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**Follow-up study on the African graduates of Seinäjoki
UAS 2003 — 2015**

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This study was conducted in order to reveal the current status of graduates of African background of Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences from 2003 to 2015. This was made possible by reviewing the internationalisation strategy of Finnish higher education institutions 2009 – 2015 and the internationalisation policy of Seinäjoki UAS. Moreover, the study also considered the situation regarding the employment of foreigners in the Finnish labour market.

Data collection was made possible following the mixed method approach. A total of 25 persons were surveyed while interviews were conducted for 10 persons. The results revealed that 96 % of the respondents still live in Finland in which most of them work in cleaning companies with just a few working in old people's home.

The findings can be useful for future student recruitment, curriculum development, policy review and the strengthening of academic programmes.

Keywords: Internationalisation strategy, Internationalisation policy, Finnish higher education institutions, Employment, Finnish labour market, Seinäjoki University of applied sciences, African graduates, International students

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Abbreviations

UAS	University of Applied Sciences
SeAMK	Seinäjoen Ammattikorkeakoulu
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
CIMO	Centre for International Mobility
TE	Työ- ja Elinkeinoministeriö
EU	European Union
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EEA	European Economic Area
ILO	International Labour Organization

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the years, there has been an influx of foreign students into Finland studying in different higher education institutions as part of the Finnish higher education institutions' policy. It is therefore necessary to state that the higher education institutions in Finland are divided into two complementary parts which are: universities and universities of applied sciences (Garam 2009). These institutions of higher learning are scattered across the 19 regions in Finland. One of these institutions is the Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences located in the western region of Finland. Hence, Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (Seinäjoki UAS) has been playing host to a chunk of international students from different countries across the globe. These students who are of different cultural backgrounds are from Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and South America.

In the light of this, there is a need to do a follow-up study of the international students who have successfully graduated from the Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences. Consequently, this study intends to review the major activities of students of African background that completed their studies in Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences from 2003 to 2015. It will cover students from the Nursing programme and as well as the International Business programme. The focal point of this study will be on what has happened to these African students of Seinäjoki UAS after graduation between the periods of year 2003 through 2015. This research work will reveal the present situation of these Africans that had the opportunity to grace the university after undergoing moral and academic training in bachelor's degree and Master's degree programmes. In order words, the study will address the questions of their present location, job status as well as their future plans.

Relevance of the research

Since there is no information available about the status of the former African students of Seinäjoki UAS, there is an urgent need for the university to know the current situation of these graduates from Africa. The findings can be used for the purpose of future student recruitment, curriculum development, policy review and the strengthening of academic programmes.

Research Objectives

In order to achieve the aim of this study, the following objectives have been designed.

1. To establish the kinds of education Finnish higher education institutions offer to foreign students
2. To identify the kinds of internationalisation policies being offered to foreign students
3. To examine the level of engagement of foreigners in the Finnish labour market
4. To ascertain the current status of African Seinäjoki UAS graduates

Scope and Limitations

This study covers only students of African origin who have graduated and about to graduate from the business and nursing degree programmes of Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences between 2003 and 2015.

There are some limitations to this study. To begin with, the researcher was not provided with data containing details of the graduates for legal reasons. Thus, the participants were picked based on the network of the researcher.

Also, some of the interviewees complained about having tight schedule which made it difficult for the researcher to conduct proper interviews for some of the respondents.

2 EMPLOYMENT SITUATION IN FINLAND

Finland ranks amongst one of the top countries in the world in terms of the general well-being of its citizens. As a matter of fact, the country was ranked 10th in the rankings of The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Better Life Index for 2015 as indicated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The OECD Better Life Index of countries for 2015 (OECD 2015).

These rankings are done annually by the OECD after taking 11 topics into consideration which are housing, income, jobs, community, education, and environment. Others include civic engagement, health, life satisfaction, as well as safety, and work-life balance. This attests to the fact that Finland is one of those countries with better quality of lives of its citizens as shown in figure 1 above. This might be one of the reasons why there has been considerable increase in the population of immigrants in Finland.

However, according to the statistics recently released by Statistics Finland's Labour Force Survey in April 2015, the employment rate in March 2015 was 66.8 % which is not different from last year's result for persons between the ages of 15 and 64. The statistics show that 2,382,000 persons are employed which was 10,000 less than 2014 estimates.

On the other hand, the unemployment situation in March 2015 according to Statistics Finland's Labour Force Survey shows that 272,000 persons were unemployed which represents 10.3% with 21,000 more people than in 2014.

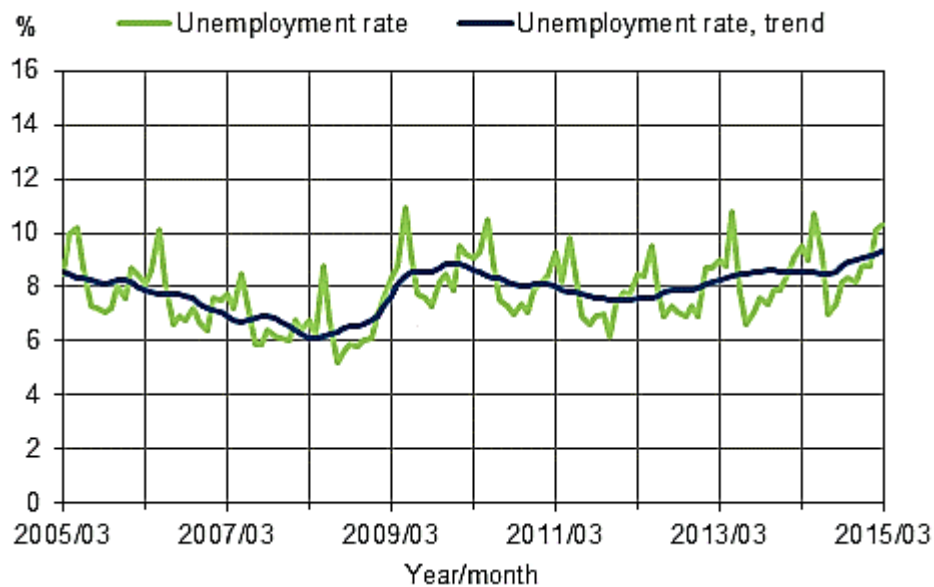


Figure 2. Rate of unemployment and trend of unemployment rate of persons between ages 15 & 74 from 2005/03–2015/03 (Statistics Finland 2015).

Figure 2 shows that Finland is facing one of the highest unemployment rates in the last 10 years. This is basically due to the bad state of the economy at the moment. The country has been battling with recession in the last 3 years running into its 4th year. In spite of this, there seems to be some level of optimism that the situation will improve in the next few years.

It is therefore pertinent to state that there are two different statistics released every month on the rate of unemployment in Finland. One is released by Statistics Finland's Labour Force Survey based on the criteria recommended by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the practices of Eurostat whereas the another one is released by the Employment service statistics of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy based on the information available in the TE offices' customer register across the country (Ministry of Employment and the Economy 2014).

2.1 Unemployment rates by region

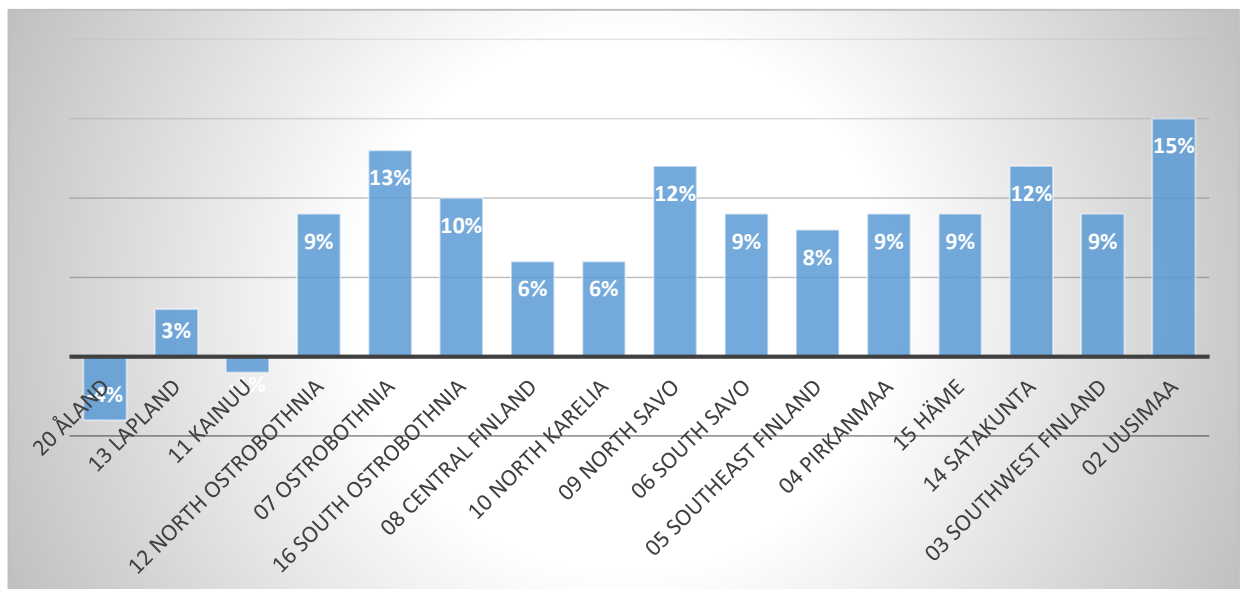


Figure 3. Unemployed job seekers in March 2015 in comparison to March 2014 (Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment 2015).

The statistics shown in Figure 3, was for March 2015, which was released in April 2015 by the Employment service statistics of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. The statistics show that unemployment rate increased elsewhere apart from the Kainuu region (-1 %) when compared to the same period in 2014 – March 2014. The south Ostrobothnia region manifested a 10 % increase in unemployment while the highest increase was recorded in the Uusimaa region (15%).

2.2 Employment of Foreign Students

Most students coming to study in Finland especially from Africa and Asia usually have high hopes of getting jobs in Finland during and after studies mostly due to its high standard of living. This notion is supported by CIMO (2015) which states that more than 70% of foreign students in Finland usually consider the possibility of getting a job during and after their studies as an important factor for coming to study. While in Finland, most foreign students search for part-time jobs such as cleaning, dishwashing, and delivery work in Posti since these kinds of jobs do not necessarily require Finnish language skills. But interestingly, the majority of students still continue with these low-paid jobs even after studies partly due to the lack of jobs in their various fields of study or the quest to remain in Finland. Just recently, a new rule came into force which will allow non-EU students to apply for one-year temporary residence permit extension in order to search for employment in Finland (Study in Finland 2015). Going by this new rule, non-EU students are expected to search for jobs within a 'grace period' of up to one year. With this, foreign students have no choice but to take any jobs available in order to secure their living and residence in Finland. In principle, jobs in these sectors have literally been abandoned by Finns for foreign nationals. This view is also supported by Könönen (2014) who says that "*the conditionality of rights and residence has a negative impact on migrants' bargaining power in the labour market and restricts their possibilities for an independent life*". It is common knowledge now that Africans are being identified with a particular cleaning company due to their presence in this particular company. Despite their presence, service and commitments to these 'low paid' cleaning company jobs, these African workers have been short-changed by some of the administrators of these companies through unfair treatments and exploitations. Even some of the work contracts given to these foreigners are nothing to write home about. These contracts include the 0 – 25 hours/week contract which basically means that someone could be under this type of 'contract' in one month without pay. There are also cases when some of these foreigners are being owed or not paid at all.

It is also necessary to point out that some of the employers do undermine the status of their workers being students thereby giving them jobs to do during school hours. Although these employers are encouraged by the attitudes and actions of these foreign students informing them of their availability for work any time even during school hours, they ought to discourage it and stop giving them jobs during school hours. This action causes a lot of distractions to students.

However, there are two factors that can help to influence the employability of foreign students in Finland (CIMO 2015). These factors are language skills and networks.

2.2.1 Language skills

Language skills are critical and important when searching for jobs. This is so because no effective communication can take place without the necessary language skills. Language skills can go a long way in determining the success and failure of job seekers.

When someone is seeking a job, additional language skills could increase the chances of that person getting the job. Most employers are always interested in jobseekers who have the ability to speak two or more languages. There are more people of different cultural backgrounds working in different organisations in different parts of the world now. Thus, jobseekers with multi-lingual skills are always favoured to land jobs in places like that. Besides, being able to speak the official language wherever someone finds themselves will definitely open doors and create possibilities to integrate properly in the society.

Foreign students with good knowledge of the Finnish language usually have the possibility of securing jobs after graduation. Their level of the language can make them a bit more competitive and increase their chances in the labour market. Since most companies use Finnish as their working language, convincing an employer will definitely require some amount of Finnish skills. This goes to show someone's level of integration and understanding of the Finnish culture.

Alho (2010) posited in his article that, “Finns have a strong sense of national identity”. This is significantly obvious in the way Finns express themselves. They are proud of their culture (language). Thus, they expect foreigners to show a sign of respect for their culture by learning their language. Finns don’t expect a foreigner to speak the language perfectly – as they often claim the language is difficult. All what is expected of a foreigner is to be able to use the language to communicate to some extent for survival in the society. The illusion that foreign students usually have after securing a part-time job while studying that they could survive without the language in Finland is misleading and tantamount to self-inflicted relegation status in the society. Although the major barrier is not the language, foreign students should endeavour to learn the language so as to boost their chances and job status.

2.2.2 Networks

As rightly pointed out by CIMO (2015), building networks serves as an important factor in getting a place to work in Finland. The number of networks you build, determines your chances. These networks can be built during studies especially for students of Universities of Applied Sciences. The 5 months internship programme or thereabout could serve as a starting point for building networks. There are also other possibilities of building social networks outside school which can be utilised for this purpose.

Foreign students, especially African students who have found themselves in a place like Finland should have it at the back of their minds that the possibility of getting a job will to a great extent depend on the 'networks' they have built. Finns do exhibit some form of skepticism with regards to things they are not used to.

In addition, previous studies have also shown that student’s background, level of study, field of study as well as labour market situation can influence their employability.

Most of the international graduates that got employed in their field of study after graduation are those in the social and healthcare sector; the majority of them are Africans and Asians. This might be due to the need for more workers in the sector. Certainly, this is somewhat better than the situation with their counterparts from the business schools.

3 FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION OFFERED IN FINLAND

The internationalisation policy of the Finnish higher education is centred on providing education and training in a foreign language. However, this policy dates back to the late 1980s when the focus was basically on student exchange. During that time, according to Garam (2009), it was observed that the number of students coming to Finland were not as much as the number of students going abroad due to the fact that there were no courses taught in foreign languages. Consequently, this set the agenda for a policy review by the Ministry of Education to usher in courses taught in English. This also led to the introduction of foreign language-taught programmes in the Finnish universities of applied sciences which came into existence in the early 1990s. Soon after that, the focus was not just on student exchange alone but for the need to attract international students to study degree programmes in Finnish higher education institutions (Garam 2009).

Presently, there are over 500 programmes studied in English in Finnish higher education institutions (Study in Finland 2015). These programmes fall under the following categories:

1. Erasmus and other exchange programmes
2. Bachelor's studies

3. Master's studies

4. Doctoral studies

For the avoidance of doubt, according to CIMO (2014), Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) are the bodies saddled with the responsibility for providing higher education in Finland. Universities deal with the promotion of research and academic education while UASs offer professional higher education closely tied with working life.

There are 24 UASs (polytechnics) offering bachelor's degree programmes which last for 3.5 years (210ECTS) – 4.5 years (270ECTS) and master's degree programmes for 1 – 1.5 years (60ECTS – 90ECTS) depending on the study programme. In Finnish UASs, there are about 100 bachelor's degree programmes and 20 master's degree programmes taught in English (Study in Finland 2015).

At the moment, there are 14 universities in Finland offering bachelor's degree programmes for 3 years (180ECTS), master's degree programmes for 2 years (120ECTS) and doctoral degree programmes for 4 years (240ECTS). There are about 200 master's degree programmes in English studied in Finnish universities as well as about 23 special doctoral programmes in English (Study in Finland 2015).

Foreign students who wish to study in Finland can also apply through the Erasmus Mundus Joint Degree programmes which are funded by the European Union (EU). Students will have the opportunity to study in two or more universities/universities of applied sciences and will be awarded a double/multiple degree at the end of their studies at master's level or doctoral level (Study in Finland 2015). There is also the possibility of being awarded a double degree at bachelor's level after completing one academic year in a partner university outside Finland.

There are other mobility programmes opportunities provided by the Finnish higher education institutions. These include: Erasmus+, Finnish-Russian Student Exchange Programme (FIRST), and Nordplus. Others include International Student Exchange Programs (ISEP), North2North, as well as North-South-South.

As at the time of conducting this research, universities and universities of applied sciences in Finland do not charge tuition fees.

4 SEINÄJOKI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences *“is a multidisciplinary institution of higher learning and an expert in education and research, development and innovation situated in the South Ostrobothnia region in Finland (Introduction of Seinäjoki UAS)”*.

Table 1. Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences Degree programmes.

	Bachelor	Master	Double degree programmes
Degree Programmes	20	7	Technology (1) and Business (11)

It has a staff strength of 400 academic and non-academic employees with a population size of 4800 full-time students. There are 3 programmes taught entirely in English in Seinäjoki UAS as indicated in Table 1. There are

- International Business (Bachelor’s degree)

- Nursing (Bachelor's degree)
- International Business Management (Master's degree)

There are about 200 universities working with the university as partners in different countries around the world as part of its strategies for internationalization which supports students and staff mobility, research, development and innovation projects as well as international conferences.

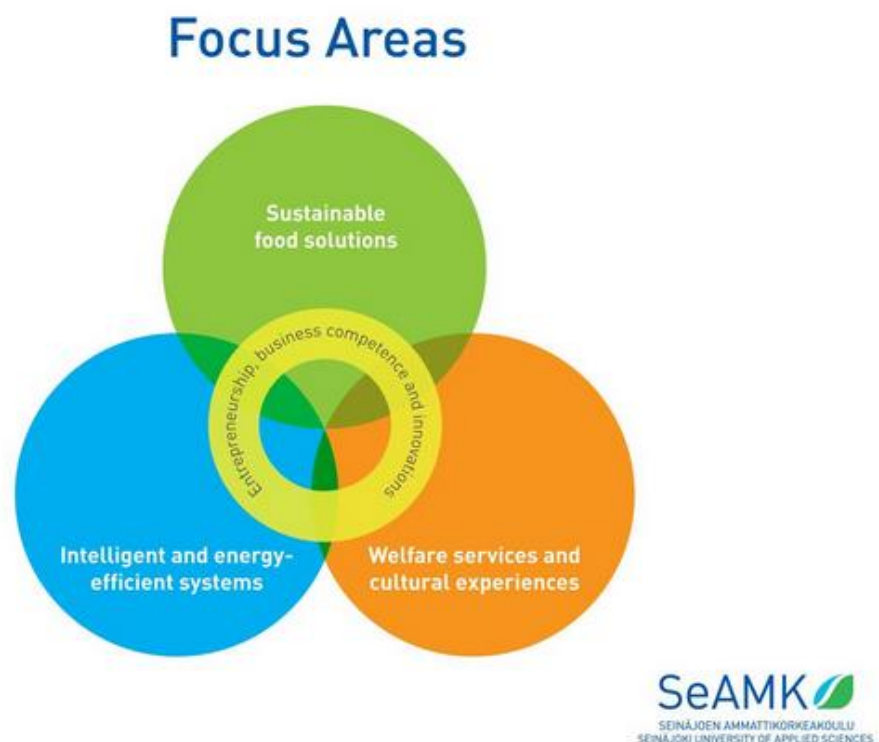


Figure 4. Focus Areas (Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences).

As shown in Figure 4, Seinäjoki UAS is focused on providing sustainable food solutions; intelligent and energy-efficient systems; entrepreneurship, business competence and innovations; as well as welfare services and cultural experiences through education and research & development activities aimed at serving the needs of the region and the international community.

4.1 Internationalisation policy of Finnish Higher Education

The Finnish higher education internationalisation strategy was developed by the Ministry of Education as a strategic response towards making Finland more competitive by investing in knowledge and competence and ensuring international cooperation in the areas of higher education, research and innovation. Since this is key to a sustainable future, it was imperative to reform the higher education institutions in Finland so as to ensure increase in the wellbeing of the citizens, improved status of the culture, creativity, education as well as an improved competitive economy. The need to make Finland and Finnish higher education system attractive and have a diversified society formed the basis for this reform. Moreover, it was also developed so as to increase the number of researchers (international researchers) as well as increase the mobility of teachers and students in Europe and other parts of the world.

According to the Ministry of Education internationalisation strategy (2009 pp 10-11), the internationalisation strategy consists of 5 primary aims which include

- Higher education environment that is genuinely international — there is an increase in the number of international teachers, researchers and students by 2015 thereby making the environment a truly international one.
- Increase in the attractiveness and quality of higher education institutions — that Finnish higher education attracts talented non-Finns and researchers due to the high quality of education and research.

- Promotion of the export of expertise — there is cooperation among international higher education partners which would lead to the exportation of expertise from Finland.
- Increase support for a multicultural environment — there is a considerably representation of immigrants among students in the higher education environment and that all personnel and students in the higher education institutions are agent of internationalisation in the society
- Promotion of global responsibility — Finnish higher education institutions are constantly engaged in solving global problems using their expertise and competences

4.2 Internationalisation Policy of Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences

Internationalisation is one of the key strategies of Seinäjoki UAS. Hence, the university is a partner to 200 universities in 46 countries.

The internationalisation strategy of Seinäjoki UAS is contained in the Seinäjoki UAS Erasmus policy statement 2014-2020. The strategy was designed to reflect the policies developed in the region by the south Ostrobothnia regional council, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture's internationalisation strategy for Higher Education Institutions 2009 -2015 and other international policies.

The internationalisation strategy of Seinäjoki UAS

1. Seinäjoki UAS sees internationality as a requirement and factor for success.
2. Cooperating with national, European and global partners for the creation of internationally significant research clusters through investments.

3. The use of foreign language for teaching as well as ensuring the competitiveness of international degree programmes in Europe and globally
4. Investing in the education of internationally competent workforce for regional and national needs, and for European and international needs
5. Effective utilization of the competence of staff in teaching, research development and innovation functions and regional developments
6. Utilizing the consolidated operation of Seinäjoki UAS in the global higher education for publicity, developments, international competence and cooperation with countries in Europe and Russia and partners in Asia and Latin America.

Erasmus Charter 2014 – 2020

An Erasmus charter for higher education was awarded to Seinäjoki UAS by the European commission from 2014 – 2020. This award provides the framework for a higher education institution that wishes to engage in international cooperation within Europe and outside. Thus, students and staff members of the awardees can participate in Erasmus+ programmes which gives an opportunity to apply for funding.

In the wake of that, many international students and about 200 lecturers visit Seinäjoki UAS every year with about 500 students and half of the employees of Seinäjoki UAS going abroad for studies and work respectively.

International Activities

There are 20 – 25 projects being run by Seinäjoki UAS annually which are funded by the EU and the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Annually, Seinäjoki UAS organises conferences, seminars, intensive courses and summer schools.

4.3 Ways of supporting International degree students in Finland – global competency and citizenship

International students coming to study in Seinäjoki university of applied sciences are given adequate support from the beginning of their programme to the end of their programme. In fact, Seinäjoki UAS has a line-up of activities aimed at providing guidance to their students which run through the entire duration of their programmes. This include international study and student counselling.

International study and student counselling

One of the ways in which Seinäjoki UAS support international students is through *academic counselling*. This is usually done at the faculty level. The head of degree programmes, student counsellors and teachers in the degree programmes are responsible for it. There is also the *student counselling* which is related to the arrangement of studies and living in Finland. This is partly done at the faculty level and the international office. The third one is *advising* which is done at the international office which involves a lot of information related to student housing, financial issues, residence permits, and other practical issues (Kitinoja 2015).

Seinäjoki UAS international guidance usually start during the entrance examinations held in 13 different countries abroad. These entrance exams are organised in conjunction with the Finnish Networks for International Programmes (FINNIPS). The Finnish Networks for International Programmes (FINNIPS) is a network made up of 21 Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland whose sole aim is to organise

entrance examinations abroad for candidates seeking to study in Finland. Besides, there are some entrance exams organised by Seinäjoki UAS alone in some embassies abroad. Subsequently, successful candidates are welcomed with one week orientation programme which is organised by the international office. Part of the activities included in the orientation programme are general advice on student housing, residence permits, healthcare and insurance, Finnish language studies, culture and other necessary information about studies, the environment and Finland (Kitinoja 2015).

Action plan for International study and Student Counselling

The action plan for international student counselling is intended to act as a support for social integration (Kitinoja 2015). Students are being counselled on their academics, careers as well as being advised on living in Finland.

Table 2. Action Plan for International Students (Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences).

	Schedule	Parties Responsible	Implementation and Evaluation
ACADEMIC COUNSELLING			
STUDENT COUNSELLING			
Orientation			
Language and Culture			
Tutoring			
Internship and Networking			
Social programmes			
Healthcare			

Student's pastor services			
Friend family			
ADVISING			

The action plan as shown in Table 2 is a one-to-one discussion between the head of programme/international coordinator and the student which is signed by the tutor-teacher (Head of programme), international coordinator and the student.

4.4 Projects for the integration and the employment of international students

All universities and universities of applied sciences make yearly negotiations with the Ministry of Education and Culture. In those negotiations for example, for 2013–2016, Seinäjoki UAS and ministry of education agreed to have around 160 foreign students.

To give some background information about the situation in the region — in 2014, the unemployment rate of immigrants in the region was 19.3 % whereas in Finland in total, it was 27.6 %. This implies that it was lower in the region for the immigrants (spring 2014 estimates). So, what is the challenge?

CIMO made a study on the integration of foreign students in 2012. According to them, the international students find it difficult to find local friends and network. They also find it difficult to get employed both during the study and after. These are the two biggest challenges for all international students in the whole of Finland. Furthermore, they also complained about finding it difficult to get an internship place. According to Loukola (2015), the reason for this could be attributed to the economic situations in the entire European region. For instance, according to the

Finnish law, if companies lay off and there are cuts in the budget, the companies cannot hire new people (Loukola 2015).

Finnish companies and other companies around the world can gain a lot from the unique opportunities for new applied knowledge, new and richer perspectives and ways of doing things because of the combination of different cultures. These opportunities could come in the form of making new contacts as well as finding alternative ways of entering an international market (Loukola 2015). The perspectives and solutions are always richer unlike within only one culture.

It was against this backdrop, the Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences decided to carry out some projects in the past so as to promote integration and networking. This was actually not the only project that had been carried out by the school.

The stakeholders involved in these projects include Seinäjoki UAS, Regional Council, the Chamber of commerce, Regional Enterprises Association, Local Employment and Economic office, Student Union and Regional representatives.

4.4.1 Friend Family Activities

The friend family activities started in 2008 and at the moment, there are about 90 families involved with 60 being active. It has been observed from the response of the students that the experience has been positive and it has been growing in popularity. Although the total number is not high but it is a respectable figure. These activities are mainly for the degree students and not for the exchange students because they don't need as much support as the degree students.

The goal of these activities is for the students to know the Finnish culture, build networks and improve their Finnish language skills. This project has been a success with the participants on the rise over the years. However, there have also been some challenges in which some students have not been playing their own role. There have been complaints about students not turning up for meetings with

their respective friend families. Perhaps they have so much work to do with their studies or part-time jobs. Since it is a voluntary activity, there is little or nothing that can be done to rectify the issue. Some of these complaints usually come to the notice of the facilitators when they meet four times in a year.

4.4.2 Puhu Minulle Suomea Campaign (Talk to me in Finnish)

The campaign started in spring 2014, but before then, there was a mere campaign in 2011 after which feedback was gathered and developed upon it. The goal was to incorporate this idea into the Finnish language courses for the International Business and Nursing students. In 2014 when the real campaign started, students were encouraged to conduct their businesses in Finnish with co-participants (school cafeteria, student affairs office, campus library) in the campaign which would form part of their Finnish language course study. This was to encourage the students to use whatever language skills they had while communicating outside the classroom within the campus area. The feedback was positive and showed that the students wanted the campaign to extend to other places outside the campus area. Thus, it was further developed, incorporated into the curriculum and extended outside the campus area to other service points.

4.4.3 Internship- Working Pair

The idea of the working pair method was necessitated by the need to help international students get the necessary support required during their internship by working in partnership with a Finnish student thereby reducing the burden on their employers. A pilot project for this was done in 2014 which still serves as the only project till now.

4.4.4 Working life certificate

The idea is to increase students' awareness of the Finnish working culture so as to reduce conflicts in workplace. It is a test organised for international students for

which students can demonstrate their knowledge of the rules and regulations governing Finnish workplace.

4.5 Work for future

The *work for future* project was one the projects carried out by the Seinäjoki UAS from 2012 to 2014 being part of the efforts aimed at promoting integration and networking in the region. The project was funded by the European Regional Development Fund. The project includes company visits and cultural skills acquisition.

Company Visits

The school did develop company visits program in the region. The visits which were done twice per semester were both specific to the field of education as well as from a multidisciplinary perspective. The visits were mostly done outside the city of seinäjoki so that the students could have a feel of the business activities and opportunities going on outside the city which served as part of a course work or a voluntary activity. Another idea for the visits was to use the avenue to promote the school and expose students to these potential employers in the region.

Cultural Skills

Another project the school did was a training for companies in the region for cultural sensitivities. These training afternoons were provided for free in about five different cities within the region which focused on social and health care sector and general business sector. The feedback from the events showed that the participants were satisfied with it and would love to have more of it.

5 RESIDING IN FINLAND

5.1 Legal Issues for residing/Permits

As a prerequisite to study in Finland after being admitted to a Finnish higher education institution, non-EU/EEA citizens must apply for a residence permit before arriving in Finland. This permit is subject to renewal annually. The first permit will be applied for in Finnish embassies abroad which is regarded as a “temporary residence permit” whereas the subsequent ones will be applied for in the local police offices.

When applying, applicants must show a means of support which is 560 euros per month to cover accommodation, food and other expenses. Thus, 6720 euros (for 12 months) must be available before the residence permit will be granted (Means of support 2015). In addition, applicants are required to provide a valid health insurance policy which covers their entire stay in Finland.

However, it is necessary to state that, with this permit (Class B), foreign students are not entitled to any social/welfare benefits in Finland.

Meanwhile, EU/EEA and Nordic citizens do not necessarily need a permit to reside in Finland. However, if their stay exceeds 3 months in Finland, they are required to visit the local police stations to register their residence.

5.2 Opportunities Finland offers to learn the Finnish language

The knowledge of the Finnish language is of paramount importance for proper integration in the society. The need to learn the language have been echoed by policy makers and administrators in both the Finnish higher education institutions and the society. Almost all the higher education institutions provide opportunities for

the study of basic Finnish for survival in the environment in which Seinäjoki UAS is not an exception.

Students studying international business and nursing in Seinäjoki UAS have the opportunity to learn for four Finnish language courses. This opportunity is designed to help these foreign students learn the basics of the language that could help them become acquainted with the culture of the people. Also, there is an opportunity for non-degree students to study two courses in Finnish language and culture.

Furthermore, students are encouraged to make use of other opportunities that present themselves in their immediate environment to learn the Finnish language in some of the local institutions namely Vocational Education Centre, Sedu. There are also opportunities available online to learn the language.

Some graduates have had the opportunity to improve their Finnish skills by attending Etelä-Pohjanmaan Opisto (Folk High School) in Ilmajoki for a year as full-time students or short courses at Seinäjoen kansalaisopisto (Seinäjoki Civic Institute).

6 RESEARCH STRATEGY

This section intends to give a clear picture of how the objectives of this study would be achieved. In fact, the research design and research tactics used in this study will be explained in this chapter.

Since the main purpose of this research was to reveal the current situation of Seinäjoki UAS African graduates from 2003 to 2015, the mixed methods approach was chosen by the researcher to achieve this goal. This method was chosen so as to provide a deeper understanding of the current study. In other words, both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collections and analysis procedures were chosen.

Specifically, the researcher used a mixed method research approach in which quantitative and qualitative research techniques were used to collect data. This method was chosen in order to aid the interpretation of the findings and also for triangulation purpose. As a matter of fact, the interviews and the survey were done concurrently.

6.1 Survey

Survey is simply an act of using a set of questions for the purpose of investigation. Based on this, a quantitative research technique was employed by way of conducting a survey of the entire Seinäjoki UAS African graduates from 2003 – 2015. The survey method used was the questionnaire method. The questionnaire was designed based on the objectives of the research. The self-administered questionnaire was made using Google forms in which links were created and sent to the respondents. Some printed copies of the self-administered questionnaires were distributed by hand to some respondents by making some personal visits to the respondents' individual homes. The questions were brief and easy to understand so

as to avoid unnecessary confusion as well as ambiguities according to the researcher's interpretation. Additionally, some open questions were used in the questionnaires for the purpose of allowing the respondents to give detailed and appropriate answers.

In all, the survey questionnaire recorded a 63% response rate. From the researcher's point of view, this is quite significant – which in a way is a reflection of the entire population.

6.2 Interviews

An interview is simply a discussion that occurs between an interviewer and the interviewee for the purpose of gathering information. The interviewer is the person asking questions while the interviewee is the person responding to the questions being asked.

The qualitative data for this study was collected via interviews. The method was chosen so as to get a deep understanding of the issues being explored. For the purpose of this study, the interviewer decided to conduct interviews for 10 persons out of a total population of more than 40 African graduates. The reason for choosing 10 persons for the interview was to have a deeper, richer and broader understanding of the issues being explored. As it is often the case, *the bigger the size, the better*.

The sampling method employed for this interview took into consideration some issues like the nationality, year of graduation, gender, and the course of study of the individuals for even representation of the population size. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted based on availability and accessibility. The interviews were semi-structured and structured. A semi-structured interview is an interview which a researcher conducts which may depend on the flow of conversation without necessarily following the order of questions (Saunders et al. 2009, 320). The researcher

chose this method in order to create room for new ideas during the course of the interview as well as to have a direction and a guide in order not to lose track of the research objectives. On the other hand, the structured interviews were conducted due to the different complaints by the respondents on having tight schedules. 3 out of the planned 10 interviews were conducted face-to-face which lasted between 10 – 40 minutes while 3 were done via telephone which lasted between 30 – 40 minutes, and the remaining 4 were responded to via email because of distance and the busy schedule of the respondents

6.3 Ethical Issues

The researcher adhered strictly to ethical guidelines while conducting the research. The issue of data privacy was a priority while sourcing and collecting data. The researcher adhered strictly to this while formulating the questionnaire and the interview questions. In fact, the names and other information concerning these African graduates were not released by the Seinäjoki UAS. Furthermore, before the any interview, the researcher made efforts to seek the permission of the interviewees before recording.

Another issue the researcher took into consideration was the issue of objectivity (Saunders et al. 2009, 194). All participants were not selected subjectively so as to maintain my objectivity during data collection. While selecting the interviewees, the selection criteria were based on equal representation. Friends or people close to the researcher were not selected for the interview. Moreover, all the data received were not fabricated. Issues of confidentiality and anonymity were taken seriously.

6.4 Reliability and Validity

On the reliability of this research, as mentioned earlier, the interviewees were objectively selected taking into consideration the number of countries, gender,

school, as well as the year of graduation. Friends of the researcher were not interviewed. The researcher also considered the environment where the various interviews took place in order to elicit the best response from the participants.

In order to ensure the validity of this study, the researcher studied the questions on the questionnaire and those for the interview carefully if they were in line with the objectives of the study before administering the questionnaires and conducting the interviews. In addition, the researcher liaised with the supervisor for possible feedback before proceeding.

Furthermore, the questions were simple and precise so as to avoid ambiguity as well as retaining the participants' interests.

7 RESEARCH FINDINGS

For the purpose this study, it is necessary to give some statistics on the number of African graduates Seinäjoki UAS have had as of the time of conducting this study.

Tables 3, 4 and 5 include the countries, study programmes, year of graduation as well as the total number of graduates, to name but a few.

Table 3. Statistics of Seinäjoki UAS African graduates (Seinäjoki University of applied sciences).

Countries	Bachelor's degree programme	Master's degree programme	Total number
Cameroon	1	1	2
Ghana	4		4
Kenya	4		4
Nigeria	25	1	26
Somalia	1		1
Tanzania	1	1	2
Uganda	1		1
Total	37	3	40

Table 4. Study programme (Seinäjoki University of applied sciences).

Study programme	Number of Africans
Nursing	10
Business Management (Finnish programme)	1
MBA (International Business management)	3
BBA(International Business)	26
Total	40

Table 5. Year of graduation (Seinäjoki University of applied sciences).

Year of graduation	
2010	6
2011	2
2012	16
2013	10
2014	6
Total	40

7.1 Survey

In the survey conducted, the number of responses recorded was 25 out of 40. This figure represents 63% of the total population. The following is the summary of the data collected.

Nationality

From the findings, six countries from Africa have had one or more graduates from Seinäjoki UAS. These countries include: Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda.

Figure 5 shows the home background of the African graduates that responded to the questionnaire. From the figure, the respondents are from five countries in Africa with Nigeria having the largest share of 80%. As a matter of fact, most of the African graduates of Seinäjoki UAS are of Nigerian backgrounds.

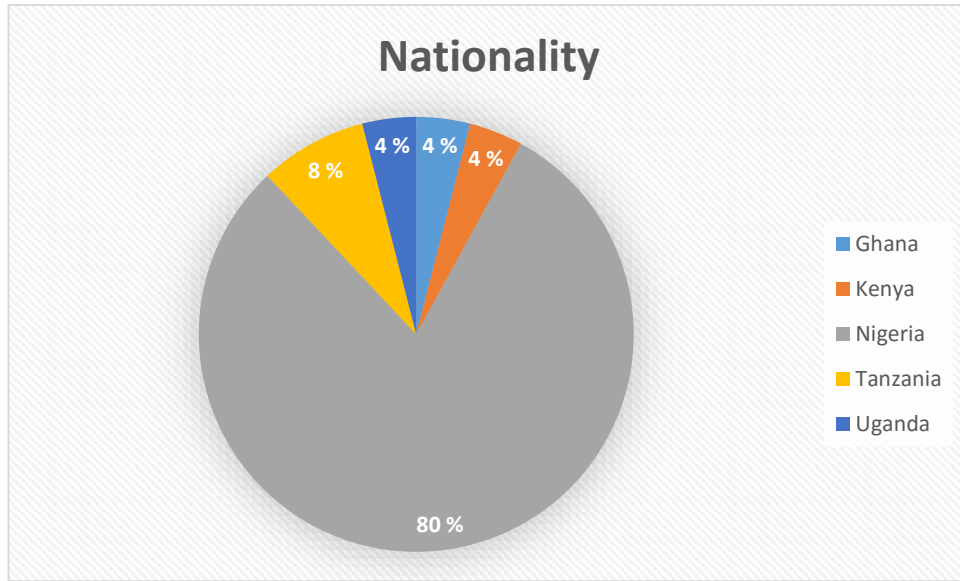


Figure 5. Nationality.

Country of Residence

In the survey, it was observed that most of the African graduates of Seinäjoki UAS still reside in Finland in different parts of the country. In other words, 96% of Africans that graduated from Seinäjoki UAS still live in Finland as shown in Figure 6. This might not be unconnected to the availability of 'jobs' in Finland for these African graduates of Seinäjoki UAS as the only reason to secure one's stay in Finland after studies as a foreigner is to secure a job after graduation.

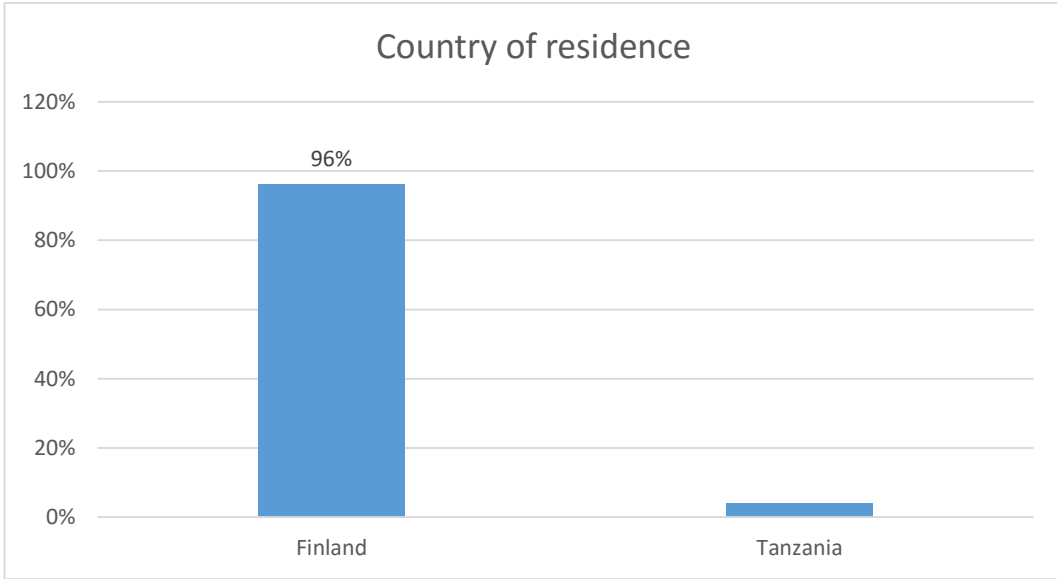


Figure 6. Country of residence.

Gender

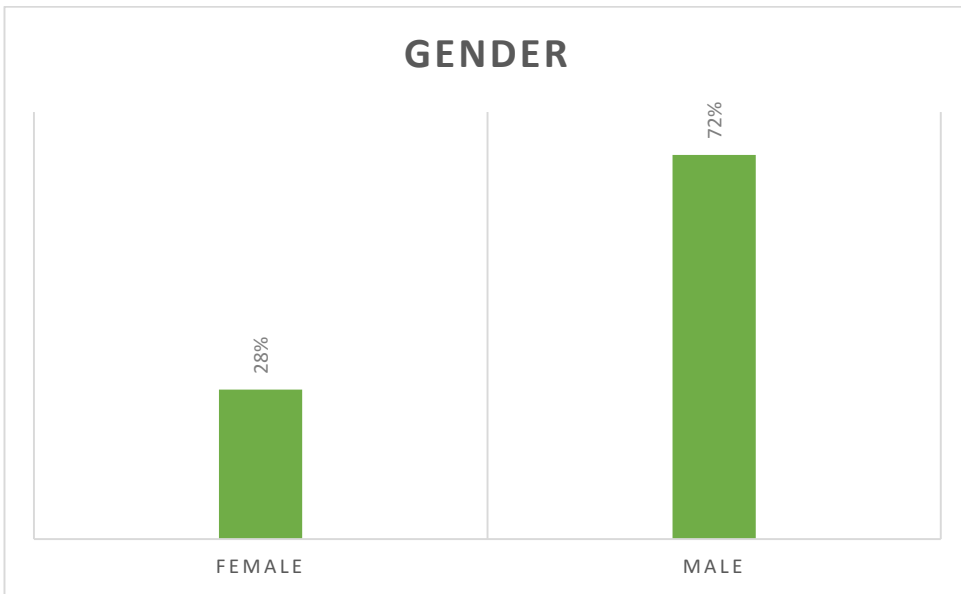


Figure 7. Gender.

Figure 7 shows that most of the respondents were males with 72%. This is a pointer to the fact that majority of the Africans that graduated from Seinäjoki UAS were males during the period considered for this study.

Study programme in SeAMK

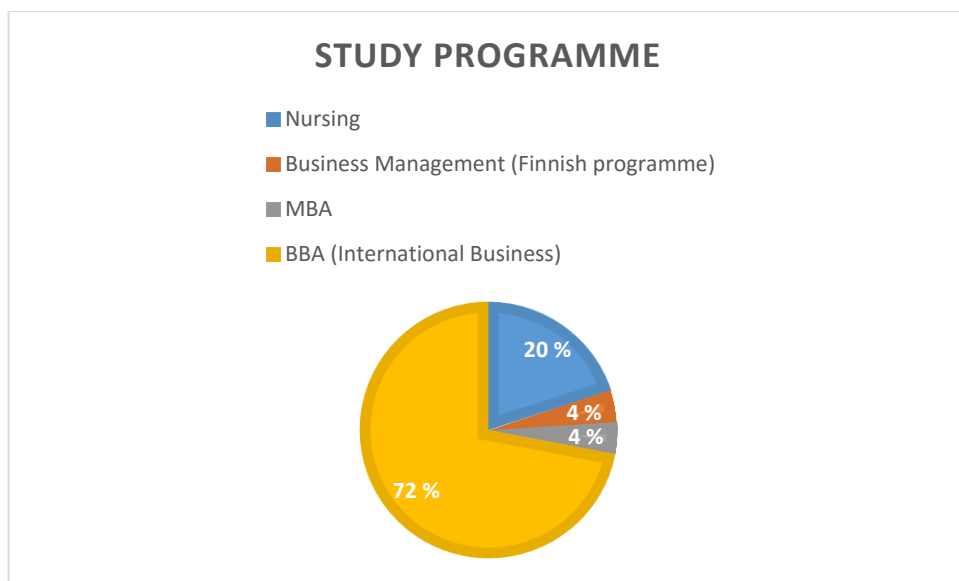


Figure 8. Study programme.

With regard to the kind of study programmes available in Seinäjoki UAS, Figure 8 shows that there were quite a lot of Africans that studied Bachelor of Business Administration (International Business) programme in comparison to the other programmes in Seinäjoki UAS. In other words, 72% of the respondents studied BBA (International business), 20% had their studies in the Nursing programme while 4% studied MBA. It is interesting to note that 4% of the respondents studied Business management (Finnish programme).

Year of graduation

Figure 9 shows the year of graduation of the respondents.

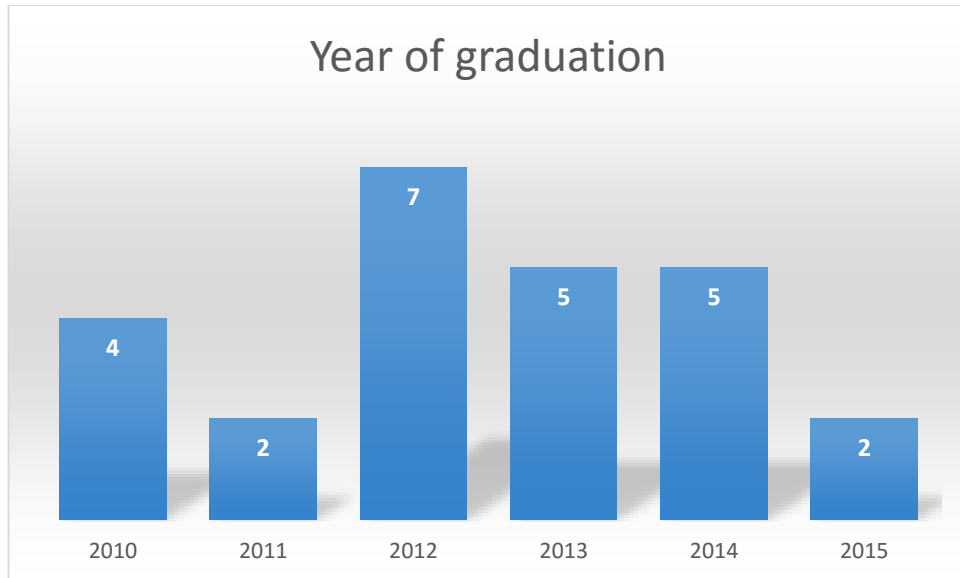


Figure 9. Year of graduation.

How would you rate your studies in Seinäjoki UAS?

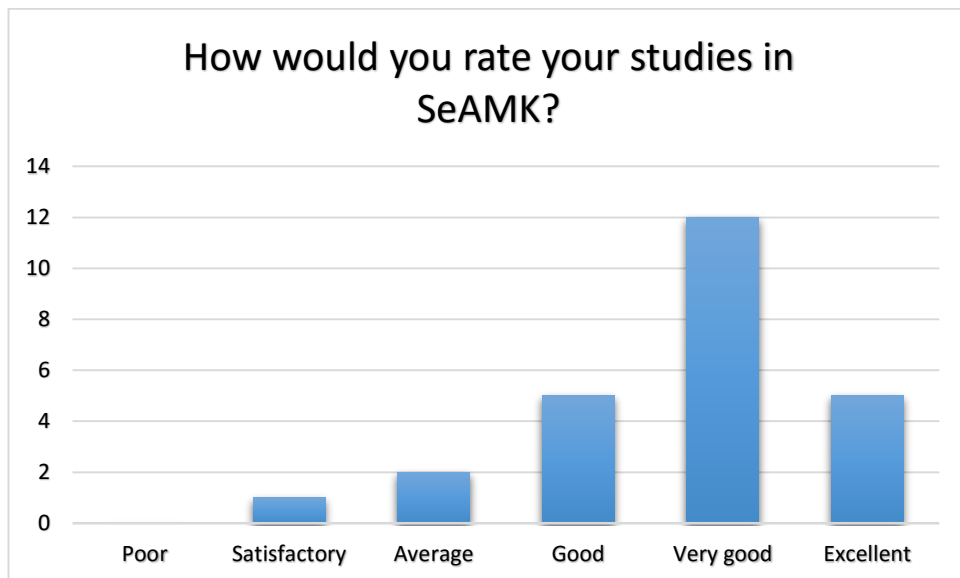


Figure 10. How would you rate your studies in SeAMK?

The respondents were asked to rate their studies in Seinäjoki UAS on a scale of 1-6. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 represent poor, satisfactory, average, good, very good, and excellent respectively. Figure 10 shows that all the respondents were satisfied with their studies in Seinäjoki UAS with varying degrees of satisfaction.

Did you work during your studies?

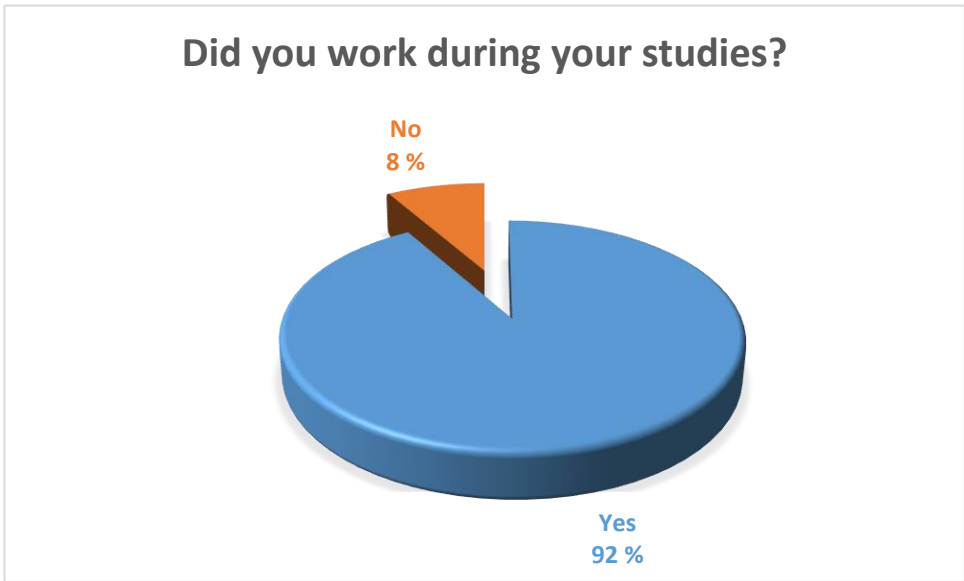


Figure 11. Did you work during your studies?

92% of the respondents did work during their studies as indicated in Figure 11. When probed further about the kind of part-time jobs they did, it is unsurprising that they all had cleaning jobs as their part-time jobs.

What were the challenges you faced with respect to integration?

As it is usually the case when a foreigner moves to another country, chances are that the foreigner would encounter some challenges while trying to adapt to the new environment. The respondents gave their own version of the different kinds of challenges they faced during their studies with respect to integration. The responses were summed up as follows.

- I. Language
- II. Culture
- III. Attitudes of the host community
- IV. Weather
- V. Racism/Discrimination

Since language is one of the major factors of integration, all the respondents had challenges with the language – Finnish language. Some also claimed they had challenges with weather and the attitudes of the host community. Below are some of the responses.

“Language was the very number one challenge and of course the weather. But with time it became easier through association with the native Finns”

“Acceptance into society and work life, limited openings for foreign graduate in related field. Language as a big barrier.”

“My challenges for integration were: 1. Coping with the system, adjusting to the weather 2. Cultural difference 3. Language challenges, quite difficult to learn Finnish language”

Another respondent gave the following

“- Culture shock - Different people from different countries - Weather conditions - Language issues”

One respondent claimed that even the Finnish courses they took were not enough.

“Language difference was a big issue for me at the time and the survival Finnish language courses we took in school were not sufficient at the time.”

Some of the respondents gave few other related comments.

“- Insufficient amount of jobs - The fact that you have to speak very good Finnish to get job from your field of study - Racism (when the color of your skin defines you)”

“- Social discrimination is common among healthcare workers - Language barrier is also another challenge”

Did you receive any support as an international student in SeAMK?

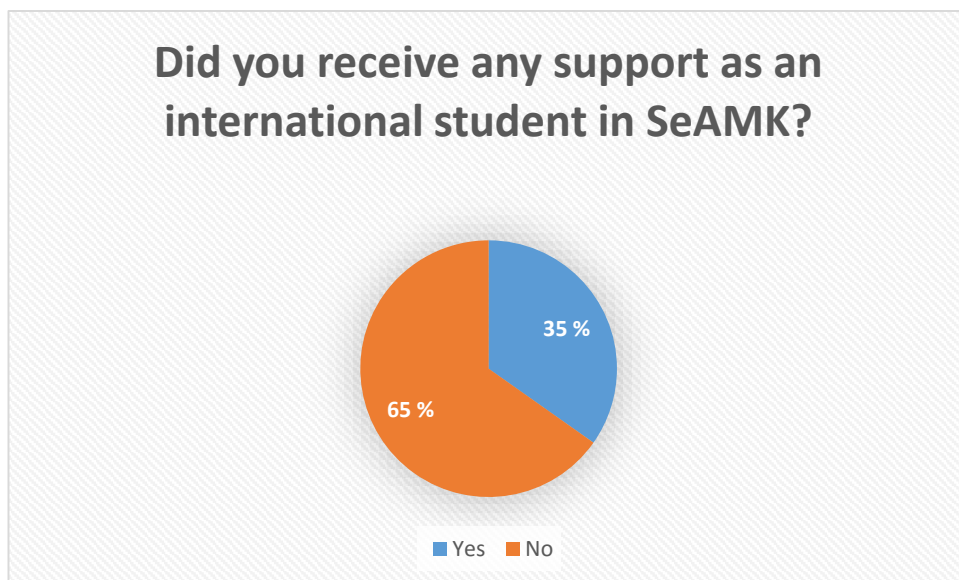


Figure 12. Did you receive any support as an international student in SeAMK?

The participants were asked if they received support as an international student in which 65% responded with a “No” answer as shown in Figure 12.

Kindly state the challenges you faced after graduation

People face challenges at every stage of their lives which can come in any form. Besides, most students are always full of high expectations after graduation. Thus, the respondents were asked about the challenges they faced after graduating from the Seinäjoki UAS. Expectedly, almost all the responses were job-related. Most of them complained about not being able to find a job in their own field of study. Below are some of the responses.

“Challenges of getting a professional job in my discipline.”

“Difficulty in getting suitable or related job that suit my course of study. Life remains the same even after graduation as a housekeeper.”

“Finding a job, I can't even imagine how painful it would be for a university graduate turn to a cleaner, it is the situation that most graduates in Finland find themselves facing as they begin to make applications.”

“- Not being able to secure appropriate nursing job - No enough money to unite with my family.”

“- Getting a job was a big problem - Negative attitude towards black men in the Seinäjoki Central hospital and City of Seinäjoki”

“Getting the right job as an International business graduate”

Some even complained about not being able to secure a professional job despite having the knowledge of Finnish language.

“It was a huge challenge transitioning from student life to working life simply because the jobs were not forthcoming. My Finnish language proficiency had increased considerably by the time I graduated and I felt really confident about my chances of securing a really good job, partly, because I had also acquired some professional qualifications to go with my degree in International business. Unfortunately, things did not pan out

the way I had thought due to the fact that I got exactly zero (0) replies out of about a thousand Job applications I sent out. I subsequently did further my studies by bagging a Master's degree as the wait for that job continued.”

“Finding a job even after learning the Finnish language. Method of employment in the few available jobs are not based on merit”

What is your current job status?

Figure 13 shows the current job status of the respondents. 44% are fully employed, 16% are employed and still studying, while 8% are underemployed i.e. part-time workers.

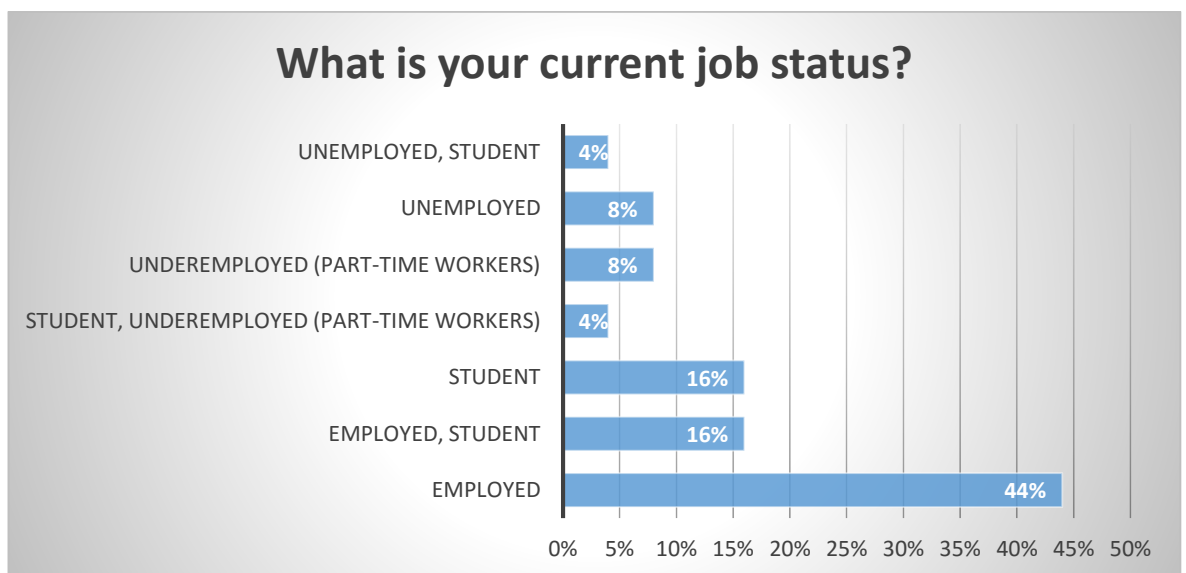


Figure 13. What is your current job status?

Your future plans

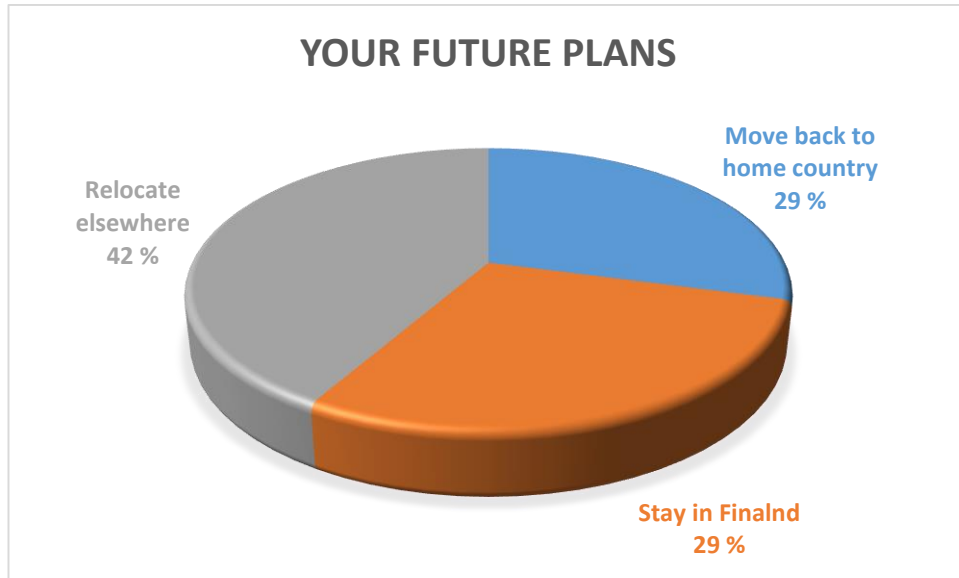


Figure 14. Your future plans.

Figure 14 reveals the future plans of the respondents with 42% planning to relocate elsewhere while 29% want to stay in Finland. In addition, the researcher asked the respondents to state the reasons for their decisions. The reasons given by the respondents are summarised in a table below.

Stay in Finland (29%): According to the reasons given by the respondents, those that will be staying in Finland are actually staying for family reasons except one.

“I want to stay in Finland and start a family maybe someday I get a better job”

“I have my family here and I would like to stay here and continue improving my language skills and aspire for the best because I know the best is yet to come.”

“I have my company here in Finland”

Move back to home country (29%): Those that plan to move back home want to do that for better opportunities.

"It is the best solution to the current problem here in Finland. Moving back to my country will open door of opportunity for me to practice my course of study. House-keeping job will not be an option as a graduate in my country".

"It is difficult to gain trust and for the other people especially Finns to accept black men. College Asians are given jobs immediately after school but not black men, even as nurses."

"I would like to invest back in my home country and also participate in the ongoing charity work taking place there."

Relocate elsewhere (42%): The researcher found out from the reasons given by the respondents that the decision to relocate elsewhere is inspired by the need to further their study and seek career opportunities.

"To explore and seek opportunities outside Finland."

"Employment opportunities for foreigner in Finland is too poor especially if you are an African. Career development, job satisfaction, employment system which is based on merit not on race. These and many other reasons has kept the black race in a state of pity"

"As I will try to see if there are other big cities in Finland or other European Union (EU) countries that could appreciate my potentials. The qualification and previous work experience that I possess must not waste."

"Reason I intend to relocate elsewhere is because Finland has no place or space for my future"

"My relocation may be temporary. Master's studies in another country"

"Work related and better integration"

"For further studies i.e. master's degree"

Recommendations for Seinäjoki UAS

As part of the survey, the researcher asked for recommendations for Seinäjoki UAS. In all, the respondents shared their opinions on ways to improve the programmes and help international students integrate properly in the society. The need to learn the Finnish language for proper integration cannot be overemphasised. As recommended by one of the respondents, SeAMK should do more in terms of teaching their international students Finnish language. In the researcher's opinion, incorporating an additional Finnish course into the curriculum would serve as a step in the right direction.

Furthermore, some of the respondents suggested the need for the reinvigoration of the alumni programme which they believe is practically not in existence. Other recommendations include the need to create more activities for international students, the need for SeAMK teachers to treat all international students equally, help international students in getting work placements as well as giving international students opportunities to work in the university.

Below are some of the recommendations.

One of the respondents emphasised the need to create more activities

“1. I recommend more activities outside school for international students. 2. I recommend more activities to educate the locals about the various foreign countries and cultures. 3. Thirdly, I recommend activities that incorporate both the international students and foreign students.”

“Do more of business related courses that will end up funding student upon graduation to start a business of their own.”

“- The school should resuscitate its alumni association as it seems moribund. If it works perfectly well, some graduates could get jobs through attending the alumni meetings. - The school should sometimes employ the best graduating students and

use them as research assistants or assistant lecturers on a part-time basis as that could help one or two graduates to get a part-time job. -The school should do more linking of the students with the City council and the local companies around as it seems the city government and the associate companies are only concerned about the students when they are undergraduates. It is obvious that life after graduation is difficult for the graduates as nobody seems to care about them anymore. It is a bad trend in this city as graduate of International Business who are meant to become business managers and administrators are now becoming shop cleaners and the school is not seeing anything wrong in that.”

Teach students more Finnish

“- Teach students more Finnish language - SeAMK should try to work out an integration programme with the Municipal council in terms of securing jobs especially for nurses.”

“To introduce a robust integration programme that is effective”

“Giving graduate students opportunity to work at the University, also help in smoothing the transition into various companies around seinäjoki.”

“I think SeAMK should work on getting more practical work placements for her international students.”

“I recommend that SeAMK should have a forum for old students thereby getting information about their present situation. However, supporting or recommending students for jobs. Organizing effective job fares to make job process easy for graduating students.”

“I think they are doing a great job anyways for accepting students around the world to study for free. I would only recommend them to have more company recruiting days. Companies can come to school to advertise themselves so they could get to know and talk to the students who are interested in working for them. And maybe students can get a great chance to get work in Finland/ Seinäjoki.”

“1. Positive people like the student pastor, to do some extra curriculum activities for international student 2. To encourage alumni programme for all ex-student to meet and share ideas and thought together 3. To employ some of their foreign student for Job opportunities and internship for those doing masters in another school. 4. There should be some page or database to trace all the alumni of SeAMK and know how far they have gone in their career.”

Equal treatment for all

“- SeAMK teachers should treat all international students in the same way and not favor Asians and other internationals at the expense of Africans - The school should collaborate with the City of Seinäjoki to help international students get jobs after school”

“The only change we need is the change of mindset with regards to foreign nationals living in Finland. The Finnish people are stereotypical even in the face of a changing world still maintain their 16th century ideology. I strongly feel if this continues over a long period and in 50years from now, only Finns will live in Finland.”

7.2 Interviews

The interviews were conducted for 10 persons in which 3 were conducted face-to-face, 3 via telephone and the remaining 4 were responded to via email. The following are the answers given by the interviewees.

Why did you choose to study in Finland?

Almost all the responses were basically the same – tuition free education:

“I chose Finland because of its tuition free, world-class education”

“I chose to study in Finland because Finland was and is counted as one of the countries with best education. Moreover, I was highly motivated by the availability of free tuition”

“What attracted me to Finland was the free education opportunity. This was the sole reason.”

For international experience:

“I chose to study for international experience”

Finnish education system:

“I met a friend who went for further studies in Finland; I was moved by his compelling story on how quality the Finnish education is especially the great student-teacher relationship, facilities and fairness of the Finnish society. I also was impressed by his changed attitude and performance after his studies in Finland”

What was your experience like as a student in SeAMK?

The interviewees recalled their experience as students in Seinäjoki UAS and gave the following comments.

“The experience was good. The teachers were helpful, accommodating and cooperative especially the student counsellor at that time Ritva Leppanen. On the general school experience, we had zero relationship with students studying other programmes. This, to me, wasn’t good at all. In general, it wasn’t a bad experience”

“The experience was quite interesting due to the fact that it was different from the kind of experience I had back in Africa. And also, I got everything I wanted as an MBA student”

“The experience was wholesome. I learned the Finnish culture. I was impressed with the friendliness of the lecturers. I was able to learn about different cultures with students from Asia, Europe and Africa. I also had the opportunity to meet with visiting lecturers from Spain, Germany, Japan, China, Canada, USA and France.”

“I felt belonging to the school community; love, cooperation and peace.”

Did you face any challenges with respect to integration?

This question was repeated during the interview due to the major role integration plays in immigrants' wellbeing. Most of the challenges the interviewees claimed they had, centred on stereotyping, racial discrimination and language. They were also other challenges relating to the weather.

"In the beginning yes. Some Seinajoki people had a bad experience of Africans, so I faced some negative experiences from some people around some areas. But this then changed drastically as the school took some measures to help us integrate."

"We had so many challenges with respect to racism. I remember one time in the supermarket, they had to search our bags which was really embarrassing to us. Even in the supermarket, to buy food was a big challenge to us because people were not ready to talk to us; they were always monitoring what we were doing while we moved around as if we were thieves. In all, it was a tough experience. We also had challenges getting jobs."

"Language differences. And the Finnish course wasn't sufficient enough. At that time, in my opinion, there was no guide or plan for student integration"

"Of course, like food, weather, Language and cultural challenges. Moreover, stereotypes and disguised racism are another form of challenges faced during the integration period, even till date."

"Discrimination in job places i.e. people were not ready to work with you because of your background as well as the issue of stereotype"

"The culture was a barrier as well as the cold weather."

"Finnish language and making friends. Most of the friends I have are my schoolmates - I don't have friends outside the school"

What kinds of support did you receive as an international student in SeAMK?

This question is actually based on the kind of roles Seinäjoki UAS played in helping their students achieve their goals.

“First and foremost, the lecturers and teachers were very supportive during my studies in SeAMK. I also enjoyed cheap launch as a student in SeAMK. Also, the accommodation and utilities were very cheap as a student which you can’t get if you are not a student.”

“Counselling from student Pastor, provision of Family friend as well as furniture and other housing equipment by the student pastor.”

“I received just academic support”

“I just received normal support like advice from my teachers – not special support.”

“I received a number of support from the school, all important. But most important, I once experienced racism in one shop (at Halpa halli near railway station – the food store side). The school arranged an interview between one media (newspaper) and me. The issue was fully covered and aired. Things started to change drastically. I can never forget how the school helped me resettle after the racism incidence.”

“Absolutely zero support. I think during that time, there were not prepared for international students”

“There was no much support, even the ones they offered came a bit late.”

In what ways did the South Ostrobothnia region help you to integrate into the society?

The interviewees recalled the kind of help they got in the region especially the role the church played in helping them to integrate which was made possible by the student pastor.

“The kind of integration I had was made possible by the Lutheran church. The church organized English service on Sundays which gave me the opportunity to interact and meet new people.”

“The help came through the Lutheran church (Aila, the student pastor) through which I got a Finnish family which in turn helped me to integrate. The Lutheran church, through Aila, the student pastor helped us a lot in terms of buying into our ideas as Africans.”

“Well, by organizing various events in summer, provision of Job opportunity and the church hospitality towards foreigners has helped”

“The major of Seinäjoki had organised some programmes in the past to welcome the international students in the region. We had a programme at a point in time in Torikeskus where we had the opportunity to display our different cultures, interact with people etc. Also, the church has been supportive and have encouraged us to study the language and the culture.

However, there have been no specific programs to help integrate students into the job market; no job market intervention. The only approach the region had employed to help integrate had been basically sociocultural.”

Some claimed they got no support

“No way at all. The South Ostrobothnia region only rendered help to the refugees. The kind of help they rendered was not applicable to the international students. For example, in May 2010, I and two other colleagues decided to go to the Etelä-Pohjanmaan opisto in order to study the Finnish language. But to our surprise, the police did not support the idea as well as the school. We were told that we had to pay for us to have the opportunity to study the language. Due to this, others pulled out. I was the only one who decided to pay to study the language course without any form of support from anywhere. I could remember that we were constantly told that we could learn the language just by speaking to anyone we met on the street whereas in my opinion, it is difficult if not impossible. There’s just too much bureaucracy”

What do you have to say about the kinds of education you received in SeAMK with respect to labour market needs? Finnish labour market/African labour market.

The kinds of higher education provided in Finnish universities of applied sciences emphasise the need to prepare students for working life (Study in Finland 2015). Consequently, the interviewer requested for the opinions of the recipients in Seinäjoki UAS.

“The kinds of education you receive in SeAMK is applicable. This is what I experienced as a student. You can use the knowledge gain anywhere in the world.”

“I think the standard of the education was good and it I would say that it was organised in such a way that it could help us fit into the needs of the market.”

“It is relevant to the Finnish labour market needs and the labour market needs in my home country. In Finland, the population is ageing, which means there is a need for more nurses. Also, in my home country in Africa, there is a need for more health workers. Furthermore, the entrepreneurship study I had while studying has made me business-oriented which could be used anywhere in the world.”

“The kinds of education I received are more int'l. I think if I decided to go to Tanzania to work, I would get a job.”

“The study is relevant to the needs of both markets. The knowledge gained are useful in both places.”

“This is a bit tricky. I think it depends on what the student wants to achieve. To me, I worked very hard in my studies to ensure my learning target was met, which I did. What I learned at the university has been of immense contribution to my career growth. In my country I quickly managed to get a job because the Finnish education is respected – especially by those who are aware of it. In Finland... I find it difficult to say yes or no. I know Finnish employers know and appreciate the quality of the Finnish

education. But during those days (after my graduation) it was very hard to get a professional job in Finland, you could count the numbers and only in some professions such as business IT and Engineering.”

“I would say SeAMK education is a good foundation for the labour market. However, as a foreigner, I believe the bachelor degree is not enough in an environment like Finland”

“There is no prospect or need for my career field as far as the Finnish labour market is concerned”.

“The kinds of education I received was not encouraging. I could remember that we had to push then before a course was organised which was “how to apply for a job in Finland” and of course this was a one-time course. The emphasis was on how to start up a business in Finland or in anywhere which is quite difficult to do in Finland. It wasn’t helpful”

What is your current job status?

The responses revealed that most of the graduates are currently employed in different sectors, but majority of them are still working for cleaning companies and doing other menial jobs.

“I am currently working as a cleaner for Lassila ja Tikanoja on a permanent basis.”

“I am currently working as a cleaner which is not the best for SeAMK graduate after much training from the School”

“I have a permanent job; but not happy with the kind of job I have.”

“I am temporarily employed but I am not satisfied with the job. I am still on a lookout for a better one. I work in an elderly care home but I need something more challenging.”

“I am working on a fixed-term basis in a dairy. But I would still love an opportunity to practise what I studied in SeAMK”

“Capacity building technical advisor (leadership and management) – in the field of organizational development.”

What plans do you have for the future?

The responses show that while some are planning to relocate elsewhere for greener pastures/studies, others want to stay in Finland for family reasons. There are also few undecided respondents.

“Relocate elsewhere where I can contribute effectively to the development of the society. To search for other opportunities abroad because there are no opportunities in Finland. For example, I have sent more than 1000 applications and I have done about 10 interviews but have not been successful even with my master’s degree, SAP certification, and Microsoft tech specialist certification. My opinion is that native Finns have an edge which is normal but it’s too extreme. Finland is not open to foreigners yet. Some foreigners work in other sectors like Nursing but in the corporate world, it’s difficult to find a place. Even those working in other sectors, there is a limit to their professional growth in Finland.”

“I am planning to move out of Finland because there are no opportunities to grow. It’s like a 'death sentence'. It’s just like doing something you don’t like for long without any new challenges. They give us knowledge in Finland but they don’t want to make use of it.”

“I want a better job and do my masters, possibly abroad. I want to have a different experience. I would also like to become an entrepreneur in the nearest future.”

“Laughs, I don’t think I can tell you my future plans like that but my immediate intentions are to live here, work and raise a family”.

“Work or start a business here in Finland.”

Conversely, someone plans to come back for PHD studies in Finland. Something must have inspired it which is basically due to the quality of education being offered in Finland.

“Come back to Finland for PHD and as a worker, hopefully!”

What would you recommend to SeAMK?

The interviewees gave different kinds of recommendations relating to programme strengthening and job placements.

“Establish PHD studies and also introduce or strengthen some courses which are most relevant in developing world – such as organizational development (capacity building) with leading/managing change as a component. My employer got interested with my CV after he saw that I studied organizational development – with change management incorporated. The organizational development course offered at SeAMK is great, but I think it can be enriched to include issues of capacity building (a relatively new field) which is very relevant in Africa, Asia and Latin America.”

“Seinäjoki UAS should create more activities to integrate international students like sporting activities.

They should create opportunities that can help African students create positive awareness about their countries and help to interact with the locals. The negative awareness is not encouraging.

A student body for int'l students should be formed. This body can represent the international students better because they understand the needs more.”

“SeAMK should start making use of their products (International students). There should be a constant place in the international office for prospective interns (international students). An international office should have an international outlook. SeAMK should endeavour to involve Africans in their projects in Africa. Some people can be employed as research assistants in FRAMI. It is common knowledge that someone needs reference to get a job in this region and thus, SeAMK could act as reference.

We, as Africans, have a huge problem here getting jobs because of our skin colour. There is the issue of racism everywhere. SeAMK should start being practical with the issue of integration — not just using Africans for sociocultural activities alone.”

“Cooperate more with companies in such a way that will help foreign students get employed by these companies after studies.”

“They should support international students for practical work placement. Although employers are not willing but they should do more to support them in getting a place for internship.”

“My recommendation is not only to SeAMK alone but it is directed to the policy makers in Finland. They should endeavour to make the system in such a way that the transition from school to workplace becomes easier with less barrier

The school should work with companies in the region more. Also, the council should show an example in the region by employing one or two African graduates. This could send a positive signal to the employers in the region

We want to do something that we have been trained for even if the pay is not that much.”

“Finland should ask themselves why they have international students without making use of them. These international students could serve as experts for the local companies in Finland to become international. There are limited opportunities for companies to grow in Finland. These international students can serve as tools for international growth. Take for instance the Nursing field, they bring in nurses from Spain and some other countries to work in Seinäjoki. Why can't they use the graduates they produce here? How come they trust the knowledge gained outside Finland as against the ones gained here?

SeAMK should begin to look inward and start using their products for some of their international projects.”

Need to have a functional alumni association

“...Internship is difficult for students to find, SeAMK administration should please help in this area.

They should increase their partnership in Africa.

Please let the SeAMK Alumni functionality be more pronounced, because in the USA and United Kingdom, they have very good Alumni that help graduates find employment, create project and also fund projects.”

8 CONCLUSION

The higher education institution internationalisation strategy initiated by the government of Finland in 2007 led by the Prime Minister, Matti Vanhanen which was undertaken by the ministry of education set goals to be achieved in 2009 – 2015. Certainly, it is obvious that the five primary aims for internationalisation as contained in the internationalisation strategy of Finnish higher education 2009 – 2015 have been more or less achieved.

In recent times, many students and researchers have been attracted to Finland to study as well as live and work after their studies. In the areas of international cooperation, Finnish higher education institutions have increased their joint cooperation with other partner institutions around the world. Take for instance, Seinäjoki UAS has more than 200 partner universities in different countries around the globe. Furthermore, Finnish higher institutions now offer different courses and programmes in English to native Finns and international students. Many students come from within the EU and other parts of the world to study in Finland – either as exchange or regular students.

In spite of all that, more work still needs to be done going forward. The strategy needs to be reviewed and realigned with the current reality so as to make sure the ultimate aim of the internationalisation strategy is fully achieved which is:

...to create in Finland an internationally strong and attractive higher education institution and research community that promotes society's ability to function in an open international environment, supports the balanced development of a multicultural society and participates actively in solving global problems (Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009–2015, pg. 10)

The situation whereby international students come to Finland to study and afterwards find it difficult to actually put into practise what they have learnt should be looked into especially the case with graduates of African background.

The policy makers and the higher education institutions still need to do more in enlightening the populace on the importance of a multicultural society. The public's view of foreigners especially Africans in the society needs to change. In the researcher's opinion, this should start from the higher education institutions. For example, during the course of conducting this research, the researcher paid a visit to the international office in Seinäjoki UAS. While waiting at the lobby, the researcher took time to study the periodicals on the shelf about Africans. Unfortunately, most of the stories about Africans centred on poverty, diseases, hunger and the likes. These kinds of stories about Africans are one-sided and do not send a good message to the public in Finland. Positive awareness should be created about Africans as mentioned by one of the interviewees.

As for the level of engagement of international graduates in the Finnish labour market, various studies including this study have shown that the trend is not encouraging. Most of the graduates find themselves doing menial jobs to survive in Finland. Although the current economic situation in Finland is a contributing factor it is not the major problem. The major problem lies with the colour and origin of the jobseeker. This is the major issue (discrimination) restricting foreigners from getting suitable jobs in Finland. An interviewee, who is in the nursing field, told the researcher that he received a call from a prospective client that his service was no longer needed after being assured of the job initially. In fact, he said the client specifically told him he preferred an Asian to him, a black man. This is just one of the numerous challenges graduates of African background face in the labour market in Finland.

Practical steps should be taken towards reducing this sort of discrimination in the society. Moreover, Seinäjoki UAS and other institutions of higher learning in Finland need to start leading by example. Otherwise, Finland will be faced with the issue of brain drain.

The university should do more in terms of assisting these students in getting places of internships within Finland as this will help reduce the negative perception which most Finnish employers have towards Africans.

The goal of any institution of higher learning is to produce graduates that will in turn become good ambassadors of the institutions. Besides, all institutions of higher learning want to see their products become successful in their chosen careers. However, bulk of the work still lies with the students themselves in terms of taking their studies seriously, learning Finnish language as well as taking advantage of the opportunity provided by the internship period in building networks and gathering work experience – just like the Seinäjoki UAS's slogan "*You are your future*".

It is so unfortunate to learn that most of these students do not put more efforts in learning the language. Most of them fail to take advantage of some of the opportunities available within their environment to learn the language. There are barriers but learning the language will help in reducing the barriers. In addition, other relevant skills could to be acquired in order to stand a better chance of securing a workplace. Above all, international students should realise that for them to stand a better chance, they have to be twice as good as the native Finns.

Overall, the current status of Seinäjoki UAS African graduates shows that 96 % of the respondents still reside in different cities across Finland studying and working. However, most of them still work in cleaning companies with just a handful working as practical nurses in old people's home. The results revealed that many are planning to relocate elsewhere for career opportunities or studies while the decision to continue to stay in Finland for those not planning to relocate, is largely influenced by family reasons.

8.1 Suggestion for further research

The researcher suggests that a follow-up study like this should be extended to other graduates of foreign background from Seinäjoki UAS. Also, a comparison of the current status of graduates of foreign background would be interesting.

The case of Seinäjoki UAS can be compared to other universities of applied sciences in Finland.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Survey Questionnaire

Appendix 2. Interview

Appendix 1. Survey questionnaire

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Nationality:

Country of residence:

Gender:

Study programme in SeAMK:

Year of graduation:

How would you rate your studies in SeAMK?

- Poor
- Satisfactory
- Average
- Good
- Very good
- Excellent

Did you work during your studies?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please state

What were the challenges you faced with respect to integration?

Did you receive any support as an international student in SeAMK?

- Yes
- No

Kindly state the challenges you faced after graduation

What is your current job status?

- Employed
- Unemployed
- Student
- Underemployed (part-time worker)

Your future plans

- Move back to home country
- Stay in Finland
- Relocate elsewhere

Reason(s) for the above

Please state below your recommendations for SeAMK.

Appendix 2. Interview

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did you choose to study in Finland?
2. What was your experience like as a student in SeAMK?
3. Did you face any challenges with respect to integration?
4. What kinds of support did you receive as an international student in SeAMK?
5. In what ways did the South Ostrobothnia region help you to integrate into the society?
6. What do you have to say about the kinds of education you received in SeAMK with respect to labour market needs? Finnish labour market/African labour market
7. What is your current job status?
8. What plans do you have for the future?
9. What would you recommend to SeAMK?