

KEMI-TORNIO UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

“ Students need to know that we belong here,
regardless of where we came from ”

- A research of services for foreign degree students
in Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences in the year 2010

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ABSTRACT

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Title of thesis: “ Students need to know that we belong here, regardless of where we came from ” - A research of services for foreign degree students in Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences in year 2010
Pages (+appendixes): 48 (+1)
Thesis description: This thesis will present the services of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences and the satisfaction of foreign degree students on those services. Theoretical summary: Kemi-Tornio UAS has international study programs, but struggles to keep their students in the area and every year a lot of students transfer to other cities to study. Since foreign degree students are not entitled to take part in the social integration program organized by municipalities, the educational environment plays a big role in students’ integration process. Therefore the university should provide enough services for foreign degree students in order to keep them satisfied. Methodological summary: The survey is quantitative and was made as Internet questionnaire sent to all foreign degree students of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences. Questionnaire is quite wide and gives information about lot of different issues. Main results: In overall results the students seem to be quite satisfied with the services of Kemi-Tornio UAS. Main concerns are the lack of working possibilities as well as student accommodation. Students also hope for more free-time activities and guidance, especially from the student unions. Conclusions: There are some service areas that should be improved a lot in order to improve students’ well-being in everyday life in Kemi-Tornio area.
Keywords: foreign student, international student, integration, immigrant

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tekijä: Vahertimo, Riina
Opinnäytetyön nimi: “ Students need to know that we belong here, regardless of where we came from ” - A research of services for foreign degree students in Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences in year 2010
Sivuja (+liitteitä): 48 (+1)
Opinnäytetyön kuvaus: Opinnäytetyö kuvailee Kemi-Tornio Ammattikorkeakoulun ulkomaalaisille tutkinto-opiskelijoille tarjoamia palveluita ja opiskelijoiden tyytyväisyyttä niihin palveluihin. Teoreettinen ja käsitteellinen esittely: Kemi-Tornio AMKilla on kansainvälisiä opinto-ohjelmia, mutta on kuitenkin vaikeaa saada opiskelijoita pysymään alueella. Joka vuosi moni opiskelija siirtyy jatkamaan opintojaan muille paikkakunnille. Koska kansainväliset tutkinto-opiskelijat eivät kuulu kunnan järjestämän kotouttamisohjelman piiriin, on opiskeluympäristöllä suuri rooli opiskelijan integroitumisprosessissa. Ammattikorkeakoulun tulisi tarjota kattavasti palveluita kansainvälisille tutkinto-opiskelijoille pitääkseen heidät tyytyväisinä. Metodologinen esittely: Tutkimus on kvantitatiivinen ja tehtiin Internet-kyselylomakkeella, joka lähetettiin kaikille Kemi-Tornion Ammattikorkeakoulun kansainvälisille tutkinto-opiskelijoille. Kysely on laaja ja tarjoaa informaatiota monesta eri aihealueesta. Keskeiset tutkimustulokset: Vaikuttaa siltä, että opiskelijat ovat yleisesti tyytyväisiä Kemi-Tornio Ammattikorkeakoulun tarjoamiin palveluihin. Suurimmat huolenaiheet ovatkin työmahdollisuuksien vähyys sekä asumisolosuhteet. Opiskelijat myös toivovat enemmän vapaa-ajan mahdollisuuksia sekä ohjausta vapaa-aikaan, erityisesti opiskelijayhdistyksiltä. Johtopäätökset: Edistääkseen opiskelijoiden hyvinvointia arjessa, tulisi joitakin palvelualueita kehittää paljon.
Asiasanat: ulkomainen opiskelija, kansainvälinen opiskelija, integraatio, maahanmuuttaja

1. INTRODUCTION

In Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences there are five different educational possibilities for studies in English language. Those groups are Business & information technology (BIT), Business management (BM), Nursing (BHC), Social services (BSS) and Information technology (IT). The last class of Information technology started their studies in 2008, but in other programs new groups are still starting every autumn. There are only some Finnish students taking part in the English programs and the rest of the students are foreigners, mostly from Asian and African countries.

In the past few years the number of foreign degree students in Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences (also abbreviation Kemi-Tornio UAS is used in this thesis) has increased a lot and that is why Kemi-Tornio UAS has started to make changes in their services for international students. Kemi-Tornio UAS is struggling to have their foreign degree students stay as their students in Kemi and Tornio. In autumn 2008, 128 foreign degree students began their studies in Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences, but in the autumn 2009, 30 of them had interrupted their studies, seven students informed to be absent and 29 students had not given information about their whereabouts (Räinä 2009).

I did my practical training at Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences in autumn 2009 with the school social worker who then together with the quality coordinator suggested me that I could do a well-being research on our international students. I have worked as a student tutor since spring 2007 and I am very interested in multicultural work so I decided to choose the well-being of foreign degree students as my thesis topic. The main goal for this survey is to find out how the foreign degree students of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences are doing, by figuring out their opinions about their studies, living and life in Finland, financial situation and future plans. I will introduce the acts how equality among students is defined in Finland and Kemi-Tornio UAS. The research answers will be presented and also some comparison with previous researches will be made. I will also ponder the usability of the results. I will introduce the individuals' integration process to a new culture a little bit. I will also ponder how big impact it has in the life of the foreign degree students of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences.

I will do an overall view on the questionnaire answers and concentrate on the opinions given by the students. This thesis and the results are given to the use of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences so the staff can apply them when planning and improving the services for foreign degree students. Based on the results, I am also making some suggestions on some things that could be improved. Through this survey foreign degree student, international student and student mean the same thing if not mentioned otherwise.

2. NEW CULTURE AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

“ Integration can be understood as fitting the old and the new culture together. It can also be individual's intention for creating ways to survive the everyday life and to keep functioning. ” (Lipponen & Talib 2008, 75.)

For a student, especially for a foreign student, the university environment can be the most important way to structure and experience everyday life (Kinnunen 2003, 73). That is why it is important that student can feel valued in the learning environment. In this chapter I will introduce some laws and plans that have been made to assure the equality of students with different backgrounds and for them to be treated equally in educational environment. I will also tell a little bit about integration and the role of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences' role in students' integration process.

2.1. Culture and social integration

People have different reasons to move to another country, some move by their own choice, some unwillingly, says Anne Alitolppa-Niitamo (1994, 14) in her book *When cultures come together*. She also underlines the difference between refugees and immigrants. Refugee is a person who has left his or her home country because there he or she has a reason to be afraid because of own race, religion or nationality. Also political views or being part of a certain social group can be reasons to be haunted (Alitolppa-Niitamo 1994, 15). Other immigrants move to Finland for example to work, to study or because of marriage. Often times people move because they are after something better, so experiencing a new country and culture can be a crisis if everything is not as good as expected (Alitolppa-Niitamo 1994, 14). Social worker of Kemi-Tornio UAS, Maria Sipilä (Discussion 2009) mentions that most of the students of Kemi-Tornio UAS have come to Finland for their studies, not as refugees. Immigrants have the possibility to get ready to move to another culture, because for example applying process to different educational programs takes time. Therefore the students of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences have the opportunity to prepare themselves to big changes that might apply in a new culture.

Alitolppa-Niitamo (1994, 18) defines culture a way of thinking, feeling, reacting and being all the things that people have learned to do and value in their own history and it is also things they have learned to believe in and things they have learned to enjoy. She also states that culture is all the small things we are and do, it is everything that we have been brought up to (Alitolppa-Niitamo 1994, 19).

The culture that we are brought up by and where we live, defines us what is right and wrong. We learn to know what behavior is good and what is inappropriate and bad. From our environment we learn how to do different things associated with living. These customs and habits have been formed by long history to fit each living environment. (Alitolppa-Niitamo 1994, 19.)

Since cultures are linked to the environment, it is natural that when a person from one culture moves to another everything might not be so simple. The learned things are not the same anymore and do not work in the new culture. Alitolppa-Niitamo (1994, 20) reminds that it takes the effort of trying and learning by mistakes to learn the new culture, it's language, customs, attitudes and values.

The official immigrant legislation's goal is to enable immigrants to get integrated to Finnish society. The goal is to make them become equal to Finnish people by having the same rights and responsibilities as the rest of the population (Lipponen & Talib 2008, 45). In Finnish legislation is a law about social integration of immigrants. Laura Metso and Ulla Peltola (2008, 24) mention that only immigrants being registered as unemployed and getting the income support from the social office are entitles for social integration program.

Acculturation means the way of adapting to the new culture (Alitolppa-Niitamo 1994, 29). In acculturation groups with different cultures are in continuous contact with each other and followed by that, either one or both cultures go through changes. The starting point to acculturation is often the reason why person has come to a new country. Refugees usually do not get to choose the country they go to so perhaps their willingness to immigrate is not as strong as with those immigrants that have chosen to move to a certain country

(Alitolppa-Niitamo 1994, 25). Naturally acculturation is different with different people because personalities vary. Usually acculturation process starts with going through the crisis of moving to new culture. Crisis is not only a negative thing, but can be something good also. When moving to a new country, the cultural shock can be a crisis for some students. When facing a cultural shock, students must go through it to start the integration process (Lipponen & Talib 2008, 73).

In the picture below (Picture 1) is described what are the different ways of acculturation. Integration happens when immigrant finds a balance between the culture he or she comes from and the new culture. That way immigrant can choose the good things from both cultures (Alitolppa-Niitamo 1994,). If the old culture is not very important to the immigrant and he or she wants to learn and be part of the new culture, it will most likely lead into assimilation. Alitolppa-Niitamo (1994, 32) describes these immigrants being very eager to be as much as possible like the major population and to forget their cultural background. She also (1994, 33) mentions that if immigrant is not interested in the new culture and wants to maintain the old culture only, it is called segregation. In segregation person can function in the new culture, but is strongly attached to the old culture. Alitolppa-Niitamo (1994, 33) also talks about marginalization and sees it being a little bit problematic, because in marginalization immigrant does not really want to maintain the old culture or learn the new culture either. That is when the immigrant might get stranded without a culture and might feel that does not really know where he or she belongs (Alitolppa-Niitamo 1994, 33).

		<i>It is important to maintain own cultural background and identity?</i>	
		"Yes"	"No"
<i>It is important to accept and get used to new culture?</i>	"Yes"	Integration	Assimilation
	"No"	Segregation	Marginalization

Picture 1 Acculturation process

Foreign students coming to Finland do not belong to the service sector and do not get governmental benefits and therefore they are not part of the social integration plan. That is why the responsibility of foreign students' integration is partially on the responsibility of the school they are attending, but most of all the responsibility is on the students

themselves because the will to integrate starts from them. Also Metso & Peltola (2008, 3) and Hanna Ahlgren-Leinvuo (2005, 28-30) draw attention to the fact that many immigrants do not benefit enough from the services provided by public sector to integrate to Finnish society because government pays municipalities only for the refugees that come to Finland. That is why municipalities use the money they get to integrate only refugees even though also people who come to Finland for other reasons, such as marriage, work or studies, would need help to integrate. Metso & Peltola (2008, 18) state that integration is two-way dynamic process and it requires change in both immigrant and the society.

“ With immigrant changes can mean for example getting new skills. With the receptive society and population it can mean renewing and reconstructing the existing services and models as well as responding to the needs of immigrants. ” (Metso & Peltola 2008, 18).

Acculturation can be stressful for many students. Alitolppa-Niitamo (1994, 32) talks about acculturation stress, which differs from person to another. She mentions that in acculturation stress a person can experience disturbance of psychological balance and uncertainty of own identity. Personality affects a lot on how acculturation stress is experienced. A person who is open and can handle uncertainty well, usually does not experience acculturation stress (Alitolppa-Niitamo 2004, 31).

In education acculturation means that the background of students and the study environment are in contact, therefore both students and the environment have to be accepting to each other's differences. Student needs to learn about the culture, but the school environment should take into consideration the cultural differences also and remember that not all students can, are willing or able to follow our rules and ways of living. That is why it is important for Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences to keep in mind that to have their students stay here, they need to focus on the needs of foreign degree students. From my experience as a student tutor, I have learned that the more the students feel that their opinions are heard, the easier the integration process gets and the more students enjoy the studies.

Sipilä (2009) has experienced some foreign degree students having quite mild acculturation stress, but nothing severe has occurred. She thinks that it is helpful to have good learning environment and enough help for the students to help them integrate. Often the reasons for stress are associated with the changes in the environment, when actually the reasons are in the changed life situation and the ability to handle those changes (Alitolppa-Niitamo 1994, 48). For those reasons it is good to have support from people at the educational environment, because unfortunately foreign degree students are not entitled to take part in social integration organized by the communities because they come here for studies (Social integration law, §3).

Still no matter what are the expectations or assumptions on the integration of foreign degree students, it has to be kept in mind that not all students want to get integrated to Finnish society. Immigrants have different reasons to come to Finland and also different plans for their time here. Some want to get integrated, some want to become similar to the majority of people and some want to stick with their own culture.

2.2. Equality of students in Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences

Foreign degree students are important for Finnish higher education because they internationalize and therefore improve the quality of education (SAMOK 2008, 20). Also for Kemi-Tornio UAS international relationships are important and having English education programs is very highly valued (Pulkkinen, discussion 2009). Foreign degree students come to Kemi-Tornio UAS to get a degree in some study program, so they stay in Finland for at least 3,5 – 4 years. Exchange students come to Kemi-Tornio UAS from some other school through an exchange program and stay only for 1 – 12 months. As a target group in this research I decided to have only the degree students and leave out the exchange students. Reason for this is that the needs of degree students and exchange students vary a lot. By Maria Sipilä (2009) degree students use the services of Kemi-Tornio UAS more than exchange students because they have other kind of needs throughout their studies. They are here to complete the whole degree when exchange students only come here for couple of months and have a certain plan for their time here.

Equal treatment of students is important because it enhances the students' well-being. The discrimination law (Discrimination law, 2004) forbids discrimination of any person because of his or her ethnic or national origin, nationality, language or religion. In the law discrimination is defined as treating a person unfavorably than someone else is treated, has been treated or would be treated in similar situation or that in some situation regulation would be interpreted to put some person in an unfavorable situation. (Law of equality, §6). European Union agreed on so called discrimination directive in the year 2000 by which also harassment is discrimination when behaviour based on person's race or ethnicity is aggressive, disturbing or offensive to environment or person (Janinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind & Vesala 2002, 37).

Equality and non-discrimination plan made for Kemi-Tornionlaakso Municipal Education and Training Consortium LAPPIA is also applied at Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences since Kemi-Tornio UAS is a part of LAPPIA. The meaning of the plan is to develop the equality of all staff and students despite of their background. Within the consortium, issues related to equality and non-discrimination are handled by the Cooperation Committee. Also student representatives are invited to join the meetings when issues pertaining to equality and non-discrimination are discussed (Equality and non-discrimination plan 2008, 3).

The human resources strategy takes into account the internationalization of the education and work community. Staff members are supported as they encounter multicultural students and colleagues in their work. They are also encouraged to participate in multicultural work and international projects. Students are encouraged to become exchange students and accept international students from different cultures into their communities. (Equality and non-discrimination plan 2008, 3).

As mandated in law of Universities of Applied Sciences, the responsibility of University of Applied Sciences is to evaluate the quality of the education they offer as well as doing constant development (Ammattikorkeakoululaki §9). In Kemi-Tornio UAS the academic year 2009-2010 is very important because the school is part of the auditing project organized by The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (Tuovila, discussion 2009).

This year sixteen higher education institutions are part of the project of evaluation the quality assurance systems. The quality assurance system is an important part of studies also for the foreign degree students because having English educational programs in Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences is still relatively new, so there still are plenty of things to improve.

In Finland the main goal of Universities of Applied Sciences is to provide education. We do not have the so called campus model which I have seen for example when studying in Canada. In the campus model the university environment offers almost everything students need in their everyday life, for example such as sporting possibilities, food stores, libraries and free-time activity groups. The Equality and non-discrimination plan (2008, 6-7) states that all people from different cultural backgrounds should be treated equally. Therefore also all foreign students are offered with the services of school social worker, nurse as well as student affairs office and help with finding free time activities in the area. So even though the university environment itself does not offer hobby possibilities, there is a person to give guidance when students look for information. In addition to that the foreign students are offered help with finding accommodation.

Kemi-Tornio UAS also offers tutoring for incoming international students, but as I have experiences as a tutor, unfortunately most of the tutoring is concentrated on guiding the new exchange students, even though also foreign degree students are also in a big need of tutoring. Foreign degree students have expressed that there is more need for tutoring. There are a lot of everyday things to take care of with the foreign degree students because the system of dealing with official things can differ a lot from the system in the students' home countries. Student tutors help them with transportation from airport or train station to their apartment and with guiding them around the city and the university a little bit.

3. RESEARCH, QUESTIONS AND RESULTS

Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences is relatively small and new university in Finland, and having international students there is also a quite new thing. Therefore the resources are not similar and the practices are not perhaps as developed as in other universities. The cities of Kemi and Tornio are also quite small and it is very difficult for students to find jobs here, especially without sufficient language skills. From my previous information got from the students those are the reasons for many students to leave from Kemi-Tornio UAS and transfer to some other city with better services and working possibilities. The main purpose of this thesis is to get somewhat familiar with the everyday life of foreign degree student. Also I want to bring out the issues the students have, so Kemi-Tornio UAS will have some material to look into when developing the services.

In this chapter I will introduce the reasons for this research, the questions asked from the students and the results of the questionnaire. I will also analyse the answers a little bit and look into possible reasons for some opinions.

3.1. The survey introduction

As a starting point for my survey I had “ We need more English information about our study, life in Finland and this country ”, a research of foreign degree students’ situation in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. It is a research made in the year 2007 by SAMOK, an association for student unions in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. Study is a part of the project Internationalized Student Union and it was made in 25 Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland, including Kemi-Tornio UAS. The study was made because the amount of international students in Finland has increased a lot from year 2002 (3131 students) to year 2006 (4632 students) so the services might need some changes (SAMOK 2008, 8). I used this study as a main reference when forming my research questions, because the questions in their survey were good and that way I had a good reference to compare the situation of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences and the whole Finland.

Another research I used as references is “ If I can find a good job after graduation, I may stay” - Integration of foreign degree students to Finland. It is research made in year 2003 by Taina Kinnunen. The meaning of the research of Kinnunen (2003, 9) was to research the foreign degree students’ integration to Finland, because there was not much earlier research on that subject. The goal of the research made in Kemi-Tornio UAS and Rovaniemi UAS was to research the issues of the well-being and health of the students as well as the issues of student health care and the need of improving them.

As a research method I decided to use quantitative research method, including all the foreign degree students to my research. There are only 261 foreign degree students in Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences and I thought that by doing quantitative research all of them could have the chance to speak up. The research was made through Webropol online questionnaire. As analysis I use content analysis, because it is the best way to analyze such variety of questions. With content analysis it is possible to analyze the text and the results as well as to focus on the issues that stand out from the survey answers. (KvaliMOT 2010). I had questions with multiple choices and open ended questions so students could express their thoughts more widely. There are quite a lot of questions and if I tried to make them all into multiple choice questions, I would have needed to have even more questions to get detailed opinions.

All together I had 54 questions (see appendix no 1). I divided the questions into six different sections about background information, living in Kemi-Tornio area, studies, guidance and counseling of Kemi-Tornio UAS, practical training and employment, income and future plans. In the sixth section I asked about general opinion about Kemi-Tornio UAS and the questionnaire.

For my survey, I sent the survey by email to all international degree student groups. By the information given by the student affairs office of Kemi-Tornio UAS (Korkeamaa 2010), there should be 261 students in those groups all together. The system administration informed me that the email could not be forwarded to two of the recipients so the email went through to 259 recipients. I got 33 replies through Webropol online questionnaire

form so the percentage of the replies was 12,7% which is very low compared to the previous researches. In survey made by SAMOK the percentage was 33,8%, in the research of Kinnunen (2003, 11) the percentage in whole Finland was 35% and at Kemi-Tornio UAS 41,7%. I sent the questionnaire to the students twice, because by the first due date for the questionnaire, I had only 24 answers. After the second round, the number had increased to 33.

Many students had not even opened the link to the survey, because there were only 47 visitors at the webpage. 27 of foreign degree students of Kemi-Tornio UAS have informed of being absent for spring 2010 and 35 students are using extra years to finish their studies so perhaps those students do not check their university email actively and did not have time to reach on the email. It is also possible that some students did not find it interesting enough to answer the questionnaire or they thought that their answers would not have any impact. some students also do not use their university email even though they are encouraged to do so, because it is an important way of sharing information in Kemi-Tornio UAS. Perhaps some students have not even seen the email.

3.2. Background of students

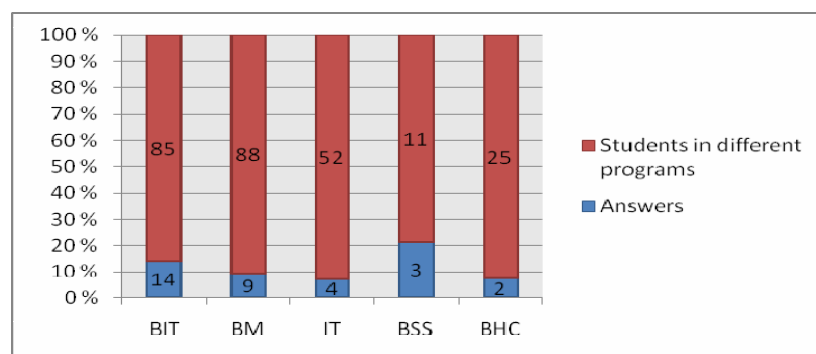


Figure 1 The percentage of answers in different study programs

The figure 1 illustrates the number of answer from different study programs (see appendix, question no 5). From BIT group I got 14 answers which is 16,5% of all BIT students. Nine BM students answered which is 10,2% of all BM students. The social service student group, the BSS group gave three answers which brings it to answering percentage of

27,7%, but there are only 11 students in that group altogether, so the percentage seems high. From nursing students I got only two replies so their answering percentage was 8% from all the students. There is only one international student group in both social services and nursing programs. Students from IT group gave four replies so in their group the answering percentage was the lowest.

Only 25% of answerers are females see appendix, question no 2). Half of the answerers are 21-25-year olds and one quarter are 26-30-year olds. Rest are equally from age 19 to 20 (12,5%) or over 30 years old (12,5%) (see appendix, question no 1). The biggest amount of replies came from students who started their education in Kemi-Tornio UAS in the autumn 2009 (14 students) and autumn 2008 (12 students). From students who started in autumn 2007 and 2006, I got 3 replies from both (see appendix, question no 3). I also sent the questionnaire to those few students who started their studies in 2005, but got no replies from them. Perhaps some students that have started their studies earlier, did not feel that their replies will benefit them and left the survey unanswered. Another reason for that might be that the students already are familiar with the school services and the surroundings in Kemi-Tornio area and that is why they did not feel the need to get the information the survey would provide them.

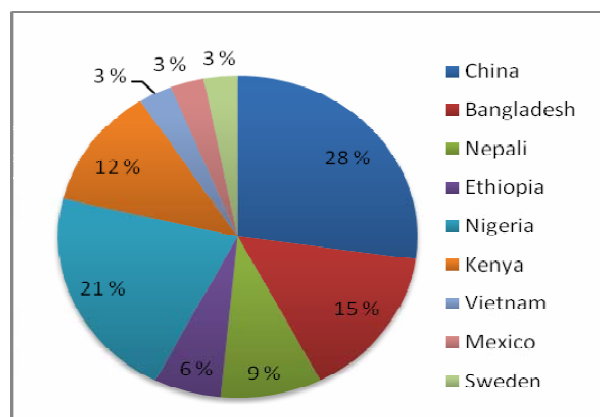


Figure 2 The amount of answerers from different nationalities

Figure 2 shows the nationalities of answerers (see appendix, question no 3). Most active ethnicities to take part in this survey are Asian and African which can be explained by most of our foreign degree students being from those continents. Only two students had English, the language of their studies, as their mother tongue (see appendix, question no. 4).

None of the Finnish students in international classes have answered this survey even though they were also included when sending the email to the groups. It shows that the concept foreign degree student has been understood correctly and therefore Finnish students did not answer the questionnaire. Foreign student in this study is a person who has come from outside Finland and is studying in Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences.

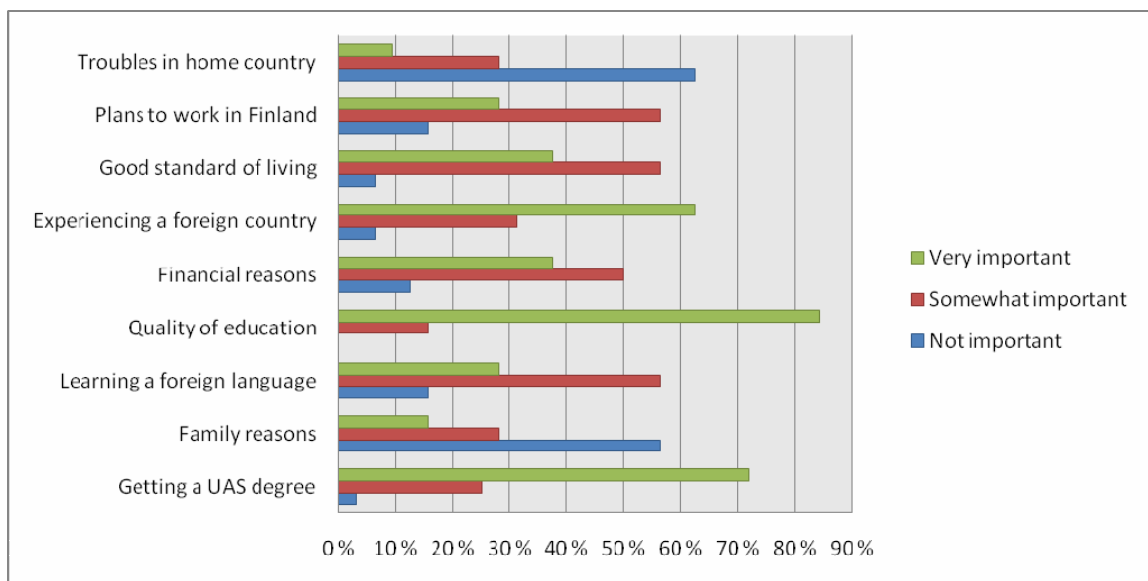


Figure 3 Reasons for choosing studies in Finland
(see appendix, question no. 7)

As seen on Figure 3, two of the most important reasons for studies in Finland seemed to be getting an UAS degree (71,9% of very important) and the quality of education (84,4% of very important). Those factors were also important for students taking part in the research made by Kinnunen (2003, 27). Least importance of choosing studies in Finland was on troubles in home country (62,5% of not important) and family reasons (56,3% of not important). Education in Finland is free of costs and the quality is good which some students have mentioned to be the reasons to study in Finland.

3.3. Living in Kemi-Tornio area and interaction with the society

31,3% of answerers have lived in Finland for less than a year and 12,5% have lived here for a year. 37,5% of the students have lived in Finland for two years, 12,5% for 3-4 years and only 5.3% for more than four years (see appendix, question no. 8). The years lived in Finland do not seem to change the answering percentage that much. The low percentage of answerers who have lived here for than four years can be explained by most of the study programs lasting only four years, so students there are not many students who stay here after that, except if they prolong their studies or participate in another study program.

Living conditions and costs are one of the main concerns for foreign degree students. Accommodation officer offers help for foreign degree students of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences to find apartment and 68,8% of the students have got help from the school when finding their current apartment (see appendix, question no. 9). School offers foreign students help with finding cheapest, furnished accommodation, but unfortunately 53,1% of the students are not happy with the accommodation (see appendix, question no. 11). 41,4% of the students said the rent is too high and also the conditions of apartments were a concern for some students. 51,4% of answerers share an apartment with someone else (see appendix, question no. 10).

In Kemi and Tornio there are not many apartments available for foreign degree students, because the students want furnished apartments with cheap rent. Questions about living conditions (see appendix, questions no. 10-12) and the area of Kemi-Tornio (see appendix, question no. 16) raised both positive and negative opinions. Many students have felt discriminated because they are not treated equally to Finnish students when trying to find apartments in the private market. Usually private market is also more expensive than the accommodation available through school, so students prefer to stay in cheaper apartments. High living costs were mentioned in the open ended question about accommodation as well as other open ended questions several times (see appendix, questions no. 12, 16, 49 & 51-53).

“ The rent is relatively high. It's not convenient that the housekeeper can't speak English.”

“ Living here is not a really big problem for me. The apartment is fine and I have good relation with the room-mates. ”

“ Very high rent. Small room, small bed. No extra facilities. ”

The apartments available for international students are located in the same area, in Tornio quite near the school and in Kemi near the technical unit. There were only few students from the health care and social unit who mentioned that their apartments are located too far from the school. Alitolppa-Niitamo (1994, 87-90) ponders if it is better to centralize all immigrants to one area or to try and organize apartments around the city, among the majority population. I believe for some foreign degree students, being a neighbor to Finnish people is good, but in that case also the Finnish people should be the kind of people who want to interact with foreigners. Living close to people from own culture gives the feeling of security because in a lot of countries the importance of close social network and family is much higher than in Finland (Alitolppa-Niitamo 1994, 54). Also the concept 'family' can include much more in other cultures than what it includes in Finland. In Finland family is usually understood to include the parents and the children, but in more collective countries, it can also include for example grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins (Alitolppa-Niitamo 1994, 52). Therefore the network around people is wider and tighter so when student comes to Finland, a big loss in social network takes place. That is why having people from student's own culture nearby is quite good at least in the beginning.

More guidance for living, for example with housekeeping was wanted by 37,5% of the students (see appendix, question no. 13). It is understandable because many students I have tutored come from countries where for example electronic appliances are different as well as the way of cooking or storing food. Also all the products for cooking or cleaning are different so more information on those would be useful.

78,1% of the foreign degree students had no Finnish language skills when arriving to Finland, but now 75% evaluate their language skills as beginner level (see appendix, question no. 14). The same 18,8% that were on the beginner level when arriving to Finland, seem to have improved to being intermediate in Finnish language. Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences offers foreign degree students Finnish language courses worth of nine study credits.

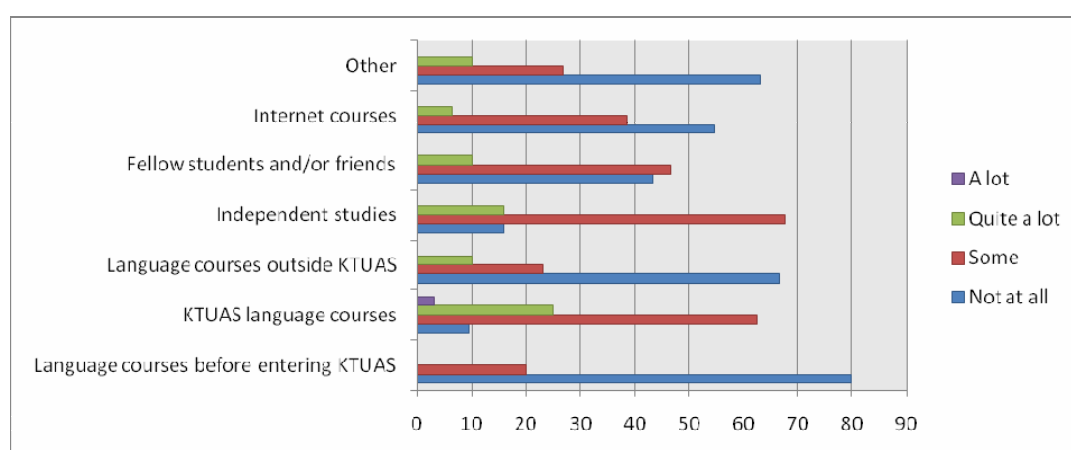


Figure 4 Amount of learned language skills from different sources
(see appendix, question no 15)

As Figure 4 shows, only 9,4% of the students had not learned the language on those courses at all, but for most students those courses have been an important way of learning the language. 62,5% informed that they have learned some and 25% have learned quite a lot of Finnish language. 33,3% of the students had also taken language courses outside the course offered by the UAS and 45,2% had improved their skills through Internet courses. 56,7% of the students have also learned Finnish by communicating with Finnish people, such as other students or friends. 43,3% informed that they haven't learned any Finnish from other people, which might be explained by foreign international students often creating a tight group and not communicating with Finnish people that much or by communication with Finnish people happening in English language.

71% of the students think that getting to know Finnish people is somewhat difficult or even very difficult (see appendix, question no. 17). Of course the language barrier might be a reason for lack of communication and the feeling that Finnish people are not easy to

approach. By sociologist Geert Hofstede (itim International 2010), Finland is quite individualistic and not that collective, so we take care of ourselves more than others. The uncertainty avoidance index is also high in Finland (itim International 2010) so Finnish people also do not like to be in situations where they are uncertain of themselves so if people are uncertain on their language skills or how to act with a person from another culture, they might avoid the situation rather than facing it. Students coming from countries with more collective nation like China, it can be a shock for them that Finnish people seem so closed and uninterested.

In many opinions Finnish people seem quite uninterested in communicating with foreign degree students. I have experienced that many Finnish people are shy to interact with foreign students because they are not confident enough about their own language skills. Of course also ignorance of different kind of people might be a reason not to communicate with foreign students.

“ Kemi is a very isolated area, besides, most people here do not accommodate foreigners, they treat us like aliens. They are not even ready to employ us, not to talk or having anything to do with us. ”

“ ..if there was interaction between students and the society, learning language could have been easy. ”

“ ..Kemi people do not appreciate the international environment, everybody sees us as an alien.. even among the fellow Finnish students who suppose to be the first people accept the international student. Separating Finnish study class from English study class is not really helping. ”

In the survey made by Kinnunen (2003, 81) over half of the foreign degree students had felt to be treated unfairly because of being a foreigner. In Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences 43,8% of the foreign degree students have experienced prejudice towards self sometimes so the number is about the same as in the research made earlier (see appendix 1, question 18). Although in the research made by Samok (2008, 88) only 27% of the students

informed about having experiences of discrimination. Of course students have different views on what is discrimination and what is not. The results still show that Finnish people have a lot of prejudice towards foreigners. The experiences of answerers do not seem to be bad and most of them write to cope with those situations quite fine by understanding (see appendix 1, question 19).

“ ..a bit here and there.. and I normally don't pay attention to it since it's ignorance for their part. ”

That is a nice way of looking at things, but it is good for the students to know their rights and to be provided guidance in such matters. 15,6% of the students don't know how to act if they get into undesirable situations, like racist attack, but the rest of the students know at least sometimes where to contact in different situations (see appendix 1, question 20). Person who experiences discrimination has to decide how to react on the discrimination or racism he or she experiences (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind & Vesala 2002, 44). Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind & Vesala (2002, 45) define different ways of reacting in such situations.

“ In direct or aggressive coping methods the victim shows feelings either verbally or physically or reports to authority. Avoiding (non-aggressive) and passive acceptance of situation as well as non-direct reaction on situation can lead to psychological problems. More precisely divided non-aggressive ways include either indirect message such as humor, conciliating of the bully or indirect hostility. Psychological reactions can be divided into two groups, emotional reactions and coping methods.” (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind & Vesala 2002, 45)

By Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind & Vesala (2002, 45) emotional reactions can be for example frustration, anger or depression and avoiding methods are for example denial. Directive coping in undesirable situations can ease the feelings of victim and it can be better way to handle situation than hiding the feelings inside. Unsolved situations can be a risk to mental health. (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind & Vesala 2002, 45). Students should talk with some person to decide how to deal with situations, because at the moment the students have a lack of information on who to contact (see appendix 1, questions no. 19-20).

3.4. Studies, guidance and counseling

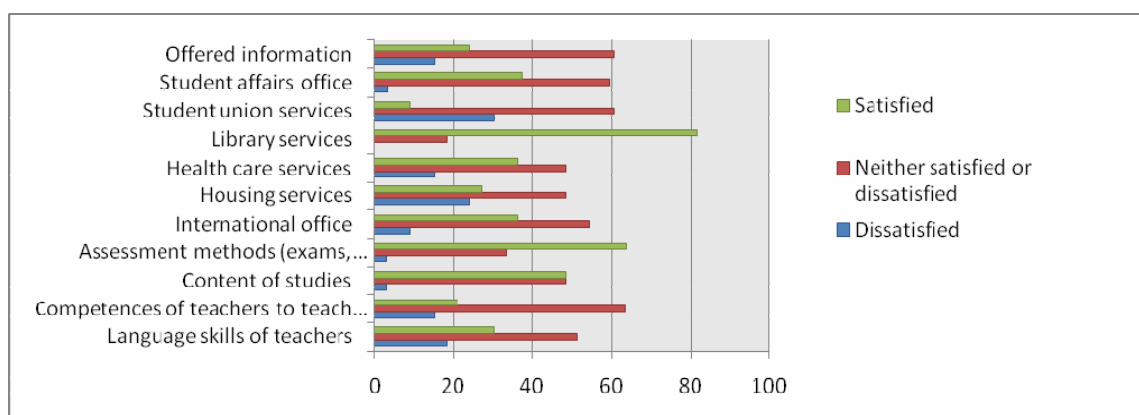


Figure 5 Satisfaction on different services
(see appendix, question no. 24)

There are not many things that raise a lot of negative or positive opinion in the services (Figure 5). Almost one fifth (18,2%) are not satisfied with the language skills of teachers which is a matter of concern since Kemi-Tornio UAS is, after all offering students education in English language. The language skills of teachers was also a concern of students in the research made by Samok (2008, 50). Also on open ended questions (see appendix 1, questions 26, 51 & 52) were a lot of comments about staff and students. Teachers were considered helpful but sometimes the weak level of teachers' English skills was upsetting some students.

“ Teachers are very friendly and experienced, school environment is good. ”

“ I don't want to say “worst” but I would like to say this is not that good is some teachers' English level. I think we students could get better understanding if some teacher can explain more. ”

“ Teachers who do not speak proper English rely on the Finnish speaking students in the international groups as walking dictionaries during the class. This should give us at least one or two tutoring credits or maybe equal treatment with other students. ”

Housing services were a matter of dissatisfaction for 24,2% of the students, because the rents are too high and living conditions are not so good in all the apartments. Students were most satisfied (81,8%) with the library services of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences. Also the research made by Kinnunen (2003, 37) and the research made by Samok (2008, 51) shows that library services are a matter of satisfaction among the foreign degree students. The facilities raised plenty of positive opinions also when asking about positive and negative things in Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences.

“ The units and groups are small. Everybody know each other and I think this might reduce the risk of anybody to be left alone or having worries without somebody noticing it. ”

“ The learning environment (is good). Access to learning material, learning hours, exposure to major learning figures and industries. Experienced and multi-cultured teachers (some). ”

“ Equipments for teaching, for example computers, library, fitness room and so on. ”

“ Study, international environment, co-operative teachers. ”

“ Huge resources we can use. We just need the willingness. ”

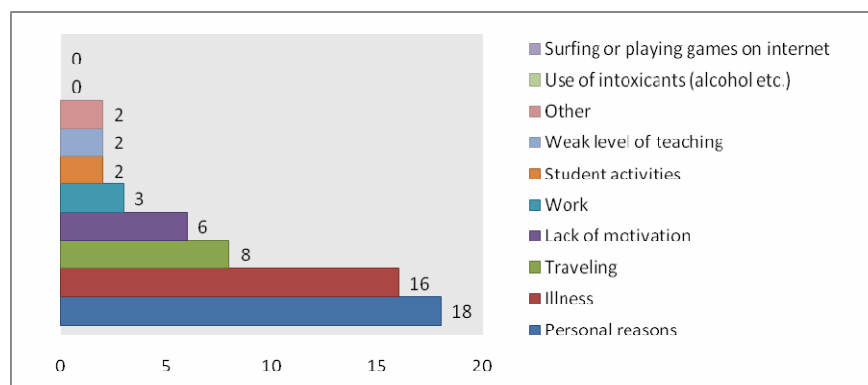


Figure 6 Reasons why students have skipped lessons in the past six months
(see appendix, question no. 28)

Four of the students have not skipped lessons in the past six months. 36,4% had skipped lessons 1-2 times and 30,3% 3-5 times. Four students had skipped lessons 6-10 times and three students quite a lot, more than ten times (see appendix, question no. 27). As Figure 6 demonstrates, the biggest reasons for skipping lessons were personal reasons (62,1%) and illness (55,2%). Traveling was a reason to skip lessons for 27,6% and lack of motivation for 20,7%. Student activities had taken the time of 6,9% of the students and 6,9% thought the level of teaching was too weak to motivate them to go. Work was a reason to skip lessons for 10,3% of the students.

The amount of school work and lessons is too much for two students, but for 18 students it is sufficient and nine students are quite happy with the amount (see appendix, question no. 25).

“ Each course have their own credit hours and its enough to practice at home plus at school. ”

Only four students say that there could be more lessons or assignments. In some students' opinion the studies should be more interactive and students should teach more, not just send students off to search information and do tasks on their own. Students are hoping for more instructions from the teachers to do assignments and how to use their skills in the working field. Foreign degree students also experienced to be too separated from Finnish students.

“ We foreign students are always “ the foreign student ”. Everybody behave with us like foreigner. ”

51,5,% of the students evaluated their health as good and 33,3% as average. Still 12,2,% evaluated their health as being below average and one evaluated to even have poor health (see appendix, question no. 29). So there seems to be a need for more health care for students and the survey also showed that students want more information about student health care (see appendix, question no. 32). By Primary Health Care Act foreign students are legitimated for student health care. Also emergency care should be organized for everyone regardless to home municipality and nationality (Vuokila-Oikkonen 2009, 8). 24

students of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences want information about the health care services available for students in general. The school nurse meets the new students every autumn, but school health care is in interest of 11 students. Ten students are not familiar enough with the health care centers and 15 students want more information about dental care. Also information is wanted about mental health care (8 students) and health emergency situations (9 students). Only two students have enough information already. Over half of the students (57,6%) informed of having troubles sleeping and 54,4% do not sleep enough (see appendix, questions no. 30-31).

3.5. Satisfaction on the services

The services of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences were evaluated good by 33,3%, varying by 63,6% and not good by 3% (see appendix, question no. 33). The results are similar to the results in research made by Samok (2008, 59). Kemi-Tornio UAS has four different units in two different cities which makes all the units different. For example the unit of social services as a building is a lot smaller than the technical unit, so it is understandable that the study environment at social unit is tighter and collective than the technical unit because of the field of studies and amount of people.

Less than one third (27,3%) know who to ask for help in different situations (see appendix, question no. 34). The number is very concerning, especially if compared to the results in the research made by Samok (2008, 60) where 75% of the students knew who to ask for help. Both sometimes and mostly 33,3% know who to turn to when 6,1% inform that they do not know who to ask for help. Help is given to 15,2% students always when they asked. Over half (51,5%) get help most of the time when needed and one third (30,3%) get help sometimes (see appendix, question no. 36). Only one student informs to rarely get help when asking. It was not asked what kind of help students asked from different people, so the case might be that they asked for something that can not be solved and that is why they felt like they got no help.

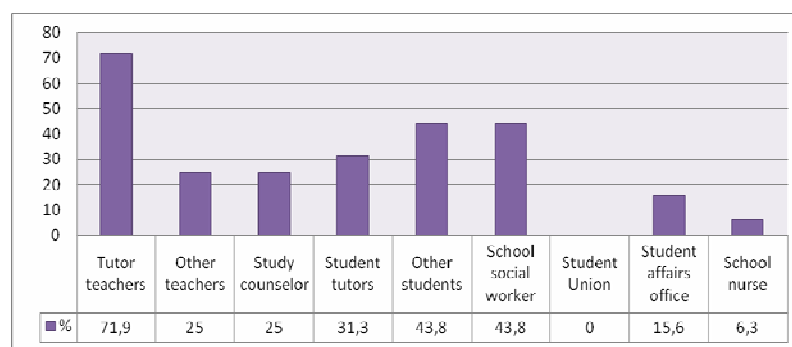


Figure 7 Who students ask for help
(see appendix, question no. 35)

As seen in figure 7, the tutor teacher is the main source of help for students. The research made by Samok (2008, 62) shows similar results. It can be explained by tutor teachers usually having information on big variety of things, not only the studies. For foreign degree students also school social worker and other students are important people to ask for help. Sipilä (Sipilä discussion 2009) confirms that a lot of foreign degree students contact her about various things and ask for help. One quarter ask help from other teachers and study counselors. Also student tutors seem to be a quite important source of information because 31,3% ask help from them. Student affairs office is usually helping with official paperwork but not many other things so perhaps that is why only 15,6% students turn to them for help. School nurse is a main resource of help for only 6,3% of student and assume it is only with health related issues. Probably students mostly ask help from the school nurse with things related to their health which might explain the small percentage of students getting help from them. What is concerning is that students do not consider student union as possible recourse of help. It shows that student union is not important to foreign degree students at all. Also the research made by Samok showed that student union is not a resource of help for most students, because students felt that student union did not provide help or guidance at all (Samok 2008, 68).

3.6. Student activities

As the question about sources for help also questions about student union show that student union is not at all familiar for students (see appendix, question no. 39). The responsibility of the student union is to motivate students to be active, enlightened and critical citizens.

The main task of student union is also to be a connection between students and to enhance their social and mental need as students (Ammattikorkeakoululaki, §42a). Even though 51,5% of the students have taken part in some activities organized by the student union 60,6% of the students know only a little bit and 33,3% do not know at all what the student unions in Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences are for (see appendix, questions no. 39-41). Only two students know quite much of the student unions.

Student union services raised dissatisfaction in 30,3% of the students, mostly foreign students hope that the student union organize also other kind of events than just parties because not everyone is interested in partying. As in the research made by Samok (2008, 69), also in my research the interest of events without alcohol were wished for. Students hope that there would be more information available in English also so they could be more involved. Only 10% of the students were happy about information given by student unions in the research of Samok (2008, 68). Also Kinnunen (2003, 47) states that foreign degree students are disappointed with the actions of student unions and they feel that there are not enough activities for foreign degree students. A part of the students experienced that student unions had not welcomed them or were not interested in foreign degree students (Kinnunen 2003, 47). Students answering this questionnaire hope there would be activities involving creativity and human connections, such as different music or discussion groups (see appendix, questions no. 41-42, 51-53).

Students seem interested in organizing something themselves and not only waiting for someone to organize all the activities for them. Student union is supposed to be able to help with such situations, but ignorance about it is stopping this development.

“ I want to make something interesting. You know something creative which can make Kemi glorious. ”

“ I like Kemi-Tornio UAS. As a student of it, I hope I can do something that I can do for developing together with school. So if the school can give more scope for us, we will show school there are so many improvement that we can push. ”

62,5% of the students have found interesting hobbies in Kemi-Tornio area (see appendix, question no. 21). Mostly the information is found from fellow students or friends (75%), school web-pages (56,3%) and staff (46,9%) as well as other people (31,3%) and Internet (34,4%) (see appendix, question no. 22). There still is the remaining 37,5% which has not found interesting hobbies in the area. In the area there are quite many activities even though the cities of Kemi and Tornio are not big. As some students bring out on their answers, a problem here might be that not many activities are free and therefore students do not have money to participate in different hobbies. Kemi-Tornio University offers free school gym, but that is not enough to satisfy interests of all students. They hope that there would be other kind of activities available.

3.7. Working possibilities of foreign degree students

With student visa the students have the right to work 25 hours per week and full-time during holidays (Nikkilä 2008). Only five out of 33 students answering the survey, work besides their studies (see appendix, question no. 43). In the survey was not asked if students were looking for a job or if they would be interested in working if there were jobs available, but the issue stands out throughout the survey.

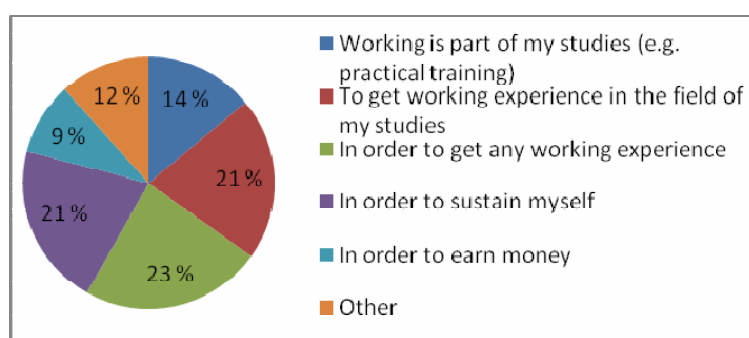


Figure 8 Reasons for working
(see appendix, question no. 44)

Getting working experience is the most important reason for working (Figure 8). Money is also good motivation for working, because foreign degree students do not enjoy the student grant paid by social insurance company KELA and they also can not get income support from the social office because those are only for Finnish citizens.

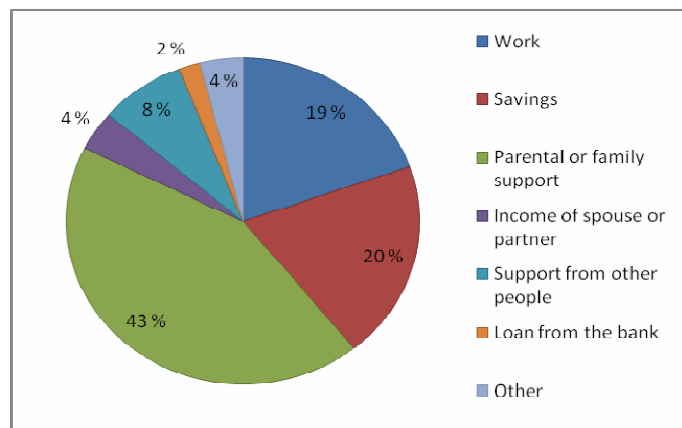


Figure 9 Ways of funding the studies
(see appendix, question no. 46)

As Figure 9 demonstrates, by the percentage of 71% , the biggest economical help for foreign degree students seems to be the support they get from their parents. Savings and work are also important way to support life in Finland, by 32,2% of the students. Results are similar to the research made by Samok (2008, 75) and Kinnunen (2003, 57). Students would like to have work simply to sustain themselves and have some income for extra activities. The results are similar as in the research made by Kinnunen (2003, 56). 38,7% were able to survive with the money they had in the last six months by using it carefully. 41,9% had to struggle from time to time and one student did not have money to survive from everyday life because of not having enough money (see appendix, question no. 47). Many of the students would be ready to do any job to sustain themselves in Kemi-Tornio area, but they have only slight possibilities to do so.

“ Being honest, there is nothing bad in Kemi except the job issue. As an international student , I don't want to earn thousands of euros. It is enough if I only survive here and am able to complete my degree. ”

Still the will to work is brought up in the answers throughout the whole survey. It shows that the lack of work really is an issue here in Kemi-Tornio area. Metso & Peltola (2008, 100) state that sometimes people coming from foreign countries have unrealistic expectations of the working possibilities and when talking with some of the foreign degree students, I have come across the same problem. Students might know someone living in bigger cities of Finland where there are also better working possibilities than in Kemi-Tornio area and the

students coming to study in Kemi-Tornio UAS, they expect that the working possibilities are similar in whole Finland. Students commented working situation a lot in open ended question about the city of their studies as well as other open ended questions (see appendix, questions no. 16, 49, 51-53).

“ Quiet and silent, which is good for studies, some time for students it is necessary to get a part time job so they can survive easily, but here we do not have enough opportunity to get job. ”

“ Very small city. Very less opportunity to get job (before or after graduation). ”

“ It would be better to be in bigger place, more chances might be available to work.”

It is hard for foreign students to find job, especially now when it is hard even for Finnish students to find work because of the economical crisis. For the foreign students often lack of language skill is the main reason of not getting work, but also the attitude and prejudice or employer can prevent foreign students from getting work as also Metso & Peltola (2008, 97) say.

“ Employers prefer to take a native Finnish if they can choose. There are prejudice towards immigrants and people coming from other countries... If employer had bad experience of some nation's skills and work motivation, has to a person belonging to this nation work very hard to prove the prejudice wrong and to break the stereotypes. ” (Metso& Peltola 2008, 110-111.)

Lack of language skills were a disadvantage when looking for a job, as also Kinnunen (2003, 68) mentioned. Metso & Peltola (2008, 111) say that sometimes lack of Finnish language skills are used as an excuse for not wanting to take a foreign person as employee. Employers might think that lack of Finnish skills also mean lower working skills (Metso & Peltola 2008, 111).

“ The one and major disadvantage is the lack of job opportunities and an insistence on being very fluent in Finnish before getting the opportunity. ”

Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti, Karmela Liebkind and Tiina Vesala (2002, 23) underline that immigrants social connections, own initiative and activity in job searching are important factors as well as knowing the Finnish manners. Practical training placements are a good way to connect with the working life and companies. In the questions about practical training placements 25,8% informed that they have had trouble in finding practical training placement (see appendix, questions no. 37.38). As reasons they mentioned lack of Finnish language skills which is often required at working places. The missing contacts to different companies were also a concern of some students because they felt that in that way the opportunities of getting practical placements were quite bad.

“ ..at least school and individual staff should be ready to assist the student in getting placement by inviting companies, professional bodies to have discussions with the students and possible way of getting the placement. ”

A couple of students also mentioned their interest in exchange programs which at this moment is quite difficult to organize for other than students from the EU. International office of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied sciences states (Kehusmaa 2010) that generally all students have possibility for practical training abroad. Students coming from third world countries must get visa to the country of their studies, when studying lasts more than three months and the approximate time for exchange is five months (Kehusmaa 2010.). Kehusmaa (2010) also tells that when students apply for visa, they need to prove that they have enough money to support themselves during their stay and that they also have health insurance from their home country. Applying for visa is a long, sometimes also costly process and these have been the primary obstacles for foreign degree students not taking part in student exchange (Kehusmaa 2010).

3.8. Future plans of students

Studies in Kemi-Tornio University had met the expectations of two students very well (see appendix, question no. 23). 15 students' expectations were met quite well and somewhat with 14 students. Two students were disappointed with their studies here.

“ So far my expectations haven't been fulfilled. ”

“ I am satisfied with my studies and the university. There are some few problems but university can easily solve them if they want. I would love to complete my graduation in this university. ”

In the answers to questions number 48 and 49 came out that only one student is going to transfer to another University of Applied Sciences without graduating from Kemi-Tornio UAS. 39,4% is thinking of transferring to another UAS in Finland and 18,2% of the students were going to transfer but decided to stay in Kemi-Tornio UAS. 57,1% of those who perhaps are thinking of transferring to another school, mention lack of working possibilities as one of the reasons for not continuing their studies in Kemi-Tornio area. Also small amount of extra courses for foreign students as well as lack of international facilities and activities seem to bother some students.

63,6% of the students would like to stay in Finland to work or study more after graduating from Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences (see appendix, question no. 50). The result was about the same in the research made by Kinnunen (2003, 97-104) where students said that if circumstances allow, they would like to stay in Finland. It shows that students have good experiences from Finland despite some obstacles they have had to face while living here. Only four students plan to go back to their home country and five students have not planned that far.

“ I have fallen in love with Finland and Finns. I was telling one of my teachers that I wanted to go to Canada to complete my study but that was a bit more expensive and the quality compare to Finnish education would be better. I want complete my

higher degrees in Finland. Probably Oulu or somewhere around norther Finland. Then I want to go back to my home country and make the bridge with Finland. ”

As students answering the research made by Samok (2008, 47), also the students answering this survey hope for more international learning environment and activities. It stands out in the open ended questions throughout the survey.

“ The bad part is that there is no interaction with the society and our only environment is the school. ”

“ I will like to get more information on the available opportunities for students, foreign or not, that will promote his well-being in the community. ”

“ There is a gap between foreign student and Finnish student. Our university should arrange some event that we can have the chance to know them. ”

Overall the answers show that foreign degree students are quite happy with the services, but would appreciate better services helping them to integrate with Finnish people and society.

4. DISCUSSION

In this last part I will look into the conclusions and ponder the ethical issues of the research. There were of course some difficulties in the research process so I will also tell about those. I will also introduce ideas to use the results of the research to improve the services as well as for some more research.

4.1. Ethical viewpoint

When planning the research it is very important to make sure that all information that I get from the students, remain confidential. I have a lot of experience in working with foreign degree students and also with the staff, but had to keep in mind that I would have to consider what information to use, since some information I had got outside my thesis process.

For getting official information from university, I got a research permit from the principal of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences. That gave the staff also permission to give information for example about the number of foreign degree students. I also made a project agreement with our vice principal which means that Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences is the participant making the initiative for this thesis project.

When sending the survey to the students, I introduced myself, the purpose of thesis and also the confidentiality of the answers they would give. When answering the survey, the student gave me a permission to use the information gathered. All answers remain anonymous because the survey was made by Webropol online question form and only a little background information was gathered so I could not connect answers with any students.

As a native Finnish speaker it was interesting to use English as the language of my thesis. I used both Finnish and English material and sometimes came across the difficulty of translating Finnish text into English. Sometimes I had to shorten or lengthen sentences because everything could not be translated word by word to make text understandable. I

tried to be as accurate as possible so that references and my translation would have the same meaning. In my original plan was to visit each class to introduce the survey and lead them through it, but in the end it could not be organized because of the timing. Therefore I sent the survey to each class by email. I think that if I had the chance to meet each class face to face, the number of replies would have been higher.

Replies seemed to have many similar issues the students tell about and it shows that there really are some issues that need more focus when school develops the services. Although some of those issues might be such that school can try to work on, but is not able to change things.

It is difficult to analyze the answers, because people are different. That is why it is hard to know what people actually think when choosing different options. Also for example when asking about undesirable situations, we have to keep in mind that there is differential vulnerability that defines the reliability of answers. When people come to new culture, they experience a cultural chock and I was thinking to look into cultural shock and it is different phases, but it would have required such huge effort that I decided to leave out that part. In a qualitative research that might have been possible to do.

4.2. Thesis process

I have worked a lot with international students since spring 2007 as a student tutor so I have a little insight on what it is to be a foreign student here in Kemi. Already in year 2008 I started to think about my thesis subject and had some ideas about making a research on cultural awareness and prejudice in Kemi. I also had come across the problem of free-time activities of international degree students so there was a lot to choose from. I discussed with the school social worker at Kemi-Tornio UAS, Maria Sipilä about different subjects I could choose, but could not really wrap my thought around that idea and come up with a subject that would be interesting enough. In autumn 2009 I started my last practical training at Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences, working with Mrs. Sipilä. We made an agreement that I would mostly concentrate on working with our international students. During the practical training Mrs. Sipilä and the quality coordinator of our university, Anja

Tuovila suggested that perhaps I could do a well-being research to our international students. The quality issue had become big in our university and also the thoughts of foreign degree students wanted to be taken into consideration. The idea sounded interesting and the thought of me being able to actually provide our university with some useful information gave me motivation.

There were similar surveys made earlier in Finland. One of them was “We need more English information about our study, life in Finland and this country”, a research of situation of foreign degree students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. It is a research that was made in the year 2007 by association for student unions in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. Another research was Terve Fiilinki – parempi meininki?, a research of the well-being of students in Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences and Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences. It was made in the year 2005 by Minna Viuhko. Those surveys gave me plenty of idea on what to ask on my research.

The questionnaire was finished and sent to students in February 2010. Before sending it further to the research target group, I sent it to few students who went through it, tested it and gave feedback. After the feedback I got from them, I changed the questionnaire a little bit. The original plan was to set up meetings with each international student group, but on the week of the meetings, I got ill and could not meet the students. It was the week before spring break so I decided to send the survey to each group by email because I felt I could not wait over the holidays for the replies. I think meeting with the students would have increased the number of replies and it would also have been good for school’s reputation. A lot of international students think that school only uses pretty words, but does not really take matters into action and actually do something for the existing issues.

In the beginning of my thesis process, I was highly motivated, but the motivation vanished at some point. It was partly because for example a quality afternoon was held for the international students and after reading the outcome of that afternoon, I felt like they had talked about a lot of things I also had asked about on my survey. When I was feeling like I lost all ideas on what I was suppose to write, I read some other theses. It helped me to get my thoughts together and structure my thesis better.

Doing thesis initiated by Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences was a great experience and I feel it gave me more opportunities to ask for opinions and help, because not only I had my thesis instructors, but also a co-operating staff member, in this case school social worker Maria Sipilä. Reading more material before starting the thesis process itself, would have given me a lot more ideas and perhaps helped me to define my research questions to be more detailed and focused on a certain subject. That way I could have improved my questionnaire and leave out some questions and form some of them better. I tried to form the questions to be as accurate as possible so the students did not have to spend time trying to figure out what I meant by the questions. Some questions have options and in the feedback of questionnaire one student wrote that on some questions there should have been more options to choose the answer from.

I think I should have concentrated more only on the services of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences, because now the research became too scattered and I could not do deep analysis. In future research I know to limit my research more so I can concentrate on some things only. Some questions felt unnecessary when analyzing thesis. For example question about mother tongue only gave the information that students answering the survey come from nine different countries but still have 15 different mother tongues which I found very interesting.

When doing the thesis for the university, I tried to fulfill their wishes as well as possible, but did not realize that I can not do a huge research as my bachelor thesis, because thesis is only meant to be a work of 15 ECTS, not a research covering all the issues concerning foreign degree students. I should have put my own thought into it more and limit the research area more carefully and not try to get answers to all questions. For example question about sleeping bring out that over half of the students have trouble sleeping. Because I did not go deeper to that subject, I did not really need the information to find out how to improve the services of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences. As I planned in the beginning, I wanted to look into cultural differences and possibly also the differences between genders, but it would also have been too deep analysis for me to do alone, so it was not done at this thesis. I did divide the answers by different nationalities and genders, so hopefully Kemi-Tornio UAS will find it useful when improving the services.

5. USABILITY OF THESIS AND IDEAS FOR BETTER SERVICES

Many students also wrote that they would like to know how the feedback they gave on my survey will be applied when developing services and they would also like to give more information in the future.

“ The questionnaire is superb one and I will like to have more to fill in the future. ”

“ I like this questionnaire. It shows that school pay attention on our feedback. This active attitude will push the school improve itself. This can be school spirit-progress, seek for knowledge. ”

“ How does this help us improve? ”

“ I hope this will not be just a while elephant-project which will not have effect, it is good things to give feedback that would have effect. ”

I will present my research results to the staff of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences in a full complete written rapport including also the opinions that I did not directly write on this thesis. In the rapport the staff can see the results divided for example by nationality, age and gender. The school can then use the results as informative reference when improving services. There are still many issues to be deeply researched concerning foreign degree students so there surely will be available research subjects for other students.

There is a new project called To Care, To Dare, To Share which is a project to prevent exclusion in UAS studies. The project is administered by Diakonia University of Applied Sciences and made together by 14 different Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland, also Kemi-Tornio UAS. According to the introduction of the project by Tarja Lipponen (2010), the goal of this project is to support both Finnish and foreign students' well-being and finishing of the studies by

- creating standards of activity to become aware of the risks of becoming excluded.

- creating different kind of Internet material to support students in different problematic situations.
- educating the staff of UAS to recognize the risks of students' exclusion.
- developing the involvement of students and other supporting environment.
- surveying the services improving the well-being of foreign students in Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences.
- providing information about exclusion of students.

Lipponen (2010) thinks the project is important, because being a student does not always mean that everything in life is good. In the project they are taking into consideration about the same things as in this thesis. Lipponen is mostly interested in the health care services for students in Kemi-Tornio area, because the situation of student health care in the area is not functioning that well. There is not enough recourses for student health care and especially the services in English language are almost non-existing (Lipponen 2010). By being part of this project, also the already existing well-being groups of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences, will improved. Lipponen (2010) says that differences between the well-being groups in different units are huge, so it is good to get all of them to the same level. I will also present my research to the well-being groups and hope they get some useful information from it. Some students are also doing their bachelor theses on that project, so hopefully my thesis can be of some help for them.

5.1. Student unions and tutoring

As came out in the research, students do not really know what the student union is and do not rely on it to improve the well-being of students. In the autumn 2008 there came a lot of foreign students to Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences and a lot of the responsibility for their introduction to the area was laid on the student union KETOAKKU. This task was not in the contract between KETOAKKU and the school, so KETOAKKU did not have enough resources. The contract was canceled and quiet times in KETOAKKU started. Now the co-operation has been built again and it seems like Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences will be working closely together with KETOAKKU also to

improve the well-being of foreign degree students. KETOAKKU also has some foreign students as their board members so they have more view on how it is to be a foreign students in the area. Perhaps other foreign degree students will participating more in their activities too.

In addition to the main student union KETOAKKU, there are sub unions in all units. From my experience as a member of student union KetoSok at the social unit of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences, students do not really know what happens at the student union meetings, because no one is telling them. The issues that students bring up, usually are discussed in the meetings, but since the feedback of feedback does not go back to students, they do not know that the issues they bring up are actually discussed at the meetings.

Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences has also created a new, more structured policy on student tutoring. From autumn 2010 student tutoring will be an actual course in Kemi-Tornio UAS. It means that students who want to be tutors, enroll themselves to this course and therefore have some demands on what to do to get the credits for this course. I think this will help students to be more committed to tutoring. Having this structured action plan has also created a lot of interest and more students seems to be interested in being a tutor than ever before. School should be ready to set some resources for student activities, because in student life also other activities are important and Kemi-Tornio University could raise the appreciation of students by showing them that the school interested in overall well-being of students.

Most of the students' orientation for studies and living in Kemi-Tornio area is organized in the first week, which is fine, but in my opinion more guidance should be provided later during the school year also. In the last couple of years I have noticed that lot of foreign degree students arrive late, after the school year has started already so they often miss the first orientation week. That is why information should be provided also later, for example in the second period. I think it would also be good if school had more personal taking care of the guidance, because then the students would have more clear idea about who to ask.

As it came out in the research, foreign degree students are also willing to do something for their well-being by themselves. Student union as well as student tutors could be good help in this, because often times it remains a bit unclear what kind of things should be taken into consideration. School also has facilities for different kind of events, but students do not always know about all the possibilities they have, so events are not organized. Not everywhere people speak English so sometimes a Finnish speaking person is required when making arrangements and the student union could provide this person if needed.

5.2. Cultural awareness

The non-discrimination plan is good to have, but I am not sure if many students or staff members know about the plan, because for example I did not know about it at all, before I started asking around. Introducing the plan to both Finnish and foreign students should be included in the orientation period to prevent discrimination at the learning environment. I have experienced that many students still think they never will encounter a person from different culture in their working environment, but I think that way of thinking should be changed. Whole Finland is getting more and more multicultural, so at any profession people might have to service or work with a person from another culture. That is why some awareness of cultural differences should be included in the studies of all study programs. Also having more mutual lessons with mixed groups of Finnish and foreign students would make Finnish students more aware foreign students, their reasons for being in Finland and also differences and similarities of people from different cultures.

The strategy of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences should also be modified to utilise the multicultural classes. There could be more sharing of knowledge learned in different cultures. That way every student could have possibility to learn in the best suitable way. It should also be taken into consideration that not all people from the same culture are the same. Everyone are individuals. Perhaps multicultural education could be improved in Kemi-Tornio UAS and also teachers' skills to teach multicultural groups could be upgraded. There could for example be some courses for teachers on multicultural education.

Also the cultural awareness of the environment should be improved, because the area of Kemi

and Tornio is not that multicultural yet, but there still are plenty of people from different nationalities and cultures. Many people have bad opinion for example about the foreign degree students of Kemi-Tornio UAS, but I think most of the Finnish and other students do not know enough of the foreign people in the area. People make too many assumptions and judge people by what they have heard or what some individual has done. Cultural awareness of the environment could be enhanced by organizing events and happenings where all cultures could come together. Also perhaps some publicity about everyday life of foreign degree students or on other subjects could be presented.

5.3. Employment

Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences can not do much with the employment market in the area, but it can help promote our students to different companies in the area. Kemi-Tornio UAS has helped to organize part time jobs for students, especially for the summer and it has been great. The problem in that has been the lack of motivation and commitment for students to work. Naturally jobs available might be very interesting for students, but the school should help students become committed to the job, since any working experience from Finland will be an advantage when looking for a job in the field of studies in Finland. Offering students more courses about Finnish culture and for example Finnish working mentality would benefit students when finding work during or after studies. The international students of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences have already planned a project called Student Hope. The purpose of the project is to improve the working possibilities of foreign degree students by creating contacts with different employees. Also Student Hope is suppose to be able to offer part-time jobs for students. I have not heard about this project at all so I do not know if it is active or not, but it is sounds like a great idea. It would be good if it would be possible to organize part time jobs or practical training places where employers are also committed on teaching foreign students a little bit of Finnish language while they work. That way students would get to practice their Finnish skills also in the working life and perhaps the vocabulary would become more specific, especially in practical training places. Everyone of course have their own ways of learning, but practicing is always the best way to maintain and brush up the language skills.

5.4. Overall

Cooperation between different sectors should be utilised more. More connections with for example the multicultural meeting point Leipätehdas in Kemi, should be improved. The more cooperation Kemi-Tornio UAS has in the area, the better chances students have for finding things to do or even job possibilities. Also when introducing for example the employment system or health care system in Finland, it would be good to have more professionals there to answer questions. Foreign degree students from previous study groups could also be involved in these introductions to tell about their own experiences.

Also cooperation between the university and the municipalities is important, because both sides need to know what is going on in the area. If these two important factors in students' lives are being separate, there surely are problems. There are a lot of companies and organizations that might be able to offer the foreign degree students some services so more information should be provided to those companies and organizations also. The services might not have to be fully in English language, but they should be something that the students could take part in when trying to integrate to Finnish society. Most important thing in integration process is to feel welcome.

Another important thing Kemi-Tornio University can do to improve the services and well-being of students, both Finnish and foreign, is to assign new staff to different responsibilities. The existing staff has their hands full of work already and do not have time to take care of extra tasks. Of course there always are some kind-hearted people who help just because they want to, but even they can not help everyone. Not having enough resources to take care of the students of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences is a serious matter and enhances the inequality between students. Having international learning environment is a great benefit for all students of Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences and I hope the students as well as the school itself will appreciate this possibility. Effectiveness comes from motivated people, so it is important to take care of the well-being of both students and staff.

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APPENDIX no. 1**The survey questions****BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

1. Your age
 - under 18
 - 19 – 20
 - 21 – 25
 - 26 – 30
 - over 30
2. Gender
 - male
 - female
3. Nationality _____
4. Mother tongue _____
5. Field of studies
 - Business and information technology (BIT)
 - Information technology (IT)
 - Business management (BM)
 - Social Services (BSS)
 - Nursing
6. When did you start your current studies?
 - In autumn 2009
 - in autumn 2008
 - in autumn 2007
 - in autumn 2006
 - in autumn 2005
7. How important factors were these factors when making decision to apply to Finland? (Options: Not important, Somewhat important, Very important)
 - Getting a UAS degree
 - Family reasons
 - Learning a foreign language
 - Quality of education
 - Financial reasons
 - Experiencing a foreign country
 - Good standard of living

- Plans to work in Finland
- Troubles in home country

LIFE IN KEMI-TORNIO AREA

- How long have you lived in Finland
 - Less than a year
 - 1 year
 - 2 years
 - 3-4 years
 - more than 4 years
- Did you get help from school when looking for your current apartment?
 - Yes
 - No
- How do you live?
 - Alone
 - With parents
 - With partner
 - With someone else
- Are you satisfied with your level of living at the moment?
 - Yes
 - No
- Please write your opinion about your living situation. Specify what you are and aren't happy about (apartment, living conditions, area etc.)
- Would you wish to have more guidance for living, for example for housekeeping or other things?
 - Yes
 - No
- Evaluate your skills in Finnish language
(Options: None, Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced)
 - When you arrived to Finland
 - Now
- Where and how you have learned Finnish
(Options: Not at all, Quite a lot, A lot)
 - Language course before entering KTUAS
 - KTUAS language course(s)
 - Language course outside UAS
 - Independent studies of language

- Fellow students and/or friends
- Internet courses
- other

16. What is your opinion about the city of your studies? Answer freely about the good and bad. Also comment on what could be better. _____

17. How easy you find it to be to get to know Finnish people?

- Easy
- Relatively easy
- Somewhat difficult
- Very difficult

18. Have you experienced prejudice towards you while living in Kemi or Tornio?

- Yes
- No (if you select this option, please jump to question no.20)

19. Please specify what kind of uncomfortable situations have you been in (where, by who etc.) _____

20. Do you know how to act and where you can get help if you get into uncomfortable situations?

- No
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Most of the times

21. Have you found interesting hobby activities in the Kemi-Tornio area?

- Yes
- No

22. Where do you find information about different activities in Kemi-Tornio area?

- Fellow students or friends
- School staff
- Other people
- School webpages
- Brochures
- Bulletin boards
- Internet
- Newspapers
- Libraries
- Other

STUDIES, GUIDANCE, COUNCELLING

23. Have the studies in KTUAS met your expectations?

- Very well
- Quite well
- Somewhat
- Poorly

24. How satisfied are you with the following?

(Options: Dissatisfied, Neither dissatisfied or satisfied, Satisfied)

- Quality of teaching
- Language skills of teachers
- Competences of teachers to teach multicultural groups
- Content of studies
- Assessment methods (exams, assignments etc.)
- Finnish courses
- International office
- Housing services
- Health care
- Computing services
- Library services
- Practical training periods (if you had some)
- Student union services
- Student affairs office
- Offered information

25. How do you feel about the amount of lessons and school work?

- Too much
- Sufficient
- Average
- Could be more

26. Please comment on your previous answer: _____

27. How many times you have skipped lessons in the past six months

- Not at all (if you select this option, please jump to question no. 29)
- 1-2 times
- 3-5 times
- 5-10 times
- more than 10 times

28. What have been the reasons to skip lessons

- lack of motivation
- illness
- personal reasons
- student activities
- traveling
- use of intoxicants (alcohol etc.)
- weak level of teaching

- work
- surfing or playing games on internet
- other

29. How would you evaluate your complete health at the moment (physical and mental)?

- Good
- Average
- Below average
- Poor

30. Do you have troubles sleeping?

- Yes
- No

31. How much do you sleep

- Enough
- Not enough

32. Which of the following you would like to get more information about?

- School health care
- Health care centers
- Health emergency situations
- Dental care
- Mental health care
- Available health care for students in general
- I have enough information already

33. How would you rate the guidance and counseling services at KTUAS?

- Good
- Varying
- Not good

34. At school do you know who to ask for help in different situations?

- Yes
- Mostly
- Sometimes
- No

35. Who you mainly ask for help? Select three.

- Tutor teacher
- Other teachers
- Study counselor
- Student tutors
- Other students
- School social worker

- Student union
- Student affairs office
- School nurse

36. How often you get help when you ask for some

- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely

PRACTICAL TRAINING

37. Have you had trouble finding practical training places

- Yes
- No

38. If you answered “yes” to previous question, please clarify. What do you think were the reasons for the problems of getting practical training place? _____

STUDENT LIFE

39. Do you know what the student unions of KTUAS do? (KETOAKKU, KetoSok, KetoTerve, KeIO, ToKko, Kemin Kauppaopiskelijat)

- Not at all
- A little bit
- Yes, quite much

40. Have you taken part in student union activities, such as meetings, parties or other events?

- Yes
- No

41. Please specify your previous answer. If you answered no, tell why haven't you participated in any activities. If you answered yes, tell what kind of activities you participated and why. _____

42. Here you can freely comment your free-time. Tell for example what is good, what could be improved. Is there some kind of activities you are missing or would like to get more information about?

EMPLOYMENT, INCOME, FUTURE PLANS

43. Do you work at the moment besides your studies?

- No
- Yes, about 1-5 hours per week
- Yes, about 6-10 hours per week
- Yes, over 10 hours per week
- At the moment I'm working only, not studying at all

44. What are the reasons for working at the moment?

- Work is part of my studies (e.g. practical training)
- To get working experience in the field of my studies
- In order to get any working experience
- In order to sustain myself
- In order to earn money
- Other

45. How much you feel work harms your studies

- Not at all
- Somewhat
- Quite a lot
- Very much

46. What are the sources of funding studies/living in Finland

- Scholarship from home country or from Finland
- Work
- Savings
- Parental or family support
- Income of spouse or partner
- Support from other people
- Loan from bank
- KELA student grant (opintotuki)
- Other

47. How well did you do with the money you had for spending in the last six months

- I did well
- I used my money carefully so I did OK
- At times I had to struggle with the little money I had
- I didn't have enough money for everyday things

48. Are you or were you going to transfer to another UAS without graduating from KTUAS?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No
- I was planning to stay, but decided to transfer
- I was planning to transfer, but decided to stay

49. Please specify your previous answer. Why are / were you planning to transfer? Why

did you decided to stay / transfer even though you didn't plan to? _____

50. What are your plans after graduating from KTUAS

- I plan to stay in Finland
- I would like to stay in Finland to work or to study more if possible
- I plan to go to work or study in another foreign country
- I will return to my home country
- I don't know yet

51. In your opinion, what are the best things in Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences? _____

52. In your opinion, what are the worst things in Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences? _____

53. Here you can write anything else you would like to say as a foreign student. _____

54. In this last text field you can write any comments concerning this questionnaire.
