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Improving the Collaboration Between the Finnish and International Business Students

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Name of the bachelor's thesis Improving the collaboration between the Finnish and International students in the Department of Business management.			
Abstract <p>The main objective of the research was to analyse the current situation of the internationality at the Department of Business management in Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences (MAMK) and thus draw a conclusion to improve the collaboration between the Finnish and international students. The thesis consists of four parts through which a reader can have a deeper knowledge about internationality at Finnish universities of applied sciences and the real situation in the Department of Business management in MAMK. The theoretical part explains the main concepts of the research: polytechnic system in Finnish education and how it is applied in MAMK. The accent of the theory is put on the discussion of the international activities in MAMK.</p> <p>The empirical part includes the description of the case study research design, data collection methods applied, the teaching and studying in MAMK and its current international activities. In the results the talk concentrates on presenting the information obtained by data collection methods. All in all, it is about the current situation of the internationality in Business Department, the expectations and willingness of the first-year business students, both Finnish and international, to interact with each other. The conclusion includes the response to the main objective of the research and provides several recommendations to the department on a more effective way to strengthen the bond between the students. The limitations of the research are also discussed in this final part.</p> <p>The research is precise in the current condition of the department, and its conclusions might be useful and applicable for 2-3 years ahead. The result is also helpful in future researches about developing curriculum for business students since it reflects thoughts and feelings of the students about their current studies.</p>			
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1 INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of polytechnics, internationalisation is always one of the focal points in development plans of Finnish Ministry of Education. This point focuses on how to attract international resources and take advantage of them, as well as to promote the image of Finland to the world. The reasons can be clearly seen: a remote country with limited resources cannot stay out of the internationalisation trends, Finland is suffering from a brain drain and losing its position as an interesting cooperation partner. Since higher education institutions play a key role in the Finnish economy and society, the internationalism in higher education can strengthen the development potential, available resources and the competitiveness of a region (Ministry of Education 2009, 11-17).

The commissioning party of the research is the Department of Business management at Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences (MAMK). Since its establishment in 1992, Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences was among one of the first polytechnics to implement internationalisation in Finland. It has been considered as one of the main targets of the university. Some features of international activities which are competitive advantages of MAMK have been attracting hundreds of international students each year. The increasing number of international students comes with the need of combining this new energy with local students. In order to develop this opportunity to its full potential, the university needs to understand the thoughts and feelings of the students.

The research aims to analyse the current situation of internationality in the Department of Business management at MAMK and thus to suggest a conclusion to improve it. For this purpose, the research question of the thesis is as follows: what are the expectations and willingness of the Finnish and international first-year students to collaborate with each other? In order to achieve a profound understanding and expertise in the research problem, a questionnaire and two interviews were conducted to figure out the current situation and the needs of the students. As an outcome of this research, some suggestions were summarized and will be provided for the commissioning party.

2 FINNISH UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES

The Finnish higher education system consists of two parallel sectors: universities and polytechnics (AMK institutions, *ammattikorkeakoulut* in Finnish). Universities and polytechnics are complementary in their respective areas of strength, and both sectors have their own profiles. While universities emphasise scientific research and instruction based thereon, polytechnics are high-quality experts in working life and its development (Ministry of Education 2000, 3).

2.1 Background for the polytechnic system

Polytechnics have established a new sector in the Finnish education system, alongside with universities. It was regarded as desirable to direct the increase in higher education to the new polytechnics instead of traditional universities, and at the same time diversify higher education. The polytechnics were established during the reform process of the 1990s. They were formed on the basis of the institutions that had formerly provided post-secondary vocational education by raising their standards and by amalgamating several institutions to create multi-field polytechnics (Ministry of Education 2000, 6).

The reform was launched at the beginning of the 1990s with an experimental and developmental phase. The conditions for the reform were good since post-secondary vocational education had been systematically developed in all fields during the 1970s and 1980s. The aim of the reform was to raise the level and the quality of education and thus include it into the higher education system. The reform was initiated with a view of improving the international cooperation. The purpose was to provide young people with another high-level alternative by creating a more practically and professionally oriented higher education degree system to exist side by side with the traditional university degrees. The aim was to strengthen the regional development and the cooperation of polytechnics with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and providers of the welfare services. Moreover, the purpose of establishing strong, multi-field units was to create new degree programmes to serve the needs of the changing working life (Ministry of Education 2000, 6).

The polytechnic reform was implemented in a process-like manner. During the experimental phase, polytechnics were given a chance to improve their operations. In the latter part of the 1990s, the Government has yearly granted permanent operating licenses to polytechnics. The licenses were granted on the basis of their quality and

performance demonstrated in experimental and developmental activities. The Higher Education Evaluation Council has evaluated the applications and submitted its opinion on them to the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education 2000, 6-7).

2.2 Polytechnic system

In 1995, the Finnish Parliament adopted a permanent legislation governing the polytechnic system. Based on this legislation, the Government granted operating licenses to polytechnics. The license includes provision on the educational duties of the polytechnic concerned, i.e. its field of study, student quantity, language of instruction and location. The new network of 24 polytechnics covers the entire country. Polytechnics are mainly regional and multidisciplinary institutions of higher education. Because of their regional nature, polytechnics are mostly maintained by municipalities or federations of municipalities. In some cases, local authorities have established limited companies to maintain a polytechnic. All the universities are owned by the government, whereas all the polytechnics are either municipal or private (Ministry of Education 2000, 7).

The general administration of polytechnics is managed by a board and a rector and, where necessary, a delegation. The organization of a polytechnic's administration is primarily decided by its maintaining body. The board and any other collective administrative body of a municipal or private polytechnic may include representatives of its teachers, other staff, students, as well as those of trade and industry, and other sectors of working life (Ministry of Education 2000, 7-8).

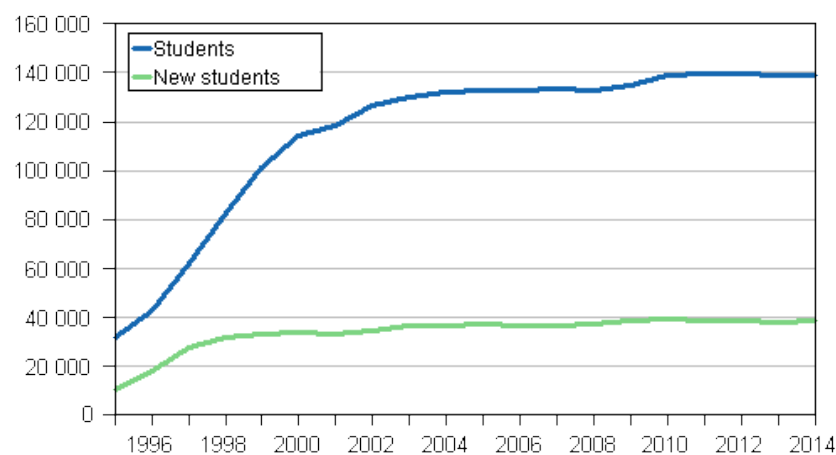


FIGURE 1. New students and total number of students in polytechnics from 1995 to 2014. Source: Statistics Finland

According to Statistics Finland, polytechnics had 138,700 students in 2014. New students numbered 38,600, which is over 1,000 more than in the year before. The number of students attending education leading to a polytechnic degree was 129,500, which was over 800 students fewer than in the previous year. The number of the students attending education leading to a higher polytechnic degree was 9,200, over 600 students more than in the previous year. Figure 1 presents the number of new students and the total number of the students in polytechnics from 1995 to 2014.

2.3 Polytechnic degree

Polytechnic degrees are higher education (Bachelor's) degrees with a professional emphasis. The starting points for the development of the degree programmes come from the requirements and development needs set by working life. The degrees create capabilities for various professional expert positions in working life. Polytechnic degree programmes are either 3.5-year or 4-year degree programmes of higher education (Ministry of Education 2000). Certain programmes are more extensive. The scope of the degree programmes has been determined in terms of credits, usually consisting of 210 or 240 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits. A credit means a student's estimated average study effort of 27 hours; the studies of one academic year amount to about 60 credits. Students have the right to exceed the standard duration set for the completion of a degree by one year (Ministry of Education 2000, 8-9).

The studies leading to a polytechnic degree comprise:

- Basic and professional studies
- Optional studies
- Practical training
- A diploma project (thesis)

The thesis completed as a part of the degree programme is usually written on a topic related to the development of working life. The studies leading to a polytechnic degree are organised in the form of degree programmes. The Ministry of Education and Culture confirms the degree programmes of the polytechnics. The polytechnics decide on the

contents of their curricula independently. Several polytechnics also provide foreign-language degree programmes, mainly in English (Ministry of Education 2000, 9).

2.4 Students

Students may apply to polytechnics after completing general or vocational upper secondary education or an equivalent foreign qualification. Polytechnics decide on the criteria for student selection independently, usually taking account of earlier success in studies, working experience, level of interest, and entrance examination in some sectors. Qualifications required for adult studies at a polytechnic may vary more including, for example, vocational training in a given sector (Ministry of Education 2002, 71)

Since the polytechnic system was established, its student figures have risen. In 2014, the most popular sectors of education were social services, health and sports; technology, communications and transport; and social sciences, business and administration, which also offered most places. The details are shown in the figure 2. There are two application periods in a year. Far more degree programmes start in autumn than in January, so the number of applications received differ greatly (Ministry of Education 2002, 72). Study places for young are sought through a joint application procedure which allows applicants to apply with one application up to 6 study programmes (Studyinfo).

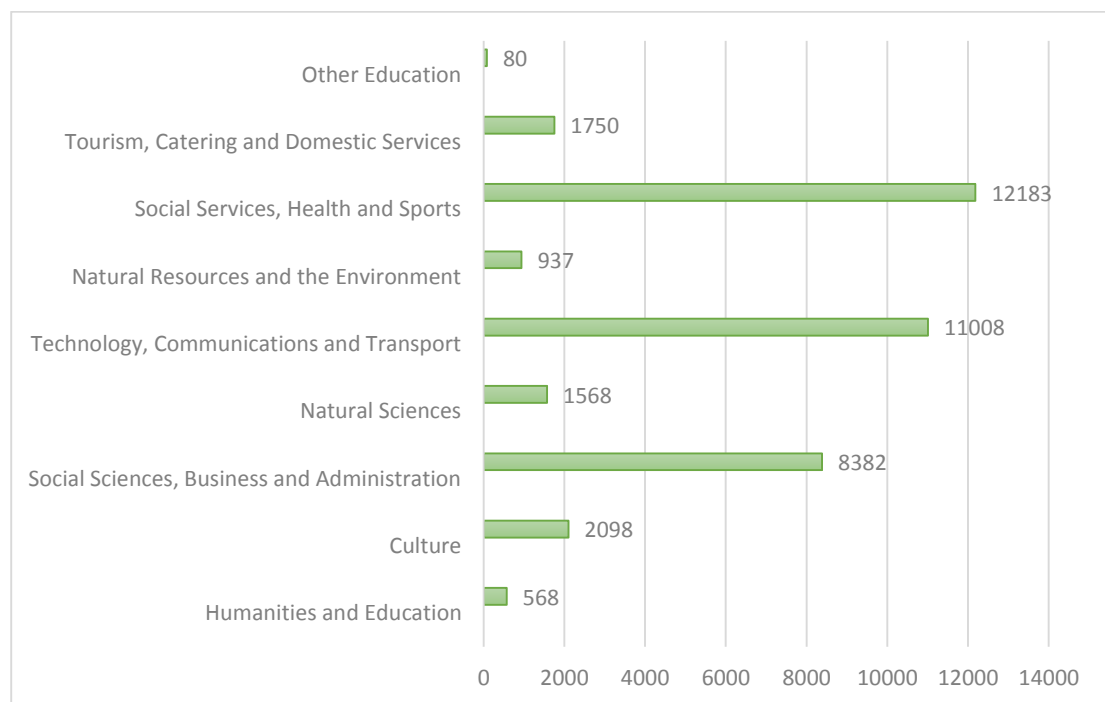


FIGURE 2. Polytechnic intake by sector in 2014. Source: Statistics Finland

Finnish students receive financial aid from the Finnish government, including a student grant, a housing supplement and a government guaranteed study loan. The period for which it is paid depends on the extent of the degree concerned. At universities of applied sciences, financial aid is available for 45 to 55 months. During that time, the students must make adequate progress in their studies. Foreign students may qualify for the financial aid if they have inhabited in Finland for a minimum of two years for purposes other than study, or if they have a permanent residence permit in Finland (Ministry of Education 2002, 75-76).

Students can apply to study abroad through their own polytechnic's exchange programmes, or apply for a foreign institution independently. Finnish students get financial aid from the government to study abroad. Various exchange programmes also provide small grants for students going abroad on student or trainee exchanges (Ministry of Education 2002, 80).

2.5 Teachers and other staff members

According to the Polytechnic Act, there are two categories of teachers in polytechnics: senior lecturers and lecturers. The number of senior lecturers will gradually increase to about 30% of the entire body of teachers. The formal qualifications required from teachers are stipulated in legislation. Senior lecturers must primarily have a postgraduate degree, either a doctorate or a licentiate, and lecturers are required to have a Master's degree. Both groups of teachers are required to have three years of work experience. All teachers have to complete pedagogical studies (Ministry of Education 2000, 11). Rectors are required to have a Licentiate or Doctorate, to be familiar with polytechnics and to have previous administrative experience, and also to have proficiency in the language(s) of instruction at the polytechnic concerned (Ministry of Education 2002, 99).

The internationalization of universities of applied sciences has diversified their teaching approaches and improved the pedagogical skills of teachers. The long-term objective of the internationalization is that every year one fifth of the polytechnic teachers should spend at least one month abroad. The volume of foreign teacher exchanges to Finland is expected to be the same (Ministry of Education 2002, 101).

Other staff members of universities of applied sciences are employed in a wide range of categories, including administration, library and information services, teaching support, teaching administration, and financial and general management. The number of non-teaching staff has risen sharply along with the polytechnic reform. Various kinds of planning and development work call for additional resources. The educational level of non-teaching staff has also risen to meet the complexity of the work (Ministry of Education 2002, 102).

2.6 Steering and funding of polytechnics

The provision governing universities of applied sciences can mostly be found in the Polytechnics Act and Decree. The legislation deals with issues as the status of polytechnics in the higher education system, studies and degrees, administrative principles, eligibility for studies, free-of-charge instruction, and teachers. Moreover, the criteria according to which the Government decides on granting the operating licence to a polytechnic are also prescribed by law (Ministry of Education 2002, 58). On 22 October 2015, an official press release of Ministry of Education and Culture stated that “Institutes of higher education may charge tuition fees from students coming from outside the European Union and the European Economic Area. The size of the fee charged would have to be at least 1,500 euros per year.” The fees would be collected from non-EU/EEA students admitted to Bachelor’s or Master’s level degree courses offered in some other language than Finnish or Swedish (Ministry of Education and Culture 2015). Besides that, from the autumn 2016, applicants to Finnish universities of applied sciences and universities who are applying based on a qualification completed outside the EU/EEA -area will be required to pay an application fee of 100 euros (Studyinfo.fi). This is the result of changes in the Universities Act and the Polytechnics Act.

Every six years a Government Development Plan for Education and University Research is adopted to determine the development targets for universities of applied sciences at a general level. The Ministry of Education and Culture and each polytechnic conduct target and performance negotiations, on the basis of which they sign agreements determining the polytechnic’s general objectives, educational provision, development targets, and funding.

The operations of the polytechnics are primarily financed from public funds. The costs are shared by both the government and local authorities. Under legislation, the government's contribution accounts for 57% and that of local authorities for 43 %. The 43% share of each local authority depends only on the basis of its population. The funding is based on degree-specific unit prices determined per student. A calculatory unit price is determined for each polytechnic, depending on the fields in which the polytechnic provides education (Ministry of Education 2002, 58). Figure 3 below shows the average expenses on education and culture in Finland in 2012.

Average expenses of selected public services in 2012		
EDUCATION AND CULTURE	EUR	
basic education	8 404	/pupil
upper secondary education	7 392	/student
vocational upper secondary education and training	11 663	/student
polytechnic education	8 132	/student
budget funding for university education	9 577	/student
public libraries	3.29	/loan

FIGURE 3. Average expenses of selected public services in 2012. Source: Budget Review 2015

The polytechnics receive three kinds of government funding: core funding, project funding and performance-based funding. *Core funding* is calculated on the basis of unit prices which are determined in advance for the next year and not influenced by decisions concerning educational arrangements and financing made by a municipality or other owner of an institution. The recipient can decide how to allocate its resources within its educational system. The polytechnics also receive additional *project funding*. Most of this funding has been used to support the polytechnic reform. However, the purpose is to shift the priority of the polytechnics gradually to financing Research & Development, new development and individual projects. The performance of each polytechnic in general criteria such as efficiency and cost-effectiveness, international activities, equal

opportunity, and capacity for future functioning and renewal would affect their *performance-based funding*. The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council evaluations can also decide some performance-based funding (Ministry of Education 2002, 61-63).

2.7 Developmental trends and internationalization in polytechnics

Polytechnics are being developed as a part of the international academic community, emphasising their position as high-level experts in the working life and its development. Universities of applied sciences are consolidating their working life contacts and actively developing their roles as the catalysts of regional development. Polytechnics take active part in international cooperation, such as student and teacher exchanges, joint projects and other forms of international cooperation. One of the objectives in the internationalization is that a third of universities of applied sciences graduates will have spent at least a three-month period of study or practical training abroad (Ministry of Education 2000, 12).

Aim		2015		2007	
The number of non-Finnish degree students in higher education institutions		20,000	7 %	11,303	3,7 %
The share of non-Finnish students in graduate schools			20 %		15,8 %
Teacher and expert mobility in polytechnics		3,000	47 %	1,689	26,2 %
(long and short term)	outgoing	4,000	62 %	3,252	50,4 %
Teacher and researcher mobility in universities		4,000	29 %	1,733	12,7 %
(long and short term)	outgoing	4,000	29 %	1,223	9 %
Student and trainee mobility in polytechnics		8,000	8 %	4,418	3,7 %
(long and short term)	outgoing	8,000	8 %	7,178	6,1 %
Student and trainee mobility in universities		8,000	6 %	5,214	3,8 %
(long and short term)	outgoing	8,000	6 %	5,275	3,8 %

FIGURE 4. Mobility goals for 2015. Source: Ministry of Education 2009, 30.

Internationalisation has long been among the key aims of the Finnish science and higher education policy as well as at the core of higher education institutions' own strategies. Though the internationalization of the Finnish higher education institutions and science has progressed well since the 1990s, the low level of internationalism is still one of the key weaknesses of the Finnish higher education and research system ((Ministry of Education 2009, 14). The demand for internationalism has increased in all the activities of higher education institutions. International cooperation and mobility would make business life in Finland more diversified and varied. As a small nation, Finnish mental and financial resources are limited. Internationalism would help Finland attract more highly educated labour force and foreign investments; provide opportunities to work with top experts in the field, and to become acquainted with the most recent technology. For individuals, the internationalisation promotes the mental growth and understanding of global responsibility and improves their language skills. These are the reasons why the internationalisation of the higher education is particularly important (Ministry of Education 2009, 15-17). Figure 4 above shows the mobility goals for 2015 based on statistics in 2007.

3 INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN MIKKELI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Internationalisation will be increasingly present in the day to day life of Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences. The objective of MAMK's international activities is to promote the multicultural competence of the members of the University community. The opportunity for the competence development in an international learning environment also increases MAMK's appeal (The strategy of Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences: MAMK 2017). This chapter describes the development of the internationality in MAMK and its features as well.

3.1 The Development of International Activities in Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences

In the early 1990s, MAMK was among the first universities of applied sciences in Finland to plan and develop partnerships with European higher education institutes. The International Centre established in 1993 was responsible for planning and organizing

international activities. It has conducted International Summer Term since 1993, supported MAMK to develop English-teaching degree programmes, and organise student and staff exchange, participated in international projects, and developed cooperation with foreign universities (Puttonen 2007, 8).

International cooperation is conducted based on bilateral and multilateral agreements. Most of these agreements have been implemented in international programmes and networks. Among the European Union programmes MAMK has participated in, the most notable are Socrates/Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Tempus, Interreg and Alfa. The Nordplus programme has been the main instrument for the cooperation in the Baltic and Nordic regions, and Finnish-Russian Student Exchange programme (FIRST) has been the programme for cooperation in Russia (Puttonen 2007, 8)

3.2 The features of International Activities in Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences

The regular student and teacher mobility supported by the EU programmes has been the main activity, but some special arrangements can be found. There are diverse strategies for activities organised in the fields of study. Some of the best practices in the international cooperation can be found among these activities.

3.2.1 Student Mobility and English-teaching programmes

MAMK staff members have been promoting *student mobility* since the beginning. Outgoing exchange students have chances to receive international experience and improve individual skills during the exchange period. In most fields of study, the third year is the most typical time for an exchange period. The most popular destinations are European countries, partly due to low travelling costs and the similarities in culture and education systems. However, there are students who seek for exotic experiences with completely different cultures and languages. The incoming exchange students coming to MAMK study mostly for three months or more. Majority of them attend courses provided in English-teaching degree programmes. Foreign students coming for the International Summer Term are also an important part of incoming exchange students (Puttonen 2007, 18-23).

In Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences there are three *degree programmes organised totally in English*: Business Management, Information Technology and Environmental Engineering. The international aspect of the studies is strengthened also by visiting lecturers. Students can also apply for double degree programmes in business management (BBA), building services engineering (BEng.), environmental engineering, information technology (BEng.), hospitality management and tourism, which offer studies in English for a full academic year (Mikkelin ammattikorkeakoulu).

In addition to the degree programmes, teaching in English has been conducted in the annual International Summer term since 1993. Summer term starts at the beginning of May and lasts until the beginning of September. It consists of intensive courses of 2-3 weeks (3-5 ECTS) and professors from partner universities are invited to lecture the courses. The programme has varied slightly each year, but there have always been two parallel modules, one from the Department of Business management and the other from the Department of Environmental Engineering. Some modules from culture and health care have been added to the schedule during the last couple of years. During the summer 2005 there was a joint effort of four polytechnics from Eastern Finland to create a common summer term. The polytechnics in the network were Kymenlaakso Polytechnic, South Carelia Polytechnic, Savonia Polytechnic and Mikkeli Polytechnic. One of the aim was to try new methods of teaching among the network members ((Lappalainen 2005, 6-7).

In the curriculum of every degree programme in Finnish, there is at least one course offered in English. In case of foreign students attending, the language of a course can be changed into English. Some degree programmes have organised larger modules in English (Puttonen 2007, 14).

3.2.2 Intensive Programmes and other activities

Intensive programmes have been conducted in many ways in MAMK. The term intensive programme refers to courses, projects or workshops lasting one to two weeks. Most of the programmes presented here have been organised annually for several years. Intensive programmes attract the students, since they give a possibility of international experience for students who are not able to go abroad to study or would not go abroad alone. Students attending the programme get credits for their work during the

programme. The intensive programme may initiate a longer exchange period of a student (Puttonen 2007, 15)

Euroweek is a project-based-learning intensive programme organised annually by the Prime Network and available for students from all fields of study in MAMK. Euroweek is a large-scale academic conference which creates a chance for students to compete with their projects and presentations in teams. International and interdisciplinary teams are formed months before the conference to develop research projects within an overall theme. The projects are finalised, presented and evaluated during the conference (Puttonen 2007, 15).

Neptune rings coordinated by Neptune Association have organised intensive programmes annually. MAMK is a member of two Neptune rings with the main themes “Environmental Management” and “Water Management in Urban Surroundings”. Each Neptune ring which is interdisciplinary and international includes institutions from five to six countries. The partner institutions have a chance to participate in project-based-learning intensive programmes and real local projects. After receiving the main theme of the project, the participants study and prepare a presentation on it from their point of view. At the beginning of the course, the students work intensively on more detailed topics of the project in groups. At the end of the course, the project results are presented, evaluated and awarded (Puttonen 2007, 15-16).

Students have a chance to do their *practical training* abroad. For Finnish students, work placements abroad are a rare exception in the fields of health care and social work. Most of incoming and outgoing exchange students in nursing do practical training organised and supervised by receiving partner institution. The practical training abroad is more common among international students since they have opportunities in English-speaking environment (Puttonen 2007, 17).

Double degrees have been conducted for foreign diploma students in some degree programmes. The main purpose of the double degree programmes is to offer the degree of MAMK to suitably qualified students of a partner institution. To be awarded the degree of MAMK, students need to complete one academic or calendar year including professional studies, bachelor’s thesis, and practical training (Mikkelin ammattikorkeakoulu).

4 COMMISSIONING PARTY

The commissioning party of the thesis is the Business Management Programme of Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences, later MAMK. Being located in the centre of the South-Savo region, Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences has two campuses in Eastern Finland, the Main Campus in Mikkeli, and the Savonniemi Campus in Savonlinna. Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences is an amalgamation of several institutions of higher education and it was granted a permanent status in 1997 after five-year operation period under temporary accreditation. Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences covers seven fields of study: humanities and education; natural sciences; natural resources and the environment; tourism, catering and domestic services; social services, health and sports; technology, communication and transport; social sciences, business and administration. In 2015, Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences offers 18 degree programmes, of which three are delivered in English. (Mikkelin ammattikorkeakoulu).

The total amount of students is about 4500, and the annual intake is over 720 for the undergraduate programmes. Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences currently hosts over 300 international students from more than 30 countries. In addition, there are several international lecturers and experts from partner institutions visiting MAMK every year. The university has been rewarded five times for its international activities by the Finnish Ministry of Education. (Mikkelin ammattikorkeakoulu).

The mission of the Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences is to promote the development of the expertise, vitality and wellbeing of its region. The MAMK vision states that it will be a recognised promoter of international activities in the region. In September 2013, the university was ranked as the best university of applied sciences in Finland according to the comparison made by Finnish journal Talouselämä. (Mikkelin ammattikorkeakoulu).

In 2011, Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences and Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences constituted a united network of universities, which is profitable, of good quality, close to working life, and international. In 2012, the original shareholders of these universities established a new company, South-Eastern Finland University of

Applied Sciences Ltd. (Xamk), which now owns both Kyamk and Mamk. The universities will merge at the beginning of 2017 (Kyamk ja Mamk).

The teaching and studying in MAMK, as well as the degree regulations are based on laws governing universities of applied sciences (932/2014) and government decrees on universities of applied sciences (1129/2014) with the relevant amendments (Student Handbook, 24). MAMK provides an innovative and conducive environment to studying to promote smooth progress of studies and students' motivation. There are many activities and study methods for both native and foreign students. Entrepreneurship studies provide entrepreneur-oriented students with a wide range of relevant and practical skills while innovation studies focus on the development of innovations and innovation management. MAMK's language teaching provides the language, communication and interaction skills necessary for working life. The practical training period for degree students aims to enable students to familiarise themselves with the work related to their fields of study and gain real-life experience. MAMK's degree students have a chance to study abroad during exchange period which can last one or two semesters (from three to 11 months). Students also have key role in improving MAMK's quality by giving feedback for course development (Student Handbook, 24-33).



FIGURE 5. The MAMK logo

As one of three English-teaching programmes, Business Management provides a modern environment for students to develop a wide range of skills and knowledge relevant to international business. The degree focuses on entrepreneurship, management and leadership work-related skills in an international business environment. Students are able to get acquainted with international assignments, entrepreneurship, and skills to act in the changing digital economy (MAMK).

One of the competitive advantages of the programme is intensive weeks with foreign visiting lecturers. With these intensive weeks, business students have a chance to work with different people from different cultures to enrich their knowledge and to broaden

their networks. Visiting lecturers also create a multicultural environment in the Business Department which can help the students in their future working life.

Since over 80% of the students in the programme are international, the collaboration between Finnish and international students always attracts attention from the management of the Business Department. Not only in the English-teaching programme, should the internationalisation also take place in the Finnish programme where the Finnish students are willing to participate with foreign fellows. The collection of expectations and willingness of first year students in both groups is the first step to improve the collaboration between the students in the department.

5 RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

Research is a process of searching for facts – explanations and investigation in order to answers to specific questions. This investigation needs to be done in a systematic, logical, critical and empirical manner, so that it is easier for people to understand the logic of and believe in the report. It begins with detecting and addressing the research problem, followed by developing research design – a plan for relating the research question to empirical research. The underlying research design greatly influences the type and quality of empirical research (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 56).

Based on the problem structure, three main classes of research design can occur: exploratory, descriptive and causal. When the research problem is badly understood, an exploratory research is adequate. Key skill requirements in an exploratory research are often the ability to observe, get information, and construct explanation. In a descriptive research, the problem is structured and well-understood. Key characteristics of a descriptive research are structure, precise rules and procedures. In contrast to descriptive research, in a causal research the researcher is confronted with ‘cause and-effect’ problems. The main tasks in this kind of research are to recognise the cause and to what extent it results in certain effects (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 58-59). Since the research question is relatively new in Business Department, a flexible and exploratory research is the best way to study the problem.

5.1 Research Methods

Research methods refer to a systematic, focused and orderly collection of data to obtain information, to solve or answer a particular research problem or question. There are two major research methods – quantitative and qualitative. The outcome of a quantitative research is presented in numerical or monetary terms, and in most of the cases is to test or verify an existing theory. A qualitative research is closely related to subjective ‘insider view’ and closeness to data, and it is primarily used to generate a theory instead of testing it (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 109-110).

It is generally accepted that, for an inductive and exploratory research, qualitative methods are the most effective, as they can lead researchers to hypothesis building and explanations. Depending on different stages or levels of research, either qualitative or quantitative methods or both are suitable. At first level, qualitative methods are appropriate for unstructured problem. At the second level, when researchers want to test hypotheses that were found at the first level, quantitative methods are most effective. At the third level, both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 111).

Qualitative methods provide better understanding of issues that have remained unclear in quantitative methods, and enable the researcher to examine the issue in depth with a wealth of detailed data. They seek for open-ended responses with more variable content. However, quantitative research can provide a general overview and grounded information on the relationship between various issues that a researcher can then explore for more detail with qualitative research. For that reason, combining qualitative and quantitative research can produce good-quality research, though it can be far more challenging than performing either one of them separately (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 300-301).

For the purpose of this research, both methods were used by the researcher. The main objective of the research was to discover and analyse the attitudes of the business students towards each other and then to suggest practical solutions for this problem. Because of an unstructured problem, a qualitative research should be conducted to explore and probe deeply into the attitudes of the participants. The flexibility of qualitative research also provide more in-depth insight into this phenomenon. However, qualitative research can only reflect ideas from a small minority of the business

students. This thesis needs a more comprehensive result for a better conclusion which a quantitative research can provide.

5.2 Data collection

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008,7) stated that there are nine different qualitative research approaches:

- Ethnographic research
- Case study research
- Focus group research
- Grounded theory research
- Action research
- Narrative research
- Discursive research
- Critical research
- Feminist research

They suggested that focus groups (group interview) work well for issues related to attitudes, needs, perceptions and preferences (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008, 177). In an exploratory study, in-depth interviews can be very useful to discover what is happening and to find new insights. An exploratory study is likely to include interviews for the researcher to infer relationships between variables (Saunders et al. 2009, 324). In this research, since the researcher needs to understand the reasons for participants' attitudes and opinions (expectations and willingness to collaborate), it is necessary to conduct a qualitative (non-standardised) interview. Though questionnaires are usually not particularly good for an exploratory research, they can be complemented by in-depth interview to explore and understand some sorts of attitudes (Saunders et al. 2009, 362). Questionnaires or surveys are also very useful to find out opinions or ideas from large numbers of participants. If only interviews were conducted, the results would not be comprehensive, while a questionnaire itself cannot provide in-depth understanding.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 77-78) divide data into two major types: primary and secondary. Primary data is empirical data collected by the researcher him/herself by conducting observations, experiments, questionnaires and interviews. Secondary data is information that already exists, including both textual data and visual materials.

Secondary data often supports theories acquired through primary data collection methods. For the purpose of this research, only primary data will be gathered through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews because of the specific objective and small scale of population.

Questionnaire design and questions

Questionnaire is a general term to include all techniques of data collection in which each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order. There are two main types of questionnaires which differ according to the process of their implementation: self-administered and interviewer-administered. The first one is usually completed by respondents, while the other happens when interviewers physically meet respondents and ask the questions face-to-face ((Saunders et al. 2009, 360-363). The interviewer should not diverge from a defined schedule of questions, which is the difference from interviews.

In this research, the primary aim of the questionnaire was to gather essential information and create a possible picture of the current situation, as well as to gather as many possible ideas to improve the collaboration as possible. The researcher, with help from a supervisor, contacted a Finnish-teaching and an English-teaching teacher to ask for his presence in their classes. The researcher briefly introduced the objective of the questionnaire before giving the students at both groups the link to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of list questions, category questions, ranking questions and open question in order to receive as comprehensive responses as possible. The full set of questions can be found in the Appendix 2. The same questionnaire was given to both groups to compare the responses. All responses were kept confidential and anonymous. It took the students 5-10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Semi-structured interviews

According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 8), there are three types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and informal. Guided semi-unstructured interview was chosen since it provides flexibility and leaves room for open discussion, unlike a structured interview. On the other hand, it requires less interpersonal skills and time for

analysis than informal ones. It was also expected to encourage the interviewees to express their ideas comfortably, which might not happen in one-on-one interview.

There were two group interviews, one for the Finnish-teaching programme and one for the English-teaching programme. All the interviewees were voluntary to participate. The Finnish-speaking students were asked directly by the interviewer after completing the questionnaire, while the English-speaking students were contacted by means of email correspondence, providing a short explanation about the thesis theme and objectives, and an inquiry for an interview via email with a help from Student Counsellor. Six students in the English-speaking group are from five different countries (Russia, Norway, Estonia, Vietnam and Finland) to provide as comprehensive ideas as possible. The interviews lasted around 1 hour for the English-speaking group and around 25-minutes for the Finnish-speaking group, and were conducted face-to-face in quiet rooms to avoid any likelihood of interruption or being overheard. All of them were recorded with the permission of the interviewees.

At the beginning of both interviews the participants were introduced to main objectives of the research and the future use of the information provided during the interviews. During the interviews process, the researcher applied a variety of questions, sometimes adjusting the originally presented in the list. The participants would answer the questions one by one or discuss it together. When needed, clarifications and follow-up questions were asked to receive as much precise information as possible.

Interview questions

The same set of questions were applied for both group interviews with slight differences. 16 questions can be divided into three categories: background information, expectations about the studies (before and after coming to MAMK), and willingness to collaborate with the students in the other group. The full set of questions can be found in Appendix 1.

The first part of the interview questions aimed to gain some background information about the participants. In the English-speaking group, it was vital to receive the essential data about the participants' background because different cultures could lead core beliefs to different paths, therefore to different ways of communication (Lewis 2010,

19). This part is also used for making a friendly and relaxing atmosphere and for the researcher to get to know the participants. All the information in this part was confidential, except for their nationalities.

The second part of interview included the reason why they chose to study business in Mikkeli. It would affect their expectations about their studies and communication with their classmates. It is crucial to discuss the freshmen's assumptions and first impressions about Business Department and analyse their satisfaction, not just for this research but also for future researches or future development plan.

After being aware of the expectations of the first-year students, another important part of the research should be explored. The final part of the interview focused on the willingness of Finnish and international students to participate with each other. Some situational questions were asked to get an opinion about their attitudes towards each other and the reasons behind that.

5.3 Data analysis

If a research is conducted by mixed methods, a researcher needs to understand distinct differences between qualitative and quantitative data in order to analyse them meaningfully. Quantitative data is numerical and standardised data which is based on meanings collected from numbers while qualitative data is non-standardised data which is based on meanings expressed through words. The nature of these data has affected their analysis. Qualitative data analysis is often conducted by forming a concept while quantitative data analysis is conducted through the use of diagrams and statistics. According to Saunders et al. (2009, 489), there are two approaches to a qualitative analysis: deductive and inductive approach. In a deduction approach, the researcher uses a theoretical framework to organise and direct a data analysis. In contrast, an inductive approach starts by collecting data and then examining it to see which issues to follow up and concentrate on. This approach requires more time and resources than a deductive approach, and may not lead to success for an inexperienced researcher. This approach is adequate for exploratory researches which seek to generate a direction for further work (Saunders et al. 2009, 482-502).

In this research, because of small size of the two interviews, an inductive approach was conducted to maximise potential and practical outcomes. Since the data collected was audio-recordings, the researcher had to transcribe these data before analysing them. During this stage, the researcher was interested not only in the content of the interviews, but in the way the participants interacted with the questions and with each other as well. The data was transcribed one day after the interviews and saved in separate word-processed files. After transcribing the data, the researcher started to summarise and simplify the collected data. Then the condensed data was transformed into a matrix display which consists of defined columns and rows. This stage helped the researcher recognise the relationships and patterns in the data. From the logic deduced from this stage, the researcher could draw and verify conclusions.

Creswell (2002, 159-161) recommended presenting quantitative data as a series of steps. Firstly, a table should be presented to show the response rate of the questionnaire. Secondly, a method to determine a response bias should be discussed. A response bias is the tendency of a person to answer questionnaire questions misleadingly. This would have affected the quantitative results. Then the researcher should discuss a plan which indicates the means, standard deviations and ranges of scores for all independent and dependent variables. Finally the researcher identifies the statistics to draw a conclusion and associates the conclusion with the research question.

The questionnaire was introduced twice to the English-speaking group. The first one received only nine responses, which required the second one. Therefore it is difficult to measure the response rate of the questionnaire. It is also quite hard to examine the response bias since the answers for the questionnaire were collected in one day. The researcher could not see any changes in the responses, which could be a potential threat of the response bias. The questionnaire was made on Webropol platform, a solution for conducting surveys and gathering data. The website also provides report and summary services to help researchers analyse data more easily. Based on the results and statistics from Webropol, the researcher summarised and made diagrams and charts which was presented below to draw conclusions.

6 RESULTS

This chapter intends to provide an interpretation and analysis of the primary data collection methods. The analysis of the empirical findings is closely related to the theories introduced in the theoretical framework. The results of the quantitative method will be presented in figures and tables due to numerical characteristics, while qualitative results will be expressed in textual form.

6.1 Results based on the questionnaire

The questionnaire got 88 responses from both groups, of which 66 are from Finnish-speaking group and 22 are from English-speaking group. The first attempt to introduce the questionnaire to the English-speaking group produced only 9 responses which forced the researcher made another attempt one week later.

6.1.1 Findings from the Finnish-speaking group

The respondents were asked to provide their opinions about *difficulties of getting to know each other and getting involved in different groups*. The levels varied from 1 to 5 (1 = easy, 2 = somewhat easy, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat difficult, 5 = difficult). In the majority of the cases, the respondents felt it was quite easy to get acquainted to each other and be involved in new groups (mean = 2.05 and 2.20 respectively). The details are shown in Figure 7 below.

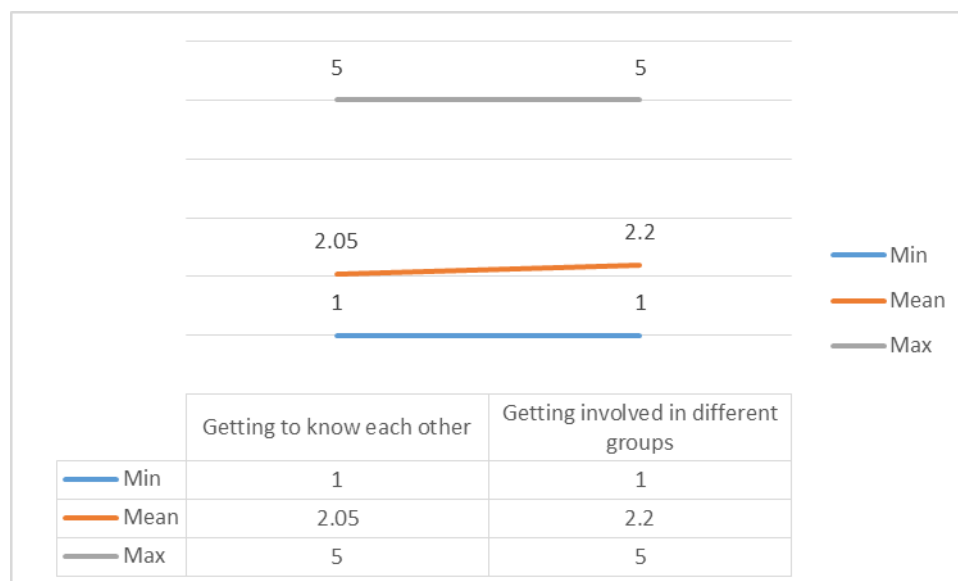


FIGURE 7. Difficulties of getting to know each other and getting involved in different groups

The answers of the respondents to *number of times they had worked with students of different nationalities before their current studies* are shown in Figure 8. Around 45% of the Finnish respondents had never worked with foreign students. The answers for the two other options were approximately balanced.

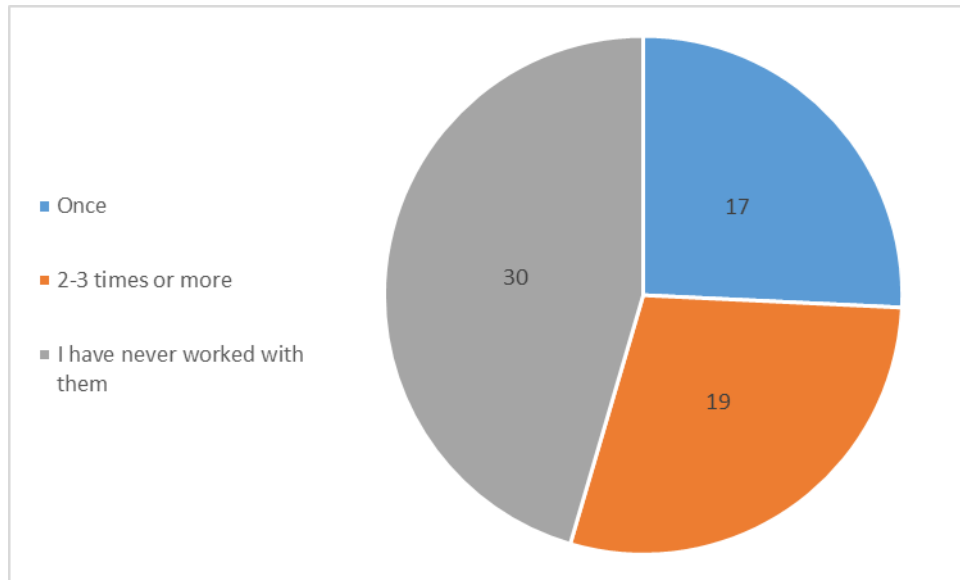


FIGURE 8. Number of times the respondents had worked with students of different nationalities before their current studies

During their current studies, most of the respondents (57.58%) had never participated with foreign students before their current studies, 37.88% of them had only once, and very few of them had twice or three times. Figure 9 presents the answers to *number of times respondents have participated with foreign students during their current studies*.

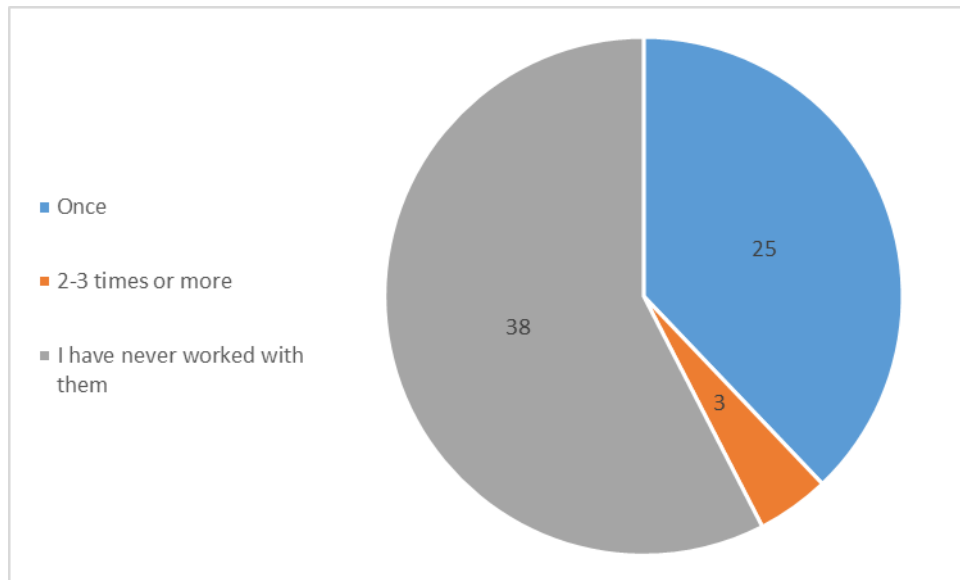


FIGURE 9. Number of times respondents have participated with foreign students during their current activities

The respondents were asked to provide their opinions about their *feelings and interaction during projects/events with foreign students* in case they had any. The levels differed from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all, 2 = a little bit, 3 = neutral, 4 = quite a lot, 5 = definitely). The details are shown in Figure 10 below.



FIGURE 10. Feelings and interaction when working with foreign students

In the Finnish group, 19 respondents had never worked with foreign students. Out of 18 respondents (one was missing), one respondent (5.56%) definitely wants to

participate with them in the future, 6 respondents(33.33%) do quite a lot, 6 respondents (33.33%) gave a neutral answer, and 5 respondents (27.78%) do a little bit. The answers to *willingness of respondents who have never worked with foreign students* are shown in Figure 11 below.

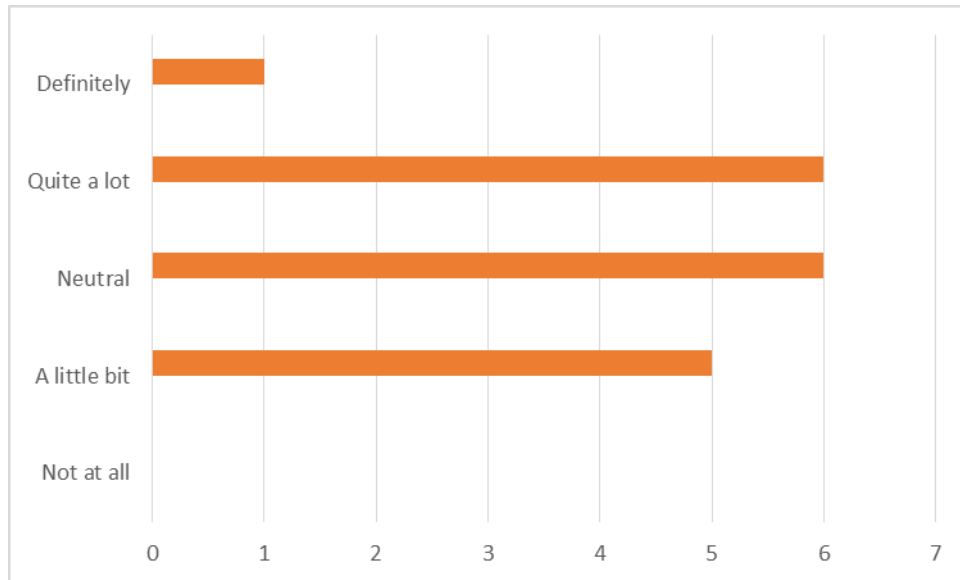


FIGURE 11. Willingness to participate with foreign students of respondents who have never worked with them

The respondents were asked to provide their *responses to different situations related to intercultural communication*. The levels varied from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all, 2 = a little bit, 3 = neutral, 4 = quite a lot, 5 = definitely). The details are shown in Figure 12 below.

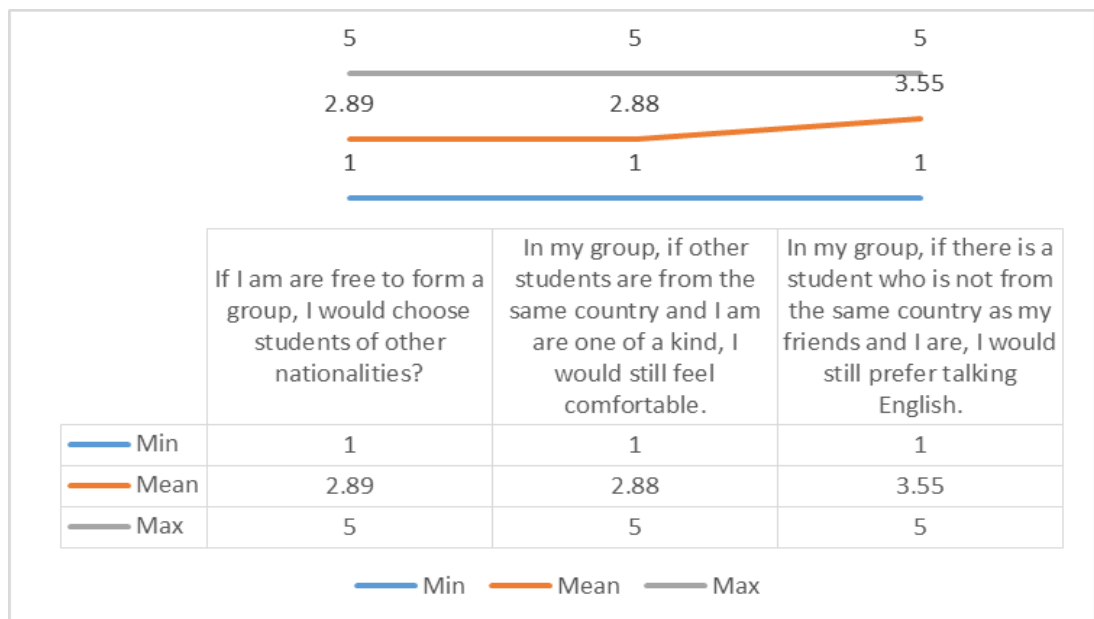


FIGURE 12. Situational responses

When being asked about *the best way to make friends*, 43 respondents thought about outside activities, while activities related to studies was the best for 21 respondents. There were two ‘others’ responses which were ‘parties and hobbies’ and ‘sport’. The details are shown in Figure 13.

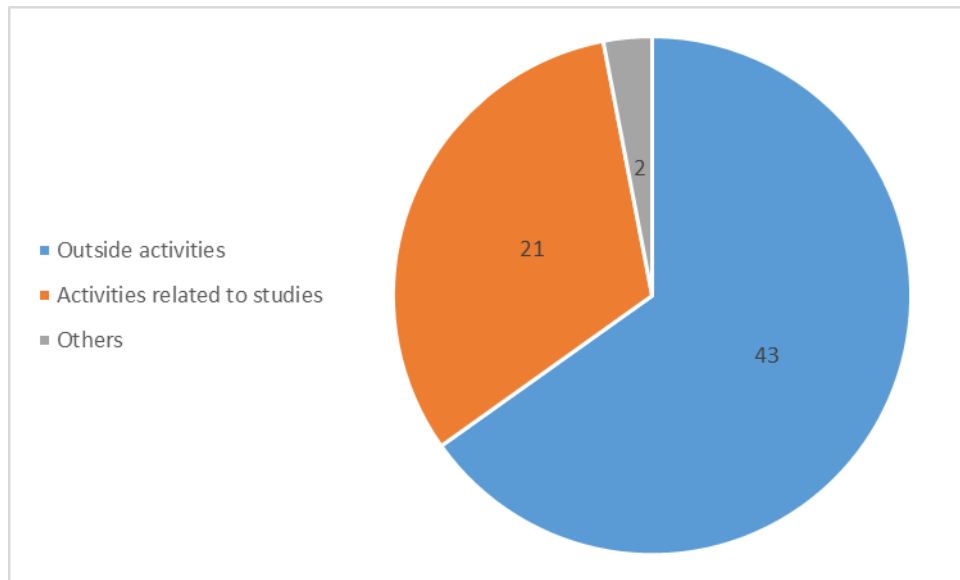


FIGURE 13. Best way to make friends

When being asked about some sorts of *outside activities they want to participate*, the majority of respondents thought about parties and sport activities. The details are shown in Figure 14 below.

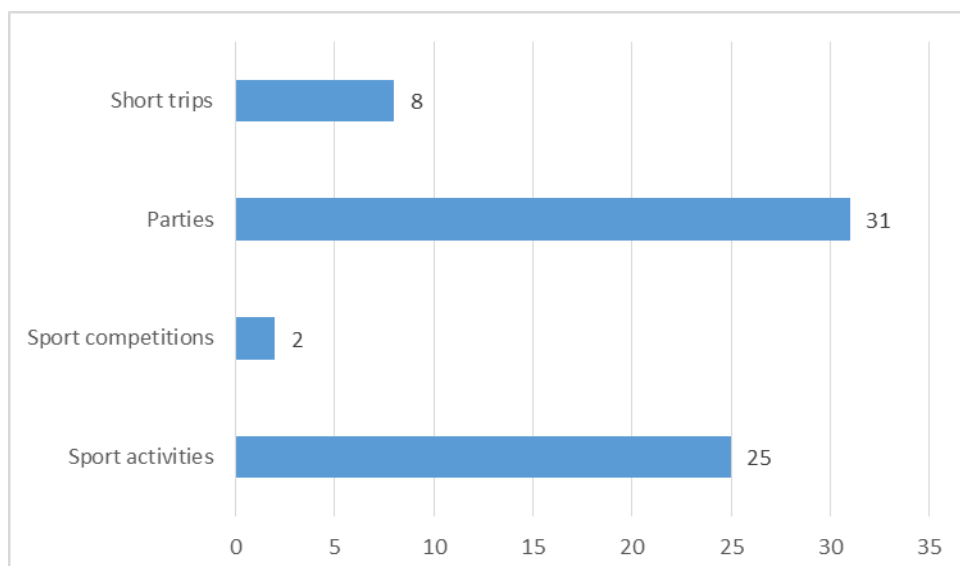


FIGURE 14. Kinds of outside activities respondents want to participate

Out of 65 respondents, most of the participants want to have some courses with international students and competitions related to studies when being asked about some *kinds of activities related to studies they want to participate*. The details are shown in Figure 15.

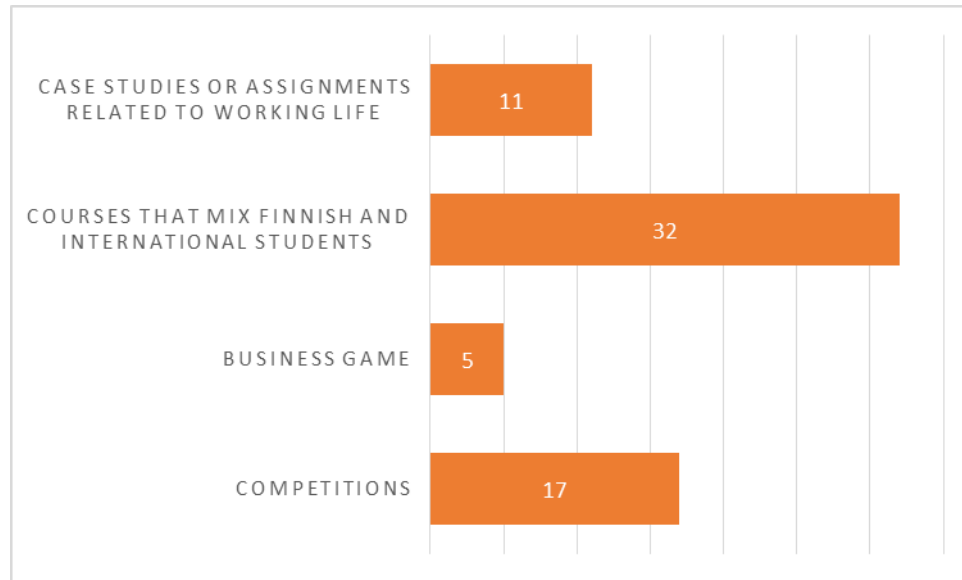


FIGURE 15. Kinds of activities related to studies respondents want to participate

For the open question at the end of the questionnaire, the Finnish students thought that “it would be nice to speak English more” and “it could be fun to study together, and get to know each other more”. The other comment was that “a lot of students will happily take international students into their groups.”

6.1.2 Findings from English-speaking group

The Students in English-speaking group come from five different countries. Figure 17 shows the distribution of *nationalities of respondents*. Around two thirds of the respondents come from Russia. The others are Finnish, Vietnamese, Norwegian and Canadian.

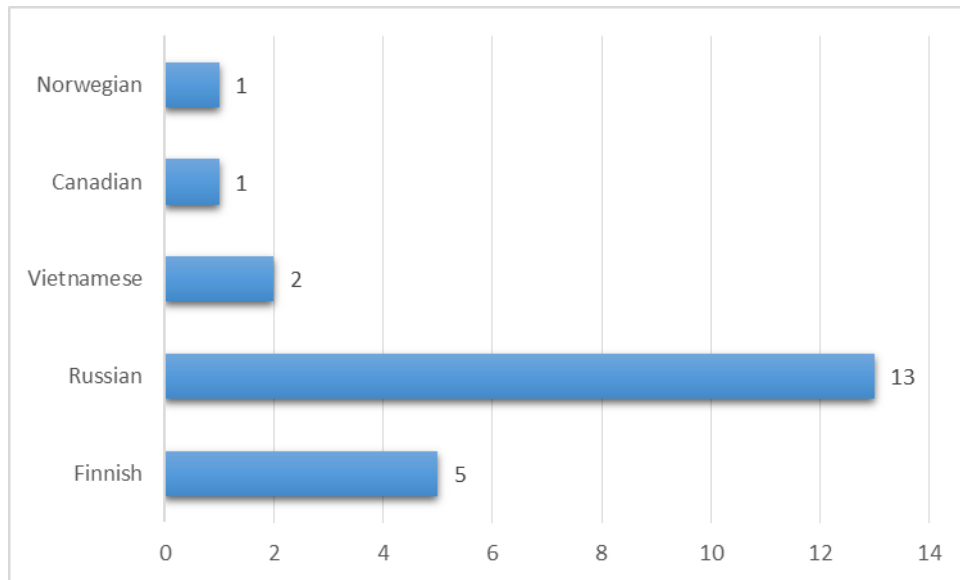


FIGURE 17. Nationalities of respondents

The respondents were asked to provide their opinions about the *difficulties of getting to know each other and getting involved in different groups*. The levels varied from 1 to 5 (1 = easy, 2 = somewhat easy, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat difficult, 5 = difficult). In the majority of the cases, the respondents feel it is easy to get acquainted to each other and be involved in new groups (mean = 1.77 and 2.00 respectively). The average results can be seen in Figure 18.



FIGURE 18. Difficulties of getting to know each other and getting involved in different groups

The answers of the respondents to *number of times they had worked with students of different nationalities before their current studies* is shown in Figure 19 below. Only 9% of the respondents had never worked with students of other nationalities. One had once and the rest had twice or three times.

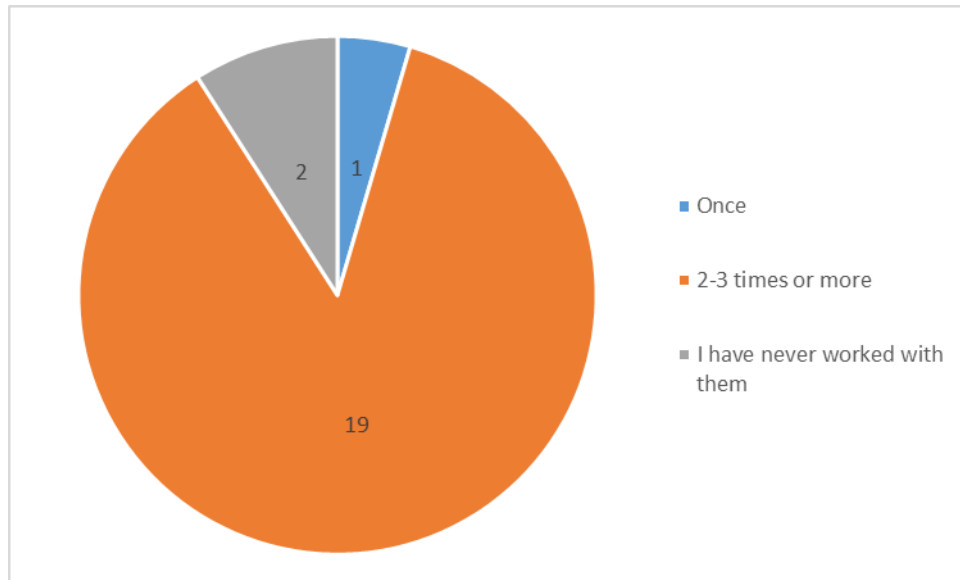


FIGURE 19. Number of times respondents had worked with students of different nationalities before their current studies

During their current studies, all the respondents had already participated with students of other nationalities. Figure 20 presents the answers to the *number of times the respondents have participated with students of other nationalities during their current activities*.

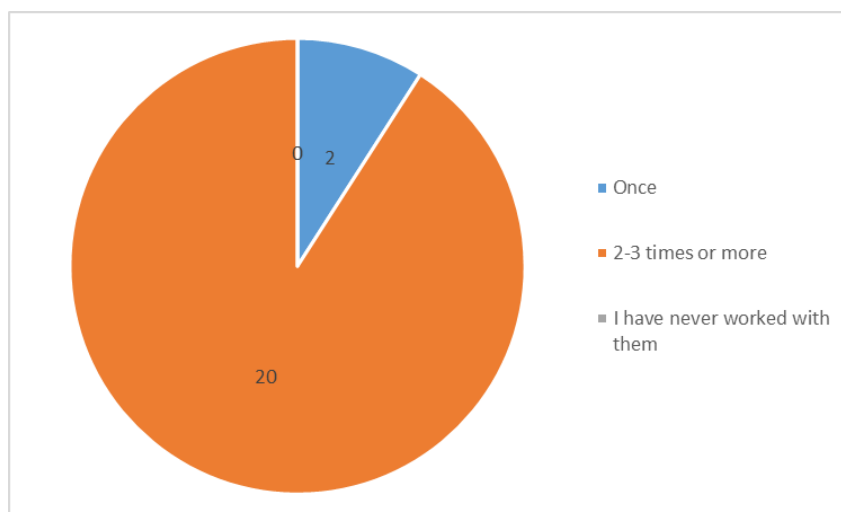


FIGURE 20. The number of times respondents have participated with students of other nationalities during their current activities

The respondents were asked to provide their opinions about their *feelings and interaction during projects/events with foreign students* in case they have any. The levels differ from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all, 2 = a little bit, 3 = neutral, 4 = quite a lot, 5 = definitely). Figure 21 presents positive answers of respondents.

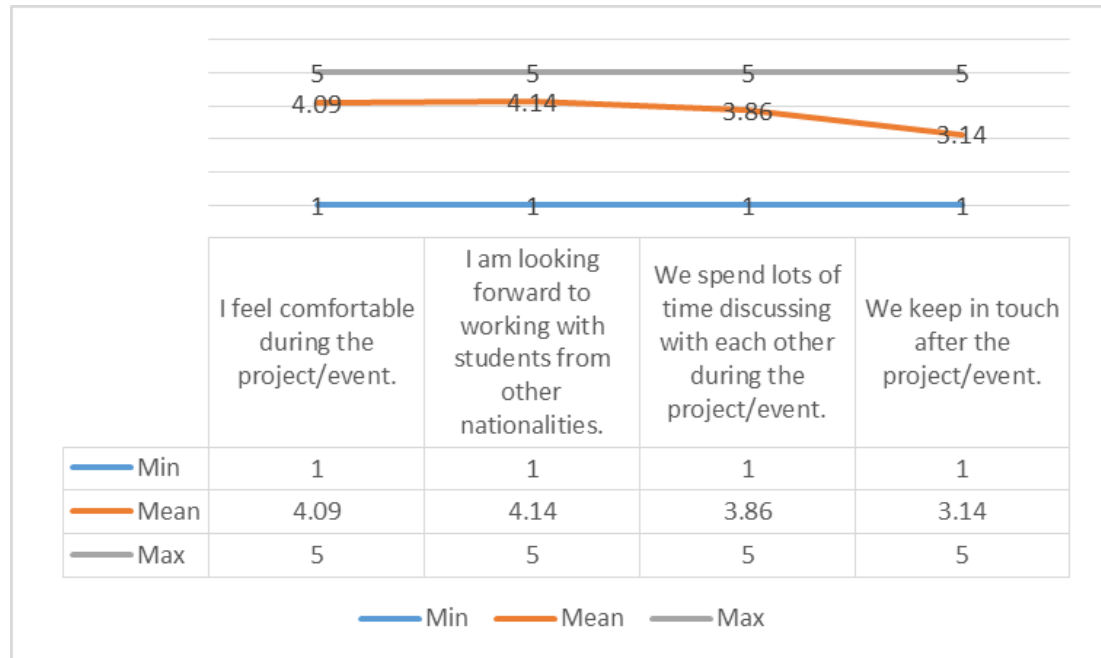


FIGURE 21. Feelings and interaction when working with students of other nationalities

The respondents were asked to provide their responses to *different situations related to intercultural communication*. The levels varied from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all, 2 = a little bit, 3 = neutral, 4 = quite a lot, 5 = definitely). The details are shown in Figure 22.

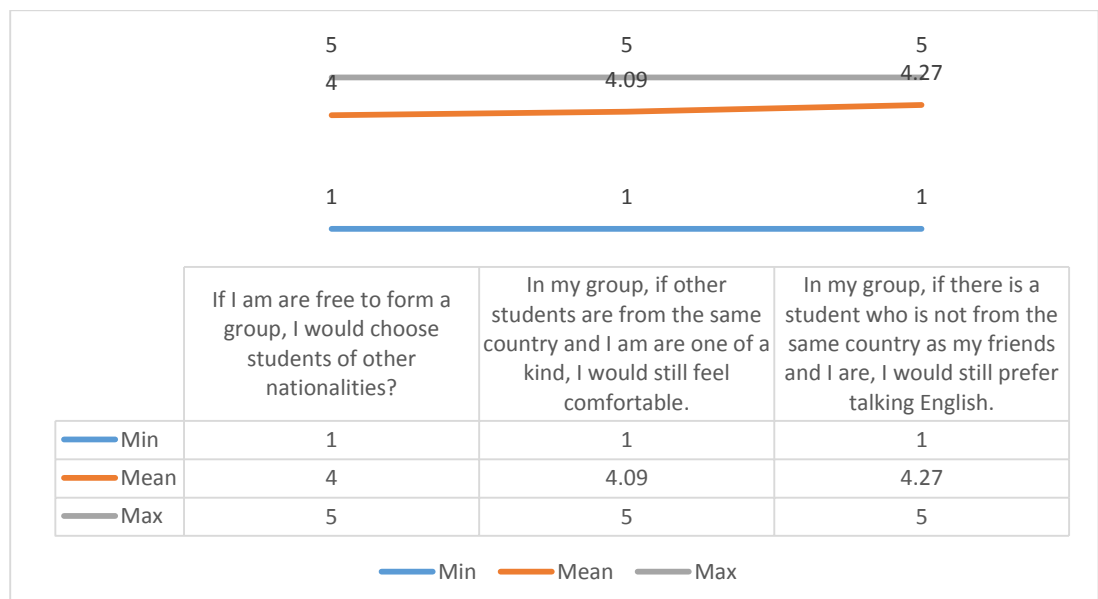


FIGURE 22. Situational responses

When being asked about *the best way to make friends*, they were interested in both outside and study-related activities. The answers were approximately balanced for two options. The details are shown in Figure 23.

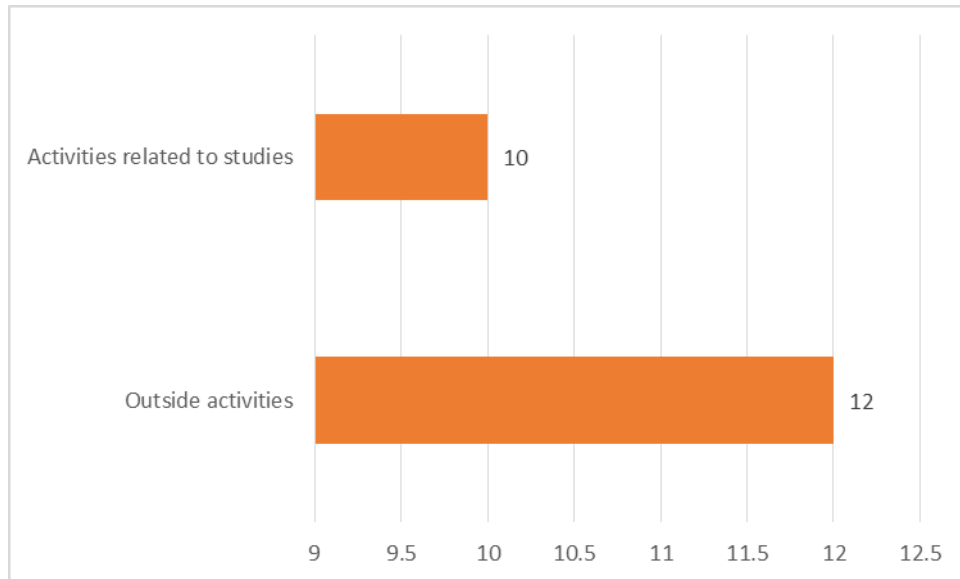


FIGURE 23. Best way to make friends for the English-speaking students

When being asked about some sorts of *the outside activities they want to participate*, half of the respondents thought about parties. Some others were also interested in short trips and sport activities. The details are shown in Figure 24.

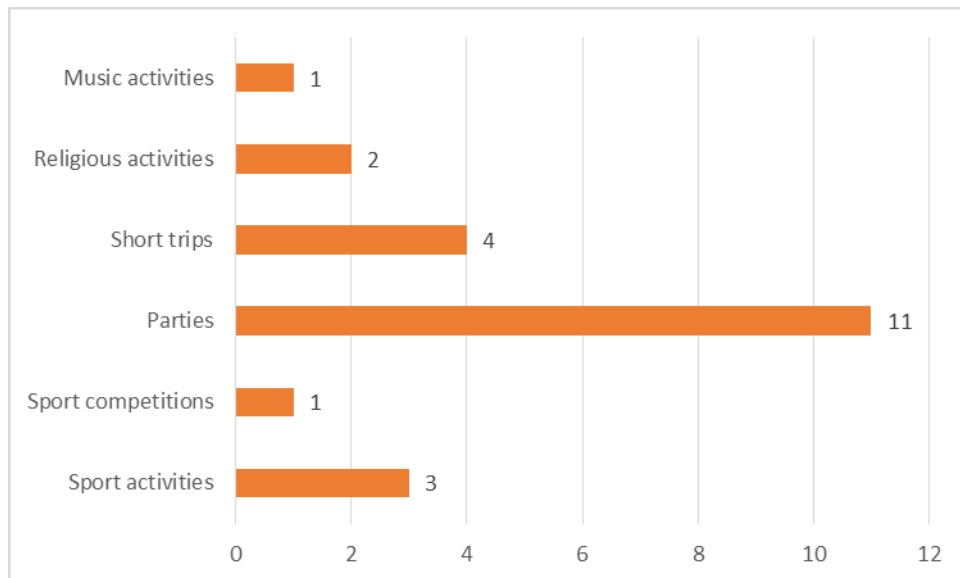


FIGURE 24. Kinds of the outside activities respondents want to participate

Most of the participants want to have some courses with the Finnish students and business games when being asked about some kinds of *activities related to studies they want to participate*. The details are shown in Figure 25.

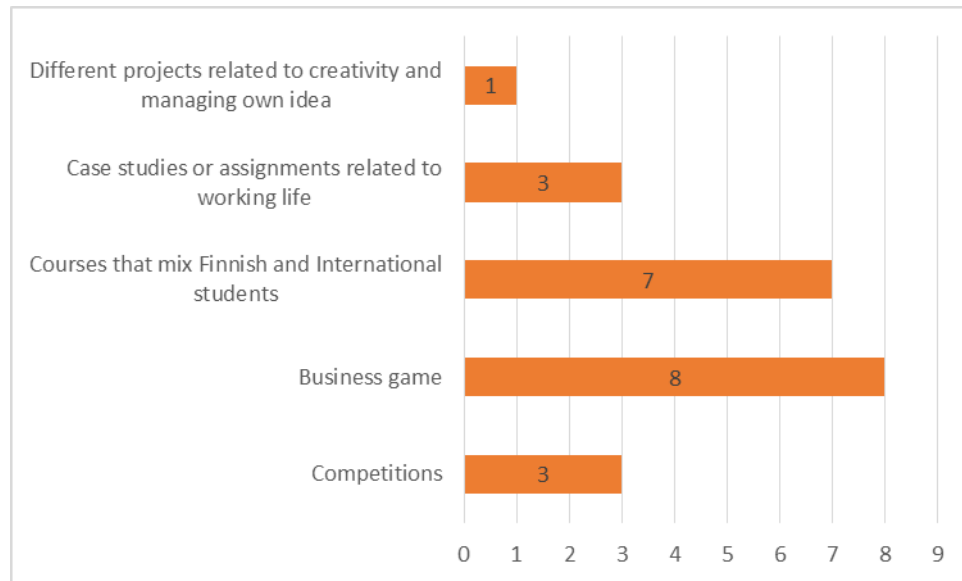


FIGURE 25. *Kinds of activities related to studies the respondents want to participate*

For the open question at the end of the questionnaire, two answers suggested that there should be more activities like trips or games between the students from different countries. The other one was about less percentage of Russian students.

6.2 Results based on the interviews

The two interviews were conducted one after another in the same day, the English-speaking first and then the Finnish group. It took around one hour for the first group and 30 minutes for the other to finish the interviews. The English-speaking group had one day to prepare for the interview, while the Finnish group had only several hours. That might lead to different results and conclusions which are discussed in this chapter and again in the chapter 7.

6.2.1 Findings from English-speaking group

Six students were interviewed for about one hour. They are from five countries: Finland, Norway, Russia (2), Vietnam and Estonia. Five of them had been in Mikkeli for around one month at that time. The reasons why they chose to study business were quite similar.

Two of them wanted to study in English. Two of them wanted to improve their leadership skills. One wanted to start a company, while the other had lots of ideas and he needed knowledge, education and connections to do so. The reasons why they chose Mikkeli were random, and the number 1 position among Universities of Applied Sciences had very little effect on their decisions.

They did not really have serious expectations before starting their studies in MAMK. Two of them did not think that there would be so many Russians at the school. One participant did not expect to have quite many projects and much workload in the first year. However, overall they did think that the curriculum of the programme was quite easy, and they talked about workload of other study fields or in Russia to confirm this point. Since they had been in Mikkeli for about one month, it was difficult to say that they were satisfied or not. Their expectations for the future were to have more practical projects and to have more time to spend together. They did not really have any difficulties related to studies here in Mikkeli. Two participants thought that there were so many good students in their group and they know much about business. It makes them feel quite nervous and not confident. About the good things, most of them thought that people here are kind and sociable; it is good that they can speak English and the teachers always try to do their best. One participant who is working thought that it is easier for him to understand theoretical frameworks since he already has some work experience.

About the intercultural communication in the group, all the participants had no problem communicating with students from other countries. They thought that the students spoke English fluently and that was an advantage of the group. If they are free to choose teammates, most of them would still choose their friends though they also wanted to be in a mixed group. They thought that it was far easier to communicate, to express their ideas and to make jokes in their mother tongue. "It is difficult to translate some jokes and the senses into English". If they are one of a kind in their group, they would still feel fine as long as the other ones speak English or try to translate what they say into English. Otherwise, they would ask their teammates to do so. If they have one friend who is not from the same country as the others, they would respect him/her and try to speak English as much as possible.

Among the non-Finnish students, one is very interested in speaking Finnish and tries to speak Finnish every day. The only Finnish in the group also likes to explore new cultures and languages and she already learnt Portuguese and Spanish. About the impressions towards each other, one participant thought that “in our team, it is quite difficult to work with Finnish students in the group and to shake them up”. “They do something, but in lower level than in Russia”. But they all agreed that it was not true for all Finnish students. The Finnish participant was excited to work with foreign students but she honestly thought there are so many Russians. Since they are studying in English, they expect to work with international students, both inside and outside their group. About improving the collaboration between the Finnish and international students, they want to have more practical projects, real working life case studies or assignments that would mix all the students, not just theoretical ones. One participant thought about short trips when they need a break from their studies, “not every week but maybe once a month”. There was also one suggestion about the way groups are formed for group assignments. Teachers can choose students randomly or tell them to count and make group of students with the same number. In that way they can be in a mixed group, not just Russians or Finnish groups.

6.2.2 Findings from the Finnish-speaking group

Five students voluntarily participated in the interview with one participant from Mikkeli. So most of them also had been in Mikkeli for around one month. They had quite clear reasons to study business. Four of them have relatives in business field, and the other wanted to explore new things in business. Only one participant were affected by the ranking of MAMK as the best university of applied sciences in Finland in 2013. Most of them chose Mikkeli for non-study-related reasons. Three of them did not have any expectations at all before coming to Mikkeli. The others heard that the teachers and the quality of studies were very good, and they were partly satisfied.

One good thing in Mikkeli is that it is very easy to make friends. The town is quite small and getting to know each other is not difficult. About the studies, some of them thought that there are quite many projects and it was hard to finish them on time. However, they all agreed that the projects were practical, and group works were going smoothly when everyone was doing their parts. All the participants had not worked with foreign students at all, and really wanted to do so. The number of Russians was not a problem

for the Finnish participants, and they thought foreign students were nice and a little bit shy. All of them felt that there was no barrier between them and the international students. They were interested in working with the international students in both ways, activities related to studies and outside activities. Some of them thought that small group work was more appropriate so they could get to know each other better. If there is only one foreign student in their group, they would try as much as possible to not make him/her feel like an outsider. They also suggested that more practical projects and some trips may improve the collaboration between the students.

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This part of the study focuses on the conclusions and is heavily based on the research of empirical data. The objective of the thesis was to explore the expectations and willingness of the Finnish and the International students to collaborate with each other. According to the obtained results and theoretical background, the objective defined was partly achieved. In the following chapters, the answers to the research questions and the limitations of the research are presented.

7.1 Conclusions

From the questionnaire results, it is quite easy to notice that since every English-speaking student has already participated with students from other nationalities (both before and during their current studies), they are more active, respond more positively to intercultural issues, and take no time to get acquainted to each other. However, a fairly high mean in the ranking questions suggests that the Finnish students are also willing to participate with the international students. In order to strengthen the bond between students in both groups, outdoor activities sound very interesting for all of them. They would be most likely to participate in parties, as well as sport activities. Another potential way to strengthen the bond between the students is courses that could put them together. Since there have been many parties organised during academic years by both MAMOK and individuals, the department may focus on creating more courses, projects and competitions related to studies which would mix students from both groups, or creating more common content for existing courses for them. As not so many Finnish students tend to keep in touch with foreign students after their project/event, these activities should be conducted regularly for the maximum effect.

During the interviews, the intentions to collaborate with the other group were expressed strongly by the English-speaking students, but not as much in the Finnish group. While the first group discussed with excitement and enthusiasm, the Finish students were more silent and did not offer many ideas. However, in general, both groups tend to participate more with each other because “it is an international group”. Besides parties, they also wanted to get involved in more activities such as short trips and sport activities.

In conclusion, most of the students in the Department seem interested about maximizing the collaboration between each other. They suggested some interesting ideas to do so. As first-year students, outdoor activities such as parties, short trips, sport activities, etc. sound more compelling. Activities related to study, however, also attract their attention. Practical projects or courses which mix students from both group is the most appropriate plan in their opinion.

7.2 Limitations of the research

After the conclusions are drawn from the data, researchers should assess limitations of the research. A classical way to assess the procedure and results of a research is to apply validity, reliability, or in some cases, objectivity criteria. Various alternative criteria for assessing research has also been developed since the middle of the 1980s. On the other hand, the meanings of validity and reliability criteria which differ in quantitative and qualitative research should be carefully examined by the researcher (Flick 2006, 367-376).

Reliability refers to the extent to which a measure or analysis procedure will generate consistent findings. Threats to reliability may come from both the researcher and participants. Participants may make some errors while completing a questionnaire (participant error), or say what they thought other people wanted them to say (participant bias). These subject threats should be taken care by researchers (Saunders et al. 2009, 156-157). In quantitative research, researchers can receive highly unreliable results even though survey questions are carefully formulated. This is because mutual interpretations which control answering questions are non-standardizable (Silverman 2009, 185).

In general, *validity* is concerned with whether the findings accurately represent the phenomenon. In a quantitative research, threats to the validity may come from experimental procedures, participants or when researchers draw incorrect assumptions from the sample data to other situations or contexts. In qualitative research, the term has a slightly different meaning. It is used to determine whether the findings are true and certain based on the standpoints of the researchers, the participants or the readers (Creswell 2002, 195-196).

There have been some arguments about the role of validity and reliability in a qualitative research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), these classic criteria can be subtitled with trustworthiness which consists of four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The new criteria are important in evaluating a qualitative research (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294-295).

Credibility concepts imply answering the questions: does the researcher have familiarity with the topic? Has the researcher made strong logical link between observations and particular categories? It provides guaranteed confidence in the certainty of the conclusions (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294). In the case of this study, several credibility issues had to be considered. For the interviews, honesty of the interviewees was of great importance. The questions aimed to improve the current situation in the Department of Business management, and partly their future curricula. Their information was anonymous and confidential, so they did not have any reason to provide false answers. In the questionnaire, the responses were more unreliable in general. However, similar to the interviews, there was no real reason for the respondents to answer the questions dishonestly.

Dependability refers to the research procedure to be logical, traceable and documented (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294). This research process was conducted in a thorough and suitable manner to establish the trustworthiness of the research. If the investigation is done again, it would produce the same results.

Confirmability concept deals with the idea that the data and findings are not researchers' imagination. Basically it is about supporting the interpretations with collected data in way that can be effortlessly understood by others (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294). In the case of this study, all the confirmability issues had been taken into consideration.

The questionnaire was designed in a simple and concise way. The researcher was also willing to answer any questions related to the questionnaire. During the interviews, the researcher stayed neutral and polite to avoid influencing participants' reactions and explanations.

Transferability concept is interrelated with the degree of similarity of the research, or part of it, with other research. The idea is that there should be some kind of connection between particular research and previous findings (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294). Though the researcher could not find any research with similar ideas, the conclusions of this research are still useful and can be referred to in future researches for the Department of Business management.

8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

I tried to put as much effort as possible in writing this bachelor's thesis since I wanted to participate in the development of the Department of Business management. Although sometimes it was challenging, I have learnt how to overcome some scientific and personal difficulties by implementing the research on my own. The research process has promoted myself as an ambitious and hard-working student.

During the research, I have got a chance to study more about Finnish higher education system and the polytechnics system, as well as the operations of Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences. Though it might not be useful in my future professional life, it helped me understand partly the reason why the Finnish education has become one of the best in the world and probably improve my self-education process in the future. I also learnt how to conduct a research from the scratch, prepare a questionnaire and implement interviews. I have improved my data collection, communication and reporting skills during the process. It will inevitably be of great use for my working life.

The questions of the interviews and questionnaires focused not only on the intentions of the Finnish and international students to participate with each other, but on their expectations about their future curricula as well. The students, especially international students, crave for more practical projects or case studies related to the real working life. They are not interested in theoretical projects which are mostly conducted on paper. For outdoor activities, they think that a chance once in a while, short trips or sport

activities, would be good to strengthen their bond. These results look promising for the future projects of the Department of Business management.

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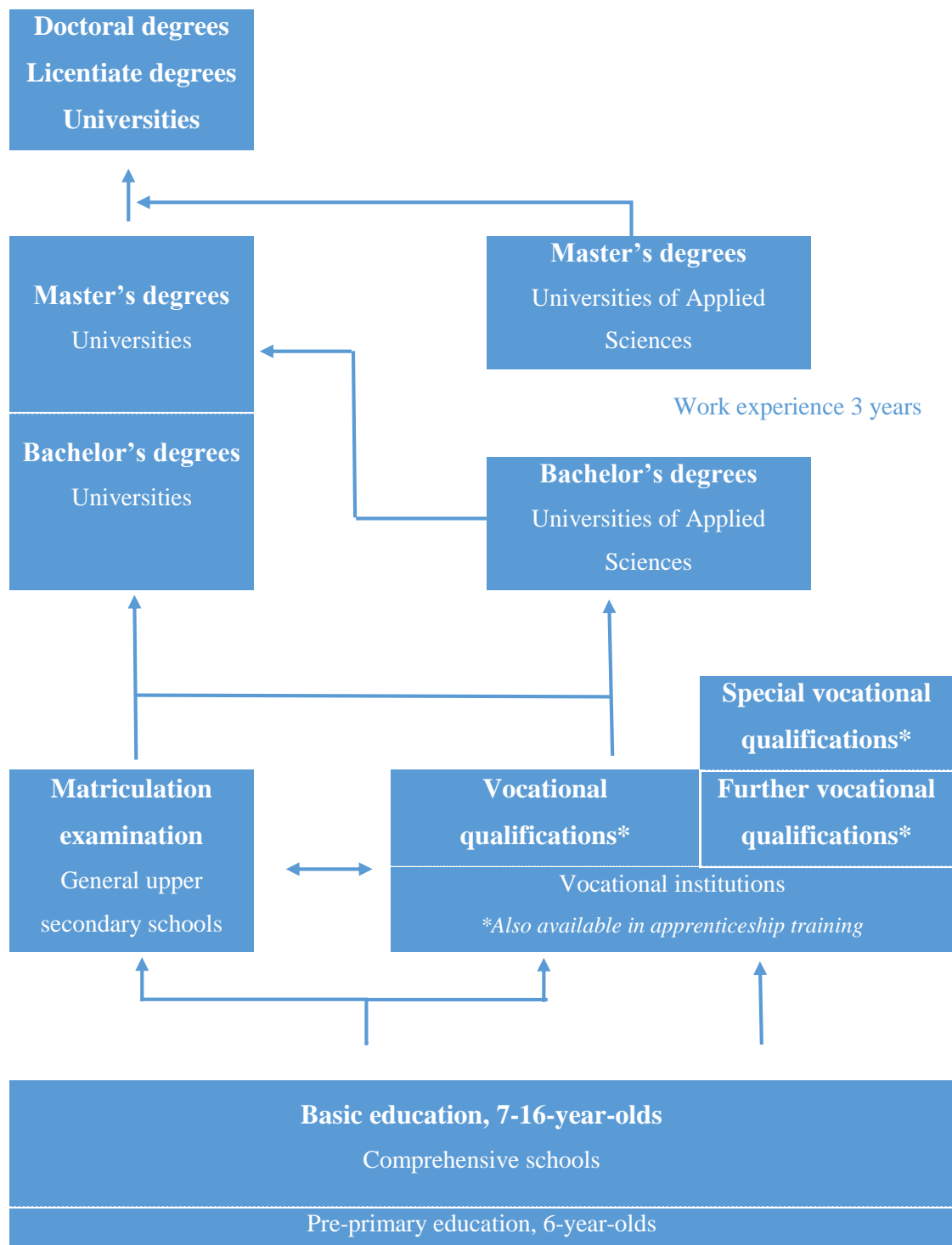
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APPENDIX 1.

Finnish Education System



APPENDIX 2.

Interview Questions

1. Introduce yourselves (name, nationality, hobbies, etc.)
2. Why did you choose to study business? Why in Mikkeli?
3. Did you have any expectations related to studies before coming here? If yes, what were they?
4. Do you feel that you are satisfied or partly satisfied with your studies? Why?
5. Having been here for one month, how do you feel now? Do you have any expectations for the future (about activities, curriculum, courses, etc.)?
6. What makes you feel most comfortable and difficult here? (related to studies)
7. Do you find it difficult to communicate with students of different nationalities?
8. If you are free to form a group, who would you choose: your friends from the same country or international friends? Why?
9. How do you feel if other students in your group are from the same country and you are one of a kind? What would you do?
10. In reverse situation, if there is one student who is not from the same country as the others, how much would you like to speak English?
11. Are you interested in learning Finnish, or reluctant to learn it? Do you have any motivation to learn Finnish (for everyday life, to get a job, to make friends, etc.)? If a cashier speaks English to you, would you reply 'Thank you' or 'Kiitos'? (For international students)
Are you interested in exploring foreign languages and cultures? (for Finnish students)
12. What is your first thought or impression of Finland and Finnish people? What about Finnish students in the school? (For international students)
What is your first thought or impression of international students in the school? (For Finnish students)
13. Do you expect that you would usually participate with students of different nationalities (inside or outside your group)?
14. What is the best way for you to make friends (outside activities, sports, projects, etc.)?
15. What kind of activities do you want to join?
16. Do you have any suggestions or comments about collaboration?

APPENDIX 3(1).

Questionnaire

1. What is your gender?

☐ Female

☐ Male

2. In which language are you studying?

☐ Finnish

☐ English

3. What is your nationality?

☐ Finnish

☐ Russian

☐ Vietnamese

☐ Others Please specify:

4. Evaluate how easy or difficult the following things are for you:

	Easy				Difficult
Getting to know other students	1	2	3	4	5
Getting involved in different groups	1	2	3	4	5

5. Did you ever worked with students of different nationalities before your current studies?

☐ Once

☐ 2-3 times or more

☐ I have never worked with them.

6. Have you worked with students of other nationalities during your current studies?

☐ Once

☐ 2-3 times or more

☐ I have never worked with them.

7. Please circle the number that matches your view most closely for the following statement (skip this question if you have never worked with students of other nationalities):

	Not at all				Definitely
I feel comfortable during the project/event.	1	2	3	4	5
I am looking forward to working with them again.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX 3(2).

Questionnaire

We spend lots of time discussing with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
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We keep in touch after the project/event.

8. If you have not collaborated with students of other nationalities, do you want to try working with them?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Definitely

9. If you are free to form a group, would you choose students of other nationalities?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Definitely

10. In your group, if other students are from the same country and you are one of a kind, do you feel comfortable?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Definitely

11. In your group, if there is a student who is not from the same country as you and your friends are, how much would you like to speak English?

Just when we need to talk to her/him					As much as we can
1	2	3	4	5	

12. What is the best way for you to make friends?

☐ Outside activities

☐ Projects/events related to studies

☐ Others Please specify:

13. What kind of outside activities do you want to participate?

☐ Sport competitions

APPENDIX 3(3).

Questionnaire

☐ Sport activities

☐ Parties

☐ Short trips

☐ Others Please specify:

14. What kind of activities related to studies do you want to participate?

☐ Competitions

☐ Business game

☐ Courses that mix Finnish and International students

☐ Case studies or assignment related to working life

☐ Others Please specify:

15. Do you have any further comments or suggestions about collaboration between Finnish and International students?