

**ENCOUNTERING DIFFERENCES: STUDY AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
CULTURE-SHOCK IN FINLAND:
(THE CASE OF ASIAN FIRST YEAR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS)**

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Thesis, Fall 2013
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ABSTRACT

Chege, Dorothy Njeri. Encountering Differences: Study and Learning Environment Culture Shock in Finland. The Case of Asian First Year International Students. 81 pages, 1 appendix. Language: English. Järvenpää, Autumn 2013. Diaconia University of Applied Sciences. Degree Programme in Social Services. Degree: Bachelor of Social Services.

International students have diverse needs when undertaking education in Finnish universities. It is in the interest of both international students and the host institution to ensure these students achieve success in their studies.

The research study aims at examining the experiences of Asian international students in Finland. It seeks to find out how they perceived their new learning environment in Finland, and to explore the strategies they employed to adjust to, manage and construct meaning out of their learning situation in their first year of study, as they adjusted to the culture of learning and teaching in the new learning environment during their first year abroad.

The study research material was collected during the spring semester and summer of 2013. Not much previous exact research has been conducted. Nevertheless some related researches provided me with knowledge and acted as guidelines for the research study.

The research study is based on Phenomenological qualitative research method. The data was collected through semi-structured and focus group interviews. The study was carried out with a group of Asian postgraduate and graduate students from Finnish universities. Qualitative analysis was chosen using the semi structured interview to elicit responses from seven international students from Asia studying in different universities in Finland.

It was found out that adjustment for the students was most difficult in the first year from entry into the new cultural context, largely due to the influence of previous educational and cultural experiences.

The findings of the research study shows different motivational factors why the Asian international students chose to study outside their countries of origin. The study shock experienced was explained as being caused by different learning methods and everyday encounters in the Finnish society and educational system. The findings suggest that stress related to the academic task is caused by academic cultural differences, particularly in regard to critical evaluation and participation and discussion in class and social interactions.

Keywords: Asian international students, learning, culture shock, student adjustments

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1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research is to find out what kind of culture shock in studies and school environment the first year international students from Asia experienced in their first year of study in Finland while studying and living under the Finnish culture. In these days, a growing number of students are travelling abroad to obtain higher education. Although numerous new international students enroll in graduate schools every year, relatively little attention has been paid to their needs and experiences during their adaptation period. International graduate students who study abroad often experience difficulties in many areas of life, such as language differences, financial conditions, academic stress, homesickness and social relationships with native students (Furnham and Bochner 1986).

These students must learn to operate in new environments, to live on their own, to work with new and unfamiliar ways, people and to handle new stresses and new challenges. Learning a new culture and learning in a new culture which may have different beliefs and Values can be a difficult situation subjected to international students. (Dee & Henkin, 1999). They have to contend with novel social and educational organizations, behaviors and expectations as well as dealing with the problems of adjustment common to students in general. This is difficult enough when the newcomer is aware of the differences in advance, but even more difficult when the newcomer is unaware and falsely assumes that the new society operates like their home country. (Hayes 1998; Taylor 2005). Newcomers easily become lost in transitions. The collective impact of such unfamiliar experiences on cultural travelers in general has been termed as culture shock. Student sojourners are an example (Hayes 1998; Taylor 2005).

I sought to explore the experiences of Asian international students and the process they used to survive and thrive during their sojourn of studying in Finland.

This study aims at contributing to our understanding of what comprises of cultural learning transition, using the experience of a group of international undergraduate and graduate students to describe and define the initial stage of the sojourn in the Finnish learning environment.

An Increasing number of students are choosing to undertake their studies outside their home countries. The predominance of international student enrolments from Asia is significant. In 2004, students from Asia formed the largest group (45%) of international students. Asian students, studying and gaining a Western degree are considered major advantages in gaining employment in their home countries and increasing their prospects for professional mobility (Marginson & McBurnie, 2004).

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Culture and Culture shock

Culture shock is the feeling of disorientation experienced by someone who is suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture, way of life or set of attitudes. It is the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment. In a multicultural context. Culture shock is more or less sudden immersion into a non-specific state of uncertainty where the individuals are not certain what is expected of them or of what they can expect from the people around them. (Kalvero Oberg 1960).

Pedersen (1995) explained culture shock as follows: (a) culture shock as the consequence of an encounter to a new environment or situation, (b) as caused by ineffectiveness of intercultural or interpersonal communication, (c) as a threat to the emotional well-being of the sojourner, (d) as inappropriate behaviors that are caused by needs and wants, and (e) as a growth and learning experience. Oberg (1972), it can occur when individuals become immersed in a culture different from their own (Westwood, Lawrence, & Paul, 1986). It is a psychological concern, characterized by symptoms such as anxiety, depression, sleeping problems, fatigue, irritability, loneliness, forgetfulness, nostalgia, and feelings of not fitting in (Pedersen, 2004).

It results from external changes and differences in the physical environment such as climate, food, transportation (Pedersen, 1995). The five stages of culture shock regarding immigrants: are" (1) the immigrants feel euphoria about the exciting new culture, (2) failure to succeed leads to extreme dissatisfaction with the host culture. This is the period of psychological transition from back-home values to host-home values, (3) persons begin to understand the host culture and feel more in touch with themselves, (4) the host culture is viewed as

offering both positive and negative alternatives, and (5) the immigrants return home and experience reverse culture shock" (Gopaul-McNicol 1993, p.16). According to (Oberg, 1972) Culture shock is a pervasive disorientation that does not strike suddenly. Rather, it is cumulative, building up slowly from a sequence of small events that are hard to identify.

2.2 Culture

Culture is the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the members of a culture group while also distinguishing those of another group (Damen, L. 1987). Culture has many definitions, and it affects everything people do in their society because of their ideas, values, attitudes, and normative or expected patterns of behaviour. Culture is not genetically inherited, and cannot exist on its own, but is always shared by members of a society (Hall 1976, p. 16).

Culture is a set of shared and enduring meaning, values, and beliefs that characterize national, ethnic, or other groups and orient their behaviour (Mulholland 1991). Culture definitions have a lot of culture related theories and in all the theories are collectiveness and community features that are mutual.

According to (Hofstede 1980, it is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes members of a certain group from others, he notes that culture is learned not inherited and derives from one's own social environment. The sources of one's mental program lie within the social environments in which one grew up and collected one's life experience, which is passed from generation to generation, it is changing all the time because each generation adds something of its own before passing it on.

It is usual that one's culture is taken for granted and assumed to be correct because it is the only one, or at least the first, to be learned. (Hofstede 1980, 21). Cultures are born between people's interactions. Everybody has their own culture. When interacting with people from a particular culture understanding of a culture is helpful. Reading about a culture one is about to enter helps, but there will be surprises and learning it on the go is the best way to get acquainted with any given culture. (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997, p22-23)

3 Studying Abroad

UNESCO (2005) stated that, there is an upward of 2 million students annually that are now studying in countries other than their own. The internationalization of higher education is being adopted by many nations. Almost all countries are affected by the presence of international students in the higher learning institutions, or the pressure to send some students to study abroad (Paige, 1990). In these days, a growing number of Asian students are travelling abroad to obtain higher education. With the current increasing ease of travel, new technology of long distance communication and the economic globalization, some individuals maintain ties and commitments to multiple countries at once. These kinds of individuals have been named transnationals (Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Szanton-Blanc, (1994).

The transnationals are incorporated into host societies while holding strong ties back home. One type of a transnational is the international student Adler, P.S. (1975). According to Paige (1990), international students are individuals who temporarily reside in a country outside their country of citizenship to participate in an educational program.

3.1 International Students Sojourners

Sojourners are a type of strangers who spend many years of their lifetime in a foreign country without being assimilated into it, Siu (1952: 34), or those individuals who voluntarily spend a medium length of time (six months to five years) in a new and unfamiliar environment with the intention of returning at some point to their home country (Furnham, 1988). A sojourner will always have a job Siu (1952). Due to their distinct status as temporary sojourners International students are differentiated from other immigrants who travel from their home countries to work and live in other cultures (Martin & Harrell, 1996).

Therefore, this distinction creates a unique condition for their cross-cultural experience, often attributed to their being in transition; they are challenged to manage the transition away from their home country, the transition to living and learning in a new country and in some cases manage the transition back home. The tendency is to treat these transitional immigrants as members of a homogeneous group of learners (Arthur, 2004)

3.2 Studying in Finland

The free education system in Finland has opened doors for hundreds of students from Asia and other developing countries to the University of Applied Sciences, and universities to venture into new experiences outside their home countries. These universities promote learning and have the most inclusive university network in Europe which a lot of international students benefit from (CIMO 2011). Finnish higher education institutions have made good progress, getting closer to the numerical targets. The steady number of the increase of international students have been noted over the last years.

At the start of the millennium there were just over 6,000 international students in Finnish higher education and by the year 2011 they had already numbered up to more than 17,600. Most of them come from China, Russia, Sweden and Estonia, but the biggest increases have been in the numbers of students from Asia and Africa. (CIMO 2011)

In the course of a few years, Nepal, Cameroon, Vietnam, Ethiopia, India and Nigeria have emerged among the biggest countries of origin of international students in Finland (CIMO 2011). The Finnish Ministry of Education published the strategy for the internationalization of higher education in Finland since the early 1990s and in 2009 which aimed at improving the Finnish higher education. The implementation was through an increase in the number of foreign students

in English programs and welcoming foreign researchers and innovators. Vatsk (2011).

Their study focus is mainly on courses in health care, international business, information technology, chemistry, and engineering. (Vatsk 2011.) They usually face different kinds of difficulties and experience different kinds of problems which include culture shock, language problem, adapting to new methods of learning and education systems, patterns of weather, financial problems, accommodation problems and loneliness among others. Due to loss of contact with their loved ones and families back home, they encounter loneliness. Sawir, Marginson, Deumert Nyland & Ramia (2008), according to (Carroll & Ryan 2005). High proportions of students get depressed, while studying abroad.

4 Learning

According to Svensson, 1997: 68. Learning is equivalent to what is new to understanding. According to Wenger learning is an identity formation, an increasing participation in a community of cooperation and a process of becoming a certain person'(1998: 215). To learn is to strive for meaning, and to have learnt something is to have grasped its meaning (Dahlgren, 1997: 27).), Process factors describe how students approach their learning. While there is some diversity in the terms used, there is a fair degree of empirical evidence that students adopt two basic orientations or approaches. A 'deep' approach to learning which is described as striving for improved understanding by applying and comparing ideas. Conversely, 'surface' learning involves reproductive strategies with little attempt to integrate information (Marton & Sa"ljo", 1976; Thomas & Bain, 1984).

learning is seen as a qualitative change in a person's way of seeing, experiencing, understanding, conceptualizing something in the real world (Marton & Ramsden, 1988: 271) Product factors describe the learning outcomes (cognitive, affective or behavioural) which students derive from the learning process. Traditionally, depth, or accuracy of learning, has been summarily described through assessment scores (grade point averages).

4.1 Conceptions of learning

Biggs (1994) identified two major perspectives about learning 'quantitative' and 'qualitative'. The quantitative view proposes that learning is concerned with acquisition and accumulation of content, whereas the qualitative view suggests

that learning is about understanding and meaning-making through relating or connecting new material with prior knowledge. The stages in students' development of conceptions of learning involve acquiring information or knowing a lot (2) memorizing acquiring and applying facts, skills, and methods that can be retained and used as necessary, (4) understanding, relating parts of the subject matter to each other and to the real world (5) seeing something in a different way.

There are four stages in the development of students conceptions of Knowledge. According to Perry (1970), and (Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, 1993), knowledge in the students patterns throughout their academic programme develop through a dualistic view .i.e. understanding approaches to a situation can be from different angles and knowledge is either right or wrong. Learning was understood as an interpretive process aiming at an understanding of reality the categorization of säljö (1979).

Many other researchers (Bennack, 1982; Dahlin, 1999; Ryan, 1984; Schommer, 1990, 1993; Schommer et al., 1992; Stonewater et al., 1986; Wilkinson and Schwartz, 1990) have examined students' beliefs about knowledge. In a manner that parallels student conceptions of learning supporting säljö (1979). The Conceptions of learning that solely involve the increase of knowledge are considered as the starting-point from which all other conceptions of learning develop, whereas conceptions of learning that imply changing as a person are viewed as the most advanced i.e. highest level in the development conceptions of learning

More direct studies of conceptions of learning have developed from the work of Marton and Saljö, (1976a, 1976b) and Saljö, (1979), who identified the contrasting conceptions of deep and surface learning with their respective emphases on constructing meaning and memorizing details..

4.2 Learning Styles

Some students prefer certain methods of learning more than others. As far back it was noted that students have different approaches to learning (Wratcher et al., 1997; Diaz & Cartnal, 1999). These individualistic learning approaches are referred to as learning styles, which usually are defined as physiological characteristic cognitive and affective behaviors serving relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment' (Ladd & Ruby, 1999, p. 363).

Learning style is the composite of characteristic cognitive, affective and physiological behaviours that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment (Ellis 2001). Cognitive processes include storage and retrieval of information in the brain and represent the learner's ways of perceiving, thinking, problem solving, and remembering James and Gardner (1995). On the other hand, teaching styles refer to the behaviours that teachers exhibit in their interactions with their learners (Heimlich and Norland 2002; Dasari 2006) or to the way various teaching approaches are combined to produce an optimal outcome in learning (Hoyt and Lee 2002).

Findings from researchers and educators states that when teaching and learning styles are compatible students retain information longer, apply it more effectively, have a more positive attitude to their subjects and are greater achievers (Boles, Pillay & Raj, 1999; Charkins, O'Toole & Wetzel, 1985; Felder & Silverman, 1988). Many educators regard the recognition of students' learning styles as a vital part of an effective teaching strategy Blackmore (1996). Although not all researchers agree. Some assert that there is lack of evidence to support the view that matching teaching and learning styles is educationally significant (Robotham, 1999), whereas others suggest that students can be trained to develop a versatile learning style (Smith, 2001).

4.3 Some common approaches to learning

Approaches to learning differ from conceptions of learning, with regard to approaches to learning, the main distinction is between surface, deep and achieving approaches to learning (Biggs, Kember, & Leung, 2001; Entwistle & McCune, 2004). The surface approach to learning involves using “surface-level processing” focus on the substance of information and emphasize rote learning and memorization techniques (Biggs, 1989; Tagg, 2003).

Biggs (1987a) proposed three approaches to learning that are comprised of learning strategies and motives for learning. First, a deep approach to learning is characterized by an intention to seek meaning from the material being studied through relating to it in ways that elaborate and transform the material. Second, a surface approach to learning is one in which the intention is to reproduce the material being studied through using routinized procedures.

The deep approach to learning implies dealing with academic tasks. Surface and deep approaches to learning are not unalterable behaviors, though they may be influenced by personal characteristics such as ability (Biggs, 1987). According to Entwistle and Peterson (2004): the use of a deep approach does mean the avoidance of memorization, and, the achieving approach to learning refers to the search for excellent grades through work organization (Biggs, 1990). Although the deep approach seems the best way to learn, there is evidence that its extreme or exclusive use might not contribute to students' adaptation, maybe demanding a combination with the achiever approach to learning.

According to Dart et al. (2000a) this approach to learning is related to: (a) constructivist teaching which suggests learners actively construct knowledge for themselves and (b) high quality outcomes such as developing knowledge that is structured around a unifying theme.

4.4 Existing approaches to Asian students' culture of learning

Approaches to learning, the main distinction is between surface, Accepting new facts and ideas uncritically and attempting to store them as isolated, unconnected, items deep Examining new facts and ideas critically, and tying them into existing cognitive structures and making numerous links between ideas and achieving approaches to learning (Biggs, Kember, & Leung, 2001; Entwistle & McCune, 2004).

The cultural characteristics of the conceptions of learning as well as cultural practices in conducting teaching and learning have given rise to some terms, such as cultural beliefs' (Gardner, 1988), culture of learning' (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), learning culture' (Riley, 1997). Approaches to learning are different from conceptions of learning,

In addition to the two characteristics discussed above, the third feature of Asian learners' learning style is their passive learning, according to Ballard (1989a) "...diligent, obedient, hardworking, passive and assessment-centered. Cortazzi and Jin (2001) explain two conceptions of teaching and learning. One conception resembles a hierarchical line where students regard teachers as all-knowing and accept knowledge transmitted by teachers.

Asian classroom activities are typically seen as dominated by teachers with limited questioning or discussion (Chan, 1999). The other conception resembles a horizontal line where students are considered to be acquiring knowledge through participating in activities and sharing their independent thinking. Thus the relationship between teachers and students is more egalitarian.

According to Jin and Cortazzi their culture of learning focuses on classroom-based schemata culturally based ideas about teaching and learning, about appropriate ways of participating in class, about whether and how much to ask

questions (1998b:100) in this culture definition, there is normative nature where the culture of the students is explained in class behavior, learners and teachers and the culture beliefs exclusion and creating new forms of learning and teaching. Cited wang lihong (2010)

Table 1: Comparison of Asian and Finnish Learning Styles

• Asian	Finnish
• Evaluative learning is preferred	Evaluative learning is not preferred
• Non critical reception of information	Critical thought is expected
• Students work hard to learn everything	Students selectively learn the central concepts as well as detail
• Students are inclined to seek clarification	Students are willing to seek assistance as part of the learning process

• Few initiatives are taken	Independent learning and research are rewarded
• A willingness to accept one interpretation	Students are encouraged to apply general principles to specific situations and to test various interpretations
• Overall concepts are seen as important to understanding	Analytical thinking is encouraged. Students are expected to support opinions with logical argument.
	(Source: Adapted from Phillips 1990, p. 772)

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5 Learning shock

Learning shock (Ballard & Clanchy, 1997: 28) in this study is more challenging but understood as a form of culture shock (Oberg, 1960). When Asian international students enter into their respective courses at the universities in the western culture of learning, they find that they are expected to actively participate in classroom discussions, respond to questions posed by their faculty during class meetings, take more responsibility for their own learning, and participate in group activities, such as presentations.

The teaching methods in Asian universities are mainly viewed as teacher-centered, didactic rather than student-centered and problem-based learning. They come from a culture which has a collectivistic tradition in which education is measured in terms of reproducing knowledge. (Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Robinson, 1992; Ryan & Carroll, 2005).

Finland has a much more individualistic culture in which educational success is measured through critical analysis and the extending of knowledge. Thus due to non-familiar teaching and learning methods, international students face difficulties in learning. These new expectations for academic performance and participation may lead some international students to experience “academic culture shock. This occurs due to the difference between new culture of learning and one’s inherited beliefs of learning, and the need to adopt to new behaviors, contrary to one’s own attitudes. Terms like intellectual cultural shock’(Ballard, 1987), study shock’(Burns, 1991), cognitive dissonance’(Festinger, 1957; Ryan, 2005), relate together. Academic culture shock often has a negative effect on student performance (Ren & Hagedorn, 2012).

6 Students Psychological and Socio-cultural adjustment

International students face adjustments with academic expectations, language barriers, cultural differences, and discrimination. It is widely recognized that the first 6 to 8 weeks after arrival are the most critical in the adjustment process, and a time in which they need the highest level of support (Barker et al., 1991). Adjustment relies on a person's capability of making accurate attributions about the cultural values, beliefs, behaviors, and norms of a new society (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004.). It is important to note that stress and adjustment are not culture specific; rather adjustment will be dealt with by individuals on a person by person basis (Sovic, 2007).

Certainly the initial adjustment period can be very challenging for students. In the Psychological and Socio-cultural Adjustment during Cross-cultural transitions, there are many theoretical models that have been developed to analyse the nature and intercultural encounters. These have been categorized into two categories: psycho- logical and socio-cultural (Searle & Ward, 1990; Stone Feinstein & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, in press; Ward & Searle, 1991). The former refers to feelings of well-being and satisfaction, whereas the latter is concerned with the ability to "fit in" or negotiate interactive aspects of the host culture.

The first derives from research on psychology of adjust- ment. It is underpinned by the work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) on stress and coping, and is exemplified by the research of Berry and colleagues on acculturation and adaptation (e.g. Berry & Kim, 1988; Chataway & Berry, 1989). The second tradition is based on Argyle's (1980) social skills model which has been popularized by

Furnham and Bochner (1986) in their culture learning approach to cross-cultural transition. Cited in wang lihong 2010.

According to Kim (1988) he identified two main trends in sojourner adaptation research: one is a problem-oriented perspective, such as culture shock studies or overseas sojourner effectiveness 'studies, and the other is a learning and growth perspective, where intercultural learning experience is viewed as a transitional experience reflecting a movement from a state of low self- and cultural awareness to a state of high self- and cultural awareness'(Adler, 1975: 15, cited in Kim, 1988: 26).

Social support networks reduce stress by providing students with information and emotional support (Furnham, 1997, p. 18). Adjustment to a new culture relies on both the group (culture) and the individual for choosing how they will adjust (Berry, 1999 In order to reduce the feeling of isolation they experience, providing them with social support is considered to be particularly important in their initial adjustment period. (Huxur et al., 1996, p. 12).

Since students volunteer to study abroad and their stay is temporary, they may only adjust themselves to certain demands from the new learning culture, the selected aspects for instrumental reasons'(Furnham, 1987, cited in Anderson, 1994: 303-304). Therefore, considering the nature of the academic sojourn, I use adjustment in this thesis, in contrast to adaptation to refer to the participant's attempts to achieve a fit between themselves and the new learning environment through learning either to change themselves or change the environment

7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

7.1 Focus group Interviews

The research was carried out from the objectives drawn from the above mentioned research problems by means of personal interviews. Both the interviews and the focus groups were semi-structured, and centered on two topics of concern the personal and academic shock experienced by these students and the adjustment difficulties they faced in their first year, and that gave me a conceptual framework as to how to develop it further. The main idea was to collect information from a focus group. By carrying out individual interviews with different students from Asia. The research aimed at capturing data from the research participants in their own words attentively examining the material gathered in terms of consistent themes.

My focus group was mainly students I have met before. They are among the many immigrant students in Finland. The study was taken with 7 students 5 undergraduate 1 masters and 1 doctoral who had previously taken a compulsory English academic test before moving to Finland. They were from different parts of Asia and they were both male and female between the ages of 23-34, the undergraduate and graduate students had previous degrees from their home countries and the doctoral student came here on a master's program before advancing. Participation in the study was on a purely voluntary basis. Students were informed of the aim of the study, its importance, and the time commitment required of them. Fortunately, all the selected students remained in the study. The use of pseudonyms was applied as enhancing students' privacy and anonymity. The empirical part of which this research will be based on is a qualitative approach (interviews and focus group).

7.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative research has been defined as a particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, on their own term (Kirk and Miller, 1986, 9) According to miller (2000), qualitative research based on meaning expressed through words, and collection results in non-standardized data requiring classification into categories and analysis conducted through the use of conceptualization.

Qualitative research encompasses a variety of research strategies, such as ethnography, phenomenology, discourse analysis, qualitative case study, autobiography, grounded theory, and others. Denzin and Lincoln (2005a) admit that qualitative research may mean different things to different qualitative researchers. But the common agreement among qualitative researchers is that they seek understanding of the world we live in from the research participant's point of view.

7. 3 Phenomenological approach

The first of the two qualitative strategies adopted to guide this research design is phenomenological approach. Phenomenological methods have been used in international student studies, such as I. Lee and Koro-Ljungberg (2007), phenomenological approaches have been a popular methodological framework in social sciences and health sciences. Phenomenology was subscribed in this thesis because I view the researcher as a person who is methodically learning from the subject of interest.

I find the phenomenological principle fitting to the purpose of my study because the principle will allow me to understand the study cultural shock experience as a phenomenon experienced by international students from the school communi-

ty in general and little application of the case study approach, according to Creswell and Maietta (2002), it is an exploration of a bounded system or a case (or multiple cases), over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and rich in Context. The case studies general idea is to study cases in detail and understand the cases fully in their natural settings, recognizing the importance of context and the complexity within the cases (Punch, 2009).

7.4 Limitation of qualitative research

The limitation of qualitative research is that, it is subjective and single context. Focus groups one central concept is focus group which has been defined in the following way: It is a special type of group in terms of purpose, size, composition and procedures. It is a way to better understand how people feel or think about an issue, product or service. Participants are selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the focus topic of the focus group (Krueger and Casey, 2000, 4).

Therefore, the purpose of the focus group is to listen and gather information about study cultural shock between the focus group members. At the end, I was able to analyze their attitude towards the issue. The group was established to gain different opinions through a discussion. Therefore, the focus groups for this thesis consisted of different backgrounds from Asia. All of the participants had studied in Finland and lived in Finland for more than one year but not longer than 3years, and had their own opinions of the topic from experience.

Challenges I faced are the timing, the students I intended to interview have very busy schedules. I also got similar kind of answers; I had to continue again with a group interview. Group interview phase with sessions, first session consisted

of 3 students second session 2 and third session 2. I chose the group interview method due to its unique advantage of stimulating group dynamics between the group members (Krueger 1994, Koskinen & Jokinen 2001). I had similar answers previously in the individual interviews and I thought a group brainstorming would yield more results. The successful side of the chosen group of interviewees is that they have experienced some difficulties with the study culture and it did not need to be explained too much on how it should work or much to research or refer to beforehand.

7.5 Qualitative content analysis

The material consisted of the students own stories, coming from the interviews, as well as their answers. The data can be considered diachronic in the sense that it entails information about the sequential relationship of events. It describes when events occurred and the effect of these events on subsequent happenings, and thus has both a historical and a developmental dimension (Polkinghorne, 1995). Initially, I read and listened to the recording several times in order to reach a general understanding of each participant's experiences. I have also included interpretations and to provide a flavor of the language and personal tone of each participant (cf. Rhose, 2003, p. 107). Most topics have phrases uttered by the interviewees. These utterances are seen as capturing the essence of the participant's experience.

My data collection was close to one another and after reading and listening to the first conducted interviews, I began by writing down a system that consisted themes, where I realized participants had reported difficulties and also satisfaction in relation to functioning of the Finnish system of learning. I kept the initial topic in mind as I tried to write everything down since I had a focus on my study. I got the description of the individual cases and tried to bring pattern out of them. I concentrated more on the recurrent topics and that became my category focus.

8. Ethics and validity

It is important to make it clear from the beginning to the interviewees that even without them demanding confidentiality and anonymity it is guaranteed. Should there be quotes of any kinds the names will not be told out. I assured them to trust that everything is very confidential and no name naming in the study should there be quotations. I also watched some ethical issues like Respect for persons is one of the main ethical issues in social sciences. According to the Belmont research and Nuremberg code (Israel & Hay 2006, 36), human beings as a subject of research need to be granted autonomy. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), there are four key elements which define reliability and credibility. These are trustworthiness, transferability, dependability and conformity.

Trustworthiness refers to the ability to maintain honesty in data collection and reporting. According to Gregory (2003, 49), confidentiality is a core professional and ethical value in my reporting. I also promised the students verbally the ones who had the fear of any leakage of their recorded interview that it's only me who will listen and analyze the data alone and discard any information immediately. According to Silverman (2008), validity is another word for truth In order to ensure validity of the data; the interviews were recorded and transcribed, with the interviewees consent. Therefore the interview was carried out with the research question in mind straight to the point not too long, and in response the interviewee responded to the questions with adequate answers. Since Reliability and validity were required for this research in order to come out with correct results.

9 FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter I will present the results from data collection analysis. Qualitative content analysis was used to form categories from the transcribed focus group interviews. This chapter aims to present the results of the qualitative research that was conducted among the study group. I will also explain the findings analyzed from the research data. Analysis from research data collection of focus group interviews is collected in this chapter. I will also include quotations referred from the focus group interviews by use of numbering the participants (student 1, 2, 3).

During the interviews participants were excited to have the experience to tell their stories and a lot of appreciation was expressed. They also thanked me for choosing them to be part of this thesis. Most of them remarked that it was the first moment anyone was interested in their experiences and asked them to talk about their study experiences from different perspectives and in deep meanings. For many participants the interviews were interesting meaningful and became a significant event for illustrating that Interviews may yield more than data for a study (Charmaz, 2003, p. 326).

9.1 Moving to study in Finland motivational pull and push factors

From the theoretical background studying in Finland chapter 3.2, during the semi-structured and focus group interviews the interviewees discussed the major factors that motivated them to study outside their own countries. In the study all the interviewed students admitted their motivations to come to study in Finland is because, it was a developed country and they wanted to grow academically and develop professionally. During the group interview student

(1) Claimed that, *“China has a big population and there is a lot of competition in my country studying abroad means a lot to me since the international qualifications is a security in job searching and I will always be considered first in a group of job seekers.*

Student (2) argued *that she chose Finland because she loved nature and she had a big problem with hot weather so she loved the cool Finland weather, and the fact that it is in the European Union she would have the chance to travel around the European countries.* The free education system was also a great motivation to many.

“I wanted to study abroad, all my life but the financial status in my family was not enough to educate me abroad, international education is very expensive and Finland is known to be a social welfare country offering free international education” student (7).

Others admitted that personal and political frustrations pushed them away from their home countries to come and study here and get better paying jobs. Studying abroad meant a lot to many because people from their home countries would appreciate them differently. Other students believed their study methods and culture of learning would improve. Apart from that they hoped they would experience and learn new cultures, learn different methods of living, and make new friends,

“I had met European’s briefly a number of times in my work place in Nepal but had not known anything about them to be specific from Finland they appeared cool to me I wanted to experience their calm way of culture student (3).

Some students could not continue with the living conditions of their countries and others wanted to show their ability away from home. According to (Andrade 2006; McClure 2007). International students may develop new outlooks, in-

crease their self-esteem and confidence, and mature as a result of their independent life experiences in another culture. Moreover some few students stated the decision to study abroad was not their own

“studying abroad was not my choice but I really wanted to do one degree that really needed very high qualifications and in Taiwan I was not qualified enough to join the universities there to study the course, so I really needed it and I applied to several schools all over and I got the school here in Finland so I had to come over and satisfy my desire or then never have a chance to study what I wanted” student (7).

It is clear from the findings that the interviewees' reasons for the motivations of them moving to Finland are push and pull factors. The major push factors in few students is lack of valid qualifications to be accepted into their home countries universities, some students studying abroad stands better chances for better job opportunities for them back home in future, and competition in their home countries. The second reason for international student to move to study in Finland is the pull factors. (Castles and Milles 2003:22).define pull factors as opportunities for better living or to get a better economic standpoint in the future. There are major pull factors in the findings free education system was the major reason for the students to move to Finland others wanted better qualifications and learning and experiencing new cultures.

10 Adapting academically in Finland

Since Finnish universities endorse a Western academic model, encouraging the development of learner independence, the course work and the previous studies of the Asians was in a system which was much more controlled and directed. Finnish studies were more pressuring to the new students without much attention and much intense contact teaching given to them to make them understand better.

“One good thing about this kind of learning is that you’re never wrong there can be varieties of approaches and different perspectives with different students and it’s really good because a student can express him/herself and learn according to their own style, but back home if the standard and theory is one then that’s it. There was no self-expressions, no different ways of learning, just one way of learning which is not a way of learning, unlike critical thinking which really pushes your brain to the whole perspective towards what you’re studying and you understand better. I’m always for this Finnish education student (4)

From the literature there is evidence supporting the conventional view that Critical thinking lies at the western universities core which is defined as the ability to develop a capacity to reason logically and cohesively. As such, this refers to the capacity to carry out a set of logical operations, to evaluate categories and forms of knowledge in order to determine their validity. (Atkinson, 1997). (Explained more in chapter 5.2 learning styles)

10.1 Critical thinking learning approach

According to Brookfield (1987, p.15) critical thinking is about taking democracy seriously, Facione’s study (1990) concluded that at the very core of critical thinking are interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-

regulation. Inference is comprehending and expressing meaning about a wide variety of experiences, beliefs, procedures, rules, etc. it is about identifying and challenging assumptions and exploring and imagining alternatives.

Critical thinking skills are essentials for higher order problem-solving thinking. Critical thinking is, in this case, also about the capacity to apply theory into practice, the ability to question and challenge existing knowledge. (Atkinson, 1997).

“In my home country a teacher comes and teaches you a chapter today, they explain deeply to you. Nothing like discussion. They teach you chapter by chapter, and at the end of the day you feel like you have learned something, in Finland the teacher comes and start talking, it’s like talking with you and at the end, there is an assignment and you get confused and you’re like is it over?? And then you have to go and research it all by yourself, you read like four to five books which sometimes are not available in the library, and the standard of the assignment is so high. It was really hard for me because it wasn’t contact teaching it was like a discussion and they make you work on your own a lot”. Student (1)

Student (2) *“This made me almost quit school at first. My friend actually quit and went back home. I was shocked by the way of teaching here, when the teacher came to class and used the slides which was a very advanced method, I can admit, but I wish the teachers could do it more better, because they had prepared slides and all they did was open the slides and start talking, direct reading from the slides and after few minutes it was sometimes “go into groups discuss and present. It was just too awkward for me. How do I know this immediately” “I have started learning now?? And soon to make a presentation??? We could ask each other with my fellow countrymen. Sometimes the teacher was asked questions and they could not answer, it was a shock to me that a qualified teacher did not have answers to students in the middle of the lecture”. Something like that has never happened in my previous studies.*

Student (3) *“The first time I heard the term critical thinking I thought should I criticize?? Or what exactly should I do?? It was not clear to me. It was a totally different learning approach to me. Sorry to say this but sometimes I regret coming here. I did assignments because I was supposed to finish by the deadline but the deep qualification which I hoped to get, I feel like I will not, if the learning method is that there is no wrong answer then what do I learn critical thinking always?? Well I’m still very new to this learning method, maybe with time I will think otherwise”.*

From the findings we can clearly see from direct quotations that to Asian students the meaning is not usually clear and the awareness of this context, which may fail to be understood or remembered by Asian students, is necessary to identify the possible meaning of the concept properly. (See chapter 5.3 some common approaches to learning).

10.2 Teaching and learning approaches

Education systems aim to enable students not just to acquire knowledge but also to become capable, confident and enthusiastic learners.’(OECD, 2003, p. 8). According to the OECD, the purpose of education is to develop self-regulated learners. There are significant cultural differences in the approaches to teaching and learning Strategies in Finland and overseas contexts.

According to Ballard and Clanchy (1991, 1997), the key differences in the western culture of learning oriented towards extending knowledge. As a consequence teaching approaches adopted are designed to develop the analytical and speculative ability of the student’s critical thinking approaches are mainly used. Approaches to learning have received attention from researchers dealing with cross culture studies. Approaches adopted by students reflect their educational purposes

“I like understanding now that I have learned a new method that is appreciated whichever way you put it, in a lot of different approaches you get to the point. And you are awarded marks for that. I’m now into the Finnish system I love the education system here”. Student (4).

By comparison, in comparing to the more traditional cultures i.e. the Asian cultures the education systems are mainly oriented towards conserving knowledge memorization, and the teaching approach emphasizes the reproductive ability of students. (See chapter 5.4 existing approaches to Asian students’ culture of learning). It would, therefore, seem that students who, begin studying in a university in Finland and are only provided with specific materials by their teachers would be disoriented and disadvantaged realizing that the method of study is independent and lot of wide reading, than their approaches to learning to meet their studies requirements, and they would be unfamiliar with their lecturers methods of teaching.

“Teachers gave us as much study guide as they could when I was studying back in my home country previously much more guidance was given in terms of learning materials. They carried you to the end, but here they introduce to you roughly and ask you to give more. The courses guidelines are given before lessons and the teachers expect the students to know something beforehand”. Student (5).

In many students’ home countries, the words teachers are highly credited and the students’ expectations are that teachers will always supply answers for them, which they are expected to memorize and reproduce (Ballard & Clanchy 1991).

Majority of the Interviewees admitted that memorization was their learning method and as much as they can remember it is the method whereby they are clear about different definitions of issues unlike critical thinking where you are

not certain about something or concepts. Some students said they can define things they learnt back home 3 years ago but they can hardly define things clearly in the critical thinking kind of method they have currently learned in 2011, "I might be guessing it could be this or that different learning methods have advantages and disadvantages but seriously speaking even when I'm back home I think my peers back there will be more intelligent than me I feel so" student (6).

The findings show that the students had a different approach to learning According to Ballard (1987, p.114). Memorization is popular in Asian countries because traditional knowledge is highly respected in those countries, while questioning and criticism is not part of the learning process

10.3 Perceptions of Classroom Activities and Participation

Classroom activities include various forms of teaching and learning. Lectures, Seminars, classroom participation in asking questions and discussion, group work, evaluations, etc.

"when I came to class, it took me one hour to realize the teacher was teaching I thought she was saying something before going to the main teaching, all she had was a good system of the slides and she kept reading like a novel, no explanation, no text books to follow and no structured notes to take down. And after the first break she said we shout aloud numbers and join into groups, I was lost and wondered what exactly was happening. The native students apparently seemed to love it as I got confused I did not contribute anything I did not know what to say". Student (3)

These classroom activities poses great challenges for cultural outsiders (Ho, et.al., 2004:31-37.) like the Asian students, who follow different social scripts of learning from Western students (Wu, 2008). These students prefer a learning method that is structured and the teachers in control in order to maintain harmony in the class.

“The class was free anybody could eat or, talk, drink or neat scarfs or even sleep I was shocked and I did not understand why the teacher could not stop them to keep order. One student was always on Facebook and I wondered what the rudeness was all about. Because something like that cannot happen in my country, it is termed as disrespect. Class order was zero and most of the teachers could plead with the students if they had something to say. A presentation after 30 minutes of a big topic was the most ridiculous thing to me, how can one really go and talk about a topic you have learnt only in 30 minutes and do a presentation?? I’m still very new here maybe with time I will get to understand it.” student (7)

Asian students viewed spontaneous discussion as very unstructured disorganized and unplanned they are not used to informal learning situations to interact among the students and teachers. (See chapter 6. learning shock)

“What shocked me most was the open exam which needed references. In my country exams were to test you not anything else it was really strict in the exam rooms” and this kind of learning in my culture was good because then the teachers can know the weak students and help them grow, because I believe there are students who will have qualifications that are not really theirs and they are not helped at all in this kind of learning methods then it’s to the disadvantage of the student”. Student (4).

10.4 Summary.

Many of the difficulties Asian students experienced in their study in Finland come from the clash of educational cultures. (Ballard and Clanchy 1997:iv) Different cultures value different skills and therefore have different learning and teaching practices. In the initial start of studies in Finland the participants seemed to understand learning in the sense of formal academic learning. It is clear from the findings that Asian students don't apply critical thinking approaches in their study methods, and the students consider teachers as the most important channel of gaining knowledge. All the participants in this study demonstrated their awareness that the Finnish study method was different and distanced from the Asian learning culture. It's clear that they had difficulties at first adjusting to the western culture of learning, but despite the fact that they were not compatible, they were receptive and adaptive to the new learning environment some even argued that they liked it.

11 Social Interactions

11.1 Group work and Working in a group

Group work is a common learning and assessment method in Finland universities. It increases active and deep learning of a topic; it appears to be unpopular amongst the Asian students. And as much as they are welcomed in the studies by their counterparts the native students, during group work the native students wish to conduct group work amongst themselves and vice versa, everyone one of them find it easier to work with their own group of people they understand each other more from the language, culture, ways and approaches to learning and methods.

“Group work to me was a little bit of trouble adjusting we had a bit of differences from values beliefs and religions. Sometimes I wished I could choose my own people to work with in the group because it could sometimes get a bit too uncomfortable but with time I got used to it and I liked it although they were a bit strict with timing which I was not too much conscious about but now I am”. Student (1).

Groups are very essential for both parties and more so to the international students, because the more they relate the more they understand the natives culture and interacting with local students has been found to improve communication competency and to facilitate general adaptation to life overseas (Ward and Kennedy, 1993b; Zimmerman, 1995). Research has shown that having local friends is associated with decrements in psychological distress (Redmond & Bunyi, 1993). Frequent social contact with host nationals relates to general adjustment and sojourn satisfaction (Pruitt, 1978; Torbiorn, 1982). It has also been associated with communication competence, fewer academic problems, and

fewer social difficulties in student sojourners (Pruitt, 1978; Ward & Kennedy, 1993a; Ward & Searle, 1991; Zimmerman, 1995).

According to student (3) *“Group work was a new method to me, despite the fact that it was too much, but the good thing about it, is that the learning method tries to get you out of your comfort zones and you learn in groups a lot unknowingly. I loved it personally; to me it was better than teaching. Because you miss out so much from the teaching but you learn from your group mates and in my career where I need to work with people, I think it was good for me to start dealing with people from my class. It’s like a training to prepare you for professional life. I’ve always enjoyed it and learnt much more than from my teachers”*

Student (2) said *“group work was a very good method if you had different approaches from different cultures and one culture would be learning from the other. I learnt a lot but for a short while because, the Finnish native students could be very strict with time which is a very good thing but international student also need to work to survive, so it was very hard for me. I had a problem with my group and I had to change to one of my choice who could understand me. It was good to work in a group where people could understand you. You get more motivated than working with a group that is giving you pressure of 20 to 30 minutes about your late coming which is not out of ignorance but coming from work”*.

Student (6) explains that *“group work to me is a method to learn but not a method to grade. I feel up to now there are people who did much more than others in group work, if you ask some students about some courses right now they cannot quite tell you much the group assignments are a bit not too fair, people are graded in a group and gets marks that they did not work quite hard for I’m talking on behalf of a few of my group members”*

“Here nothing defines a good student, bad, foolish or incapable it’s all about learning the group exams aims at making the students understand more. Not test them to fail but from my country we were tested and it’s a good thing because you can know where you belong average or below average and then something more can be done to you to be able to make you improve”. Student (3)

The use of group study methods was strange to some, and the use of group examination was the most confusing part of learning. Exams from their home countries meant testing the individual capability but in Finland they solved examination questions in groups.

“I loved it because it had less pressures to go through the many papers you got your part and you learn with others by dividing and learn from each other I loved everything with group”. Student (1)

It is clear that personalities can hinder the group process. This can obviously be magnified by the different cultural backgrounds of a group, particularly for students unfamiliar with working in this way in an academic environment. With time some students adapted and liked it. The success of the teamwork approach is dependent on the members becoming cognisant of reward interdependence and role interdependence (Colbeck et al, 2000).

11.2 Friends and school community

“Finnish people are seen as individualistic, they are not social they are too reserved don’t like change, they like sticking to themselves much but once approached they will of course answer you and assist you if they can, but they hardly start a conversation” student (1)

Most interviewed students agreed on the same point student (6) said that *“they don’t accept change immediately “In the school cafeteria domestic students from my class sat together and seemed to have specific sitting positions each of them and had their own things they were talking about in their own language. I did not know where to sit and it made it very difficult for me, and they spoke Finnish, I felt much intimidated and if they asked me anything it was about my country nothing important”.*

“Finnish students are not welcoming at all, they have the same lifestyle they don’t care who come, or who goes they don’t care at all. Nothing affects them their lifestyle remains the same nothing changes no excitement no worries or mercies to anybody. You can’t understand them” student (5)

Mostly Asian students stayed with their fellow country students or other foreign students.

“I come from a sharing culture and it was very hard for me to understand Finnish students they did not want to share the smallest things possible I don’t have Finnish friends but I have many Asian and African friends”. Student (4).

The students who were from less represented countries had even more difficulties to adapt since everybody when together spoke their own language. Schools activities were many in some schools but whenever anything was going on it was all in Finnish language and Asian students felt less motivated to keep on with the activities. During school parties where most people hoped to make friends,

“Mostly sauna parties were the many activities organized by my school and notifications came in Finnish language, and from where I’m coming from nudity especially with women is forbidden. I could not imagine men and women naked. Alcohol to us is not a usual thing, so we were all left out in these activities where

we would mix and make friends. So adjusting and getting to know my study mates outside class was almost impossible in the outside class activities I did not attend them due to my culture". Student (3).

The activities were

students already had their friends with them after the few days of schooling or they had met earlier, so making friends for them was less stressing in the beginning, unlike the Asian students, and during group work, some natives somehow immediately had their own built study group.

International students preferred domestic students for informational support such as providing support with academic difficulties and language but co-nationals were good for companion. Bochners functional models specifies that students use networks in different ways local students for information support and co- not of certain peoples interests too and the open kind of culture was shocking to many.

"There were no activities for ladies or men alone. Mostly it was mixed up activities, this culture is too open to men and women being friends, in my culture it's not very common to have men and women as friends to a certain extent. It was the most shocking things to me to see the people in the school parties just go to sauna parties' women and men and sit there naked. One day I was going to the sauna and there were 4 boys from my class and I went talking silly boy stuff and after sitting down in a minute to enjoy my sauna, I realized 3 girls from my class who I respected were also there naked. I could not face them in class or even after because this can never happen in my country it's a shame and disrespectful" but luckily, I transferred from that school shortly after the incident. Student (2).

Adapting to college life in Finland needed more than just class work; extracurricular activities to some people were meaningful

"I think the more you get close to the Finnish people when they are drunk then it's easier for them to talk freely, the few students who did not go to the school parties found it more challenging to adapt to college life and community and most of them had to work and complete assignments that had deadlines it was really hard for them". Student (3).

When the students had difficulties with school assignments, they asked the Finnish students or met lecturers with the specified assistant hours, used emails but usually, they referred to their friends since being with friends is more convenient. The informal lifestyle of friends made it easier to relate. Many native nationals for emotional support (Bochner et al., 1977; Furnham and Alibhai, 1985):

Student (5) noted that "I was always with my countrymen because "I tried to make friends with the Finnish students and distanced myself immediately when I realized they don't socialize easily, and I chose to have foreign students as friends. In class they could sit next to you if there was no other empty seat apart from the one next to you, but otherwise they opted to sit with their fellow domestic students. They maybe prefer one another. Everybody have different opinions, cultures and values it's not like a bad thing though, it was what I experienced, I wasn't patient enough to create a bridge maybe they needed a bridge it was shocking to me that there people who do not want to make new friends"

Student (1) said "sometimes you talk something and this western people think you are weird and on the other hand you don't understand their culture either. So it's hard for you to open up and express yourself, because with friends you should have some comfort level, open up to each other, and have certain kind of comfort level but it's hard to have that with Finnish people".

Being in a foreign country as a student in a new culture is overwhelming, and living in a large strange community. Mostly students' easier adaptation is achieved when they form their own communities within the large communities (Bochner et al., 1977; Furnhm and Alibhai, 1985):

"I dint care about the school community after my few days in school because the Finnish students were not friendly, so if I had my foreign girl friends that was my community, and if my friends were not there I could meet the men friends from my community but I could not imagine myself with the native students it's not an easy thing for me to do. I was all fine till now with my foreign friend's I'm happy to have met them here". Student (2)

From the findings there was a different kind of definition in the school community. School community to many students was about who they relate well with.

"I'm very outgoing and I kept pushing to the native students I did not pull off like many foreign students do. I created a bridge and tried to pull them to me, I enjoy music and karaoke and most of them did, so with the same interests, I got a friend at least one very genuine one. The rest could be very friendly when drunk but when sober again different and I then thought they don't like change so I opted to not push again too hard", student (7).

The interviewees stated big differences in encounters with the school community student (3) noted that *"The community here is different if you are not from the same class you hardly know each other or talk to each other, unlike home where the school community meant a lot to each member of the schooling institution. Here the community is the group of people you relate with and it was easier for me to stay near a group of foreign students I felt more comfortable since they could understand me better.*

From the findings it's clear that making friends was not easy and the definition of school community was from their own way of life they defined the school community from the group they were comfortable with.

11.4 The relationship between teacher and student

Asian teachers commands great respect in the education system and play an authoritarian role, an accepted wisdom in the west. Analyzing deeply the teacher student relationship in Asia reveals that there is a role the teachers' play that goes beyond the classroom. This students regard teachers as moral role models to them thus creating closeness between the both of them despite the strict discipline Watkins (2000). This is especially the case at the universities where students and teachers both live in the campus and students seem to have a great deal of access to their teachers.

This relationship has been compared to one of child and parent. Stevenson and Stigler (1992) claimed that Asian teachers have lighter teaching loads specifically to enable them to spend more time with students outside class. Watkins (2000) noted that the perception of Asian teachers as friendly and warm. It has been noted by several researchers that this is part of the Confucian tradition.

Western teachers are guiders they give you as much study guide as possible to study at home and do it yourself by getting all sorts of information students need to find the information themselves. Students are expected to be independent learners, and initiators for their own learning, and research a lot on their own there is no much contact with the teachers. In Asia teachers give the students a lot of things then they digest and memorize meet with them a lot, correct you and guide you. (Watkins 2000)

All Interviewees agreed that the relationship was a bit distanced not like in their home countries where there were no limitations. "Teachers were there "to teach and guide you all the way and in return we respected them. Here students do not even respect any teachers addressing them by their names and sleeping during lectures" or maybe our understanding of respect is different that's what I feel. Student (5)

11.5 Student apartment room mates

In this study student shared their experiences from different issues. (See chapter 7 student's adjustment) In the shared accommodation in the students apartments, most students had roommates from different cultures, both international and native students were concerned about the mixture of different cultures despite the fact that roommates were culturally different, in order to get a positive living experience they tried to find similarities it was the first time for some students to have roommates.

"Due to our religious beliefs we had a lot of difficulties adjusting to the ways of living in the shared apartments. We were not used to men coming to our rooms back home, and here they came even drunk. We however tried to adjust, it took time but we managed". Student (4)

They had to adjust to the differences that ranged from religious views, daily schedules, music and discussions of any kind.

"When I moved to my new student apartment, I was very frustrated my house-mates were all Finnish girls young and ignorant they did not want to share anything with me, and coming from a sharing culture, I could buy more stuff for all of us but it was not the case here. They could write down notifications and not talk directly to me. One thing I realized in this culture is individualism where nobody cares about the other which was the opposite of where I was coming from.

Everything had names on it from trash, to soap to hand paper it was the most shocking experience of my life something's did not make any sense to me like a trash bin" student (6)

Being open minded helped the students to adjust with their roommates and if they had issues with these differences the students dealt with it by staying by themselves or going to a friend's room and some finding new roommates.

"Schedules, privacy and disturbance were the issues, I had. The house I lived in was like an open house people could come and go anytime and I wasn't comfortable in my own home no relaxation, it wasn't possible to live peacefully. Weekends were always full and it was really hard for me, no space for me to cook, music was loud it was really hard. But after shifting I enjoyed the life of having a roommate. Student (3)

11.6 Summary

From the findings the students had a lot of difficulties in adjusting to the community and the social interactions in almost all aspects. They did not report a lot of positivity's. Student's experiences in their new academic culture portrayed negative tension represented differently. Overall it contributes significantly to our understanding of the student's experiences. Implications arising from the research may inform intervention of issues directed to the student's points of tension from their experiences. It is however noted that when people get closer to each other, the more they get familiar with each other, they naturally are able to share the cultures, but if they are in their own demographic group, they would not be able to expand their knowledge about other cultures and opinions. Working with people from different backgrounds helps broaden one's global perspective a greater amount of interaction with host nationals has been associated with fewer academic problems and fewer social difficulties (Pruitt,1978). In this

case the students in my research study seemed to have had problems interacting.

12. Everyday experiences

These are the results from the discussions of the open ended questions in the interviews. The students had different experiences in different areas during their studies these differences came up in the study as sources of difficulties or satisfactions adjusting to.

12.1 Technologies use of computers and advanced facilities

In western learning institutions teachers and administrators who work today with students assume students who were born after 1980 mostly grew up with computer and internet and are thus characterized as broadly capable users of digital technologies (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 1998) but not all students value or use technology to the same extent as their peers (Lohnes & Kinzer, 2007).

More recently Jones, Ramanau, Cross and Healing (2010) emphasize that it is far too simplistic to describe young first-year students born after 1983 as a single generation as having equivalent technological skills. For these students, technology may actually pose a barrier to success as they struggle to align with the ways in which the institution values technology.

Three of the interviewed students Said when they came to Finland they had zero knowledge about computers, not that they were ignorant but they had never had the chance to have some. Believing and using technology was 100 percent in the academic environment in Finland they were expected to use it for a range of academic and administrative activities. (See chapter 7 students' adjustment.

“The I.T method was so complicated i.e. the blackboard. But the software was very nice we had our own personal usernames and i.ds and uploading assignments via internet it was good and reliable you dint have to worry about anything Wilma, ebrary, this was very nice and modern” this was a method we did not have back in Taiwan. Student (3)

12.2 Social marginalization

As the students tried managing the academic environment demands, they encountered confusion and disorientation that contributed further to their experiences of loneliness and social marginalization from the wider community.

“Amongst my own peer groups in the class, I could feel sometimes like they assumed this are Asians and they are always like having different perspectives of different things and topics in class, and native students could make this faces that make us feel like we are talking too much about poverty or something like that and you feel a bit down, like I’m not from here and one has the feeling of being unlucky in a way like why was I born in a country with so many problems?? during some lectures in class I remember like poverty, because the Finnish classmates did not have an idea of poverty, they gave stupid answers comparing to our understanding of poverty they did not care and didn’t want to learn that made an unpleasant environment in the class”. Student (1)

Native students were not very friendly and it was hard for the students to get friends they had the feeling of rejection by the host country members in the new social and academic culture and also the psychological reaction to cultural difference in experiences.

“The schools have admitted too many international students from many different religions into the schools and they have not taken into consideration certain aspects about some issues. I’m a Muslim myself and they had nowhere suitable

for Muslims to hold their daily prayers. Another thing is that during the holy months of Muslim holidays, one teacher gave me an extra task to do because I wasn't in class something's that are known worldwide were totally ignored". Student (7).

12.3 Time management and work load

"Sometimes there were so many assignments at once and sometimes so little and it was too much also one after another teachers wanted to run the course fast cutting down hours of lecturing and all. It hampers the students because the students do not have time to go through one chapter or one module before another one comes and you have to hop skip and run which doesn't make any sense it's very pressurizing" student (7)

Coming from different school systems the academic advisors are not keen on students' academic schedule which is mostly not fair to the new international students. Some late coming students talked about being confused for quite a while and they had to turn to their classmates. They were also given the same task with the natives who were used to the study methods and the school did not consider their adjustment process.

"I had never used a computer or the fronter system of sending my assignment. I did not have that much skills and when I came here the methods were all equalized to all of us we had to deal with the same task and timing with students from Finland who were familiar with the methods, nobody bothered to ask if we are capable or even have computers in our student apartments, nobody considered the timing which was very important to us at that moment. I can give a good example, its like 4 animals in a tree climbing competition, a monkey an elephant, a giraffe and a dog if the four animals climbed a tree given the same time

to complete the task a monkey will definitely make it but the rest cant or will be very slow". Student(6)

Interviewed students said time is much respected in the Finnish culture and everything revolves every minute. According to (Biggs 1997). Time management is important to every student because the work associated with the full time study load can be very demanding it is very easy to drag behind lessons and assignments semester.

"I was always confused with the time sometimes at the beginning and I felt that the pressure of the deadlines was too much, that I did not do quite a good job in my assignments I did not know that learning method either and I wasn't familiar with the academic individual search methods I did not know where to get materials up to 8 and pages to write". Student (4)

Time tables are very important as it gives the students an overview of what they are doing during the semester, leading them in the way they can manage their time. Interviewees admitted that the work load was much and although they had difficulties adjusting to the different academic level they somehow managed, and when they had difficulties with assignments or studies, they often asked their friends more than the teachers. In class the international students held more discussions.

"Adjusting to higher education and in a foreign country was very challenging to me I came straight from high school and late due to visa delay issues, and it was very difficult for me to catch up, but I had friends from my country where we live in a collective kind of culture so we catch up with making quick friendship and helping each other very fast". Student (7).

"Time management was horrible the first year. Huge workloads from the teachers working at night sleeping very late, going to school early dosing off in

class always feeling half a wake, your dressed funny with winter clothes, it was really hard. My life was miserable working at night in winter” in my first year.
 “Student (3)

12.4 Instructor and advisor support

It’s too systematic here sometimes it gets too difficult for me, especially when you want to talk to your advisors and teachers they always say they are busy and they are like “maybe we can book an appointment, and I’m like I just want to talk to you for 5 minutes. They were not flexible at all”. Student (5)

Generally the students felt that the teachers tried to do their best but the approaches and styles were different. They responded very well to their emails and gave good guidance. Most students argued that the teachers themselves some have very poor writing and speaking English skills and they wonder how they grade their academic work.

“Before we came here, we were told to have a certain score mark in English. Sorry to say this, but the teachers too should have that checked on them as well to enable sufficient communication with international students. “I cannot understand how a teacher can be a master’s holder teaching in English and anytime she/ he communicate he /she has wrong broken English very simple English. Some of them are not supposed to be in the English section and they are very demanding to the students. I know they are qualified but the English department should be considered again. Student (7)

Students’ expectations of the student/teacher relationship were based on previous cultural and educational experiences and their perceptions of whether or not those expectations were fulfilled. Accustomed to having close relationships with the teachers most of the students felt unprepared of the expectation from the teachers here.

“the teachers here were so different I did not understand what I was supposed to do, if you met a teacher for an explanation, all she could give you was a website, but back home we were given a lecture individually even in the teachers homes” student (1).

Managing and communicating their needs to teachers was through many emails which they were not accustomed to in their previous learning culture. They experienced a number of uncertainties concerning attitudes, roles and communication in the new student teacher relationships.

“Teachers back home were more of a parent brother or sister, whenever we met with the teachers in the streets they behaved like part of us and we gave them a lot of respect. Here the teachers were called by names jukka, paivi, markku sari no proper titles sir or madam or professor so and so. And after classes a teacher could not talk to you anything. I remember when I was very new I met with a teacher in one of the groceries stores, I was so happy and excited and he totally ignored me. I had lost my direction and needed help and I was so shocked because when I saw him I thought “now I have found an answer” like we always do back at home but with the teachers here I realized everything is done with limits his duty is to teach and guide you and he is paid for it nothing more of community stuff”. Student (2)

12.5 Academic marginalization

“One time the teacher was explaining about a course I had studied back home and in very deep context and I was very excited to learn that I will gain more knowledge about the course that is really interesting. I and my classmate had discussed the course previously before the lectures and he too had a broad knowledge about the particular course, and we hoped to gain much and we were happy to have the course repeated to us again but shockingly the teacher

had slides that basically touched on the basics on the particular course, and then told the students to go into groups for a discussion and I was left wondering if the other fellow students really understood the real meaning of the interesting course that was very informative but was only touched on the basics”.

Student (4)

The feeling of anxiety in adjusting to new Academic requirements. Students admitted not having enough course work but insufficient unplanned unprepared unstructured discussions, and no one ever asked them about their best study methods. Here the learning context is one where student-centered activities and discussion are considered to be appropriate and assignments are structured so that all students develop critical and analytical skills. Based on previous educational experiences and continued communication with friends back home, comparing with themselves the friends back home seemed to be more informed than them. Studying internationally the students expected more knowledge from the developed country than they got.

“courses were very well explained in their webpages before we applied to the universities of Finland but when we reached here everything was Finnish based in terms of community development nothing much was taught about developing countries in terms of many courses considering more than half of the class members were from the developing countries and I wondered how we were going to approach issues if we went back to work at home some things were only in Finnish and it’s an English programme”. Student (2)

It is clear that students’ perceptions are that the primary function of a university is to teach (Biggs 1997). Consequently their expectation was that they would receive a substantial amount of teaching input through coursework and a high level of guidance through supervision but the approach was different and group work and individual search was too much.

12.6 Practical placement.

Practical placements which are believed to help students prepare for the work force, the students experienced a lot of pressure getting their own placement places with the language challenges since most of them were Finnish language centric, thus reflecting on the opportunities of the students to get the placement place. Some placements were either gender or religious based and most students especially the male students complained about it. There were presumed concepts in the placements where the students attended based on race and country of origin. Language was more considered than the capability of the individual person, and there was also a big barrier to do things directly with the clients at the placement places.

According to a number of students, These placements sometimes made no real sense, first one goes to a placement, one is so new in the country, the placement has nothing in relation to the topic, there is language barrier, when writing a report one just writes anything or guess what to write not real reflection since there was not much learned due to the language barrier. The supervisors and workers worked the student so hard for no apparent reasons and for the fear of failing; the students worked hard and again went for their normal part time jobs. Students claimed to have worked for more than 12 hours during their placement periods, needing more clarifications of what to do in the placements places defined limits from the schools.

“I went for a placement back home and things I learnt here cannot make sense in my home country like ethics of kids or something about child welfare, back home when I apply those things everybody will laugh at me. Our problems are so major very distinctive that whatever we learn here doesn't make sense back home. But I have learnt to accept that whenever you go to Rome, you behave like a roman and because we have sense and we have to reason we had to adapt” student (3)

13. Coping and adjusting to Finnish culture of learning and environment

The tactics students adopted to adjust to the tensions of the academic cultural transition, from the findings students experienced both positive advantages and also saw negative tensions. In the new learning experiences that motivated them in adjusting to their new environment. The student admitted that their approach to learning and a lot of independence was required and had to change their approaches to learning. They stated that they were self-determined in order to get along in the new learning environment since they did not have choice. They were also inspired by free education.

13.1 Learner independence.

"I did not understand what exactly to do at first with independent learning but with the many sources of information and the organized manner and nobody is watching or following me, then I was motivated to learn from my heart nobody urges you but your own self-consciousness and with time I actually liked it". Student (1).

A strong characteristic of student's cross-cultural encounter was a deepened level of self-awareness, concerning the need to change their study practices. Students realized to be able to study in Finland being independent is the most important thing since from their background, it was natural and obvious to think the teachers and supervisors will help them they were more of parents or brothers.

"In the very beginning when I came here I thought the supervisor's help or suggestions are important, but after some time I understood I had to do the academic search on my own". Student (3)

Students in this study said the guidance they could get from their teachers and supervisors was limited, and to succeed in their new environment, they had to develop a high degree of independence to solve both their academic and social problems.

“when I realized that the teacher is more of a facilitator to me and gave me materials to read without telling me what to do then I realized I can adapt to something new I loved it somehow it was relaxing back home teachers were like bosses”. Student (2)

13.2 Difficulty in coping with an Independent Learning Environment

While most international students are prepared for difficulties associated with weather and change of environment when they arrive, not many anticipate that they will experience problems adapting to a new learning environment (Samuelowicz, 1987). Much attention has not been paid to the particular learning problems that students from non-Western cultures face when entering to western academic environments.

“Here teachers tell you to do things you don’t really understand they tell you how to go into one thing and you eventually do the discovering yourself”. Student (1)

It has been noted that students shifting between different cultures of learning often experience a form of study shock (Burns, 1991, p. 61). Critical thought within the western systems of learning is one of the biggest differences that these students are believed to encounter. Western cultures are noted to place much emphasis on debate and critical thinking than collectivist cultures, which are said to be characterized by a large power distance between teacher and student and a reliance on memorizing and reproducing course materials. (Chalmers & Volet, 1997; Harris, 1997). Asian countries that possess a collec-

tivistic culture, where mutual support and ongoing guidance from the very beginning of their learning career are the norms (Samuelowicz: 1987, Phillips: 1990). As a consequence, the learning approach in the Asian context is relatively more passive and surface-oriented (Jandt, 2000).

For this students adapting to a culture with less supervision and little need for memorization and the nature of highly structured course work and very strong direction from the lecturers as they were used to, the independent self-directing approach to learning can be daunting to Asian students, in the western culture of learning where teachers tend to act more as informal advisors who require the student to critically engage themselves with learning materials and express their own perspectives and conclusions (Barker et al., 1991; Chan & Drover, 1997).

“ After much struggle around 8 months after I realized I have learnt a lot of things, like learning approaches which are different, back home for example, I was asked to solve problems. Like a teacher gave you one problem to solve and here one is being asked to write essays so you just not learn in a particular way to complete different given tasks but you get new insights on learning new things. Resolving a question in various ways is one thing I have learned here”.
Student (2)

The lecturers in the collectivist cultures are seen as mentors who give guidance to the students and feed them with information required by them in order to understand and master a subject. This leads the international students to assume and expect much from their lecturers thus demanding more direction than local students. (Barker, 1990; Samuelowicz, 1987). It is common for these students to feel that their supervisor or lecturer is being too indirect in advising them about what course of action to follow (Huxur et al., 1996,

13.3 The necessity to adapt to different learning practices.

The importance of academic adjustment goes well beyond language and Cultural factors (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991; 1997). Roots of Some of those adaptation problems come from past learning experiences. According to Ryan (2000), differences affect modes of participation, teacher-student relationships, learning styles and approaches to learning, attitudes to knowledge and learning. Mostly previous learning experiences with students seen as assets all over a sudden becomes obstacles and are sometimes defined as inferior practices. (Biggs 1997).

“It’s very necessary to do what your required to do because coming along with my Asian method of learning will not do me any good because it doesn’t work here, and if you go to Rome do as the Romans do I have tried to adjust I wouldn’t fully adapt to it because it’s not what I’m used to but I think both methods are great they have advantages and disadvantages” student (2)

However it is not convincing enough that western students are of the best caliber considering the learning practices they follow. On the contrary according to Biggs (1997), students from East Asian educational systems outperform Western students on the same academic achievement tests.

“I think I will hold on to both the study methods because both are necessary the one I was used to is the one that has made me qualified to this level and the new one I have learned has taught me to research more on my own so both are great” student (1)

13.4 Learning to shift between cultures

In their reflections on the university first year transition, these students revealed what a challenge it was to remain true to themselves in an environment where

they differ from the norm. Keeping that balance means changing, but it also means remembering their roots Biggs (1997). They learn what both the old and new settings call for, and they continually move in and out of different cultures. Biggs (1997)

“Being away from home was a learning experience which in itself is nothing I would have never learned if I did not choose to come here. I learnt much about the independent academic culture, though it was very confusing at the beginning, and apart from the academics, there is more about life learning. I have a lot of things to teach about cultures which I have learned here, if I ever returned home to my friends”. Student (6).

The students faced difficulties in this individualistic and independent learning cultures

“Adapting to this culture of learning was really difficult even more difficult because Finns are not very friendly people it’s always easy if you are in a new environment of any kind and the host people are really helpful. The teachers never even asked us to describe our learning methods in order to be prepared for a change or a little bit of orientation. I think they should include it in their school information sites about the learning methods they use for international students to choose either to come here or not to because most of us have regretted it was a total shock to some of us and others liked it” student(4)

Younger students in the study had more challenges

Adjusting to higher education and in a foreign country was very challenging to me I came straight from high school and late due to visa delay issues and it was very difficult for me to catch up but I had friends from my country where we live in a collective kind of culture so we caught up with friendship and helping each other very fast”. I was confused with time sometimes at the beginning and I felt

that the pressure of the deadlines was too much that I did not do quite a good job in my assignments I did not know that learning method either it wasn't familiar and with the academic individual search methods I did not know where to get materials up to 8 and pages to write student (5)".

14. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to make sense of overseas Asian students' learning culture in Finnish academic setting. It is concerned with investigating the participants' attitudes, values, and beliefs about learning from their own perspectives. In the discussion, I include the challenges and expectations. This thesis highlights a great number of issues that need to be addressed. It is evident after the research that Asian international students in Finland face difficulties and shock in their learning experiences. Through the methods used to collect my data I have been able to gain considerable insight into the students' perceptions and experiences and that there is need to address the issues outlined in this report and need for intervention in many areas.

14.1 Learning Disillusionment

Western definitions of learning due to the domination of psychology in education have been exclusively related to cognitive capacity of meaning making and understanding. For example, Learning is equivalent to what is new to understanding (Svensson, 1997: 68). To learn is to strive for meaning, and to have learnt something is to have grasped its meaning

All the interviewed students experienced disillusionment in Finland they had very high expectations and they found out that things were very different than they thought. Some of the factors that interfered with these students reaching their potential in higher education in Finland were the major factors influencing their learning experiences were: language, culture, expectations, and teaching and learning styles (Burke 1986; Ballard & Clanchy 1991, 1997; Volet & Renshaw 1996; Zhang, Sillitoe & Webb 1999).

14.2 Cultural Synergy Model (Jin & Cortazii, 1993)

Examining The Asian international studies in Finland their expectations and academic practices their academic success in the Finnish learning methods commands for a successful accommodation culture gaps from the expectations from the Finnish university staff and those of the Asians can be juxtaposed as follows
 ‘ Cultural Synergy Model (Jin & Cortazii, 1993)

Western academic expectations	Asian academic expectations
• individual orientation	collective consciousness
• horizontal relations	hierarchical relations
• active involvement	passive participation
• verbal explicitness	contextualized communication
• speaker/writer responsibility	listener/reader responsibility
• independence of mind	dependence on authority
• creativity, originality	mastery, transmission
• discussion, argument, Challenge	agreement, harmony, face
• seeking alternatives	single solutions
• critical evaluation	assumed acceptance

14.3 Learning shock

Additionally, to avoid cultural learning shock (Ballard & Clanchy, 1997: 28) in this study is understood as a form of culture shock (Oberg, 1960) but more challenging than the traumatic sense of the word. And school everyday encounters in the educational system with the Asian students and international students in general the host universities in Finland should collect different information, opinions and ideas from the new students about their own feelings in order to note the differences encountered and proposed improvements. It is important to know about international student in the schools and find out if there are solutions, as to how they can help them in adjusting to the new learning culture.

14.4 Social life

As stated before, almost all the interviewed students in the study felt that domestic students were not much welcoming. I cannot emphasize too much on this issue because there are few people with native students friends, but generally the interviewed students in this study had their own opinions about negative experiences. There were also findings about the activities carried out in the schools which did not suit the same people's interests, some due to culture and others religion.

Interviewees suggested that due to the open culture, schools should provide activities for students of the same gender. That way they would maybe make easy friends. They also noted that making friends from their own communities was not enough to help them adapt, but on the other hand they felt intimidated because the Finnish students spoke their language, kept to themselves and they seemed not to want new friends or change.

14.5 Accommodating and assimilating new values

Accommodating new notions was taken by the Asian students since they were here and did not have much choice than to adjust to the learning culture. They also valued more pursuits of life and career, and to realize that they broadened their conceptions. Despite the fact that they stayed in their own cultural environment they learned self-perfection, emphasizing psychological and intellectual

In addition, learning in a new culture made the participants more aware of their cultural identity; however, in the meanwhile, the newly acquired skills adapting to new learning cultures and competency, distinguishes them from other Asian students. They have acquired changes they had not imagined about.

14.6 Implications for the Finnish lecturers.

According to the findings it's noted that clash of education learning cultures values different teaching and learning methods attitudes, approaches to learning and assessment, teacher student relationships perception of classroom participation are many of the difficulties Asian students experience in their studies. Different cultures value different skills (Ballard and Clanchy, 1997) these differences should be noted by the Finnish lecturers. Although Asian students from the findings are teacher dependent and use memorization as a learning method the study shows they are adaptive.

The fact that they lack critical thinking at first and western academic writing and fell into difficulties, they did not give up. Their willingness to change their learning methods, self-determination, focus, good relationship with the teachers, facilitative learning environment, and motivation by the free education, these students through adjustments and change of learning approaches can perform well academically. Compared with Finnish students, Asian students were engaged in more theoretical work. The use of technology was not a norm in their early

learning methods. They also reported greater gain in having friends from their own community and other foreign students, since the native students were not welcoming to them. Asian students seemed to differ in ways that affected the student social engagement.

14. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Conducting a study on the experiences of Asian first year international students from different universities studying in Finland seeking to find out how they perceived their new learning environment in Finland, and to explore the strategies they employed to adjust to, manage and construct meaning out of their learning situation in their first year of study, as they adjusted to the culture of learning and teaching in the new learning environment during their first year overseas. I have gained experiences in the research field I have gained a lot of knowledge about Asian learning culture and how it works. I have also learnt a lot about Asian culture. My professional development was enriched by contacting and reaching many Asian students from many different countries from Asia.

Initially this was not the exact topic of my interest it was just part of it, but through the help of my supervisor, I came up with this interesting topic so being able to achieve this demanding goal of conducting further interviews more than once, I can say was a development, and a nice development because the student voiced out their experiences and the challenges they have faced or have been facing during their studies in the Finnish universities and their stay in Finland through my research. My professional development was enriched in the sense that I applied some ethical issues i.e. social work principles to guide professional practice. This research process has enabled me to relate with people from different cultures who hold different values and opinions. Sometimes it was challenging due to the timing and this has enabled me to accept and cope with the challenges I may encounter in future. Conducting the interviews is a process that helped me. I acquired the necessary tools that facilitate a qualitative interview process. Mostly planning and semi structuring the interviews, carrying out the interviews, getting the data together recording tools transcribing it and analyzing it and being able to match it with the literature was something very challenging but I have developed.

15. CONCLUSION

A number of common themes running through the narratives of the participants in the study supported the conclusions of the previous research on the difficulties faced by Asian international students and international students in general. The Asian students in this study came to Finland in search of higher education to meet career goals, and different life experiences, which they hoped would fulfill their dreams and aspirations. The one year after arrival was confirmed to be the most stressful period for these students. As it has been seen from the students' responses, cultural learning differences significantly impinged upon the academic adjustment experiences of those Asian students. However, most students interviewed, attributed learning approaches as the cause for the difficulties of their academic experience. Some students regard the adjustment experience as a form of personal development, although the majority of the informants were not aware of the adjustment in the first year until they had gone through it. Adaptivity in the Finnish learning culture is noted and also Success in the students chosen courses of study and very positive reflection on their experiences in a new cultural and learning environment. For example, while several students in the study noted that they had found the emphasis on independent learning in their courses challenging at first, they stated that they had come to appreciate the chance to explore new ways of learning. Many participants spoke of setting new goals, some of which involved continuing their education here in Finland.

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17. APPENDIX

Preliminary interview questions

The research method was carried out by means personal semi structured interviews through recording and transcribing with students from Asia. It included questions and the purpose of these questions was to help develop the process. The questions came in the form of themes all together. I handed out the questions to the students, I intended to interview before hand in order to prepare them, before the oral interview. The interview was sent by email to the potential interviewees.

The contents are based on the results from an extensive review of the literature including articles books and internet resources on this and related topic. There was flexibility in the interview to make the process more informative when it was needed. The developed questions/themes regarding the interview in the handed out questions were

- 1ST Year University learning and its environment experiences
- learning shock/learning methods, approaches to learning
- study transition adjustment
- Anything you would like to present, or, i.e. give examples about a specific occurrence related to the research study?

