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Student Preparedness for Intercultural Communication in International Workplaces

The Skills Needed to Succeed in an International Workplace in Finland

Thesis

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Thesis abstract

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The world today is increasingly becoming more internationally connected every day. With this connection come heterogenous societies and the need for new communication and work skills, such as within Finland. The country of Finland is more international than ever and showing record numbers of immigration in recent years. This change from a very homogenous society to a very heterogenous one shows the need for more multiculturalism and intercultural communication skills in not only school and work – but everyday life.

This thesis study explored how prepared students in Finland feel to enter this international workforce with the skills they have learned at their respective universities or how they have already used them. The purpose of this study was to highlight what students and workers alike need to succeed in their studies and careers. The data for this research was gathered through multiple different surveys distributed to all students from universities all across Finland. The research looked into their opinions, skills, challenges, and recommendations in regard to their own intercultural communication training.

The results showed clear differences between the international students and the Finnish students researched: whilst international students felt somewhat prepared, Finnish students felt unprepared. There are clear gaps in knowledge, available courses, and implementation that could greatly benefit students going on to work in international workplaces – or simply a workspace in an increasingly internationalizing country. The thesis highlights the need for better intercultural communication training in universities, mandatory sensitivity training in all workplaces, and improved support systems for students of all backgrounds.

¹ Keywords: Intercultural Communication, Multiculturalism, Cultural Sensitivity, Higher Education, Finland

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1 Introduction

As Finland is rapidly becoming a more international and heterogeneous society every day, the need for student knowledge on intercultural communication becomes more relevant – both in their studies and in their future workplace. International workplaces, students, and society makes these communication skills the key to success for people with relations both abroad and within Finland.

This thesis will present how prepared the current international and Finnish students feel about their intercultural communication education, skills, and experience in the workplace. The students researched are from various universities of applied sciences across all of Finland. They come from all types of degree programmes, language of instruction, and are all in different stages of study.

These skills are very important to thrive not only worldwide but now locally. They work through issues such as language barriers, nonverbal cues, communication styles, and more. They help us understand how others may behave and understand the ever-present internationalisation happening around us. This thesis aims to explore what's missing, what's working, and what these schools can do to improve the experience for future students intercultural communication education going forward.

1.1 Background of Intercultural Communication

Credit for what is commonly known as “Intercultural Communication” today is commonly accredited to the American anthropologist Edward T. Hall. Hall used the term in his classic 1959 book titled *The Silent Language*, in which he explores how cultural aspects may influence one’s interactions and communications (Hall, 1959). He explains in the introduction (p.15):

“Difficulties in intercultural communication are seldom seen for what they are. When it becomes apparent to people of different countries that they are not understanding one another, each tends to blame it on “those foreigners,” on their stupidity, deceit, or craziness.”

According to Salo-Lee (2006) as obtained by Hart (1998), the elements of Hall's paradigm were:

- “systematic empirical study and the classification of nonverbal communication (defined as communication that does not involve the exchange of words)”
- “emphasis, especially in nonverbal communication, on the out-of-conscious level of information-exchange”
- “focus on intercultural communication, not as earlier on macrolevel monocultural studies”
- “a non-judgmental view toward and acceptance of cultural differences”
- “participatory training methods in Intercultural Communication.”

In more recent times, Bennett (2013, p.1) defines intercultural communication as “...the study and practice of communication across cultural contexts.” He continues to expand on this by explaining:

“It applies equally to domestic cultural differences such as ethnicity and gender and to international differences such as those associated with nationality or world region. Intercultural communication is an approach to relations among members of these groups that focuses on the recognition and respect of cultural differences, seeks the goal of mutual adaptation leading to biculturalism rather than simple assimilation, and supports the development of intercultural sensitivity on the part of individuals and organizations to enable empathic understanding and competent coordination of action across cultural differences.”

1.2 Why Intercultural Communication is Needed in Finland

In the year 2024, a record number of international students decided to work, live, and study in Finland (Finnish Immigration Service, 2025). Approximately 14,163 applications residence permit applications on the basis of studies were submitted, of those 12,192 were granted by The Finnish Immigration Service to applicants outside of the EU. In comparison, at the same time in 2021 only 4,595 permits were granted, showing a significant increase from the year 2021 to the year 2024. As for this year of 2025, the number of student permits granted is expected to increase to upwards of 15,000 (Finnish Immigration Service, 2025). These numbers can be observed in Figure 1.

Migration, 1950-2023

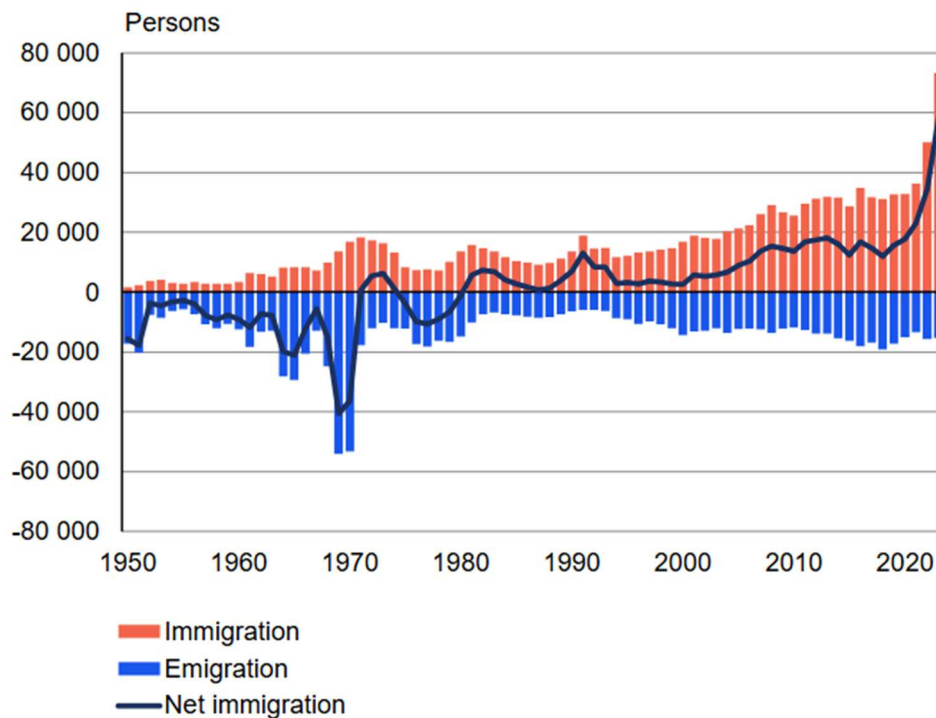


Figure 1. Graph of Migration within Finland in 1950–2023 (Statistics Finland, 2024).

As seen in Figure 1, it is not only student permits that have been granted, as overall immigrations and net immigrations as of 2023 is higher than it's ever been within Finland. With this spike, 6.9% (386,100) of the entire population in Finland consist of third-country nationals and 2.4% (134,100) of other EU citizens as of 2024 (European Commission, 2024). This significant spike has caused political uproar among some members of parliament, as there are concerns of job market issues and benefit exploitation.

As of 2024, there have been multiple policy measures enacted to control and manage the large spikes in immigration, such as introducing border procedures, tightening validity of certain permits, revising and developing permit procedures, and more (Ministry of the Interior, 2024). Because of these changes, the immigration to Finland is expected to shrink, as it had already done in 2024 for certain permits (Finnish Immigration Service, 2025). Regardless of this point, intercultural communication will still be needed to succeed in this international space.

In terms of cities, Helsinki is the most international city and region in Finland. This city is home to about 674,500 residents, with the region housing 1,582,452 residents of the entire population of about 5,584,000. (Helsinki Facts and Figures, 2024, p.8) Of those 674,500 residents in the Helsinki, about 80,000 of them are of foreign origin. With these statistics, we can observe that about 11.8% of the city of Helsinki consists of people of foreign origin, thus making Helsinki the most international and intercultural city in Finland.

Because of these observed population statistics, intercultural communication is more important in Helsinki than ever before. The city has already put in measures to accommodate this growing international population, such as adding more immigration services and added English to the cities list of official languages, alongside Finnish and Swedish. According to Eurocities (2022),

In Helsinki, several reasons influenced the decision to adopt English as one of the city's official languages besides Finnish and Swedish, one of them being the shortage of technology and other professionals. Language barriers are cited by foreign students in Finland as one of the reasons for them to leave after completion of their studies.

1.3 Scope and Limitations of Thesis

This thesis discusses and gives valuable information about intercultural communication both worldwide and within Finland – from the history to the theories and practice. The research is based around how prepared students in Finnish universities feel about their intercultural communication skills and working in multicultural environments. The results focus on the experiences students faced, both positive and negative, their work experience, their current skills, and more.

The research is built upon three separate student surveys distributed to students across the country of Finland. The findings of this research, however, are limited by the number of participants that willingly participated and are based upon student opinions on their skills rather than actual skill presentations. Despite these limitations, the results offer an insightful look into how students experience the current intercultural communication framework and offers valuable information into improving the future of this topic.

1.4 Structure of Thesis

This thesis will cover all information within the sections shown below in Figure 2. The structure of the thesis is based on the author's own observations and research in this area along with the guidance of professionals.

Structure of Thesis

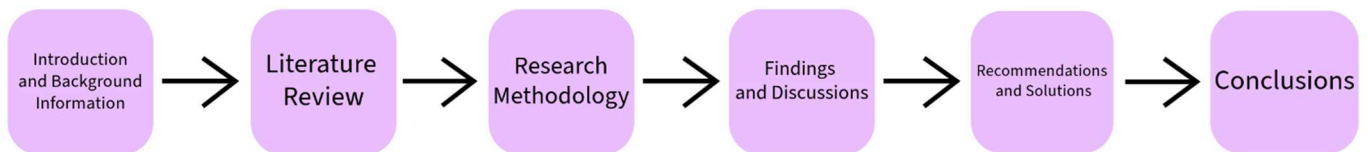


Figure 2. Structure of the Thesis.

The thesis will begin first with the introduction and background information of the thesis topic, questions, limitations, and history. Then the thesis will begin the literature review where many academic literatures have been analysed and presented for a better understanding of the intercultural communication and the need for it within the country of Finland. The next section will discuss the research methodology used to explore the topic of intercultural communication within higher education in Finland, followed by the findings and discussions, where the survey results will be presented, analysed, and discussed in detail. Recommendations and solutions will then be explored and presented followed by the conclusions, covering the key findings and offering recommendations for research in the future.

1.5 Research Questions

There is one main research question, and two sub questions considered during the completion of this study and thesis. All the questions were considered when completing the research and analysing the results.

Main research question: How prepared do both Finnish and international students in Finland feel for the international workplace setting?

Sub research questions:

1. Are students satisfied with the volume and quality of intercultural communications studies in Finnish universities of applied sciences?
2. What policies should universities adopt to improve global workplace readiness?

2 Literature Review

This section of the thesis will explore key definitions, information, and theories about intercultural communication and multiculturalism. This information is essential to knowing what it is, why it's important, and why it is needed today. There will also be information about the current internationalization state of Finland and how schools are currently teaching these skills.

2.1 Deeper Definition of Intercultural Communication and Multiculturalism

Intercultural communication can be defined as the communication that occurs between people of different cultures, backgrounds, and linguistic differences (Baker, 2024, p.212). This communication can refer to both verbal and nonverbal forms (Denomme et al., 2023). Any type of communication can be interpreted differently among those of different cultural background. For example, pointing at something with an index finger may be seen as nothing special in one culture but can be deeply offensive in another.

Intercultural communication skills, however, can be defined as the ability to communicate effectively with people of different cultures, backgrounds, and linguistic differences (Fiva-ble, 2024). These skills can build relationships, foster effective teamwork, and develop communication skills for other people. To effectively demonstrate intercultural communication skills, the knowledge of non-verbal social cues, extensive listening skills, and empathy are all key. They are needed to reduce the chance of misunderstandings that can often be associated with communication between cultures. Typically, open minded people can develop very strong intercultural communication skills and are adaptable to different cultural norms and developments. Training programmes, classes, school lessons, and workshops are the best way to improve these skills across large groups of people and engage a peaceful population in the process.

Multiculturalism is slightly different, as according to *Merriam Webster* (2019), refers to anything "relating to, reflecting, or adapted to diverse cultures". In this way, schools, societies, countries, and more can all be multicultural, as this simply refers to anything relating to these points. This type of ideology explains that the environment in which multiculturalism

is taking place is dependent on the existence of multiculturalism in the first place, as multiculturalism cannot exist without the support of other people, the environment, and political space. In support of this ideology, Eagon (2025) defines multiculturalism as “the view that cultures, races, and ethnicities, particularly those of minority groups, deserve special acknowledgment of their differences within a dominant political culture.”

2.2 Theories and Models of Intercultural Communication

There are multiple different theories that help understand and explain intercultural communication, multiculturalism, and integration. Gert Hofstede’s 6D model represents the different aspects that make up a culture, Milton Bennet’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity explains how people experience the journey of intercultural sensitivity and understanding, Howard Giles communication accommodation theory explains how people act and socialize in certain situations, and the Melting Pot theory and the Salad Bowl theory explains how different cultures may merge – or stand out – within different homogeneous and heterogeneous cultures will all be discussed in this section.

2.2.1 Geert Hofstede’s 6-D Model of National Culture

Gert Hofstede developed the 6-D model to understand culture and cultural differences. The model consists of six aspects of society called dimensions. Each dimension can be measured on a scale of 0–100 to understand specific cultures around the world.

The first of these dimensions is Collectivism – Individualism. This observes how individualistic a culture is, such as how in the United States (a very individualistic country) values achievements and the needs of individuals themselves, whereas a collective culture considers the greater good of a group (Vinney, 2024). The measurement of Collectivism – Individualism can be observed in Figure 3.

Collectivism – Individualism World map

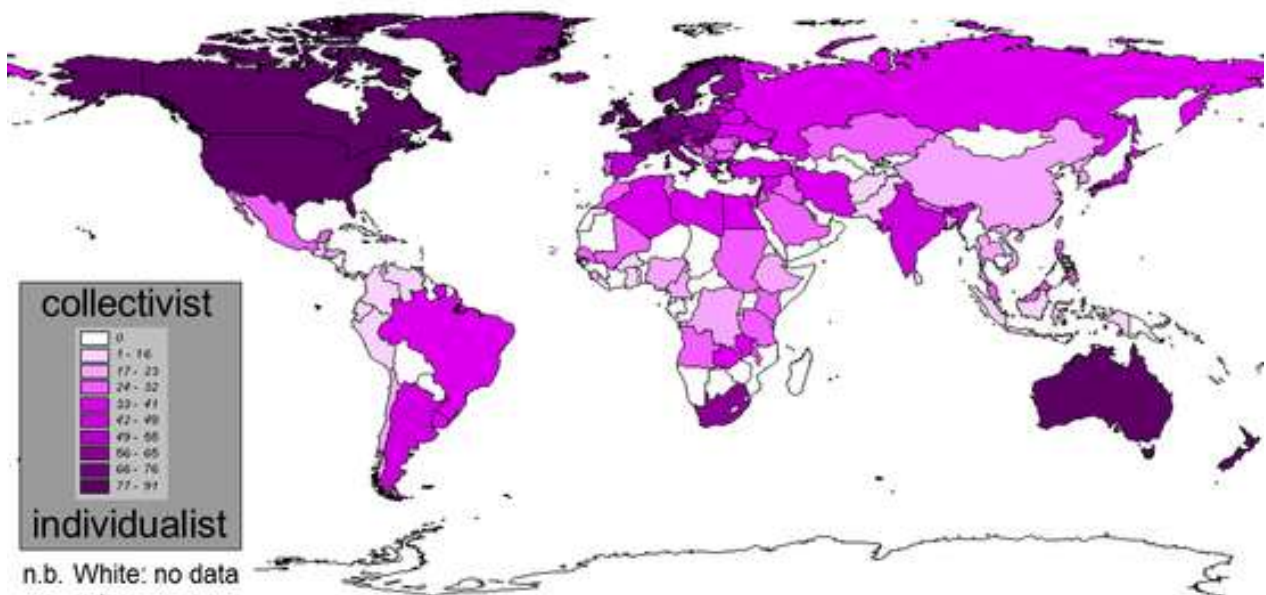


Figure 3. Collectivism - Individualism World Map (Hofstede, n.d.).

The next dimension is Power Distance (Vinney, 2024). This dimension measures how equal people are in a society. Finland has a relatively low power distance – with most subject in school and work being on similar levels whereas in many Asian countries there is an observably high-power distance, with teachers and bosses being put on a pedestal compared to their juniors. The measurement of Power Distance can be observed in Figure 4.

Power Distance World map

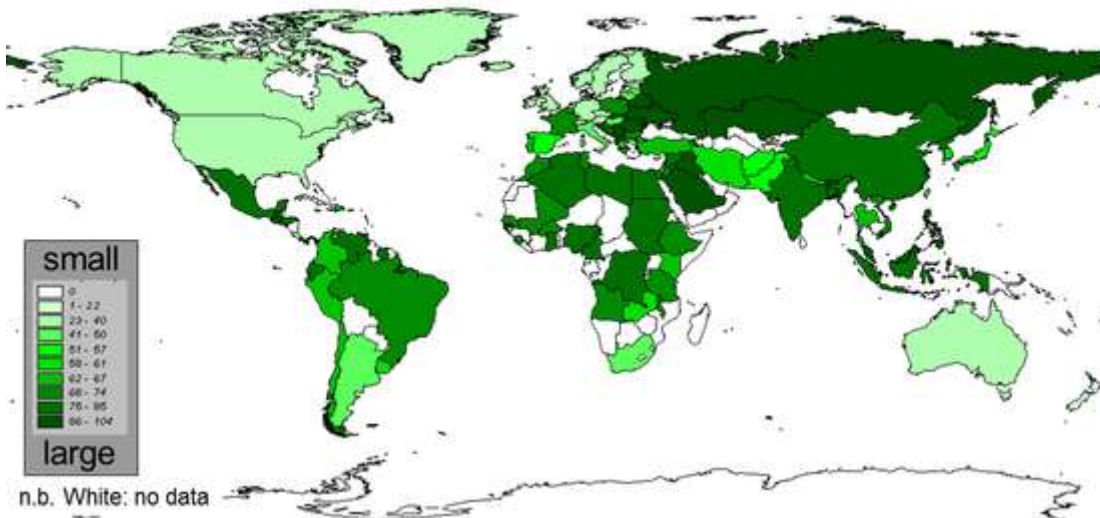


Figure 4. Power Distance World Map (Hofstede, n.d.).

The next dimension is Femininity – Masculinity (Vinney, 2024). This dimension observes certain traits of a society that are typically associated to such gender norms. Masculine traits in this way refer to the desire for assertiveness, success, and competition. Feminine traits, however, refer to the desire to nurture, care for others, and display empathy. The measurement of Femininity – Masculinity can be observed in Figure 5.

Femininity - Masculinity World map

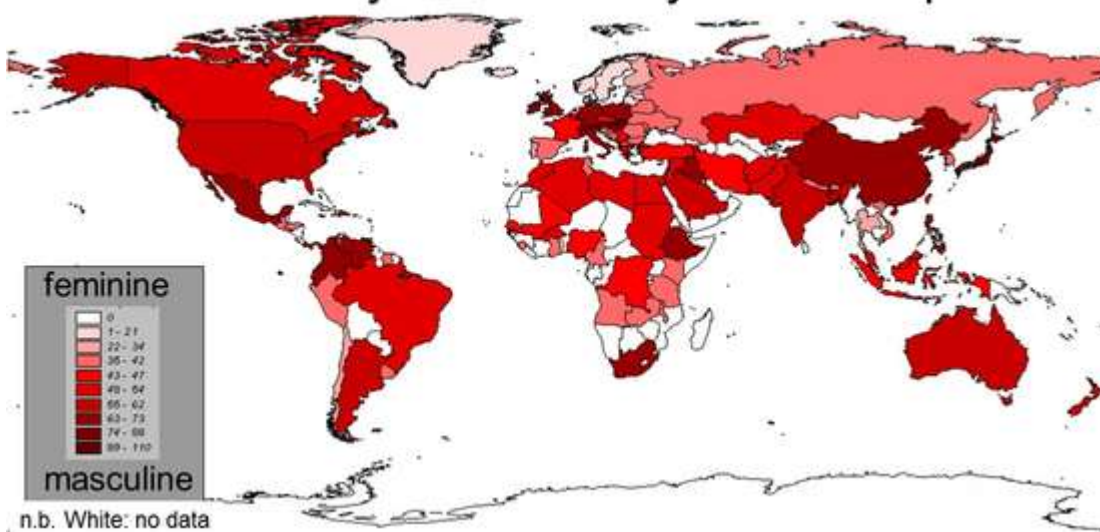


Figure 5. Femininity - Masculinity World Map (Hofstede, n.d.).

The next dimension observed is Uncertainty Avoidance (Vinney, 2024). This dimension measures how well a society can deal with an uncertain future and life. Societies that harbour a high uncertainty avoidance often rely on rule and structure to deal with such uncertainty, whereas a low uncertainty avoidant culture is more relaxed on this topic. The measurement of Uncertainty Avoidance can be observed in Figure 6.

Uncertainty Avoidance World map

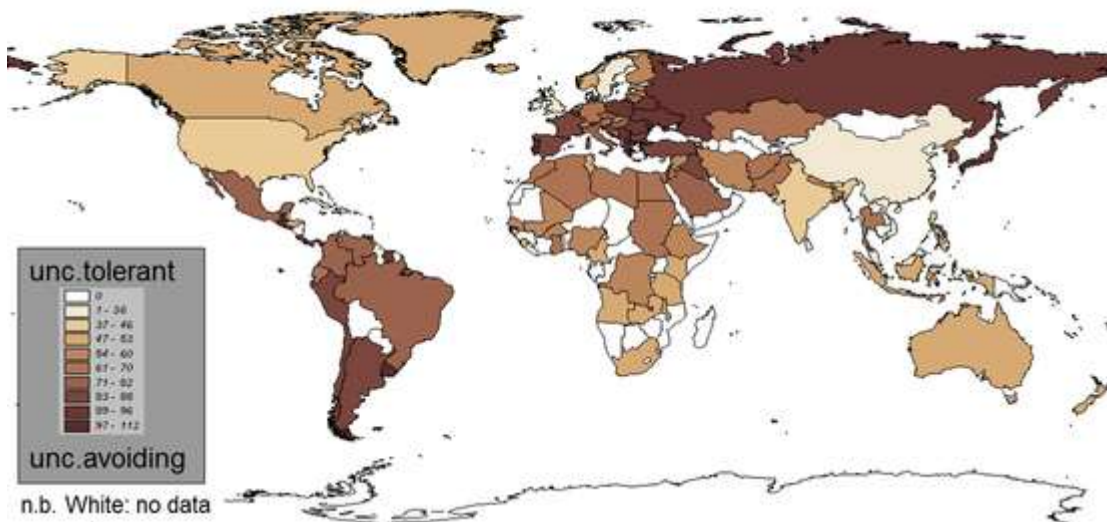


Figure 6. Uncertainty Avoidance World Map (Hofstede, n.d.).

The last two of the dimensions were founded later than the first four. The first of which being Short-term Orientation – Long-term Orientation (Vinney, 2024). This dimension measures how people view success. A culture with a long-term orientation is more willing to let go of short-term successes for the good of future successes. Short-term orientation in this way, is opposite, a culture that may let go of future successes in favour of successes in the short term. The measurement of Short-term Orientation – Long-term Orientation can be observed in Figure 7.

Short-term orientation (Monumentalism) – Long-term orientation (Flexhumility) World map (based on WVS)

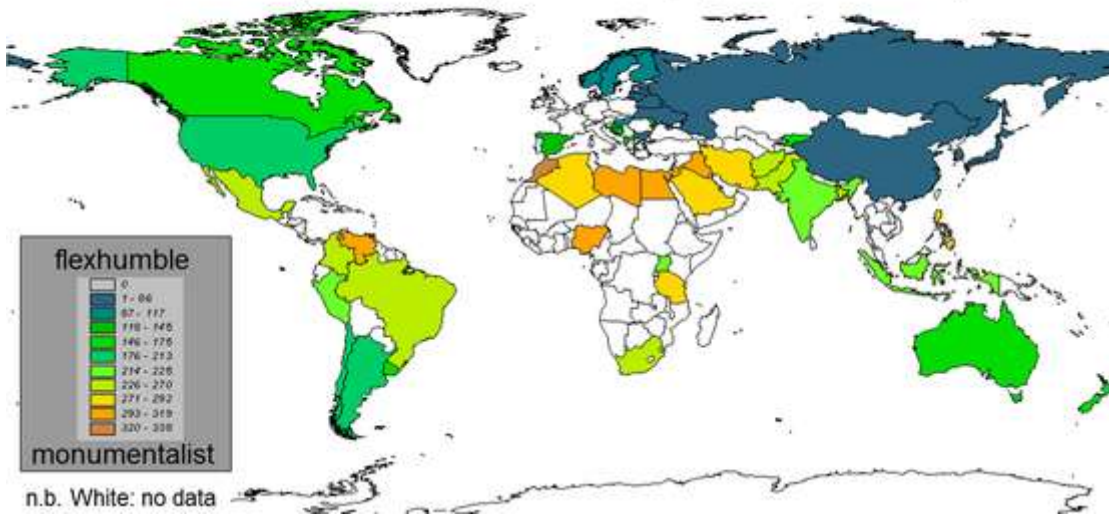


Figure 7. Short-term Orientation – Long-term Orientation World Map (Hofstede, n.d.).

The last dimension is Indulgence – Restraint (Vinney, 2024). This dimension defines how a culture deals with desires and satisfies wants and needs. A high indulgence culture focus on freedom and may be seen as impulsive, whereas a restrictive culture focuses more on societal norms and keeps desires within the reason of them. The measurement of Indulgence – Restraint can be observed in Figure 8.

Indulgence - Restraint World map (based on WVS)

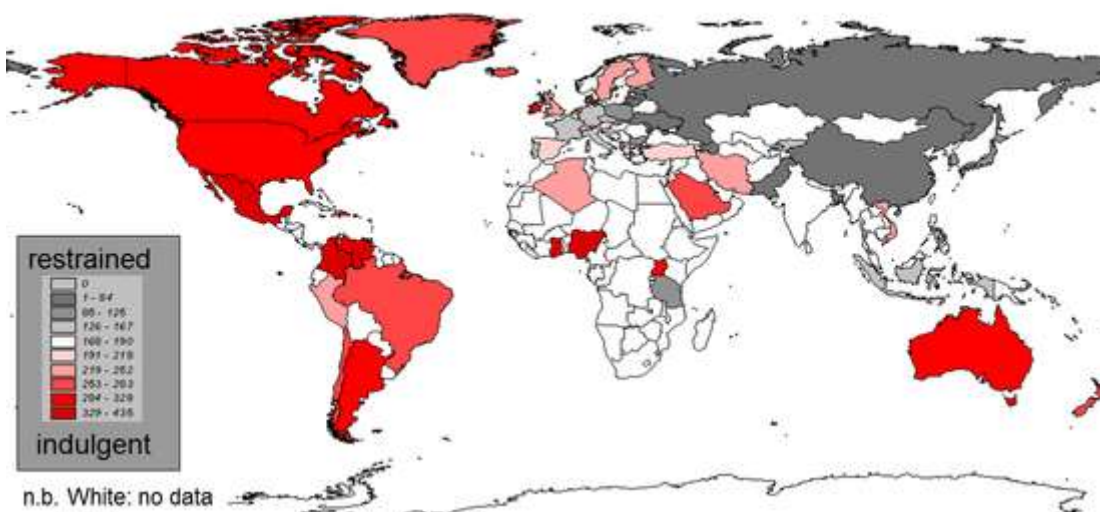


Figure 8. Indulgence - Restraint World Map (Hofstede, n.d.).

2.2.2 Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity was originally developed in 1986 by Milton Bennet and has been updated many times since that time (Posodobitev, 2025). The model displays the way people experience cultural differences, and how they interpret the differences on their journey to understand them. The model is built upon many years of academic research in cross-cultural situations in schools, organizations, and more. To support research related to this model, Bennet founded the Intercultural Development Research Institute.

According to Posodobitev (2025):

In 2004, Bennett explained his rationale for developing the model: “After years of observing all kinds of people dealing (or not) with cross-cultural situations, I decided to try to make sense of what was happening to them. I wanted to explain why some people seemed to get a lot better at communicating across cultural boundaries while other people didn’t improve at all, and I thought that if I were able to explain why this happened, trainers and educators could do a better job of preparing people for cross-cultural encounters.”

This model begins displays six distinct stages of intercultural sensitivity, starting with denial and ending with integration. The linear display of this model can be observed in Figure 9.



Figure 9. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennet, 2024).

The first stage of this model is denial, which is described as when people refuse to or fail to acknowledge differences and distinctions of culture or deem them to be irrelevant (Posodobitev, 2025). People in this stage might do things such as stereotype certain groups, dehumanize, or simply demean people on the sole reason of cultural difference or background. This can also manifest in naiveness or ignorance in statements or actions, such as asking questions deemed to be racist or uneducated.

The next stage shown in this model is defence, in which a person may view people of other cultures as competition and adopt an “us vs. them” mindset (Posodobitev, 2025). They might feel attacked when partaking in conversations about bias or racism, as they might become hostile or opt out of such conversations altogether. Common mindsets in this stage might be about immigrants breaking the job market or the need to “protect” values and traditions from said immigrants.

The next stage of the model is minimization, where a person assumes that their own cultural view, mindset, and mannerisms are shared by the world (Posodobitev, 2025). People in this stage will often disregard cultural aspects that are different to their own and neglect topics of racial, ethnic, and gender biases – often with arguments such as they “don’t see colour”. People may minimize their own cultural bias in this way which thus enables people to avoid and ignore it.

The next stage is observed as acceptance, in where people start to recognize the different aspects that can be affected by culture, such as beliefs and values (Posodobitev, 2025). It is during this stage that people start to display feelings and beliefs that other cultures have other perspectives that should be respected as much as your own. This can often happen when a person is in constant contact or communication with people of other cultures. This can also be observed in people who are in regular contact LGBTQ+ people and women, whom before had had negative connotations and views of them.

The next stage is adaptation, which is when people can adopt other cultures in experiences and empathize with others of that culture (Posodobitev, 2025). People in this stage display more developed skills of cultural sensitivity, as they are open to and able to observe different perspectives in a new and different light without cultural bias being a factor.

Cross-cultural teamwork and inclusiveness within companies can thrive when people are in this stage.

The final stage observed is integration, in which a person's sense of identity can include values, perspectives, and behaviours that have been observed within other cultures (Posodobitev, 2025). In this way, a person's mindset has widened, and they can observe themselves becoming more multicultural. This final stage is most often observed in those who are in a non-dominant cultural group of any situation – such as an immigrant in a new country.

It is usually observed that people who go down the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity do not call back on it (Posodobitev, 2025). Meaning that once a person is integrated, it is very often assured that they will stay that way – if kept in the same cultural situation. If someone does fall back, it is often done as a response to threat or criticism.

2.2.3 Communication Accommodation Theory

The communication accommodation theory was developed by Howard Giles, a professor of communication at the University of California according to *Communication Accommodation Theory* (2014). His theory explains how people try to minimize or emphasize certain social situations depending on who they are interacting with. This theory is an extension of speech adjustment theory, which shows the value of psychological concepts to understanding different aspects of speech. This communication accommodation theory explains two main processes in the accommodation:

1. **Convergence:** In where people adapt to other people's communication styles, characteristics, and quirks to reduce the number of differences in communication.
2. **Divergence:** In which people contradict the adaptation and show emphasis on the differences in communication styles, characteristics, and quirks in both a social and non-social sense.

These processes depend greatly on the personal characteristics of whomever is in the situation. However, it is common that one will display convergence when they are interacting with someone of higher standards or hierarchy. This theory, however, according to *The Communication Accommodation Theory* (2014) is also dependent on four assumptions:

1. There are both similarities and differences in the way that one speaks, communicate, and behave with other people that are dependent on the cultural background a person comes from.
2. People judge conversations based on how other people communicate and behave, which in turn helps them decide how to act or “fit in” better in a certain group.
3. The way that people communicate and behave determines their social status. Because of this, people will copy the behaviour of people they deem to be of higher status or authority.
4. Social norms determine how people behave in communication. These are perceived as unwritten rules that must be followed to “fit in”.

One example of this theory in practice might be an employee trying to impress their higher ups by complimenting their favourite thing or a new student trying to impress their new classmates by telling them outrageous stories. They are trying to accommodate their behaviour depending on the situation to leave impressions on the people around them.

2.2.4 The Melting Pot Theory and The Salad Bowl Theory

The Melting Pot Theory displays multiculturalism in a way that assumes that various immigrant culture groups “melt together” into one, abandoning their old original culture to become assimilated into their society (European Center for Populism Studies, n.d.-a). In this way, the melting pot theory explains the how heterogeneous societies become homogenous by “melting together” in the “melting pot”, with the pot being where they are located. When this happens, a common culture is often created. The opposite effect can also occur where

an already homogenous gets an influx of immigrants and disharmony is created within the already existing culture.

The melting pot theory has been criticized for “reducing diversity” and “causing people to lose their traditions” according to European Center for Populism Studies (n.d.-a). This is because in a “melting pot” of cultures, the individualistic aspects of the cultures start to dissipate. The USA is often referred to as a melting pot, as it is a nation built mostly of foreign immigrants that has since formed it’s very own culture.

The Melting Pot Theory	The Salad Bowl Theory
<p data-bbox="165 831 695 1055">"The <u>melting pot theory</u> of multiculturalism assumes that various immigrant groups will tend to “melt together,” abandoning their individual cultures and eventually becoming fully assimilated into the predominant society. Typically used to describe the assimilation of immigrants into the United States, the melting pot theory is often illustrated by the metaphor of a foundry’s smelting pots in which the elements iron and carbon are melted together to create a single, stronger metal--steel."</p> 	<p data-bbox="708 781 1249 1061">"A more liberal theory of multiculturalism than the melting pot, the salad bowl theory describes a heterogeneous society in which people coexist but retain at least some of the unique characteristics of their traditional culture. Like a salad’s ingredients, different cultures are brought together, but rather than coalescing into a single homogeneous culture, retain their own distinct flavors. In the United States, New York City, with its many unique ethnic communities like “Little India,” “Little Odessa,” and “Chinatown” is considered an example of a salad bowl society."</p> 

Figure 10. Explanation of the Melting Pot Theory and the Salad Bowl Theory (Chegg, n.d.).

The Salad Bowl Theory is similar to the Melting Pot Theory in that it discusses homogeneous and heterogeneous cultures, but in a different light (European Center for Populism Studies n.d.-b). The salad bowl theory explains that people do not have to change or give up their own culture when they are not the dominant culture in a society. This can be observed in big cities such as New York City, Los Angeles, and London where there are

China Town neighbourhoods present within the cities. This model supports cultural diversity instead of cultural integration or erasure.

2.3 Importance of Intercultural Communication Today

The *Oxford Review* (2024) explains that intercultural communication creates diversity and promotes inclusivity within any group of people. With intercultural communication, people of all cultures and backgrounds can feel valued and have all their voices heard. In this, knowing how to navigate intercultural communications reduces misunderstandings, biases, and conflicts that can appear when intercultural awareness is not present. All these factors create the perfect environment for multicultural teamwork to thrive. Having different backgrounds, opinions, and ethnicities can be greatly beneficial to any team and having the skills to manage them is crucial to success in such environment.

This point also proves true for all of Europe. There is an exceeding amount of ethnocentrism occurring in European countries in recent years (Gelovani et al., 2024). This can be displayed in the growing rate of right-wing politics support across Europe as of late, as this ethnocentrism mindset is commonly associated with such political ideation. In addition to this, many countries within the western world are becoming more international every day, such as Finland, Canada, and Germany. One thing that is connecting the whole world is the internet. AlTaher (2019) explains this well, stating:

In this interconnected world, communication has become an important aspect, especially in the age group of 18–24. Young adults, who have just entered university, must learn how to communicate effectively without animosity or misunderstanding.

In a more general way, intercultural communication can educate people on vast array of human experiences, which in turn can bring people together (Middlebury Language Schools, 2023). These skills in turn can create a more connected world with communication between cultures, languages, and backgrounds becoming effortless. Until that happens however, intercultural communication is crucial to collaboration and relationship building in today's very multicultural world.

This importance is just as prevalent in Finland. As stated by Janhonen-Abreuquah & Palojoki (2005) “Finland is undergoing a rapid change from a homogenous culture to a heterogeneous culture.” This statement has revealed true since then, as the number of immigrants coming to Finland has increased every year since then and has reached extreme numbers in the past five years. These figures can be observed in Figure 11 and Figure 12. Finland has become that of a hub for international talent, thus making the workforce extremely diverse and bringing more skills, languages, backgrounds, and languages into the society (Finland Work, n.d.).

Migration by Year. TOTAL, Immigration to Finland.

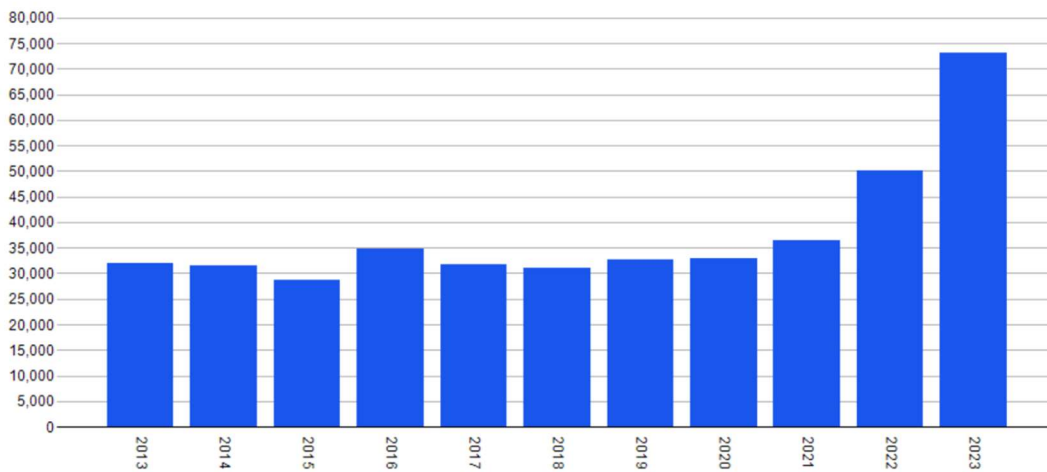
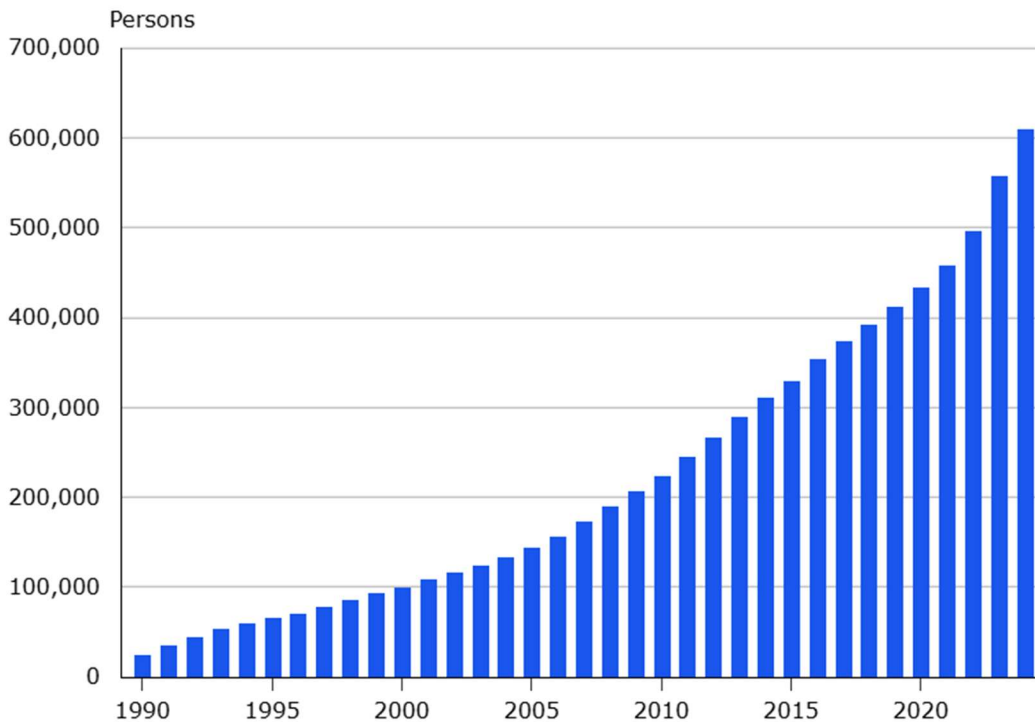


Figure 11. Migration by Year. TOTAL, Immigration to Finland 2013–2023 (Statistics Finland, 2025).

As seen in this graph, the number of immigrants coming to Finland for work, study, or refuge has been steady in the 2010's but has spiked up as of recently. The 2020's brought many new people to Finland, thus causing a need for intercultural communication now more than ever. Reasoning for this conclusion can also be observed in Figure 12, which shows the amount of people who speak a language other than Finnish or Swedish within Finland.

Number of persons speaking a foreign language as their native language in F



Source: Statistics Finland, population structure

Figure 12. Number of persons speaking foreign language as their native language in Finland 1990–2024 (Statistics Finland, 2024).

2.4 Challenges of Multicultural Environments and Intercultural Communication

There are multiple challenges and obstacles that can show when trying to use intercultural communication skills or manage in multicultural environments (Oduro, 2022). Some of these challenges are as follows:

- Ethnocentrism: Ethnocentrism is a term used to describe a person who views their own culture as superior to others. Although usually not purposeful, this kind of mind-set is not uncommon, and can display as a challenge when trying to operate in a multicultural setting.
- Stereotypes: Prejudice about other cultures is very hurtful and can disrupt harmony among multicultural environments. This of course is a large challenge associated with intercultural communication. Educating oneself and removing these biases is essential for proficient communication across cultures.

- Language: For people to understand each other, they typically need to speak the same language fluently or have a proficient interpreter. When one or both parties are not fluent in a common language, this can lead to many misunderstandings and issues down the line.
- Anxiety: Many people can feel anxious or awkward when trying to communicate with someone of a different culture for the first time. It's important for people to educate themselves on different cultures and proper intercultural communication skills to help with or prevent these feelings that can arise when communicating.
- The Concept of Cultural Difference: This point ties slightly into ethnocentrism, as everyone will view other cultures through the lens of their own – even if they don't see their own culture as superior. Although intercultural communication relies on cultural difference in practice; it is simply communication at its core.

2.5 Culture Shock

According to Segal (2024), culture shock is defined as the anxiety inducing, confusing, and unknown feelings that can arise within a person when moving to a new country and experiencing the surroundings for the first time. This occurs when people move to another country or vastly different environment from their own. Studying abroad, international work trips, vacations, student exchange, and more are all common places for culture shock to occur. There are typically five stages associated with culture shock: honeymoon/excitement stage, negotiation/frustration stage, adjustment stage, mastery/acceptance stage, and the reverse culture shock stage. These stages can be observed and explained in Figure 13

2

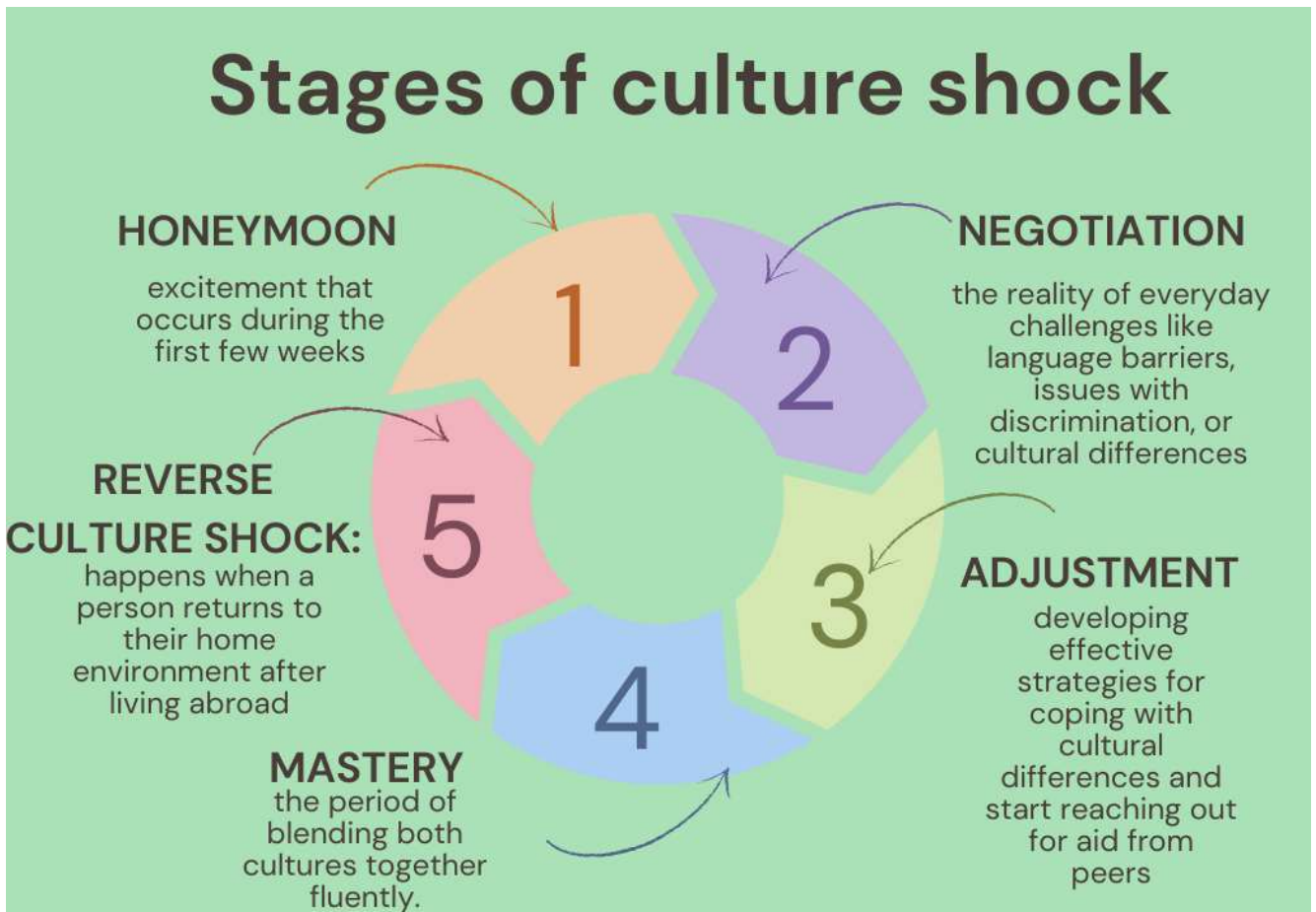


Figure 13. The 5 Stages of Culture Shock (Bloom, 2025).

Oberg (1954) describes culture shock as the anxious feeling that arises from losing familiarity in life and social situations. This fact can make integration into new societies very hard, taxing, and lonely. Intercultural communication skills can help with the process of culture shock – as well as culture classes and language learning.

2.6 Current Framework of Intercultural Communication Education

Currently, the framework used across Europe is the MICC, an abbreviation for the Multilingual and Intercultural Communication Competence Framework (University of Jyväskylä, n.d.). The University of Jyväskylä (n.d.) defines this competence as:

an interpretation of effective and appropriate communication using linguistic and semiotic resources and repertoires in situations and contexts where

interculturality and cultures are relevant to the interactants. MICC is situated, contextual, and evolving as a continuous and dynamic process based on interaction.

Kokkonen and Natri (2024a) go more in depth on this framework by providing the following aspects expected to be learned in the framework: Respect for diversity, empathy, flexibility, confidence in culturally diverse settings, knowledge about languages, cultures, and the aspects of communication, emotional regulation, critical thinking skills, language skills, and more. They then go on to state:

the aim of the MICC framework is not to depict the students as “intercultural performers” (Ferri, 2014). MICC is “an inference, not an ability” (e.g., Spitzberg, 2015), and as such it is a malleable construct that may be developed through education and/ or experience (Borghetti, 2017) as well as improved in higher education (Dervin, 2010; Gregersen-Hermans, 2017).

Finnish universities also explain their part in the intercultural communication and internationalisation space. The following points are public information pulled directly from the university websites:

- **Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences** (2017) states they have multiple opportunities to develop these competencies. They offer courses in language and intercultural communications, exchange studies, and multiple international degree programmes. They also claim to have Finnish taught classes with international guest lecturers, blended studies, and international study partners.
- **The University of Jyväskylä** (n.d.) states that they aim to teach students to understand multilingual communications, help them become accustomed to multilingual interactions, and give them the skills to thrive in multicultural contexts. They also aim to give students an understanding and appreciation of all languages and cultures, give them the skills to analyse and link cultural behaviours, and develop their own language and cultural skills to use in work and life.
- **Tampere University of Applied Sciences** (2024) states that they have intercultural communication course open to all students. They offer both on campus and online lessons to widen the opportunities of students. They aim to teach students

adequate language skills, multicultural interaction, and multicultural teamwork. They recommend the courses to those who want to critically analyse and immerse in a multicultural classroom and use their intercultural communication skills outside of school.

3 Research Methodology

The research of this thesis was done using both qualitative and quantitative methods through closed and open-ended survey questions. These surveys were given to university of applied sciences students across the country of Finland, one for international students, and two for Finnish students in various languages. Over 100 student responses were received across all three surveys from 11 schools of students with 22 different nationalities and 13 different kinds of degree programmes.

3.1 Research Onion

Saunders' research onion, developed in 2007, is a tool used to understand the decisions made when conducting research and collecting data (Phair & Warren, 2021). The onion starts at the outer later and works itself in. As such, research philosophy, approach, strategy, time horizon, and techniques and procedures can be observed within the onion.

Research Onion

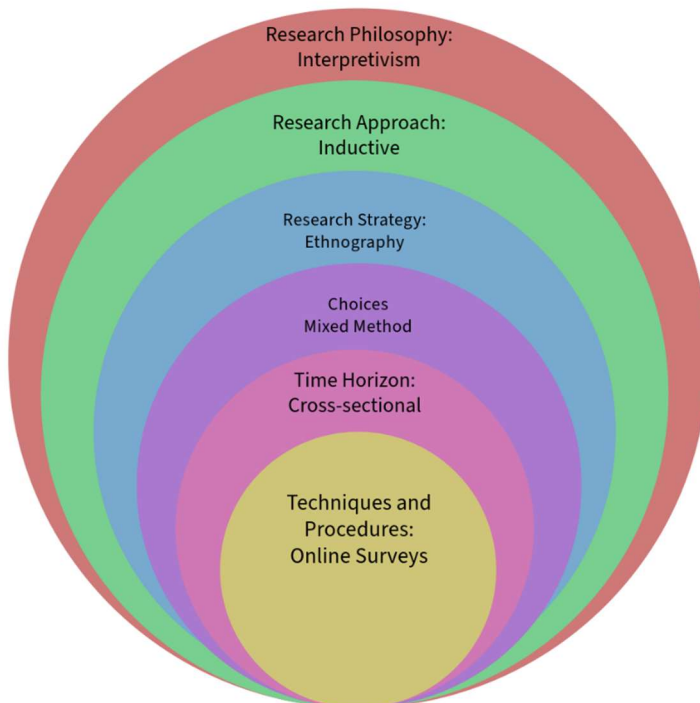


Figure 14. Research Onion Graph for thesis topic research.

The research philosophy of the onion is interpretivism. Interpretivism refers to how social and cultural influences may affect a person (Phair & Warren, 2021). This in turn focuses on opinions, ideas, and thoughts of people through a cultural lens. In terms of the research of the thesis, the goal is to understand different students experiences, opinions, and perspectives about intercultural communication.

The research approach of the onion is inductive. Inductive research refers to using theories as a foundation for research (Phair & Warren, 2021). In terms of the research of the thesis, the goal is to gain insight based on student experience and survey data, with no project associated, making the approach inductive.

The research strategy of the onion is ethnography. Ethnography refers to observing people in normal environments and social situations to then translate meanings in their interactions (Phair & Warren, 2021). In terms of the research of the thesis, the goal is to examine and understand how students feel about the current intercultural communication education, their skills, and their cultural work experience.

The choice of the onion is mixed method. Mixed method approach refers to using both quantitative and qualitative data in research (Phair & Warren, 2021). In terms of the research of the thesis, both closed and open-ended questions were asked in the research of this topic, thus making it mixed-method.

The time horizon of the onion is cross-sectional. Cross sectional time refers to the studying a topic at a specific point in time (Phair & Warren, 2021). In terms of the research of the thesis, the data was collected in 2025 and refers to the students current perception of education and intercultural communication.

Finally, the techniques and procedures of the onion are online surveys. This last section of the onion refers to what data will be collected and the method to do so (Phair & Warren, 2021). In terms of the research of the thesis, multiple surveys will be used to collect the personal opinions and thoughts of students who decide to participate.

3.2 Research Questions

As stated in Section 1 of this thesis, there are research questions that were considered during the duration of this research, with one main question and two sub questions. Three of these questions stood out as most important and are the main focuses of the research, they are as follows:

- How prepared do both Finnish and international students in Finland feel for the international workplace setting?
- Are students satisfied with the amount and quality of intercultural communications studies in Finnish universities of applied sciences?
- What policies should universities adopt to improve global workplace readiness?

The ever-present internationalization within Finland brings the need for proper intercultural communications studies – for all students. Therefore, the research needed to answer these questions to figure out the amount, quality, and satisfaction of the intercultural communication education as well as figure out the issues and solutions attached to it.

3.3 Research Design

The aim of this research was to find out how different types of students in Finland feel about their intercultural communication skills, learnings, and education. To receive the most responses from multiple different school students, three different surveys were conducted and distributed through multiple different channels. These channels include school Intra pages, email, word of mouth, social media, and Microsoft Teams.

3.4 Target Sampling Audience

The target sampling audience of this research was university of applied science students in Finland. The degree programme, nationality, and language were not a factor in the sampling group as the purpose of this research is to examine the intercultural communication skills of all students in Finland.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

To achieve the most amount of research and ensure multiple different kinds of students were included; Three separate surveys were created. The first of these surveys was written in the English language and was intended to be completed by international students or Finnish students studying in international degree programmes. The second of these surveys was also written in English language but was intended for students completing degrees in Finnish taught programmes. The last of these surveys was a copy of the second survey in the Finnish language- this was done to get more responses.

4 Findings and Discussion

As stated before, over 100 student responses were received and analysed for the purpose of this research. These responses come from students across the country of Finland from all different types of degree programmes. All respondents of the surveys responded voluntarily with no affiliation to their school or institution.

4.1 Survey Questions

This section provides the content of all three surveys that were conducted in the research process of this thesis. Two of them are in the English language and one of them is in the Finnish language.

4.1.1 English Language International Survey – For International Degree Programmes

1. What school or institute do/did you attend?
2. What is your nationality?
3. What is/was your field of study?
4. Have you worked in an international workplace? Part-time, Full-time, and Internships all count
5. If you have worked, what was the industry or job role?
6. Please share more about your position and experience if possible
7. On a scale of 1–5, how well do you think your studies prepared you for communicating in an international work environment?
8. Did you attend any courses related to intercultural communication?
9. What learning methods helped you develop intercultural communication skills?
10. Were there enough opportunities to interact with students from different cultural backgrounds in your programme / school?
11. Do you feel you work better on multicultural teams as opposed to monocultural teams?
12. Please explain your answer to the last question

13. If you are an expat, did you receive any type of culture classes when coming to your new country?
14. Did your school help you understand Finnish workplace culture?
15. Have you encountered difficulties in intercultural communication in a workplace?
16. If yes, what were the biggest challenges?
17. How comfortable do you feel communicating with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds?
18. Did you go through cultural sensitivity training in your workplace?
19. Have you experienced discrimination or bias due to cultural differences in your workplace?
20. Did your school prepare you to handle misunderstandings or conflicts related to cultural differences at work?
21. What skills do you think your school should focus more on to improve students' intercultural communication readiness?
22. Would you have attended more intercultural communication training if it were available?
23. What advice would you give to future international students at your school about intercultural communication?
24. Overall, how satisfied are you with your school's support in preparing students for intercultural communication?

4.1.2 English Language Survey for Finnish Students – For Finnish Degree Programmes

25. What school or institute do you attend?
26. What is/was your field of study?
27. Have you worked in an international workplace? Part-time, Full-time, and Internships all count
28. If you have worked, what was the industry or job role?
29. Please share more about your position and experience if possible
30. Do you ever plan on working in an international environment?
31. Why or why not?

32. Do you feel it's important to learn Intercultural Communication (The study of communicating and interacting with people of different cultures and nationalities)?
33. On a scale of 1–5, how well do you think your studies prepared you for communicating in an international work environment?
34. Did you attend any courses related to intercultural communication?
35. What learning methods helped you develop intercultural communication skills?
36. Were there enough opportunities to interact with students from different cultural backgrounds in your programme / school?
37. Do you feel you work better on multicultural teams as opposed to monocultural teams?
38. Please explain your answer to the last question
39. Did your school help you understand international workplace culture?
40. Have you encountered difficulties in intercultural communication in a workplace?
41. If yes, what were the biggest challenges?
42. How comfortable do you feel communicating with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds?
43. Did you go through cultural sensitivity training in your workplace?
44. Did your school prepare you to handle misunderstandings or conflicts related to cultural differences at work?
45. What skills do you think your school should focus more on to improve students' intercultural communication readiness?
46. Would you have attended more intercultural communication training if it were available?
47. Overall, how satisfied are you with your school's support in preparing students for intercultural communication?

4.1.3 Finnish Language Survey for Finnish Students – For Finnish Degree Programmes

48. Mihin kouluun tai instituuttiin opiskelet?
49. Mikä on/oli opiskelualasi?
50. Oletko työskennellyt kansainvälisessä työpaikassa? Osa-aikaiset, kokopäiväiset ja työharjoittelut lasketaan

51. Jos olet työskennellyt, mikä oli toimiala tai työtehtävä?
52. Kerro lisää asemastasi ja kokemuksestasi, jos mahdollista
53. Asteikolla 1–5, kuinka hyvin arvelet opintojen valmistaneen sinua kommunikointiin kansainvälisessä työympäristössä?
54. Oletko osallistunut kulttuurienväliseen viestintään liittyville kursseille?
55. Mitkä oppimismenetelmät auttoivat sinua kehittämään kulttuurienvälisiä kommunikaatiotaitoja?
56. Oliko ohjelmassasi/koulussasi riittävästi mahdollisuuksia vuorovaikutukseen eri kulttuuritaustoista tulevien opiskelijoiden kanssa?
57. Tunnetko toimivasi paremmin monikulttuurisissa tiimeissä kuin yksikulttuurisissa tiimeissä?
58. Perustele vastauksesi viimeiseen kysymykseen
59. Auttoiko koulusi sinua ymmärtämään kansainvälistä työkulttuuria?
60. Oletko kohdannut vaikeuksia kulttuurienvälisessä kommunikaatiossa työpaikalla?
61. Jos kyllä, mitkä olivat suurimmat haasteet?
62. Kuinka mukavaa tunnet kommunikoinnin eri kulttuuritaustoista tulevien kollegoiden kanssa?
63. Kävitkö kulttuurisensitiivisyyskoulutuksen työpaikallasi?
64. Valmistiko koulusi sinua käsittelemään väärinkäsityksiä tai konflikteja, jotka liittyvät kulttuurieroihin työssä?
65. Mihin taitoihin koulusi pitäisi mielestäsi keskittyä enemmän oppilaiden kulttuurienvälisen kommunikaatiovalmiuden parantamiseksi?
66. Olisitko osallistunut enemmän kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän koulutukseen, jos se olisi ollut saatavilla?
67. Kuinka tyytyväinen olet yleisesti ottaen koulusi tukeen valmistaakseen opiskelijoita kulttuurienväliseen kommunikaatioon

4.2 Home Country of Respondents

Firstly, the home country of the respondents is important to understand how they may function and communicate regarding their cultural dimensions as explained in the last section of the thesis. People from over 22 different nationalities participated in the survey, with

the majority being from Finland, followed by various south Asian countries. These numbers can be observed in Figure 15.

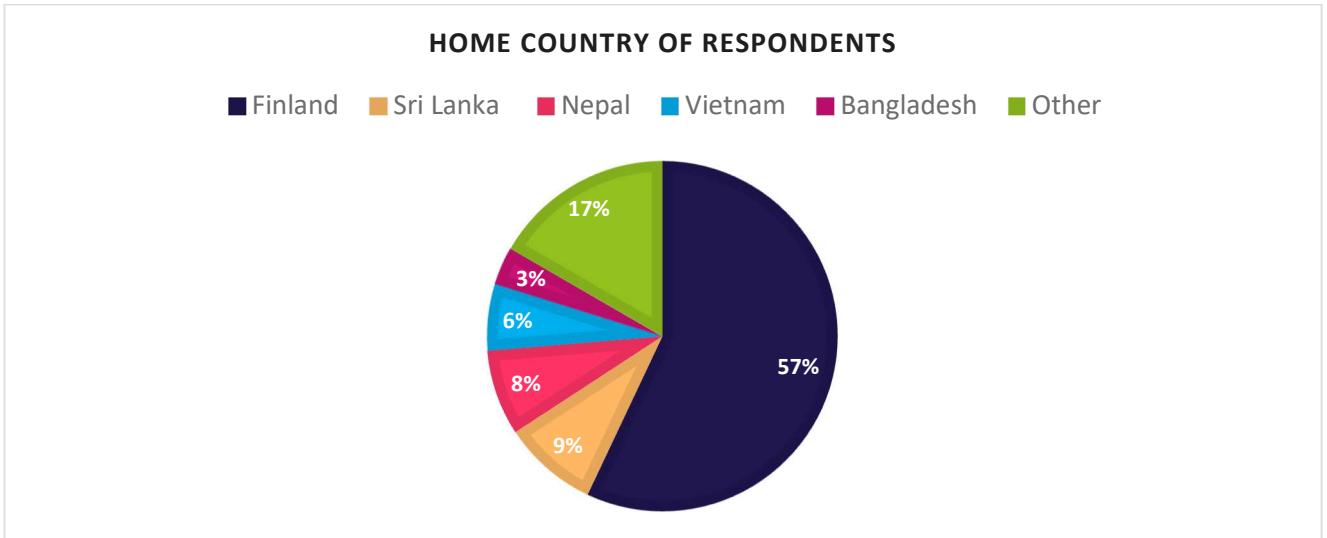


Figure 15. Data of where respondents come from (N=114).

These countries all have different values, communication styles, and practices. Within these are the cultural dimensions, as developed by Hofstede and discussed earlier in the thesis. In Figure 16, these cultural dimensions can be fully observed and compared. Finland greatly differs from all the other countries compared in power distance and individualism, which in part can create confusion, conflict, and disarray when trying to communicate amongst each other in both casual and work settings.

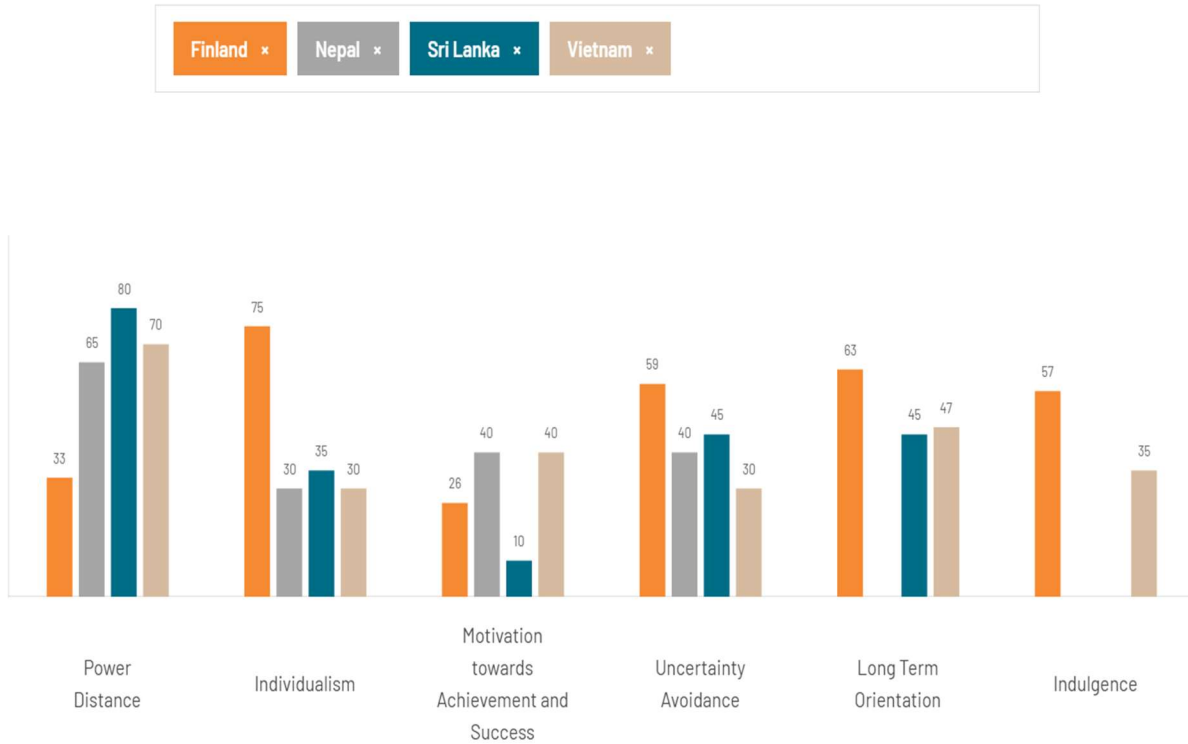


Figure 16. Cultural dimensions of Finland, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam (The Culture Factor, 2023).

4.3 Culture Classes for Expat Students

The purpose of this question was to find out if international students were given any type of cultural integration classes when arriving to study in Finland. Only expatriated international were researched for this purpose. The data shows that the results are almost half and half, with the majority receiving said cultural lessons to integrate into Finland and Finnish culture. The remaining 48% of students claimed that they did not receive any type of Finnish culture lessons upon arriving in Finland and starting their studies. These results can be observed in Figure 17.

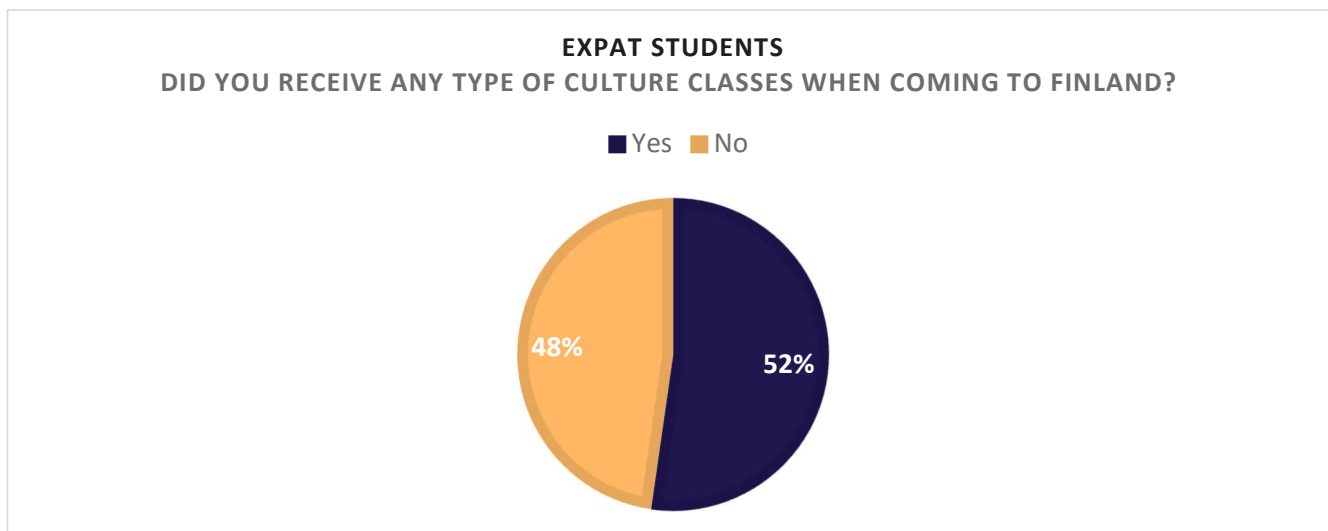


Figure 17. Data of how many expat students received culture classes upon arriving in Finland and attending school (n=60).

These types of courses prove important because they promote healthy integration, improves social skills, cultural skills, and simply skills to use in everyday life living in a new country (Kotoutuminen, n.d.). These skills make it easier to live, function, and make friends in Finland. They are also extremely beneficial to find work and or simply live in Finland after the studies are completed. These types of cultural classes also lessen the effects of culture shock on immigrants, of which can be observed in the precious section of this thesis.

4.4 Student Perception of Intercultural Communication Courses and Education

The purpose of these questions was to find out if students took intercultural communication classes, how helpful people found them if they did, and what aspects of study the students found most helpful. Both international and Finnish national students were researched for this purpose.

Regarding the international students, the majority of them at 80% had taken intercultural communication classes but only 55% of all students found them to be helpful. The remaining students stated they did not attend any of these courses, weren't able to, or were too early in their studies to tell. The vast number of students able to take intercultural

communication lessons during their studies is very beneficial. This data can be observed in Figure 18.

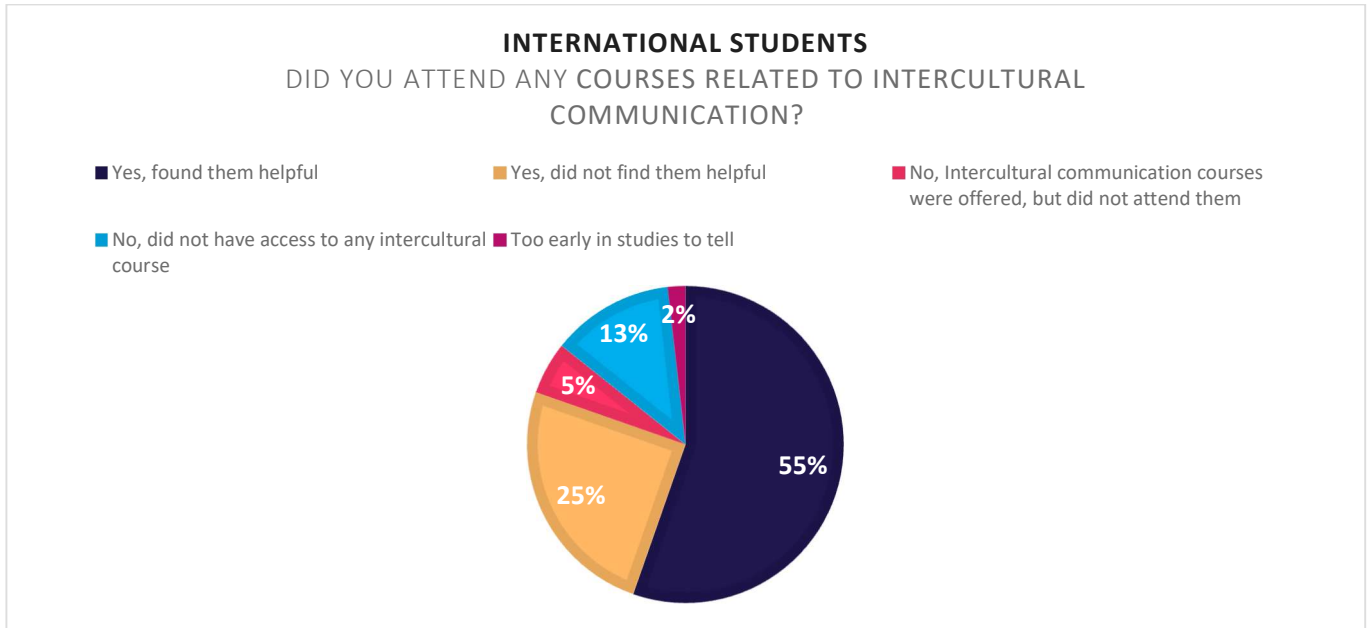


Figure 18. Data of how many international students took cultural classes and how helpful they found them (n=60).

International students did however respond that these intercultural communication courses were the most helpful aspect to developing their intercultural communication skills. The aspects found most useful behind these intercultural communication classes was international group projects, language courses, and international internships; all of which depend on having intercultural communication skills to thrive in in the first place. Some of the other points that students stated helped them develop these skills include making friends with students of other cultures, having a spouse of a different culture, living abroad for many years, and simply being super curious about other cultures. This data can be observed in Figure 19.

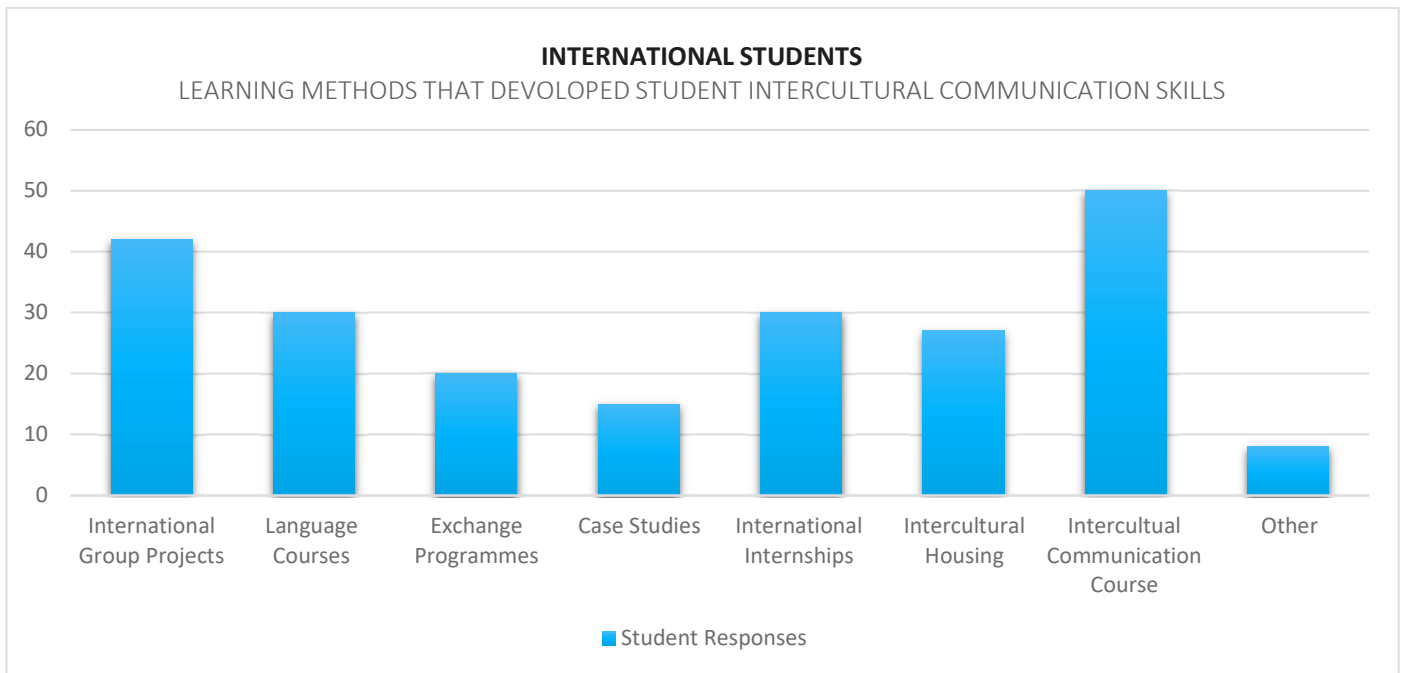


Figure 19. Data displaying the aspects that helped international students learn about intercultural communication and communication skills the most (n=60).

Regarding the Finnish students, however, they showed very different results about the attendance of intercultural communication classes. The majority of them at 33% had not taken any intercultural communication classes at all, but close behind 29% of students responded saying they had taken intercultural communication classes and found them helpful. This can be very detrimental to these students when they inevitably be working in international or cultural situation – such as interacting with a foreign customer or working with people of foreign decent. This data can be observed in Figure 20.

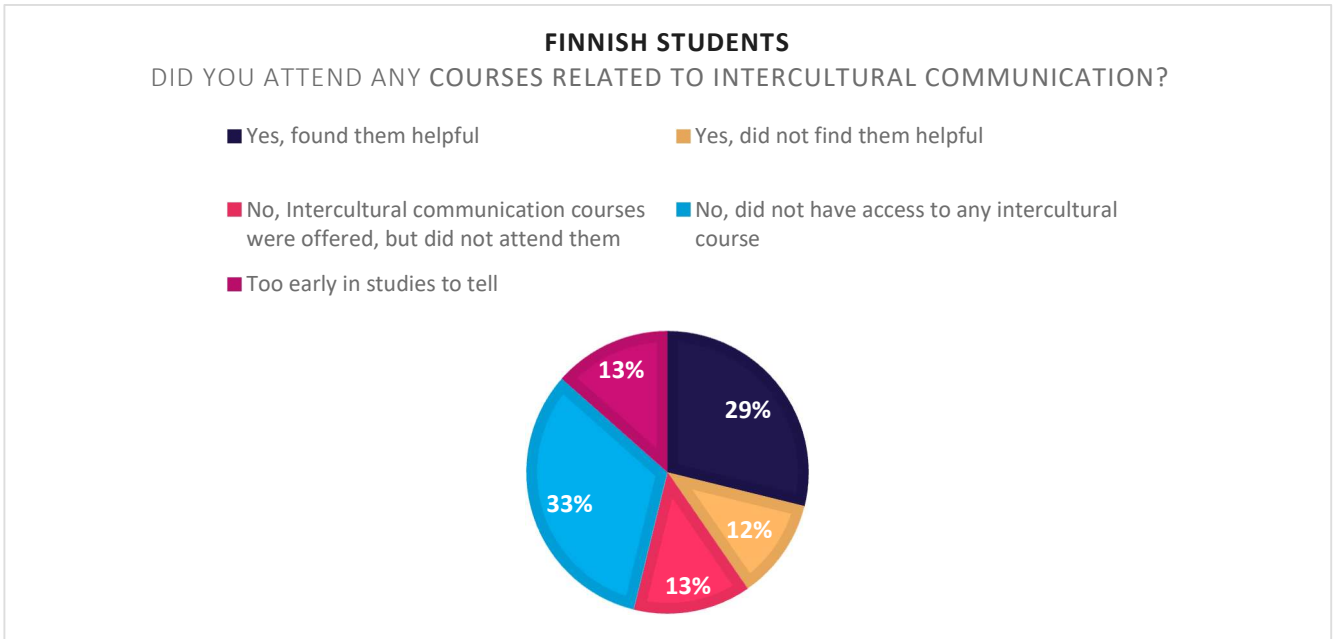


Figure 20. Data of how many Finnish students took cultural classes and how helpful they found them (n=54).

Of these Finnish students, majority responded that language courses were the main source of their current intercultural communication skills, closely followed by international group projects. However, none of the other intercultural communication aspects showed great significance amongst Finnish students. Some of the other points that students stated helped them develop these skills include living abroad and learning specific skills from language teachers. This data can be observed in Figure 21.

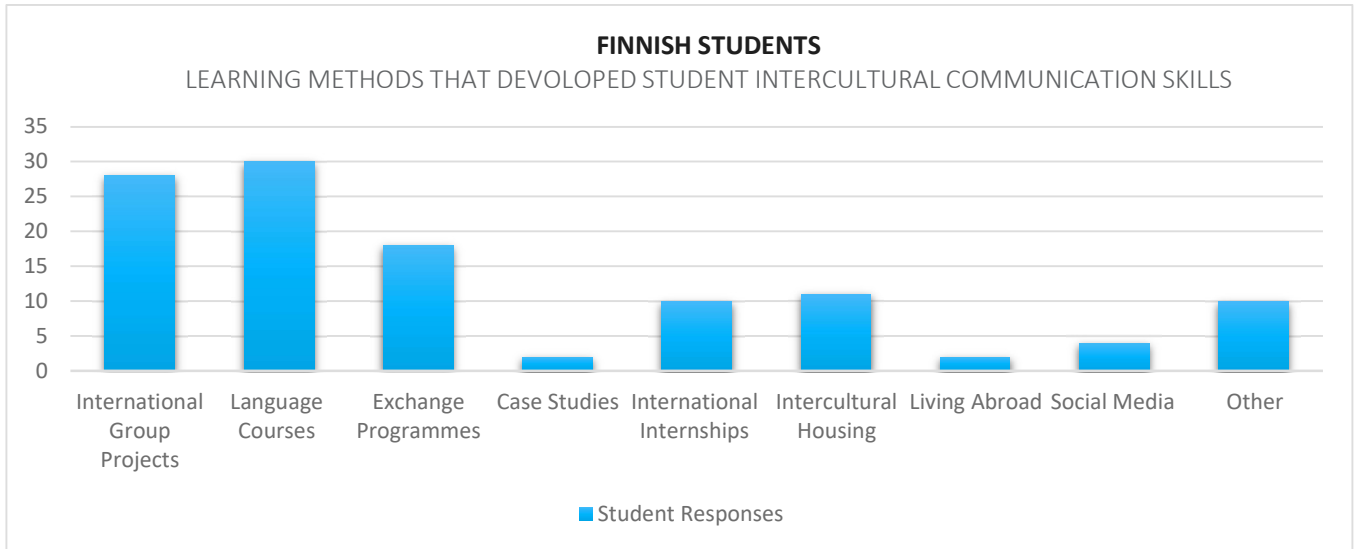


Figure 21. Data displaying the aspects that helped Finnish students learn about intercultural communication and communication skills the most (n=54).

4.5 Intercultural Teamwork

The purpose of this question was to find out how students feel about working on multicultural teams as opposed to monocultural teams. This is researched because multicultural teams can be very beneficial for work, as they offer a larger talent pool, more creativity, increased productivity, diverse opinions, and offers a unique competitive edge (Avilar, 2022). Both international and Finnish national students were researched for this purpose.

Regarding the international students, majority responded that they do in fact work better in multicultural teams. This would make sense, as international students are constantly surrounded by people of different background, cultures, and nationalities – thus giving them more opportunity to experience such team dynamics. Some students added extra comments stating they like seeing other perspectives among people of different cultures and they work well in both types of groups, but also that multicultural groups give more chance for misunderstandings, feelings of isolation, and simply that they do not want to interact with those of other cultures when given the two choices. This data can be observed in Figure 22.

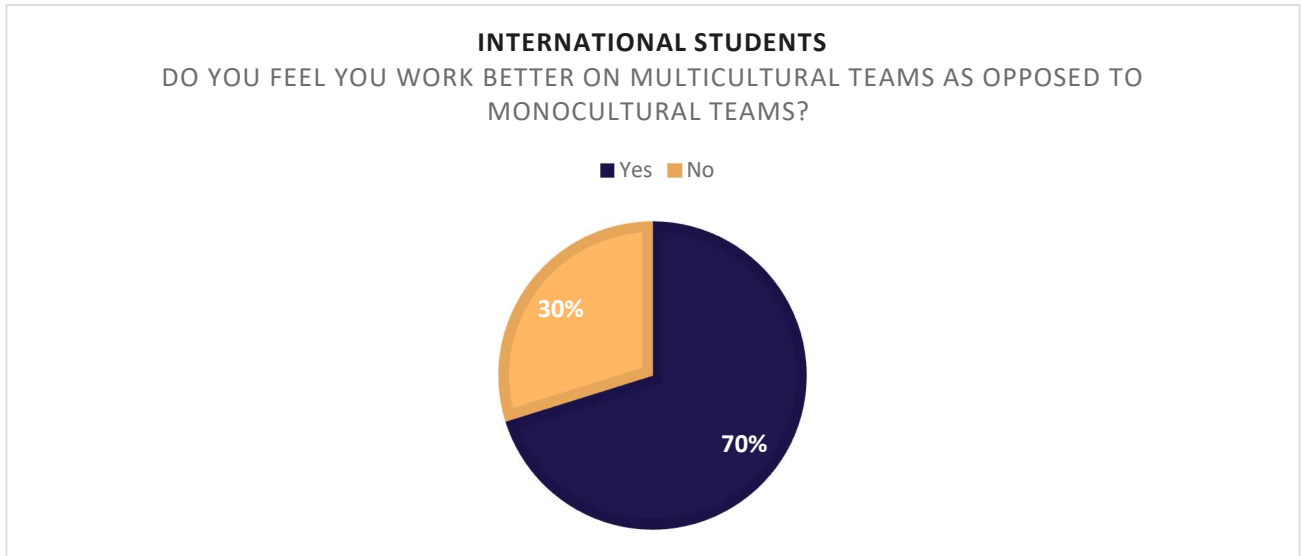


Figure 22. Data displaying how international students feel about working in multicultural teams as opposed to monocultural teams (n=60).

Regarding the Finnish students, however, showed much different results. The majority of Finnish students said they have never experienced any type of multicultural teamwork during their studies. This too makes sense, as it's unlikely for international students to study in a Finnish language-taught degree programme – although unfortunate as they have less opportunity to learn about these skills by practice. Only 23% of the Finnish students said that they work better in multicultural teams. Some students added extra comments stating that they like experiencing different cultures but don't have many opportunities to do it, other students described multicultural groups as enriching and easier to function in. On the other hand, other students stated that they believe that multicultural teams should not be prominent in Finland – as everyone should adapt to the Finnish mindset and learn the Finnish language. This data can be observed in Figure 23.

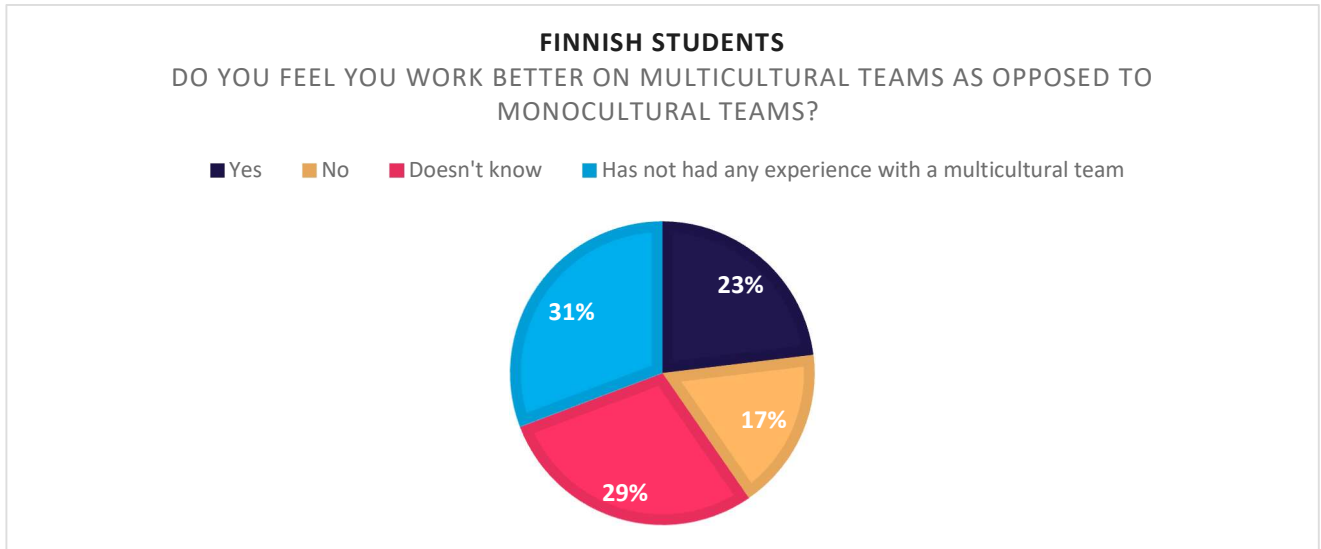


Figure 23. Data displaying how Finnish students feel about working in multicultural teams as opposed to monocultural teams (n=54).

4.6 Workplace Culture

The purpose of this question was to figure out how well students are learning about work culture. The international students were asked if they learned about Finnish workplace culture and Finnish students were asked if they learned about international workplace culture. They are asked in this way because international students naturally work in an international space while completing the degree, and vice versa for Finnish students with a Finnish space – therefore they must learn about the other.

Regarding the international students, 52% responded that they only somewhat learned about Finnish workplace culture, and 42% responded that yes, they have learned about it in full. For many of these students, they only learned about the workplace culture within the Finnish language courses – however these lessons are important whether one learns Finnish or not. Many international workplaces within Finland still hold elements of true Finnish workplace culture, thus this type of knowledge is essential to truly thrive in Finland after graduation. This data can be observed in Figure 24.

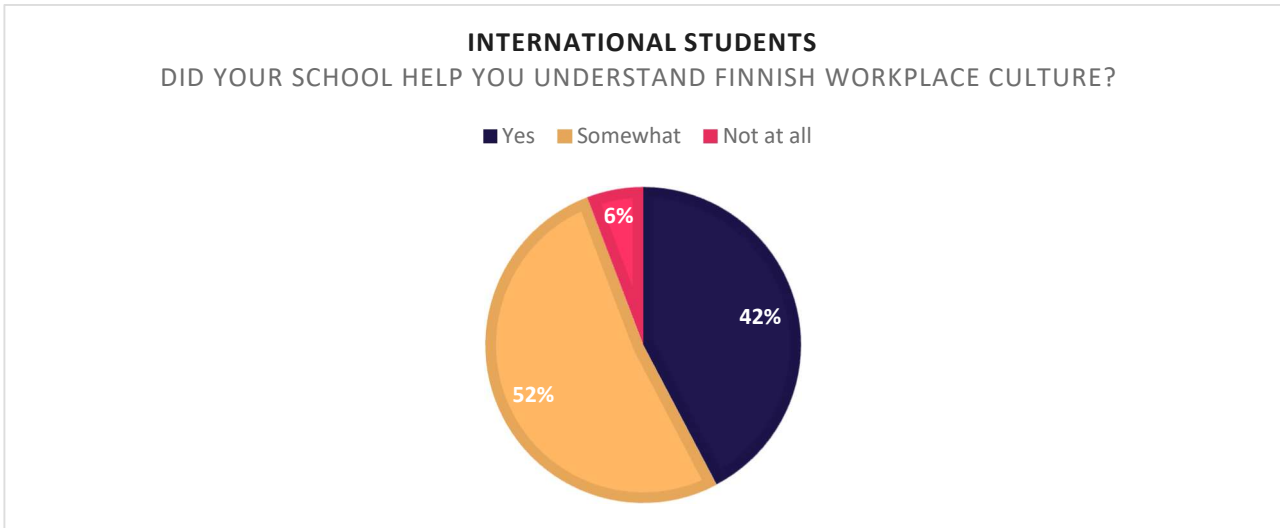


Figure 24. Data displaying how many international students learned about Finnish workplace culture during their studies (n=54).

Regarding the Finnish students, they showed very similar results. They were asked if they learned about international workplace culture with 54% of students responding that they learned somewhat about it. The remaining students responded equally that they did or did not, with both at 23%. Again, this topic is important for Finnish students to learn as the country is rapidly becoming more international, and the adequate skills and knowledge will be required to navigate it. This data can be observed in Figure 25.

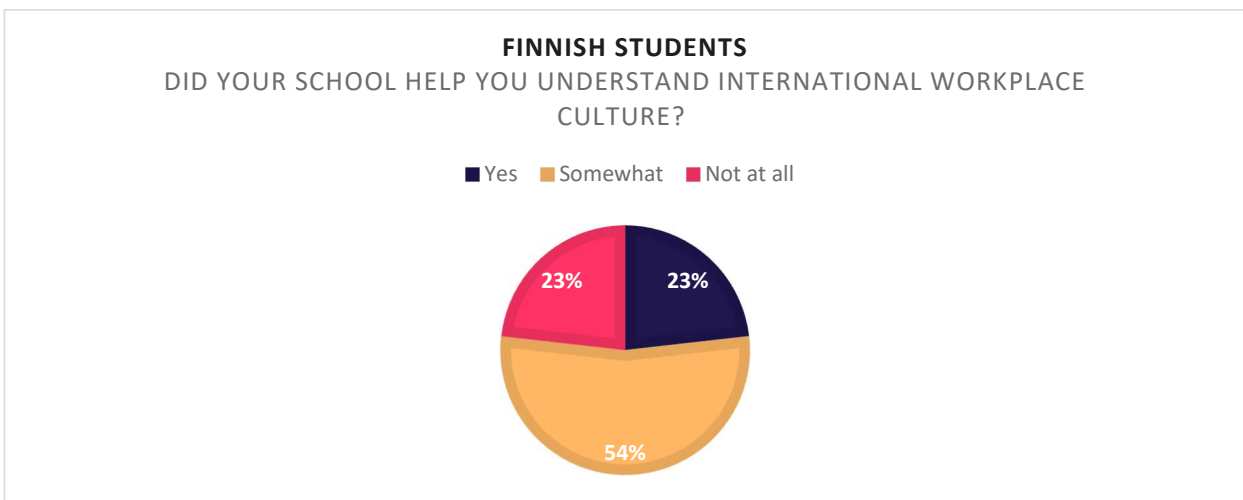


Figure 25. Data displaying how many Finnish students learned about international workplace culture during their studies (n=54).

4.7 Number of Students Working in International Workplaces

The purpose of this question was to find out how experienced both international and Finnish students are with international workplaces. All University of Applied Sciences students within Finland must complete some practical training with a workplace internship or sponsorship, thus allowing students to complete such training in various different types of workplaces. The next half of questions will revolve around the workplace culture and experience of these students.

Regarding the international students, a large majority of students at 75% stated that they have worked in an international workplace, 52% of those within Finland and 23% outside of Finland. This is to be expected from international students, as they are a part of the fundamental population that would make an international workplace to begin with. The remaining 23% of students stated they plan to work in an international workplace in the future, with only 2% stating they have not and do not plan to. This data can be observed in Figure 26.

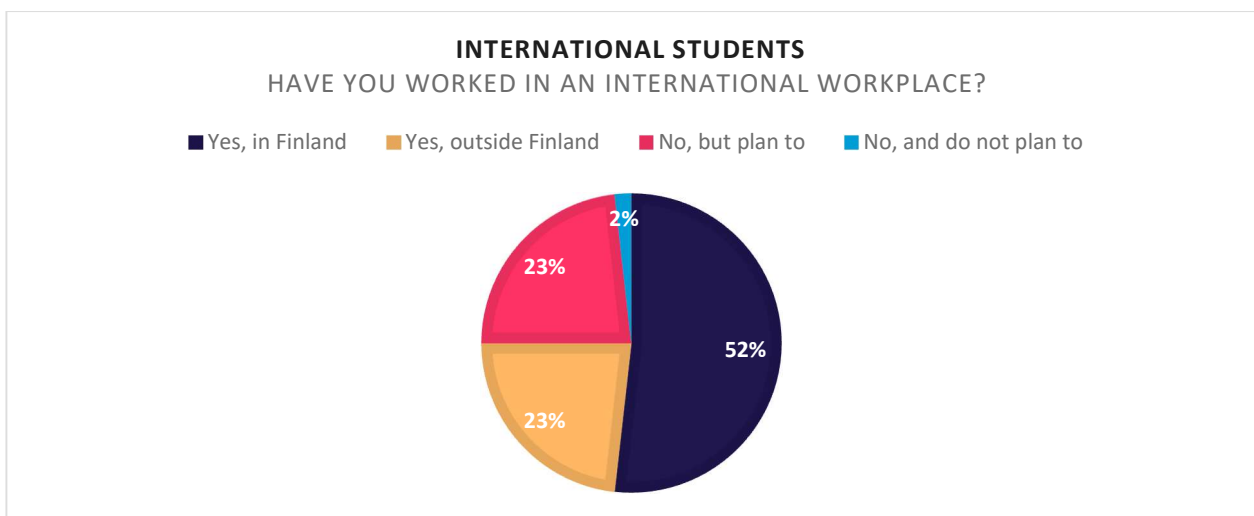


Figure 26. Data displaying how many international students have worked in international workplaces (n=60).

Regarding the Finnish students, however, displayed more varied results. Only 13% of students responded that they had worked in international workplaces in Finland and 6% have worked in them outside of Finland. However, 44% of Finnish students responded that they

planned to work in international workplaces in the future. This data can be observed in Figure 27.

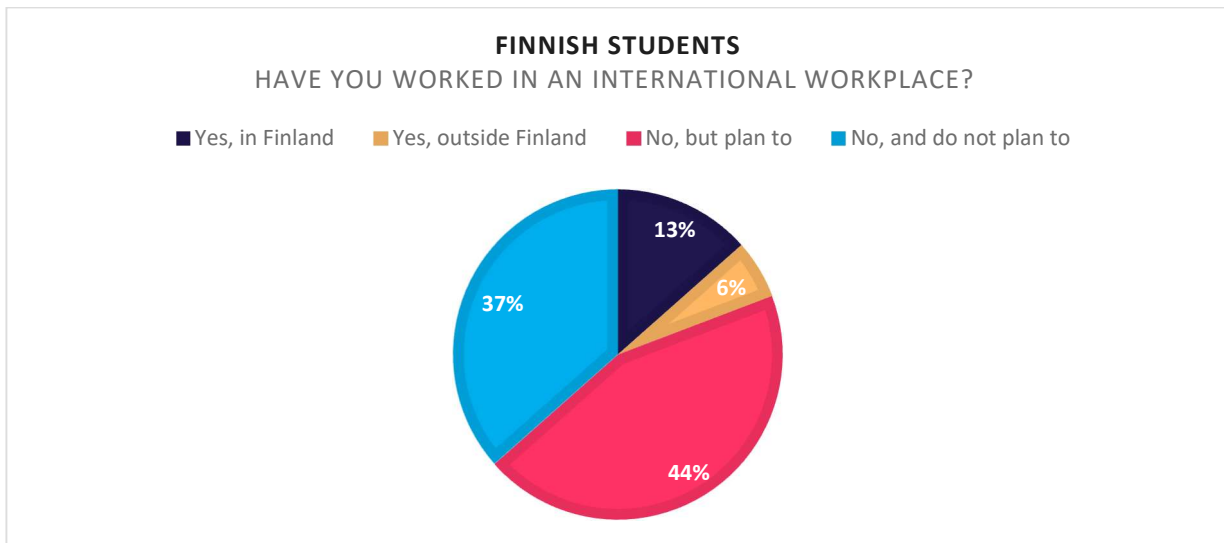


Figure 27. Data displaying how many Finnish students have worked in international workplaces (n=54).

4.8 Conflict in the Workplace

The purpose of these questions was to grasp how much conflict or cultural misunderstanding students faced in their workplace – both international and Finnish. For this, the international students were asked if they have ever faced any discrimination or bias due to cultural difference within their workplaces in Finland and the Finnish were asked if their school prepared them for when such instances may take place. This choice was made because education on how to deal with such issues is a preventative measure within Finnish workplaces and local spaces.

The international students were asked about their experience with any discrimination in the workplace, with 8% of students responded saying that they frequently experience discrimination or bias and 29% stating they sometimes experience it. These numbers are low, but the goal is 0%, and combined these stats take up the majority of the students. 27% of students claimed they rarely experience this type of situation, and the remaining 36% stated they have never experienced it. This data can be observed in Figure 28.

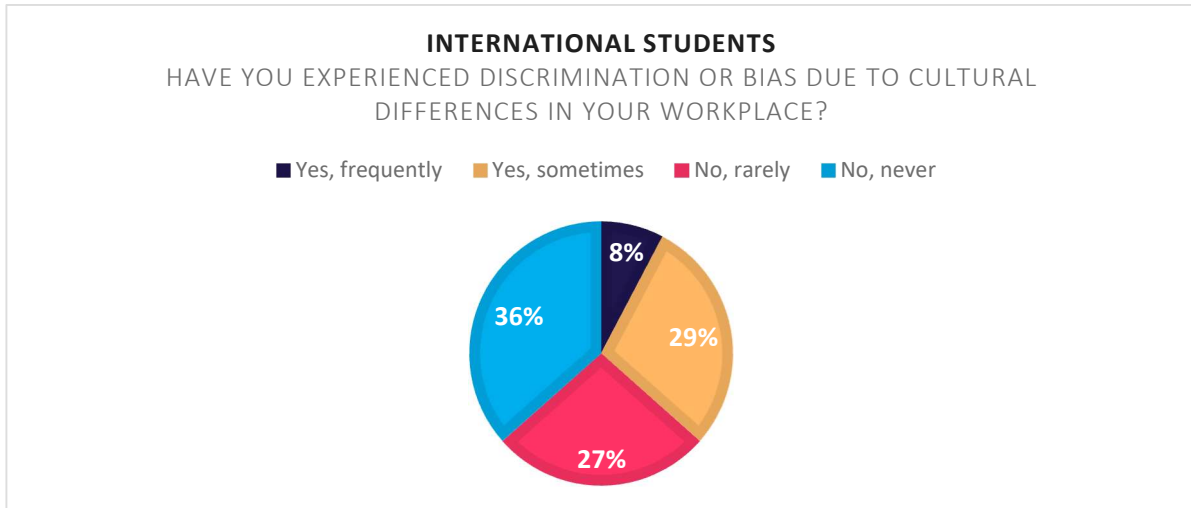


Figure 28. Data of how many international students have faced discrimination in the workplace (n=55).

The Finnish students, however, were asked if they had been prepared to handle cultural conflict or misunderstanding in the workplace by their school. The results of this show very similar to the number of international students who had experienced discrimination, only opposite. Of the Finnish students, 8% stated that they felt their school prepared them completely for such events, and 34% stated that they feel somewhat prepared. These are very valuable and necessary skills to learn, so the small number of students who feel prepared is alarming. The remaining students stated they do not feel very prepared, at 25%, and 33% stating they are not prepared at all. This data can be observed in Figure 29.

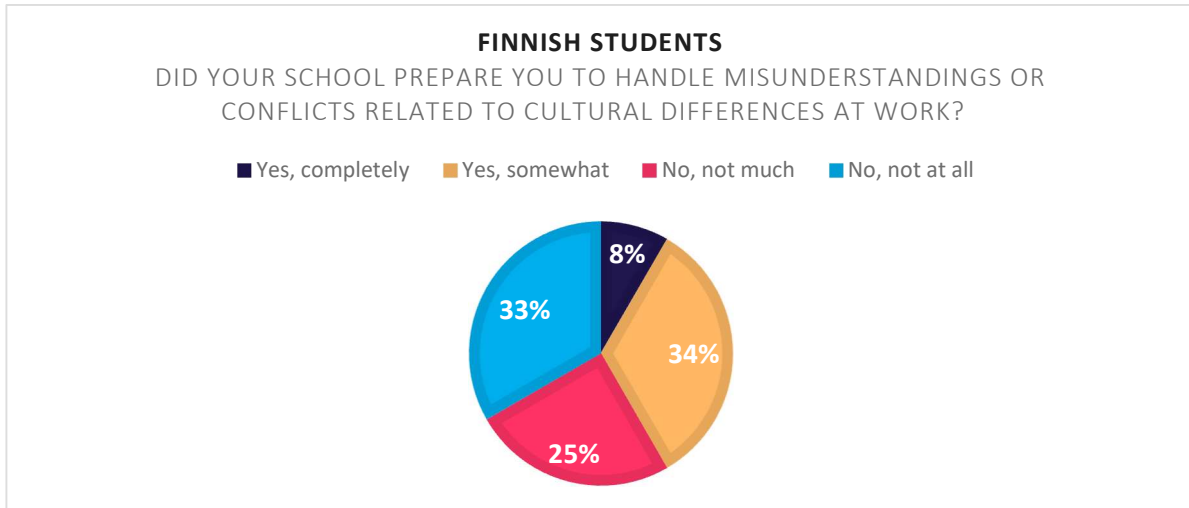


Figure 29. Data of how well Finnish students feel their school prepared them for cultural workplace conflict and misunderstandings (n=51).

4.9 Challenges Faces by Students in Finland Regarding Intercultural Communication

Lastly, the purpose of these questions was to learn about the biggest challenges students currently face in regard to intercultural communication. Firstly, they were asked if they've ever faced challenges related to intercultural communication in the workplace – which can include language barriers, nonverbal cues, stereotypes, and more. Secondly, they were asked to explain specifically what kinds of challenges they have faced in their workplaces.

Regarding the international students, majority responded that they have experienced such intercultural communication difficulties in their workplaces – with 7% stating it happens frequently and 65% stating it happens to them sometimes. This could be because many students did not feel satisfied with their intercultural communication education or were not offered it at all. The remaining students responded at 24% stating that they rarely experience intercultural communication difficulties and the remaining 4% stating it never happens.

This data can be observed in Figure 30.

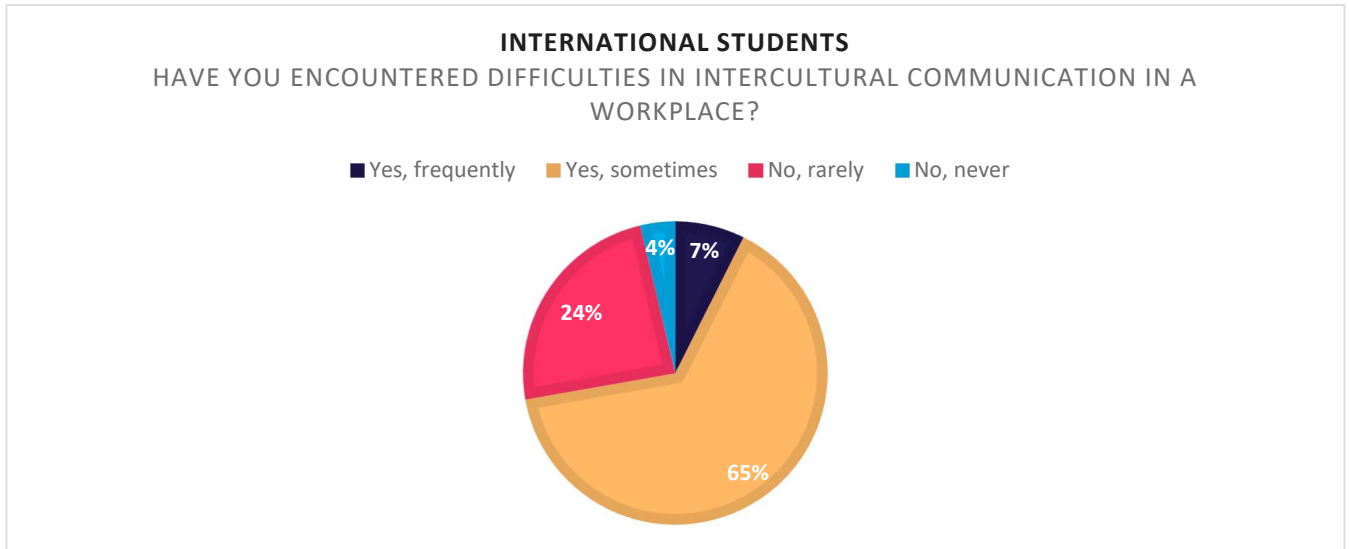


Figure 30. Data of how many international students experienced intercultural communication difficulties in the workplace (n=57).

The second half of these questions focused on the specific aspects that students felt were difficult regarding intercultural communication in the workplace. Almost all of the respondents stated that language barriers are one of the main difficulties they have faced, followed by different communication styles. These two are the only prominent results, with the remaining results holding around 25% of the responses, these are: Misinterpretation of cultural norms, stereotypes and biases, workplace hierarchy and power distance issues, difficulty understanding humour or nonverbal cues, differences in mannerisms, and simply other issues. Some of these “other” issues stated were that of students feeling other students language was rude, broken, or simply bad. This data can be observed in Figure 31.

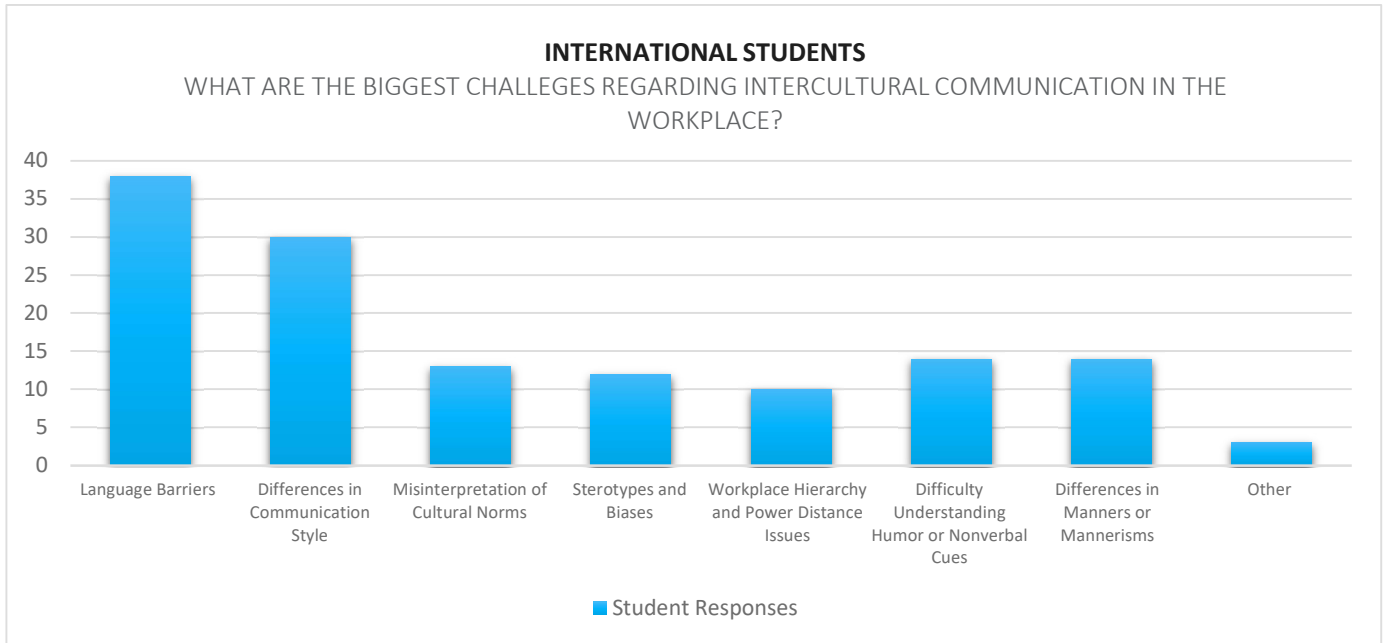


Figure 31. Data of the biggest challenges international students faced regarding intercultural communication in the workplace (n=49).

Regarding the Finnish students, only about half of the students responded stating that they have experienced difficulties with intercultural communication in the workplace. Of these students, 4% stated that it's a frequent occurrence and 47% stated it sometimes happens within the workplace. This could be because of the inadequate intercultural communication education that Finnish students have reported earlier in the survey. The remaining students responded at 24% saying they rarely experience it and 25% stating it never happens. This data can be observed in Figure 32.

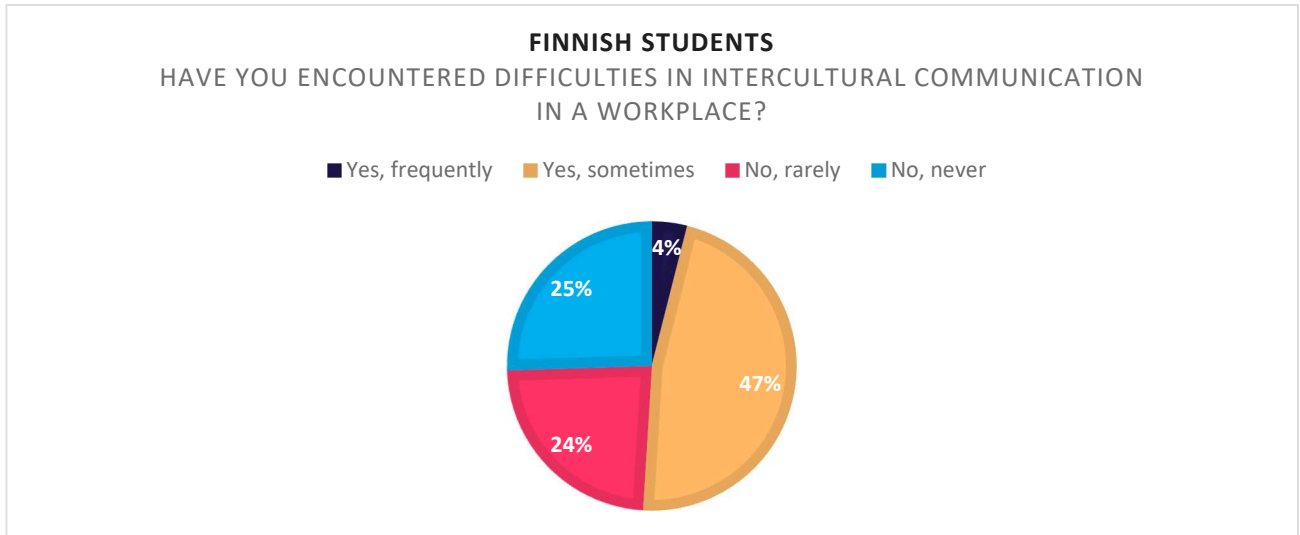


Figure 32. Data of how many Finnish students experienced intercultural communication difficulties in the workplace (n=53).

The data shown for the specific aspects that Finnish students thought were difficult is similar to that of the international students, with nearly all respondents stating that language barriers are one of the difficulties they face in the workplace. The second most difficulties stated, with about half of the respondents, are differences in communication style and misinterpretation of cultural norms. Some specific student responses indicated that Finnish students have issues understanding accents and do not feel they should be “forced” to speak any language other than Finnish in their workplace, however they do not wish for foreigners to speak Finnish either as they state they can’t understand them either, which is extremely contradictory. This data can be observed in Figure 33.

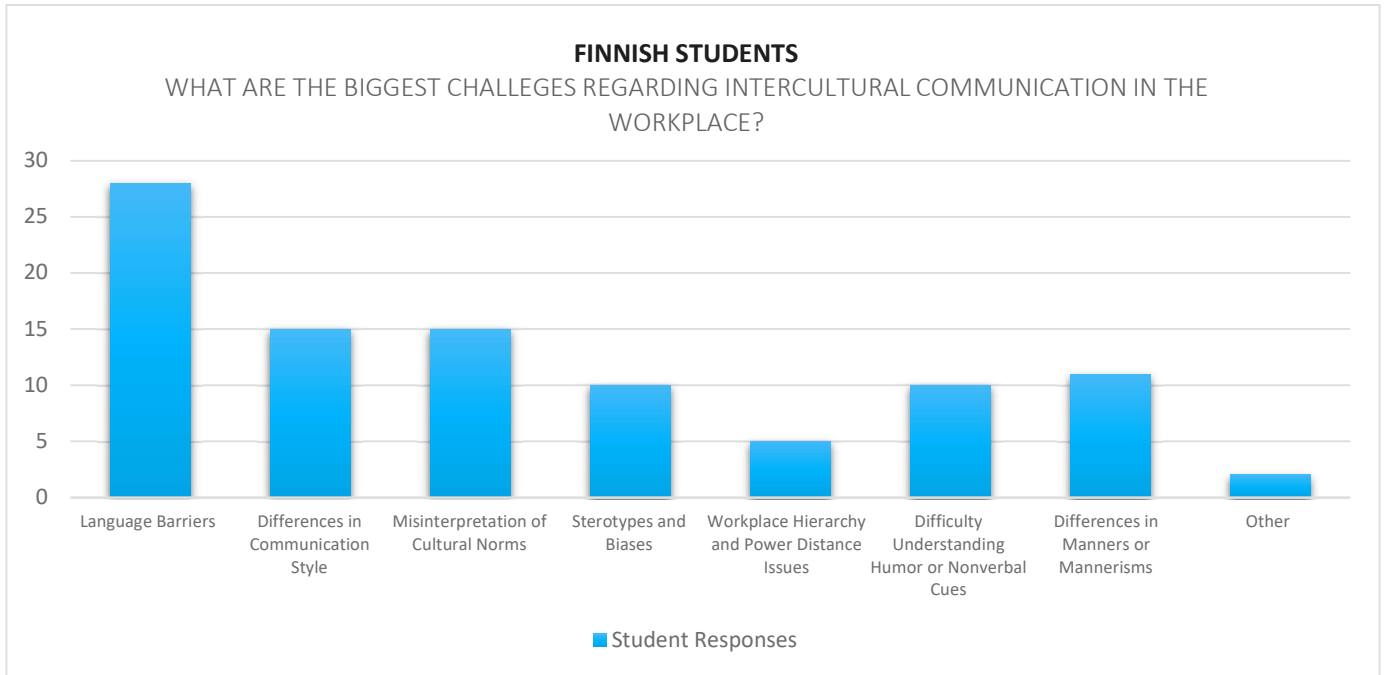


Figure 33. Data of the biggest challenges Finnish students faced regarding intercultural communication in the workplace (n=34).

4.10 Comments from Student Surveys

There are extra comments that students left on the survey that did not fit into any specific questions. These comments range from an incredibly open mindset to a very ethnocentric one, such as:

From international students:

- They feel having an eagerness to learn about diverse cultures is essential to mastering intercultural communication.
- They feel the work ethic within Finland does not work with the work ethic of international students.
- They feel people are simply born good or bad at communicating and it has nothing to do with cultural differences.

- They feel that the locals need to be more educated on cultural differences and intercultural communication.
- They feel a there needs to be a more relaxed and comfortable environment to make mistakes in language, intercultural communication, and biases – so that people can feel less bad asking questions and getting educated.
- They feel the Finnish language is by far the biggest barrier preventing them from succeeding.

From Finnish students:

- They believe that “when in Rome, do as the Romans do” should apply to Finnish workplace and school culture, which it currently is not amongst students “not from the EU or USA”.
- They feel it is unfortunate and “crazy” that they can go their entire degree without communicating with any international or exchange students.
- They feel they are encouraged to work within fully Finnish companies and do not have many opportunities to work in multicultural settings at all.
- They feel they are not currently being encouraged to do student exchange abroad or complete practical training abroad.
- They see intercultural communication skills as useful, but not as a necessity.
- They feel culture and background has nothing to do with how people may act, work, or present themselves in a work environment.

5 Recommendations and Solutions

After analysing the student responses and data provided from the research, many recommendations and solutions were researched to help improve the student experience in intercultural communications. Student recommendations as well as academic frameworks and research were all considered in making the solutions in this section.

5.1 Student Recommendation for Improving Intercultural Communication Training in Upper Education in Finland

There are four main recommendations stated based on the feedback from the conducted surveys, they are as follows:

1. Increasing the number of intercultural events: Many students expressed a great interest in wanting to attend events intended for both Finnish and international students. Although some schools are proficient on providing such experience, the majority of students feel their respective schools are not – and state that often the events held at their schools are intended for only one focus group. Mixing these events to be available to everyone promotes a comfortable space to practice intercultural communication, learn more about other cultures, and meet some new people.
2. Fostering an environment that encourages intercultural communication and multicultural interaction: Finnish students currently do not feel encouraged to interact with international students and vice versa. In addition to this, they state there are not enough opportunities to do so – as they are often separated, which brings us to the next recommendation.
3. Offering mixed-degree courses: Offering an array of courses that all students could take in English or Finnish is recommended by students as an easy way to foster multiculturalism in school. Some recommended classes include intercultural communication skills, language studies, and cross-cultural interactions.

4. Organizing and promoting a culture day for all students: Many international students suggested hosting a culture day for all students to attend and explore. Culture days foster a brilliant learning environment for fellow students, teachers, and anyone else involved. They offer opportunities to bond with people of other cultures and offers perspective into who people are surrounded by every day.

5.2 Improvement of Intercultural Communication in the Finnish Curriculum

Based on the feedback received from the students in this research, it's very clear that the intercultural communication education needs to be improved and more inclusive of all students – especially those who are studying in Finnish taught degree programmes. Currently, many students don't have access to any such courses, have sub-par versions of it, or don't know they exist at all. Making these intercultural communication classes a mandatory class for all degree students would fix that – even if it seems unnecessary in this moment, it will not be in the future.

As stated before, the Multilingual and Intercultural Communication Competence Framework is already being used in schools and universities all across Europe – but not all schools do. This framework values cultural knowledge, communication skills, empathy, and more (Kokkonen & Natri, 2024b). These skills are what students need when studying with international students, interacting with international professors, and eventually entering the ever-present international workforce of Finland. If more schools across Finland developed and taught based on this framework then students would be more prepared, knowledgeable, and ready to use their skills in school, work, and life.

In addition to implementing the framework country-wide, offering many new opportunities for all students is also in order. Exchange programmes, wider language studies, international lectures, blended classes, and multicultural events are all possible and positive changes schools all across Finland can implement for the good of their students. Everyone deserves to learn these skills and should learn them for the better of everyone around them.

5.3 Role of Educators in Fostering an Inclusive Learning Environment

The responsibility of intercultural communication does not solely fall onto the schools and workplaces – but also the educators within them. Teachers approach to teaching this subject can determine how students feel about it overall. Teachers that actively encourage participation and create welcoming environments foster the perfect atmosphere for students to learn and practice their intercultural communication skills and present cultural differences.

According to the Association College and University Educators (n.d.) “By implementing inclusive teaching practices, faculty can create learning environments in which all students feel like they belong and can learn at high levels.” They recommend educators do this by making their course reflect diversity in the world, using inclusive language, and using interest surveys to further connect with students. Although simple, actions such as these can make or break a course for one of their students.

5.4 Mandatory Cultural Sensitivity Training across Finland

One of the common themes of the research was that students are lacking in any type of sensitivity training when starting in a new workplace. Although the schools do play a large role in making sure students are prepared for such situations, it cannot fall on them alone. This is especially true for those who have entered the workforce without attending university first or those who are studying programmes without the proper intercultural communication education. Therefore, the country of Finland should start to implement mandatory sensitivity training and intercultural communications training in all workplaces – starting with those of large international staffs or customer bases.

As seen in the survey results, many international students stated that they have experiences bias or communication problems in the workplace. In addition to this, the Finnish students responded that many of them don't feel prepared to deal with such situations in a real-life scenario. This shows the apparent need of programmes such as this to help obliterate these types of scenarios altogether, as according to Oxford (n.d.) cultural sensitivity training aims to help employees understand cultural values, enable them to recognize bias, educate them on communication styles, and teach valuable lessons in conflict

resolution. They continue this topic by stating, “Cultural sensitivity training provides individuals with the skills needed to communicate effectively across cultural lines, reducing misinterpretations and enhancing collaboration.” They continue to state, “Organisations that embrace cultural sensitivity often see improved relationships with clients and customers from diverse backgrounds.”

5.5 Improving Language Support and Migration Services in Finland

By far one of the biggest challenges students reported facing is the language barrier and integration into Finnish society. There is some support in place – some schools more than others – but it’s often not enough or not very practical in real life. For example, one student stated that the extent of their support was learning that Finland has cold weather and does not use English language. Because of this, more useful Finnish language courses, courses focused on Finnish working life, and integration programmes are essential to improve the well-being of students and keep them entering the Finnish workforce after graduation.

The entire migration process also needs a support system in place for new students. There is often a long, difficult, and confusing process associated with moving to Finland. One of the biggest websites for Finnish information infoFinland.fi (2024) states that the following are all required in order to move to Finland: A residence permit, insurance, money, student position, and housing. Many students have expressed frustration in obtaining the permit, finding proper housing, and trying to find a job once arriving in Finland. Adding measures to help support these students is crucial to the overall well-being of the international student body.

6 Conclusion

This final section will conclude the research of this thesis by summarizing the findings and highlighting what can be done to improve them. It will also offer suggestions for how to further continue research in this topic, as it is extremely important in today's world and would greatly improve with such further research.

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

The research presented in this thesis shows that while some students in Finland feel prepared for intercultural communication in international workplaces, there is still a lot of room for improvement on the matter. International students are overall more likely to attend intercultural communication courses but lack the skills needed from them to be useful. Many Finnish students stated never taking them at all and not seeing a need for them – despite the growing international population nationwide.

Both of these student groups however stated that language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and real-life implementation make these intercultural communication skills harder to present and learn. Many students feel their intercultural communication studies are merely average and do not prepare them to enter the international workspace after graduation.

They state wanting more chances to interact with other students across cultures, with blended classes, cultural events, exchange studies, and more. Better framework, environment, access to classes, nationwide requirements, and improved services are all changes that can be made in favour of improving these skills and areas. Overall, the findings show a need for more consistent intercultural training, both in schools and in workplaces, to help students succeed in today's international world.

6.2 Suggestions for Further Research in the Topic

The research within this thesis focused on a group of around 100 students from all across Finland. This topic could greatly benefit from a larger respondent group, individual student

interviews, and professor opinions on the topic. Comparing specific schools would also provide helpful insight into how different areas of Finland operate in their intercultural communication skills.

Another way to continue research in this topic is to interview or survey graduated students in the workforce to see how they have used the intercultural communication skills they used in university – and what they wish they had learned earlier. This could show whether the current education really helps in the long run or if more changes are needed.

Lastly, directly hearing from international workplaces would greatly benefit the research. International workplaces know exactly what is lacking in the communication space and what skills they would like students to have before entering their workforce. This would in turn give valuable information to the schools about what skills need to be encouraged or added.

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