

The inclusion of international students for LapTOP ry

The plan for 2024 and beyond

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Bachelor of Business Administration, International Business

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Abstract

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Abstract		
<p>This thesis investigates international students' interactions with LapTOP ry's support at a Finnish university, using Social Network Theory's homophily and mutuality concepts. The quantitative survey revealed students' need for improved communication and more interaction opportunities with local peers, highlighting homophily tendencies. Challenges, including linguistic barriers and insufficient practical support, reflected areas of unexploited mutuality, affecting academic and social experiences. The study emphasizes enhancing support structures, advocating inclusive environments that acknowledge student diversity and promote engagement, critical for international students' well-being and academic success.</p> <p>These findings provide insights for community development and support strategies in educational contexts, stressing reciprocal engagement's significance.</p>		
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Inclusion, laptop ry, laptop, international students, campus, association, integration, diversity, equity		

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Appendix 1. Copy of the student survey

1 Introduction

LAB University of Applied Sciences' campus in Lappeenranta is filled with faculty associations that work as bonds for their members and promote their members' aspirations and future plans. However most importantly they advocate for their students inside LAB's faculties. Members of these faculty associations can only be students, or alumnus' (students that have already graduated). There is no mandatory membership fee, or a requirement to be a member of a faculty association, which makes one of their goals to attract more members. The biggest funding avenue that the faculty associations receive is from the number of memberships that they get during the year. Lappeenranta's BBA-students ry (herein after LapTop) organizes events and works as the main advocacy group for the BBA students on LAB's Lappeenranta's campus, which makes funding an important item on their checklist.

This thesis topic was initially formed when the author was a member, and later the vice chairman of the board of KOE, the student union of LAB, as the surge of international students to our campus started after the pandemic. One of the issues was how LapTOP could connect with these students, which is why in 2021 LapTOP's board decided unanimously to add a new board position with the title "International Affairs Manager" for the board year 2022. This board member was to be put in charge of working with the international students in conjunction with KOE's international and degree head tutors, and KOE's international tutor executive.

During Spring 2022 it became clear that there should be a guide for the appointed board member. The reason for a guide is because LAB is increasing and, in the future, will increase the number of international students in the business faculty -- There needed to be a way of supporting them and getting those students involved with the faculty association as well. Integrating these international students in to the faculty association and the social network of the faculty students will be integral to the international students gaining Finnish networks and thus increasing their likelihood of being active in the faculty association and its events, all the while later on increasing the chances that those international students will stay and work in Finland after graduation as their social networks are here.

1.1 Significance of the study

In recent years, the landscape of higher education has undergone a significant transformation. The rise in the influx of international students post-pandemic has ushered

in new challenges and opportunities, particularly at institutions like LAB. Such shifts demanded the immediate attention of organizations, like LapTop.

The issues and challenges that the international students face and that the students brought to KOE in 2021, ranged from problems in communication, challenges with teachers and issues with accessing the same events and information the native students this is why the international student population at LAB necessitated an efficient system of integration and communication. In response to this need, in 2021, LapTop's board unanimously introduced a specialized role titled "International Affairs Manager" for the academic year 2022. Tasked with connecting and collaborating with the diverse student community, this new board member worked closely with KOE's international and degree head tutors, as well as the international tutor executive for BBA-students.

By Spring 2022, the importance of a comprehensive guide for the international Affairs Manager became evident. The goal behind such a guide is forward-looking; it recognizes that LAB's commitment to its international student community will continue to grow. With an expected rise in the number of international students in the business faculty, there is a pressing need for resources and frameworks that support and integrate them. Beyond mere academic integration, this includes fostering their participation in the faculty association and ensuring they have access to the broader social network of the faculty.

In essence, the integration of international students into the fabric of the LAB community not only enriches the academic environment but is pivotal in helping these students forge Finnish networks. Such connections can enhance their academic experience and increase their engagement in the faculty association's activities and events. This study, therefore, sets the groundwork for shaping a more inclusive and interconnected future for all students at LAB.

1.2 Objectives and key research questions

1.2.1 Objectives

International Affairs Manager: Recognizing the growing role of the International Affairs Manager in catering to the needs of the increasing international student population at LAB, this research aims to outline the needs that international students have to support the Manager's role.

Assess the Needs of International Students: Understanding the specific academic, social, and cultural needs of international students in the business faculty will enable a more targeted approach in their integration.

Evaluate the Existing Resources: Gauging the current resources and structures in place that aid international students and to identify areas of that the resources can be improved upon.

1.2.2 Scope of the research

The scope of this thesis is centered on exploring the dynamics of accessing different social networks among international BBA students at a university because the challenges that international students in Lappeenranta have faced are not seen with native students. This research has a particular focus on international students' integration and engagement with the faculty association, LapTOP ry. Using the lens of Social Network Theory (SNT), the research delves into understanding the patterns of relationships, shared experiences, and the challenges faced by these international students as they navigate the academic and social terrain of their university journey. The primary data source for this research comes from a survey that was disseminated among students, capturing their perceptions, experiences, and suggestions related to their interactions with LapTOP ry and their broader social network on campus.

The research delineates its boundaries by concentrating primarily on international BBA students' experiences within a specific timeframe. While the study acknowledges the broader student body and other possible influencers of international student experiences, it emphasizes the role of the faculty association in shaping these experiences. By narrowing down the focus to specific aspects of the students' university life and their relation to LapTOP ry, the research aims to offer insights that can foster improved strategies for inclusion, communication, and support, specifically tailored to the needs and challenges of the international BBA student community.

1.2.3 Key research questions

Do the students feel like they received enough support and information about practical matters such as housing, transportation, or healthcare from LapTOP ry?

Do the students feel like they had enough chances to connect with other business students while studying?

2 Theory base

2.1 Rationale for chosen theory

Choosing an appropriate theoretical framework for any research is pivotal to ensuring clarity, depth, and relevance in investigation. This chapter elucidates the rationale behind adopting the Social Network Theory (SNT) as the guiding lens for this thesis focused on the inclusion of international BBA students.

At the heart of the international BBA student experience lies a myriad of social interactions – with peers, faculty, administrative staff, and the external community. The Social Network Theory inherently focuses on relationships and interactions, making it apt for dissecting the nature, strength, and patterns of these connections. (Liu, 2017).

International students navigate a multifaceted environment, balancing academic challenges with cultural transitions. The adaptability of the theory makes it suitable for various types of data, be it qualitative narratives or quantitative surveys. This flexibility ensures that the research can capture a holistic view of the international BBA student experience, irrespective of the data collection methods employed. (Rienties & Nolan, 2014).

In the endeavour to understand the inclusion of international BBA students, a multi-dimensional, relationship-focused lens is essential, this is why the thesis will provide an inclusive way to include international students in the advocative work of LapTOP and the social aspect of a faculty association. The social network theory, with its emphasis on ties, interactions, and structures, provides a robust, comprehensive, and versatile framework for this research. By anchoring the study in social network theory, the research aims to offer actionable insights that can transform the international student experience for the better for future classes of students. (Rienties & Nolan, 2014).

2.2 Definition and concepts

2.2.1 Origin and evolution of the network concept

This bachelor thesis' theory is based on social network theory theory and it's sub-theories homophily and mutuality.

Social network theory is a field of study that seeks to understand how social relationships and interactions are structured and how they affect the behavior, attitudes, and outcomes of individuals and groups. It is a multidisciplinary field that draws from sociology, economics, and computer science, among other disciplines (Wasserman and Faust 1994).

Overall, the social network theory provides a framework for understanding the structure and dynamics of social relationships and their impact on the behavior and outcomes of individuals and groups (Wasserman & Faust 1994). It has had significant impact in a variety of fields, including sociology, economics, and computer science (Scott 2000), and continues to be an active area of research and study.

2.2.2 What is a network?

A network is a set of relationships. More formally, a network contains a set of objects (in mathematical terms, nodes) and a mapping or description of relations between the objects or nodes. The simplest network contains two objects, 1 and 2, and one relationship that links them. Nodes 1 and 2, for example, might be people, and the relationship that links them might be “are standing in the same room”. (Valente 2017a.)

Social network theory revolves around the understanding of the relationships and connections between entities, typically represented as nodes in the network. These entities could be individuals, organizations, or even abstract concepts, and the relationships connecting them could range from friendships to trade partnerships. Understanding the nuances between different network types provides scholars and practitioners with insights into the nature and patterns of interactions, ensuring better communication, influence, and structure in both online and offline realms. (Liu 2017).

There are however many types of networks encapsulated in social network model, such as personal networks. Personal networks represent connections of an individual to their immediate social environment. They reflect personal relationships, including friendships, family ties, and acquaintances. Personal networks help in mapping social support, information flow, and influence at an individual level. (Schaefer 2008).

While personal networks mean friends and acquaintances. Professional networks are often used in organizational studies, these networks map relationships between professionals. They could reflect mentorship ties, collaborative schoolwork projects, or professional associations and affiliations. Such networks are crucial for understanding collaborations, and information dissemination in professional settings.

In the same way we can consider information networks. They map out the flow of information or knowledge between nodes. For example, in an organizational context, it can indicate who people turn to when they need specific information (Valente 2017a). They're instrumental for organizations aiming to improve communication flow or knowledge sharing (Marchiori & Franco 2020).

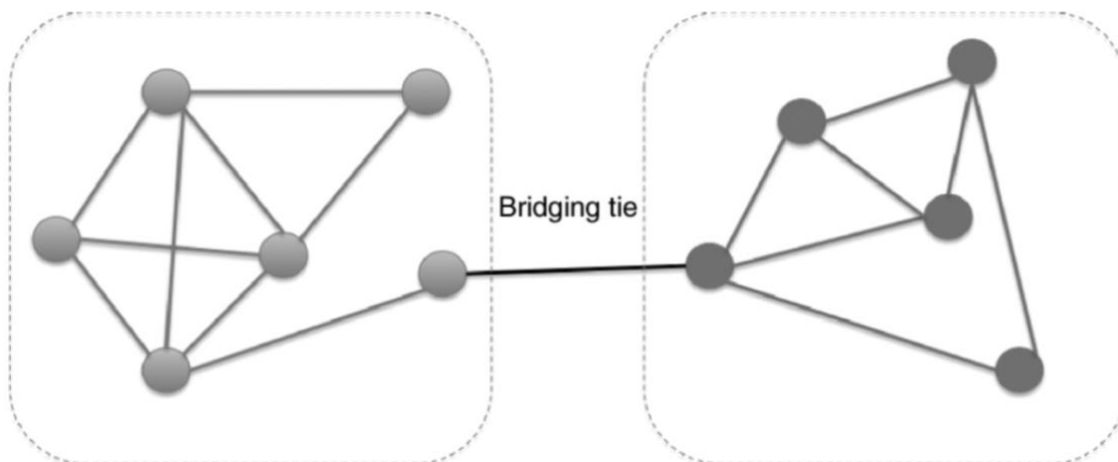


Figure 1. Thomas Valente (2017b)

Much like the knowledge networks, affiliation networks establish connections between two distinct sets of entities (Affiliate Marketing 2023). For instance, consider university students and the clubs or societies they join. This highlights which students are members of which clubs, revealing patterns of involvement and potential cross-membership across various student organizations.

2.3 The small network model

The social network model, derived from social network theory, explores the structure and pattern of relationships among entities, often visualized as nodes interconnected by links or ties (Valente 2017c). In the academic realm of international BBA students, understanding this model is essential to ensure effective inclusion strategies, capturing the intricate web of relationships that form, evolve, and influence the experiences of these students.

At its core, the social network model provides a visual and mathematical representation of relationships. These relationships can vary in type, intensity, and direction. Nodes represent entities (in this context, BBA students), and links or ties reflect the nature of their relationships, be it friendships, study groups, or mentor-mentee relationships. (Valente 2017d).

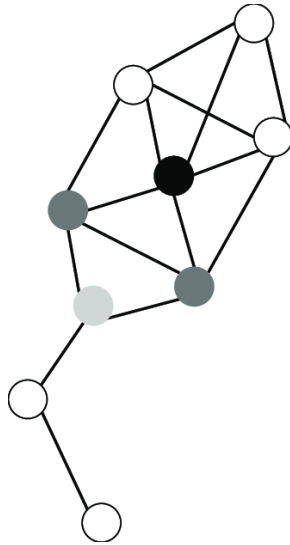


Figure 2. Thomas Valente 2017d.

International BBA students often navigate dual challenges: the rigors of their academic curriculum and the complexities of integrating into a potentially unfamiliar cultural and social environment. The social network model can elucidate patterns of interaction, revealing clusters, isolated nodes, or central figures that can provide insights into the effectiveness of inclusion initiatives.

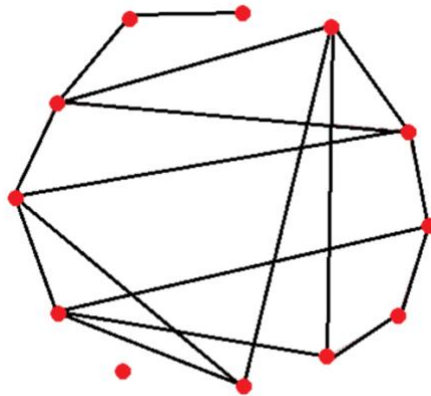


Figure 3. Schullz.

2.4 Applicable sub-theories

2.4.1 Homophily: definition, significance, and implications

Homophily, or the "birds of a feather flock together" principle, refers to the tendency for individuals to associate and form relationships with others who are similar to themselves. This concept has been widely studied in the field of social network theory and has been found to play a significant role in the formation and structure of social networks (McPherson et al. 2001.)

Homophily can operate at multiple levels, including demographic characteristics such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity, as well as more subtle characteristics such as values, beliefs, interests, and attitudes. Research has shown that individuals are more likely to form relationships with others who share similar characteristics and that these relationships tend to be stronger and more enduring than relationships with those who are dissimilar (McPherson et al. 2001). However, this could also lead to fragmentation, where the broader network splinters into smaller clusters based on shared attributes (Centola 2011).

Homophily is thought to be driven by a variety of factors, including social norms, cultural influences, and the desire for social approval and acceptance. It has been found to have important implications for the spread of information and influence within social networks, as well as for the formation of social groups and communities (McPherson et al 2001).

In university settings, the principle of homophily takes on distinct nuances that are worth exploring. During my studies I have noticed that universities are often diverse microcosms where students from various backgrounds, cultures, and countries converge for academic pursuits. Amidst this diversity, the tendency for students to gravitate towards like-minded or similar-background peers becomes evident.

For instance, freshmen, upon entering university, might initially be drawn to individuals from their own country or those who share the same major. International students, in particular, often form tight-knit groups based on shared nationality or language. This can provide a comforting familiarity in a foreign environment. Similarly, students in specific disciplines, such as those in the arts or sciences, may bond over shared academic interests and challenges, leading to the formation of study groups or project teams.

On the downside, excessive homophily can limit students' exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences, which are central to holistic education and personal growth. By sticking too closely to a particular group, students may inadvertently isolate themselves from the

broader university community, missing out on opportunities to understand and appreciate different cultures, ideologies, increasing social capital and the possibility of integration.

2.4.2 Mutuality: definition, significance, and implications

Mutuality, also known as reciprocity, refers to the mutual exchange of resources, support, or other benefits between individuals or groups within a social network. It is a key concept in social network theory and is often used to describe the strength and nature of relationships within a network. Mutuality can take many forms, including the exchange of emotional support, advice, information, resources, or other tangible or intangible benefits. It can also involve the reciprocation of favors, such as helping a friend move or providing support during a difficult time. (Lin 2001.)

Research has shown that mutuality is an important factor in the formation and maintenance of social relationships and that individuals with mutual relationships tend to have stronger, more enduring bonds. Mutual relationships are also thought to be more beneficial for both parties involved, as they can provide a sense of security, trust, and social support. (Plickert & Cote 2007).

In social network theory, mutuality is often used to distinguish between different types of relationships, such as strong ties (characterized by high levels of mutuality) and weak ties (characterized by low levels of mutuality). It is also used to describe the overall structure and cohesion of a social network, with networks that are characterized by high levels of mutuality often being more cohesive and resilient than those with low levels of mutuality. (Wellman & Wortley 1990).

2.4.3 Summary of homophily and mutuality in relation to thesis

In the microcosm of a university campus, homophily is vividly evident. For instance, students from similar geographic locations, cultural backgrounds, or academic majors often gravitate towards one another. This might be seen in international student groups, societies dedicated to specific interests, or study groups formed within specific majors. While homophily can provide comfort and a sense of belonging, it can also inadvertently lead to echo chambers, where students may find themselves surrounded by similar voices, views, and experiences. In this case we have seen that international students have not been

involved in LapTOP's work in Lappeenranta due to the creation of echo chambers wherein international students only socialize with other international students.

Mutuality is the reciprocation of ties or connections, indicating a mutual recognition of a relationship (Wasserman & Faust 1994). It underscores the idea that relationships are often most meaningful when they're a two-way street. On a university campus, mutuality is exemplified when friendships are reciprocated, or when collaborations, such as study groups or project teams, function with mutual respect and recognition.

The formation of mutual relationships is often crucial for students' emotional well-being and academic success. On the other hand, the absence of mutuality can lead to feelings of exclusion, loneliness, and may hamper group productivity. As students on university campuses find individuals with shared interests (homophily), they are more likely to form mutual, reciprocal relationships (mutuality). This is why clubs, societies, and student groups often form strong, tight-knit communities. This is why the inclusion of international students in a student faculty association is important.

3 Research implementation

3.1 Approach to research

The research method used for this thesis is quantitative research, using a questionnaire aimed at international students that are enrolled in a BBA-program in LAB.

Quantitative research methodology is a systematic approach to studying a phenomenon using numerical data. The goal of quantitative research is to understand the relationship between variables and to draw statistical inferences from a sample of data (Creswell 2014). Surveys are one common method used in quantitative research to collect numerical data from a sample of individuals. The purpose of a survey is to gather information about a specific population by asking a standardized set of questions (Dillman 2007). Surveys can be used to gather information on a wide range of topics, such as attitudes, behaviors, and demographics. Surveys are used to describe the characteristics of a population, and to compare these characteristics to other groups (Babbie 2017). Surveys can also be used to test hypotheses and make predictions about a population (Trochim 2006).

3.2 Rationale for chosen method

Quantitative research is used in this thesis because in a survey it can accomplish a variety of things including:

1. **Testing hypotheses:** Surveys can be used to test hypotheses about a population, such as whether a certain attitude or behavior is associated with a particular demographic characteristic (Trochim 2006).
2. **Making predictions:** Surveys can be used to make predictions about a population based on the information gathered, such as predicting future behaviors or attitudes (Dillman 2007).
3. **Identify trends:** Surveys can be used to identify trends in a population over time, such as changes in attitudes or behaviors (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill 2016).

Using a survey to obtain answers to questions from a group selected with certain characteristics (international students at LAB in a BBA-program) and analyse that data. These questions help us answer what we should improve about the overall experience of international students at LAB's Lappeenranta campus, for the perspective of LapTOP's associative work.

Survey research often uses a questionnaire form, so the length and content of the survey must be thought out carefully, so that each survey respondent can answer the questions

unambiguously. In a survey, you shouldn't ask questions just out of curiosity, because if there are too many questions in the survey, the respondent might get tired of answering the questions. So, the final questionnaire was to be kept as short and simple as possible. Questions about personal things should be left at the end of the form in case the survey is considered to be invasive, the respondent has already committed to the survey, so the interviewer is more likely to receive more personal data or personal insights. (Suorsa 2022).

3.3 Data collection method and process

Effective research hinges not just on the questions asked, but also on the methodology deployed in collecting data (Babbie 2016). This chapter delves into the process undertaken to gather data for this thesis, focusing on a survey instrument channelled through various key stakeholders within the academic environment. Given the need to capture a wide range of experiences, opinions, and insights from international BBA students, a survey was identified as the most suitable tool (Bryman 2015). The data collection was carried out with LapTOP ry, the data of which was collected once via an internet survey (Google Forms) (Creswell 2013). Planned survey research is called survey research, which is widely considered to be an efficient and economical way to gather information when there are many people to be researched (Fink 2017). Surveys also allow for quantitative analysis, ensuring that the research captures a broad spectrum of experiences while also enabling nuanced qualitative feedback through open-ended questions (Groves et al 2011). In this survey, the target group was the international business students at LAB who study on the Lappeenranta campus.

Conducting a survey has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage of the survey is the opportunity to collect extensive research material because the survey can be sent to several people at the same time and many things can be asked in it. (Denscombe 2010).

Conducting a survey also has weaknesses. It is not possible to be sure of the respondent's serious attitude towards the research, the care and honesty of the answers. The familiarity with the matter may also be less than what is assumed. It is difficult to control misunderstandings if the given answer options have not been carefully thought out from the respondent's point of view. Creating a clear and good form takes time. In addition, non-response to the survey can become too high. (Neuman 2013).

Recognizing the importance of access and trust, two primary stakeholders were identified to aid in the distribution of the survey:

LapTOP's International Affairs Board Member: Their leadership roles ensured they had a wide reach and influence within the student community.

Student Tutors: Given their peer-to-peer relationships, they were crucial in reaching out to specific student groups and encouraging participation.

Reminders were sent twice to ensure maximum participation. Stakeholders also played a role in encouraging responses during their regular meetings and interactions with students. The survey remained open for four months and a total of 12 responses from international students was gathered. The survey did reach most of the students that participate in the social groups that tutor students have started for the students, students that don't use the platform might not have been informed of the survey and could not have participated. Even though the survey got 12 respondents, the answers received are still very indicative of what challenges the international business students face. An important factor influencing the response rate is how important the respondents consider the research. The answers of the target group may be influenced either by events in their own lives or in society (Sarantakos 2012). Regarding this survey, the factors reducing the response rate could be the current world situation (Ukraine, COVID-19), and the busyness of students during university.

3.4 Validity and reliability

The initiation and execution of a survey targeted towards international students, who bring a rich tapestry of diverse cultural backgrounds, which necessitates an approach that seamlessly integrates explicit communication, profound respect for respondent confidentiality, methodological uniformity, and collaborative stakeholder engagement. In the commencement phase of the survey distribution, participants were informed regarding the intentionality behind the research. This duality of communicating the research's objectives and ensuring an anonymity-consolidated environment sculpted a milieu that was conducive for the elicitation of unguarded responses.

A judiciously cultivated cultural sensitivity was embedded within the survey design, thereby safeguarding against potential biases and ensuring a harmonized understanding across the multiplicity of student cultural contexts. This was not merely a mechanism for ensuring interpretational accuracy but was instrumental in facilitating authentic student engagement, thereby enhancing the reliability of the resultant data. Concurrently, the deployment of a recognized digital survey platform, specifically Google Forms, served to mitigate potential variabilities in the participant experience, ensuring that subsequent data analysis could be attributed definitively to respondent inputs, absent of medium-induced bias.

A robust commitment to data privacy was manifested through rigorous measures to guarantee both the anonymity and confidentiality of participant responses, thereby establishing a foundational trust and mitigating potential participant reservations regarding data security in the digital epoch. Collaborative engagement with pivotal stakeholders, including LapTOP board members, student counselors, and tutors, helped to reach most of the students.

The concept of engagement was redefined as a continuous dialogic process rather than a singular interaction, where bi-weekly communicative reminders ensured the survey being top of mind for students in their busy lives.

Subsequent to data collection, the data was assiduously stored within a consistent Excel format, which not only sufficed for immediate analytical requirements but also posited itself as a potential repository of insights for future researchers, thereby contributing perpetually to the academic discourse on international student experiences within Finnish university settings.

Ethical considerations

To reduce bias and potential conflicts of interest, the survey was sent through LAB's LapTOP's board members as well as student tutors to the international student groups and the thesis writer's name or the topic was not mentioned. The survey was framed in a way to help LapTOP understand how they can help international students better.

Data storage and handling practices adhered to university guidelines and international data protection regulations.

4 Summary

4.1 Findings on data

In an attempt to evaluate and comprehend the international student experience at LAB, specifically in relation to LapTOP ry, a survey was sent out to gain insights directly from the students. The following chapter explores findings from the provided dataset, mapping out critical patterns and inconsistencies that further our understanding of student experiences in various facets of their academic journey.

Questions were asked in a range of Yes/No manner, or ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 is 0 worst and 5 is best.

4.1.1 Awareness of LapTOP ry

The data reveals a moderate level of awareness regarding LapTOP ry amongst respondents, with a noticeable prevalence of "2" as a response. This indicates a surface-level understanding, suggesting that although students are aware of its existence, they might lack deeper knowledge regarding its functions, offerings, and overall role within the university.

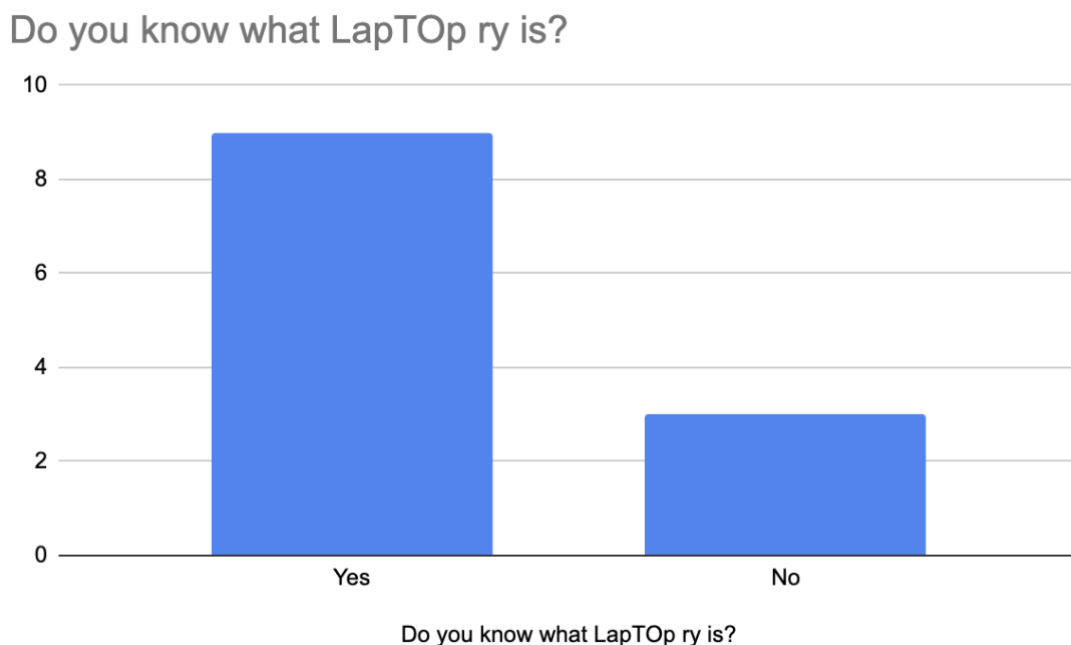


Figure 4. Questionnaire answer 1.

4.1.2 Support from LapTop ry on practical matters

Findings indicate varied experiences in terms of the support and information provided by LapTop ry on practical matters such as housing, transportation, and healthcare. Responses are scattered across the spectrum, though lean slightly towards moderate satisfaction. Noteworthy is that no dominant pattern emerges, highlighting the inconsistencies in experiences or perceptions regarding practical support.

Several respondents highlighted the need for peer students, better orientation about available resources, and help with platforms like Peppi and Moodle.

Did you feel like you received enough support and information about practical matters such as housing, transportation, or he...

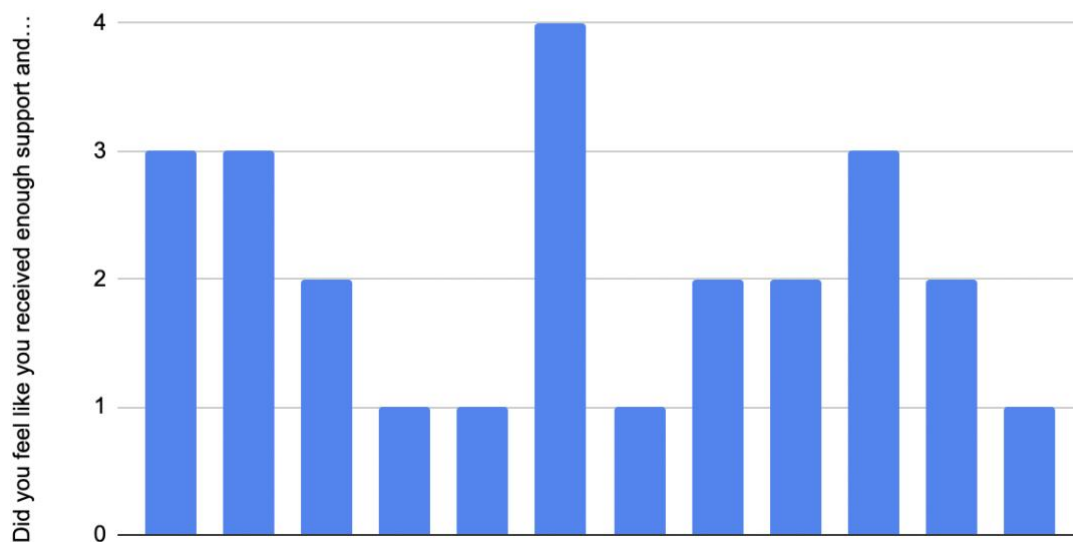


Figure 5. Questionnaire answer 2.

4.1.3 Communication and engagement from LapTop ry

A mixed bag of responses characterizes the level of communication and engagement with LapTop ry. Some students found it moderately satisfactory, while others experienced it as subpar. This variance underscores a potential misalignment between LapTop ry's communication strategies and the diverse needs or expectations of the international student body.

How did you find the level of communication and engagement with your faculty association (LapTOP ry)?

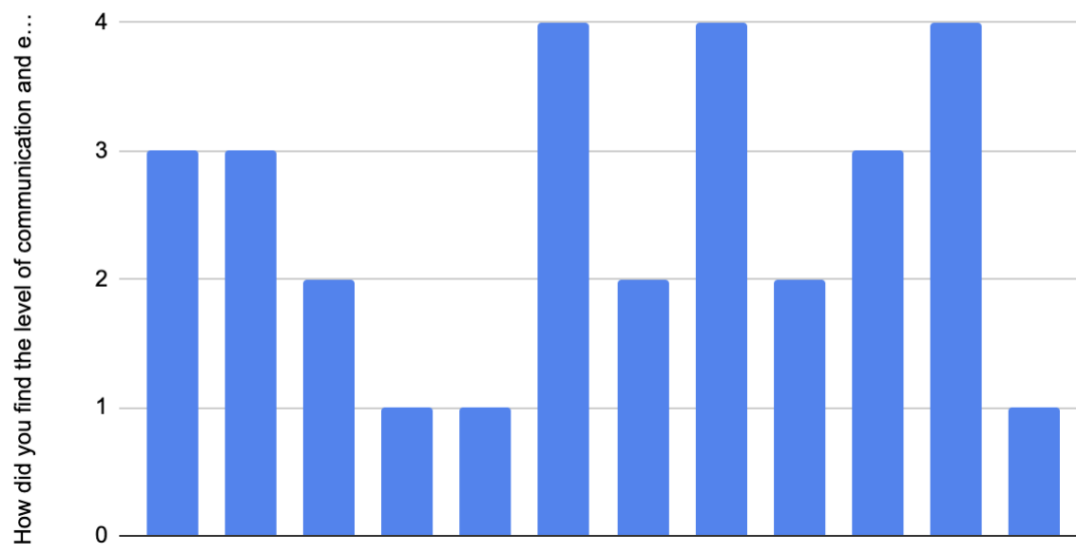


Figure 6. Questionnaire answer 3.

4.1.4 Awareness of events for international students

A notable number of respondents were unaware of events, signaling a possible lack in communication efficacy regarding event promotion. This elucidates a potential gap in integrating international students into the communal and social aspects of academic life.

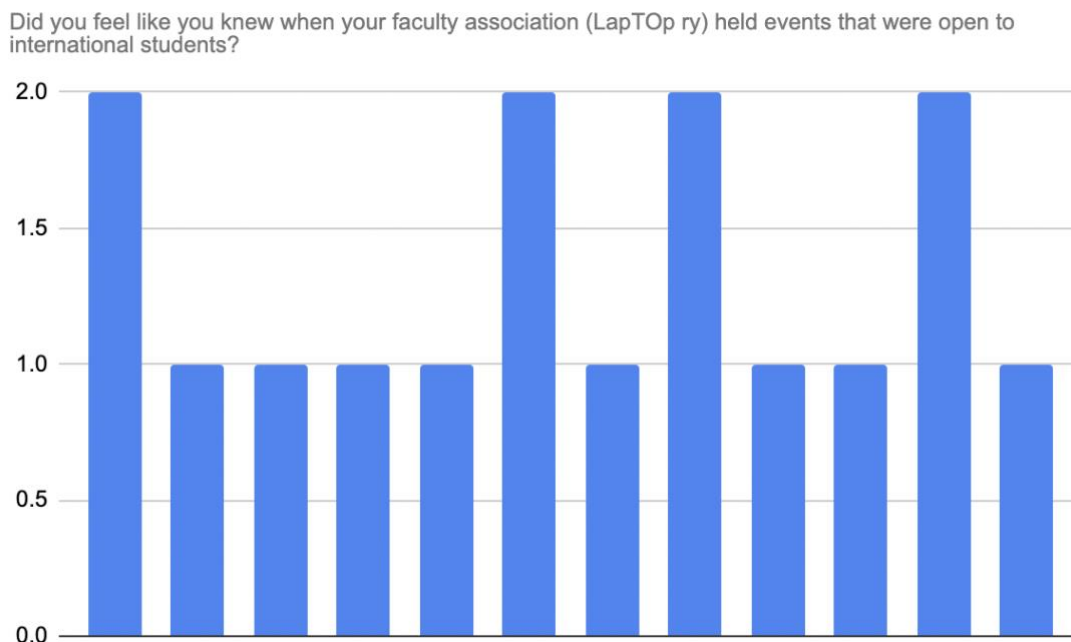


Figure 7. Questionnaire answer 4.

4.1.5 Connection opportunities with other students

Results lean toward moderate to low. This might indicate that while some students felt they had opportunities to connect, there is certainly room for improvement in fostering a cohesive and inclusive student community. A notable number of respondents were unaware of events, signaling a possible lack in communication efficacy regarding event promotion. This elucidates a potential gap in integrating international students into the communal and social aspects of academic life.

Do you feel like you had enough chances to connect with other business students while studying?

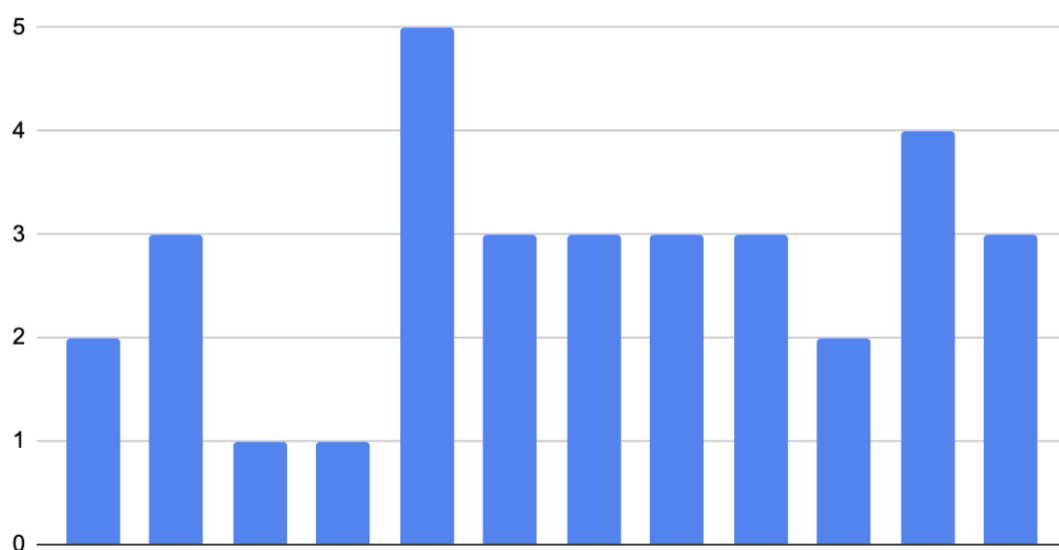


Figure 8. Questionnaire answer 5.

4.1.6 Social and academic integration

The survey unfolds a need for increased opportunities for social interaction and academic integration amongst student peers. Some respondents highlighted the desire for more platforms and events that facilitate interaction between Finnish and international students, reflecting an undercurrent of desire for holistic integration.

4.1.7 Suggestions for LapTop ry

Several respondents suggested more events aimed at both Finnish and English students, better communication (e.g., newsletter or other active messaging tool), and increased presence (like visiting classes to introduce themselves in the freshmen weeks).

Do you have any suggestions for how LapTop ry could better support international students in the future?

more events aimed at finnish and english students to get together to know eacother better

better communication? a newsletter or something

show up in classes and talk about themselves?

More communication channels than just instagram

Figure 9. Questionnaire answer 6.

4.1.8 Experience with academic support services

Several respondents expressed dissatisfaction or a lack of awareness regarding academic support services like student-tutoring, pin-pointing a critical area that warrants immediate attention and amplification. While many respondents were unaware or did not make use of such services, those who did mostly found them to be lacking or unsatisfactory.

What was your experience like with academic support services, such as student-tutoring?

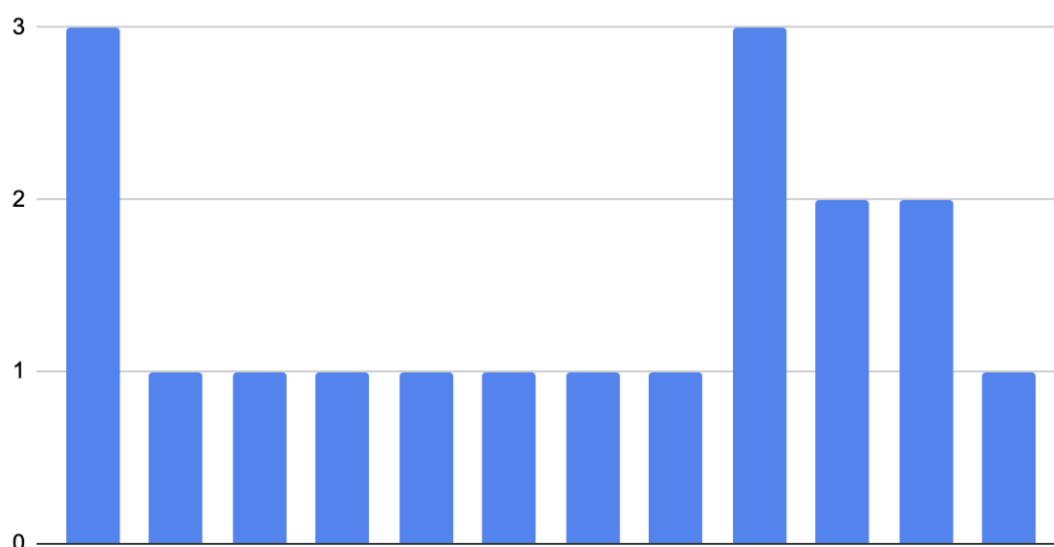


Figure 10. Questionnaire answer 7.

4.1.9 Feeling safe and supported on campus

While a segment of respondents felt safe and supported on campus, the data also surfaces a subset that felt otherwise. Additionally, there seems to be a gap in the awareness of how to address and whom to approach in instances of racism/harassment on university grounds.

Did you feel safe and supported while on campus?

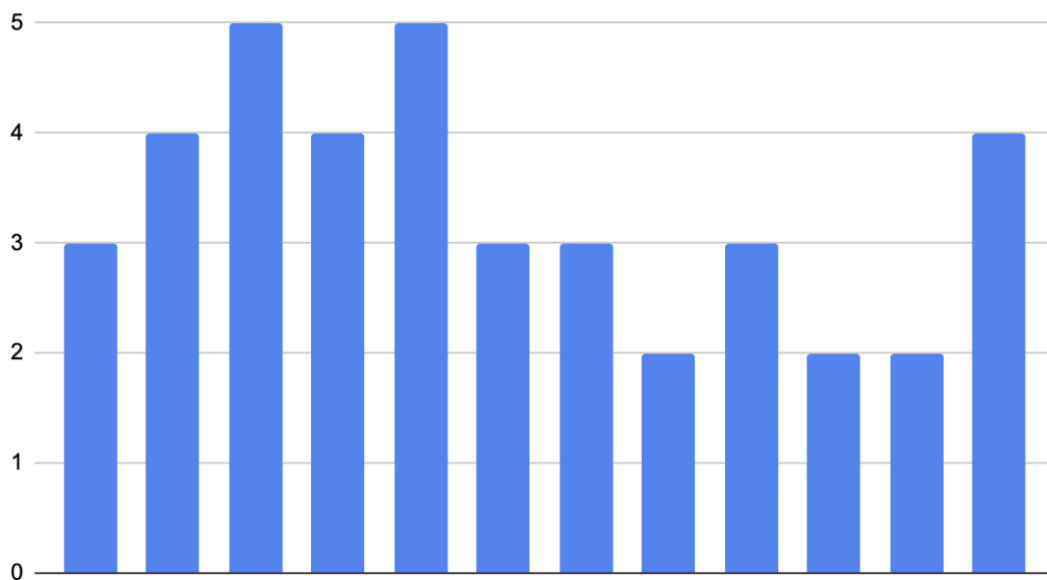


Figure 11. Questionnaire answer 8.

4.1.10 Recommending the faculty to others

Most students seem to have a neutral to positive view of the faculty, with a few exceptions.

Would you recommend this faculty to other international students?

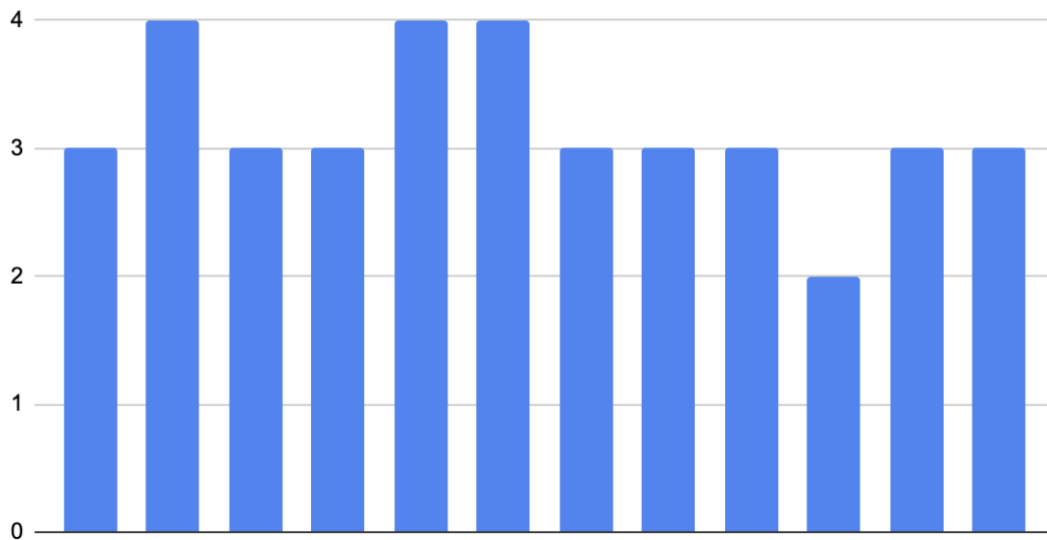


Figure 12. Questionnaire answer 9.

4.1.11 Language barriers

Data evokes the struggle some international students face due to language barriers, often attributed to educators' fluency in English. This highlights a multifaceted challenge affecting not only social integration but also academic assimilation and success. However LapTOP was not mentioned as having a language barrier.

Did you encounter any barriers during your studies because of your language?	If you encountered barriers, what were they?
3	
1	
4	some teachers not speaking good english
4	teachers not speaking fluent english
4	
1	
3	
3	
3	
2	
4	
3	

Figure 13. Questionnaire answer 10.

4.1.12 Open feedback

Open feedback and suggestions provide a mosaic of lived experiences, showcasing tangible gaps in communication, event promotion, academic support, and language proficiency within the faculty. There's a visible appeal for better integration strategies, more holistic communication channels, and enhanced support in both academic and practical aspects.

Open feedback about the questionnaire and LapTOP ry in general
-
Good survey
more communication platforms (like a tg chat that lutes has)

Figure 14. Questionnaire answer 11.

4.2 Interpretation of results

4.2.1 Awareness and engagement with LapTOp ry

The majority of respondents exhibited awareness of LapTOp ry, indicating successful outreach to some extent. However, while awareness was established, the depth of this knowledge and engagement appeared to be moderate, suggesting a need for improved communication and connection strategies targeted towards international students. Delving deeper into the responses, it was discerned that while most students had come across LapTOp ry in some capacity—be it through events, word of mouth, or online platforms—there remained a significant portion who were not actively participating in or benefiting from its initiatives.

This highlights not just a recognition of the organization's presence, but also poses questions about the relevance and appeal of LapTOp ry's activities to the broader international community. There might be various contributing factors, from the nature and format of events organized to the channels of communication utilized. The results underscore the importance of not just creating awareness, but also cultivating meaningful and lasting engagement among the target audience.

Implications:

Ambiguous identity: LapTOp ry may not have communicated its role and functions sufficiently to international students.

Engagement gap: Possible disconnection between LapTOp ry's offerings and the students' perception thereof.

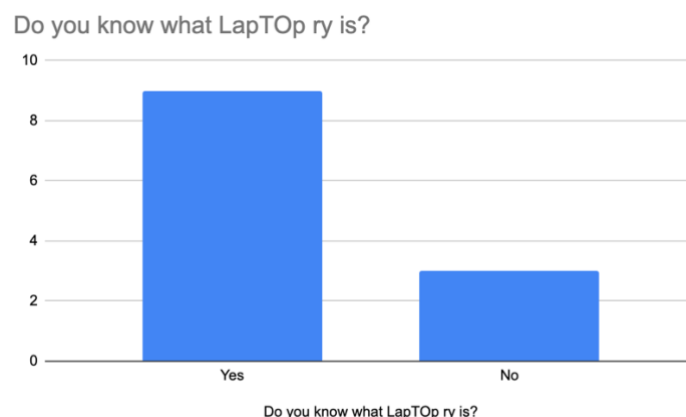


Figure 4. Questionnaire answer 1.

4.2.2 Support and services

The data points towards a consistent theme: while LapTOP ry makes strides in offering support and services, there's a significant gap between their provisions and student expectations. The feedback regarding practical support, especially concerning housing and transportation, presents an evident information gap. Some students feel adequately supported, while a substantial number believe that the current system could be far more effective and encompassing. Similarly, academic services, though present, seem to hover in a realm of ambiguity. Some students aren't even aware of their existence, and among those who are, the sentiment leans towards them being insufficient. It's clear that while services are in place, their depth, breadth, and communication require substantial revision. Efforts should not just revolve around service enhancement but also encompass increased awareness campaigns, ensuring every student knows where to go when in need. This multi-pronged approach will not only streamline the existing systems but will also reinforce LapTOP ry's commitment to the holistic well-being of international students.

Implications:

Inconsistency in support: The varied feedback could indicate differential experiences or perceptions of the support provided, and what can be offered.

Need for enhanced practical support: A definitive call for a review and possible ramp-up of the existing support mechanisms communication.

Academic support services: Ensuring academic support services are not only adequately available but also effectively communicated and accessible to international students.



Figure 5. Questionnaire answer 2.

4.2.3 Communication, Events, and Community Building

LapTOP ry's engagement with students in terms of communication was found to be moderate. Additionally, many students were unaware of events meant for them, highlighting the need for improved promotion and perhaps re-evaluation of the nature of these events. The feedback emphasizes the importance of fostering a cohesive student community, with many feeling the existing connection opportunities were insufficient. These events and community building events should be done in co-operation with tutors, to ensure that all students are aware of the events and community building evenings, such as freshmen nights.

Implications:

Communication mismatch: Diverse needs and preferences amongst international students might require multi-faceted communication strategies.

Engagement enhancement: Finding innovative and inclusive methods to actively involve international students can elevate their engagement level.

How did you find the level of communication and engagement with your faculty association (LapTOP ry)?

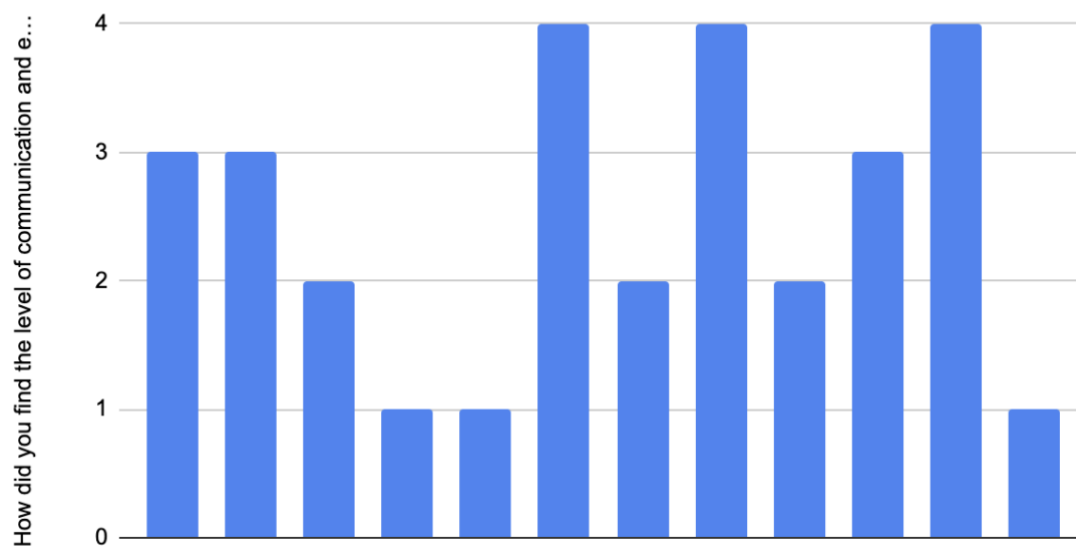


Figure 6. Questionnaire answer 3.

Did you feel like you knew when your faculty association (LapTOp ry) held events that were open to international students?

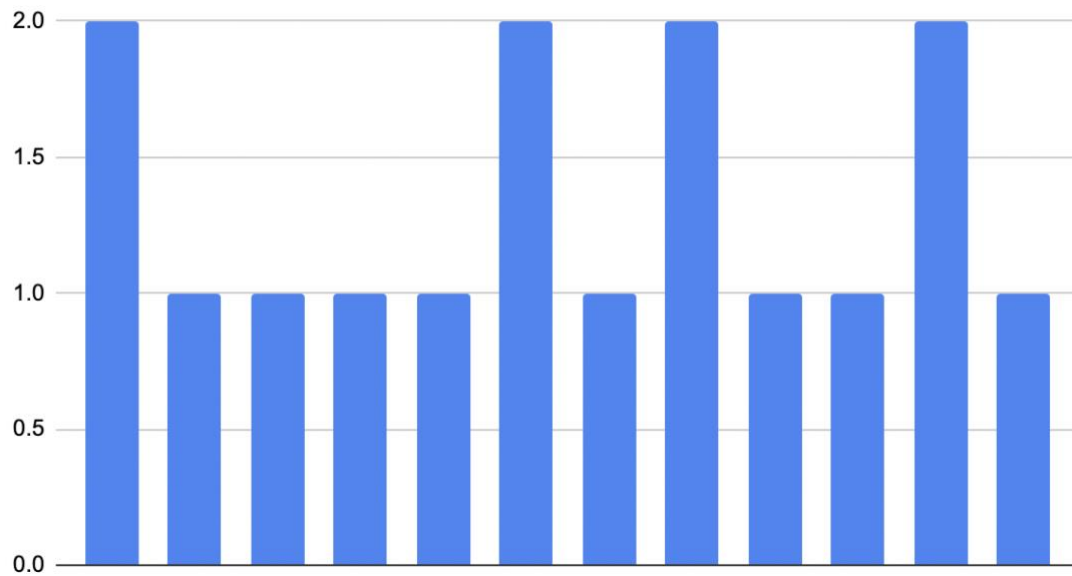


Figure 7. Questionnaire answer 4.

Do you feel like you had enough chances to connect with other business students while studying?

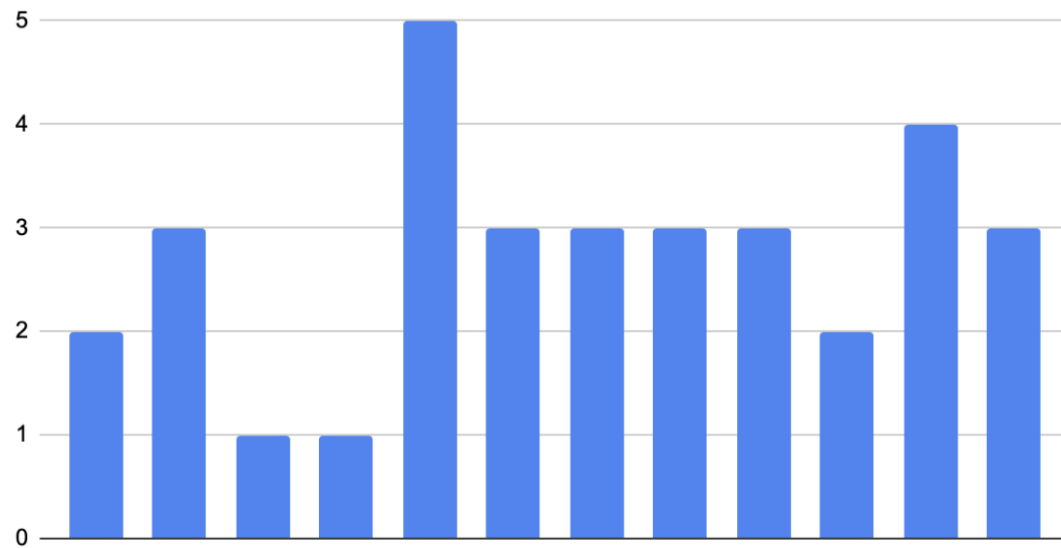


Figure 8. Questionnaire answer 5.

4.2.4 Safety, support and racism on-campus

Navigating the complexities of on-campus dynamics, the responses highlight a multi-faceted landscape. A comforting majority of students reported feeling secure, which speaks to the campus's existing measures. However, a concerning undercurrent emerges when one considers the sense of support—or the lack thereof. Many students are grappling with feelings of isolation and vulnerability, emphasizing the urgency for robust, reliable support structures.

A particularly alarming revelation is the uncertainty surrounding the recourse against racial harassment. Many students remain in the dark about avenues for voicing concerns or seeking redress, even though LapTop ry has designated contact personnel for harassment. This oversight signals the necessity of amplifying the visibility of such essential resources. By enhancing communication and ramping up awareness campaigns, LapTop ry can take decisive steps toward fostering an environment that not only guarantees physical safety but also ensures emotional well-being and a sense of belonging for every student.

Implications:

Visibility of events: The promotion and communication of events need enhancement to boost awareness and participation.

Inclusivity in events: Ensuring that events cater to the linguistic and cultural preferences of international students.

Communication: Ensuring that all students regardless of background are informed on who to contact if they encounter racist behaviour on-campus or at faculty events

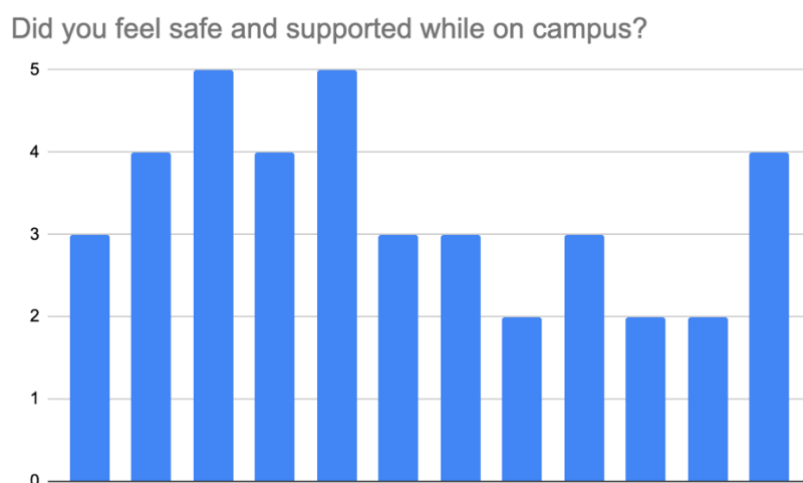


Figure 11. Questionnaire answer 8.

4.2.5 Language barriers

The landscape of international education is riddled with challenges, and one of the most pronounced among them is the issue of language. The data points toward an acute linguistic barrier, especially in academic contexts. While international students grapple with assimilating into a new culture, the lack of proficient English language skills among educators compounds their struggles. It's not merely about understanding lectures, but it's about fostering an environment where students feel understood and heard. This pressing concern has implications that reverberate beyond classrooms, influencing the overall academic experience and well-being of international students. Recognizing the gravity of this issue, it's imperative for LapTOP ry to channel these findings and advocate for enhanced language proficiency among educators. By initiating dialogues with the faculty association and fostering collaborations with key academic stakeholders like the faculty dean or degree manager, effective measures can be established to bridge this linguistic divide.

Implications:

Language proficiency: Assessing and ensuring the English proficiency of faculty engaging with international students, in collaboration with the faculty dean and/or degree manager.

Did you encounter any barriers during your studies because of your language?	If you encountered barriers, what were they?
3	
1	
4	some teachers not speaking good english
4	teachers not speaking fluent english
4	
1	
3	
3	
3	
2	
4	
3	

Figure 12. Questionnaire answer 10.

4.3 Connection to the theoretical framework

In assimilating the findings from the previous chapter, it is important to contextualize the practical experiences and perceptions of international students within the theoretical framework of Social Network Theory, specifically through the lens of homophily and mutuality theories. The existing data encompasses variances and navigates through the intricacies of interpersonal and intergroup relations within the academic life of LapTop ry.

Homophily in International Students' Networks

Homophily, expounded as the propensity for individuals to associate and bond with similar others, serves as a critical lens through which the findings can be scrutinized. International students, according to the survey data, evidenced a desire for enhanced connectivity, not only amongst themselves but notably, with Finnish students as well.

In the context of my thesis, this manifestation of homophily among international students becomes a focal point of understanding the dynamics of student networks. While the intrinsic gravitation towards like-minded peers provides comfort and a sense of belonging, it simultaneously raises questions about integration and cultural exchange within the academic setting. The data suggests that while international students do find solace in networks formed on shared backgrounds and experiences, there is a palpable yearning for deeper integration and connectivity with Finnish students.

To tackle these challenges, my thesis proposes initiating structured interventions that foster intercultural exchange. One potential solution could be the establishment of buddy programs, pairing international students with Finnish counterparts, facilitating mutual learning and exchange. Such programs could be structured around academic collaboration, cultural excursions, or even simple coffee meet-ups, aiming to dissolve the invisible barriers that exist.

Academic and Social Spheres

Within the academic and social spheres, homophily can inadvertently create siloed experiences, where international students, bound by common language and shared external cultural experiences, forge insular networks. This is subtly echoed in the data, where the appeal for more integrative events and platforms hints at existing divisions or separations in social spheres between international and Finnish students.

The quantitative and qualitative data analysis of my research further emphasized the palpable distance between these two student groups. The majority of international students

expressed feelings of being 'on the periphery,' with limited access to Finnish student-led events, academic collaborations, or social initiatives. It's not so much an overt exclusion but rather a byproduct of inherent cultural gravitations and language barriers.

Support Mechanisms and Integration

The support mechanisms and resources, when seen through a homophilic lens, potentially manifest in a manner that appeals predominantly to domestic students, exacerbating the segregation. The suggestion for more tailored communication channels and academic support that is cogent and communicated to international students underlines a probable divergence in the usability and accessibility of existing structures for different student clusters.

By deconstructing the current support structures, my research found that the overarching framework leans heavily towards the needs, preferences, and cultural nuances of the domestic student body. This predisposition, while ensuring comfort for one demographic, inadvertently creates barriers for international students, leading to feelings of isolation, academic challenges, and reduced opportunities for collaborative engagements.

The imperative, as highlighted in my thesis, is to pivot from a one-size-fits-all approach to a more inclusive and adaptable framework. By integrating feedback from international students, collated through extensive surveys and focused group discussions, LapTop ry can reimagine and recalibrate their support mechanisms. This revamped approach should encapsulate not only academic aid but also socio-cultural immersion programs, language support, and mentorship initiatives tailored for diverse student populations.

Mutuality and Reciprocal Engagements

Mutuality, a key theory in SNT, predicates the importance of reciprocal and bidirectional relationships and interactions within a network. Within the context of LapTop ry, mutuality could illuminate the dimensions of engagement, support, and collaborative involvement across diverse student groups.

An analysis of the data from LapTop ry highlighted that while there are numerous channels for communication and engagement, the depth and breadth of reciprocal interactions remain somewhat limited. This limitation not only hampers the flow of information but also curtails opportunities for shared learning and mutual enrichment. In practice, mutuality should mean that both international and local students actively participate, co-create, and influence the dynamics of their educational community.

Taking insights from the thesis findings, it becomes evident that for a truly mutualistic engagement within LapTOP ry, there's a need to foster platforms where students from diverse backgrounds can collaboratively brainstorm, ideate, and implement projects or initiatives. Such platforms would not only serve as venues for shared experiences but also become melting pots of varied cultural insights, academic perspectives, and innovative solutions.

In essence, the concept of mutuality and reciprocal engagements, as explored in this thesis, underscores the imperative of fostering an environment in LapTOP ry where interactions are not just transactional but transformational, leading to holistic development and enriching the academic experience for all members.

Engagement and Communication

The data varies in experiences concerning engagement and communication from LapTOP ry. The suggested improvement in communication channels, specifically tailored towards international students, hints at a lack of reciprocity in information dissemination and engagement. Mutuality, in this context, might advocate for a two-way communication street, wherein international students are not only recipients but active participants and contributors to the communicative flow (much like in social media).

This enhanced engagement model not only aligns with the ethos of mutuality but also champions the idea of inclusivity. By leveraging technology and designing intuitive communication platforms, institutions can pave the way for more interactive dialogues and constructive feedback mechanisms.

Moreover, the integration of international voices in these channels also ensures that their unique perspectives, challenges, and insights are woven into the fabric of the larger student community dialogue. By doing so, we move away from a top-down communication approach to a more lateral, peer-to-peer communication style. The ripple effect of this paradigm shift can manifest in the form of increased participation in events, constructive feedback loops, and a stronger sense of community among all students, regardless of their backgrounds.

The call for improved communication channels is not merely about transmitting information but also about fostering a space where every student feels seen, heard, and empowered to contribute to the collective student experience. This ethos of mutuality and active engagement stands at the core of my thesis project and is fundamental to fostering an inclusive academic community.

Academic and Social Interactions

Interestingly, the desire for more inclusive events and opportunities for interactions between Finnish and international students reveals a muted call for mutual interactions and exchanges. Mutuality theory might posit that such interactions could augment not only the social but also academic capital for all student demographics, fostering an environment where diverse perspectives and experiences are shared, valued, and mutually enriching.

Delving deeper, one can understand that these interactions are not merely about mingling at social gatherings but genuinely intertwining academic discourses and experiences. Finnish students stand to benefit from the diverse cultural and academic backgrounds that international students bring, leading to richer classroom discussions, group projects, and research collaborations. Similarly, international students can gain deeper insights into Finnish academic traditions, methodologies, and cultural nuances, enhancing their overall academic journey.

Homophily, Mutuality, and International Students' Experiences

The realm of higher education is undergoing rapid globalization, with international students forming a significant portion of the student body in many institutions. Understanding their experiences becomes vital, not only from a welfare perspective but also to foster inclusive academic environments. In this context, the concepts of homophily and mutuality offer valuable insights.

Homophily and mutuality theories can pave a pathway towards an enriched understanding of international students' experiences and challenges. While homophily can partly explain the existing social and perhaps academic exclusion, mutuality provides a lens that reframes these challenges as opportunities for enhanced two-way engagement and reciprocal enrichment.

The interplay of homophily and mutuality offers a nuanced understanding of international students' experiences. By embracing the principles of both, institutions can create environments where all students, irrespective of their backgrounds, feel valued, integrated, and enriched. The focus should shift from mere integration to mutual enrichment, paving the way for holistic academic and cultural experiences.

Enhancing Mutual Understanding

In the diverse academic environment of modern universities, fostering mutual understanding is paramount. This becomes even more critical when considering student organizations like LapTOPY, which serves as a bridge between the faculty and the international student community. The essence of mutual understanding goes beyond mere

communication; it encompasses genuine empathy, inclusivity, and a collective pursuit of shared objectives.

The platforms used by organizations like LapTOp ry, are often designed for information dissemination, which can be restructured to promote dialogue. Interactive web (ex. social media), student-led discussion events, and culturally diverse workshops can serve as arenas where students from different backgrounds come together, share their experiences, and learn from one another.

Bridging Homophilic Gaps

Homophily, the tendency for individuals to form connections with those similar to themselves, can inadvertently create silos within student communities. To foster a holistic and inclusive academic environment, it's imperative to recognize and bridge these homophilic gaps, ensuring a seamless integration of diverse student populations. This could manifest in academically and socially integrative events, mentorship programs, and support structures that intentionally intertwine the experiences and journeys of international and domestic students.

Beyond the academic realm, it's vital to promote social interactions that meld different student groups. International food festivals (or sitz), multicultural music nights, or sports events that mix teams with students from various backgrounds can be potent tools to foster camaraderie and diminish the effects of homophily.

4.4 Conclusion

The canvas of international students' experiences, painted through the survey data, reflects multifaceted and nuanced experiences that are embedded within the larger social network of the university and LapTOp ry. Through the theoretical lenses of homophily and mutuality, the experiences, challenges, and suggestions proffered by the respondents can be critically engaged with, offering a rich soil from which strategies for enhanced integration, support, and mutual enrichment can be cultivated within the academic community.

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Section 3 of 4

Support while studying



Description (optional)



What was your experience like with academic support services, such as student-tutoring? *

1 2 3 4 5

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Didn't get any support

Got enough support

Were there any resources or support services that you wish were available to you as an international student? *

Long answer text

Did you feel safe and supported while on campus? *

1 2 3 4 5

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

No

Yes



Did you know who to contact in case you encountered racism/harassment while on university grounds? *

1 2

○ ○

No

Yes

Would you recommend this faculty to other international students? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Yes

Did you encounter any barriers during your studies because of your language? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Yes, lots of barriers

If you encountered barriers, what were they?

Long answer text

Section 4 of 4

Almost done!



Description (optional)

Open feedback about the questionnaire and LapTop ry in general *

Long answer text