



Profiling British Columbia Offshore Schools: A Comparative Analysis of Inspection Reports

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ABSTRACT

The problem and the aim of the study. The British Columbia (BC) offshore schools deliver the provincial curriculum in international contexts under the oversight of the BC Ministry of Education. Despite their established presence, particularly in China, there is limited empirical research on how these schools function within diverse regulatory and cultural environments. *This study aims* to examine how BC offshore schools implement the curriculum, meet governance and staffing requirements, and adapt to host-country educational contexts while maintaining provincial standards.

Research methods. The study employed a qualitative content analysis of 37 official inspection reports released in 2024 by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. These reports, which evaluate curriculum implementation, staffing, governance, and compliance, were systematically coded to identify key themes and recurring issues. A comparative lens was applied to examine differences and similarities between BC offshore schools operating in China and those in 11 other countries, allowing for the exploration of region-specific challenges and implementation strategies.

Results. Findings show that most schools maintain curriculum fidelity and meet certification expectations, with approximately 80% of schools in China reporting full or near-full compliance. However, region-specific constraints persist. These include enrolment caps (typically 50–80 students per grade), teacher shortages, sometimes requiring exemptions for up to 30% of staff and high turnover, with some schools hiring as many as 27 new teachers in 2024. Chinese schools tend to be smaller (ranging from 9 to 347 students) and often share campuses, while larger institutions in Egypt, Bahrain, and Qatar report enrolments exceeding 700, driven by favourable local policies and feeder systems. Despite staffing and infrastructure challenges, several schools in China reported enrolment rebounds of up to 19% in 2023.

Conclusion. BC offshore schools operate at the intersection of public accountability and private international education, balancing curriculum integrity with local adaptation. The study recommends streamlining teacher certification, improving leadership continuity, enhancing infrastructure support, and strengthening parent communication. These findings contribute new empirical insight into Canada's expanding but underexamined offshore school sector.

KEYWORDS

BC offshore schools, curriculum export, international schooling, transnational education, school inspections

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the global expansion of international education has accelerated dramatically, driven by heightened demand for English-medium instruction, increased student mobility, and the growing competitiveness of higher education. As UNESCO [1] notes, cross-border education plays an increasingly strategic role in global development, yet raises pressing questions about quality, equity, and international cooperation.

With nearly 15,000 international schools educating over 7.4 million students and employing more than 700,000 staff, the sector generates an estimated USD 67.3 billion annually in tuition revenue [2]. This aligns with trends observed by the OECD [3], which emphasizes that the internationalization of education offers new learning opportunities but also underscores global concerns about access, affordability, and consistent quality assurance.

This growth reflects broader forces of globalization and the strategic positioning of education as both a public good and an internationally traded commodity. Countries have responded to this demand through a variety of transnational education (TNE) models, including branch campuses, twinning arrangements, dual-degree programs, and offshore schools.

Offshore schools represent a distinct category within this landscape. These are institutions located outside the country of curriculum origin but licensed to deliver its national curriculum in full, typically under direct regulation by the originating government. Unlike international schools that may offer hybrid programs or globally recognized curricula such as IB, AP, or A-Levels, offshore schools must adhere to the curriculum, assessment, and teacher certification standards of a specific national or provincial authority [4; 5].

Several Canadian provinces have entered this sector by authorizing schools overseas to deliver their provincial curricula. As of 2024, according to the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials [6] and provincial sources, New Brunswick with 39 schools, British Columbia 37, Ontario 19, Nova Scotia 15, Alberta 15, Manitoba 6, and Prince Edward Island 5 license offshore schools. These schools span over 30 host countries, with China hosting the largest number, sixty-one, followed by Brazil, Turkey, Japan, Egypt, Bangladesh, and the United Arab Emirates. This distribution illustrates the global appeal of Canadian curricula, and the differentiated strategies provinces are using to extend their educational influence abroad.

Among these provinces, British Columbia (BC) stands out as a leader in developing a comprehensive, government-regulated offshore school model. Administered by the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care, the initiative began informally in 1995 and was formally certified in 1998, when the first BC offshore school was established in Northern China [7; 8].

In the early years the program grew gradually. By 2005, only two BC-certified schools were operating in China. However, as China's economy grew and its middle class increasingly pursued international education, the program expanded significantly. This demand led to rapid growth in the sector. Schuetze [4] reported that by 2008, 12 BC offshore schools were operating in China, with more in development. By 2016, the network had grown to 32 schools [8], reflecting the global trend toward international curriculum adoption.

A turning point came in 2019, when the program reached 47 certified schools worldwide, including 39 in mainland China. That same year, Maple Leaf Education System, the largest operator of BC offshore schools, announced a shift to its own proprietary curriculum in 12 schools, resulting in BC losing nearly one-third of its China-based schools and almost half of its offshore student population in China [9]. As of 2024, the BC offshore school network comprises 37 certified schools [10], positioning it as the second largest provincial program in Canada but the most systematically structured. These schools function under Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between the BC Ministry and host governments, with strict requirements on curriculum delivery, teacher certification, annual inspections, and reporting procedures.

Schools must offer the BC curriculum in English, taught by BC-certified teachers, leading to the internationally recognized Dogwood Diploma. Establishing a BC offshore school entails a rigorous, multi-stage approval process that includes business planning, financial audits, site inspections, a one-year pre-certification phase, and ongoing annual evaluations [11]. Although these schools use a

public curriculum, they are privately owned and operate for profit, primarily catering to local families seeking admission to Western universities [4; 12].

The appeal of BC's model lies in the strength of its education brand. The province is internationally recognized for its concept-based, competency-driven curriculum, high student performance on international assessments, and the global acceptance of the Dogwood Diploma as advertised on the official website [13]. BC-certified teachers bring pedagogical expertise, and the offshore program serves as a platform for promoting BC as a destination for postsecondary education and skilled immigration [10].

The cost of participation is considerable. Schools pay a non-refundable application fee, annual licensing and administrative fees, inspection-related costs, and per-student registration fees. Inspections include document audits, classroom observations, stakeholder interviews, and post-visit reporting, ensuring transparency and alignment with BC's educational standards [11]. Notably, current application and licensing fees are significantly higher than those reported in early studies by Schuetze [4] and Cosco [12].

From a theoretical perspective, BC offshore schools are best examined through a transnational education (TNE) lens. Altbach and Knight [14] define TNE as the cross-border delivery of education services, shaped by national policy and global markets. BC's program differs from conventional international schools by exporting a provincial curriculum within a tightly regulated framework, administered by a domestic public authority rather than an international body. These schools operate at the intersection of public accountability and private market pressures, navigating both BC's standards and host country regulations.

Despite the program's policy significance and global reach, empirical research on the functioning of BC offshore schools remains limited. Previous research explored initial development [4; 12], policy development [8], branding and representation [13; 15], teacher moral tensions [16], neoliberal critiques [17], and curriculum localization [18]. However, these studies are largely qualitative, discursive, or case-based, often limited to a few schools. To date, no research has systematically examined the BC Ministry's inspection reports, which offer a rare, comparative dataset on how curriculum, governance, and staffing function across diverse international contexts. This study addresses this gap through a thematic content analysis of 37 inspection reports issued in 2024.

Research Aims and Questions

These reports provide a rare, systematic look into enrolment trends, staffing configurations, curriculum implementation, governance structures, and regional variation, particularly between China and other host countries.

The following research questions guide the analysis:

1. What are the key structural and operational characteristics of BC-certified offshore schools as identified in inspection reports?
2. What trends and variations exist in enrolment patterns, grade offerings, and staffing?
3. How do schools in China compare with those in other host countries in terms of governance, challenges, and curriculum implementation?

By applying a transnational education framework, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how provincial education systems engage globally, how accountability mechanisms operate across borders, and how BC offshore schools serve as instruments of both public policy and global aspiration.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This research aims to profile Canadian offshore schools based on an analysis of the Ministry inspection reports for 2024. The study focuses specifically on Canadian BC offshore schools in China,

as well as schools in other countries, to provide insights into governance structures, curriculum implementation, staffing, and operational challenges. The methodology is based on a qualitative content analysis of 37 inspection reports obtained from the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care, providing standardized data on the operational dynamics of these schools.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from the 2024 Ministry inspection reports, available on the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care website. A total of 37 reports were reviewed, representing Canadian offshore schools located in China 23 schools and various other countries, including Japan 3, Egypt 2, Kazakhstan 1, France 1, Qatar 1, Colombia 1, Bermuda 1, Taiwan 1, Bahrain 1, Bangladesh 1, and Thailand 1 school. These reports were selected based on their availability and relevance to the study, providing comprehensive data on each school's governance, staffing, curriculum, and operational practices.

Data Extraction and Coding

The data were extracted manually from each inspection report. A coding sheet was developed to ensure all relevant information was captured systematically. The coding sheet contained predefined categories, which helped ensure consistency in the extraction process and minimized the risk of overlooking key data from each report. Each report was read carefully, and relevant data were categorized according to the established subthemes [19; 20]: School ID, Country/Region, Total Enrolment, Grade Levels, Curriculum Implementation, Governance Structure, Staffing & Teacher Certification, Operational Challenges, Enrolment Trends, and Other Key Observations.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns across the inspection reports [21; 22]. Each school's data were reviewed within the context of the subthemes, focusing on identifying common trends and key differences. For example, the governance structure of each school was analysed to determine the prevalence of Owner/Operator models versus local board-based models, while staffing data were examined to assess the foreign vs. local teacher composition and their certifications. Following the coding process, the data were compared across regions, specifically between Chinese offshore schools and those in other countries, in order to identify any regional variations in governance, curriculum implementation, and operational challenges.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of a thematic content analysis of 37 British Columbia (BC) offshore school inspection reports from 2024, with 23 schools located in China with the remaining 14 distributed across 11 other countries. The analysis identifies key operational and educational dimensions of BC's offshore programs, organized into the following themes: school demographics, enrolment patterns, curriculum implementation, governance, staffing, operational challenges, and broader institutional features. These themes highlight shared traits and regional distinctions, offering a comprehensive profile of how the BC offshore education model is implemented across diverse global contexts.

School Demographics, Enrolment Patterns, and Trends

The reviewed BC offshore schools are located in 12 countries, with a significant concentration of nearly two-thirds in China. In this context, schools are typically embedded within host school campuses or operate as international divisions, serving primarily local student populations. A similar pattern is observed elsewhere, where some institutions share facilities with universities or other international programs. Figure 1 illustrates the global distribution of BC offshore schools, with the highest concentration in East Asia.

Building on the regional overview in Figure 1, Table 1 offers detailed enrolment and grade-level information for each BC offshore school included in this study.

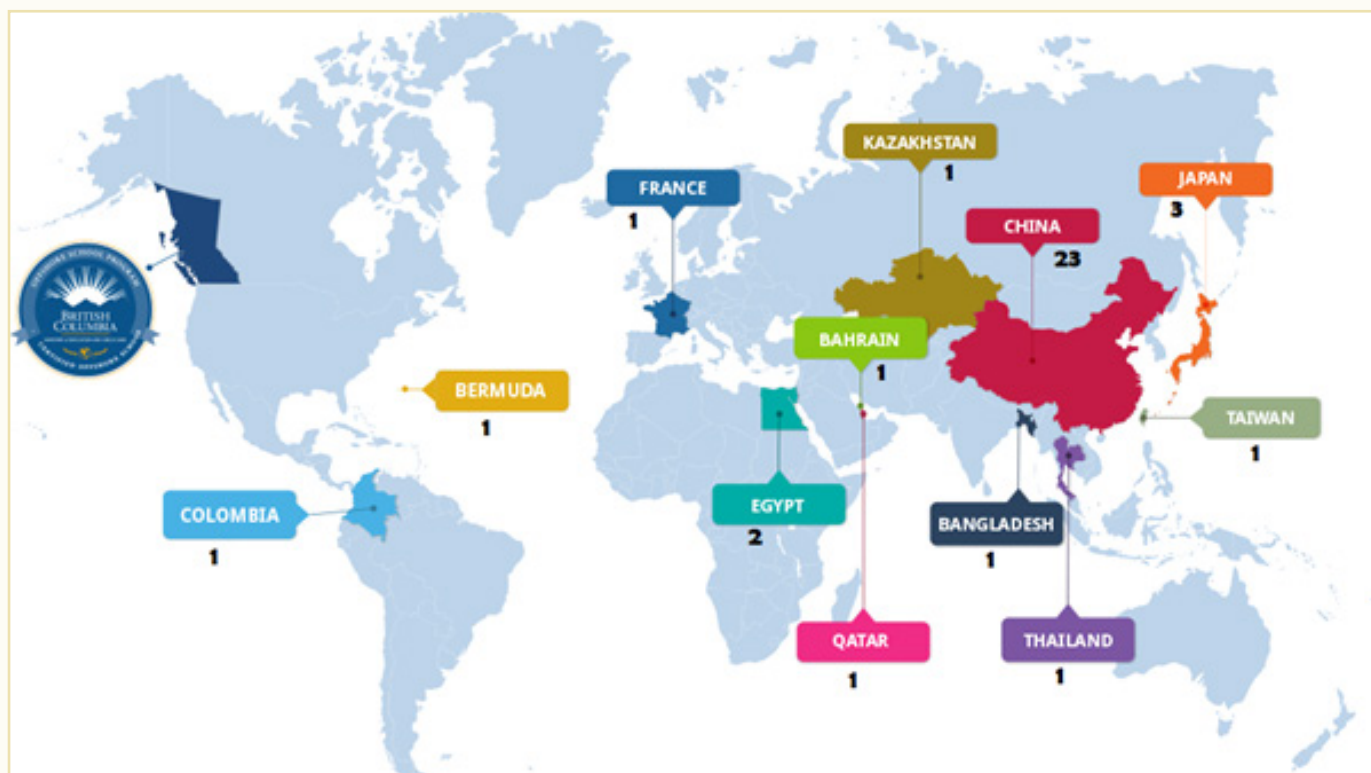


Figure 1 Locations and Distribution of BC Offshore Schools by Country

Note. Adapted from Find a B.C. Offshore School, by British Columbia Ministry of Education and Child Care [23]. Edited by the authors to indicate the number of BC offshore schools per region.

Table 1

BC Offshore Schools – Enrolment and Grade Levels (2024)

School Location	Total Enrolment	Grade Levels
BC China_01	77	Pre-K to Grade 9
BC China_02	36	K–Grade 9
BC China_03	220	Grades 1-12
BC China_04	9	Grades 10
BC China_05	17	Grade 10-11
BC China_06	157	Grades 10-12
BC China_07	103	Grades 10-12
BC China_08	165	Grades 10-12
BC China_09	61	Grades 10-12
BC China_10	96	Grades 10-12
BC China_11	116	Grades 10-12
BC China_12	55	Grades 10-12
BC China_13	119	Grades 10-12
BC China_14	37	Grades 10-12
BC China_15	77	Grades 10-12
BC China_16	180	Grades 10-12
BC China_17	57	Grades 10-12
BC China_18	174	Grades 10-12
BC China_19	77	Grades 10-12

BC China_20	319	Grades 10-12
BC China_21	347	Grades 10-12
BC China_22	282	Grades 10-12
BC China_23	247	Grades 10-12
BC Egypt_01	1011	K-12
BC Egypt_02	235	Grades 1-11
BC Thailand	28	Grades 10-12
BC Taiwan	55	Grades 10-12
BC Japan_01	265	Grades 7-12
BC Japan_02	9	Grade 10
BC Japan_03	40	Grades 10-12
BC Bangladesh	13	K–Grade 4
BC Qatar	766	Grades 1-12
BC Bahrain	879	Grades 1-10
BC Kazakhstan	114	Grades 10-12
BC France	98	Grades 1-12
BC Colombia	201	Grades 10-12
BC Bermuda	725	K-12

To highlight scale and regional variation, Figure 2 presents total student enrolment by host country. China hosts the largest number of BC offshore schools but has a comparatively modest average school size. In contrast, countries such as Egypt, Bahrain, Qatar, and Bermuda, each with fewer schools report significantly higher total enrolment, indicating large, often K–12 institutions with high student capacity.

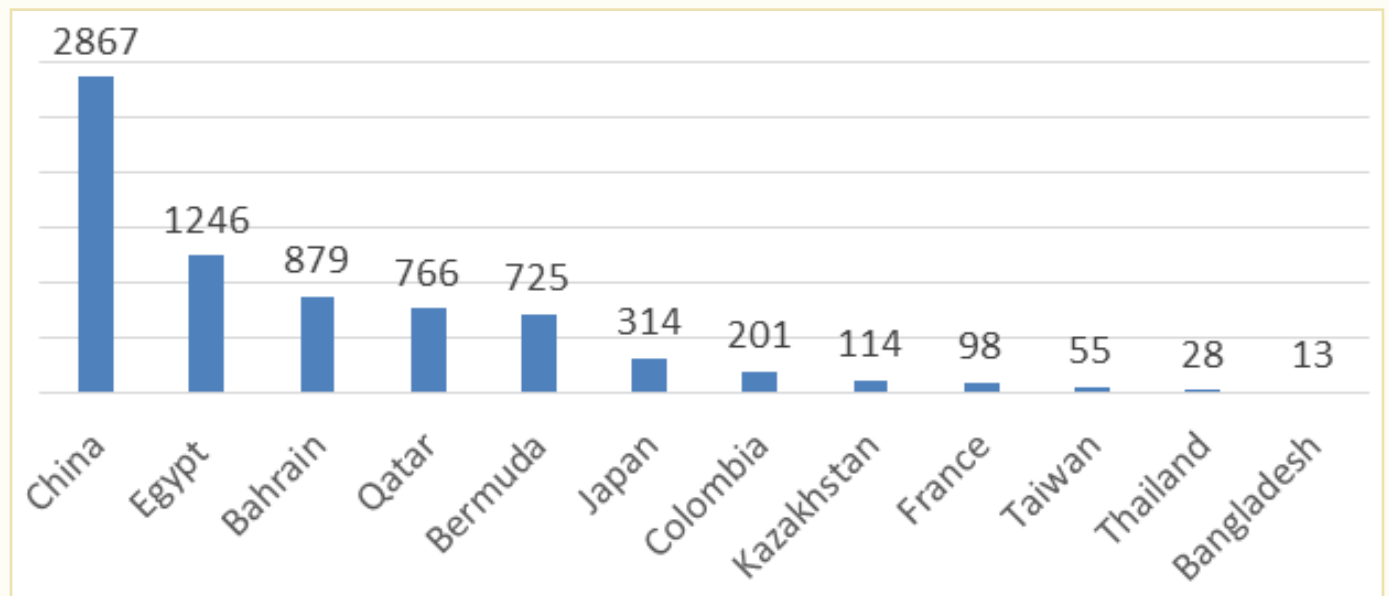


Figure 2 Total enrolment by country in 2024

As shown in Table 1, most BC offshore schools in China serve Grades 10–12, with a few offering K–9 or full K–12 programs. Enrolment ranges from under 20 to over 300 students per site, with class sizes typically capped between 50 and 80 students per grade due to local policy. Newly established and re-opened schools often reported under-enrolment due to challenges in student recruitment and growing competition from other international programs. Several schools also noted a decline in Grade 12 enrolment, largely attributed to families opting for earlier overseas transitions. Schools offering

K–9 programs reported significant post-COVID enrolment declines, reflecting shifting parental preferences and market volatility.

Despite these limitations, several Chinese schools reported enrolment rebounds of up to 19% in 2023 and are pursuing expanded enrolment caps targeting 350 students by 2029/30. Recruitment strategies include education fairs and social media campaigns with WeChat as the main channel.

In other countries, approximately half of the BC offshore schools offer programs beginning in the early grades, including kindergarten, while the remainder focus exclusively on senior secondary levels (Grades 10–12). Enrolment trends in these regions show greater variation. Schools in Egypt and Bahrain, for instance, are experiencing rapid growth, with some planning to expand from under 300 to over 1,000 students. In contrast, schools in Japan and Taiwan benefit from well-established feeder systems, contributing to more stable and predictable enrolment. However, challenges persist elsewhere. For example, the school in Qatar operates under strict government-imposed enrolment caps (limited to 1,033 students) and faces restrictions on accepting transfer students from other British-curriculum schools. Additional constraints, such as staff shortages and limited physical space, have also been reported. In several high-demand markets, waitlists have become increasingly common. Across all regions, schools implement diverse student recruitment strategies, such as open houses and social media platforms.

While nearly all BC offshore schools serve primarily local students, two schools reported notably international student populations, with one school in France enrolling students from 28 nationalities and another school in China reporting a student body comprising 37 different nationalities. These cases illustrate the variability in school profiles across regions and the growing appeal of the BC curriculum to expatriate communities in certain contexts. Overall, while enrolment strategies vary by context, nearly all schools focus recruitment on local students, with only a few reporting substantial international student diversity.

Curriculum Implementation

All offshore schools deliver the BC curriculum as the foundation of their academic programming. In China, this typically involves Grades 10–12, occasionally alongside national diploma options. Schools meet BC graduation requirements through a mix of core and elective courses, with the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL) integrated throughout. Common BAA (Board/Authority Authorized) courses include Chinese Culture and ESL Canadian Studies. Mandarin and other locally required courses are usually taught by host institution staff.

In other regions, dual-diploma programs are standard, with local adaptations reflecting national education requirements, such as Islamic Studies, Arabic or local History. Indigenous content is embedded where feasible. Many schools also incorporate experiential learning through partnerships with local universities and organizations.

Governance Structures

Governance models vary by region but typically follow the BC Ministry's requirements, with most operating under an Owner/Operator structure, with Offshore School Representatives (OSRs) responsible for ensuring compliance. Principal experience varies, from those new to the role to others with over five years of leadership. BC-certified principals usually oversee academic areas, while local principals manage administration and finances in line with local regulations. More than half of the schools in China belong to larger education groups, which provide policy guidance, leadership support, and help with overall school operations. In other regions, schools are typically run by private entities. Co-leadership and bilingual leadership models are common in some jurisdictions, enhancing local engagement and regulatory alignment. Several schools including those in Japan, Bahrain, and Colombia underwent leadership transitions in 2024.

Staffing and Teacher Certification

Staffing structures consist of BC-certified teachers, those working under Letters of Exemption (LOEs), and locally hired educators for non-core subjects. In China, nearly 80% of schools reported full or near-full compliance with BC certification standards. However, certification and LOE processing delays remain an ongoing challenge. Four schools reported disruptions due to incomplete LOEs, with some relying on exemptions for up to 30% of teaching staff.

Remote instruction is often used to address staffing gaps in specialized courses such as Calculus 12 and Anatomy & Physiology 12, particularly for smaller senior cohorts. National subjects, such as local language, religion, or physical education are often delivered by locally certified teachers. Many schools in China also employ local homeroom teachers, English Language Learning (ELL) assistants and bilingual administration to support learning and communication.

Professional development (PD) is a consistent priority across regions as reported in ministry inspection reports. In China, 14 schools reported holding monthly PD sessions focused on ELL strategies, assessment practices, and curriculum delivery. Schools in other countries expanded their PD programs to include topics such as Indigenous education, mental health and onboarding. Despite these efforts, high teacher turnover remains a concern. Staffing shortages and LOE processing delays were reported in multiple countries, contributing to increased workloads for existing staff. Some schools noted average teacher retention of only 2–3 years, with some hiring as many as 27 new teachers in 2024. Delays in certification and LOE approvals were also noted in Bahrain, Qatar, France, and Bermuda, disrupting instructional continuity while increasing workload. In response, many schools have strengthened their mentoring systems, pre-service training, and collaborative planning to help maintain program quality.

Operational Challenges

Several operational issues were reported across the network. In China, schools cited enrolment caps, limited access to dedicated facilities, and unreliable internet as persistent challenges. Many institutions operate on shared campuses with restricted access to gyms and laboratories, prompting the use of offsite locations for certain programs. Infrastructure upgrades and campus relocations are underway at several sites to address these limitations.

Schools in other regions reported similar challenges, including capped enrolments in Qatar and incomplete facilities in Bangladesh. To mitigate these issues, institutions have invested in digital infrastructure, reorganized program delivery, and expanded physical facilities where possible.

Other Institutional Features

BC offshore schools emphasize holistic student development and well-being. Initiatives include extracurricular programs, wellness surveys, peer mentorship, and talent showcases. Some schools offer flexible scheduling to accommodate student travel or mental health needs. Technology is widely integrated into instruction, with platforms like PowerSchool, Google Workspace, and OneNote commonly used for teaching, reporting, and communication. However, inconsistent internet connectivity remains a barrier to effective digital integration in some schools.

Parent engagement is promoted through bilingual communication, regular parent-teacher conferences, and digital updates via social media, particularly WeChat in China. Post-secondary pathways vary by region: most Chinese graduates pursue education abroad, especially in Canada, while schools in Egypt report up to 73% of graduates entering local universities.

Collectively, these findings provide a comprehensive snapshot of how BC-certified offshore schools function across varied geopolitical and cultural contexts. While the program demonstrates a high degree of standardization in curriculum delivery and teacher certification, regional differences persist in enrolment strategies, governance structures, and operational challenges. These themes form the basis for the subsequent discussion, which explores the implications of these patterns in relation to policy goals, institutional sustainability, and cross-border educational governance.

DISCUSSION

This study analysed 37 inspection reports from British Columbia (BC) offshore schools operating in 12 countries, providing systematic insight into how these institutions implement a Canadian provincial curriculum in diverse global contexts. The findings reveal a dynamic landscape shaped by regional policy environments, enrolment pressures, infrastructure limitations, staffing challenges, and evolving governance structures. While BC offshore schools demonstrate curricular fidelity and operational consistency, their effectiveness and sustainability are deeply influenced by contextual factors, necessitating a more nuanced understanding of transnational education in practice.

Regional Concentration and Structural Models

The concentration of nearly two-thirds of BC-certified offshore schools in China highlights the long-standing appeal of Canadian education in East Asia and the market receptivity to dual-diploma programs. The typical integration of BC schools within host campuses, functioning as international divisions, offers cost efficiencies but imposes structural constraints. Limited access to dedicated facilities and shared governance arrangements dilutes institutional autonomy and restrict innovation. This operational model, while pragmatic, positions BC offshore schools as embedded actors within larger educational ecosystems, complicating efforts to scale programs or standardize delivery.

By contrast, schools in other regions, such as Egypt, Bahrain, and France, often operate independently or within multi-campus systems. These institutions benefit from greater administrative flexibility and access to purpose-built infrastructure, but face their own constraints, including regulatory uncertainty and real estate costs. The variation in school typologies across regions reflects both opportunity and fragility in the offshore model; its ability to adapt to local conditions is a strength, but this adaptability also introduces inconsistencies in implementation and oversight.

Enrolment Dynamics and Policy Tensions

Post-pandemic enrolment trends show modest recovery, particularly in China, where some schools reported gains of up to 19%. This growth is likely driven by renewed demand for Western academic credentials, especially the Dogwood Diploma, which remains a gateway to English-speaking universities. However, enrolment in Grade 12 continues to lag, as families increasingly pursue earlier transitions abroad. This pattern suggests both the globalization of academic mobility and a lack of effective communication about the value of completing the BC program. Several inspection reports noted that families rely heavily on private education agents who may misrepresent the benefits of program completion in favour of profit-driven strategies [24]. These dynamics underscore the need for targeted outreach by the BC Ministry and schools themselves to reinforce program credibility and retain students through graduation.

Enrolment caps imposed by host governments, particularly in China and Qatar, further constrain school growth. These caps often hover near BC's own minimum certification thresholds, creating tension between local compliance and provincial oversight [9]. This misalignment raises policy questions about the sustainability of certification in schools operating below minimum enrolment, and whether exceptions undermine broader quality assurance efforts.

In other regions, such as Egypt and Bahrain, enrolment growth is supported by strong feeder systems and high local demand. In Japan and Taiwan, structured student transition models contribute to stability, while in Qatar, government-imposed caps create exclusivity that may paradoxically enhance institutional branding. These contrasting trends point to the importance of understanding enrolment not as a uniform metric of success, but as a reflection of complex policy, cultural, and market forces shaping school viability.

Curriculum Implementation: Fidelity and Flexibility

One of the most consistent findings across inspection reports is the high degree of curriculum fidelity. Schools generally adhere to BC's standards in course offerings, assessment, and reporting, and integrate the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL) to varying degrees. However, this fidelity often coexists with local adaptations. In China, dual-diploma models require coordination between BC and national curricula, often leading to scheduling strain and inconsistent instructional depth, especially when local teachers deliver non-BC courses in ways misaligned with BC pedagogical norms. This hybrid model can obscure accountability and affect learning continuity, particularly when schools are pressured to deliver both programs without expanding instructional time or instructional support.

These challenges are echoed in Zhang's [25] ethnographic study of a Sino-Canadian program, which found that Chinese and Canadian teachers navigated contrasting expectations in delivering a hybrid literacy curriculum, resulting in power negotiations around language, modality, and cultural representation. Teachers aimed to support students' development as global citizens while simultaneously responding to competing models of accountability and literacy. Likewise, Zhang and Heydon [26] demonstrated how institutional, programmatic, and classroom-level curricula in transnational schools are shaped by a complex network of actors, including neoliberal policy,

entrepreneurial agendas, and ideological goals of East–West integration. Their study revealed how the transnational curriculum is inherently unstable in practice, producing both enabling and constraining effects on students’ literacy experiences and identity formation. These findings reinforce the idea that curriculum fidelity in BC offshore schools is not only a matter of technical alignment, but also one of pedagogical negotiation, actor influence, and transnational compromise.

This tension between curriculum transfer and local adaptation reflects a broader challenge in transnational education. As Crossley and Watson [27] argue, exported curricula must be understood within their local contexts, as direct transplantation rarely accounts for socio-cultural differences, institutional pressures, or the lived realities of teachers and learners. Without deliberate mediation, efforts to implement imported curricula risk superficial compliance and unintended outcomes.

In other jurisdictions, local requirements such as Islamic Studies or national history are integrated with more flexibility. While this allows for cultural alignment and regulatory compliance, the incorporation of Indigenous content, now mandated by BC, remains uneven. As Adams [18] notes, the meaningful application of FPPL is contingent on teacher preparation and institutional commitment. Many teachers in offshore schools report uncertainty about how to embed Indigenous content in culturally appropriate ways. Without additional professional development and curricular guidance, this initiative risks being symbolic rather than substantive, particularly in regions where Indigenous histories are not locally relevant.

Experiential learning opportunities through community partnerships and university collaborations are more prevalent outside China, likely due to better infrastructure and fewer bureaucratic constraints. This suggests that curriculum quality depends not only on formal compliance, but also on the physical and institutional environments that enable innovation. The challenge for BC policymakers is to support a balance between curricular fidelity and contextual responsiveness, ensuring program integrity without enforcing rigid uniformity.

Governance and Leadership Variability

Governance structures across BC offshore schools generally follow the Owner/Operator model required by the Ministry, with Offshore School Representatives (OSRs) tasked with ensuring compliance. However, governance quality varies widely depending on leadership stability, organizational structure, and local engagement. In China, schools operated by large educational groups benefit from centralized support systems but sometimes lack site-level flexibility. Conversely, independently run schools elsewhere may have more autonomy but fewer organizational resources to manage compliance or professional development.

Leadership continuity emerges as a critical factor in school quality. Several schools report high turnover among principals, leading to strategic drift, weakened instructional leadership, and diminished staff morale. Dual-principal models, where BC-certified administrators focus on academics while local leaders handle operations—can be effective, but often encounter friction due to language barriers, conflicting priorities, or cultural misunderstandings. As Smith [16] and MacKinnon and MacLean [28] suggest, governance effectiveness is enhanced when co-leadership is integrated, bilingual, and locally grounded.

Succession planning and internal promotion are also associated with greater stability, particularly in regions where experienced educators are trained and advanced from within the school network. However, the Ministry’s expectations for certified leadership are not always compatible with local labour markets, creating pressure on schools to hire underqualified or transitional leaders. Addressing this gap requires a rethinking of how BC supports leadership pipelines in international contexts.

Staffing, Certification, and Retention Challenges

Staffing remains one of the most persistent and complex challenges facing BC offshore schools. While most institutions meet certification requirements, the heavy reliance on Letters of Exemption (LOEs), especially in China, signals systemic weaknesses. Up to 30% of teaching staff in some schools are uncertified, and certification processing delays frequently disrupt staffing plans. The Auditor General of British Columbia [9] reported that only one-third of LOE holders ultimately achieve full certification, with many leaving before the end of their contracts. This creates a revolving door of short-term teachers, undermining program stability and relational continuity in classrooms.

This pattern reflects broader trends in international education. Research has shown that many international schools experience high turnover rates, with average teaching contracts lasting just two to three years, compromising continuity and contributing to institutional fatigue [29]. BC offshore schools are no exception to this trend.

Staff turnover also strains onboarding, mentorship, and professional development systems. Some schools reported hiring 20 or more new teachers in a single academic year. While PD efforts are extensive, especially in China, where schools often conduct monthly sessions on ELL, assessment, and curriculum alignment, these initiatives are insufficient if retention remains low. Schools that invest in mentoring, collaborative planning, and robust pre-service training report better integration outcomes, but these practices are uneven across the network.

Remote instruction is frequently used to address teacher shortages in specialized subjects such as Calculus 12 or Anatomy & Physiology 12. While this approach offers short-term relief, it raises concerns about instructional quality, student engagement, and pedagogical consistency. Without a more coordinated strategy for international teacher recruitment and certification, BC offshore schools will continue to face staffing vulnerabilities that compromise educational quality.

Infrastructure, Technology, and Operational Realities

Operational constraints, especially related to infrastructure significantly affect program implementation. Many schools in China operate within host campuses that restrict access to science labs, gymnasiums, and flexible learning spaces. While some are investing in new facilities or relocating, progress is uneven and often constrained by local regulations or funding limitations.

Technology access is similarly variable. While platforms like PowerSchool, Google Workspace, and OneNote are widely used, their effectiveness depends on internet quality and government restrictions. In China, limited access to certain platforms due to censorship impedes assessment, communication, and even teacher collaboration, concerns echoed in Smith's [16] study on digital suppression in Canadian-accredited schools abroad. Schools in other regions report more stable digital integration, suggesting that infrastructure quality is a key determinant of program effectiveness.

Some schools have adopted creative strategies, modular classrooms, hybrid scheduling, shared partnerships, but these are interim solutions. Long-term planning and capital investment are essential to sustaining quality and expanding capacity.

Student Experience and Graduate Pathways

Despite challenges, inspection reports highlight a strong commitment to student well-being, holistic education, and post-secondary preparation. Schools promote wellness, flexible scheduling, peer mentorship, and a range of extracurricular programs. Parental engagement is increasingly prioritized through bilingual communication strategies and regular updates, especially via WeChat in China.

Graduate trajectories vary by region. In Asia, most students pursue international higher education, particularly in Canada, aligning with the offshore program's original mandate to serve as a post-secondary feeder. This finding is consistent with Young [30], who reported that the majority of students in Canadian offshore schools in China enrol with the explicit goal of continuing their education in Canada or other English-speaking Western countries. In contrast, schools in Egypt report that over 70% of graduates remain in local universities. This demonstrates that while the BC offshore model is positioned as a global launchpad, it can also strengthen domestic education systems in host countries. Expanding short-term exchange and bridging programs with BC institutions may increase student interest and familiarity with Canadian academic environments.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study offers a rare, system-level analysis of BC offshore schools based on publicly available inspection reports from the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care. While these documents provide structured, comparable data on governance, staffing, curriculum implementation, and compliance, they reflect institutional conditions at a single point in time and do not fully capture informal dynamics, lived experiences, or year-round variability. The reports are authored from the perspective of Ministry inspectors and, as such, may not reflect the voices of students, teachers, or school leaders [31].

Although the coding process was applied consistently and cross-checked to ensure reliability, the quality and depth of reporting varied across documents. Some included extensive narrative accounts, while others were more limited in scope. In several instances, missing or ambiguous entries constrained the analysis. The sample of 37 schools, though geographically diverse, represents only a subset of Canadian offshore schools globally and may not fully reflect the diversity of institutional models or regional dynamics. As such, the findings should not be assumed to be generalizable [32].

Future research would benefit from triangulating these official reports with qualitative data sources. Interviews or focus groups with teachers, administrators, and students could surface context-specific insights into curriculum delivery, cultural adaptation, and workplace dynamics, dimensions often absent from formal inspections [33]. In addition, longitudinal research could track institutional development over time, while cross-provincial comparisons might reveal how different regulatory regimes shape offshore school operations. These extensions would help build a more holistic understanding of the complex realities underlying Canada's offshore education landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study provided one of the first systematic analyses of inspection reports from BC-certified offshore schools, offering comparative insights into how the British Columbia curriculum is implemented across 12 countries. The findings reveal that while curriculum fidelity remains strong, schools operate under highly variable local conditions that shape governance, staffing, infrastructure, and enrolment practices. In China, schools face structural constraints related to shared facilities, enrolment caps, and a continued reliance on uncertified teaching staff under Letters of Exemption. These factors impact program stability and raise concerns about instructional continuity.

Outside China, the expansion of BC offshore schools is influenced by factors such as government regulations, infrastructure readiness, and the strength of feeder systems. Despite these regional differences, a consistent theme is the need for stable leadership, efficient teacher certification pathways, and context-sensitive curriculum implementation strategies. Schools are navigating tensions between provincial accountability and local adaptation, reflecting the complex realities of transnational education delivery.

These findings have important implications for provincial education authorities, school operators, and policymakers. To support sustainable program growth and quality assurance, targeted action is needed in areas such as teacher retention, digital infrastructure, and curricular guidance, particularly in implementing Indigenous content and dual-diploma coordination. This research contributes to the growing literature on offshore and transnational schooling by providing empirically grounded recommendations for improving the design, oversight, and future scalability of BC's international education programs.

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