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# **Exploring the Reasons for Limited International Mobility of SAMK Students**

DEGREE PROGRAMME IN INTERNATIONAL TOURISM  
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## ABSTRACT

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The objective of this thesis was to investigate the reasons of limited outgoing student mobility in Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK). This was done in order to give the International Office of SAMK a bigger picture of the reasons of students' limited participation in international study exchange and traineeship programmes.

This research-based thesis was focused on both qualitative and quantitative methods, having collected empirical data within an online survey via Google Forms. The qualitative data was focused on internationalization and its importance on individuals and higher education.

The survey was conducted in order to see the factors of the limited mobility directly from the students, to be able to provide the commissioner reliable recommendations for increasing the international mobility. The survey was sent directly to all of SAMK's students through their student e-mails, and after almost two weeks (22.04.-05.05.2024) of response time, the survey had received 383 responses.

The survey produced a good number of responses, from which the author was able to come up with recommendations in order to help the commissioner have a clear understanding of the actual reasons of the students, and, if necessary, to put them into use.

Overall, the students require personal reflection from former exchange students, so that it could open up the whole exchange experience for them. Moving abroad is not easy, therefore they need to have someone constantly assisting them (e.g. with accommodation). Other reasons why students do not consider exchange programmes are family obligations and insufficient funds.

Keywords: International Student Mobility, Internationalization in Higher Education, Student Exchange

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

International student mobility has evolved into becoming an important aspect in the lives of most young adults around the world. In Europe, it has started to become almost common that students mix education at home with several weeks, semesters or even years of studying abroad. Students participate in international mobility programmes for many reasons, such as personal growth, improving existing skills or developing new ones, learning languages, or overall gaining general expertise of living, studying, or working abroad (Zimmermann, 2017.)

Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture supports the internationalization of higher education institutions through global networking. Finland has created eight international partnership networks for its universities. These networks aim to connect Finnish institutions with international partners, promoting collaboration in research, development, innovation, and education. The purpose is to improve Finland's reputation in higher education and establish a stronger global network (Ministry of Education and Culture.)

This thesis investigates outgoing student mobility in higher education institutions, more specifically in Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK). The mobility periods can include study exchange programmes or professional internships abroad. The International Office plays an important role in assisting students who are interested in student mobility; therefore, the staff can always be considered a point of contact.

Along with essential details on all international student mobility options at SAMK and their many varieties, the theory of the thesis will also address the significance of internationalization in general, for individuals and higher education institutions. The research part of the thesis will be conducted for the

International Office of SAMK, exploring the reasons of students limited international mobility. The research data will be collected using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, specifically a survey, which will be completed by students who have not participated in a study exchange or traineeship abroad.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Thesis Objectives and Research Questions

The main concept of this research is international student mobility of SAMK students. Student mobility is important for students and individuals, therefore SAMK students from all degree programmes are eligible and recommended to go abroad. The aim of the thesis is to find out the reasons for the students' low participation in the exchange programmes, as well as to seek all the possible solutions in order to attract students to go abroad. According to Education Statistics Finland (2023), SAMK's international student mobility is classified amongst the last 10 universities in Finland, as it can be seen from Figure 1.



Figure 1. Degree students' outgoing international mobility.

This study is conducted utilizing qualitative and quantitative research methods, to explore the reasons for SAMK students' limited mobility. Moreover, by deploying the above-mentioned research methods, the author will develop strategies and initiatives to help the staff of the International Office of SAMK to encourage students to participate in international mobility programmes.

This thesis will answer the following research question: "What are the primary factors that influence SAMK students negatively, as a result of them not participating in international mobility programmes?". Moreover, the thesis will also try to answer the following question: "What methods can SAMK's International Office staff rely on, in order to encourage and support students to be involved in international mobility programmes?"

When implementing the new approaches found by the results of this research, the international mobility of SAMK students will have the opportunity to grow significantly.

## 2.2 Research Methods

This thesis is a research-based thesis, therefore most of the information found in the study will be based on qualitative research. Despite the fact that most information is secondary data analysis, a survey will also be conducted, therefore quantitative data will also be used within the thesis.

Any research in which the author's methodology differs from statistical or quantitative methodologies can be considered qualitative research. Since there are several approaches to conducting qualitative research, including phenomenological, ethnographic, grounded theory, historical, case study, and action research, qualitative data is typically flexible. To use them successfully, the author needs to become familiar with the majority of them. Because it can be integrated with quantitative techniques, qualitative research is beneficial. Essentially, the researcher aims to obtain the necessary data from a certain target group (Khan, 2014.)

In science research, surveys, or questionnaires, are a common method to gather information. The goal of using this method of quantitative data collection is to ensure that the author obtains the most accurate responses through the survey. The main goal is also that the data would be as accurate and produce consistent findings every time. Compared to other research methods, they can also be simpler to conduct, as they can be made completely online. Moreover, using a survey, the author can control the scalability in order to match the research (Taherdoost, 2016.)

This research will focus on finding out the reasons of students' unwillingness to go abroad, then studying that as closely as possible, in order to understand the students on a deeper level before making any assumptions on their reasoning. Moreover, after meticulously analyzing the survey responses, the author will proceed to categorize the responses in a way that the commissioner would understand the reasons, and then think of possibilities the commissioner can provide the students, in order to help them decide their possible participation in international exchange programmes.

### 3 COMMISSIONER

Satakunta University of Applied Sciences is an international industrial higher education institution of about 7,400 students and 500 employees. SAMK has campuses in four different cities of the Satakunta region – Pori, Rauma, Kankaanpää and Huittinen. As for degree programmes, there are a total of 40, from which 29 are in Finnish, and 11 in English (SAMK website, 2024.)

SAMK is the highest quality teaching university in Finland, having been ranked first four times a year in AVOP's feedback questionnaire, most recent one being in 2021 (SAMK website 2024). The AVOP questionnaire is a survey that all of the graduating students fill upon graduation, "evaluating and providing feedback on their education." (www.avop.fi)

The vision of the university is that every one of their students will be employed, and according to statistics, SAMK graduates are the most employed among the universities of applied sciences outside the Helsinki Area. The motto of the university is fin. "Katse tulevaisuuteen", eng. "Think future". The International Relations Office of SAMK acts as the commissioner for this research (SAMK website, 2024.)

The International Relations team is responsible for making mobility possible at SAMK. They offer guidance regarding any kind of issue either to staff members or to students. They have several staff members, with each and every one taking care of their own work tasks (SAMK website, 2024.)

In addition to handling matters related to exchange students and programmes, the International Relations team also handles international degree students matters and their welcoming to Finland, helping them and providing guidance upon arrival and after, making sure that their social integration into SAMK goes as smoothly as possible. Moreover, SAMK has international partnerships, and there are international visitors and delegations all year round (SAMK website, 2024.)

## 4 INTERNATIONAL SAMK

### 4.1 Overview of International SAMK

The International Relations Office of SAMK is operated by a dedicated team of specialists that play the central role in coordinating and assisting students and staff members interested in going abroad. The team consists of multiple members, each up with their own specific tasks and responsibilities to ensure the proper management of international mobility. The International Relations Office is also responsible for sharing information about mobility, grants and all the possible options for outgoing exchange. Currently, there are only 4 staff members working exclusively with international mobility in the International Office (SAMK Website, 2024.)

Furthermore, the International Relations Office develops international university partnerships and manages student exchange programmes, along with other mobility opportunities. The international community of SAMK is comprised of over 1000 international degree students representing around 100 nationalities. The International Relations Office provides constant support for international students, taking into account pre-arrival guidance and assistance throughout all of their study time (SAMK Website, 2024.)

SAMK provides a wide range of internationalization initiatives, while also promoting intercultural awareness through specific programmes and courses, such as language studies and specialized winter and summer schools (Oiva, 2024.)

### 4.2 Internationalization Opportunities at SAMK

In SAMK, it is possible for all students to complete part of their studies abroad, by either doing a study exchange or practical exchange. There are several possibilities of internationalization at SAMK, with the most common one being

the Erasmus+ programme, with most of the exchange students heading to European countries (Oiva, 2024.)

Furthermore, there is Nordplus (for the Nordic countries) and Magellan (for the United States, Mexico, Costa Rica and South Korea). There are also partnerships with certain Asian institutions, with which SAMK has bilateral agreements. With all these programmes, there are also grants that the student gets for the time of the exchange (Oiva, 2024.)

The students also have the possibility of going abroad independently, as freemovers, but in this case the student may need to cover the possible tuition fees (Oiva, 2024.)

The Baltic University Programme is part of the international networks and cooperation programmes, organizing different types of events, such as workshops and courses, for students, staff members and researchers of higher education. The National Agency for Education supports and promotes international cooperation among higher education institutions through a variety of financial initiatives. Network cooperation is a vital component of national and international initiatives (SAMK webpage, 2024.)

SAMK is also a member of the West Finland higher education institutions network. There are networks tailored to particular fields, such as TURID, ENNElaunch, ENPHElaunch, Businetlaunch and NIBSlaunch. Together, these institutions plan collaborative projects and apply for mobility funding and curriculum development (SAMK webpage, 2024.)

#### 4.3 Study Exchange

An exchange programme implies that for a selected period, the students of two universities from two different countries have the opportunity to be students in their home university, while also studying at the partner university. Thus, students of the home university have the opportunity to become exchange students of the partner university for a certain period of time, while opening

new international horizons. This is made possible by the partner agreements universities have with each other (Atalar, 2020.)

The study activities the students and trainees are offered must be included in the students' study programmes. Before any activities begin, a Learning Agreement must be signed by the student, and the sending and receiving organizations. This agreement will outline the educational components that the student will complete at the receiving institution, the educational components that will be replaced in the student's degree at the sending institution after successfully completing the study programme abroad, and the rights and obligations of each party (Erasmus.eu.)

Study exchange does not have to lengthen the original study period of a student, as long as the studies are planned correctly since the beginning. (Oiva, 2024) In Finland, all of the students receive the KELA (fi. Kansaneläkelaitos, eng. Social Insurance Institution of Finland) student financial aid monthly, as soon as they complete at least 5 credits every study month, and at least 20 credits each academic year (Kela.fi, 2024.)

All European countries do not necessarily have courses in English, and this is something all of the students need to be careful with. Whenever planning an exchange, the students need to be well aware of the courses and how they fit into each one's curricula (Oiva, 2024.)

#### 4.4 Traineeship Abroad

Similarly, as to study exchange, if the student chooses to plan their traineeship abroad, it does not have to lengthen the study time, as well as there is a training coordinator that can help the student with planning it. Most of the things are similar to study exchange, including the Kela benefits (Oiva, 2024.)

Moreover, in order to be able to get benefits from SAMK and Erasmus, the traineeship placement should not be any shorter than 2 months. The

traineeship can also be paid by the receiving country, if that is possible, and that will not affect the grant the student gets from SAMK (Oiva, 2024)

There are some traineeship places that SAMK has partnered with, most of them being for Wellbeing and Healthcare students, but these can not be found in every degree programme yet. Therefore, the students will most likely need to find themselves an appropriate place to do their traineeship on their own. For Sea Captains and Maritime Engineers, the training places are directly arranged by SAMK (Oiva, 2024.)

Whenever the student has found a suitable training placement, that needs to be approved by the training coordinator, before signing any kind of contract or agreement. The training place needs to understand all the rules and regulations of SAMK and Erasmus, and they need to fill out all the necessary forms provided exclusively by the student to them. The students need to find the forms by themselves from Oiva (Oiva, 2024.)

#### 4.5 SAMK's Erasmus+ Policy Statement

SAMK is constantly expanding cooperation with European partners, by launching new double degree programmes across many fields of study. The new strategy of SAMK is to include one double degree possibility in every international degree programme, as well as increasing the number of international agreements for master's degrees (SAMK Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-2027). Currently, SAMK has three double degree partnerships in Europe (Belgium, France and Germany) and four outside Europe (three in China, and one in Namibia). (SAMK Webpage, 2024)

A double degree is essentially obtaining two degrees when graduating, one from SAMK, and one from the partner institution. Taking a double degree is worth taking, it enhances skills deeper than a usual exchange programme. This is because the institutions work together in order to have the students take courses, train and write the thesis within both institutions. A double degree

can help an individual's possibilities for PhD studies and adds a lot of value to one's academic achievements (SAMK Webpage, 2024.)

SAMK also develops BIP's (*Blended Intensive Programmes*), student projects and online cooperation with international partners, in order to give students possibilities for internationalization (SAMK Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-2027). A Blended Intensive Programme is an Erasmus+ coordinated programme, which includes the use of online cooperation in terms of learning and teaching. A BIP can also be referred to as a short blended intensive programme, as the physical component of the programme usually lasts from 5 to 30 days. Regarding the virtual component, which is mandatory in order to organize a BIP, there is no time limitation. Moreover, in order to make a BIP happen, there should be "at least three higher education institutions, coming from at least three different EU Member States and third countries associated to the Programme." (European Commission, 2024)

Exchange is possible in all degree programmes at SAMK, be it study exchange or practical training abroad. Disabled students are offered even more assistance in finding suitable places for internationalization. SAMK teachers and staff are constantly given information about exchange possibilities, in order to encourage the students to go abroad. Moreover, they are themselves encouraged to implement common courses with international partners, in order to boost intercultural and pedagogical skills (SAMK Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-2027.)

Erasmus+ exchange programmes provide opportunities for SAMK students to expand their international experiences. Students who complete a placement or summer job abroad often stay in their host country for longer periods of time, establishing long-term networks with European colleagues for future employment opportunities (SAMK Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-2027.)

## 5 INTERNATIONALIZATION

### 5.1 Internationalization for Individuals

Internationalization means all the activities that take place in educational institutions, the purpose of which is to make international activities part of the organization's normal activities. The goals, means and forms of internationalization vary by level of education, and it also covers domestic internationalization (Siltala, 2013.)

The benefits of internationalization for individuals have been studied extensively, and the results are consistent. Language and intercultural skills always improve when being in contact with international people, and they are always a good skill to enhance. The skills and competences of individuals, such as personal, social, and entrepreneurial skills had improved, according to the evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). The LLP was a programme within the European Union that covered all levels of education, and in which participated individuals from all over EU countries (at the time) and other countries. It is not running anymore today, but the implementation of the LLP has been used when tailoring the next Erasmus+ programme, utilizing the documents and practices (Siltala, 2013.)

Hand in hand with internationalization goes globalization, which is usually connected to similar issues, such as political or cultural. Globalization promotes the exchange of cultural values, after which the term “globalization of culture” has been added in the late 80’s. Through cultural interaction, which is the concept of individuals from different cultures coming into contact, people can extend their preferences and engage with different cultures. Moreover, combining different cultures gives individuals the opportunity to embrace sensitivity and awareness, which helps with forming perceptions and interactions with others. The media has been a big factor in helping the cultural exchange migration (Sadykova, 2014.)

Moreover, since the world's population grows, and people are more interconnected, intercultural competence acquires more utility and importance. Intercultural competence essentially signifies the awareness of one's culture, combined with the willingness to learn about different cultures, as well as engage with them. (Deardorff, 2011) Intercultural competence is essential for communities to develop. It is swiftly turning into a need for daily life (Irving, 2010.)

Excessive cultural interaction between people can be a negative aspect as well. New cultural practices may take dominance over previous ones, essentially borrowing traditions from one another; this phenomenon is called "cultural diffusion", and it has occurred multiple times in the past, such as throughout the European colonization of Latin America and Africa (Sadykova, 2014.)

In a research study conducted in 2013 by Demos Helsinki, to which there were invited 282 companies and 1770 students as sample, it became clear that the value of international skills was not properly recognized. The international experts were viewed solely as mobile individuals with language skills and cultural awareness, but most employers were unaware of the true meaning of internationalization and its impact on individuals (Leppänen et al, 2013.)

Overall, employers value reliability, the capacity to seek and process information, and problem-solving abilities as key recruitment requirements. According to the study conducted by Demos Helsinki in 2013, employers who value foreign capabilities also prioritize language proficiency and exchange study experience. Employers who prioritize international experts in their recruitment process also place a high importance on networking skills, inventiveness, and openness to new experiences. In other words, while most people understand what internationalization means, they are unaware of all its advantages (Leppänen et al, 2013.)

## 5.2 Internationalization in Higher Education

Internationalization has always been present in higher education, but it has only started to evolve about 30 to 40 years ago. Byram (2006) explains the phenomenon as fast growing, and states that it is starting to be easier to study abroad, especially in the European Union and its countries, where more and more students are encouraged to participate in international exchange programmes. Despite the age of the reference, the observation is still true today, highlighting the continuous need for better economic opportunities that come with acquiring a degree abroad, rather than domestically. The internationalization of higher education is a constantly developing trend, therefore there are plenty of approaches on how to achieve performance and competitiveness in international student mobility (Byram, 2006.)

Most students moving abroad to study are from Asian and African countries, and they usually move to Europe and North America. Especially in African countries, student mobility strives to be an important factor of the whole continent's higher education matters. Quite many African countries have developed certain agencies under higher education stakeholders, in order to make it easier for them to create partnerships. African countries create international partnerships mostly with the Global North, in which Europe and Finland take part. Moreover, according to Tamrat & Teferra (2018), previous internationalization can also contribute to the growth of PhD studies (Deardorff, 2021.)

Internationalization of higher education institutions can frequently be seen as a potential response to globalization, for example to be a way of making higher education institutions more efficient as a response to the globalization of societies, cultures and economies, as the definition of internationalization is “a process more readily steerable by governments than is globalization”. (van Der Wende, 2007)

As internationalization is a constantly evolving phenomenon, there has been a shift in the focus of higher education institutions and on what they consider

internationalization, and what is hoped to achieve via it. According to Knight (2014), the growing trend of international education includes branch campuses, double degrees, offered by multiple universities, virtual courses and further flexible options for the students. These factors have been important for higher education institutions, as it has given them the opportunity to attract more students, therefore leading to success related to internationalization.

Below, in Figure 2, we can see the two pillars of internationalization, at home and abroad/cross-border. As it can get difficult for some students to go abroad, therefore not being able to experience international experiences, internationalization at home has been developed. According to Beelen and Jones (2015), internationalization at home is “the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments”.



Figure 2. Two pillars of internationalization: at home and abroad. (From: "Virtual Internationalization in Higher Education" by Bruhn, E. 2020.)

Internationalization at home emphasizes integrating international perspectives into the curriculum within a university setting. Internationalization at home goes beyond serving only domestic students, reaching to encourage a more global

learning environment. The key here is ensuring some form of international activity, as shown in Figure 2 (Bruhn, 2020.)

Employers value and prioritize international student mobility experiences. They consider alumni with such experiences as particularly qualified for international work and generally more capable than applicants that have never taken part in such a project. This was found to be one of the main reasons of students' participation in international mobility programmes on the whole. (Campus International, 2022) In the globalized labor market, international student mobility is frequently marketed as a method to improve employment after graduation (Van Mol, 2017.)

## 6 FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENT MOBILITY

When considering migrating abroad, there are two types of causes that drive people to the need for change: push and pull factors. Essentially, push factors are those that impact migration and cause people to leave their native countries, such as low living standards, a lack of shelter, food, and employment opportunities. Pull factors are those that attract people to a certain location or country, such as economic reasons, improved living circumstances and standards, cultural considerations, and so on. There are many research papers stating that global migration is increasing continuously, due to the above-mentioned push and pull factors (Urbański, 2022.)

In the following chapter, the author will briefly explain, from a student's perspective, a few of the reasons that may discourage students from having the courage to go abroad.

## 6.1 Economic Factors

If a student decides to travel abroad, they must be aware of the associated costs. SAMK provides all outgoing exchange students with a mobility grant, the size of which is determined by the duration of the exchange, the destination country, the academic year, and the mobility programme. In the Erasmus+ programme, countries are divided into two groups based on their cost of living. The first category's monthly allowance is 540€, while the second is 490€. For BIP's, students can be granted 79€/day, if the exchange period meets the conditions of the Finnish National Agency for Education.

If the outgoing student pays tuition, they must pay it to SAMK as they would normally do, but they do not need to pay any to the host university. Moreover, there are additional grants funded by Erasmus+, that are offered to the students with less possibilities of participating in exchange programmes. These additional grants are 250€/month for semester/academic year exchanges, and 150€ for traineeships. (Juhantalo, 2024)

Below, we can see the requirements for additional support (Oiva, 2024.)

### **Additional grants in the Erasmus+ programme**

The Erasmus+ programme also supports exchanges for students who have fewer opportunities to participate in the programme. They will receive an additional grant. In Finland, these groups include:

- students with a family (student has a dependent minor child or children)
- carers (students who have a contract with the municipality for caring for their close relative).
- students with an EU disability card, or entitled to one.
- students with disabilities and functional impairments (at least moderate functional impairment).
- students with serious or chronic health problems (at least moderate disability).
- students enjoying international protection (refugees, asylum seekers, beneficiaries of international, subsidiary or temporary protection (students holding the relevant residence permit or refugee travel document). For more information:  
<https://intermin.fi/maahanmuutto/turvapaikanhakijat-ja-pakolaiset>

Figure 3. Additional grants in the Erasmus+ programme

These grants can compensate for certain travel and accommodation costs, but they are not enough for living. In Finland, students can get multiple financial aids while studying, such as study grant, housing supplement and government guarantee for student loan. (Kela, 2024)

If a student has another occupation other than studying, it can make a big difference. A student who is unemployed is more likely to make use of their money in some other manner than a student that receives financial aid or has a salary. Regardless, if a student is not working over the period of their studies, it might get difficult for them to save enough money in order to move to another country. As for starters, it can be expensive and challenging to locate cheap solutions for apartments or student accommodations, thus financial concerns may be the primary barrier for students who would otherwise wish to take part in exchange programmes.

## 6.2 Personal Factors

It can be quite tough for people to entirely move to another country, especially from Finland, which is, according to the World Happiness Report, the happiest country in the world, and has been for the past seven years as of 2024. Of course, family plays a vital role in people's lives, and some people may be hesitant to leave their relatives and migrate abroad. Furthermore, moving to another country can be rather lonely, especially if the environment is strange and unsuitable for an individual (Lawrence-Smith, 2013.)

Furthermore, university students may have their own children, which can make the situation even tougher. Moving with a young child and being responsible for both your own and the child's lodging in the new surroundings may be extremely stressful. Additionally, moving with children requires them to learn another language, attend kindergarten or school, along with making new friends. Children's healthcare might also be more expensive in other countries,

thus without help, it can be difficult for a student to take their life into their own hands and migrate with their children (Lawrence-Smith, 2013.)

Students' minds are also preoccupied with health and safety concerns; people with pre-existing medical conditions may be concerned about access to proper medical care and the possible difficulties of maintaining their health in a foreign country. Furthermore, safety concerns about the host country, including crime, politics or certain cultural matters, might cause anxiety that overcomes the benefits of studying abroad (Lawrence-Smith, 2013.)

### 6.3 Social Factors

Intercultural communication can be stressful, particularly when students travel to countries or areas that are dominated by other cultures. One of the most common concerns among students traveling abroad is learning to communicate in the host language and not having enough time to become connected with the area. It is most likely that the mother tongue of the outgoing students is not English, therefore it can be quite difficult for them to communicate to other people (Gan, 2022.)

In order to be able to adapt to a new country, a person must have a positive and open mindset, together with healthy self-esteem and strong communication abilities. It might be hard for students to have a cheerful attitude and willingness to try new things, whenever having to get familiar with a new country and study environment, as well. Furthermore, because it is necessary to create a social network, which helps students feel like they belong in the new environment, it might be difficult to constantly seek connections with people who are willing to offer support and understanding, but it is very beneficial in the long term (Korhonen, 2015.)

Exposure to favorable experiences of friends, family, relatives, or other contacts that have participated in exchange programmes or lived abroad can

have a major effect on a person's desire to go abroad themselves. This social effect provides encouragement, increasing their confidence and enthusiasm to go on similar experience. This is called “chain migration” and is essentially the concept of “new migrants making use of relationships with previous migrants to learn about opportunities in the host country and to receive instrumental support for the journey, initial accommodation and employment.” (Herz et al, 2019)

#### 6.4 Cultural Factors

People who move to new cultures, whether permanently or temporarily, all face the same challenge, which is adapting to a new way of life. This can be especially problematic for students that want to go abroad. Students at SAMK come from a variety of nations and cultures, and moving to Finland may have been difficult enough for them, so some may not want to go through the adaptation process again. Furthermore, Finnish students or those who have lived in Finland for a long time may be hesitant to learn about new cultures. Some factors that people may be concerned about when moving abroad include deculturation, which refers to letting go of certain features of their own culture, and acculturation, which refers to adopting aspects of the new culture (Kim, 2017.)

Nearly everyone who moves abroad experiences culture shock, which is the outcome of a collision between two cultures. Differences in views, attitudes, assumptions, and ideas can all contribute to culture shock. Culture shock can be increased by a foreign language, as well as differences in people's attitudes and habits. Some people may face mental difficulties such as insecurity, anxiety, and sadness, while others may be physically affected because of cultural exchange. According to Korhonen (2015), culture shock symptoms may include trouble concentrating or sleeping, as well as a loss of appetite (Korhonen, 2015.)

When in a foreign culture it is crucial to adjust to the local lifestyle and environment. It is not an easy process; it takes time and effort to understand and assimilate all of the new and unique aspects of another culture. Moreover, before having to move to another country and get to know the culture, it is often recommended to seek knowledge about the destination. People tend to think that if the culture is comparable to their own, the cultural differences may be minor, but this is not always the case (Korhonen, 2018.)

The goal of any individual thinking about going overseas should undoubtedly be to understand how to adjust to life in the country of destination, thereby avoiding humiliating or unpolite circumstances that can be difficult for both the newcomer and the host (Korhonen, 2018.)

## 6.5 Educational Factors

According to Finnish National Agency for Education (2021), previous research has identified smooth academic progress and support services provided by higher education institutions, such as libraries and IT services, as crucial variables in the integration of foreign degree students who have come in Finland. Moreover, the cultural academic informality as well as the minimal hierarchy between institutional staff and students have been noticed to help students adapt to their new surroundings. This is usual for Finnish students, and now for international students living in Finland; thus, it can be strange to be introduced to another culture where everything is backwards from Finland, especially in a higher education institution. On the other side, this gap in academic culture can be more suitable for other students.

One of the primary reasons for limited mobility is that educational institutions no longer invest in communicating explicitly about organizing exchange programmes, therefore leaving students uninformed about all of the available options. Furthermore, a period abroad as part of the curriculum in degree programmes has been requested, ensuring that students would not be

delaying their graduation, and possibly giving them more interest towards the subject. (Opetushallitus, 2019)

In students' personal study plans, there is not enough assistance given for going on exchange, thus there is a danger that students will be unable to incorporate the studies they take abroad into their personal study plan in Finland. The Finnish National Agency for Education's emphasis on faster graduation may make it more difficult for students to study abroad, discouraging them from participating in exchange programmes. Students frequently feel pressured to graduate soon, which reduces their desire to participate in exchange programmes. (Opetushallitus, 2019)

## 7 SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION

In order to enhance the reliability of the research, the author decided to elaborate a study (Appendix 2) aimed at clarifying the factors of students' limited international mobility, coming directly from the target group. The target audience of the survey were all the students of SAMK, from all campuses (Pori, Rauma, Huittinen, Kankaanpää).

### 7.1 Survey Insights

The survey was sent through a mailing list, with the help of the commissioner of the thesis. Considering the author was looking for to incorporate as many perspectives as possible to conduct an accurate and reliable study, the survey was made available in both Finnish and English to increase the number of respondents. The survey was conducted using a voluntary response sampling method. After responding to the survey, the respondents had the possibility to take part in a draw, from which they would win a merch hoodie by SAMK.

The survey design strictly observed ethical matters, protecting the privacy and security of participants. It was facilitated completely online, with a participation in total of 383 SAMK students, from both bachelor's and master's degrees, as well as completing various stages of their academic progress, giving the author the possibility to gain a variety of perspectives that provided insight on the wide range of respondents.

As of 2023, SAMK is known to have about 7,400 degree students, therefore about 5.17% students answered the survey. Though, it is important to keep in mind, that the survey was conducted at the end of April – beginning of May, therefore most of the students might have already finished their semesters and have not been checking their e-mails. Considering that, the material is of high quality, of a sufficiently large sample, making it possible to observe opinions and discover potential solutions to the problems highlighted in the survey, therefore assisting the International Relations Staff in better managing the situation.

## 7.2 Survey Results

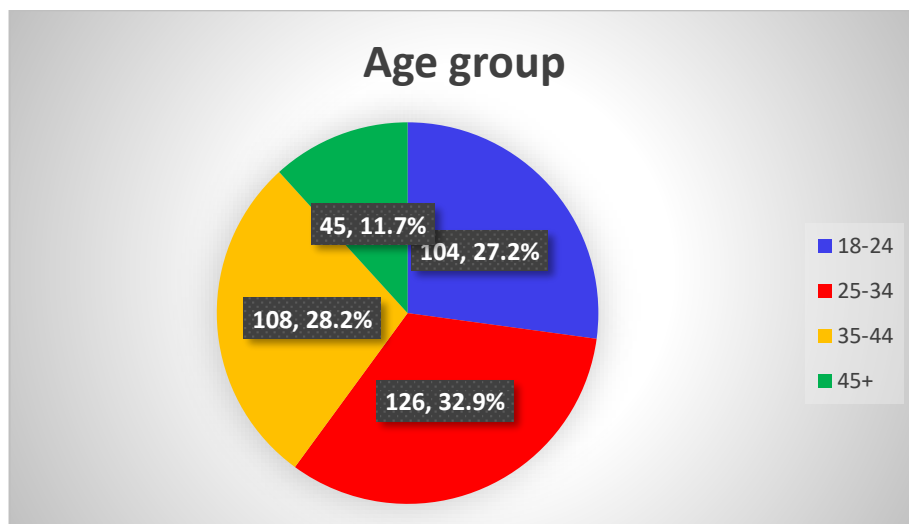


Figure 4. Age group.

The first question (Figure 4) was mandatory to answer, in order to give the author an insight about the respondents. All of them are SAMK students,

between 18 and 45+ years of age. As we can see in Figure 3, the predominant age group is 25-34 years, with 126 (32.9%) respondents (red color). Following, we have 35-44 years, with 108 (28.2%) responses (yellow color), and closely following, the youth, with 104 (27.2%) responses (blue color). The least responses were submitted by 45+ year olds, with 45 (11.7%) responses (green color). Responses in total were 383.

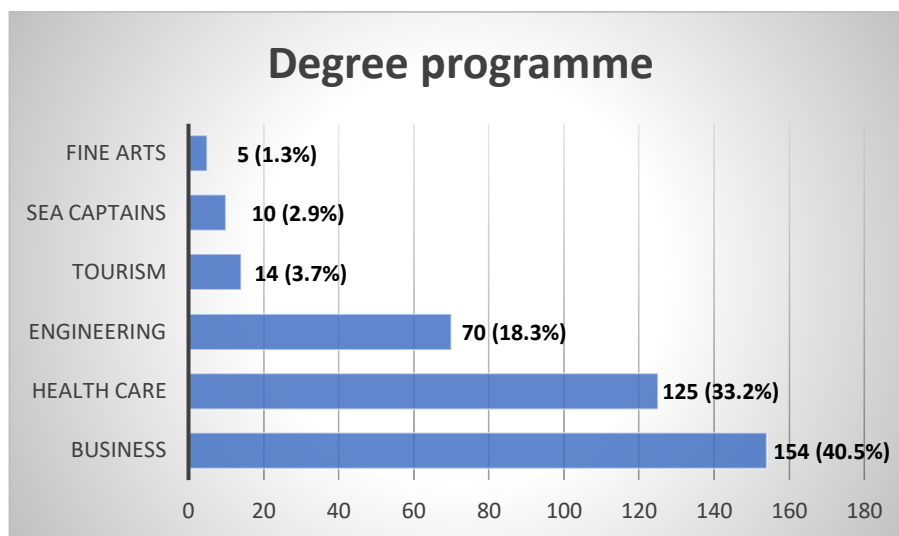


Figure 5. Degree programme.

The second question (Figure 5) was mandatory to answer, as well. The majority of respondents (40.5%) were Business students (incl. Bachelors of International Business, and Bachelors and Masters of Business Administration), followed by 33.2% Health Care students (incl. Bachelors of Nursing, Physiotherapy and Social Studies), 18.3% Engineering (incl. Bachelors of Mechatronics, Logistics, Artificial Intelligence, Energy- and Environmental Engineering, Building and Civil Engineering, and Production Engineering and Production Economics), 3.7% Tourism (Bachelors of Hospitality Management), 2.9% Sea Captains (Bachelors of Marine Technology) and 1.3% Fine Arts (Bachelors and Masters of Fine Arts). Responses in total were 383.

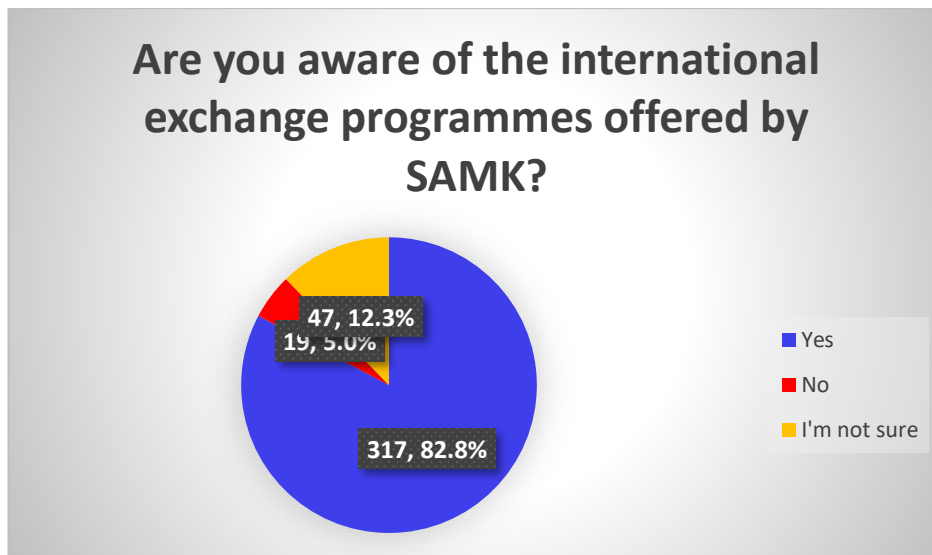


Figure 6. Awareness of offered programmes.

The third question (Figure 6) was answered by all the respondents. While some people were unsure, the majority (82.8%) knew of the exchange programmes that SAMK offers. The minority of 5% was not aware of the programmes at all.

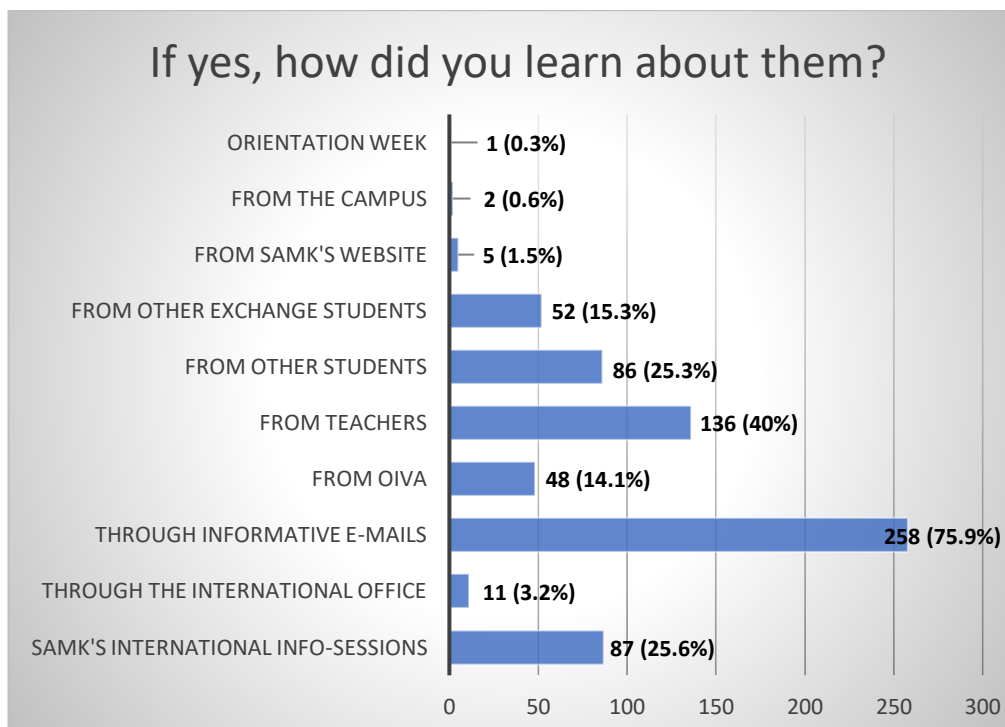


Figure 7. Distribution channels.

If the answer to the previous question was Yes, then question four (Figure 7) needed a response as well. Most students who participated (75.9%) communicated learning about the exchange programmes from informative e-mails sent regularly by the International Office to all SAMK students. These e-mails are sometimes also included in the Kasi monthly bulletin published by SAMMAKKO, the SAMK Student Union.

Teachers were the second most common source of information, followed by international information sessions held at SAMK. Other students, former exchange students, and Oiva were all mentioned by a smaller portion of respondents. The least effective ways of reaching students, according to the survey, were the university website, campus advertisements, the International Office itself, and orientation week.

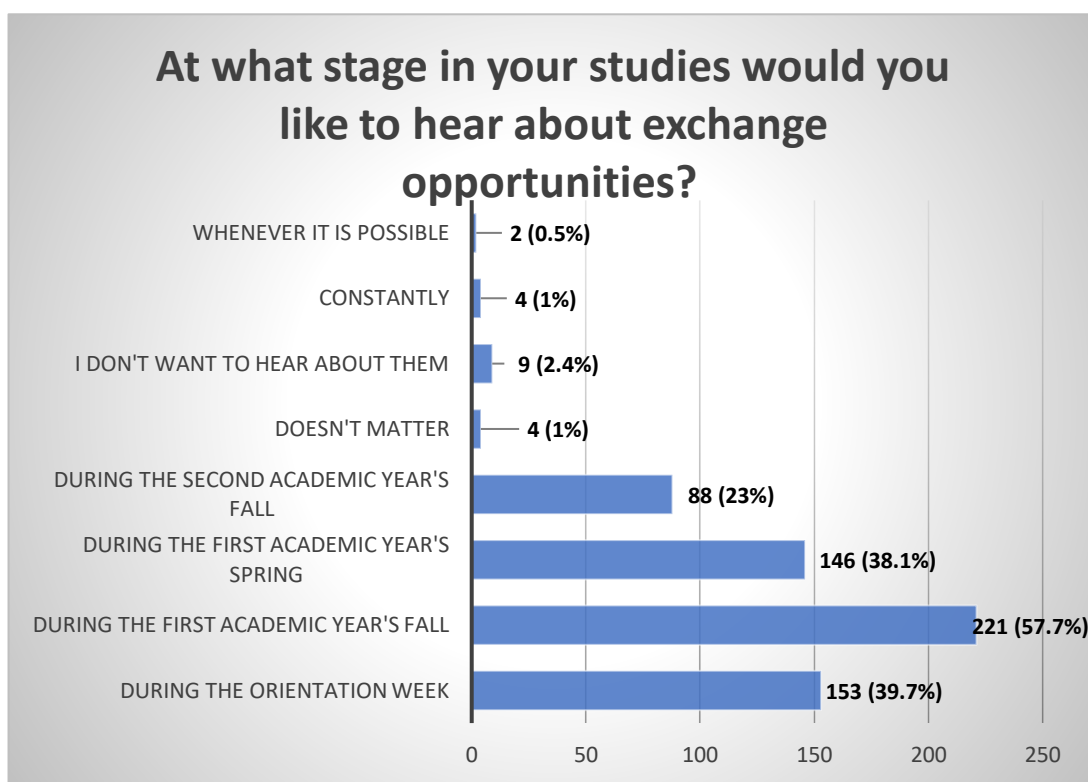


Figure 8. Advertising exchange.

Many students expressed a preference for learning about exchange programmes early in their first year, with a significant portion mentioning the

fall semester. Orientation week, the spring semester of the first year, and the fall semester of the second year followed that closely.

An option for the students was, as well, to provide their own answers to the question, in case the options were not enough, which small number of students did. Some indicated they would not want to know about exchange opportunities at all, while others said the timing didn't matter. An even smaller group preferred to hear about them either constantly or whenever possible.

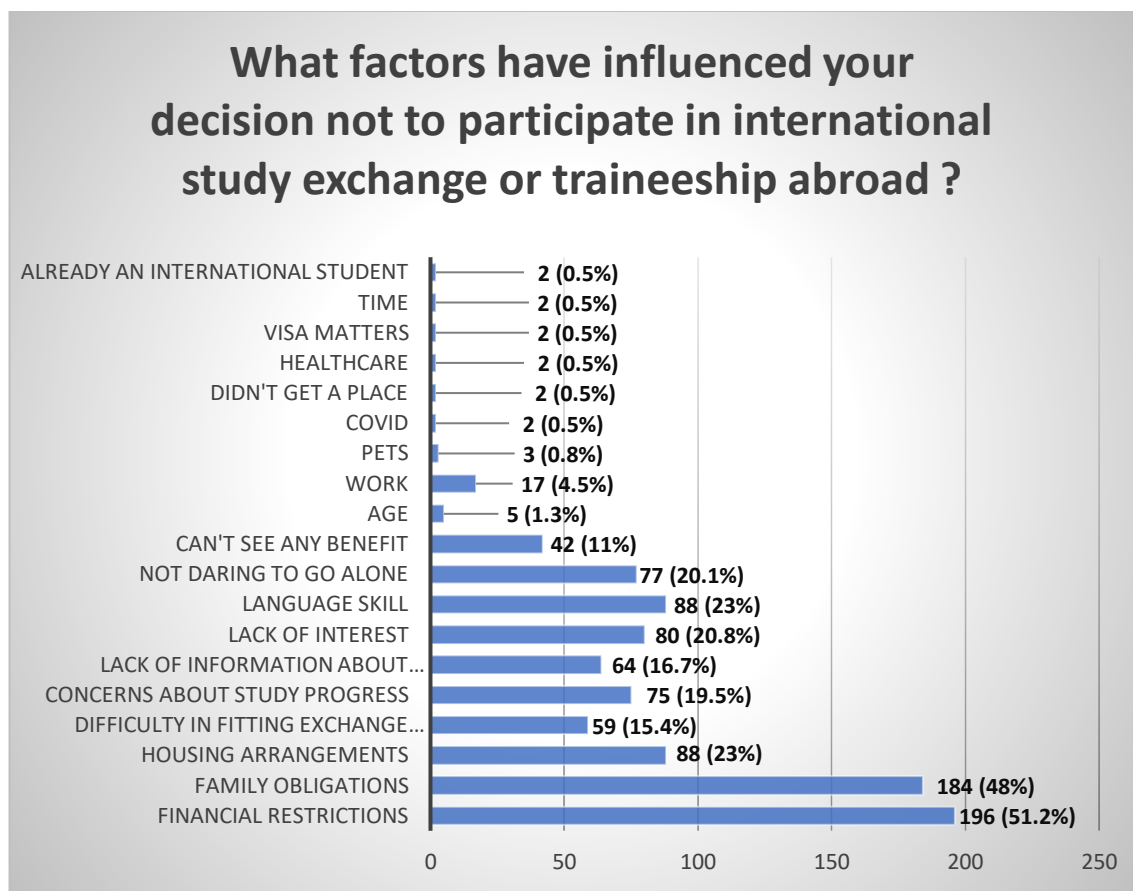


Figure 9. Reasons for not participating in exchange programmes.

The biggest barrier to student participation in international programmes was financial limitations, followed closely by family obligations. Language skills and finding suitable housing in the host country were also significant concerns for a similar portion of students. Less common reasons included lack of interest, not seeing the benefits, fear of participating alone, and worries about falling behind in studies.

A small number of students felt uninformed by the university regarding the available programmes, while others felt it would be a struggle to fit the programme into their studies. Work commitments, age, and even pet ownership were reasons for a very small percentage. Finally, a handful of students mentioned Covid-19, health concerns, visa issues, time constraints, application rejection, and already being an international student as reasons for not participating.

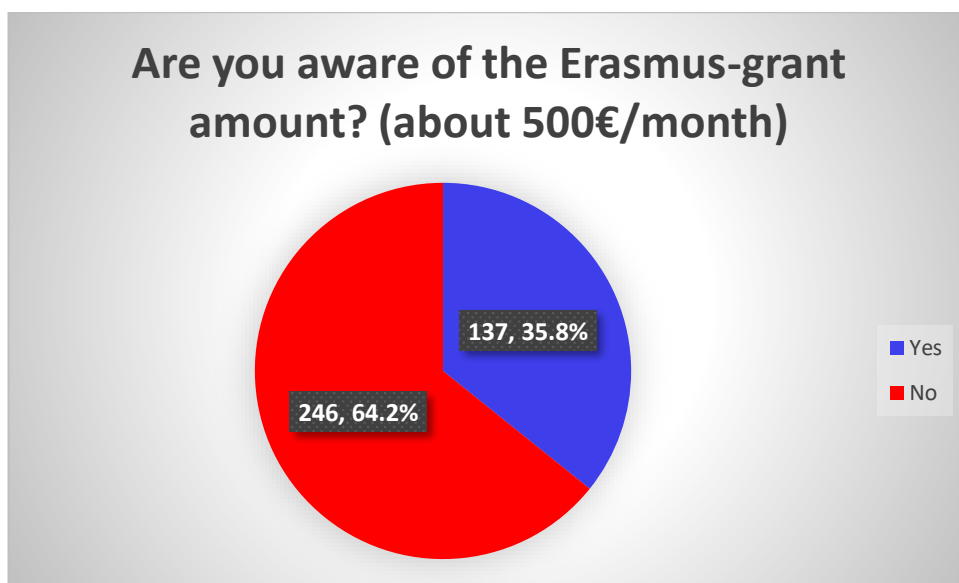


Figure 10. Awareness of financial aid.

Financial limitations are a significant barrier that discourages students from taking part in exchange programmes, as the survey reveals. The fact that only 35.8% of students are aware of the Erasmus+ grant makes particularly concerning. The purpose of this grant is to reduce the financial burden associated with studying abroad. Increased awareness about the Erasmus+ grant could lower the price barrier and make it possible for many students who otherwise could not afford such an amazing opportunity to participate.

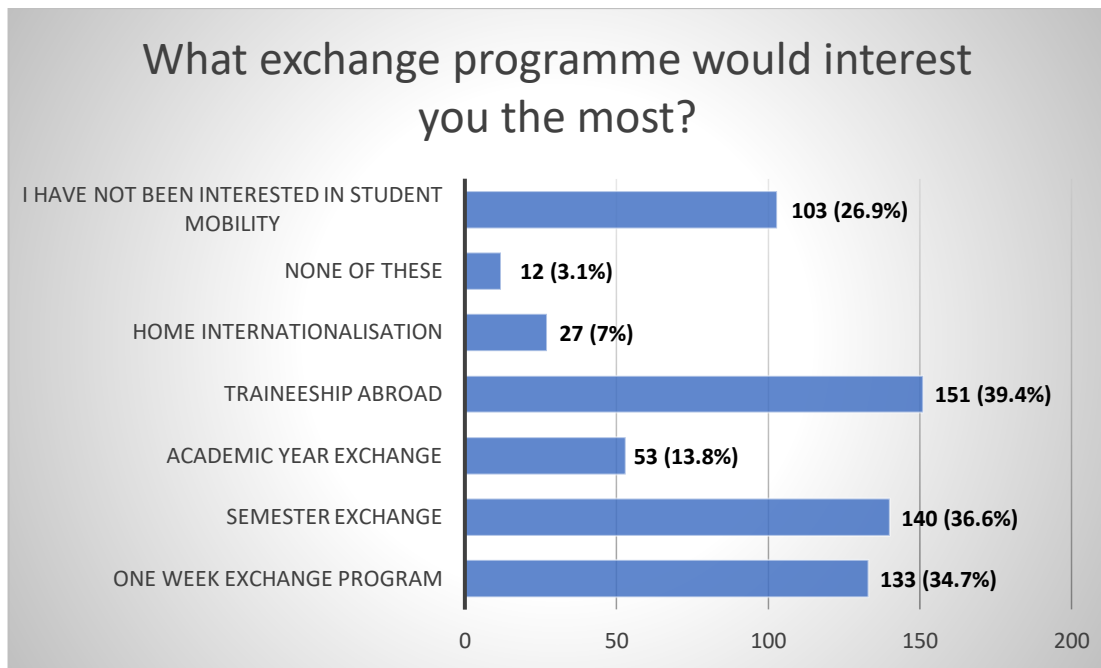


Figure 11. Interest in exchange programmes.

The survey revealed a strong interest in studying abroad, with a clear preference for traineeship programmes. Semester and one-week exchange programmes were also popular choices. A significant portion of students, however, expressed no interest in exchange programmes altogether. There were also some students who indicated a preference for academic exchange or home internationalization programmes, and a small number remained undecided.

The last question was “What initiatives/support services SAMK could offer to encourage more students to participate in international exchange programmes?” and it was voluntary to answer. It was a free word section, to which all respondents had the opportunity to reply to. This question had 183 responses out of a total of 383.

Out of 183 responses, 62 respondents, which cover approximately 34%, indicated that they would appreciate having a dedicated person to support them throughout the process, especially before the exchange program. They see this individual as providing full advice on what to expect and how to prepare, both before and during the exchange. This includes having alumni

come and share their personal experiences and insights, offering practical advice on life abroad. Furthermore, these respondents revealed a strong need to be supported and cared for, believing that such reassurance would significantly enhance their confidence and eagerness to go abroad, as well as making the whole exchange process easier overall. This additional assistance is viewed as essential in making them feel safer and more prepared for the challenges and opportunities that come with international exchange.

Among the respondents, we can find 12% that find their financial condition as insufficient to go abroad, which is one of the main reasons they do not participate in exchange programmes. In addition, approximately 8.2% believe that SAMK provides insufficient information overall. Some of these respondents would be interested in exchange programmes and would want more mandatory information sessions to guarantee they do not miss important details. Another 12% are unable to attend exchange programmes owing to family obligations. They find it tough to leave their country and family behind, and if there were ways to bring their families with them, some may consider participating.

Shorter exchange programmes, preferably lasting a week or a little more, were appealing to 6% of respondents. The affordability of this type of experience and the concentration on experiencing another culture were highlighted as major benefits. These students indicated an interest in learning about different educational environments and cultures, but their ability to travel for extended periods of time was limited. Furthermore, some expressed an interest in pursuing double degree programmes.

A lack of awareness about exchange opportunities within specific programmes was identified by a minority of students, potentially setting back the want to participate. Furthermore, some students expressed concerns regarding the limited availability of exchange placements compared to student demand. Language barriers were also seen as a challenge with a specific example highlighting the need for English language support courses at SAMK. There was a case in which a student wished to go abroad but the courses in the host

university were not available in English, thus the student was unable to complete their exchange in the desired destination.

SAMK already has a strong international student presence, therefore some of them may be less interested in extra exchange programmes due to their current migration to Finland. Some of these students are dependent on Finnish jobs to pay tuition, thus limiting their possibilities to participate in exchange programmes. Some of them also wish for paid traineeship places abroad, as they do not feel that the Erasmus+ grant is enough to live with. Furthermore, a small minority (3%) of responders expressed concern about potential study delays due to exchange participation, such as losing time or credits, or not being able to graduate in time.

Finally, students expressed a desire for information about hosting arrangements and the support from the host university. This shows that SAMK and host institutions may need to communicate and collaborate more effectively. A small percentage of students preferred that teachers would have a more extensive awareness about exchange program and would be available to answer student inquiries.

## 8 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING STUDENT MOBILITY

A few improvements should be made to increase SAMK students' enthusiasm for going abroad. According to the survey, the most important thing is to broaden the information and distribution channels. It would be fantastic if students would attend frequent walk-in information sessions concerning exchange or traineeship destinations and opportunities, that could be held in public places of the university, such as Agora Hall or the library.

When it comes to encouraging students to go abroad, guidance and information are critical, as are peer mentoring, financial aid, language support, and cultural preparation. Moreover, in the world of technology, social media would be a valuable tool for distributing information about exchange programmes in a way that is accessible and convenient for the students. It would be helpful to have, for example, a monthly newsletter regarding exchange programs because some students have stated that they would want to hear about the exchange opportunities constantly, or whenever it is possible for the staff to tell about them. Furthermore, the newsletter-style emails could contain information about the application periods and procedure, as for some students it is too difficult to stay on top of it because it can simply slip away.

The survey found a high demand for peer tutors or support amongst returning exchange students. SAMK students believe that returning exchange students would be a big benefit to them; so, the international office should always provide feedback or suggestion opportunities for students, essentially getting to know, from a student's point of view, if they have made a mistake throughout the sending procedure and knowing not to do it again. Student feedback should always be appreciated, since it allows staff members to get further insight into the exchange itself, rather than the planning and organization.

The International Office must hold information sessions, as requested, for students and teachers on a regular basis during the semesters to ensure that they receive the necessary information. To ensure that students do not miss them, the information sessions need to be scheduled into their schedules and considered mandatory, wished by the students. Teachers are obviously seen as important players in the entire process; therefore, they must be well educated in all aspects of exchange. Additionally, thorough information about exchange opportunities particular to each programme would be useful. As an example, consider a fare-like event where there would be tables specific for each degree programme held by teachers and staff members, and students could go up and ask questions about general information, grants, and exchange opportunities.

SAMK is unable to offer further scholarships or financial aid specifically for the students participating in exchange programmes, but it would be beneficial to inform them of the advantages that Kela continues to provide them with even though they are living abroad. It is important to note that the survey (Figure 10) made it widely visible that 64.2% of students did not know the amount of the Erasmus+ grant. This is a significant problem, given that students not only decide not to participate in exchange programmes due to financial constraints but also lack proper knowledge about the ones that are already present. Furthermore, SAMK should seek the opportunity to help students with finding paid traineeship places abroad, and it would be beneficial to promote them broadly throughout different distribution channels, to let all the students know of the possibilities they have.

Regarding language support, if students have been studying in Finnish up until the start of exchange, and are not too sure of their language skills, it would be helpful for SAMK to offer language support classes, especially in English to help them become ready for studying in a non-native language. Participating in an exchange program requires a high level of language proficiency, and it is essential for both the university studies and the student's social life in the destination country. SAMK should make it clear up front that all of the universities with which they have partnerships offer English-language courses that are appropriate for potential exchange students.

Furthermore, SAMK should be aware that the host university is in charge of students' academic journey. In order to prevent graduation delays, it is to guarantee that credits earned abroad are easily transferred and used in the students' personal study plans. Furthermore, teachers must offer flexible academic planning and guidance, assisting students in integrating exchange programmes into their schedules without delaying their graduation.

People with families, on the other hand, are unaware that taking kids overseas can result in higher financial aid. It would be beneficial to provide them with ongoing assistance during the whole process. In addition, host institutions should acknowledge and adapt to the needs of students who have families,

perhaps by offering more online courses and taking flexible scheduling into account.

Last but not least, it seems as though an increasing number of students are considering shorter exchange programmes like Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs). More BIPs, like the ones that last a week on site, should be developed and advertised. These could be designed for any degree programme and are easier to put together, allowing students to better incorporate them into their personal study plans.

## 9 CONCLUSION

The survey results revealed a difference in student awareness of exchange programmes. While some students demonstrated strong knowledge of available programs and opportunities, a significant percentage lacked awareness and expressed interest in learning more. However, a significant number of the respondents – nearly one-third – were not interested in learning more about exchange programs.

The responses highlighted financial restrictions, family obligations, housing arrangements and language skills. The research highlights how essential it is to make the most of already-existing distribution channels. This method not only has no previously identified downsides, but it also meets the expectations of students for increased knowledge about exchange programmes. It is essential to keep promoting student participation in international mobility programmes. Through these exchanges, students become more courageous, achieving personal development, and even alter their professional paths.

The main research question was “What are the primary factors that influence SAMK students negatively, as a result of them not participating in international mobility programmes?”. The desired answers were collected thoroughly via the

survey conducted; therefore, the research question was given a clear answer to. Moreover, the author offered several suggestions to address the sub-question of the thesis, which was “What methods can SAMK’s International Office staff rely on, in order to encourage and support students to be involved in international mobility programmes?”.

This emphasis on student participation in international exchange programmes should not overshadow the reality that some students may genuinely lack interest in exchange programmes, which is perfectly acceptable, as it rarely is easy to please everyone.

### 9.1 Validity and Reliability

The thesis statement can be considered reliable as it makes sense in relation to the arguments and supporting data in the research question. Consistency can be seen in the facts, as they were verified twice before being included in the research. The thesis has relied on both primary and secondary sources, with the most used sources being research papers and textbooks. Although a couple of the sources were somewhat older, the author has made sure to verify that the material was still accurate at the time the source was cited. The majority of the sources were current and up to date.

The data collection method was primarily a survey, therefore involving original research. Additionally, the survey was accessible to all students and distributed to the whole university, ensuring that the data collection process was impartial. The commissioner has been given the thesis and has helped the author throughout the thesis process.

### 9.2 Ethical Considerations

The author ensured that the thesis strictly adhered to SAMK’s ethical recommendations for research, involving careful consideration of participant privacy and data security especially regarding the survey and data collection.

Even though the thesis did not involve any actual collection of sensitive or personal data beyond what participants felt comfortable sharing, it was completely anonymous. The only demographic collected was age.

### 9.3 Reflection

The thesis process certainly had its challenges, especially considering the broadness of my topic. However, I'm proud of the outcome, a reliable and coherent piece of research. It was especially delighting to receive such positive feedback from my commissioner (Appendix 1).

Initially, I was worried about the survey responses, sending it out late in the semester, and thinking that I would not receive enough. Thankfully, student participation exceeded my expectations. Of course, this was the most demanding academic project I've ever worked on, requiring plenty of reading and source analysis, but to my surprise, it wasn't as overwhelming as I had thought, as I succeeded in managing my time well.

Having a supportive commissioner made all the difference, as they were always available to answer questions and voluntarily provided valuable sources. I've gained a wealth of knowledge and valuable research skills throughout this rewarding journey, and I can't wait to apply my learned skills in the future.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: COMMISSIONER FEEDBACK

Feedback 29.5.2024

Noora Maja

International Relations Coordinator, International Office  
Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, SAMK

#### **Feedback to Alexandra Marin's thesis for the degree programme in International Tourism Management**

Higher education institutions around the world are offering students multiple opportunities to study abroad during their studies. These opportunities develop important working life skills. The International Office of SAMK has noticed that after the pandemic the number of outgoing exchange students has not been increasing with the same pace as the number of incoming exchange students. After having a complete pause in mobilities and students studying online during the pandemic has made it difficult to spread the word about these great opportunities.

Nowadays students need multicultural and international competences no matter what they study, and we feel that something needs to change in the culture of promoting exchanges (or some practices need to be implemented again after a long break) to make them see the benefits of studying abroad. For this we feel that the thesis found great answers and tools.

The thesis of Alexandra Marin is very clearly structured, presenting the possibilities and also the challenges for applying for study abroad. She has used the theory successfully and observed mobility from many different angles. She has also explained the background and the situation in SAMK at the moment. The suggestions for the International Office and to the degree

programmes in SAMK are concrete, well-thought and well-argued. She planned the questionnaire well and got a very good number of responses covering all study fields in SAMK. This thesis is very useful for the everyday work of the International Office and we will definitely progress with the suggestions to increase the number of outgoing students in the future.

## APPENDIX 2: SURVEY



### **Kysely kansainvälisestä liikkuvuudesta SAMKissa / Survey on International Mobility at SAMK**

Tämä kysely on tarkoitettu SAMKin opiskelijoille, jotka eivät ole aiemmin osallistuneet mihinkään kansainvälisiin vaihto-ohjelmiin. Kysely pyrkii selvittämään niitä tekijöitä, joiden vuoksi SAMKin opiskelijat eivät hyödynnä kansainvälisyysmahdollisuuksia opintojensa aikana. Kyselyyn vastanneet voivat halutessaan osallistua arvontaan, jossa palkintona on SAMKin huppari. Kaikki vastaukset käsitellään luottamuksellisesti.

This survey is intended for SAMK students who have not previously engaged in any international exchange programmes. The survey aims to identify the factors that prevent SAMK students from taking advantage of internationalisation opportunities during their studies. Respondents can participate in a prize draw to win a SAMK hoodie. All responses will be treated confidentially.

#### 1. Ikäryhmä / Age group \*

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45+

2. Tutkinto-ohjelma / Degree programme \*

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3. Oletko tietoinen SAMKin tarjoamista kansainvälisistä vaihto-ohjelmista? / Are you aware of the international exchange programmes offered by SAMK? \*

- Kyllä / Yes
- Ei / No
- En ole varma / I'm not sure

4. Jos olet, kuinka sait tietää niistä? / If yes, how did you learn about them?

Valitse kaikki sopivat vaihtoehdot. / Select all suitable options.

- SAMKin KV-infotilaisuuksista / SAMK's International info-sessions
- KV-toimiston kautta / Through the International Office
- Sähköpostin kautta / Through informative e-mails
- Oivasta / From Oiva
- Opettajilta / From teachers
- Opiskelijatovereilta / From other students
- Vaihdossa olleilta / From other exchange students
- Muu / Other

5. Missä vaiheessa opintoja haluaisit kuulla vaihtomahdollisuuksista? / At what stage in your studies would you like to hear about exchange opportunities? \*

Valitse kaikki sopivat vaihtoehdot. / Select all suitable options.

- Orientaatioviikolla / During the orientation week
- Ensimmäisen lukuvuoden syksyllä / During the first academic year's fall
- Ensimmäisen lukuvuoden keväällä / During the first academic year's spring
- Toisen lukuvuoden syksyllä / During the second academic year's fall
- Muu / Other

6. Mitkä tekijät ovat vaikuttaneet päätökseesi **olla osallistumatta** kansainväliseen opiskeluvaihtoon tai harjoitteluun? / What factors have influenced your decision **not to participate** in international study exchange or traineeship abroad? \*

Valitse kaikki sopivat vaihtoehdot. / Select all suitable options.

- Taloudelliset rajoitukset / Financial restrictions
- Perhetilanne / Family obligations
- Asumisjärjestelyt / Housing arrangements
- Vaikeus sovittaa kv-jakso opintoihin / Difficulty in fitting exchange period into your studies
- Huoli opintojen etenemisestä / Concerns about study progress
- Puute tiedosta saatavilla olevista vaihto-ohjelmista / Lack of information about available programmes
- Kiinnostuksen puute / Lack of interest
- Kielitaito / Language skill
- Ei uskalla lähteä yksin / Not daring to go alone
- Ei näe mitään hyötyä / Can't see any benefit
- Muu / Other

7. Oletko tietoinen Erasmus-apurahan suuruudesta? (n. 500€/kk) / Are you aware of the Erasmus-grant amount? (about 500€/month) \*

- Kyllä / Yes
- Ei / No

8. Millainen vaihto-ohjelma itseäsi eniten kiinnostaisi? / What exchange programme would interest you the most? \*

Valitse kaikki sopivat vaihtoehdot. / Select all suitable options.

- Viikon vaihtojakso / One week exchange programme
- Lukukauden vaihto / Semester exchange
- Lukuvuoden vaihto / Academic year exchange
- KV- harjoittelu / Traineeship abroad
- Kotikansainvälistyminen / Home Internationalisation
- Ei mikään näistä / None of these

- En ole ollut kiinnostunut opiskelijavaihdosta / I have not been interested in student exchange

9. Mitä aloitteita/tukipalveluita SAMK voisi tarjota kannustakseen enemmän opiskelijoita osallistumaan kansainvälisiin vaihto-ohjelmiin? / What initiatives/support services SAMK could offer to encourage more students to participate in international exchange programmes?

Mitkä tekijät saisivat sinut lähtemään kansainväliseen vaihtoon/harjoitteluun? / What factors would persuade you to go on an international exchange/traineeship?

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10. Mikäli haluat osallistua huppariarvontaan, jätäthän sähköpostiosoitteesi alle. / If you would like to participate in the hoodie draw, please leave your email address below.

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