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# EMPLOYABILITY OF FOREIGN GRADUATES IN FINLAND

Master's Thesis

International Business Management

October 2016



Author (authors) Abdurasak Adam	Degree Master of Business Administration	Time October 2016
Thesis Tittle Employability of foreign graduates in Finland		51 Pages 3 pages of appendices
Supervisor Varis Jari, Principal Lecturer		
<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>Internationalization of higher education was the agenda of the Finnish higher education to attract foreign talents who come as international students thereby creating an international environment for study and work. Every year about 2000 non-Finns from the Finnish universities graduate, and majority of them end up taking their skills and expertise outside the Finnish job market due to lack of appropriate ways of integrating them into the Finnish Industry in their qualified professions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges facing foreign graduates by looking at the factors, which, hinder their employability and find methods and techniques of enhancing their employability in the Finnish job market.</p> <p>The study applied qualitative method for the research methodology and has used semi-structured face-to-face interviews for primary data acquisition. Secondary data was derived from articles, reports and statistics and the author used coding method approach to analyze the data collected.</p> <p>The findings show that although Finland is gradually becoming multicultural and tolerant to other cultures, still non-Finnish graduates face challenges in integration into the Finnish labor market. This is mainly due to several factors, which include; lack of adequate working Finnish language, lack of work experience in Finland, lack of professional network and negative Finnish employers' attitude. And finally the author feels that this study will greatly contribute to finding lasting solutions in this subject.</p>		
<p><b>Keywords</b></p> <p>international graduates, employability, higher education, Finnish job market, multicultural, semi-structured, attitude.</p>		

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The significance of internationalization stands out the agenda of Finnish higher education. A significant number of international students arrive in Finland every year. Most of the international students come from China, Russia, Sweden and Estonia, but in the recent years the number of students from Asian and African countries are intensifying rapidly. It is estimated that about 2,000 foreign students graduate every year from the Finnish higher education (CIMO, 2012, pp.1-3). Most of these international students get Bachelor degree in the universities of applied sciences, and Master's degree in the academic university sector.

As Finland grants these international students free education, it would make sense also to enable them to stay in Finland after their graduation, and to apply their skills in the Finnish job market. Graduates are not the only beneficiaries of free education, but the host country also takes enormous advantages from them as replacing workers in industries with very high aging population. They build ties between home countries and host-country, help domestic small companies to internationalize and increase their sizes, bring new ideas, skills and innovations that support labor market and increase economic growth (Vehaskari, 2010, pp.16-18)

Earlier studies conducted on this subject shows that almost 50% of international students remained in Finland for some time after their graduation to search a suitable professional work before deciding to take up any available job or leave the country (CIMO, 2014, pp.2-3). However, these graduates are faced with so many challenges and obstacles in their search for jobs related to their professional fields in the Finnish job market

The researchers (Forsander & Alitolppa-Niitamo 2000, Jaakkola, 2000, and Garam, 2004 cited in CIMO, 2012, p.5) noted that Finnish language barrier is the most common obstacle for finding suitable job for international student. Finland is a small country, very much isolated from the rest of the world, and therefore to get a suitable job demands that the Finnish language both written

and spoken be fluent. Other major obstacles are cultural barriers, religion, lack of work experience and lack of the right contact person (Shumilova, Cai, and Pekkola, 2012, p.58).

To overcome these challenges faced by international graduates in their search for professional jobs, the author looks at some of the suggestions, which came from the interviews conducted among selected international graduates and came up with recommendations addressing graduates, higher educational institutes and the local Finnish employers. This study explores the problem from the international graduate's point of view, since they are the ones who face and experience the challenges, can best suggest effective practical solutions.

### 1.1. Aim, and objectives of the Research

The aim of this thesis is to study the factors that affect the employability of foreign graduates in the Finnish job market.

The research objective of this study is to identify factors, which enhance employability and use them to develop methods and techniques to meet employers' skill requirements for today's work, increase employability of international graduates, and help employers plan for the future.

## 1.2. Research Question

The research questions are:

1. What factors are affecting the employability of international graduates?
2. What methods and techniques can be done to enhance the employability of international graduates in the Finnish job market?

## 1.3. Research Approach

Narrowing down the scope of the research was the most challenging aspect faced by the author. The author noticed that different factors or attributes enhance employability in higher education institutions, ministry of economic and development, employers, etc. of international graduates in Finland. Through the discussions with the supervisor and reading studied previous researches, the author decided to write about factors affecting employability of international graduates.

The author began first by studying the background and theoretical framework of the topic to understand the concepts and theories related to employability. Based on the knowledge gained from literature the author arrived at interviews as a method of collecting data. The author contacted foreign nations both in employment and those not in employments to arrange for a face-to-face interview. It was very difficult to get positive responses, but the author managed to secure 10 persons, who were willing to be interviewed. The informants of the study were non-EU international graduates, who have at least a degree from one of the Finnish universities, integrated in the Finnish society and currently working in Finland and also those in informal employment. The author chose this way, because it mostly non-EU citizens, who face more working challenges in this country than EU citizens. First, it is hard for them to get working residence permit unless they already have job in Finland. Second, there educational degrees from their respective countries are not easily convertible into Finnish job market. In

addition, their physical appearance, culture difference and religion also make it hard for them to find a job in their qualified profession easily in Finland.

The group that the author specifically chose as participants of this thesis consisted of graduates from Russia, Africa and Asia, because they were quite a number of them in Finland and were culturally different from native Finns. The author included Russians, because they are the largest number of international students in Finland, although very close in many ways with the Finns. On the other hand, majority of Africans and Asians come into Finland as international students. The author contacted most of the interviewees through the author's friends' network, except one graduate who the author knew personally. All of the informants welcomed the study, and participated voluntarily. Some of the participants cancelled first interview appointments and re-arranged new appointments, while some of them delayed. The interviews were conducted verbally and recordings were acquired.



## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. International students in Finland

The interest of Finnish authority to attract international students began in the late 1980s, when the ministry of education had formulated the first national goals of increasing international students' mobility within Europe (Garam, 2009, pp.1-2), but in the late of 2006, the ministry of education put in place a policy that attracted international students globally to study in Finland and to provide a working opportunity to stay in the country after their graduation.

The ministry of education saw the benefits of having international students in Finland and in 2009; the ministry had published the 'Strategy for the Internationalization of Higher Education in Finland 2009–2015'. This strategy proposed and recommended to attract up 20,000 international students by the end of 2015, however by the end of 2014, about 20,255 international students were already in the Finnish higher education institutions (Figure1). This showed that the ministry of education underestimated their expectations and there by the end of 2015, the number of students in Finland exceeded their budget estimates by far. The figures by 2014 showed that approximately over 3000 students came into Finland. (Statistics Finland, Garam & Korkalla, 2013, pp.4-7).

International students bring a lot of advantages than disadvantages to the host country, because they help domestic companies to become internal companies, support labor market and increase economic growth (through paying government taxes). These international students also bring new ideas and innovations ((Vehaskari, 2010, pp.16-18).

## The number of International degree students in the Finnish higher education 2004-2015

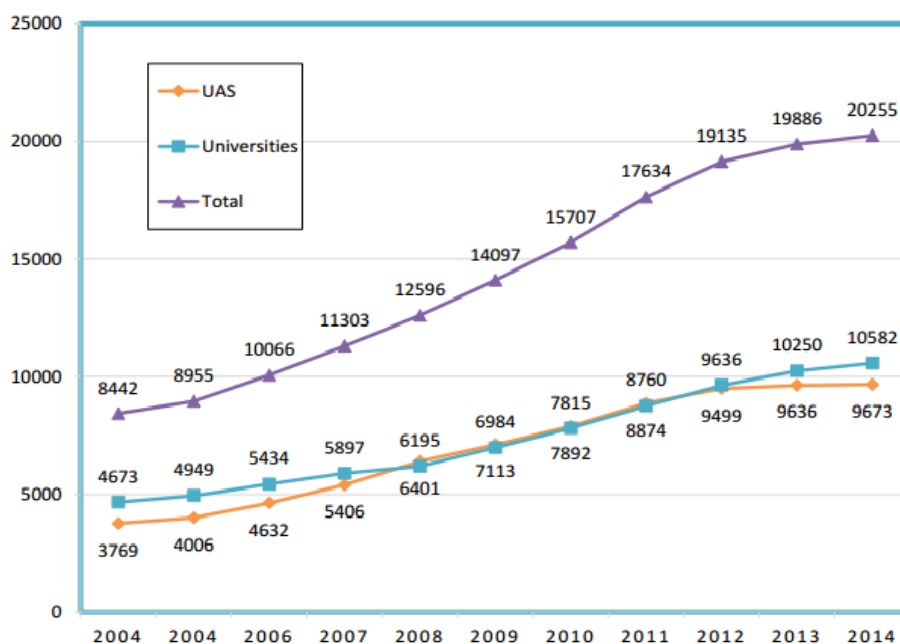


Figure 1: The number of International degree students in the Finnish higher education 2004-2015 (Chart: CIMO, Data: Statistics Finland)

According to CIMO (2014, pp.14-15), the data gathered from Statistics Finland indicated, Russians and Chines are among the top international students in Finnish higher education and these two groups account for 24% of total number of international students in the country. The second group consist of students from the emerging economies (BRIC), which consist of Brazil, Russia, India and China and lastly the group comprising of Vietnam, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and rest of Africa; Nigeria, Ethiopia.

Finland is among the top European countries providing higher education to International students and second to Holland. The country has a total of about 450 programs in English (Wächter and Maiworm 2008, p.29, Garam & Korkalla, 2013, pp.8-15). According to Lehikoinen (2004:46 cited in Saarinen, 2012, p.2), Finland is called “little England” and it is the first choice for those who normally find it difficult to secure an exchange study place in the United Kingdom. Despite the weather conditions of Finland, there are other factors that attract foreign students, such as the availability of many English

programs, the open Finnish international development cooperation, no tuition fees and its reputation of having an excellent education system. (Majakulma, 2011, pp.45-46, Garam & Korkalla, 2013, p.8).

According to the information from Finnish Statistical office, majority of foreign students in Finnish higher education institutes mostly study technology, communication & transport and social sciences and business administration (Figure 2).

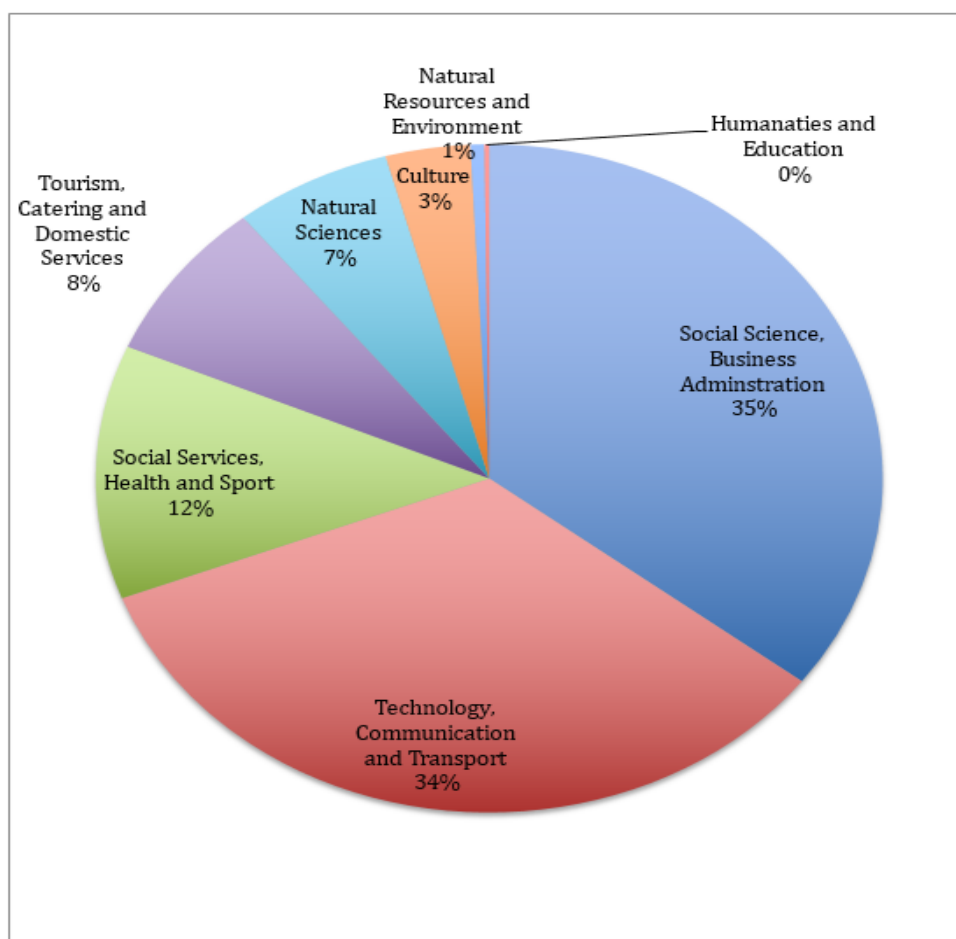


Figure 2: Foreign degree students in Finnish higher education by field of study, 2014, % (Source: Statistics Finland).

The 10 most common nationalities of international degree students in Finland 2014  
(Source: Statistics Finland)

Country	UAS	Universities	Total
Russia	2083	961	3044
China	699	1264	1963
Vietnam	1281	383	1619
Nepal	865	284	1149
Estonia	427	431	858
India	108	651	759
Pakistan	172	533	705
Germany	243	407	650
Nigeria	374	265	639
Iran	70	524	594

Table1: The 10 most common nationalities of international degree students in Finland 2014 (Source: Statistics Finland).

## 2.2. Employability and Higher Education

The Bologna process defines employability as ‘the ability to gain initial employment, to maintain employment, and to be able to move around within the labor market’. Employability reveals the moderate philosophy of individualism, in which individuals are responsible for their employability and maintaining the competencies and capabilities that make them employable (Connell & Burgess, 2006, in Puhakka, et al., 2010, p.47). According to Romaniuk & Snart, (2000, cited in Puhakka, et al., 2010, p.45) the concept of employability contains more than getting and maintaining the competences needed for work: it also involves the ability that one has to sell and market ones’ self in order to get job.

According to Williams (1985, cited in Puhakka, et al., pp.45-47), graduates of universities had been from the elite of societies and had the privilege to get high rank jobs, but when universities expanded, and allowed all members of the society, this resulted in an increase in the number of graduates. This also forced the labor market to select graduates based on their education and specialization, making it more competitive. This ignited a huge debate on the relationship between higher education institutions and employability. The debate concentrated whether HEIs are responsible for the employment of graduates or for the growth of the graduates' intellectual needs. The Bologna process had highlighted that higher education institutions (HEIs) are producers of graduates in different fields, and the employer's responsibility to help graduate attain expertise and graduates responsibility to use the acquire knowledge & skills from HEI to use in industry in order to become experts. This requires that graduates be flexible and maintain his or her work career (Puhakka, et al., 2010, pp.45-52). Universities and polytechnics must pay special attention to developing their regional reaction to work demand, cooperate with local businesses and industries thereby assist their graduates on how to transfer their acquired knowledge into the working life of their regional job market (Tynjälä et. al, 2006, pp.73-74).

Most researchers have revealed that there are differences in how graduates are treated, when it comes to employability. Graduates whose qualifications are more closely related to labor market have better opportunity to get jobs than those graduates whose qualification are not listed on the wanted for the labor market (Patrinos, 1997; Dolton & Silles, 2001, in Puhakka, et al., 2010, p.48).

Nowadays, new graduates will find it more difficult to secure a high-ranking job, because of employers demand for both experience and education qualification. University degree is one of the roots or prospects of getting job, but no more guarantees for finding job as it was before (Glover et al, 2002; Wood, 2004; Purcell et al, 2005, and Honkimäki, 2001, in Puhakka, et al., 2010, pp.49-53).

### 2.3. Employability of foreign graduates in Finland

Employment is essential for international graduates to continue to stay in the host country. Graduates do not want to continue staying in their host country for financial benefits and paying taxes only, but they want to be a part of the entire society and feel at home, because they have developed social ties with fellow graduates who may happen to be local Finns. The period that the international students spend studying is long enough that they even develop certain habits, which makes them feel like strangers if they were to return to their home countries. Some international students even get married whilst in school with either fellow foreigners or local Finns and therefore their expectations of going somewhere else is low, hence the need to look for job within the country. It is also a moral sign of being socially accepted (Majakulma, 2012, p.47, and Valtonen, 2001, pp. 247-262).

According to previous studies CIMO (2012, p.4) the report shows that in the past few years, more than half of the international graduates from Finnish higher education have left the country and are using their skills and competences outside the Finland. However, there are differences in the employment rates of international graduates in the Finnish job market based on their education, fields of study and their nationalities. Graduates from the universities of applied sciences and bachelor's degree from traditional universities stay the country more years and have the opportunity to settle the country. Those with Bachelors' and Masters' degrees from universities of applied sciences have the maximum record of finding a job, while those with master's degree in traditional universities and doctoral graduates have fewer possibilities of finding jobs. Bachelor's degree students from a university of applied sciences participate in practical trainings related to their education programs, and such opportunities may provide them with work experience and social contacts that may help with their future employments.

Fields of education determine the job possibility in the Finnish job market. Graduates of Social Services, Health and Sport fields have high rate of employment in the Finnish job market, while graduates of Natural Sciences & Natural Resources, Culture and environment fields have the worst

possibility of job findings in Finland. Graduates from Transport, Technology and Communication fields have fair opportunity of job findings in Finland (CIMO, 2012, pp.3-4).

The graduate's nationality may also have an influence on job findings. Finns have positive attitude about graduates from similar cultural background and those from developed countries, as well as emerging markets (Forsander, 2003, p.64, CIMO, 2012, p.4, and Majakulma, 2011, p.48). Indians and Chinese have good employment record in Finland. They are exceptional and their unemployment rate in 2012 close to the Finns (CIMO, 2012, p.4), on the other hand graduates from African countries tend to have the lowest employment rate than the other nationalities, but in the fields of health and social sector they are above the employment average rate than other nationalities (CIMO, 2014, p.2).

Graduates from EU countries and East Asian countries have high opportunity rate of employment in the Finnish job market, as compared to the other nations (Figure 3, and Heikkilä, 2012, p.6).

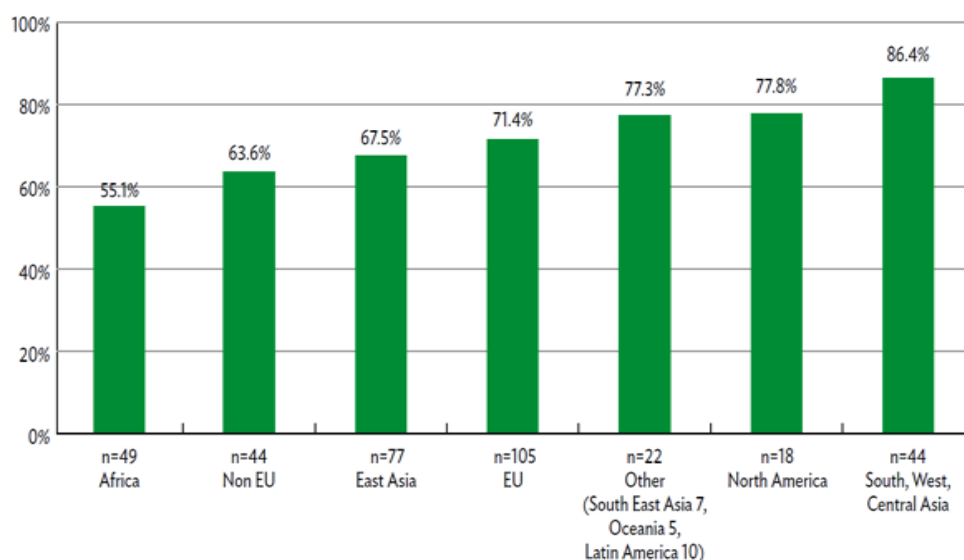


Figure 3: Employment rate of international graduates by continent of origin (Shumilova, Cai and Pekkola, 2013, p.42).

There is prejudice that outsiders are suspected, always break the happiness of the local, seems to threaten the local thereby bring in insecurity among the locals. (Alloport, 1954, pp.29-33). According to Ahmed 2005; Forsander, 2002; Forsander & Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2000; Välivehmas & Ylätaalo 2008 cited in Majakulma, 2011, p.48, foreign background job seekers feel resistance power, while they search job in Finland due to prejudices, ethnic discrimination and attitudes of employers.

Foreigners face indirect discrimination for recruitment in the Finnish job market, where unnecessary requirements demand to prevent unwanted foreign applicants. The high unemployment rate of qualified foreigners caused by the continued practices of indirect discrimination of public and private bodies (Makkonen, 2000, p.138, Vehaskari, 2010, pp.19-21, Majakulma, 2011, p.48, Shumilova, Cai & Pekkola, 2012, p.58). The Eurobarometer study concluded that discrimination on the grounds of origin (ethnicity) is the most common form of discrimination that is spreading widely in the EU countries, while 72% of Finnish respondents believe that discrimination of origin (ethnicity) is widely spread in the Finnish society (Eurobarometer, 2009, p.65).

#### 2.4. Competences enhance the employability of international students in Finland

The increase of knowledge economy and global competition for skilled labor has provided a new motive for internationalization of higher education system in many countries of the world. The broader strategy of internationalization is to recruit the skilled international students and to increase the human capital of host countries, and therefore it is necessary to enhance factors that directly influence the employability of foreign background graduates in labor markets (Majakulma, 2011, p.45, Wächter & Maiworm, 2007, p.28).

Higher education institutions should not only provide academic knowledge to the international students, but also must prepare them proficiently in the world of work generally and particularly how to cope with the Finnish labor market demands (Majakulma, 2011, p.46).



According to DeSeCo project (Rythen and Salgnik, 2003 cited in Tynjälä et al 2006, p.76), the key competences that may improve the opportunity of individual's work of all foreign nations at the present and future were studied broadly, and described into three main categories: (1) interacting in socially heterogeneous groups, (2) acting autonomous, and (3) using tools interactively. Each of these competences involves several sub-competences. For instance, interacting in socially heterogeneous groups needs social skills, respecting diversity, cooperation, negotiation skills, managing and resolving conflicts, and so on. Acting autonomous requires forming and conducting life plans, self-development and social interaction.

Using tools interactively requires using both physical tools such computers and machines, and socio-cultural tools such as language skills and literacy. It requires language skills and using modern information technology interactively.

Employability and Finnish labor market integration are influenced by several competences. Important competences may include an individual's professional knowledge, Finnish language skill & cultural competences, work experiences, networks and job seeking skills (Forsander, 2003, pp.67-69 and Majakulma, 2009, p.47).

#### 2.4.1. An individual's knowledge and professional development during studies

According to Chiswick & Miller, 2007, 2009a, 2009b; Duvander, 2001; Friedberg, 2000; Noki & Kovanen, 2008; Tremblay, 2004 cited in Majakulma, 2011, p.47, an individual's knowledge expert is important for employability of people with foreign background. Mostly, a high-qualified person gets easily employed, due to their expertise and skills. The intellectual mobility of human capital is limited, but however there is still demand in certain professions and some skills will be considered internationally transferable. Some skills and professions cannot easily transfer due to cultural and technical differences of countries. A discrimination against foreigners may reduce the recognition of

foreign background skills. Having a degree from the host country may enhance the employability of foreign students, because employers can easily recognize and trust proficiencies related to their degrees.

It is difficult to identify the job market demand, and factors influence one's employability during studies, therefore developing and supporting the professional development of international students during studies is significant for their future employability in the Finnish job market (Majakulma, 2011, p.52). This frustration may also concern national students, but special considerations should be given to international students. Reflection of professional competences should be developed during studies, and should be motivated and bring positive examples in the Finnish job market (Majakulma, 2011, p.51).

#### 2.4.2. Finnish language skill and Cultural competences

Finnish language skill is considered as the most crucial factor for employability and integration of international graduates in the Finnish job market (Forsander, 2003, p.67 Garam, 2009, pp.25-26 and Majakulma, 2011, p.52). Finnish higher education institutions have increased in the number of Finnish courses in the recent years to meet the requirements of their international students. It is important to motivate the students to learn the language in the beginning of their studies, and the motivation depends on the future plans of students. For example, if the student's future plans is not to stay in Finland after graduation, then learning Finnish language is waste of time, but it is important to keep in mind that plans may change and learning the Finnish language after graduation may not be easy (Majakulma, 2011, p.52).

According to Majakulma, (2011, p.53) Finnish culture is different from other cultures and knowing it is essential for the employability of foreign graduates.

Regardless of language proficiency, a cultural competence is the main dominant factor for getting work in Finland. International students should be taught Finnish culture and ways of acting in the Finnish work environment, and how to behave in the Finnish society as in general in order to integrate in the society. This has a possibility of increasing their level of employability. International students should be encouraged to find a job during studies not because of income, but due to their integration plan into the Finnish society and Finnish work culture (Majakulma, 2011, p.55).

### 2.4.3. Work experiences

According to Tynjälä et al. (2006, pp.77-80) higher education institutions were not able to provide their graduates' with the skills required in the Finnish job market. For instance, university graduates lacked the needed communication skills and they learned it from work places rather than universities, while UAS graduates should already have practical knowledge before graduating but institutions do not expose them enough and most of them even lack the ability to exhibit self-regulation. The UAS instead provided them with more theoretical knowhow compared to the practical knowhow.

In some programs in traditional universities and almost all programs in the universities of applied sciences the curricula include practical training and gaining working life experience through internships, working on projects are compulsory part of the studies, but still graduates face challenges regarding in securing these to practical skills. To overcome these challenges, the universities should help students obtain work experience during studies through networking with the industry and should be educate the students on the importance of practical training during their time at the university (Majakulma, 2011, p.48).

#### 2.4.4. Networks and job seeking skills

In Majakulma studies (2011, pp.49-51) building networks with Finnish people and companies operating in the Finnish job market during studies is very important, and counted as a positive step for enhancing the employability of foreign international graduates. These networks could be reached through different ways, for instance internships, completing a company's case study or company's project during studies. Job seeking skills were also emphasized as important factors for employability of graduates especially the foreign graduates and was found to be the missing element in the Finnish education curriculum. Internships during studies played a major role in employability prosperities of international students in Finland.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains qualitative method, the data acquisition method of the thesis, and describes how data gathered will be analyzed in detail.

#### 3.1. Qualitative approach

In this study, qualitative approach has been chosen, because qualitative is good for exploratory research. When it is needed to investigate a problem deeply, and the topic is not investigated/researched, deeply and not also published earlier sufficiently, then qualitative method is the best (Myers, 2013, p.9). Qualitative research is used to understand how people think, act and behave and how they translate their experiences gained from their world and construct their real world (Merriam, 2014, pp.13-14). When it is needed to understand people's motivations, their reasons, their actions, and their context for their beliefs and actions in an in-depth-way, qualitative research is the most suitable (Myers, 2013, p.8). The study of this topic is studied earlier and further research is needed to know more about the phenomenon, and

therefore to investigate the problem deeply, qualitative research is the best approach to apply, because it enables the researcher to ask and listen to the people related to the study, and thereafter to bring a desired solution.

### 3.2. Data acquisition method

In qualitative research data can be collected through various approaches such as interviews, focus groups, and observations. In this study interviews are chosen to be the data acquisition method. Interview is one of the most used data gathering techniques for qualitative research. It allows the researcher to gather a rich data from people in various roles and circumstances (Myers, 2013, p.119). Qualitative interviews are like night goggles, 'permitting us to see that which is not ordinary on view and examine that which is looked at, but seldom seen (Rubin & Rubin, 2005: vii, in Myers, 2013, pp.119-120).

Semi -structured interview is the most appropriate method for data collection of this study, because it allows the author to be prepared all questions early of time, and perform competent during the interview, and also at the same time the interviewee can talk freely, and tell everything that he or she considers important. It gives the interviewee the opportunity to add important insights as they arise during the course of the conversation (Myers, 2013, pp.121-123). Semi-structured interview is extremely useful in situations, where either in-depth information is needed or little is known about the area (Kumar, 2008, p.126).

### 3.3. Interview as the data of acquisition method

The author realized that interview was the best choice of getting in-depth and rich information regarding the research question, because the topic is attention grabbing and still needed further research and holistic solutions in Finland. Interview is the most reliable tool that may allow the respondents to talk freely, and describe their experiences regarding to the competences needed in the Finnish job market.

The author him-self is skilled immigrant, and there were common values and mutual understanding between the author and the participants of the study. By using these commonalities the author created an open and friendly environment that allowed the respondents to talk freely and generously, and share additional personal stories, which bring extra valuable information and findings to this study.

The interview questions were prepared based on the themes examined in the theoretical framework. The interview questions were sent to the respondents a week before the interview. The respondents were called by phone, sent emails and made appointments for the interviews. The interviews arrangements were completely depended on the respondents' schedules.

Ten international graduates were interviewed. They represented different nationalities, one from Indonesia, one from Nigeria, one from Bangladesh, one from Zambia, two from Russia, one from Cameroon, one from Pakistan, one from Ghana and the last one from Nepal. All of them have a minimum of a bachelor degree from the Finnish higher education; among them there was one PhD graduate, two Bachelor degree holders and the rest of them were master degree holders. All of them have lived in Finland for more than four years. All of the ten graduates interviewed 70% were working in the fields they are not qualified in. Seven of the respondents were working other jobs outside of their professions, and three were working in their professions. The majority of these interviews were conducted in public libraries, which seemed to be the most preferred place by most of the interviewees. These international graduates were interviewed individually and on a face-to-face basis. During the interviews, several interview techniques and tools were used, and each

interview took between 25 to 40 minutes. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. After conducting ten interviews the author realized that the respondents were giving almost similar experiences and the information appeared to be the same even though their ideas were presented using different sentences, expressions and stories. Therefore, the author recognized that the data is almost saturated and could not interview further more.

### 3.4. Data analysis method

Data analysis is the most complex part of any thesis or dissertation. It is the process of making meaning out of the data, and making meaning out of data involves combining, reducing and interpreting what people said, what researcher has seen, observed and read. Shortly data analyzes is the process used to answer research questions. The preferred way of qualitative data analysis is to do simultaneously with the data collection (Merriam, 2014, pp.175-176).

Qualitative research has no standardized methods of data analysis as quantitative research has standardized protocols and uniform of hypotheses. There are recommended guidelines from the qualitative scholars that may be used for qualitative analysis, but the primary methods for qualitative analysis that may apply during studies are deductive, inductive, and abductive reasoning. Deduction is what we generally draw and conclude from established facts and evidence. Induction is what we explore and conclude to be transferable from the particular to the general, based on an examination of the evidence and a gathering of knowledge. Abduction is guessing from the evidence that which is most likely, those explanatory ideas based on clues (Saldana, et al., 2011, pp.93-94).

In this study coding approach has been used as a method for analyzing data. According to Saldana, et al. (2011, p.95) Coding is a method of finding to the meanings of each part of collected data. Its purpose is to work as a way of organizing, classifying, and later reorganizing each datum into developing and

upcoming categories for further analysis. Auerbach, et al. (2003, p.32) describe coding a practice for organizing the text of transcripts, and discovering procedures and patterns within that structure.

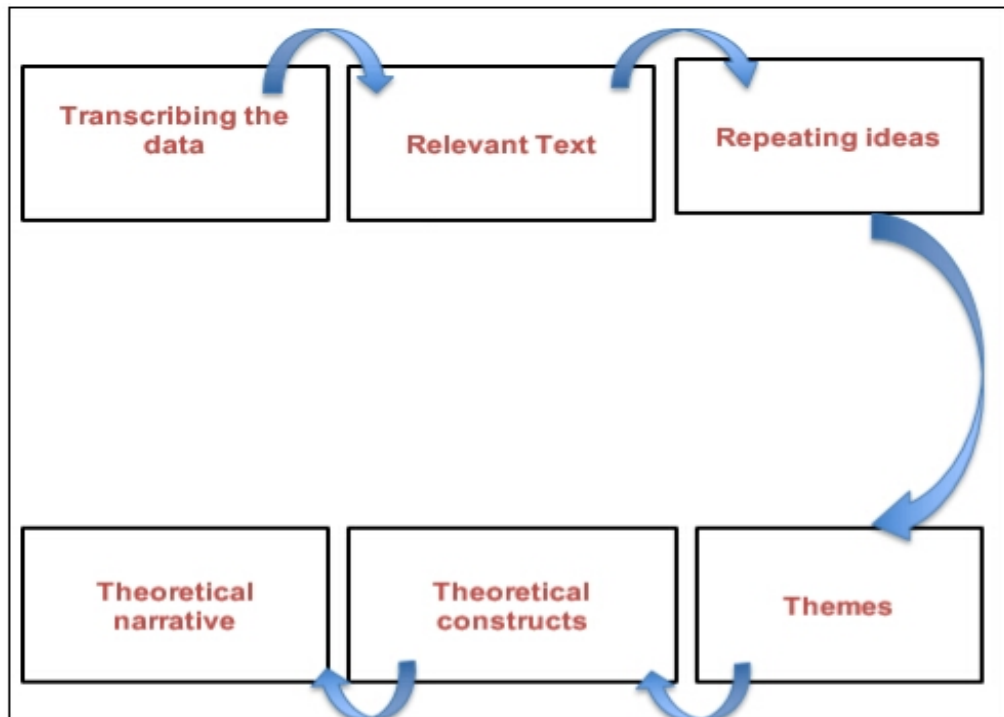


Figure 4: Data analysing process (Auerbach et. al, 2003, pp.37-41)

As shown in figure 4, the recorded interviews has transcribed into word form. (Step 1) The first step of data analysing after transcribing is the selection of the relevant text of the raw data. Relevant text is the text that related to the author's research questions (Auerbach, et al., 2003, p.37). It can be found through reading the whole text carefully with the research concern in mind, and keeping only the related text to the research concern and discarding the rest. This is also called filtering process. (Step 2) After having the relevant text of the data, the author noticed that different participants frequently used the same or similar words and phrases to express the same ideas. These ideas are called repeating ideas. (Step 3) After highlighting the repeating ideas, the author has grouped these ideas into themes. The repeating ideas that have something in common have called themes. "A theme is an implicit



topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas” (Auerbach et al., 2003, p.38). (Step 4) In the same way that the author grouped the repeating ideas into themes, the author also grouped the themes into larger theoretical constructs/concepts. (Step 5). Finally, the author organizes the theoretical constructs into a theoretical narrative, which summarizes what the author had learned about the research concerns. The theoretical narrative is the final step of data analyzing process that connects the gap between the researchers’ concerns and the participants’ personal experiences. It expresses the participants’ subjective experiences, while they are using their own words as much as possible. However, it also includes the researchers’ theoretical framework by including the theoretical constructs and themes in parentheses during the narrative, and whatever the author noted and saw during the whole study.

The expected results will be societal. The Ministry of Employment and Economy as well as the higher education institutions use to overcome and to minimize the future challenges of international graduates in order to enhance their employment in the Finnish job market.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter provides the findings from the data gathered and analyses that have been carried out in the study and also it highlights the author's observations regarding to the graduates' type of work in Finland. The findings are divided into two:

1. Factors affecting the employability of international graduates from Finnish higher education, and
2. Methods and techniques that can be done to enhance the employability of international graduates in the Finnish job market.

The structure of the findings is based on the different theories that have been used in the theoretical framework. This will provide a foundation for conclusion and the author's recommendations.

During the data gathering different factors affecting the employability of foreign graduates were found, and after discussions and consultations with the expertise the author limited the number of factors to seven; Lack of adequate Finnish language skills, Lack of work experience from countries and companies recognized either in Finland or outside of it, limited of professional networks, lack of internship in Finland, lack of culture awareness and persistence, negative employers' attitude and lack of labor market job demand.

At the beginning of data acquisition, the author decided to interview 20 international graduates, but after taking 10 interviews as shown in table 2, the author realized that most of the respondents were giving almost similar information and this suggested that the same factors affected the employability of international graduates, there after the author settled for 10 and recognized that the data has reached its saturated point.

List of respondents participated in the interviews, their gender, country of origin and the form that were interviewed.

Respondents' ID	Gender	Country of origin	Interview type
1	M	Indonesia	Face-to-face
2	M	Nigeria	Face-to-face
3	M	Zambia	Face-to-face
4	F	Russia	Face-to-face
5	M	Bangladesh	Face-to-face
6	M	Pakistan	Face-to-face
7	M	Nepal	Face-to-face
8	M	Russia	Face-to-face
9	M	Ghana	Face-to-face
10	F	Zambia	Face-to-face

Table 2. List of respondents participated in the interviews

Ten international graduates from different nationalities were interviewed on a face-to-face basis as shown in table 2, and they have given huge and valid information related to the factors affecting employability of international graduates based on their personal experiences.

#### 4.1 Research Question 1

What factors are affecting the employability of international graduates?

There are many factors affecting employability of international graduates in Finland and this include:

#### 4.1.1 Lack of adequate Finnish language

Finnish language skill is a key factor affecting employability of international graduates in Finland (Vehaskari, 2010, p.21). It is well known that knowing adequate Finnish language is essential for Finnish labor market, because the working language of almost all Finnish companies is Finnish.

Respondents told the author, that most companies they applied to for employment demanded adequate Finnish language, due to safety reasons and for communication with other employees during the working hours. The employers intimated that most of the work /reports were done in teams, hence the need for adequate Finnish both written and spoken.

Respondents highlighted that communication skill is one of the most important factors that affects the employability of foreign graduates.

Therefore, almost all respondents agreed that Finnish language skill is the key determinant aspect that affects the employability of international students and graduates in the Finnish labor market.

#### 4.1.2. Lack of work experience in Finland

The other factor that seemed to follow the lack of adequate Finnish language skills was lack of proper work experience in Finland or work experience obtained in other recognized countries/companies of the Finnish corporate world. Again almost all respondents agreed strongly that having working experience in Finland matters a lot if an international graduate wants to secure a job in Finland

#### 4.1.3. Limited professional network

Building networks with the Finnish professional societies is an important door, which allows international graduates to enter the Finnish job market easily (Majakulma, 2011, p.49). Limited professional networks or lack of connections with people both professional & non-professional and with companies in the Finnish job market during and after studies affect employability.

70% of the respondents stressed about the significant relationship between work place opportunity and networks within the Finnish society. Some of the respondents managed to get their first jobs through networks with friends and companies.

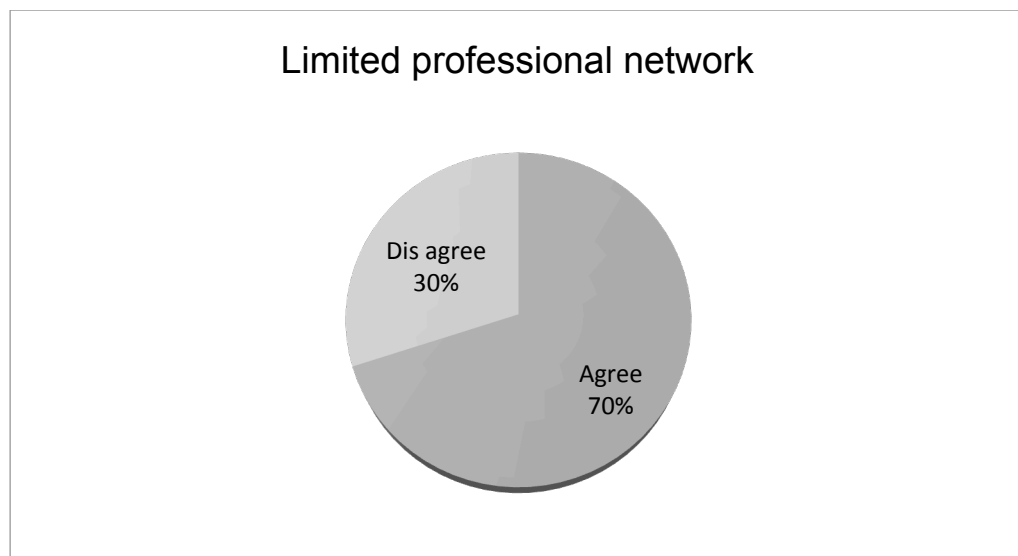


Figure5: Limited of professional network affects employability of international graduates.

#### 4.1.4 Lack of proper internship

Respondents emphasized the significance of internships during studies, and it came out as one of the major issues that can enhance the employability of foreign graduates in Finland.

About 80% of respondents argued that internship is a bridge that connects foreign graduates and Finnish job market. They also agreed that lack of proper internships during studies might diminish the employability chances of foreign international graduates.

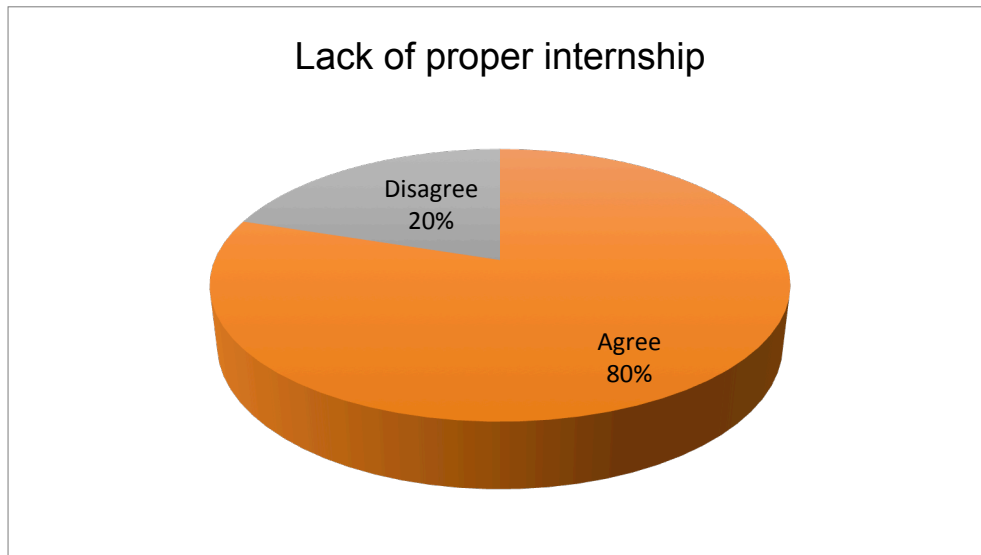


Figure 6: Lack of proper internship affects employability of international graduates.

#### 4.1.5. Lack of culture awareness, persistence and job seeking skills

The importance of international graduates' understanding the Finnish culture cannot be under played. Therefore cultural awareness and sensitive should be taken seriously and should be understood together with persistence and job seeking skills to work in Finland as highlighted in previous studies.

About 60% of the respondents agreed that they are challenging these aspects.

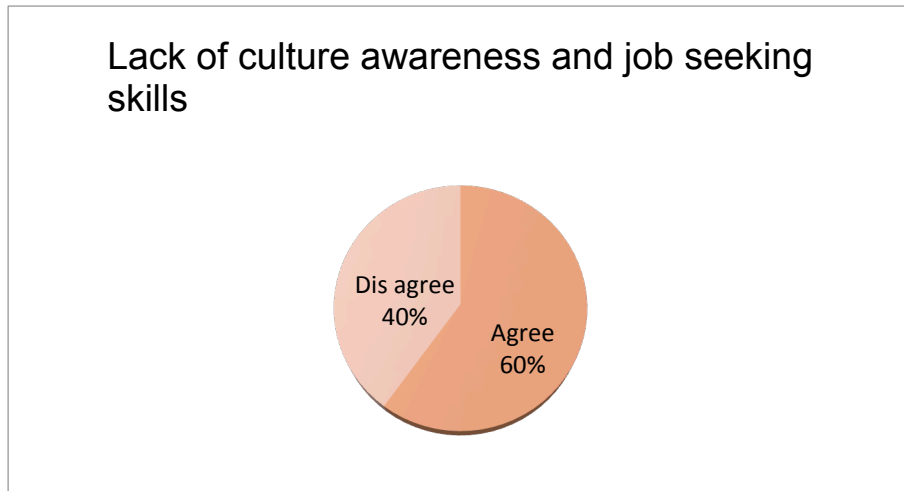


Figure 7: Lack of culture awareness and job seeking skills affects employability of international graduates.

#### 4.1.6. Negative Employers' attitude

The distrust and prejudice of Finnish employers for international graduates begins just when the international students are in universities and applying for internship. At the beginning of this study, the author tried to skip this factor, but during interviews the graduates highlighted the importance of this issue regarding how this factor affects their employability. About 60% of respondents mentioned that employers' negative attitudes affect to the graduates' employability negatively.

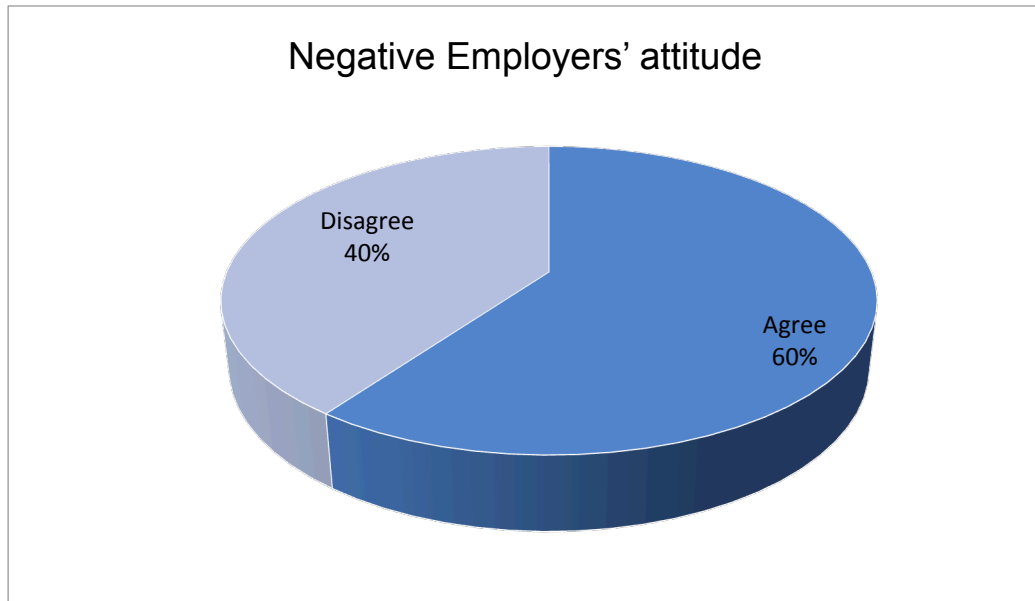


Figure 8: Negative employer's attitude affects employability of international graduates.

#### 4.1.7. Lack of knowledge of the labor market demand

Market structure and economy of the country are vital factors that determine the employability of international students and graduates. Some of the graduates argued that the market structure of Finland is designed to prevent the entering of international graduates. Others also argued that current economic situation of the country is not attracting graduates for employment.



#### 4.2. Research Question 2:

What methods and techniques can be done to enhance the employability of international graduates in the Finnish job market?

Techniques and methods that can be done to enhance employability of international graduates in the Finnish job market.

As mentioned in the introduction to this study, international graduates face challenges and obstacles for their job findings in the Finnish job market, and the respondents of the study suggested some methods and recommendations to minimize the challenges. All of them agreed that learning Finnish during studies is vital for after graduation employment. Learning Finnish language is related to the future plans of graduates, but sometimes future plans may change at the end of studies or after graduation, and therefore without knowing Finnish the challenges of employability may increase, hence the respondents advised international students to learn Finnish during studies seriously.

Technique: The Finnish language courses should be tailored according to the discipline of the international study program pursued by the student. For instance, Finnish for business students, Finnish for Engineers, Finnish for Nurses etc.

This is because respondents criticized on Finnish language teaching method in higher education institutions, and mentioned learning should have both grammar and theory Finnish courses, but suggested practical speaking grammar should be emphasized more, because speaking skill is much more needed in work places.

At the job seeking period, respondents argued that sending applications only to employers is not enough, and recommended to call the employers continuously and show their interests. This is because many international

graduates give up just after failing to receive responses from where they have applied.

According to 50% of the respondents' higher education institutions should play an active role for international graduates' employments, especially in the area of internship engagement with industries. They have also suggested that introducing and linking international students and foreign alumni graduates, who have succeeded professionally in the local market can motivate foreign students, because they give them practical advices and examples for their future employability in Finland.

The study revealed how deep the negative attitude exists among Finnish employers and the need to eliminate this attitude in their minds about their negative perception of foreign graduates, understand the importance of foreign graduates in the Finnish businesses and economy, and to change their attitudes towards foreign graduates in a positive way. It also highlighted the need for labor market structure reforms.

Techniques 1: The Finnish government should put a labor policy that demands that employers engage a certain percentage of international graduates.

Technique 2: The Finnish government to reduce taxes for companies that have employed international graduates.

### 4.3. Discussions

According to the previous studies (CIMO, 2012, pp.1-3) more than 50 % of international graduate worked in Finland a year after their graduation. However, the researchers did not indicate the nature of work, where in their respective professions or just in any informal sector such as cleaning, in restaurants etc. However, the author of this thesis agrees with the CIMO researchers on a number of issues except that he discovered that, though more than 50% of the international graduate are employed a year after graduation, only less than 5% are employed in their qualified fields. The author found most of the engineering and business international graduates are working in restaurants, cleaning and bars with an exception of the nursing international graduates, who are mostly working in old people's homes than in hospitals. It is for this reason that all international graduates working in these sectors are part of the more than 50% employed as per earlier researcher's findings. It is undisputable fact (obviously true) that these graduates are employed, supporting the labor market and the economy through taxes paid by them. The questions that comes immediately to the author's mind are how productive are these international graduates now working as cleaners if compared to them working as engineers, or is it true that Finland does not need these skilled workers.

The author of this study believes that if graduates continue working in informal sectors than in their profession, it will eventually lead to diminishing their competence and skills and this will not only be a loss on their individual side, but also to the country, which invested tax payers' money in their education at a time, when Finland desperately needs competent and skilled workers to replace the aging and pensionable workers.

## 5. CONCLUSION

While there are varieties in the order of employability, there is a wide comprehension of what qualities, attributes, skills and knowledge constitute employability all in all and for international graduates specifically. Employers anticipate that graduates will have the specialized and competence skills acquired from their degrees and in addition, they expect the International graduates to show a scope of more extensive skills and attributes that incorporate group working, communication, leadership, problem solving, critical thinking and regularly managerial capacities or potential.

It is questionable that particular definitions are less essential than a concurred concentrate on approaches, which foster transferable skills and the qualities that will empower graduates to discover suitable occupation, progress in their work and accordingly encourage the accomplishment of their organizations and add to society and the economy. Maybe most importantly, the literature and of this author's own discoveries have overwhelmingly highlighted the significance of placements, temporary positions and work-based learning, as a powerful method through which employers will provide the necessary working skills needed in their respective companies, at the same time allowing the students to learn the employers work culture in Finland.

The literature on international student employability, and this author's thesis findings, both uncover that while there have been vital advancements regarding action crosswise over employers to address international students' employability, the degree to which this is going on and the level to which it is being implemented over the segment is unverifiable. This is in spite of advancements in government strategy to urge employers and learning institutions to cooperate in order to create measures that add to international student employability.

While there are various cases of employers attempting to advance international students employability in literature and in the author's thesis findings, there are still issues and hindrances amongst bosses and a large number of those in charge of human resource in most organizations, especially that they have a different mindset, desires and needs

There are worries from employers about employability measures in their companies, because they think employing international students may result in diminishing productivity, because productive workers will be assigned to teach international graduates resulting in loss in production hours. The employers are also afraid of the shareholders, who expect them to have already competent and skilled manpower than to employing people who do not only have difficulties with language, need also to learn employer work culture. There is likewise disappointment from employers about courses taught to international students not addressing their needs.

In any case, there appears to be no critical reasons why employers cannot rehearse with educational institutes to arrive at the necessary skills that need to be taught to International graduates to boost their employability.

Moderately little is thought about the effect of international programs in promoting employability of international students and one wonders as to whether the programs are different from the ones conducted in Finnish. What comes to mind is whether there are any measures to advance international students employability abilities and attributes. Orderly assessments of such measures seem to lack. This is especially true if looked on long-term benefits of promoting employability of international students in a country like Finland with a high ageing population and in need of future workforce.

Finally, the author wishes to end this thesis with the recommendation that follow this conclusion.

## 5.1. Recommendations

**Communications:** Most companies use Finnish language as their official language. It is therefore important that students learn Finnish language intensively from the beginning of their studies, and universities should rehearse with industries so that the Finnish language include curriculum addresses both the business/ technical side of the language, which might make it simpler for graduates use during their work placements. It should be emphasized to international students looking forward to work in Finland and make it easy for them to learn.

**Teaching style of Finnish language:** Currently the Finnish language taught cannot even help an international student do any business than just buying a cup of coffee, hence the need to change the teaching style. The curriculum should put much emphasis on speaking, because it then helps them take up jobs immediately, since at that stage they do not qualify for managerial or supervisory level, which involve report writing.

**Internships:** Higher education institutions should rehearse with employers to have foreign students on internship placements and ensure they monitor the progress of the students in the work places, and employers should be able to assess the students and advise the higher education on skills that are lacking. This will create potential employers network for them to apply for jobs after graduating from their respective studies.

**Work experience:** Foreign graduates should know that the work experience acquired in their respective home countries is not enough to work in Finland and therefore they should work hard to gain work experience during and after studies in Finland if they want to compete with the locals for the same job.

Group work: International students should take the university group work assignments seriously, because that is the reflection of what is happening in the industries in Finland. Most Finnish companies encourage group work, which may differ from where individual students come from.

Problem solving: International students should realize that in Finnish industries not everything should be asked, but workers should have problem solving capabilities.

Critical thinking: International students should realize that unless you possess special skills, the employers would not settle for anything equal or less than their Finnish counterparts. Therefore graduates should strive to do extra or above their local counterparts.

The author feels that the policy makers are not doing enough to re-enforce their strategy on manpower recruitment, and therefore he recommends that companies be given a quota to employ foreigners in their institutions to reduce over dependence on the social services and government coffers.

## 5.2. Management Implications

From managerial point of view, the research contributes to the understanding of the competences that international graduates have after the completion of their studies. This thesis takes into account Finnish aging workforce and its implication on contemporary and future labor market shortage. It advocates that international graduates in Finland are adequately equipped with all the necessary skills needed to fit in any Finnish or international company.

This study can help employers and managers to understand that international graduates can be able to fill the Finnish labor market gap, fill the vacancies

that would have been left empty or would be taken by under-qualified workers. The employers and managers are not willing to recruit international graduates is due to lack of certain skills especially fluency in Finnish, but the study suggests that employers and managers to understand that foreign graduates can fill skills gap or shortage of high skilled sectors, such as IT, engineering and accountancy. All these sectors do not need fluency in Finnish, it was tested in Nokia that foreign workers were valued in doing such works without Finnish language proficiency, and therefore employers and managers should utilize these potentially educated workforce in the Finnish labor market, instead of allowing them to flee and utilize their knowledge to grow other economies.

The study advocates that international graduates just need to be provided with opportunity to work and improve their Finnish language skills. International graduates are able to improve the language skills once given work to do in their own profession. The opportunity of working in Finnish company is itself the opportunity of learning Finnish language, therefore, the study suggests that the managers in Finland need to be open minded and provide international graduates opportunity to prosper and an opportunity of learning Finnish language whenever it is possible. From a managerial perspective, this research points out that international graduates are the opportunities for the budding and growing businesses, for aging population like Finland.

### 5.3. How this thesis relates to the author's study of International Business Management?

It can simply be said that human resource is one of the core elements that drive productivity and this study was simply to help Finnish companies view of International graduate as future workforce rather than liabilities and work towards findings ways to integrate them in their respective companies. Therefore, the thesis approached IBM from the human resource point of view, which is one of the core courses in IBM.



### 5.3. Suggestions for further research

This thesis was limited by space, time and level of study and as such, many issues came up, which calls for further research. However, the author wishes that other researchers to look at the following issues:

- In this thesis, the negative of Finnish employers' attitudes should be researched in order to establish whether it's a foreign graduate's assumptions /perceptions or its real, and how this be addressed in future.
- There is also a need to research and establish, which jobs are open for foreigner so that International students are advised before applying for a study program and during their studies.

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Figure 2: Foreign degree students in Finnish higher education by field of study, 2014, % (Statistics Finland).

Figure 3: Employment rate of international graduates by continent of origin (Shumilova, Cai and Pekkola, 2013).

Figure 4: Data analyzing process (Auer Bach et. al, 2003).

Figure 5: Limited of professional network

Figure 6: Lack of proper internship

Figure 7: Lack of culture awareness and job seeking skills

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Table1: The 10 most common nationalities of international degree students in Finland 2014 (Source: Statistics Finland).

Table 2: List of respondents participated in the interviews

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX1

#### Interview themes for employed graduates

##### Background questions

- Where are you from?
- How long have you been living in Finland?
- What have you studied in Finland (Degree)?
- When have you graduated?

##### Research questions

- According to your experience, what competences should graduates have, while they need to get job in Finland?
- What are the most valuable factors?
- Do you think the education you got in Finland is relevant to the Finnish labor market needs? (Professional knowledge)
- Do you work now?
- Where do you work? Is it related to your professional?
- What competences did you think you were having, while you have gotten this job?
- How did you manage to get this job? (Job seeking skills technique)
- How long have you been searching for your work? (Your first work)
- How did you approach for your employer? (Networks & Job seeking skills, techniques)
- Are you still in touch with your fellow students in Finland? (Network)



### Future plans

- What is your future plans?
- Are you planning to work abroad elsewhere Finland?

### Additional

- Would you like to add anything else related to the employability of international graduates in Finland?

## APPENDIX 2

### Interview themes for unemployed graduates

- Did you work in Finland?
- What have you worked?
- How long have you been searching for work now, and approximately how many jobs have you applied?
- What kind of job you are looking for?
- Do you think that you are missing some competences needed in the field of work that you are looking for?
- Have you been called for an interview?
- If you have got refusal, did the employer mention the reason? What was it?
- How did you approach employers?
- Are you still in touch with your fellow students in Finland?
- What is your future plans?
- Are you planning to work abroad elsewhere Finland?

### Additional

Would you like to add anything else related to the employability of international graduates in Finland?