

Katariina Walker

**SCHOOL DROPOUT AND EXTENDED STUDY TIME AMONG THE
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS AT OULU
VOCATIONAL COLLEGE**

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ABSTRACT

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The Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration, run by Oulu Vocational College, Unit of Business and Administration, has had high dropout rates and long graduation times during its whole history. The objective of this research is to find out the internal factors of the education and the education provider that lead to dropouts and extended graduation times. Another interest of this research lies in gathering improvement suggestions from the students of the programme. The main research question of this study is: What are the main internal factors of the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration and Oulu Vocational College, Unit of Business and Administration that put the International Business and Administration students at risk of dropping out and graduating late? The additional research question is: How can the risk be reduced?

This realist constructivist case study is based on various methods. The data is mainly collected through two half-structured interviews of 19 International Business and Administration students from the second, third and fourth year. The results of previous school satisfaction surveys among the students in the course have also been analysed. In addition to those, the researcher also compares her observations with the interview results.

The theoretical framework is formed by several theories of reasons leading to dropouts and how they could be prevented. Also earlier school satisfaction survey results, and the characteristics of the programme and its students will be discussed.

The research results show that the main reason for a student to think about discontinuing studies is the disorganised practises of the programme. The students find the teaching instructions unclear and confusing. Also communication between the school and the IB teachers is described as inefficient. Therefore the students do not have the same possibilities to take part in extracurricular activities than the other students of the unit. This has a negative impact on the students' sense of belonging to the school community. Also the tutoring and guiding procedures are described as somewhat inefficient. Another finding is the school's inability to meet the students' expectations concerning language training and the international nature of the programme. This research includes suggestions for the development of the programme.

Keywords: Vocational education, School dropouts, Prevention

TIIVISTELMÄ

Oulun seudun ammattikorkeakoulu
Yrittäjyyden ja liiketoimintaosaamisen koulutusohjelma

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Oulun seudun ammattiopiston Kaukovainion liiketalouden yksikön järjestämässä kansainvälisen liiketalouden perustutkinnossa on ollut aina korkeat keskeyttämisluvut ja pitkät valmistumisajat. Tämän tutkimuksen päämääränä on löytää koulutusohjelman ja koulutuksen järjestäjän sisäiset tekijät, jotka johtavat keskeyttämisiin ja pitkiin valmistumisaikoihin. Tavoitteena on myös saada kehittämissuhteita koulutusohjelman opiskelijoilta. Tutkimuksen päätutkimuskysymys on: Mitkä ovat kansainvälisen liiketalouden koulutusohjelman ja Oulun seudun ammattiopiston Kaukovainion liiketalouden yksikön sisäiset tekijät, jotka lisäävät opiskelijoiden riskiä keskeyttää opinnot ja valmistua myöhässä? Alatutkimuskysymys on: Miten riskiä voidaan vähentää?

Tämän tapaustutkimuksen perustana on realistinen konstruktivismi, ja siinä käytetään useita tutkimusmenetelmiä. Aineisto on kerätty pääasiassa kahdella puolistrukturoidulla haastattelulla, joihin osallistui 19 toisen, kolmannen ja neljännen vuoden koulutusohjelman opiskelijaa. Tutkimuksessa analysoidaan myös koulutusohjelmassa aikaisemmin toteutettuja tulo-, olo- ja päättökyselyitä. Lisäksi tutkija peilaa omia havaintojaan haastatteluista saatuihin tuloksiin.

Tutkimuksen tietoperusta pohjautuu teorioihin koulutuksen keskeyttämiseen johtavista syistä sekä keinoista niiden ehkäisyyn. Myös aikaisemmat tulo-, olo- ja päättökyselyiden tulokset ja edellisten vuosien keskeyttämisluvut käsitellään tietoperustassa. Lisäksi kuvataan koulutuksen erityispiirteitä sekä koulutusohjelman opiskelijoiden taustoja ja elämäntilanteita.

Tutkimustulosten mukaan opiskelijat kokevat koulutusohjelman epäjärjestelmällisyyden tärkeimpänä syynä keskeyttämisiin. He kuvailevat ohjeiden olevan epäselviä ja hämmentäviä. IB opettajien ja yksikön henkilökunnan välistä yhteydenpitoa pidetään tehottomana, minkä vuoksi kansainvälisen liiketalouden perustutkinnon opiskelijoilla ei ole samanlaisia mahdollisuuksia osallistua yksikön järjestämiin tapahtumiin kuin yksikön muilla opiskelijoilla. Tämä puolestaan vähentää heidän kuulumisuuden tunnettaan kouluyhteisöön. Myös ryhmänohjauksen ja opinto-ohjauksen prosesseja pidetään osittain tehottomina. Toisen tutkimustuloksen mukaan opiskelijat pitävät yksikköä kykenemättömänä täyttämään kielenoppimiseen ja kansainväliseen toimintaan liittyvät odotukset. Tämä tutkimus sisältää koulutusohjelman kehittämissuhteita.

Asiasanat: ammatillinen koulutus, koulutuksen keskeyttäminen, ennaltaehkäisy

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1 INTRODUCTION

During the last few decades there has been a lot of discussion about school dropouts in vocational upper secondary education (later referred to as vocational education), its reasons and effects. Theorists have had different ideas about what puts a student at risk to discontinue the studies or not graduate within the target time. Unfortunately the practise has shown that implementing the theories successfully into schools can be challenging.

According to Seinä (2000,10) the phenomenon is complicated. The reasons behind the extended study time and school dropouts are frequent and various. Kuronen (2011, 17) argues that dropout students are often seen as losers, and too often attention has been paid to the causal reasons why a student has dropped out. Only recently the educational institutions' ability to offer meaningful learning experiences as well as to meet the individual needs of different kinds of students has really been questioned. According to Kuronen (2011, 85 – 86) most of the problems leading to dropping out from school can be affected and even prevented. Focus should be moved from problem-centred thinking and reaction, to prevention.

The need for this case study arose from Oulu Vocational College, Unit of Business and Administration (later referred to as Unit of Business and Administration). Permission to carry out the research was received from the Head of the unit, Mr Rovamo. The unit runs the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration, which has had high dropout rates and long graduation times during its whole history. Even though some improvements have taken place during the last years, there is still a need for new procedures to support the students to complete their studies within a target time.

The aim of this case study is to find out the internal factors of the qualification and the Unit of Business and Administration that lead to dropouts and extended graduation times. Another interest of this research lies in finding out how the International Business and Administration students would improve the qualification.

In the theoretical framework of this research, the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration will be introduced first. The concepts of the qualification, the marketing of the programme, the application process and student selection, as well as the

teaching arrangements will be described in order to give the reader a holistic picture of the qualification and its characteristics. In the next chapter the students' environment will be described: who are the International Business and Administration students, and how satisfied have they been with their education in the past according to earlier studies. The results of the earlier school satisfaction surveys are also discussed later in the study.

The fourth chapter will deal with the main topic of the thesis – the dropout rates and the length of study time. The phenomenon will be discussed in the concept of Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration by showing the latest figures of the qualification and comparing them against the other qualifications offered by the Unit of Business and Administration as well as national averages. The different theories suggested by well-known education specialists explaining the reasons leading to dropouts and some guidelines on how to prevent them will be presented. The main procedures that the Unit of Business and Administration has implemented in order to shorten the study times and prevent dropouts will also be explained.

In the empirical part of this research the procedures of data collection will be explained after which the data analysing methods will be introduced. The data for this research was gathered through two half-structured group interviews. 19 International Business and Administration students from second, third and fourth year were interviewed in spring 2013. The trustworthiness of the study will also be discussed. Presenting the research results and development proposals will conclude this report.

In this thesis the students' voice has a major role when describing the main factors that increase the dropout rates and the length of study time. The researcher also had the opportunity to visit a state school in the UK, which offers IBCC studies to its students. Some outcomes of the visit will be discussed alongside the interview results. The Unit of Business and Administration will be provided with a list of development procedures. Implementing the development proposals is left to the Unit of Business and Administration.

This thesis will hopefully have some practical value and will help the Unit of Business and Administration improve the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration. Personally the researcher hopes to gather more understanding of the reasons leading to dropping out from school in order to become pedagogically more advanced.

2 THE VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND ADMINISTRATION

Oulu Vocational College, founded in 1.1.2005 in its current form, is one of the biggest vocational schools in Finland offering education in 13 units within the city of Oulu and the northeastern part of Oulu province. They run 63 degree programmes in 32 vocational qualifications to over 13 000 students. Oulu Vocational College is part of the Oulu Region Joint Authority for Education (OSEKK), a larger organisation providing educational services. (Oulu Vocational College 2012b, retrieved 4.1.2013.)

The Unit of Business and Administration is one of the 13 units of the Oulu Vocational College with 801 students and 75 employees. The unit offers vocational qualifications in Business Information Technology, Business and Administration, and International Business and Administration. (Oulu Vocational College 2013, retrieved 17.4.2013.) The Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration has been offered since 2004.

This chapter introduces the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration provided by the Unit of Business and Administration. The structure of the qualification and the IBCC studies, the marketing of the programme, the application process and student selection, as well as the teaching arrangements will be described in order to give the reader a holistic picture of the qualification and its characteristics.

2.1 The Qualification

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012a, retrieved 25.10.2012) the qualification is based on working life occupations and the competencies required. Vocational education and training aim to improve the skills of the work force. It should respond to the skills needed in the world of work and support lifelong learning.

A vocational qualification can be obtained in three different ways: attending a vocational school, through apprenticeship training, or through a competence test (Finnish National Board of

Education 2012a, retrieved 29.12.2012). The Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration is obtained through attending the school.

The vocational education follows the national qualification requirements. The purpose of those requirements is to reflect the objectives of educational policy, to determine the requirements for nationally uniform vocational competence and the capabilities for learning to learn as well as functioning as a citizen. They must also function as the basis for evaluation of national learning outcomes. (Finnish National Board of Education 2012a, retrieved 29.12.2012; Finnish National Board of Education 2012b, retrieved 29.12.2012.)

The Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration follows the national curriculum of '*Vocational Qualification in Business and Administration 2009*', and since 2007 the local curriculum has also included the IBCC studies. This concept is unique; there is only one other qualification including the IBCC studies provided in Finland. The current structure of the qualification is demonstrated below.

Modules providing advanced individual vocational competence 20 credits

For example Finnish, Mathematics and foreign languages

Vocational modules 90 credits

Customer service (20 credits)

Support services for international trade (20 credits)

Including Swedish as Language Development (2 credits)

Accounting and finance services (20 credits)

Planning and implementation of marketing communication activities (10 credits)

IB Business and Management (10 credits)

IB English (10 credits)

Other optional modules 10 credits

IBCC core studies (8 credits)

Optional subject that varies every year (2 credits)

The qualification consists of 120 credits, and takes three years of full-time study (40 credits per year and 1 credit is equivalent to 40 hours of work). Prior learning can be counted towards the qualification. (Finnish National Board of Education 2012a, retrieved 29.12.2012.)

The students can usually combine upper secondary school studies with a vocational degree, or combine two vocational degrees (Oulu Vocational College 2012c, retrieved 4.1.2013). Due to the IBCC studies being included in the qualification, the International Business and Administration students are not encouraged to do so.

2.2 The International Baccalaureate Career-related Certificate (IBCC)

According to the International Baccalaureate (International Baccalaureate 2011, retrieved 1.1.2013) IBCC was developed to provide a “value added” qualification to schools that were already offering the IB Diploma Programme and delivering career-related studies to their students. IBCC stands for The International Baccalaureate Career-related Certificate. It was developed by IB World School.

The first phase of piloting the IBCC studies included five schools around the world. The Unit of Business and Administration was one of the pioneering schools. The second phase already included over ten pioneering schools. Since 2012 the IBCC studies have been available for the mainstream. There are around twenty schools offering them in the UK alone at the moment, and even more around the world (The Telegraph 2012, retrieved 3.4.2013). There are currently only two institutions providing the IBCC studies in Finland.

The idea of the programme is to enable schools to widen participation to an IB education. The diploma is built around the career-related courses and a selection of two or more Diploma Programme courses with a unique IBCC core. The core includes courses such as ‘Approaches to learning’, Language development, a ‘Reflective project’ as well as a ‘Community and service’ course. The aim of these elements is to help students develop the communication and personal skills necessary for success. The core forms a bridge between the rigorous requirements of the IB Diploma courses and the targeted career-related studies. (International Baccalaureate 2011, retrieved 1.1.2013.)

The ‘Approaches to learning’ course introduces students to life-skills such as critical thinking, ethics and efficient communication. The ‘Community and service’ course is based on the principle of service learning that emphasises knowledge development, civic development, social

development and personal development. Language development ensures that all students have access to, and are exposed to a second language. The 'Reflective project' allows the student to engage in personal inquiry, action and reflection and to develop strong research and communication skills. The students identify, analyse, critically discuss and evaluate an ethical issue arising from their career-related studies. (International Baccalaureate 2011, retrieved 1.1.2013.)

The school selects the career-related qualification and its curriculum. The qualification must satisfy IB criteria in relation to accreditation, assessment and quality assurance and must be studied concurrently with the Diploma Programme courses and elements of the IBCC core. Students take written examinations at the end of the two Diploma Programme courses, which are marked by external IB examiners. The 'Reflective project' is assessed by the school and moderated and graded by the IB. The school assesses the other core courses. (ibid.)

The Unit of Business and Administration has selected the career-related courses from the national curriculum '*Vocational Qualification in Business and Administration 2009*'. The two standard level Diploma Programme courses provided are IB Business and Management (10 credits), and IB English (10 credits). The IBCC core consists of the 'Approaches to learning' course (3 credits), the 'Reflective project' (3 credits), and the 'Community and service' course (2 credits). Language development (2 credits) will be offered for the first time in autumn 2013. In the beginning the second language will be Swedish. All the IBCC courses - excluding Language development - as well as some of the career-related courses are taught in English. IB English, the 'Approaches to learning' course and the 'Community and service' course start on the first study year, and the rest of the IBCC courses start on the second year.

In addition to the marketing material of International Baccalaureate, some informal conversations concerning the IBCC studies took place during this research project with some teachers and students at the Unit of Business and Administration as well as in a state school in the UK. The message has been the same from both institutions: due to the novelty of the concept, the schools have not received enough information from the International Baccalaureate on how to organise the programme. Both institutions have had problems with the 'Reflective project' for example, due to the lack of concrete guidelines on how to implement it. Students in both institutions seem to be puzzled about how to complete the project successfully, and the teachers feel that they have not been given enough tools to run the project.

2.3 Marketing the Study Programme

There are very few theory books or articles on Educational Marketing. Wahlman (2009, 14) quotes Davies and Ellison when he defines educational marketing: the means that a provider of education uses for actively advertising and communicating its purposes, values and products to students, parents, personnel and stakeholders. According to Sharma (2008, 145 – 146) consumer satisfaction is a popular topic in the marketing literature. The main model of customer satisfaction is built on the theory that gaps between ex ante expectations of a good or service and the product's ex post performance are the best predictors of customer satisfaction.

In marketing terms students' satisfaction could be defined as a school's ability to meet students' expectations. The programme's brochure (See Appendix 1) outlines the objectives of the course and post-graduate potential. Through the programme a student will gain enough knowledge and competence in customer service, sales and marketing, and he can work in international and multicultural environments. One aim of the course is to improve a student's language skills, which will give a post-graduate the potential to work fluently in both Finnish and English.

The study programme is advertised to students and parents through various channels such as: the printed "Study Guide" book by Finnish National Board of Education; Open door –days for potential applicants; Oulu Vocational College's website; and student counsellors at basic education. Social media is becoming an important channel as well.

2.4 Application Process and Student Selection

38.5 % of the compulsory school-leavers continue immediately into vocational education and training. In the spring of 2010 there was 67 200 applicants, and 70 % of them received a studying place. The largest fields are Technology and Transport (around 36 %), Business and Administration (19 %) and Health and Social Services (17 %). The other fields are Tourism, Catering and Home Economics (13 %), Culture (7 %), Natural Resources (6 %) and Leisure and Physical Education (2 %). There are 119 study programmes leading to 53 different vocational qualifications confirmed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012a, retrieved 25.10.2012; Kuronen 2011, 12.)

The admission requirement for vocational education is the completion of the basic education syllabus. The students are selected based on their earlier academic achievement, but they may be asked to take entrance exams. The application takes place electronically through a joint application system. (Finnish National Board of Education 2012a, retrieved 29.12.2012.)

In the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration the entrance exam consist of two parts. The first part tests applicants written language skills. The second part is an individual interview where the goal is to find out applicant's motivation and reasons for applying to the study programme, and to test their spoken English. An applicant has to complete all the parts of the entrance exam successfully in order to be selected. The number of applicants invited to the entrance exam is five times the number of starting places.

Since 2012 there have been 22 new studying places offered for an academic year. Earlier the number of new studying places was 24. Although the unit takes in a couple more students, since there are always some students discontinuing their studies after the first weeks of education. Thus matriculated students can generally study in vocational education, there are no studying places offered for them in the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration due to the unique structure of the qualification.

2012 was the first year when all the studying places were filled during the main application period, and there was no need to run an additional application period. Up to then, additional application periods were organised during the summer in order to find enough students before the beginning of an academic year.

The qualification has not been very popular among the applicants in the past. The following figures show the total number of applicants, and the number of applicants that had chosen the qualification as their first choice (in brackets) in 2009 – 2012 (H. Piilonen, personal communication, April 4, 2013).

- Year 2009: 80 (29)
- Year 2010: 111 (33)
- Year 2011: 101 (27)
- Year 2012: 141 (29)

The application period of 2013 finished on the 15th of March 2013. The unit received 118 applications for the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration. Even though the total number of applicants was less than in the previous year, the number of applicants who had chosen the qualification as the first choice increased significantly from 29 to 39. (H. Piilonen, personal communication, April 4, 2013.) Unfortunately some of those students did not show up at the entrance exam, and they lost their possible study place in vocational education for the academic year 2013 – 2014 (E. Vehmas, personal communication, June 1, 2013).

2.5 Teaching Arrangements

At Oulu Vocational College, the academic year has been divided into five periods. It enables different subjects and courses to be taught in different periods. It also makes it possible to arrange periods where the students are either at school or doing on-the-job learning. The International Business and Administration students do all their mandatory studies and most of their optional studies in their home groups.

The Vocational Qualification in Business and Administration is currently taught half in Finnish and half in English, which makes the qualification unique since all the other qualifications offered by Oulu Vocational College, are taught in Finnish. There are also plans to run the programme completely in English in the future. There is currently only one native English-speaking and one other non-native Finnish-speaking teacher in the programme. They both come from outside the school to teach the Diploma Programme courses. The rest of the teachers are native Finns, who are teaching in English or in Finnish. There are no English tests required for the teachers who do not speak English as their first language.

According to Mårtensson, Nilsson and Bild (2008, 140 – 144) teaching via English as a second language affect teaching practices mostly in a negative way. The seriousness of the problem depends on a teacher's language competence. The most common issue is the preparation times that increase for lessons and examinations. The bigger concern from a student's point of view however is that the quality of teaching may become poorer when the teacher is finding it difficult to provide longer, elaborating presentations, provide examples and define concepts, indicate transition between topics and between theory and examples, as well as encourage student interaction. The minimum requirement for teaching via English as a second language well

enough, is the mutual comprehensibility between the teacher and his students. Language proficiency when English is the instructional lingua franca can also affect a teacher's creditability. Students complain about linguistic proficiency through formal and informal channels, with and without justification.

Stronge (2007, 23) continues that one key finding of some previous researches show that students taught by teachers with greater verbal ability, learn more compared to those that are taught by teachers with lower verbal ability. Teachers with better verbal abilities can communicate with students in a clear and compelling manner as well as convey ideas to students more efficiently.

Teaching methods and classroom management vary among the teachers in the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration. According to Stronge (2007, 38) effective teaching includes at least the following competences of a teacher: verbal ability; knowledge of teaching and learning; certification status; content knowledge; teaching experience; and understanding the special needs of at-risk students and high-ability students.

The Unit of Business and Administration underlines the importance of qualifications when recruiting. A qualified vocational teacher in Finland has to have in addition to teacher training at least a bachelor's degree in the subject taught. Most of the teachers at the Unit of Business and Administration have master's degrees, and therefore high content knowledge. There are both experienced and novice teachers in the unit. The IBCC studies are currently taught by experienced teachers.

Stronge (2007, 42 – 43, 54) also emphasises the importance of organisational skills of a teacher. Most effective teachers are organised in terms of routines, behaviour, and materials. They are prepared for class, and they set an example of organisation for students that support their learning. In an organised classroom, the students know exactly what to do and when to do it. They have more time spent on academic tasks, and they focus on academic engagement that reduces the potential for behaviour problems. A teacher can help the students to work by using a calendar for long-term, weekly and daily planning.

All in all, the IBCC studies are described as being more academic than traditional Finnish vocational education. The qualification is said to prepare the students better for further education

than just a usual vocational qualification. On the other hand, practical aspects are gained through on-the-job learning.

On-the-job Learning

On-the-job learning is a mode of arranging vocational education and training, in which qualification objectives are learnt at a workplace. It is objective oriented, guided and assessed training. It takes place in a real working environment. The qualification includes at least 20 credits (6 months) of on-the-job learning, which is built on the basic education syllabus. (Finnish National Board of Education 2011:9, retrieved 3.4.2013; Finnish National Board of Education 2012a, retrieved 29.12.2012.)

The Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration includes 23 credits of on-the-job learning. The students complete their training mainly in local companies, with the working language being Finnish. Yet they have the opportunity to do a part of their on-the-job learning in Europe. This opportunity has not been taken often; approximately one student per year group complete part of the on-the-job learning abroad.

On-the-job learning takes place twice during the studies. The first phase takes place during the first period of the second year. The topic is Customer service (7 credits), and it can include different kinds of customer service tasks for internal or external customers. This period can be carried out in various organisations.

The second phase takes place on the third and fourth periods of the last year. It includes: Support services for international trade (6 credits); Accounting and finance services (6 credits); as well as Planning and implementation of marketing communication activities (4 credits). There is a wide range of tasks to be carried out in accounting, international trade and marketing. Due to the variety of tasks, the students may have to find two different placements in order to be able to carry out all the tasks, or show their competences in accounting at school.

International Activities

The Unit of Business and Administration offers various international activities for the students. There are regular visiting groups of students and teachers. The unit received around 30 visiting

teachers and 100 visiting students in the academic year 2011 – 2012. All these visitors are interacting with the International Business and Administration students in one way or another. (E. Vehmas, personal communication, April 4, 2013.) Some cooperation with the local expatriates has also been done on a small scale.

The unit also takes part in various international programmes such as Comenius and Nordplus that include school trips abroad. The students can do their on-the-job learning in Europe. Around 60 students and 25 teachers of the Unit of Business and Administration went out on an exchange in the academic year 2011-2012 (ibid). The students of the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration are encouraged to take part in a number of international activities during their studies.

Other Extracurricular Activities

The unit also offers other extracurricular activities. 'Sport and culture' day has been organised twice a year for a number of years. The goal is to have all the students and staff members spending a day or a half a day doing different kinds of sport or cultural activities on or off the school premises.

There are also yearly events such as a Christmas party, a graduation party, an open doors – event, employment and education event, a ball for the seniors (general upper secondary education), International day, and a fashion show organised by the students. The unit books an Interactive Theatre to support students' language development once a year, too. There are also one off events such as evening parties, and Svenka Nu! – A week that provides Swedish language among the students using different kind of workshops.

The school body run a cafeteria in the school hall. The cafeteria offers sandwiches, salads, Danish pastries, sweets and refreshments. It is open for most of the school day. There is also a canteen in the school premises run by Sodexho. The students can have a free hot lunch at the canteen every school day. The canteen also sells sandwiches, Danish, sweets and refreshments.

2.6 Summary

The previous chapters described the study programme in order to provide the reader with a holistic picture of the course. Next, the main characteristics will be summarised.

The Vocational Qualification in Business and Administration in brief:

- Offered since 2004 by Oulu Vocational College, Unit of Business and Administration.
- The qualification follows the national curriculum of '*Vocational Qualification in Business and Administration 2009*'.
- Since 2007 the local curriculum has also included the IBCC studies: two standard level Diploma Programme courses - IB Business and Management, and IB English - as well as the IBCC core studies.
- Through the programme a student will gain enough knowledge and competence in customer service, sales and marketing, and he can work in international and multicultural environments. Provide a post-graduate with the skills to work fluently in both Finnish and English.
- Since 2012 there have been 22 new studying places offered for an academic year.
- The applicants take an entrance exam that measures their motivation and language skills.
- Currently taught half in Finnish and half in English.
- One native English-speaking and one other non-native Finnish-speaking teacher, who come from outside the school to teach the Diploma Programme courses.
- The rest of the teachers are native Finns, who are teaching in English or in Finnish.
- The majority of teachers at the unit of Business and Administration are qualified teachers and they hold a master's degree in the subject taught.
- The Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration includes 23 credits of on-the-job learning.
- The students are encouraged to take part in various international activities, and some of them carry out part of their on-the-job learning abroad.
- The unit organises also extracurricular activities such as 'Sport and culture' day.

3 THE WORLD OF THE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS

This chapter will introduce the International Business and Administration students. First it will briefly explain their life situations during the studies: the age, educational background, work status, family status and future expectations concerning further education or work.

Oulu Vocational College measures the students' school satisfaction yearly. The earlier results of the International Business and Administration students will be discussed in the second part of this chapter. The aim is to find possible explanations for dropouts and extended study times to be discussed further in the Conclusion chapter.

3.1 The Students

Historically the majority of the International Business and Administration students have been Finnish. However, there are usually one or two students with multicultural backgrounds in a study group. Due to the current teaching arrangements, all the students have to be able to carry out their studies in both languages Finnish and English.

Most of the students are 16-years-old at the beginning of the course. They start their studies straight after their basic education. Yet some of them may have been studying something else, working or having a gap year after completing their basic education. The average age of the first year students has been 17 – 18 in the previous four groups. The number of female and male students varies every year. Table 1 shows the age distribution as well as the number of female and male students in year groups 2009 – 2012 at the beginning of the studies.

TABLE 1. The age distribution and sex of the students in the year groups 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 (A. Siira, personal communication, April 17, 2013)

Year group (number of students)	Age: Min. / Max. / Ave.	Number of females	Number of males
2009 (24)	16 / 36 / 18	10	14
2010 (24)	16 / 22 / 18	16	8
2011 (24)	16 / 24 / 18	9	15
2012 (27)	16 / 23 / 17	13	14

Many of the International Business and Administration students work while studying. It is estimated that half of them work during their education. (E. Vehmas, personal communication, April 4, 2013.) According to Statistics Finland (2013c, retrieved 27.3.2013) the phenomenon is nationwide: In 2011, out of students 18 or older, 57 % were working while studying and women worked more frequently than men. The employment rate increased the older the students were: 25 % of 18-years-old students; 46 % of 21-years-old students; 56 % of 24-year-old students; and 70 % of 25-year-old or older students were in some kind of employment. 69 % of students studying business and administration were employed at the end of 2011.

School attendance among the International Business and Administration students varies between the study groups and students. Often, decreased school attendance is a concern regarded a few individuals. There are numerous reasons for school absence. (E. Vehmas, personal communication, April 4, 2013.)

Half of the International Business and Administration students are living with their parents. There are several reasons for living apart: some of them have left their childhood homes and moved to Oulu for education; some of them have moved out when they turned 18; and some of them are even living away from their parents before their 18th birthday. Very rarely the students have their own children. (E. Vehmas, personal communication, April 4, 2013.)

A graduate student is generally eligible for university of applied science and university studies (Finnish National Board of Education 2012a, retrieved 29.12.2012). After graduation around a third of the International Business and Administration students will apply for higher education. The ones, who choose to start their work lives, can work for example as marketing assistants,

sales personnel, and sales representatives, as well as carry out basic international trading tasks. They can work fluently in both language Finnish and English. (Oulu Vocational College. 2012a; E. Vehmas, personal communication, April 4, 2013.)

Six months after graduation the students are always asked about their current situation regarding work or studies. In the last survey, carried out in 2012, 80 % of the graduated International Business and Administration students stated that they had continued studying in higher education or found a job within six months after graduation. (E. Vehmas, personal communication, April 4, 2013)

3.2 School Satisfaction

The students' school satisfaction is measured yearly at Oulu Vocational College. The principal of the college, Ms Niemelä-Pentti, has given permission to use the data collected in this research to explain briefly how the International Business and Administration students have found their studies in the past. The data provided by the Unit of Business and Administration was reduced into one table (see Appendix 2) and analysed.

In the surveys, the students are asked to evaluate their education by answering a number of questions that vary depending on the year level of their studies and the academic year. The scale is 1 – 5 (5 being the best). The questions are grouped into ten categories shown below. The first category 'Start of the studies' is used with the first year students. Tutoring, Assessment, Work life connections, Impacts, and Satisfaction are measured only among the second and third year students. The category 'Assessment' has been measured only since the Academic year 2011 – 2012. The categories include the following aspects:

1. Start of the studies (available information about the education; truthfulness of the preliminary information about the education provided by the unit; sufficiency of information concerning the studies in the Student's guide; and introduction of the curriculum).
2. Tutoring (sufficiency of information concerning the studies; knowledge of the curriculum and year plan; and further education guidance provided by the unit).
3. Personalising (personal study plan conducted and actualised; and previous knowledge credited towards the qualification).

4. Atmosphere (group's atmosphere and peaceful studying environment; and teacher/student relationships).
5. Implementation of the education (student's studying activity; satisfaction with teaching; teachers' professionalism; challenging learning tasks and situations; personal support and guidance; constructive feedback; and satisfaction with customer service provided by other staff members than teachers).
6. Learning environment (meaningful studying equipments and classrooms; and variable learning materials).
7. Assessment (fairness of assessment; constructive feedback; justified grades; and re-examination).
8. Work life connections (improved learning through on-the-job learning; work life competences gathered through the education; well organised on-the-job learning periods; and final thesis carried out for an external customer i.e. work life cooperation).
9. Impacts (improved learning skills; clarified career plans; increased motivation on applying for further studies; and improved cooperation skills).
10. Satisfaction (usefulness of the education; and recommending the unit to others).

The results of the International Business and Administration students are compared to the average results of the Unit of Business and Administration from the academic year 2009 – 2010 to the academic year 2011 – 2012. It is noticeable that most of the results are below the unit's averages, which implies that the International Business and Administration students have not been as satisfied with their studies as most of the other students in the unit. Furthermore it is important to point out that the biggest differences between the International Business and Administration students and other students lie for most of the times in atmosphere, personalising and tutoring. By contrast, the results of the International Business and Administration students are never significantly higher than the averages.

Charts 1, 2, 3 and 4 illustrate how the year groups 2008 to 2011 have evaluated their education during their studies. In these results the following categories have been compared: personalising, atmosphere, implementation of the education and learning environment. When analysing the results, one can notice that for some reason the satisfaction with personalising seem to have dropped after the first study year among all the study groups. Even though the other factors do not behave in a similar way, it is evident that the overall satisfaction drops after the first year of

studies. The data does not explain the reasons behind these findings, but it is essential to make a note of them when analysing the data of this research.

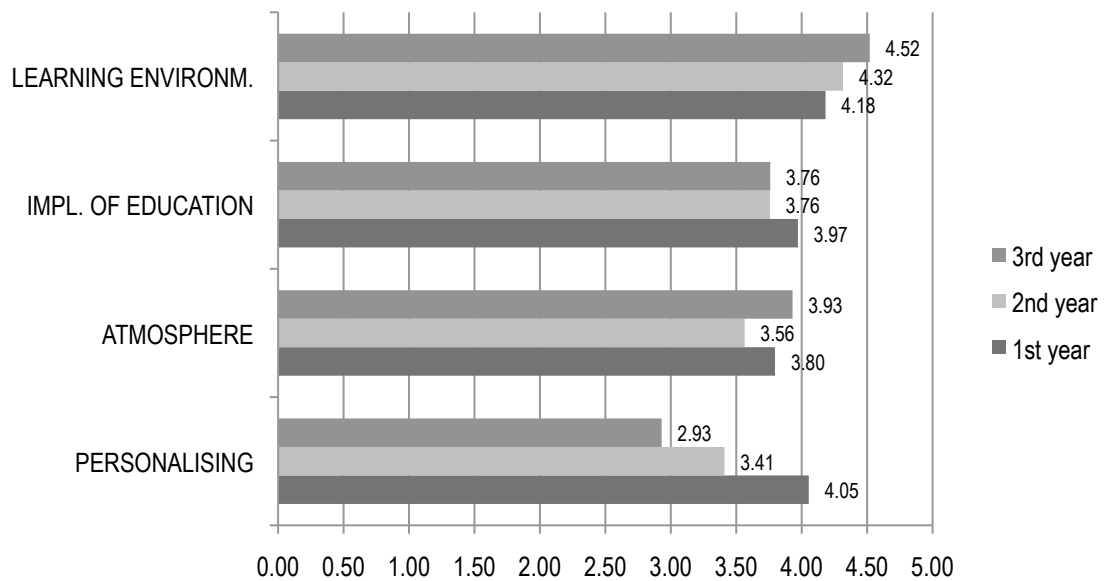


CHART 1. The mean of the 2008 group’s evaluation on personalising, atmosphere, implementation of the education and learning environment during their studies (scale: 1 – 5, 5 being the best) (Oulu Vocation College, Unit of Business and Administration 2008; Oulu Vocation College, Unit of Business and Administration 2010a; Oulu Vocation College, Unit of Business and Administration 2011a)

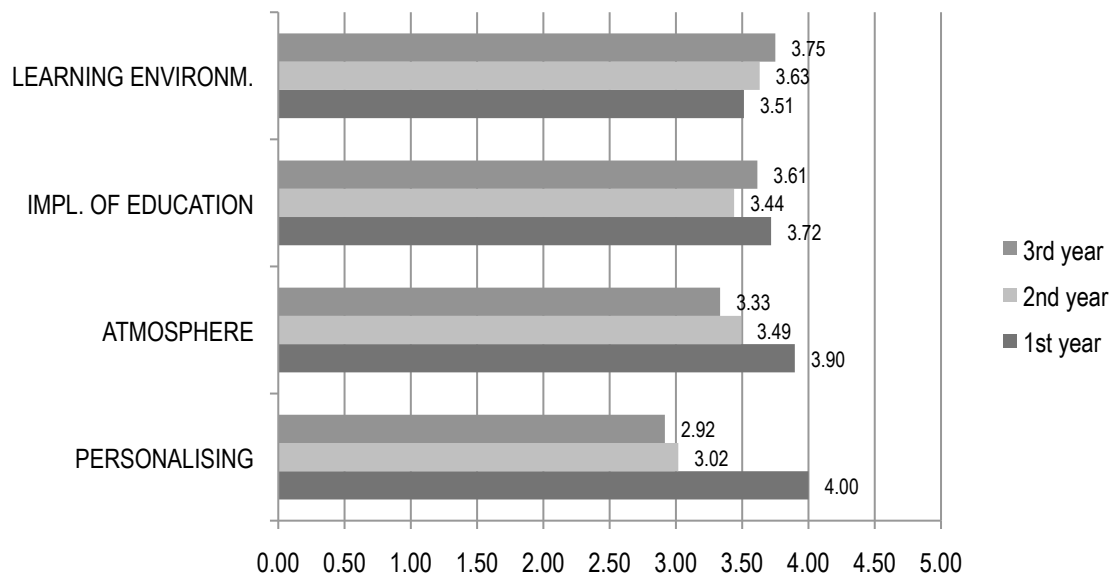


CHART 2. The mean of the 2009 group's evaluation on personalising, atmosphere, implementation of the education and learning environment during their studies (scale: 1 – 5, 5 being the best) (Oulu Vocation College, Unit of Business and Administration 2009; Oulu Vocation College, Unit of Business and Administration 2011b; Oulu Vocation College, Unit of Business and Administration 2012a)

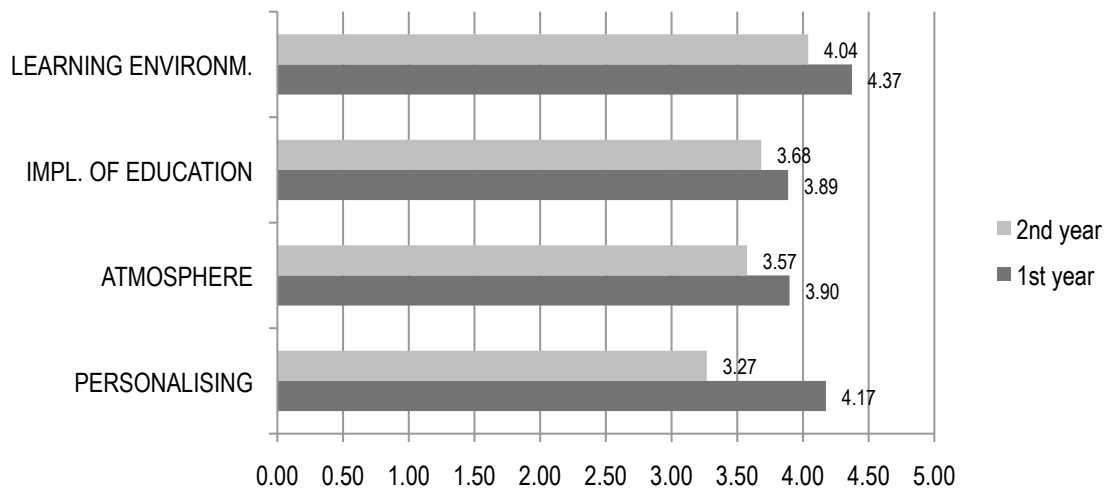


CHART 3. The mean of the year group's 2010 evaluation on personalising, atmosphere, implementation of the education and learning environment during their studies (scale: 1 – 5, 5 being the best) (Oulu Vocation College, Unit of Business and Administration 2010b; Oulu Vocation College, Unit of Business and Administration 2012b)

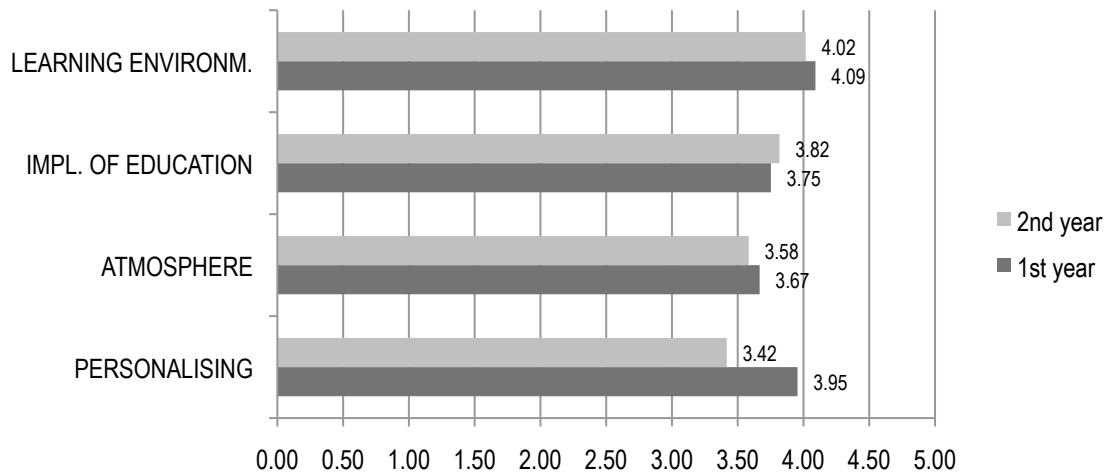


CHART 4. The mean of the year group's 2011 evaluation on personalising, atmosphere, implementation of the education and learning environment during their studies (scale: 1 – 5, 5 being the best) (Oulu Vocation College, Unit of Business and Administration 2011c; Oulu Vocation College, Unit of Business and Administration 2013)

All in all, the International Business and Administration students have not ranked their studies as high as the other students of the unit in the past. These findings will be used for supporting the results of this research, and they will be discussed more in the chapter 7.

3.3 Summary

The International Business and Administration students can be described as follows:

- The majority are Finns with some multicultural students.
- The majority are 16 at the beginning of the course.
- The number of female and male students varies every year.
- Half of them work while studying.
- Approximately half of them live away from their parents.
- Increased school absence hours are only a concern regarding a few students.
- After graduation, around a third of students will apply for higher education.
- The International Business and Administration students do not seem to be as satisfied with their studies compared to other students in the Unit of Business and Administration.

- The biggest differences between the International Business and Administration students and other students are in the atmosphere, personalising and tutoring.
- The satisfaction level in personalising drops after the first study year. Also the overall satisfaction drops after the first year of studies.

4 DROPOUTS AND EXTENDED LENGTH OF STUDY TIME

In this research two different kinds of dropouts, positive and negative, are defined. A dropout is seen as positive when a student changes his field of education or school, or starts working. A negative dropout occurs if a student is left with nothing; he has not got a studying or working place to be transferred to.

According to Kuronen (2011, 15 - 16) it is difficult to define a dropped out student, since only some of them leave the educational system for good. However, the dropouts in vocational education have been recognised, and discussions concerning school dropouts leading to alienation from society have taken place.

The calculated cost of a study place in the vocational education is approximately 8000 – 9000 Euros per academic year. The average operational costs per vocational student were 9 544 Euros in 2009. An alienated youth, on the other hand, costs 28 000 Euros annually to society. These figures show that educating a young person is cheaper for society than taking care of an alienated youth. (Kuronen 2011, 15 – 16.)

Providers of vocational education and training receive statutory government funding for operating costs. It is paid on the basis of a calculatory unit price, where the most significant factor influencing the amount is *the quantity of students*. The education providers are encouraged to promote the employment prospects and further education opportunities of the students, as well as *increase the completion rate of qualifications* by a performance-based funding system. It is a part of the basis of determining the unit price. The following indicators are combined when the performance-based funding index is calculated:

- Effectiveness (job placement and further studies).
- Processes (dropping out, % ratio of qualification certifications holders to entrants).
- Staff (formal teaching qualification and staff development).

The statutory government funding covers 42 % of the operating costs, and it is not earmarked for a particular purpose. The education provider covers the rest. (Finnish National Board of Education 2011, retrieved 3.1.2013.)

As discussed, the effect of dropping out from school has many facets: first of all, an alienated person costs more to society than a student. Secondly, the educational institution loses some funding when the numbers of its students and qualification certification holders decrease. This occurs regardless of whether the dropout is seen as positive or negative from the student's perspective. And most importantly, the possible negative effects on the youth's life cannot be quantified. Yet it is important to remember that the effects may not always be negative for the student. Sometimes the student may change to another educational institution or find work, in other words the dropout can be classified as positive.

This chapter will first discuss the national average dropout rates and compare them with the averages of the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administrations. Also figures for the graduation times will be illustrated.

After the figures, the possible reasons for dropping out from school will be discussed. In order to understand the phenomenon in a national context, some Finnish research in the field will be introduced. The main interest lies in the factors that the school has an impact on. In order to give a more holistic picture of the problem, factors that are not directly related to the educational institution are also discussed.

The last chapter will introduce some procedures for preventing dropouts, as well as some recently developed national programmes. Also the main existing procedures implemented in the Unit of Business and Administration will be discussed.

4.1 Dropout Rates and the Length of Study Time

The national dropout rate within vocational education has been between 8.5 % and 10.5 % in the academic years 2005/2006 – 2009/2010. In 2012 the national average of dropouts in the vocational education was 9.1 %. Of students 18 or older, 9 % continued their studies leading to a qualification or degree in some other sector of education, and 33 % started working. This means that 58 % of dropouts were negative. Women dropped out more often than men. 65 % of the students passed the qualification in three-and-a-half years, leaving 35 % of the students graduating late. Men's pass rates were slightly higher than that of women. (Statistics Finland

2012, retrieved 7.1.2013; Statistics Finland 2013a, retrieved 27.3.2013; Statistics Finland 2013b, retrieved 27.3.2013.)

The Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration has had high dropout rates and long graduation times throughout its history at the Unit of Business and Administration. The rates have been higher than the national averages, or the averages of the Unit of Business and Administration. In 2012 the average dropout rate of the Unit of Business and Administration was 8.9 %. The average rate of negative dropouts was 5.2 %. The same figures for the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration were 9.5 % and 5.4 % in 2012. (Oulu Vocational College, 2012d.) The problem has been recognised, and some improvement has occurred during the past years. Still the rates are high, and therefore some new procedures are needed.

Chart 5 shows the educational situation of the students on the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration course in October 2012. The students have been divided into three categories according to their current status: students who are still studying, students who have graduated, and students who have dropped out. The dropout figures include both positive and negative dropouts. The students have been grouped by the starting year of their studies.

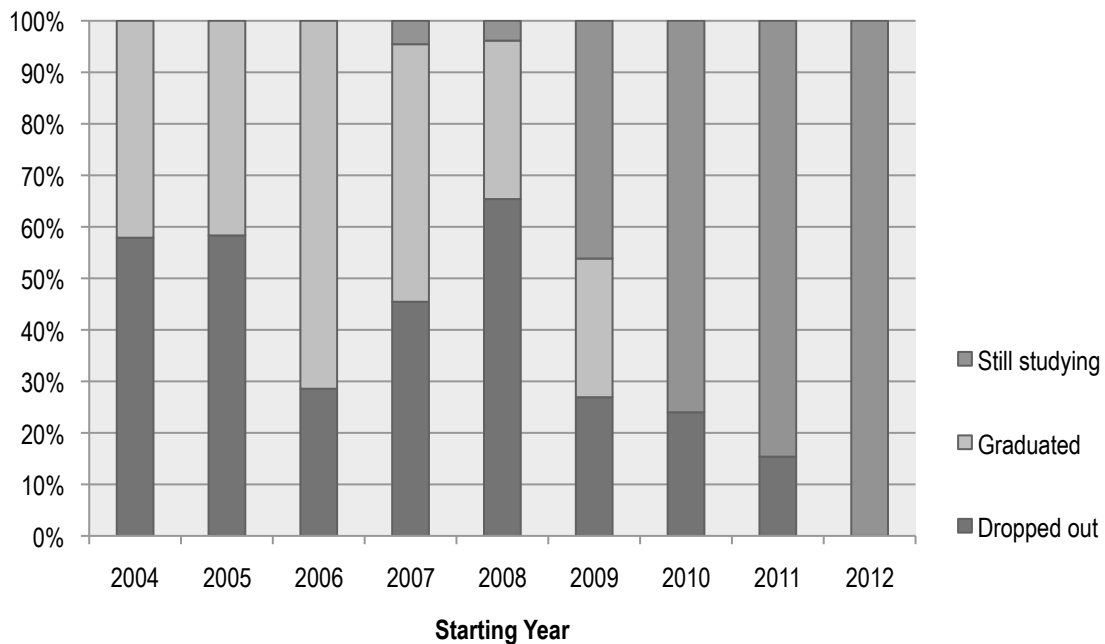


CHART 5. Educational Situation of the Students on the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration Course by the Starting Year, December 2012 (n= 19 (2004), 12 (2005), 14 (2006), 22 (2007), 26 (2008), 26 (2009), 25 (2010), 26 (2011), and 28 (2012)) (Oulu Vocational College, Unit of Business and Administration 2012c)

The chart demonstrates clearly the seriousness of the problem, thus one should remember that the sample size is reasonably small and therefore one person has a significant influence on the final rates. However, there are years (2004, 2005 and 2008) where the dropout rate has been over 50 %, and year groups (2006, 2007, 2009 and 2010) where 20 – 45 % of the students have dropped out. Year group 2011 had a dropout rate of 15.4 % after 1.5 years of studies. Year group 2012 looks positive though; all the students were still studying after the first few months.

The chart also demonstrates the extended length of study time. 46 % of the 2009-year group students are studying in the fourth year, as well as a couple of students from previous year groups. Chart 6 illustrates the same phenomenon among the year groups 2004 – 2009. There graduation is divided into two categories: graduation within 3 years and graduation after 3 years of studies.

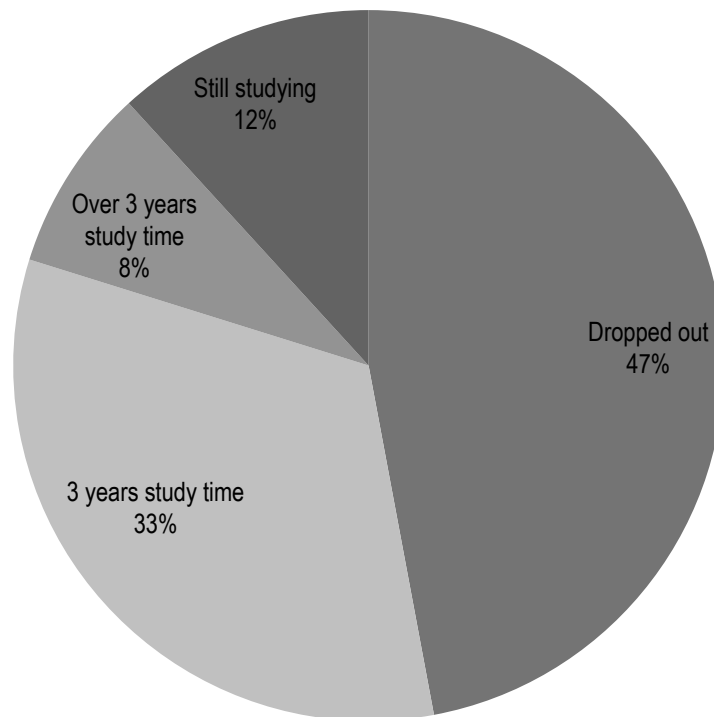


CHART 6. The Educational Situation of the Students from Year Groups 2004 – 2009 on the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration Course, December 2012 (n = 119) (Oulu Vocational College, Unit of Business and Administration 2012c)

All in all, 56 students (47 %) from year groups 2004 – 2009 dropped out from the course. 39 (33 %) graduated in 3 years, and 10 students (8 %) graduated after 3 years. 14 of them (12 %) were still studying in October 2012.

4.2 Factors That Put Students at Risk for Dropping out and Graduating Late

Causal Factors

Seinä (2000, 8) has researched school attendance and the factors behind the extended length of study time and school dropouts among students in higher education. We believe that most of the factors are relevant in vocational education, too. Seinä states that the phenomenon has to be viewed from many different perspectives: society, educational system, school, teachers and

students. In his research he concentrated mainly on teachers and students points of views, since they are the ones, who live with the problem every day.

According to Seinä (2000,10) the phenomenon is complicated. The reasons behind the extended study time and school dropouts are frequent and various, and there is not an existing theory that thoroughly explains the phenomenon yet. Seinä (2000, 10 -11) quotes Vesikansa, Lempinen & Suomela when he divides the reasons into two groups: external and internal factors.

External factors:

- Factors related to the student's financial situation (funding the studies, working while studying).
- Factors related to the school (teaching, counselling, atmosphere).
- Factors related to the structure of the studies (field of studies, learning models).
- Factors related to the employment situation (working life qualifications, available jobs).
- Factors related to the student's personal life (family, health etc).

Internal factors:

- Motivation.
- Orientation (how well the student has been familiarised with the studies and the school).
- Field of education (how confident the student is about his/her choice of field).

Factors related to the further education situation (skills needed in higher education, studying possibilities, provided information on further education) could be added to the list of external factors, when researching the phenomenon in the context of initial vocational education. However, the factors related to the school and to the structure of the studies, as well as orientation are the main interests of this study.

Kouvo, Stenström, Virolainen & Vuorinen-Lampila (2011, 75 - 78) have also researched the reasons leading to dropping out from school or graduating after the target time in vocational education as well as in higher education. They have grouped the reasons into three categories: Personal level; Transition system and social environment; and Internal factors of education and education provider.

In this study only two of them will be introduced from the vocational education point of view: Personal level and Internal factors of education and education provider. The reasons falling under those two groups are listed on the Table 2. The transition system and social environment are not within the research topic. Personal level reasons are discussed in order to give a more holistic picture of the factors related to dropouts. However, the focus is on the internal factors of education and education provider.

TABLE 2. The main reasons leading to dropping out from school or graduating after the target time in vocational education (modified from Kouvo et al. 2011, 78)

Personal level	Internal factors of education and education provider
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning skills and readiness / learning difficulties and problems. • Commitment to study. • Life control skills. • Life situation (family, health, financial situation). • Uncertainty of career choice. • Unrealistic expectations on education. • Motivation. • Working during studies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing of the educational institution. • Integrating the student into the learning environment (interaction with the teacher and other students). • Flexible studying schemes and praxis. • Curriculum (pedagogical solutions). • Flexibility of the studies (for example how a student can compensate absence). • Crediting previous learning. • Pedagogical management of the institution. • The quality of teaching and guidance. • Work life connections of the education.

Learning problems, lack of motivation and lack of commitment to the studies are reasons for a vocational student to drop out. Lack of motivation also puts a student at risk of graduating late. In vocational education a student's uncertainty of his career choice, unrealistic expectations on education as well as incomplete life control skills are also important factors related to dropouts. Therefore it would be important to guide students and give them more information concerning different fields of education when they are about to apply to vocational education. Working while studying also increases the risk of dropping out. Student's psychical resources and target-oriented behaviour have an effect on studies. Most of the dropouts take place in the first study year or straight after. (Kouvo et al. 2011, 75 - 77.)

Even though Kouvo et al. have mainly described the personal level reasons in their report, the main focus of this research lies in the internal factors of education and the education provider in relation to dropouts and late graduation. The aim of this research is to develop new procedures in order to decrease the dropout rates and the length of study time in the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration, and therefore it is meaningful to concentrate on the internal factors that the education provider has got direct impact on.

Dropout as a Process

Kuronen (2011, 7, 16, 31, 34, 36) argues that dropped-out students are often seen as losers, and too often attention has been paid to the causal reasons why a student has dropped out. Only recently the educational institutions' ability to offer meaningful learning experiences as well as to meet the individual needs of different kind of students has really been questioned. Kuronen has researched dropout as a process in vocational education. He believes that the phenomenon has to be viewed through the student's personal history and future expectations. Describing and analysing only the student's current life situation from the educational point of view does not give a holistic explanation. In his research he interviewed 15 young adults, aged 17 – 25, who had dropped out from vocational education several times in the past. Kuronen grouped the situations behind dropouts into five different groups:

1. Students caught in a cycle of dropping out.
2. Students with little strength due to depression.
3. Students who have struggled through education with the help of special support.
4. Students who have been asked to leave by the educational institution.
5. Students who have chosen the wrong field of education.

Students in the first group have had several dropouts in the past. Their problems start in basic education; they may have been bullied, had difficulties in learning and concentrating, had traumatic experiences or a loss within the family. They describe the lack of school wellbeing. Some of them may have been transferred to special schools or classes. They have not been guided and informed well enough about career choices. They do not have clear images of the future, nor do they have specific knowledge about the content of education or employment possibilities. The reasons behind dropouts are however personal and unique; multiple life control, health and wellbeing related problems have piled up over the years. Students may also have

financial problems and they find combining studying and working problematic. They do not really talk about their problems or thoughts about dropping out with anyone else until they have already decided to leave the school. (Kuronen 2011, 81.)

Students in the second group suffer from various mental problems. Moving away from home for the first time is a big change in a student's life. Students may find the freedom too tempting, and start trying things such as alcohol. This may cause problems with school attendance, and soon the problems become more complicated. This is a signal that schools should react to. Schools should build trustful and safe relationships with the students. They should help students with mental problems to get professional help at early stages. Also recognising signs of bullying is important. Students who are suffering from mental problems may not have the strength to graduate in three years. Therefore replacing efficiency with long term plans would benefit these students more. (ibid., 61 – 62, 82 – 83.)

In the third group are students who receive special support to get through education. Some of them may get the help needed to complete their studies when participating in projects the school has received funding for. The students get extra support, and most importantly they are not left alone with their problems and worries. Kuronen questions how permanent these new procedures are, and are they developed any further, once the project funding and resources are cut down. (ibid., 83.)

In the fourth group are the students who have been asked to leave by the educational institution. Sometimes students may be asked to leave the school due to the conflicts the school cannot deal with anymore. According to Kuronen this should only be the very last alternative. After all, a school should be a society where everyone belongs. Students should feel welcomed at school. (ibid., 84.)

In the last group are the students who have chosen a wrong field of education. Students may drop out from school if they find the field of education unsuitable and uninteresting. Students would need more support and guidance during basic education to find their interests and strengths, as well as more information concerning studying at vocational school and different fields of education. Students need realistic information about the content of different jobs as well as employment possibilities in various vocational fields. Students can visit different vocational institutions and workplaces in order to gain more experience. The support the students get when

applying for vocational education is usually too technical. Kuronen also points out that students should not only get support when applying but rather for longer periods in basic education and again in vocational education. (Kuronen 2011, 76, 81, 84.)

4.3 Some Procedures for Preventing Dropouts

The Finnish Government has implemented a social guarantee for young people. The purpose of the guarantee is to offer each young person under 25 or new qualification holder under 30: a job; or on-the-job training; or a study place; or a period in a workshop or in rehabilitation within three months of becoming unemployed. Also every school-leaver is guaranteed a place in one of the following: Upper secondary school; vocational education and training; apprenticeship training; a youth workshop; or in rehabilitation or by other means. The aim is ensure post-compulsory qualifications to over 90 % of the 20-to-24-year-olds by the end of the current decade. (Ministry of Education and Culture, Department for Education and Science Policy 2012, 31.)

The aim is great but in order to achieve it, there must be also procedures developed to prevent school dropouts and decrease the length of study time. The Education and research development plan introduces a programme aiming to respond to the needs, but not in great detail.

A programme will be undertaken to expedite study times in vocational education and training, to reduce dropout and to support progress in studies and qualification in the target time. The programme will especially support the development of anticipatory and personalised procedures in guidance counselling, pedagogical solutions supporting the completion of studies, practices and action models in guidance counselling, and various work-centred learning environments and opportunities.” (Ministry of Education and Culture, Department for Education and Science Policy 2012, 39.)

Some improvements are already under construction to meet these requirements nationwide: there is a bill, to be adopted in 2014, stating that psychologists should also be available for students in vocational education (Salon Seudun Sanomat, retrieved 28.3.2013).

According to Kuronen (2011, 85 – 86) most of the problems leading to dropping out from school can be affected and even prevented. Focus should be moved from problem-centred thinking and reaction, to prevention. Students should have easier access to various social, health and counselling services. The educational institutions should pay attention to personal guiding, primary prevention and multi-professional support to prevent dropouts. Schools should be aware

of the students at higher risk of dropout. A teacher or a tutor should be seen as a safe adult, who supports the student and shows interest in his problems, worries and needs.

The Unit of Business and Administration has two full-time and one part-time student counsellors. Each group has a tutor who aims to meet the students regularly. There is health care organised for the students. It is also possible for the students to get help with their studies from two school helpers, who run an “exercise workshop” where students can receive personal help with studies and complete unfinished tasks and courses.

Launonen (2005, 6 – 7, 33) has analysed the efficiency and best practises of 36 European Social Fund’s “Goal 3 –programme” projects, whose aims were to activate vocational education and decrease dropouts. In her report she states that students’ special needs should be recognised at early stages, and support should be provided straight away. Students should be interviewed and the possible learning difficulties diagnosed at the beginning of education. Also attendance should be monitored so that students’ possible problems can be found out early. She continues that some students need more personal guiding in order to get their life outside of school organised. Only then they can concentrate fully on studying.

At the Unit of Business and Administration, all the students are tested for possible learning difficulties at the beginning of their studies. Each student with special needs will be provided with an individual educational plan. Students’ achievements are monitored carefully, and a tutor’s responsibility is to keep eye on the students’ absences as well as study records, and find them help in the early stages if they are not present or failing to pass courses. A tutor follows a procedure when finding help for an absent student. The procedure, which is implemented in the whole unit, states the actions needed to be taken after certain number of hours that a student has been absent. An absent student should be contacted in various ways in order to find out what is preventing him to come to school, and helping him to be involved in schoolwork again.

Kim & Streeter (2008, 7) have studied the phenomenon in the United States of America. They believe that “a multidisciplinary strategy – addressing truancy from three different sides: student, family, and school – is the only way to make long-term strides in improved school attendance”. They say that traditional approaches like punishments and forcing attendance through parental involvement are not effective in the long run.

Strategies that focus on the student include psycho-educational interventions, cognitive restructuring, after-school tutoring programmes and mentoring programmes in order to help the students deal with anxiety, stress, frustrations and worries as well as increase student's self-esteem and social skills. Schools should also try to provide resources for families. Family problems affect student school attendance and performance as Kuronen already showed. Providing resources and connecting families with appropriate social services will help reduce family problems. Schools should try to find ways to communicate openly with the families when students are absent. Schools could also hold workshops for parents dealing specifically with attendance problems in order to provide parents with new tools to deal with their children. In some cases a home visit can help the schools to better understand the reasons behind a student's behaviour. (Kim & Streeter 2008, 7 – 9.)

The Unit of Business and Administration organises a couple of parental meetings during an academic year. The general feeling is though that the meetings are not found important or interesting among most of the parents. Quite often the active parents are already the ones whose children are not at risk of dropping out, and therefore the message do not always reach the families that would need some help the most. The level of parental involvement in children's studies in vocational education is also unknown. It is also worth noticing that not all the over 18-years-old students want their parents to be informed about their educational achievements and possible problems.

Kim & Streeter (2008, 9) also state the importance of the student/teacher relationships. They say that schools should promote an environment where students feel connected to the school and invested in their learning. Schools could also provide attendance awards for improved attendance, and ask students to come up with strategies and programmes aimed at reducing absenteeism. Launonen (2005, 32) also points out the importance of a positive atmosphere which can, according to her, be improved by increasing teachers' knowledge and understanding of students with special needs and factors leading to the risk of dropout. This way, teachers are able and willing to deal with their students in a more caring way, search for help for their students and co-operate in multi-professional teams. Also according to Kuronen (2011, 82) it is important to acknowledge students' good behaviour and give them positive feedback.

According to Freiberg (1999, 11 – 12) students start taking responsibility for their actions and those of others, when they become citizens of the school. By helping each individual to feel

personal growth, dignity and importance, a school can support the sense of belonging to something. A positive environment – the heart and soul of a school – is a reason for the students to look forward to being there each school day. Grabelle & Littky (2004, 49 - 50) believe that having fun at school helps involve students in everything else that is going on in the school. When a school succeeds in surprising the students in a positive way every day, the students attend the school more often because they are afraid they might miss something otherwise. Celebration culture should be adopted; everyday things should be made special to the people.

At the beginning of the studies the International Business and Administration students will spend a day on a boot camp with their tutor, the Head of the study programme and the IB teachers in order to get to know each other and become a group. The student counsellors have not taken part in the camp traditionally. There are similar kinds of actions, although in a smaller scale, organised during the rest of the studies, too.

One of the improvements in preventing dropouts in the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration has been the change in teachers' attitude. The teachers are supporting and encouraging the students more to take part in the IBCC exams, which have been one of the main reasons for discontinuing studies in the past. Now the teachers are happy to see the students just passing the exams, and they do not put too much pressure on the students with too high expectations on exam results. Other improvements have occurred in planning the studies: At the beginning of their studies, the students are introduced to studying in English and to the IBCC studies. This prepares them better for the academically more challenging Diploma Programme courses. (E. Vehmas, personal communication, April 4, 2013.)

4.4 Summary

The high dropout rates and length of study time in vocational education has been recognised nationwide. The concern of school dropouts leading to alienation from society has forced the policy makers to implement strategies for improving the vocational education. The effects of alienation can be devastating from a student's point of view, but the phenomenon also has a wide impact on society and the provider of education.

The dropout rates and the length of study time in the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration have been higher than the national averages or the unit's averages

throughout the qualification's history. Some improvements have taken place as discussed in the chapter, but there is still a need for new procedures to decrease the number of dropouts and shorten the graduation times.

According to Seinä (2000,10) the reasons behind the extended study time and school dropouts are frequent and various, and there is not a complete theory explaining the phenomenon yet. Kouvo et al. (2011, 75 – 78) have grouped the reasons into three categories: Personal level; Transition system and social environment; and Internal factors of education and education provider. In this study only personal level and internal factors of education and education provider are introduced from the vocational education point of view. The transition system and social environment are not within the research topic. The main focus is on internal factors of education and education provider since the school has a direct impact on them. In order to give a more holistic picture of the reasons leading to dropping out from school or not graduating within the target time, the factors of personal level are also discussed.

Kuronen (2011, 16, 85) argues that only recently the educational institutions' ability to offer meaningful learning experiences as well as meeting the individual needs of different kind of students has really been questioned. He believes that the phenomenon has to be viewed through the student's personal history and future expectations. He emphasises that most of the problems leading to dropping out from school can be affected and even prevented. Focus should be moved from problem-centred thinking and reaction, to prevention by offering the students with an easier access to various social, health and counselling services.

A positive school environment where the students feel that they are part of the community, and they are praised for good behaviour is seen as an important factor when increasing the school attendance. Teachers' willingness to help students with special needs and student/teacher relationships are vital factors when improving the school wellbeing. (See Launonen 2005, 32; Kim & Streeter 2008, 9; Kuronen 2011, 82.)

5 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will explain the research process. First the selected research paradigm and method will be defined and justified, and then the research questions will be introduced, followed by the aims and the focus of the research.

In order to increase the trustworthiness of the study, the data collection method and procedures, as well as data analysing will be described in detail. At the end of the chapter the trustworthiness of the study will be discussed.

5.1 Research Paradigm

This research is placed within the realist constructivist paradigm, which assumes that constructivism and realism can be combined in personal thinking. In other words, a constructivist can also be realistic to some extent like Tynjälä, Heikkinen and Huttunen (2005, 23) suggest. The basic ontological assumption of constructivism is relativism, where reality is viewed as socially and psychologically constructed, which varies from person to person depending on time, place, language, culture, social position, previous understanding and life experience. Realism on the other hand views that there is only one truth that is the same for everyone. However there are also elements of Popperian thinking in the research: at the same time the researcher is assuming that there is also a truth which is independent from observations, and which is constructed by individuals in order to make theories, hypotheses and everything what can be called knowledge or believes. There is an external truth independent from human mind. (Heikkinen, Huttunen, Niglas & Tynjälä 2005, 342 – 343, 345; Tynjälä et al. 2005, 21.)

At the centre of this research are the students' personal experiences and viewpoints concerning the phenomena of "school dropouts and extended study times" among the International Business and Administration students. However, their observations are presented in discussion with some quantitative data.

The basic epistemological assumption of constructivism is subjectivism; the researcher is part of the reality and the truth he studies (Heikkinen et al. 2005, 342 – 343). The researcher works at the Unit of Business and Administration as Coordinator of on-the-job learning. She interacts not

just with the International Business and Administration students but also the teachers and other staff members working in the programme. The Head of the study programme is a good personal friend of hers. It is important for her as a researcher to understand her position as well as personal connections. However, the researcher's previous experience enables her to be part of the truth and the reality that she researches.

Subjectivism can also be seen in the way the results are illustrated. The students' interpretations of the phenomena and the researcher's interpretations arising from the analysed data are the focus of the study. The aim is to produce rich textual descriptions of the students' experiences in the students' life world in order to provide a deeper understanding. According to Heikkinen et al. (2005, 344) it is typical for such a methodology to acknowledge the existence of the informants' and researcher's voice in the research report.

5.2 About Qualitative Research and Evaluative Case Study

According to Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara (2008, 157 - 160) qualitative research can be described with at least 43 different definitions. However, it is possible to identify characteristics common to the different definitions. Qualitative research aims to describe real life. This includes the concept of varied reality. The aim is to research the phenomena as thoroughly as possible, but instead of testing existing hypotheses the interest lies in finding or discovering unexpected facts. The research results can only be conditional explanations that are restricted to a certain time and place. The data is gathered through qualitative methods, where a human being collects the data and the voice and views of the informants are in the centre. The cases are handled and analysed as unique.

The interest of this research lies in the meanings people give to phenomena, and therefore a qualitative approach was chosen as opposed to providing statistically generalised results. The qualitative approach can be justified also when looking at the research questions; the aim of this research is to answer the questions *what* and *how* and to find the factors influencing the phenomena. The purpose is not to test any hypotheses but to analyse the main findings thoroughly as possible. The aim of this research is to understand the phenomena from the students' point of view in its natural settings.

Yin (2003, 14 – 15, 83, 98) argues that case study strategy should not be confused with qualitative research. On the contrary – case studies can also include quantitative evidence and be based on any mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence. Six sources of evidence may be used: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation and physical artifacts. He emphasises the importance of using multiple sources of evidence in order to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioural issues. Any finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be more convincing and accurate when based on several different sources of information. This research also combines quantitative evidence with qualitative methods when the results of the previous surveys are analysed. However, the main approach is qualitative.

According to Yin (2003, 2) the case study method can be used when a researcher wants to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events including organizational processes, for example. The main subject of this research is an individual case: the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration offered by the Unit of Business and Administration. Bassey (1999, 58) continues that an educational case study is an empirical enquiry, which is conducted within a localised boundary of space and time; into interesting aspects of an educational activity, programme, institution or system; mainly in its natural context and within an ethic of respect for persons; and in order to inform the judgements and decisions of practitioners or policy-makers.

Bassey (1999, 62 - 63) describes three types of case studies: theory-seeking and theory-testing case studies; story-telling and picture-drawing case studies; and evaluative case studies. This research falls best under the category of evaluative case studies that explore an educational programme in order to focus on its worthiness. It is formative since the aim is to help to develop the programme; the aim of the study is to inform the Head of the unit and the Head of the study programme about the students' points of view about the main reasons for high dropout rates and extended study times in order to develop the qualification.

According to Bassey case study draws on theoretical notions but it is not intended to contribute to the development of theory. Yin (2003, 32 – 33) continues that in case studies a previously developed theory is compared with the empirical results of the study. The results of this research cannot be generalised to apply to all vocational qualifications in Finland. Yet the conclusions can

be of use when developing the other qualifications provided by the Unit of Business and Administration.

5.3 Research Questions

This thesis seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

- **What are the main internal factors of the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration and Oulu Vocational College, Unit of Business and Administration that put the International Business and Administration students at risk of dropping out and graduating late?**
- **How can the risk be reduced?**

The research questions are affected by the internal developmental needs of the programme, theoretical framework and methodology. The first research question is the main problem of this study, and it aims at viewing the internal factors of the education and education provider that lead students to dropout and graduate late. The focus of this research is on the internal factors since the educational provider has a direct influence on them. The main factors will be discussed one by one.

The additional research question is asked in order to find out how the qualification could be improved from the students' point of view. The purpose is to provide development proposals based on the views of the participants of the qualification in addition to the researcher's recommendations.

5.4 Data Collection and Research Informants

There are no specific methods of data collection or of analysis in case study research. Researchers use whatever methods seem to them to be appropriate and practical. (Bassey 1999, 69). Heikkinen et al. (2005, 345) state that researchers often combine different qualitative and quantitative methods in order to triangulate. One can argue that combining different methods is problematic at a philosophical level, but in practice they are not exclusive. Researchers choose their methods according to the research questions and aims. Yin (2003, 98) also emphasises the

importance of using multiple sources of evidence in a case study. This allows a researcher to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioural issues, and to triangulate. Bassey (1999, 69) has however given two rules when collecting data: be systematic when recording data, and only collect as much data as you have time and energy to analyse.

The empirical data for this research was mainly collected through two half-structured group interviews during April 2013. During the research process the researcher also had an opportunity to visit a state school in the UK, which offers IBCC studies to its students. Through the informal observations and discussions with the teachers and students, the researcher has widened her knowledge of the IBCC studies as well as gathered some new ideas on how to improve the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration. Former quantitative research results on school satisfaction among the International Business and Administration students were also used in order to understand the phenomenon better and to compare some of the results with the findings of this research.

Interviews

Half-structured interviews were chosen as the main data collection method in order to gain in-depth answers to the research tasks. According to Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2001, 47 - 48) a half-structured interview enables the interviewer to ask the same questions in different ways or in a different order for different participants. However, the specific topics the interviewer wants to explore are thought out in advance.

Two group interviews were carried out. The intention was to interview students who had been studying in the programme longer than one academic year, and therefore the informants were selected from year groups 2010 (third and fourth year students) and 2011 (second year students). By selecting the sample based on this requirement, the informants' experiences in the IBCC studies as well as on-the-job learning was ensured.

The informants were interviewed in groups so that the students could complement each other, and maybe discuss the questions from different perspectives. It was seen as important to interview the whole study groups in order to gather opinions from as many students as possible. Through group interviews it was also possible to gather more opinions in a shorter time period compared to interviewing the informants one by one.

According to Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2001, 63) the advantage of a group interview is that the interviewer can gather information from several informants quickly. There is however a possibility that one or more informants may dominate the interview, and therefore the interviewer has a great responsibility to guide the interview and give all the informants the opportunity to contribute.

The group interviews took place at the unit in a classroom during one school day. This was the most practical way to reach the informants, and it did not require much organising from the school's side. It was agreed with the teachers that 60 minutes of their lessons could be used for interviewing the students. The students were not informed about the interviews in advance so that they would not skip the lesson if they happened to feel that the research was unimportant. In the beginning of the interviews the purpose of the research as well as the anonymity of the informants were explained. Also students' questions concerning the interview and the research were answered. The students had the right to choose whether or not they wanted to participate in the research. All the students who were present at the time being took part in the interviews. Permission was received from each informant to record the interviews.

The 2010 year group has 17 students, and the 2011 group has 21 students. 9 informants took part in the first interview that was carried out among the students from 2010. The second interview had 10 informants from the 2011 year group. In the results the informants are quoted as S1 - S9 (year group 2010) and S10 – S19 (year group 2011). Quite a few students were missing from the interviews, and there is a risk that exactly those students who are at the highest risk of dropping out and graduating late may not have been reached. On the other hand, the number of informants was already high in both group interviews. For example Lähteenmaa and Lauriainen (in Hirsjärvi et al. 2008, 206) recommend having only 2 – 3 informants in a group interview.

It was decided to carry out the interviews in Finnish since English is not any of the informants' nor the researcher's mother tongues. Most of the informants' mother tongue is Finnish, and all of them speak perfect Finnish. By choosing the interviewing language to be Finnish, any misunderstandings between the researcher and the informants caused by language problems were minimized. This also helped the transcribing process.

The interview questions (see Appendix 3) were naturally based on the research tasks. The interview questions were tested through a group interview of six second-year International

Business and Administration students in March 2013. As a result of the test interview some questions were found to be not relevant and therefore some minor changes were made prior the actual interviews.

When considering the interviews in general, it seemed that most of the informants were taking the research seriously. Yet there were some informants interrupting others and making jokes. The researcher had to make sure that they did not start dominating the interview or the other informants, and that everyone had a chance to express their thoughts. Some informants came late to the interviews, and that interrupted the interviewing process slightly. All in all, it was felt that the atmosphere was relaxed and the informants felt comfortable enough to discuss the matters truthfully. The duration of the group interviews varied from 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were recorded on a video recorder, and there were no problems with using the device during the interviews.

Other Methods

The trip to the school in the UK took place in February and March 2013, and it lasted for two weeks. During the stay the researcher had an opportunity to observe the school and discuss with the staff members and the students in order to gather more knowledge concerning the IBCC studies. The nature of the observations and discussions was informal yet a diary was kept.

When analysing the school satisfaction among the International Business and Administration students, quantitative data collected by the Unit of Business and Administration was used. Instead of using raw data, the computer-calculated means were analysed. Information concerning the sample sizes was not available. The data was input into Excel manually, and the same software was used for comparing and visualising the findings. In the analysis the figures of International Business and Administration students were compared with the averages of the Unit of Business and Administration. There is always a chance that there are some errors in the results due to the data input as well as analysing methods. However, the purpose of the analysis was mainly to describe how the International Business and Administration students find their studies compared to the other students, and to show if there are any factors where the qualification lacks. The results were also combined with the outcomes of the interviews. Therefore it was not found purposeful to analyse the data any further.

5.5 Content Analysis

First the relevant portions of the interviews were transcribed word for word, excluding the introductions, formalities and interruptions due to late-arrivals. Notes of the possible non-verbal messages were not made. Due to the quality of the videos some less relevant words were missed or possibly misheard. The total amount of transcribed data ended up being 33 pages.

After reading carefully through the transcribed interviews, each relevant statement was organised under the following categories based on the research questions: 1. Internal factors and 2. Evaluation. Next the categories were divided into initial subcategories based on the theoretical framework. The subcategories include: Marketing of the educational institution; Integration; Flexibility; Pedagogical solutions; Pedagogical management; Quality of teaching; Quality of guidance; Atmosphere; and Others.

Finally, the two main internal factors that surprised the researcher the most were recognised. The possible reasons and consequences of the findings were identified from the categorised interview data.

5.6 Trustworthiness of the Study

According to Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008, 292) qualitative researchers and methods books are divided in their opinion of whether qualitative research can be evaluated with the classic criteria of reliability and validity. Bassey (1999, 74 – 75) for example states that the concepts of reliability and validity, which are vital in surveys and experiments, do not apply in case study research. A case study focuses on singularity, which is chosen because of its interest to the researcher. It is not chosen as a 'typical' example, and therefore issues of external validity are not meaningful.

Still, the trustworthiness of a piece of research has to be evaluated. Instead of using the concepts of reliability and validity, a researcher of a qualitative research can provide a detailed description of the research process in order to increase the trustworthiness of the study. This includes describing the phases and circumstances of data collection, stating the facts influencing the selected analysis methods as well as justifying conclusions with authentic documentation. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008, 227 - 228.)

Trustworthiness can be also evaluated with dependability, transferability, credibility and conformability. The research process has to be logical, traceable and documented, and it has to be informed to the reader. This will increase the dependability of the study. Transferability is understood as a connection between the research and previous results. The research has to have some similarity to other research. In order to establish the credibility of the research, there has to be a sufficient amount of data. Other researchers should be able to agree with the results, or come relatively close to them, on the basis of the material. Conformability increases when the findings are linked to the data in ways that can be easily understood by others. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294.)

This report aims to describe the different phases of the research process thoroughly, as well as to justify the selected research methods. Enough data has been collected in order to fulfil the purpose of the thesis. The findings are supported with previous research results in order to establish transferability. Some direct quotes have been included in the report in order to increase the conformability. It is important to notice though that the quotes are translated from Finnish to English and therefore some original expressions of the informants may have been lost in the analysis.

In addition, Yin (2003, 35 – 39) uses four tests to establish the quality of a case study: Construct validity; Internal validity; External Validity; and Reliability. Internal validity, however, is not a concern of this study since the aim of the research is not to find causal relationships. Next, the three other tests are discussed in the context of the study.

Construct validity: this study uses multiple sources of evidence such as interviews, observations and statistical data. Unfortunately there was not the possibility to have the draft report reviewed by the informants, which decreases the construct validity of the study. There is now a likelihood of falsely reporting.

External validity: this single-case study connects the theoretical framework of the research with the outcomes of the interviews. In the theoretical framework, mainly recent publications by Finnish authors were used. A number of Internet sources were used, but they have been chosen carefully on the basis of the publisher.

Reliability: the procedures of this case study were documented in order to minimise the errors and biases in the study. Even though Yin (2003, 37) emphasises that a later investigator should arrive at the same findings and conclusions by following the same procedures as described by the earlier investigator, Heikkinen et al. (2005, 343) argue that a constructivist research can hardly be repeated completely by another researcher due to the subjectivism of such a paradigm.

All in all, the trustworthiness of this study is relatively high. The process is documented, the selected methods are justified, and the conclusions are supported with both previous results and authentic documentation. The biggest concerns, however, lie in the facts that some at-risk students may not be reached for the interviews, and the draft report was not discussed with the informants. On the other hand, the research process is described in detail, which increases the quality of the study. However, the aim of such an approach is not to improve the repeatability of this study due to the nature of single-case study and chosen paradigm.

6 RESEARCH RESULTS

In the interviews, the informants were asked to describe and analyse their reasons for applying for the programme and the application process, the integration process, quality of teaching and guidance, flexibility of studies, atmosphere, and pedagogical solutions. They were also asked to discuss the factors that benefit or delay their studies. Reasons for possible considerations of discontinuing studies were also covered.

In this chapter the two main findings of the interviews will be introduced. The aim is to illustrate the results by giving some examples how the informants explained their experiences and feelings. The main interest of this study has been in finding the internal factors of the education and provider of the education that leads to dropping out from the school and graduating late. The other interest of this study has been in gathering development proposals from the informants. Some of their ideas will also be introduced in this chapter.

6.1 The Experience of Disorganised Practices

When discussing and analysing the study programme, several informants from both groups described the feeling of disorganisation mainly in three areas of the education: the implementation of the IBCC studies; poor information flow and the feeling of isolation; and lack of guidance and support. Next the main findings will be discussed in more detailed.

The Implementation of the IBCC Studies

The interview results show that the quality of teaching is generally evaluated to be good, and the informants feel that most of the teachers are using multiple teaching methods. The students however, feel that the course instructions of the IBCC studies are unclear and too inaccurate for the most part:

“I think that the assignments in many cases, especially in these final ones, they were quite broad in a way, they weren’t maybe explained that well to the students.” (S6)

The informants also explained how they receive many adverse instructions for the 'Reflective project' for example.

"For the 'Reflective project' for example, we got different instructions from two teachers concerning the layout, how it should be done, how to quote, what issues we have to cover and so on. So then, I found the most challenging that I didn't know what I was doing for most of the time. We received many written instructions" (S4)

"And some oral ones on top of them." (S8)

"And they all differed from each other." (S4)

"And some students didn't have their learning diaries ready, so their 'Reflective projects' weren't sent for assessment, I don't think that rule was told to us when the course was introduced. So that kind of things like what's the purpose, and what's important, so they weren't covered. Or at least I didn't hear." (S4)

"I was told about the learning diary maybe a week before the deadline." (S3)

"It was told two weeks after the deadline" (S8)

"It's been the same with the IB English, we've got many different instructions." (S3)

The students are hoping for better instructions for all the exercises. They point out that they want to receive only one final version in order to avoid any misunderstandings, and "not so that five students are told differently" like one of them (S8) stated. Another informant thought that it would be good to receive the same information in both English and Finnish for the most challenging projects.

The informants hope that the teachers would explain to them which exercises are the most important ones, and why. They also feel that they should be reminded about approaching deadlines. The teachers should stay strict with the deadlines; otherwise the students learn that it is acceptable to hand in the exercises late. The following quotes show the importance of

reminding the students of the approaching deadlines. Forgetting the important dates can in the worst case delay their graduation:

"We have the final exam next Friday." (S4)

"What?" (S2)

"Hu?" (S6)

"Yeap, English." (S4)

"Looks like we'll have an exam next Friday then." (S8)

Also the course content and targets of the IBCC studies are left unclear according to the interview results. Providing clear instructions, explaining the content and goals of the courses, and reminding about the deadlines seem to be vital for passing the IBCC studies successfully. When failing to do so, the risk of a student discontinuing his studies increases. When asked for possible plans and reasons for dropping out from the school, the informants gave only one answer:

"I was thinking of quitting, cause I just couldn't take it that everything was so unclear. It wasn't fun not to know anything. All the instructions and everything was such a mess." (S8)

"The IBCC studies. I got so pissed off cause nothing was clear." (S5)

"The same, the ambiguity. What's the point in the end." (S2)

The informants criticised the fact that they have to study often independently in the 'Reflective project' course. They described how they did not know what to do and therefore they did not really start their projects until the last year. They emphasized the importance of having someone guiding and helping them especially in the beginning of the process.

"What do you expect that 17 – 18 –years-old students do if you are not present?" (S4)

"I didn't even know what to do, I was completely lost." (S5)

“The teacher should have been there.” (S6)

“At least in the beginning.” (S5)

“We could have had worked independently this spring. But even then it would have been good, if the teacher had been around every now and then.” (S4)

One informant also explained how the changes in the curriculum half way through the education affected their IB English studies.

Poor Information Flow and Feel of Isolation

As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a need for more accurate and regular information concerning the studies between the teachers and the students. The interview results also show that the information flow between the unit and the visiting IB teachers should be improved. According to the informants the formal corporate communication is provided only in Finnish through an unreliable information channel and therefore the information does not always reach the non-Finnish speaking teachers. The informants feel that informing the teachers about special events for example is often left to them. The next quotes show how the informants find such situations from a student’s point of view:

“When we tell to one of the IB teachers, that this is the situation, that we have such a day, then it’s our fault in a way, or we are the bad guys then, when we tell them that we will do this, only because the teachers have not made sure that the information has reached everyone. Of course it bugs them, when they’ve come here all the way from Lyseo to give us a lesson, and then they hear from us that it’s not gonna happen. Makes me feel a bit sad too.” (S4)

“And then we can’t participate, and everyone is getting irritated.” (S8)

“It’s not motivating that we can’t take part in the events cause the information does not reach the other teachers.” (S5)

The interviews results showed that the informants think that they are isolated as a group from the rest of the school due to their IBCC studies and lack of communication. The following quotes give a good example how they feel about the fact that they do not feel like part of the school:

“Yeah, what is a Sport day?” (S8)

“We can’t take part in it either, because we’ve got IB studies... They are always at the same time with our IB lessons.” (S4)

“Some people find it really irritating.” (S8)

“It actually decreases the sense of community, that we can’t participate.” (S4)

“Our group is a bit like, that we don’t interact with other groups that much. And when we can’t even join that kind of events, then it’s even more so.” (S2)

When asking how to improve the extracurricular activities, the informants thought that it would be a good idea to use the ‘Community and service’ course to provide the school with different kinds of events. That would make them feel more part of the school. The school in the UK that was visited during the research process was using the course successfully to support the sense of belonging in various ways. A need for school trips arose from the interviews as well. The informants would like to have team building days more often, and even to study in a new environment.

Lack of Guidance and Support

The informants described the lack of student counselling they have received during their studies. One informant told that it has been one reason why his studies have taken longer than planned even though the quality of the counselling was described as good enough. The following quotes show that there is a need for more counselling especially at the beginning of the studies:

“Maybe more student counsellor’s lessons especially at the beginning. So that there is more than just one or two, and if you happen to be sick you don’t get the information anymore.” (S6)

“Maybe there should be counselling couple more times a year.” (S10)

The number of student counsellor’s lessons is not the main concern of the students. The following quotes provide a good – but an unfortunate – example of how the students do not always know who their student counsellor even is.

“This year I’ve been satisfied with the counselling I have received. But on the second year I did not even know if we had a student counsellor.” (S4)

“Neither did I. I didn’t know either who is officially our student counsellor.” (S8)

“We haven’t got to know our student counsellor.” (S11)

“Well, it’s been sometimes a bit unclear to me, who our student counsellor even is.” (S4)

“It could be told us at the beginning of our studies who our student counsellor is. What you can ask from him, and how he can help you with your studies.” (S5)

“Well, at least the student counsellor could be introduced to us.” (S10)

Introducing the other staff members to the new students has not been implemented well either. The informants explained that they obviously get to know the teachers who are teaching them, but there are still many staff members they have not been introduced to properly.

The interview results also show how important it is for a tutoring teacher to know the school’s procedures and rules, as well as be able to help the students build and update their personal study plans. Some students described how they have not received enough help with their personal study plans:

“I still don’t know how the personal study plan works.” (S2)

“Well, last time I updated mine was the first year’s Christmas.” (S4)

Some other students explained how the tutoring teacher's involvement in their studies has helped them pass courses. They also found the one-by-one discussions with the tutoring teacher important. On the other hand, one informant suggested more lessons with the tutoring teacher.

According to the interview results, it is also vital that the other staff members provide good customer service to the students. The informants shared a couple of stories how they had difficulties with getting the relevant documents from the school for travel cards. It had not just caused unnecessary extra work for the students but also made it more difficult for them to get to school. One informant even described how he had missed some school days because after trying several times to get the relevant documents for his travel card he gave up the idea of using public transport for travelling to school. Therefore he could not always get a lift to school. Helping and guiding the students in every possible way should be every staff member's concern.

6.2 Failing to Meet the Students' Expectations

Considering the fact that the concept of the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration is unique in Finland, one of the interests of this research was to find out the reasons why students decided to apply for this programme and what expectations they had when considering the studies. Most of the informants described how they made the decision to apply for the programme at the beginning of the application process with only a little information. The results of the interviews show that most of the students had not received information about the education from the provider of basic education. They described their main sources to be relatives and friends, who had studied in the programme in the past, Oulu Vocational College's website and the printed "Study Guide" book by Finnish National Board of Education. Quite often the programme was found by chance.

"... what is that big book what has got all the education stuff all around Finland, is it a study guide. So I opened it, and I was lucky enough to find this, so I started looking for more information and got excited." (S4)

"What's that book, where one can look for all the education stuff. I just searched what's in Oulu, and what's got as much English as possible." (S5)

The reasons for applying vary among the students depending on their situations in life. The most important factors for applying are the teaching language of the programme being partly English and the international nature of the education. Several informants mentioned these reasons throughout the interviews:

"I changed a word or two with the previous students. I liked the fact that there was a lot of theory and they had to study hard. And it was international. And learning a language." (S6)

"I was interested in the possible jobs in retail business, and then there was English, I wanted to improve it." (S1)

"I wanted to become international." (S16)

Judging from the comments, the International Business and Administrations students are expecting the Unit of Business and Administration to provide them with language training and international experiences. Meeting these expectations is important when considering the school satisfaction of the International Business and Administrations students.

Language Development

Overall the informants feel that their expectations for studying in English are not fulfilled even though their language skills have improved during the studies. One informant criticised the fact that less courses are taught in English than was promised in the first place. Several informants are not always happy with the quality of teaching due to the fact that non-advanced English speakers teach them in English. They feel that the school does not invest in their language learning enough.

"Some teachers, for example, have been asked to teach wrong subjects or in a wrong language. - Some teachers don't speak as good English as we do for example." (S10)

"It's really frustrating, because our English should be developed all the time." (S11)

"And then we are taught by people who can't speak it." (S10)

Two students also described how the possible lack of teacher's English skills has impaired the quality of teaching. The following quotes give a good example how the teaching can suffer when a teacher is not teaching in his mother tongue.

"Because in one course for example all the examples were translated really badly, so nobody was able to do them, no-one understood them." (S10)

"And the teacher couldn't help us with them, cause even he didn't understand the examples." (S15)

Even though the students feel that the school is not investing enough in their language learning, the informants described how studying in English has become relatively easy after the beginning. The following three quotes give a good example how the students explained their language development during the studies:

"In the beginning it was thrilling, but you get used to it" (S1)

"Now you don't even notice, you don't think that, oh, this was in English." (S4)

"Often when we have many IB lessons a day, so that we don't speak in any other language than English, then I even start thinking in English." (S11)

The previous results reflect the importance of already having some courses taught in English in the beginning of the studies in order to get the students used to the idea of learning in English. The students also found important for their language development to have non-Finnish speaking teachers. According to one informant, there is then a must to use English with the teacher. The most important factor according to the interview results was the language skills of the teacher:

"The studying language wouldn't affect our studies at all, if all the teachers would speak fluent English." (S10)

International Experiences

According to the interview results, the students are not always satisfied with the level of international activities the unit had been providing. The informants are hoping for more international activities and possibilities as the following quotes show:

“I was hoping that there would be as much as possible, or more international activities, really, it is cool that we have two foreign teachers here, and we have had a few visitors, but there could have been more. I am actually a bit disappointed with the fact that there wasn’t more, because I was expecting that there would be even more. So that we should, or could, use the language with other people than just teachers, too. I am not undervaluing, we have had cool visitors, but there could have been more.” (S4)

Due to the rule that a student doing training abroad should be 18-years-old, one informant had not been able to conclude the last on-the-job learning period abroad. The same informant could not understand the rule since after all the International Business and Administration students should be internationally active. There was also discussion about a possible study group trip abroad. The informants feel that they do not receive enough support and information on organising a school trip abroad when they were trying to discuss their idea with the staff members.

6.3 Summary of the Findings

Table 4 summarise the main internal factors that put an International Business and Administration student at risk of dropping out and graduating late. The table illustrates the main failures in each factor as well as some suggestions by the students of what should be done in order to improve the programme.

TABLE 4. Summary of the main internal factors affecting drop out rates and late graduation.

Factor	Main failures	Suggestions by students
The IBCC studies	General confusion with the content of the courses and instructions.	Simpler and standardised instructions.
Information flow	IB teachers do not receive enough information from the unit.	Informing should not be left to the students.
Belonging	Cannot participate in school's extracurricular events due to the poor information flow.	More events organised. 'Community and service' course could provide some of them.
Guiding and tutoring	Student counsellor unknown. Too few lessons with the tutor teacher and student counsellor. Lack of support with the personal study plans.	Student counsellor should be introduced at the beginning of the studies. Increase tutors' knowledge of personal study plans.
Meeting students' expectations	Teachers' language skills. Too little international activities.	Increase teachers' language competence and number of international activities.

7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the outcomes of the interviews will be discussed in relation to the theoretical framework. The results of the previous studies as well as the researcher's observations will support the findings. Suggestions for the development of the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration will also be introduced at the end of the chapter. The development ideas have been drawn on the basis of the interview results.

However, before the main two internal factors leading to dropouts and extended study times are presented, the personal level factors are discussed shortly below. The aim of this is to show that the students are capable of taking responsibility for their actions and decisions, and they do not think that only the school is responsible for their learning achievements.

Like Kouvo et al. (2011, 75, 78) and Seinä (2000, 10 – 11) state, the lack of motivation, lack of commitment to the studies and lack of life control skills for example are reasons for a vocational student to drop out. Some of these factors can be seen in the interview results as well: The informants happily admitted that sometimes they are just too tired to come to school in the mornings. One of them even explained that a hangover is a reason for staying home. They also admitted being lazy sometimes and not even finding out what should be done and when.

Half of the International Business and Administration students live away from their parents, which may have an impact on school attendance as Kuronen has stated (2011, 61). Some informants also work while studying, and some travel outside of the school holidays. Balancing between the school and life outside the school may be challenging (Seinä 2000, 10; Kouvo et al. 2011, 78; Kuronen 2011, 81). However, this study does not focus on the personal level factors, thus acknowledging them is important in order to achieve a bigger picture of the phenomena.

7.1 The Main Internal Factors That Put the International Business and Administration Students at Risk of Dropping out and Graduating Late

The programme has had high dropout rates and long graduation times throughout its history. Some improvements have been seen over the years, but still the figures are above the national

averages and higher compared to the other programmes at Unit of Business and Administration. Therefore it is important to investigate the main internal factors of the school and the course that put the students at risk of dropping out and graduating late.

The Experience of Disorganised Practices

The informants described some of the course's procedures as disorganised and confusing. The implementation of the IBCC studies, poor information flow and a feeling of isolation combined with a lack of guidance and support were all mentioned as weaknesses of the study programme. The course is relatively new and it has only been accessible to the mainstream since the autumn 2012. The Unit of Business and Administration has been one of the pioneering schools of the programme for some years though. Due to the novelty of the programme, some procedures may still be under development. It is however, important to notice that some of the informants had planned to discontinue their studies at some point of the education due to the vagueness of the course alone:

"I was thinking of quitting, cause I just couldn't take it that everything was so unclear. It wasn't fun not to know anything. All the instructions and everything was such a mess." (S8)

"The IBCC studies. I got so pissed off cause nothing was clear." (S5)

"The same, the ambiguity. What's the point in the end." (S2)

The study programme has had high dropout rates and long graduation times throughout its history. The findings above may well explain the reasons behind some of these cases. Also the earlier school satisfaction results show that the International Business and Administration students are not as satisfied as the other students with the implementation of the education, personalising the studies, and atmosphere. The satisfaction of the personalising drops, even after the first study year, along with the general satisfaction. The school satisfaction results could be explained, at least partly, with the fact that the informants find the IBCC studies, communication and guiding vague and confusing.

Stronge (2007, 42 – 43, 54) emphasises the importance of organisational skills of a teacher. According to him most effective teachers are organised in terms of routines, behaviours, and

materials. They are prepared for class, and they set an example of organisation for students that support their learning. In an organised classroom, the students know exactly what to do and when to do it. The students have more time spent on academic tasks, and they focus on academic engagement that reduces the potential for behaviour problems. A teacher can help the students with their work by using a calendar for long-term, weekly and daily planning.

According to the interview results the International Business and Administration students feel that the course instructions of the IBCC studies are unclear and too inaccurate most of the time. They are hoping for better and more uniform instructions for all the exercises. Also the course content and targets of the IBCC studies are left unclear according to the interview results. The informants hope that the teachers would explain to them which exercises are the most important ones, and why. They also feel that they should be reminded about coming deadlines.

In other words, the students do not always know what to do and when. Therefore providing clear instructions, explaining the content and goals of the courses, and reminding about the deadlines seem to be vital for passing the IBCC studies successfully. When failing in doing so, the risk of a student discontinuing his studies increases.

The British students seem to have same kind of problems with their IBCC. They feel that due to the lack of concrete guidelines of 'Reflective project' for example, they are puzzled about how to complete the project successfully. The whole concept of the IBCC studies is relatively new, and the impression is that there might still be some uncertainty of how the studies should be implemented.

There is clearly a need for more accurate and regular information concerning the studies between the teachers and the students. As Kim & Streeter (2008, 9) state, the student/teacher relationships are an important factor when increasing school attendance. In this research it can be seen as efficient communication between a teacher and the students.

The interview results also show that the information flow between the unit and the visiting IB teachers should be improved. According to the informants the formal corporate communication is provided only in Finnish through an unreliable information channel and therefore the information does not always reach the non-Finnish speaking teachers. The informants feel that informing the teachers about special events for example is often left to them.

The interviews results show that the informants think that they are isolated as a group from the rest of the school due to their IBCC studies and lack of communication between the unit and the external teacher:

“When we tell to one of the IB teachers, that this is the situation, that we have such a day, then it’s our fault in a way, or we are the bad guys then, when we tell them that we will do this, only because the teachers have not made sure that the information has reached everyone. Of course it bugs them, when they’ve come here all the way from Lyseo to give us a lesson, and then they hear from us that it’s not gonna happen. Makes me feel a bit sad too.” (S4)

“It actually decreases the sense of community, that we can’t participate.” (S4)

A positive school environment where the students feel that they are part of the community, and they are praised for good behaviour is seen as an important factor when increasing the school attendance. A positive environment – the heart and soul of a school – is a reason for the students to look forward to being there each school day. It also helps the students start taking responsibility for their actions and those of others. (Freiberg 1999, 11 - 12; Launonen 2005, 32; Kim & Streeter 2008, 9.) Grabelle & Littky (2004, 49 - 50) believe that having fun at school helps involve students in everything else that is going on in the school and decrease absence. School should make everyday things feel special to the people by building celebrations into the culture.

At the moment the unit offers some extracurricular activities such as ‘Sport and culture’ day, traditional school celebrations, and a yearly fashion show. According to the interview results, the selection could be wider and the accessibility better. When asking how to improve the extracurricular activities, the informants thought that it would be a good idea to use the ‘Community and service’ course to provide the school with different kind of events. That would make them feel more as part of the school. The school in the UK is using the same course successfully to support the sense of belonging in various ways. A need for school trips arose from the interviews as well. The informants would like to have team building days more often, and even study in a new environment.

According to Kuronen (2011, 85 – 86) most of the problems leading to dropping out from school can be affected and even prevented by ensuring students have easier access to various social,

health and counselling services. Attention should be paid to personal guiding, primary prevention and multi-professional support.

Even though the unit has two full-time student counsellors, the informants described the lack of student counselling they have received during their studies. One informant told that it has been one reason why his studies have taken longer than planned. The quality of the counselling is however described as good enough but the procedure is vague. The number of student counsellor's lessons is not the main concern of the students: the students do not always even know who their student counsellor is.

“Well, it's been sometimes a bit unclear to me, who our student counsellor even is.” (S4)

“It could be told us at the beginning of our studies who our student counsellor is. What you can ask from him, and how he can help you with your studies.” (S5)

“Well, at least the student counsellor could be introduced to us.” (S10)

It could be questioned whether not knowing one's student councillor weakens the student's access to professional help, which is after all an important factor in preventing dropouts (Kuronen 2011, 85 – 86). This may also lead to a situation where some students who are at-risk are not identified early enough since only possible learning difficulties are tested in the beginning of the studies.

The interview results also show how important it is for a tutoring teacher to know the school's procedures and rules, as well as to be able to help the students build and update their personal study plans. One-to-one discussions with a tutor are seen as important. The lack of support on the other hand leads to confusion and dissatisfaction. This may be seen also in the students' satisfaction surveys. In previous surveys the International Business and Administration students' satisfaction on tutoring and personalising has varied remarkably between the groups and the academic years 2009/2010 – 2011/2012 as the Table 3 shows.

TABLE 3. The minimum and maximum results of tutoring and personalising in the school satisfaction surveys among the International Business and Administration students in the academic years 2009/2010 – 2011/2012 (Oulu Vocation College, Unit of Business and Administration 2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2012a; 2012b)

Category	Min. result	Max. result
Tutoring	2.89	3.88
Personalising	2.92	4.18

The minimum results show that there have been study groups that have found tutoring and personalising poor. On the other hand especially personalising has also been evaluated as being really good in some years. It would not be wise to be too satisfied with the last result though; as discussed earlier in the research, the satisfaction on personalising drops constantly after the first study year. Usually the students evaluate personalising around grade 4 in the first year, but the figure already drops closer to 3 by the second year. This result suggests that the amount and quality of tutoring must decrease after the first year, and the students do not receive enough support anymore in the second year.

In the school in the UK a tutor meets his students at the end of each school day. This is found as an efficient way to keep up with the students' school achievements, share information as well as monitor absence. In the Unit of Business and Administration such an approach would not work because the teachers are not contracted to stay on the school premises outside of teaching hours. However, this model could be adopted partly into the culture by starting each school week with a 15 minutes long mandatory meeting with a tutor.

Introducing the other staff members to the new students has not been implemented well either according to the interview results. The informants explained that they obviously get to know the teachers who are teaching them, but there are still many staff members they have not been introduced to them properly. According to the interview results, it is also vital that all the staff members take responsibility in the students' school achievements by guiding and supporting them. Students' school wellbeing should be the priority to each staff member.

Failing to Meet the Students' Expectations

According to Kuronen (2011, 81) and Kouvo et al. (2011, 77) unrealistic expectations on education and unspecific knowledge about the content of education increases the risk of dropping out from school. Kouvo et al. (2011, 77) also emphasise the importance of successful marketing by the education provider. Davies and Ellison (in Wahlman 2009, 14) define educational marketing as the means that a provider of education uses for actively advertising and communicating its purposes, values and products to students, parents, personnel and stakeholders. The programme has not historically been popular among the applicants, and therefore one could question the effectiveness of the selected marketing approaches. In this research successful marketing is also understood as the education provider's ability to fulfil the image they give through marketing, in other words to meet the expectations of a student. According to Sharma (2008, 145 – 146) the main model of customer satisfaction is built on the theory that gaps between ex ante expectations of a good or service and the product's ex post performance are the best predictors of customer's satisfaction.

In order to find out the students' expectations for the programme, the informants were asked to give their reasons for applying. According to the interview results the teaching language of the programme being English is the main reason for most of the informants to apply. The students are hoping to improve their language skills through the education – and they are expecting all the teachers to help them with this goal. Another important factor for applying is the international nature of the education. These reasons were emphasised by most of the informants throughout the interviews.

Also the Unit of Business and Administration's marketing material (see Appendix 1) implies how a student can improve his language skills and international competences by attending the course in order to be able to work abroad or carry out international tasks. Approximately half of the studies are promised to be organised in English. (Oulu Vocational College 2012a, retrieved 29.12.2012.)

Judging from the comments, the International Business and Administrations students are expecting the Unit of Business and Administration to provide them with language training and international experiences. Meeting these expectations is important when considering the school satisfaction of the International Business and Administrations students. As the results of the school satisfaction surveys (see Appendix 2) show, the International Business and Administration

students have not been as satisfied with the implementation of the education (i.e. satisfaction with teaching and teachers' professionalism) compared to the rest of the students in the Unit of Business and Administration. The level of overall school satisfaction also seems to drop after the first study year. The International Business and Administration students have been less willing to recommend the unit to others and found their education less useful than the students of the other programmes. Some reasons for the dissatisfaction may lie in the fact that the students' main expectations of the studies are not always met as will be shown next.

Overall the informants feel that their expectations for studying in English are not fulfilled even though their language skills have improved during the studies. One informant criticised the fact that less courses are taught in English than was promised in the first place. Several informants are not always happy with the quality of teaching due to the fact that nonadvanced English speakers teach them in English. They feel that the school does not invest in their language learning enough. The students also described how the lack of a teacher's English skills has impaired the quality of teaching. The language skills of some teachers is the biggest disappointment for the students:

"The studying language wouldn't affect our studies at all, if all the teachers would speak fluent English." (S10)

The students find it important for their language development to have non-Finnish speaking teachers. According to one informant, there is then a must to use English with the teacher. Currently there are two non-Finnish teachers in the programme and some international visitors.

According to Mårtensson et al. (2008, 142 – 143) students complain about linguistic proficiency of a teacher through formal and informal channels, with and without justification. This can also be seen in the interview results. However the minimum requirement for teaching via English as a second language well enough is the mutual comprehensibility between a teacher and his students (Mårtensson et al. 2008, 142 – 143). According to the interview results the students have experienced difficulties with understanding some of the teachers:

"Because in one course for example all the examples were translated really badly, so nobody was able to do them, no-one understood them." (S10)

Finnish-speaking teachers' language skills should be at a level where the students and teachers can communicate. That should be the minimum requirement, and it becomes even more important if the course is taught completely in English one day. It is also important to notice that the quality of teaching usually become poorer when a teacher is using a second language for teaching. According to Stronge (2007, 23) students taught by teachers with lower verbal ability, learn less compared to those that are taught by teachers with greater verbal ability. Teachers with better verbal abilities can communicate with students in a clear and compelling manner as well as convey ideas to students more efficiently. A teacher can find it difficult to provide longer, elaborating presentations, provide examples and define concepts, indicate transition between topics and between theory and examples, as well as encourage student interaction when teaching via a second language (Mårtensson et al. 2008, 141). This kind of simplification of language was also mentioned in the interview results:

“Some teachers, for example, have been asked to teach wrong subjects or in a wrong language. - Some teachers don't speak as good English as we do for example.” (S10)

“It's really frustrating, because our English should be developed all the time.” (S11)

According to the interview results, the students are not always happy with the level of international activities the unit has been providing. In the academic year 2011 – 2012 the Unit of Business and Administration received 30 visiting teachers and 100 visiting students. The aim is that all the international visitors would interact with the International Business and Administration students during their stay. The students are also encouraged to take part in exchange programmes, but only around one student per study group concludes part of the on-the-job learning abroad for example. Around 60 students from the whole unit went out on an exchange visit in the academic year 2011 – 2012. (E. Vehmas, personal communication, April 4, 2013.) However, the informants are disappointed with the international activities of the unit according to the interview results. They think that the nature of the programme is not as international as they were expecting.

“I was hoping that there would be as much as possible, or more international activities, really, it is cool that we have two foreign teachers here, and we have had a few visitors, but there could have been more. I am actually a bit disappointed with the fact that there wasn't more, because I was expecting that there would be even more. So that we should, or could, use the language with

other people than just teachers, too. I am not undervaluing, we have had cool visitors, but there could have been more.” (S4)

The previous interview results show the importance of relevant information concerning the studies provided by the school. If the provider of education cannot distribute enough realistic information, the students may feel misled and unsatisfied, and they may even discontinue their studies at the worst case.

7.2 Development Proposals

One of the purposes of this research was to provide the Head of the unit and the Head of the study programme with proposals for developing the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration further. The following suggestions have been drawn on the basis of the interview results.

Pedagogical management

- The language skills of the non-native English-speaking teachers should be at a level where the students' learning is not restricted due to language problems. It should be recommended for all the non-native English speakers to take language courses regularly. It would be recommended that the courses support teaching via English as a second language. The teachers should also be encouraged to take part in teacher exchange programmes.
- A more effective information channel between the school and the visiting teachers should be implemented. Due to the nature of the programme, it should be considered whether translating the unit's most important notifications into English is necessary.
- In addition to the integration process, the other staff members, including student counsellors, could be introduced to the students by running a "face of the week" programme on the information television. Once or twice a week an administrative person could spend a coffee break chatting with the students in the cafeteria.

- Helping the students to complete their studies should be every staff member's priority. The importance of good customer service should be emphasised.

Quality of teaching and Pedagogical solutions

- The teachers should provide the students with clear and uniform instructions. The aims, the content and the main tasks of a course should be discussed with the students throughout at the beginning of a course. The teacher's presence is important especially at the beginning of a new course.
- A calendar with all the deadlines, exams, visitors and events should be implemented, regularly updated and shared with the International Business and Administration students, as well as with the teachers and other staff members working in the programme.
- In order to increase the international level of the programme, the unit should network even more with the local expatriates. The course contents could be developed partly together with some expatriates in order to have more visiting lectures. The unit could set up a goal to find at least one international guest in each course that could give a presentation related to the course topic. Also yearly school trips could be organised. Since Swedish has been selected as the 'Language development' language, a few days trip to Sweden, Luleå for example on the second year would be justified.

Quality of guidance

- The student counsellor should take part in the Team building day at the beginning of the studies so that the students would get to know him.
- All the tutors should know the basic procedures of the unit such as how to update a personal study plan.
- More student counsellor's and tutor's lessons should take place during the studies. A weekly 15 minutes long tutor lesson should be launched in order to maintain the relationship between a tutor and his students.

- Increasing the number of guiding on the second and third year.

Atmosphere

- 'Community & service' course should be planned so that the students organise more extracurricular activities for the Unit of Business and Administration. This would not just increase the number of events held in the unit but also support the feel of belonging among the International Business and Administration students.

Marketing of the educational institution

- The marketing material should state clearly that even though one aim of the study programme is to provide the students with good English skills, teachers with different language backgrounds teach the courses. It would also be worth mentioning that the students take English courses where their language skills are developed further. Language skills and international competences are also gained through international guests. The marketing material should also describe briefly the different international activities of the study programme, as well as the basic requirements and possible limitations such as the age.

8 DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to find out the internal factors of the qualification and the Unit of Business and Administration leading to dropouts and extended graduation times. Another interest of this research lay in finding out how the International Business and Administration students would improve the qualification. The Unit of Business and Administration is provided with a list of development procedures combining both the students' suggestions and the researcher's proposals based on the interview results. Implementing the development proposals is left to the Unit of Business and Administration.

The topic of this research is important and of current interest for Oulu Vocational College, Unit of Business and Administration. The topic is also important nationwide. The results of this research cannot be generalised to apply to all vocational qualifications in Finland, but the conclusions may be of use when developing the other qualifications provided by the Unit of Business and Administration.

The main data collection method was half-structured group interviews. Two interviews were carried out in spring 2013 with a group of 19 second, third and fourth year students. The interview results were supported by previous school satisfaction surveys among the International Business and Administration students. During the research process a visit to a school in the UK that offers IBCC studies was made in order to observe their procedures. Those findings were also used for gathering a deeper understanding on the phenomenon.

The research achieved its aim; the main internal factors for leading to dropouts were identified. However, the students did not come up with that many direct development proposals, and therefore the suggestions provided to the Unit of Business and Administration contain mainly ideas raised from the interview results.

The research results indicate that simplifying and standardising teaching instructions and developing a more efficient way to communicate with the visiting IB teachers are crucial in order to decrease the disorganisation of the course. Also tutoring and guiding should be improved and increased. The disorganised practices were mentioned to be the main reasons for planning to discontinue the studies.

The students' participation in different extracurricular events should not be prevented – on the contrary – the International Business and Administration students could provide the school with more activities through the 'Community & service' course. It would help the students feel part of the community that is an important factor of school satisfaction.

The marketing of the programme should give a realistic picture of the teaching language and international activities. In order to ensure good learning outcomes, the teachers who are teaching in English as a second language should get regular language training.

Several possibilities for further study emerged when carrying out this research. An interesting topic would be to examine the personal level factors of the International Business and Administration students leading to dropping out from the course. That could help the unit to identify the students at risk of discontinuing the studies or graduating late at the beginning of the programme. Another possibility would be researching personnel's' ability to support students at-risk.

Initially the idea of this research was to collect data through individual interviews, and find out the main factors leading to dropouts. Unfortunately the contact details of possible informants were not received. Organising the group interviews with the school also took more time than expected, and therefore the report was handed in a few weeks late.

The researcher gained pedagogical competence when carrying out this research. Preventing dropouts at vocational education is important for society, the educational institutions and foremost the students. Understanding the holistic picture of the phenomenon is important when working in a vocational school. Hopefully this study will improve the awareness of possible factors of dropping out of school on other students, as well as for school personnel.

Most importantly this thesis will have some practical value and will help the Unit of Business and Administration improve the Vocational Qualification in International Business and Administration. The study programme has great potential and it offers something special to the Finnish vocational education.

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Kansainvälinen liiketalouden perustutkinto, Asiakaspalvelun ja myynnin koulutusohjelma, Merkonomi

Kansainvälisen liiketalouden perustutkinnon suorittaminen antaa valmiudet toimia asiakaspalvelun, myynnin ja markkinoinnin tehtävissä sekä Suomessa että ulkomailla. IB ja IBCC-opinnot tuovat opintoihin lisähaastetta ja valmentavat hyvin jatko-opintoihin.

Kansainvälistä liiketalouden perustutkintoa opiskellessasi opit toimimaan erilaisissa asiakaspalvelun ja myynnin tehtävissä sekä kehittämään pienen ja keskuuren yrityksen markkinointiviestintää ja asiakassuhteita. Saat myös valmiudet työskennellä kansainvälisissä ja monikulttuurisissa ympäristöissä.

Opintojen keskeistä sisältöä ovat asiakkaiden tarpeiden tunnistaminen, kilpailueduista viestiminen, itsensä kehittäminen, tietotekniikkataidot ja kielitaito. Valmistuttuasi voit työskennellä myyjänä, myyntiedustajana tai kansainvälisissä ulkomaankaupan perustehtävissä tuonti- ja vientiasistenttina. Työkielenä käytät sujuvasti sekä suomea että englantia.

Ammatin vaatimukset

Alalla tarvitaan asiakaspalveluhenkisiä ja myyntitehtäviin motivoituneita työntekijöitä. Halu palvella asiakkaita, ongelmanratkaisukyky sekä taito saada aikaan tuloksia ovat omia asioita asiakaspalvelu- ja myyntialalla toimiville.

Tutkinnon sisältö ja opiskelu

Opinnot on suunnattu opiskelijoille, jotka ovat kiinnostuneita haasteellisesta ja teoreettisestakin opiskelusta.

- opetuskielinä suomi ja englanti
- n. 75% sisällöstä tavallisia liiketalouden tutkinnon osia

- koulutusohjelma sisältää lukiossa tarjottavan kansainvälisen IB-ohjelman kokonaisuuksia: Business and Management ja Language B /English IBCC-opinnot: Community and Service, Approaches to Learning, Reflective Project (<http://www.ibo.org/ibcc>)

Opiskelutahti on kiireinen ja tämän vuoksi suomalaisen yo-tutkinnon suorittaminen kolmen vuoden opintoaikana on mahdollista vain itsenäisenä iltaopiskeluna.

Koulutuksen kesto

Peruskoulupohjaisen koulutuksen kesto on kolme vuotta. Tutkintoon sisältyy 23 opintoviikkoa työssä oppimista.

Hakutiedot

Pohjakoulutus: peruskoulu (pk). Perustutkintoon haetaan kevään yhteishaussa. Koulutusohjelmaan valitaan 22 opiskelijaa. Yhteishakuun sisältyy ennakkoitehtävä sekä pääsykoe 17.5.2013. Hakijalta edellytetään riittäviä suomen- ja englanninkielen taitoja sekä yleisiä opiskeluvaihtoehtoja.

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SUMMARISED DATA OF SCHOOL SATISFACTION

APPENDIX 2

ACADEMIC YEAR 2011-2012							
		1ST YEAR		2ND YEAR		3RD YEAR	
INDEX	YG2011 AVE.	3.71	3.83	YG2010 AVE.	3.70	YG2009 AVE.	
START OF THE STUDIES	3.83	3.71					
TUTORING	<i>not measured</i>		3.72	3.83	3.22	3.70	
PERSONALISING	3.95	3.95	3.27	3.53	2.92	3.53	
ATMOSPHERE	3.67	3.93	3.57	3.87	3.33	3.91	
IMPL. OF EDUCATION	3.75	3.86	3.68	3.77	3.61	3.89	
LEARNING ENVIRONM.	4.09	4.13	4.04	4.03	3.75	4.22	
ASSESSMENT			3.78	3.97	3.64	4.00	
WORK LIFE CONNECT.			4.06	4.18	3.52	3.96	
IMPACTS			3.48	3.63	3.67	3.91	
SATISFACTION	<i>not measured</i>		4.00	4.10	3.54	4.01	
ACADEMIC YEAR 2010 - 2011							
		1ST YEAR		2ND YEAR		3RD YEAR	
INDEX	YG2010 AVE.	3.78	3.63	YG2009 AVE.	3.74	YG2008 AVE.	
START OF THE STUDIES	3.54	3.78	<i>not measured</i>				
TUTORING	<i>not measured</i>		3.24	3.80	2.89	3.63	
PERSONALISING	4.18	4.10	3.02	3.48	2.93	3.46	
ATMOSPHERE	3.90	3.96	3.49	3.76	3.93	4.14	
IMPL. OF EDUCATION	3.89	3.97	3.44	3.80	3.76	3.85	
LEARNING ENVIRONM.	4.37	4.24	3.63	4.13	4.52	4.13	
WORK LIFE CONNECT.			3.63	4.14	3.78	4.00	
IMPACTS			3.11	3.72	3.74	3.87	
SATISFACTION	<i>not measured</i>		3.18	4.12	4.06	4.04	
ACADEMIC YEAR 2009-2010							
		1ST YEAR		2ND YEAR		3RD YEAR	
INDEX	YG2009 AVE.	3.75	3.87	YG2008 AVE.	3.80	YG2007 AVE.	
START OF THE STUDIES	3.44	3.75	<i>not measured</i>				
TUTORING	<i>not measured</i>		3.88	3.91	3.59	3.40	
PERSONALISING	4.00	3.61	3.41	3.62	3.63	3.57	
ATMOSPHERE	3.90	4.03	3.56	3.89	4.00	4.00	
IMPL. OF EDUCATION	3.72	3.82	3.76	3.79	3.68	3.87	
LEARNING ENVIRONM.	3.51	4.12	4.32	4.06	4.15	4.25	
WORK LIFE CONNECT.			4.35	4.14	3.80	3.92	
IMPACTS			3.92	3.75	3.73	3.80	
SATISFACTION	<i>not measured</i>		3.85	3.97	3.94	4.12	

International Business and Administration students' school satisfaction by year groups compared to the averages of the Unit of Business and Administration (Oulu Vocation College, Unit of Business and Administration 2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2012a; 2012b)

1. HAKEUTUMINEN OPINTOIHIN

- Mistä saitte tiedon koulutusohjelmasta?
- Miten kuvailisitte tiedonsaannin löydettävyyttä?
- Mitä tiesitte koulutusohjelmasta ennen hakupäätöstä?
- Miksi päätitte hakea opiskelemaan koulutusohjelmaan?
- Milloin päätitte hakea opiskelemaan koulutusohjelmaan?
- Minkälaisia odotuksia teillä oli koulutusohjelman suhteen ennen opintojen alkamista?
- Minkälaisia tulevaisuuden suunnitelmia teillä oli tuolloin koulun jälkeen?

2. OPINTOJEN ALOITUS

Opintojen ensimmäisten viikkojen sujuminen:

- Kuvailkaa, miten seuraavat asiat hoituivat
 - ryhmänohjaajaan tutustuminen
 - ryhmäytyminen
 - muihin opettajiin ja henkilökuntaan tutustuminen
 - koulun toimintatapojen omaksuminen

3. OPISKELU

- Miten kuvailisitte opetuksen laatua koulutusohjelmassa?
- Miten kuvailisitte ryhmänohjauksen laatua?
- Ottaako koulu huomioon opiskelijoiden erilaiset tarpeet ja elämäntilanteet? Kuinka se näkyy?
- Miten kuvailisitte koulun ilmapiiriä? Miksi?
- Miten kuvailisitte ryhmänne ilmapiiriä? Miksi?
- Miltä opiskelu englannin kielellä tuntuu?
- Minkälaisia kokemuksia ja mielipiteitä teillä on IBCC opinnoista?

- Minkälaiset asiat edistävät opintojenne?
 - opetusmenetelmissä
 - ryhmänohjauksessa, opinto-ohjauksessa ja tukitoiminnoissa
 - koulun toiminnassa yleisesti
- Minkälaiset asiat hidastavat opintojanne?
 - opetusmenetelmissä
 - ryhmänohjauksessa, opinto-ohjauksessa ja tukitoiminnoissa
 - koulun toiminnassa yleisesti
- Minkälaisia tulevaisuuden suunnitelmia teillä on koulun jälkeen?

4. SYYT OPINTOJEN HIDASTUMISEEN / KESKEYTTÄMISEEN

- Minkälaisten asioiden vuoksi olette olleet pois koulusta? Kuinka koulu on reagoinut poissaoloihin? Kuinka poissaolot korvataan?
- Miksi olette jättäneet tekemättä tai palauttaneet myöhässä tehtäviä tai tenttejä? Miten olette hoitaneet tilanteen?
- Miksi olette jättäneet kursseja kesken? Miten olette hoitaneet tilanteen?
- Oletteko ikinä pohtineet keskeyttävänne opintojanne? Miksi, miksi ei?

5. KEHITTÄMISEHDOTUKSET

Kuinka kehittäisitte seuraavia asioita jotta opiskelijat eivät keskeyttäisi opintojaan ja valmistuisivat tavoiteajassa? Voitte kertoa, mitkä asiat kaipaavat niissä parannusta ja antaa käytännön parannusehdotuksia.

- koulutusohjelma
- opetusmenetelmät
- ryhmänohjaus
- tukitoimet
- koulun muu toiminta
- koulun ilmapiiri
- muu