



MARKETING RESEARCH ON PRACTICAL TRAINING ABROAD

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of the thesis was to conduct a marketing research on the vocational school students' interest in carrying out their practical training in Spain. The thesis was made in collaboration with a student service agency called Spain Internship SC, a company which offers internship places around Spain for students and recent graduates. The main purpose of the research made for the thesis was to find out the students' interest in carrying out their practical training abroad and also to find out whether the schools are interested in collaboration with Spain Internship SC to ease the students' mobility between Spain and Finland.

The theoretical framework of the thesis includes definition and deeper investigation of marketing research, services marketing and business to business marketing. Moreover, the process of collaboration development is defined and introduced.

For the empirical part of the thesis a research was made to support the theoretical framework. The survey was carried out in a form of questioning by using a questionnaire, which was delivered to the vocational school students in order to examine their interest in performing their practical training in Spain. Furthermore, an interview was made with international coordinators of the schools to find out the schools' interest in collaboration with Spain Internship SC.

Qualitative research was used to analyze the answers received from the interviews, whereas quantitative approach was used in the survey analysis. The results gained from the survey and interviews showed that there are potential marketing opportunities for Spain Internship SC in the vocational school sector, and collaboration between the schools and Spain Internship SC is practicable.

Key words: marketing research, practical training, vocational school, students

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1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis was to conduct a marketing research of the vocational school students' interest in carrying out their practical training in Spain. The thesis was made in collaboration with a student service agency called Spain Internship SC to find out if it is possible for them to expand the market to the vocational school level. To support the research, a survey was made in a form of questioning by using a questionnaire which was delivered to four vocational schools in Southern Finland. The aim of using the questionnaire was to indicate students' interest level in doing their practical training abroad, their command in languages and accommodation preferences.

Core research questions used in this thesis were "How interested are the vocational school students in carrying out their practical training abroad?" and "Is there a possibility for Spain Internship SC to enter the market?" The research was done by sending a questionnaire to school's student advisors by e-mail in the fall 2012. The vocational schools chosen for the research were picked beforehand and were approved by Susanna Mettomäki; CRM and founder of Spain Internship SC. The same schools were also contacted for further interviews with the schools' international coordinators to inquire about their rules and requirements for sending students abroad, how many students carry out their practical training abroad yearly, do they receive a study grant while abroad and would it be possible for the schools to collaborate with Spain Internship SC in easing the students' mobility to go abroad.

In chapter two the theoretical framework of the thesis is described. Deeper investigation was done in marketing research to understand how the research needs to be executed. Furthermore, to support the thesis, services marketing, business-to-business marketing as well as collaboration development was studied.

Chapter three describes the basic information about the Finnish vocational schools and how they operate. Moreover, the company Spain Internship SC is presented and their services introduced. A closer look is also taken at the degree programmes of tourism, hospitality and restaurant to find out the number of students nationwide. The author also investigated how the practical training works in vocational schools and how much and

which study grants the students can apply for if carrying out their practical training abroad.

In the following chapter four, the answers received at the interviews with the schools' international coordinators are introduced. The interviews were made to understand the schools' support for students interested in performing their practical training abroad, what study grants are available for them, which channels they use to find practical training places and is there a possibility for the students in the future to use the services provided by Spain Internship SC. The answers of the student questionnaires are also presented and analyzed in this chapter. The questionnaire made for the students included closed questions which made it simple and easy to fill out. The questionnaire was delivered to students by the schools' student advisors who received the questionnaire by e-mail.

At the end of chapter five, the questionnaire results are summarized, the final conclusion is made, and the decision of the schools as to whether they are interested in collaboration with Spain Internship SC is revealed.

2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

In this chapter the research performed for the thesis is introduced and the aim of the research is specified. Also the research questions are revealed and clarified. Furthermore, the theoretical framework of the thesis is described. In the final sub-chapter, the research data and methods used in the thesis are described.

2.1 Focus of the research

The focus of the research lays on the information gathered by using a questionnaire delivered to the students and the interviews done with the international coordinators. The purpose of the survey among students was to find out; what is the vocational school students' interest level of carrying out their practical training abroad, and what requirements they have concerning their practical training period. The interviews with the international coordinators were done to find out what kind of support schools offer when a student want to do their practical training abroad, and is there a possibility for Spain Internship SC to offer work placements for the students. These results will provide useful information for Spain Internship SC concerning its future interest in collaborating also with other Finnish vocational schools that were not chosen for this research.

The topic was given to the author by the company where she carried out her internship in summer 2012 and was accepted by the author due to the curiosity and common interest. The selection of the schools for the research was done by the author and approved by Susanna Mettomäki, CRM and founder of Spain Internship SC. The schools were selected on the basis of the location, field of studies and size. The locations of the schools were preferred to be within two hours away from the author's residence and the studies needed to match the topic given to the author. The size of the school was required to be large enough to provide enough data for the author to analyze.

2.2 Research questions

The research questions formulated by the author for this thesis were created to match the topic received for the thesis. The questions were carefully considered and designed to bring the most valuable information for the company Spain Internship SC in their purpose to find out information about the vocational school students and about the schools chosen for this research. The chosen questions were also beneficial to the author as research methods in her thesis by applying them to surveys and interviews.

How interested are the vocational school students in carrying out their practical training abroad?

When the author started to plan her research it was crucial to know the general interest of students about performing part or whole of their practical training abroad. If the vocational school students are not interested in doing their practical training abroad, there would be no sense for Spain Internship SC attempting to market their services to them. To find out the interest level of the students, the author designed a questionnaire which was delivered to four schools in southern Finland.

The first glimpse of the answers indicated that the majority of tourism, hotel and restaurant students who took part in the survey were females, and the interest level among them seemed to be high. Though, it is good to bear in mind, that these results are purely suggestive. When the actual situation appears, the question is how many of them would actually take advantage of the opportunity.

Is there a possibility for Spain Internship SC to enter the market?

The author considered it important to find out if the market segment that Spain Internship SC wants to focus on in the future is worth, or even possible to enter. At the moment Spain Internship SC is mainly focusing on the students of the universities and university of applied sciences. But it was soon discovered that there is also a huge opportunity in the vocational school level that should be investigated.

The task of the author was to find out the rules and requirements the selected schools have about performing the practical training abroad, and to draw a conclusion as to whether there is a chance for their students to go abroad via Spain Internship SC. This required the author to visit the schools and interview the international coordinators at these schools to find out if they would be interested in collaboration with Spain Internship SC.

2.3 Theoretical framework

In the theoretical framework of the thesis, four main theories were used to support the actual research: marketing research, services marketing, business-to-business marketing and collaboration development. These theories are described and specified in the following sub-chapters.

In addition, qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in the empirical part of the thesis. Qualitative method was used to analyse the interviews with the international coordinators held by the author, while quantitative methods were greatly used to analyse the results of the survey that were collected among the vocational school students.

2.3.1 Marketing research

Marketing research is one of the central elements of a marketing process which combines the customer and the audience to the marketer. The information gained through marketing research process is used to identify and define the possibilities and the problems of the marketing as well as to create, refine and evaluate marketing actions. The information improves the knowledge of marketing as a process and those methods which can be used to intensify marketing actions. (Mäntyneva, Heinonen & Wrange 2008, 9-11.)

Effective communication between the providers of the products and services, and the customers is essential in the modern society due to the increasing international connections. To know what to offer for the customers, the providers of the products and

services need to understand the different needs of the customers. At the same time they have to figure out how these needs can be satisfied and how to notify the current and potential customers about the character of the available products or services. This is where the marketing research comes into the picture. (Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 9-11.)

The need for the marketing research process comes from the management of the company, when it has been noticed, for example, that the sales of the product for a specific segment has been decreasing, and the solution for this needs to be found. At this point the management of the company contacts the marketing researcher, either within the company or by using the professionals of the specialized marketing research companies. The main task of the marketing researcher is to design the data collecting method, lead and implement the data collecting process, analyze the collected data and report the results to the client. (Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 9-11.)

Each marketing research process has three parties involved: the client, the researcher and the customer. The client is a person or a company who orders or authorizes someone to carry out the research. The researcher is the party that implements the whole marketing research, or at least part of it. The customer indicates the person or a group who gives the necessary information for the researcher to execute the research.

In figure 1 the different steps of the marketing research process are defined. The order of the steps may vary and sometimes it is not even necessary to take each step to perform a successful research. The first step in the process is to define the problem and research objectives. At this point it is important for the client not to define the problem too broadly or too narrowly for the researcher. Determination of the research question in collaboration makes it easier to start the process and make sure that both parties know exactly for which problems the solution needs to be found. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 121-122.)

At the second step the research plan is designed. How the research is carried out influences the fact who executes the research: will it be carried out by the company itself, or will it be bought as a service outside the organization. The bigger the project, the more important it is to make an efficient research plan. To design a working research plan, the following steps need to be taken: decision about the data sources,

research approaches, and research instruments, sampling plan and contact methods. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 122; Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 13–14.)

The third step is to collect the information. This is the most expensive part of the research and where most of the errors occur. This phase includes the decision making of the population or a group that needs to be investigated, how big is the needed sample and which data collecting method is the most suitable for this specific research. (Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 14.)

In step four the analyzing of the information takes place. At this stage the collected data is gathered together, tabulated and analyzed, and the summary is drawn from the results of the findings. At the end the researcher conducts a written research report for the client. This report is then delivered to the client and the results are presented to the major marketing decision makers of the management. This takes place at the step five. It is crucial for the researcher also to deliver all the necessary graphs and tabulations to make it easier to explain the results of the research. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 133; Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 14.)

The final step is the decision making. When the findings of the research have been presented, it is the client's time to decide whether to proceed with the findings and use them in their marketing plans, or perhaps to study the issue further and do some more research about the topic. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 134.)

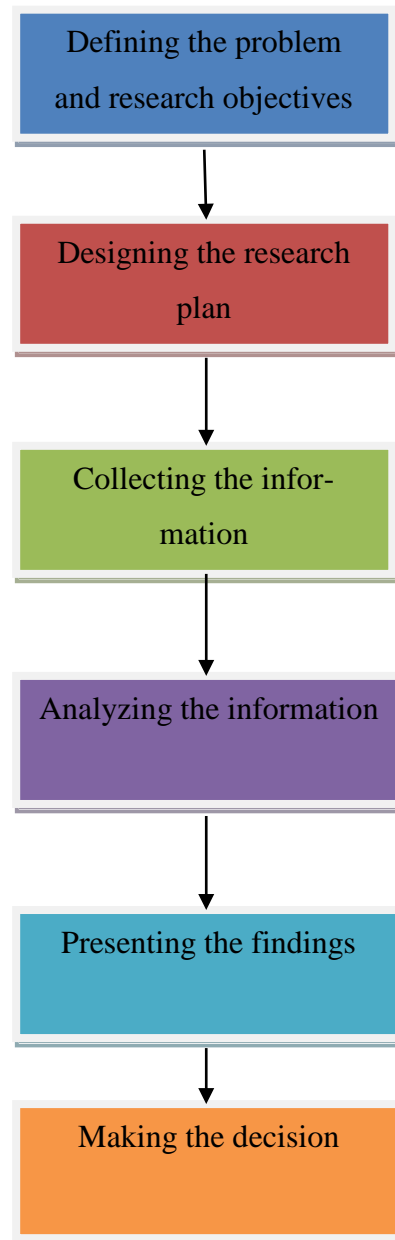


FIGURE 1. The marketing research process (Kotler & Keller 2012, 121, modified.)

To do an effective and successful marketing research, fundamental requirements of the marketing research have to be fulfilled. These five requirements are the validity, reliability and repeatability, objectivity, cost-effectiveness and utility.

The validity of the research tells whether the research is really measuring what it claims to be measuring. Therefore it is good to know how the research was undertaken to avoid misunderstandings and errors. When the theoretical and operational definitions are identical, the validity of the research is good. (Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 34.)

Reliability in marketing research means that the information gained from the research is not arbitrary but reliable. A reliable research also needs to be repeatable, meaning that the research can be done again and similar results can be expected. Reliability as a concept relates particularly to quantitative research. To increase the reliability of the research, the phenomena that are researched need to be viewed objectively. This means that the researcher has to be neutral and observe things open-minded. (Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 34–35.)

A well-made research is also cost-effective. This means that the benefit gained from the research has to match with the cost that was put in the research. There are several different data collecting methods, and choosing just one can be difficult. Therefore going through all the possible alternatives is essential to avoid finding out later on that there would have been a cheaper way to collect the same information. (Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 35.)

The last requirement is the utility. When the research is made, the main idea is that it also applies in reality when making the decision. For that reason it is important that the client defines the problems specifically so that the researcher knows exactly what answers to look for. (Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 35–36.)

Marketing research can also be divided into two sets of two different categories.

By the target market:

- Consumer marketing research
- Business-to-business marketing research

And by methodological approach:

- Quantitative marketing research
- Qualitative marketing research.

The consumer marketing research was defined earlier in this chapter as a central element that combines the customer and the audience to the marketer. Business-to-business marketing research on the other hand is more complex than consumer research. First of all, finding the right respondents for the interviews is hard, since the respondents can only be reached during the working hours, usually when they are busy

or unwilling to participate. Secondly, getting the participants to open up also requires some skills which mean that qualified researchers are needed. Finally, the researcher must have some skills of developing strategies, since that is where most business researches lead to and they need to be professionally explained.

The methodological approach in the marketing research can be divided into quantitative and qualitative marketing research approach. In quantitative research, the information gained from the research is measured in numerical forms. In this case the answers are usually collected with standardized surveys including closed questions. Quantitative research requires sufficiently large and presentable sample so that the results are realistic. The results gained from the surveys are normally analyzed in percentages, Euros, numbers, kilos etc. The instruments most commonly used in this type of a research are questionnaires, personal interviews, phone interviews, letter queries etc. The quantitative research answers the questions; how many, how much, how often, and how important something is. (Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 31–32.)

In contrast, in the qualitative research the information is collected with open ended questions which allow the customer to bring out more personal opinions and the researcher to understand easier the customers' behavior. The sample size in qualitative research is smaller and often very specifically chosen. Qualitative research attempts to answer questions such as how and why, and the common instruments to collect the data are in-depth interviews and focus groups. The main idea in qualitative research is to find the factors behind the problem. (Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 32.)

In this thesis the author has used both methods; quantitative research approach to analyze the answers gained through the questionnaires delivered to the vocational school students and qualitative approach when going through the answers from the schools' representatives. More about analyzes of the results will be revealed in chapter four.

2.3.2 Services marketing

In services marketing, the service providers are selling promises to the customers since the actual service does not yet exist at the moment when the purchasing decision is

made. This is the main challenge in services marketing; to convince the customers and give them the image that the quality and experience of the service providers are the best in the market. Even though the marketing techniques do not differ greatly between the physical products and the services, there are still four special service characteristics that need to be bear in mind when designing marketing techniques: intangibility, inseparability, variability and perishability. (Blythe 2005, 135-138; Kotler, Armstrong, Wong & Saunder 2008, 597-599.)

Figure 2 indicates what four characteristics of services need to be considered when companies decide how to market their services for the customers. Service intangibility means that the service cannot be seen, tasted, felt, heard or smelt before the purchase. Because the tangible characteristics are missing from this type of services, it is crucial for the service providers to send right signals about the quality of the services, such as outlook of the place, people, equipment and prices. Increasing the tangible features in services helps customers to get a better picture of the quality of the services that are to be sold. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 380–381.)

Inseparability in services indicates that the actual services cannot be separated from the service provider but they have to be sold as a package. For example, a hairdresser is a part of beauty salon services provided and has to be present to deliver the service to the customer. On the other hand, the hairdresser cannot provide the service if there are no customers. This means that the customer co-produces the service product and therefore the provider-customer interaction is a vital part of the services marketing and an outcome of the service. (Kotler et al. 2008, 601.)

Variability means that the quality of services provided varies depending on who provides the service as well as where, when and how. Therefore the quality of the service is hard to control. To ensure that the quality of the services remain high, a special attention needs to be paid to hiring qualified staff, motivating the employees, increasing the visibility of the personnel and substituting necessary equipment for the employees. (Kotler et al. 2008, 601–603.)

Perishability of the services means that the service provided cannot be saved for later use or sale. If the service is cancelled or the customer does not show up, it means that the service is lost since its value existed only at the point and vanished after the

customers did not appear for the appointment scheduled for them. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 383.)

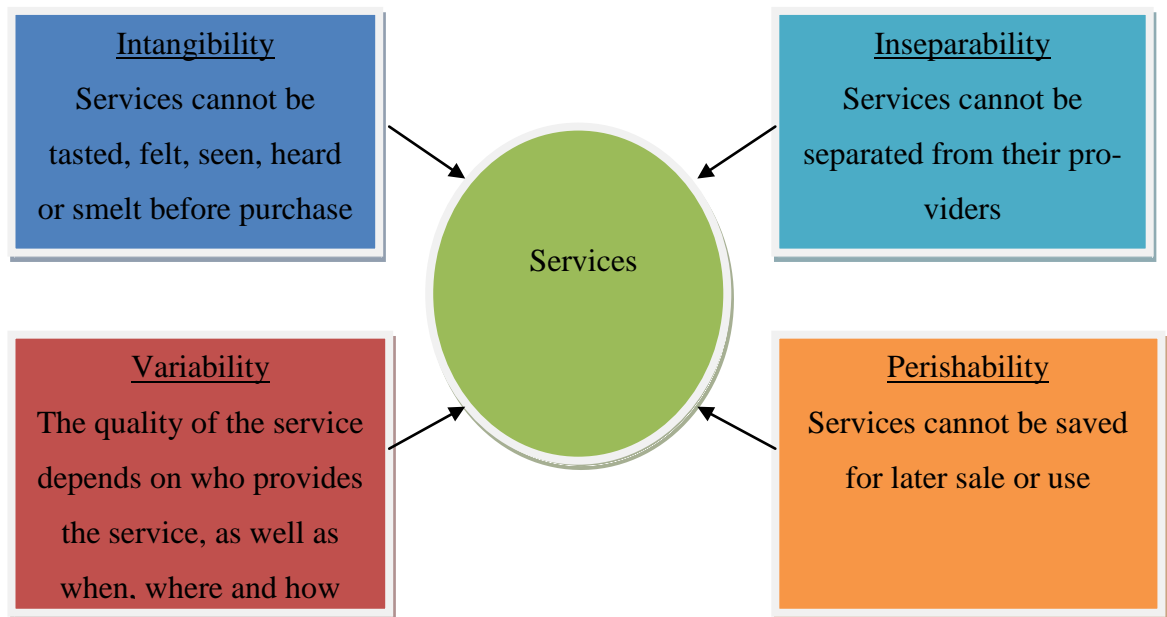


FIGURE 2. Four service characteristics (Kotler et al. 2008, 599, modified.)

Perishability in services brings its own challenges for the service providers. Predicting the demand in services marketing is difficult due to the fluctuation and variety of the demand. Therefore the yield management is crucial; the right service has to be in the right place at the right time with the proper price to maximize the profitability. To reach the best result, service providers need to be aware of their resources and the capability of the employees to provide best quality. To ensure that the demand remains steady throughout the year as well as cherish the high quality, service firms can use numerous strategies to equalize the demand and supply: Differential pricing - charging different price at different time - swings some demand from the peak-season to off-peak periods. Part time employees can be hired to ease full time workers workload. Peak-time efficiency can be improved by doing only essential tasks during peak periods as well as offering complementary services, such as cocktail lounge, for the waiting customers. (Kotler et al. 2008, 603; Kotler & Keller 2012, 383.)

The quality of the services varies between every customer experience based on whether the quality matched with customer expectations. Most services are irreversible; if the customer receives poor service, it is highly unlikely that the customer returns to the same service provider. To ensure that the customers are satisfied with the services they

receive, the service companies must understand the importance of service-profit chain; satisfied employees equal satisfied customers. To make sure that the service quality remains high and the company reaches its profit and growth goals, everything starts by taking care of those who take care of the customers. The front-line service employees interact with the customers to create the service, so internal marketing for employees is vital to make sure that the employees are satisfied and motivated. When the employees are satisfied, it automatically enhances the value of the customer satisfaction which leads to the loyal customer relationship for the company and increases the profit of the company. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 386–387; Lovelock, Wirth & Chew 2009, 408–409.)

2.3.3 Business-to-business marketing

In business-to-business marketing the buying process occurs between organizations or companies instead of private consumers. However, it is good to bear in mind that even though the buyer is a corporation, the decision to buy a product or a service is made by individuals working for the company.

The buying process between companies is different to consumer buying process; it is far more complex and requires more attention and time from the marketers. After all, business markets involve considerable amount of money and items than consumer markets do. For routine purchases, it might be enough that only one person in the company makes the decision, but for more complex investments the decision to purchase a product or a service goes through several steps and includes multiple decision makers. (Kotler et al. 2008, 300–302; Solomon, Marshall & Stuart 2009, 203–208.)

The need for the new purchase usually comes from the employees, and it is common that the person making the purchase decision may never even use the product or a service. The users of the new product are the ones defining the needs and suggesting the product. After the need for the new product has been identified, the proposal moves to the next level where research is done to find out which provider offers the best proposal and meets best the requirements of the company as well as is beneficial for it. When the research has been made, it is sent to the decision makers who assess the proposal and the alternatives found in the research. After the purchase decision has been made, the

decision is sent to the authority in charge of contacting the product providers. (Kotler et al. 2008, 300–302; Solomon et al. 2009, 203–208.)

The demand and requirements in business markets differ extensively from the private consumer demand and requirements. Furthermore, the needs of the companies diverge from each other and this requires precise examination of the companies to be able to predict sales and plan an effective marketing strategy. The four main characteristics that differ business markets from consumer markets and which are good to keep in mind are: derived, inelastic, fluctuating and joint demand. Derived demand is based on that the need for goods and services comes either directly or indirectly from the customers and goods and services are not supposed to satisfy anyone's personal needs. Inelastic demand in business market means that in business-to-business products it does not matter if the price lightly fluctuates because it does not make the companies to buy smaller quantities. Moreover, in business markets the demand is also more fluctuating meaning that changes in consumer demand can cause radical changes in business market demand. Joint demand occurs when two or more goods are necessary to create the product or a service. If there is a decrease of a supply of one of the goods, it automatically affects the purchase quantity of the two other items. (Solomon et al. 2009, 195–196.)

Like mentioned before, the marketing principles are basically the same between the business marketing and consumer marketing; in both the aim is to identify customer needs and requirements and to build up a marketing mix to satisfy the needs and requirements of a customer as well as convince other potential buyers to consider purchasing the same product or service. Although the basics are quite similar in both business and consumer marketing, there are crucial differences that make the business marketing considerably complex and diverse. First of all, the amount of buyers for one product is significantly higher in business market since there is more than one person that needs to be satisfied. Secondly, the number or actual customers is smaller than the amount of private consumers, meaning that the promotion to the companies is better to do with strong sales forces. Furthermore, the size and the quantities of the business market purchases are far larger than the ones of the consumer markets and therefore needs an effective marketing strategy. Lastly, the geographic concentration is focused in the smaller areas instead of shredded across the country. This makes it easier for the

marketers to focus their sales effort only to specific areas. (Solomon et al. 2009, 193–195.)

2.3.4 Collaboration development

While the world keeps changing and turning more international day by day, it has become clear for the companies all over the world, that if they desire keeping up with the phase, and also success globally, they have to start creating alliances with other companies that can help them to gain and grow their marketing position. Carefully created and well managed alliances allow the companies to obtain greater sales impact at lower cost by changing the competitive environment. (Kotler et al. 2008, 396–397.)

The collaboration between companies can be defined as a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals. The relationship between the companies includes a commitment and shared responsibility which will lead to a shared resources as well as rewards.

(<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/collaboration.html>)

The alliances between the companies can be divided into four main categories:

- Product or service alliances - Collaboration between two companies to jointly market their complementary product or a new product.
- Promotional alliances - A company agrees to promote another company's products or services.
- Logistic alliances - A company agrees to offer logistical services for another company's products.
- Pricing collaboration - A special pricing collaboration between one or more companies.

The most common alliance especially within business-to-business markets is the promotional alliance, or marketing partnership, as it is also known. Marketing partnership connects two companies together to gain the marketing power through the alliance. This type of a partnership model inherited its roots from networking.

However, while networking is more about creating loose connections between individuals, partnership on the other hand strives to create long-term collaboration between the companies that is based on a trust and common goals. What is important in this type of a partnership is that two organizations decide to do a project together but are not each others subcontractors and there is no jurisdictional connection between the companies. It is a joint mission which needs to be well and sufficiently planned. Marketing partnership has been called the most real partnership for the reason that both of the companies are separately owned, but functionally close to each other. (Rope 1998, 134-138; Kotler & Keller 2012, 73; Kotler et al. 2008, 396.)

To keep the alliances thriving, companies need to develop organizational structures to support them. A good way to do so, in addition to forming and managing the partnerships, is a system called partner relationship management (PRM). The idea of PRM is to interact with the current, as well as possible future partners to build mutually satisfying long-term relations. PRM is comparable to the customer relationship management (CRM) which manages detailed information about and relationships with customers to maximize loyalty. In PRM the companies are collecting information about their partners and based on what they know about each partner, each company can customize its services suitable to meet each partner's individual needs, and this way create strong bonds with the partners. To adapt the increased desire of personalized approaches, the marketers have created a concept called one-to-one marketing which is a four step framework to help marketers to customize their services more sufficiently:

- Identify the company's prospects and possible partners
- Differentiate partners based on their needs and their value to the company
- Interact with the partners to improve the knowledge of their needs and build a strong relationship
- Customize products, services and messages

One-to-one marketing helps the company to identify the best possible partners instead of trying to create collaboration with as many organizations as possible. With this system the company saves not just money but also other resources. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 73-74, 157-159.)

When the possible partner is discovered and it is recognized that the alliance between two companies would be beneficiary for both of them, the process called partner development process starts. This is a process that every company goes through when creating a new partnership. The process cycle, presented in the figure 3, is formed by three phases, which each has been divided into milestones making it easy for the management to follow the process and understand the activities directly related to the process. Each milestone is a step that needs to be reached in order to move on to the next step in the process. The partnership development process normally takes place between the planning and the management of the partnership. (Gerdes 2003, 76-77.)

At the phase one the process is divided into three main milestones in which each of them includes smaller steps. The first milestone is to validate that an opportunity exists with the potential partner and to find out who is the right decision maker the company needs to convince that the partnership will benefit both parties. The following step is to have a first meeting with the client and receive either yes or no answer to the proposal of the possible collaboration. As the final step in the phase one is to make the business decision to proceed with the partnership to the next level. (Gerdes 2003, 77-82.)

The second phase of the partnership development process starts at the point where both companies have agreed on the business collaboration. The goal of this phase is to validate that the products or services work as stated, and to understand how the products or services used in partnership will work together. The first step of this stage is to hold an initial meeting between technical teams and internal certification to create a product or service level plan that serves as a basis for the partnership agreement. As the next step, the testing of the product or service is completed and additional certification and benchmarking is performed before the final step, development discussion, takes place. (Gerdes 2003, 82-93.)

Phase three is the final stage in the partnership development process in which the goal is to create and complete the formal partnership agreement. The first two steps are regarding negotiation about the final product plans and details, as well as completing the definitive agreement about the alliance. As the last step in the process, it is time to create partnership plans and actually kickoff the partnership teams. (Gerdes 2003, 93-97.)

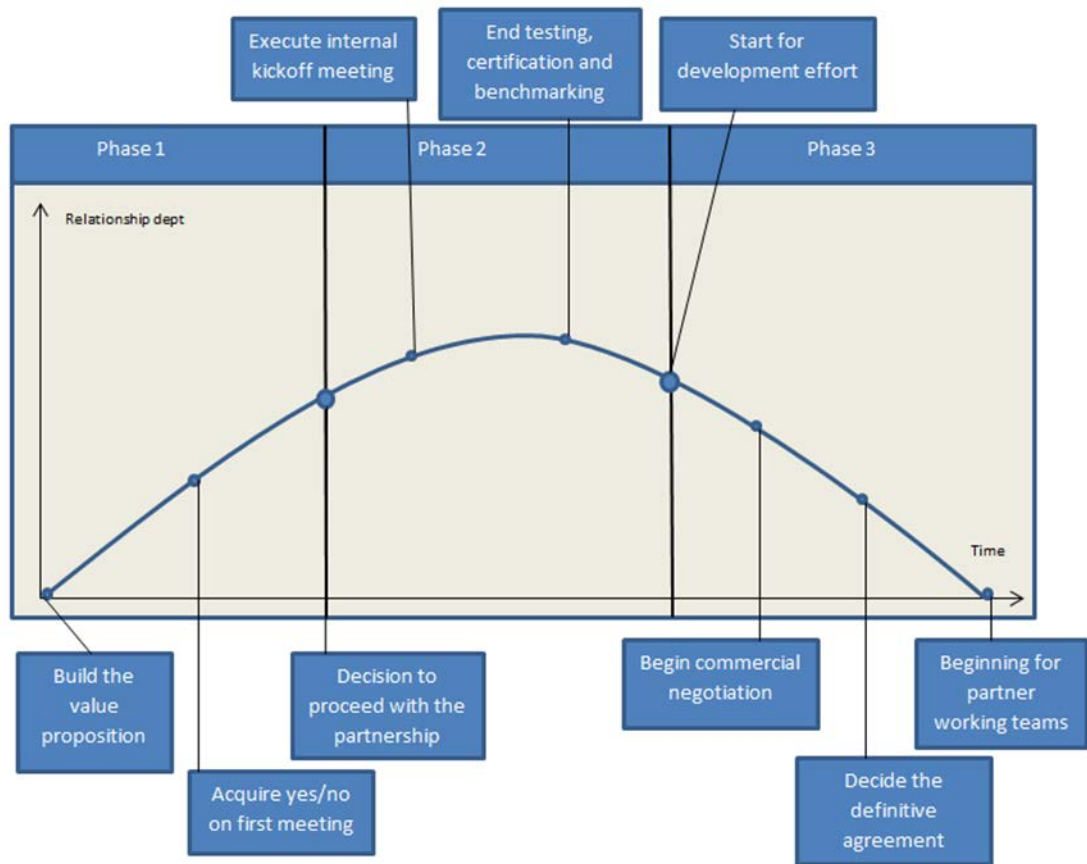


FIGURE 3. Partnership Development Process (Gerdes 2003, 77, modified.)

The process of creating a partnership is a clear process, as long as both parties have the same understanding and share the same vision that alliance is profitable for both companies. Nevertheless, the hardest and most complicated part of the partnership development process actually takes place before the actual procedure starts. Creating a long-term alliance does not happen automatically, it takes time and a lot of hard work. Forming a trust between both parties is a prerequisite to a healthy long-term alliance and helps to avoid conflicts in the future. To enhance the trust, it is essential for both parties to hold effective meetings from time to time, and it is especially important in the beginning of the collaboration. Holding the meetings ensures that the vision, ideas and values of both companies are the same concerning the future collaboration. In addition, involving everyone in the meeting is essential. Leaving someone out of a meeting harms both the bonding process and the gaining of trust of a member even before the actual collaboration takes part.

After the trust has been built, the next stage is to agree on the clear roles for each member and go through the procedures and expectations. The best way to do this is to create a written agreement in which the functions are described and divided. In the agreement also the particular goals that the parties wish to achieve should be described, as well as realistic effects and how the efforts should be measured. Decisions also about the regular check-ups and the schedules for them should be made to assess whether the goals have been met. The regular check-ups are also important, not just to see whether the goals are achieved but also to communicate with each other. The final, but one of the most important assets for a successful collaboration is communication. As long as the partners communicate with each other on a regular basis and exchange thoughts and ideas the partnership evolves and deepens. Nurturing the relationships between individuals of the company and with those who are involved in the partnership greatly impacts the outcome and success of the joint effort.

As the collaboration development is a major reason for the marketing research carried out by the author, the actual process of the partnership development process however will not be described in this thesis. The author was in charge of collecting information about the level of interest in schools for the possible collaboration with Spain Internship SC and about the support that the students would gain from the school if interested in carrying out their practical training through Spain Internship SC. Nevertheless, the actual collaboration decision and contracts will be performed by Susanna Mettomäki, CRM and founder of Spain Internship SC.

2.4 Research data and methods

The data used in this thesis was formed by using the vocational school students' answers to the questionnaire as well as by using the interviews that were held with the international coordinators of the selected vocational schools. The questionnaires were sent to the student advisors of the chosen schools, who delivered the questionnaires to their tourism, hotel and restaurant students. The answers were then delivered to the author by mail. The questionnaire included 16 structured questions regarding the students' background and language skills, as well as questions about the interest of carrying out their practical training abroad, and especially in Spain, and preferable housing arrangements. The interview with the international coordinators included

questions about the schools' rules and regulations about sending students abroad, the funding possibilities, the general procedures of carrying out the practical trainings, the duration of the practical training, and whether the schools would be interested in collaboration with Spain Internship SC.

The questionnaire delivered to the students was designed by the author based on the knowledge gained from the literature studied for the thesis and from the courses held for Tourism Degree students in Tampere University of Applied Sciences. The questions were structured with the intention of making it as quick and simple as possible to fill out the questionnaire. The questioning was carried out by using a quantitative research approach, whereas the interview was done by using a qualitative marketing research approach.

The answers of the questionnaires were processed with the statistical analysis program Tixel to facilitate the analyzing of the quantitative data. The information gained through the interviews was analyzed by the author according to the qualitative research principles, and by using the information the author received during her internship in the company Spain Internship SC.

3 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

3.1 Spain Internship SC

Spain Internship SC is a student service agency specialized in offering internships and traineeships for students and recent graduates around the world, as well as offering their assistance for companies seeking interns. The company was founded in 2010 by two international business graduates and their head office is located in Seville, the capital of Andalucía in the south of Spain. Their business goal is to be a dependable company for their customers, offering tailored services at a reasonable price.

The segment that Spain Internship SC focuses on is students between the ages of 19-26 years and those that desire some international work experience. Currently the main market area is Europe, and the majority of interns are representing either Northern or Central Europeans. However, recently the interest of American and Asian students towards internships in Spain has been rapidly increasing.

Carrying out an internship in a foreign country is not just about the work. It is also about getting to know a new culture and to become a part of it. Therefore Spain Internship SC is not just offering work placements, but also assists students with services that make their start in a new country far easier. The company has a student residence in the city centre of Seville and two more in the nearby city of Utrera which are available for the students. The company also collaborates with a housing agency which offers different accommodation solutions for the customers according to their wish. In addition to the housing arrangements, Spain Internship SC also offers the students the possibility to take a Spanish language course in one of the language schools they collaborate with. This gives the student the chance to learn some basics of Spanish before the internship starts, or develop their Spanish language skills even further. Moreover, Spain Internship SC also organizes city tours in Seville for the new incomers enabling them to get familiar with their new home city. What is more, every now and then Spain Internship SC organizes free-time activities for the students from small get-together evenings to larger events which are organized in cooperation with an event and travel organization located in Seville.

The internship placements that Spain Internship SC has to offer their customers are in various fields, and there are more than one hundred companies with whom Spain Internship SC collaborates and this enables the company to offer multiple places for its customers. Vast amounts of the internships are located in Seville, but numerous internships are also available in Madrid, Barcelona as well as in the Canary Islands. Some of the internships offered by the company are unpaid, but there are also numerous internships where some type of remuneration is offered for the students. However, most of the students applying for the internships are university students who have a mandatory internship period abroad as part of their study programme. This gives them the advantage of applying for a scholarship or study grant from their school/assisting organisation to finance their internship period. Nevertheless, students should have a stable economic situation when starting their internship to be able to finance their personal living expenses since those are not covered by the university.

In consideration of the language skills of the interns, the applicants should be able to speak fluent English and/or Spanish. Most companies require only English as a mandatory language, but there are few placements where the applicant is required to know at least the basics of Spanish in order to complete his/her job properly.

3.2 Finnish vocational schools

The Finnish post-compulsory education level is divided into two sectors: general (the upper secondary school) and initial vocational education. The aim of the upper secondary school is to offer general education and continue further the educational task of the comprehensive school, whereas the vocational school concentrates on training professionals to respond the labour market needs. The aim of the vocational schools is to meet the needs of the labour market by improving the skills of work force by training and supporting the lifelong learning. (Vocational education and training in Finland. Read 27.11.2012.

http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/ammattillinen_koulutus/?lang=en)

In 2011, approximately 49 percent of all students applied for initial vocational education and training. This is around 50 600 new students, of which roughly 6515 students applied in the fields of tourism, catering and home economics, making it the fourth most

popular field of studies. (Amount of students accepted to study in vocational schools. 2012. Read 27.11.2012. http://tilastokeskus.fi/index_en.html)

The studies in vocational schools are generally directed to the students at the age of 16 to 21, and most students apply for the education programmes straight after the primary school. There are altogether 52 vocational qualifications and 121 areas of expertise to choose from. The education in initial vocational schools is free; however any necessary equipment, material or course books will be funded by the student. The length of the studies in vocational schools is generally around three years and includes 120 credits. The 120 credits are mostly professional studies, covering more than 90 credits in total, leaving 20 credits for the general core studies, and 10 credits for the elective studies. (Vocational education and training in Finland. Read 27.11.2012.

http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/ammattillinen_koulutus/?lang=en)

3.3 Degree programme of tourism, hospitality and restaurant

The Degree Programme of Tourism, Hospitality and Restaurant is one of the fields studied in vocational schools, and currently it is the fourth most popular degree programme chosen by pupils. The length of the programme is identical with the other degree programmes including 120 credits, meaning approximately 2-3 years of studies. The studies consist of professional studies which are compulsory for everyone, general core studies and elective studies where the student can choose courses related to his/her studies. (Vocational education and training in Finland. Read 16.1.2013.

http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/ammattillinen_koulutus/?lang=en)

The Tourism, Hotel and Restaurant field is one of the fastest growing businesses and the need for professionals in this field is constant. The purpose of the tourism, hotel and restaurant industry is to meet and fulfil the expectations and needs of the customers as well as create new experiences. The aim is to promote the well-being of the customers and the quality of life by providing services and recreation in a comfortable and safe environment. (Tourism, Hotel and Restaurant degree. 2010. Read 16.1.2013.

<http://www.oph.fi/english>)

Moreover, the field of tourism, hotel and restaurant is very variable and international, which makes the language skills highly valued, in addition to the understanding and respect for different nationalities and cultures. The objective of the study programme is to focus on these qualities, while training service-oriented, liable and trustworthy professionals. Therefore performing the internship abroad is necessary for these students, to get the real picture of their own field, as well as getting familiar with and having first hand experiences with foreign cultures. (Tourism, Hotel- and Restaurant degree. 2010.Read 16.1.2013. <http://www.oph.fi/english>)

3.3.1 Students

Students applying for the vocational education are primarily at the age of 16 or older, and they most commonly enter the vocational institutions after primary school. There are around 130 vocational schools to choose from according to the statistics of 2011 revealed on the web page of Statistics Finland. Moreover, there are around 52 vocational qualifications and 121 areas of expertise for the students to choose from, and the tourism, hotel and restaurant field is one of them.

In the year 2011 there were approximately 133 800 students studying at the vocational schools, of which the new students made up around 50 600. Of the new students, a little over 6000 were accepted to study tourism, hotel or restaurant field, keeping the programme the fourth most popular field of studies.

In addition 9% of the students, approximately 11 000 students dropped out from the vocational school on the year 2009/2010, which was the latest statistics the author was able to find. Nevertheless, the statistics were only telling the amount of total drop outs, not the amount of specific study fields. What is more, it was stated in the web page of the Statistics Finland, that the most common field for the drop out was the natural resources and environmental field. According to this information, it can be concluded that tourism, hotel and restaurant field remains popular among students and the percent of students dropping out is relatively low. (Amount of students and vocational schools in Finland. 2012. Read 16.1.2013.

http://tilastokeskus.fi/til/kkesk/2010/kkesk_2010_2012-03-20_tie_001_fi.html)

3.3.2 Practical training

The practical training period focuses on supervised and target-oriented studies in the work place. The aim is to ensure that the students learn the practical part of the studies in an actual work environment. The practical training is a compulsory part of the studies which should cover at least 20 credits. Training is usually carried out at different times in different study fields and grades which are defined by the school. Most schools also offer the students the possibility to carry out all or part of their practical training period abroad, as long as it doesn't affect their length of studies. The training placement abroad is either organized with the help of the school, or solely by the student. It is recommended to take the practical training as a part of the second or third year of studies, since most employers require the students to know at least the basics of the field of their studies. Some employers also have the requirement for the student to be at least 18-years old, which makes it even more complicated for first year students to do their practical training abroad. (Työssäoppiminen. 2007. Read 20.12.2012.

http://www.pao.fi/tyossaoppiminen_2.php)

The easiest way to find a practical training place is through the school, since most schools have collaboration with employers around the world. There is also a chance for the students to find their own practical training placement; however, this needs to be agreed with the school, and the school needs to accept the work-based learning plan designed by the student. (Työssäoppiminen ulkomailla. 2012. Read 20.12.2012.

http://www.maailmalle.net/harjoittelu_ja_tyoskentely/tyossaoppiminen)

The practical training is primarily organized without employment, in which case the student's social benefits of the studies, such as study grant from Kela (The Social Insurance Institution of Finland) remains untouched. However, if the practical training is done through an employment agreement, there might appear some changes in the benefits of the student. Other grants students can claim through different mobility programmes, of which the most commonly known within vocational schools is the Leonardo da Vinci programme. (Työssäoppiminen. 2007. Read 20.12.2012.

http://www.pao.fi/tyossaoppiminen_2.php)

3.3.3 Study grants

Performing the practical training abroad has been popular among young students for a long time, and it has been made very easy for the students since most schools have collaboration with several companies around the world. Though carrying out the practical training abroad is not the cheapest solution, especially for those who don't have regular incomes or savings, or who still live with their parents. Living abroad means a lot of extra cash flow, and therefore it is good to know if it is possible to apply study grants for the time abroad. There are several solutions and grants that the student can apply for and they will be defined in a subchapter later on.

Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)

Lifelong Learning Programme is a European Union programme for education and training which has been active since 2007, and it is funded by the European Commission. The programme provides opportunities for students, organizations and staff working among education and training to learn from each other, to work together, and widen their knowledge and experiences of other cultures and languages. The LLP supports an extensive range of different activities related to education and training across Europe, and it provides opportunities of lifelong learning for people in all stages.

The Lifelong Learning Programme is made up of a several different programmes, in which each programme is targeted for a specific target group:

- **Comenius and eTwinning** – Schools
- **Erasmus** – Higher Education
- **Leonardo da Vinci** – Vocational Education and Training
- **Grundtvig** – Adult Education (non-vocational)

In this thesis the most important funding for the vocational school students is the Leonardo da Vinci funding, and it will be defined later on. However, a closer look will also be taken at the Comenius and Erasmus funding which are also important funding

alternatives in the Finnish education system. (Lifelong Learning Programme. 2011. Read 15.1.2013.

http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm;

Lifelong Learning Programme. 2010. Read 15.1.2013.

<http://www.lifelonglearningprogramme.org.uk/>)

Comenius

As a part of the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme, Comenius focuses on all levels of school education, from pre-school and primary to secondary schools. Comenius aims to help young people and educational staff to understand better the various European cultures, languages and values. It also helps pupils to acquire the basic life skills and competence that is necessary for individual development, future employment and active citizenship.

The main goal of Comenius is to improve and increase the mobility of pupils and staff within European countries as well as encourage the language learning. Moreover, Comenius hopes to increase and boost the partnership between schools between the EU member states, as well as upgrade the quality of the teacher training. (Comenius programme. 2012. Read 15.1.2013.

http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/comenius_en.htm)

Leonardo da Vinci

As a part of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme, Leonardo da Vinci grant funds projects carried out in the field of vocational education and training. The programme resources various types of activities in different fields, and normally includes mobility initiatives allowing people to network with people from other countries, creating co-operation projects and training skills in their own study field. Most of the funding is given to individuals to develop their skills in work-related training abroad, but also teacher training and recent graduates benefit from the Leonardo da Vinci funding.

Leonardo da Vinci programme is funding several types of activities which enable people in different sectors to develop various types of projects. These activities are divided into three main categories:

- Mobility projects: develop skills through exchange and placement programmes.
- Partnership: share knowledge and improve training provisions.
- Transfer of Innovations: share innovative approaches to training within a specific area.

The aim of the Leonardo da Vinci programme is to help individuals to gain new experiences and skills while working abroad, but it also makes it possible for the organizations working in the vocational education sector to work and exchange practices with partners across the Europe as well as increase their staff's expertise. By helping the staff to gain new skills, qualifications and knowledge in their own field, the programme also hopes to increase the competitiveness of the European labour market. (Leonardo da Vinci programme. 2012. Read 15.1.2013.

http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/ldv_en.htm;

Leonardo da Vinci programme. 2013. Read 15.1.2013.

<http://www.leonardo.org.uk/default.asp>)

Erasmus

Erasmus forms a part of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme and it is the leading educational exchange programme for higher education. Erasmus was introduced with an aim to increase the mobility of the students within Europe and it now operates in 33 countries, involving more than 4000 higher education institutions.

The main goal of Erasmus is to encourage students and staff mobility for work and study and to promote international cooperation projects among universities across Europe. The programme offers its target groups the following possibilities:

- Students: To go abroad from three months up to one year; either study in a partner university or carry out a work placement.

- Staff: To teach a minimum of five days up to 6 weeks. Also the non-teaching staff has the possibility to perform study visits or job-shadowing in a foreign country.
- Other possibilities, for example intensive programmes

Erasmus will work as an independent programme by the end of 2013, after which it will merge with the other Lifelong Learning Programmes to form one big mobility programme called Erasmus for All. (Erasmus programme. 2013. Read 15.1.2013.

http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/erasmus_en.htm;

Erasmus programme. 2010. Read 15.1.2013.

<http://www.lifelonglearningprogramme.org.uk/programme/erasmus#>)

Erasmus for All

Erasmus for All is a new programme from European Commission for education, training, youth and sport. The new programme is due to start in 2014 and continue until 2020. The new programme would replace seven existing programmes with one: it joins together the existing Lifelong Learning Programme (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius and Grundtvig), Youth in Action, and the international cooperation programmes (Erasmus Mundus, Tempus Alfa, Edulink and the programme for cooperation with industrialised countries). See figure 4.

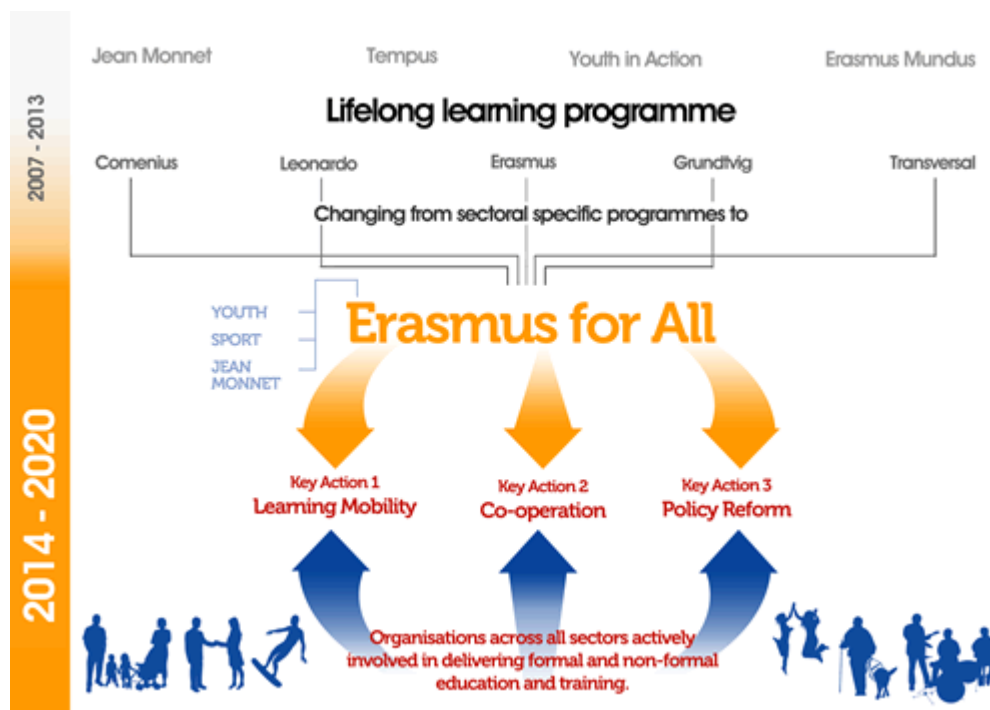


FIGURE 4. Proposed structure of the Erasmus for All Programme
<http://www.lifelonglearningprogramme.org.uk/erasmus-for-all>

The main aim of the existing programmes would remain the same in Erasmus for All: Increase the mobility, improve skills and knowledge of trainees as well as support the modernisation of education and training systems. Nevertheless, there would be some changes in the new programme even though the main idea and purpose of the programme remains the same with the existing programmes. One of the most significant changes would be the amount of grants awarded. The new programme enables up to 5 million people to study or train abroad with the grants from Erasmus for All, which is almost twice as many as the existing ones awarded at the moment. Other actions that Erasmus for All would support are the following:

- Learning opportunities for individuals in EU as well as countries outside European Union. This includes study and training, traineeships, volunteering, teaching and professional development. The new programme would give the European the option to study, train and teach at a higher education institution anywhere in the world and non-European students and staff have more opportunities to study and teach in Europe.

- Institutional cooperation between educational institutions, youth organisations as well as businesses and local authorities. The goal is to encourage the development and implementation in education and training and to promote employability and entrepreneurship.
- Cooperation with the non-European countries with a focus on strengthening the evidence-base for policies, as well as support the improvement policy within the Member States.
- A new loan guarantee scheme for the full-time Master's degree students to help them finance their studies abroad.
- To create 400 "knowledge alliances" and "sector skills alliances". Knowledge alliances are large-scale partnerships between higher education institutions and businesses whereas sector skills alliances are partnerships between education and training providers and businesses.

Erasmus for all will be open to all EU-member states, as well as for Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and countries in Western Balkan. In addition, also non-European countries (mostly the neighbourhood countries) will benefit from activities to promote study and training opportunities abroad.

Erasmus for All programme is currently at the proposal stage, which means that is not yet been approved by all the Member States or European Parliament. The proposal may change as a result of the negotiations and approval process. (Erasmus for All. 2012. Read 15.1.2013. <http://www.lifelonglearningprogramme.org.uk/>;

Erasmus for All. 2012. Read 15.1.2013.

<http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all/>;

Erasmus for All. 2013. Read 15.1.2013.

<http://www.eaea.org/erasmus>)

KELA- The Social Insurance Institution of Finland

The Social Insurance Institution of Finland, commonly known as KELA, looks after the basic security of the people resident in Finland. The terms and conditions of the benefits provided by Kela are defined specifically in legislation. Kela's mission is to secure the

incomes, promote the health of the entire nation, as well as to support the ability of individuals to care for themselves. Kela is also helping students during their studies by providing financial aid. Young individuals can apply several different financial aids from Kela after finishing their studies in primary school, and when continuing further with the studies. (The Social Insurance Institution of Finland. 2009. Read 16.1.2013. <http://kela.fi/>)

Students can apply for a financial aid if studying as a full time student, either in upper secondary school, vocational school or institution of higher education. The amount of the financial aid varies, based on the institution where the studies are carried out, student's age and accommodation type. Also the incomes of the student, or occasionally the income of the parents may affect to the amount of the financial aid.

The sectors of the financial aid provided to the students by Kela are the following: Study grant, housing supplements and government guarantees for student loans. (The Social Insurance Institution of Finland. 2009. Read 16.1.2013. <http://kela.fi/>)

Study grants

A study grant is paid for the students by the government and it can only be received for those months that the studies are carried out. The student can start receiving the study grant when turning 17. Before this the student receives aid called child benefit, and is not eligible to receive a study grant.

However, there are few requirements by Kela that the student must follow in order to get the study grant. One of them is that the studies have to last at least 2 months continuously, or the student has to receive a specific amount of credits per study month. The student is also eligible to receive a study grant while studying or working abroad. However the studies and courses have to be part of the study programme and match with the studies carried out in Finland, or work needs to be related to the student's own field of studies.

It is also possible for the student to receive the study grant for the summer months (June, July, August), if the student is taking summer classes or performs the practical

training during the summer time. The studies carried out during the summer have to reach 3 credits per month, or last at least 18 days continuously.

The amount of the study grant for the vocational school students depends on their age, housing arrangements and their parents' incomes, and it can be anything between 38€ up to 246€ per month. (Study Grant. 2012. Read 16.1.2013. <http://kela.fi/>)

Housing supplement

In addition to the study grant, the pupil can also apply for a grant called housing supplement. The requirements to receive the housing supplement are equal to the requirements of financial aid in general.

Like the study grant, the housing supplement is also paid for only those months that the student is actually studying, and only to that apartment where the studies are managed. The student also has to have a valid contract with the housing company and deliver Kela the rental agreement of the housing.

However, student is not allowed to receive a housing supplement if living with parents, or if the school is offering free housing for the students. The amount of the housing supplement varies a lot and can be anything between 26,90€ to 201,60€ per month. (Housing Supplement. 2012. Read 16.1.2012. <http://kela.fi/>)

Government guarantees for student loans

In addition to Study Grant and Housing Supplement, the financial aid also includes an arrangement where the student loans are guaranteed by the government. These loans are granted by the banks and the student can contact the bank about the loan when he/she has received the confirmation from Kela that the student is eligible to receive a student loan. (Government guarantees for student loans. 2012. Read 18.1.2013. <http://kela.fi/>)

All students who are receiving a Study Grant are entitled to receive study loans. However, there are also exceptions where students who don't receive Study Grant are

permitted to receive the loan. The requirements to receive the loan are that the student must be 18-19 years old, live on his/her own and cannot receive Study Grants on account of his/her parents incomes. Moreover, also students under 17 years old are permitted to receive the loan if the student lives on his/her own, is not studying in upper secondary school and cannot receive the Study Grant on account of being entitled to receive the Child Benefit. (Government guarantees for student loans. 2012. Read 18.1.2013. <http://kela.fi/>)

Figure 5 shows the amounts of study loans permitted to the students based on their age and level of education. According to the figure, the vocational school students would receive the loan of 160-300€per month while studying. However the figure also shows that if studying outside Finland, the loan would be 600€per month. Conversely it does not reveal whether the vocational school students are also eligible for this benefit, or if it is only for those studying in higher education.

Government guarantees for student loans (€ per month)	
Secondary education: Students aged under 18	160
Secondary education: Students aged 18 or over	300
Higher education	300
Recipients of adult education allowance (studying in Finland)	300
For those studying outside Finland	600

FIGURE 5. The amount of government guarantees for student loans
(<http://kela.fi/in/internet/english.nsf/NET/081001133800IL>)

4 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

4.1 Background information

The empirical part of the research was divided into two parts; the survey and the interviews, to find out how interested the students are about performing their practical training abroad and how schools are supporting these students. The survey was performed by using the questionnaire designed by the author and the questionnaire was delivered to the students of four different schools; Tampereen seudun ammattiopisto Tredu, Satakunnan koulutuskuntayhtymä (Sataedu), Turun ammatti-instituutti (TAI) and Koulutuskeskus Salpaus. The author was also considering the possibility of including two more schools into the research, Helsingin palvelualojen oppilaitos (Helpa) and Ravintolakoulu Perho, both hospitality schools located in Helsinki. However, Perho had already been contacted by Spain Internship SC and it was not considered necessary to include it in the author's research. Helpa was also excluded from the research due to some difficulties in delivering the questionnaires to the school. The decision of choosing the four schools mentioned above was done in collaboration with Susanna Mettomäki, the CRM and founder of Spain Internship SC.

Turun ammatti-instituutti

One of Finland's largest vocational upper secondary institutes, Turun ammatti-instituutti (Turku Vocational Institute) TAI, offers basic and further educational training for young people and adults in the fields of Business Economics and Services, Technology and Health and Welfare. TAI has 1500 new admissions every year, 6000 adult students and 3900 youngsters studying in its eight different units around the city of Turku. The main language of the studies is Finnish, but there are a few educational units where the studies can be carried out in Swedish as well.

The present school started to operate in 1.8.1998 when the former schools of Turun ammatti-instituutti (Turku Vocational Institute), Turun Kauppaoppilaitos (Turku Commercial College), Turun Teknillinen ammattioppilaitos (Turku Technical Institute) and Turun terveydenhuolto-oppilaitos (Turku Nursing School) merged into one; Turun

ammatti-instituutti (Turku Vocational Institute). The institution is maintained by the city of Turku, and is run and developed by the Upper Secondary and Vocational Education Board. Currently the school is offering 26 different basic degrees and one of them is the hotel, restaurant, catering and tourism field, which was one of the main reasons why TAI was chosen for the research. (<http://www.turkuai.fi>)

Tampereen seudun ammattiopisto Tredu

As the newest vocational school in this research, Tampereen seudun ammattiopisto Tredu (Tampere Vocational College) was established in 1.1.2013, when uniting Pirkanmaan ammattiopisto (Pirkanmaa Educational Consortium) and Tampereen ammattiopisto (Tampere College). After uniting these two institutes, Tredu is now one of Finland's largest vocational upper secondary institutes, and on its first term, 8000 youngsters and 10000 adults study at Tredu.

Tredu offers over 30 different basic degrees, 35 vocational degrees and 11 specialist qualifications. In Tredu, some of the degrees can also be studied in English. Due to its vast amount of degrees, Tredu has been divided into several campuses around the Pirkanmaa area, the campuses are located in Tampere, Ylöjärvi, Nokia, Kangasala, Lempäälä, Orivesi, Ikaalinen and Virrat. Also in Tredu, the student can gain a qualification as a chef, waitress, receptionist and in tourism and travel services.

(<http://www.tredu.fi/>)

Satakunnan koulutuskuntayhtymä

Satakunnan koulutuskuntayhtymä, Sataedu (Satakunta Educational Federation of Municipalities), was established in beginning of 2010, after the merger of several institutions in the region. Sataedu now trains over 3000 students in over 20 different professions in both young and adult education. The institution is also divided into several different campuses in Satakunta area and the offices can be found in Harjavalta, Huittinen, Kankaanpää, Kokemäki, Nakkila and Ulvila. In three of these campuses hotel, restaurant, catering or tourism studies are taught. (<https://sataedu.fi/fi>)

Koulutuskeskus Salpaus

Koulutuskeskus Salpaus (Salpaus Further Education) is a regional college providing vocational education and training in the Lahti region. Salpaus offers 130 vocational qualifications in 34 fields as well as general upper secondary education for both young and adult students. The institution was founded on 1.1.2001 and it forms its own division in Lahti Region Educational Consortium.

Salpaus has its campuses in Lahti, Asikkala, Hollola, Orimattila, Heinola and Nastola. These campuses have around 20 000 students yearly, of which around 5500 students study basic degrees and 13 000 in adult education. Hotel, restaurant, catering and tourism studies take place in Lahti and Heinola. (<http://www.salpaus.fi>)

4.2 Analysis of the interviews

The first part of the empirical research was the interviews. In the end of January, the author contacted each school and scheduled the interviews with each school's international coordinator to talk about the school's policy of carrying out the practical training abroad, how the schools are supporting the students and whether they would be interested in collaboration with Spain Internship SC. The interviews were scheduled to take place within the two weeks following the phone calls, which meant that collecting the final data would be completed by the middle of February. However, one school was not able to schedule a face-to-face interview which the author would have preferred. Instead the questions of the interview were delivered to the coordinator via e-mail and the questions were answered the next day to the best of their abilities.

To carry out the interviews, the author travelled to each city to meet the coordinator and perform the interview. The questions used in the interviews were designed by the author but were not written until the author had a Skype meeting with Ms Mettomäki to find out what information the company would like to receive from these interviews.

The first interview was scheduled on the 31st of January with Anne Tyynelä, the international coordinator of the restaurant and hotel field in Tredu. The second

interview was carried out through e-mail with the international coordinator of Koulutuskeskus Salpaus. The interviewee wished to stay anonymous and therefore his/her name will not be revealed in this thesis. The third interview was held on 11th of February in Turku with Teija Suominen, the international coordinator of Turun ammatti-instituutti, followed by the last interview with Marko Kemppinen, the head of international affairs of Sataedu on the 13th of February. The author asked each coordinator the same questions which she had designed beforehand, and the author used a recording device to save the interview for a later hearing. Nevertheless the recording was done for the author's use only and the interviews were not transcribed. The answers to the questions have been analyzed in this thesis as a whole and in the way the author has received the information from the interviewees. Each school's way of working in the international path is described in the thesis; nevertheless a straight comparison between the schools will not be presented and the author will not reveal her own statements or opinions. The first part of the questions were concerning the amount of students who are doing their practical training abroad, the length of the practical training and the grants and support they received from the school for the practical training period.

As stated earlier in the theoretical framework of this thesis, the practical training is a compulsory part of each vocational student's individual study plan and the minimum length of the training is usually 20 credits for the whole three years of studies. This is also the limit in the schools chosen for this research. However, in Koulutuskeskus Salpaus, the students perform a practical training of 32-40 credits, which is slightly higher than usually. Nevertheless, it was also mentioned by each international coordinator that it is vastly common among the students to perform a longer training periods than 20 credits to get more out of their practice. The practical trainings are also performed in more than one period. The lengths of the training period vary, and are very much depending on the student. When the author inquired about the normal length of the practical training, the answers varied between schools but most commonly it was specified that the popular length is between 6-10 weeks.

Unlike in universities, the vocational school students do not perform their practical trainings during the summer, but during the academic year. The training periods are most commonly taking place during the spring time, especially for third year students. However, there are some exceptions depending on the study field, the year of studies

and how the training period suits best for the student's schedule. Mr Kemppinen pointed out that in Sataedu they are encouraging their third year students to perform their final practical training during the spring time due to the fact that the students would have the chance to continue working at the same company through the summer, or sign a contract for a permanent position. During the spring time around 30-40 tourism, hotel and restaurant students from each school; Tredu, Turun ammatti-instituutti and Salpaus are heading abroad to perform their practical training. In Sataedu the scale is not yet as large, since the present institution has been in operation around three years and the international services are still developing. Despite this, Sataedu has built strong partnership alliances with several different institutions and companies around Europe.

These strong alliances, that for example Sataedu has created, are also the base for the other schools when it comes to finding the practical training place. Each school has several partnerships in Europe, as well as beyond, which enables the students to find the training places easier. Ms Tyynelä from Tredu mentioned in her interview that as a rule most students apply for the practical training places through the collaborators which have been approved by Ms Tyynelä and there are only few students who find their training places on their own. Collaborators are also the main practical training place employers for Sataedu and Salpaus, nevertheless, in Turun ammatti-instituutti, finding the placement through a partner or by student him/herself is approximately fifty-fifty according to the international coordinator Ms Suominen.

Companies are not the only collaborators which schools use to find practical training places for their students. Creating an alliance with another institution does not just give the students the possibility to study abroad as an exchange student, but they also have the chance to apply for training places through the foreign institutions' collaborators. Creating the alliances with the institutions has been beneficial for the schools, because when the student is sent abroad through another institution, the receiving institution normally arranges the accommodation for the students. Nevertheless, it is also common for students of the tourism, hotel and restaurant fields to perform their practical trainings at hotels that have allowed them to live on the hotel premises throughout their training period.

The schools chosen for this research are all internationally minded and encourage students to spread their wings and gain some international experience through exchange

or practical training abroad. Despite this, some students are still wary of performing their practical training abroad since it has been stated quite clearly, and for a long time, that the training period should not affect the student's length of studies and it has to be part of the study programme and match with the studies that are carried out in Finland. Also, some teachers have been denying the graduation of the student since he/she has not carried out one of their courses. Fortunately, this thinking is about to be changed during the following year. Ms Tyynelä mentioned in her interview that in Tredu they are starting to use a system called ECVET (The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training) which allows the student to undertake courses and practical training abroad, and when returning to his/her home institution, those studies will be transferred and accepted as part of the student's own study plan. ECVET is comparable to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) which is widely used in universities and universities of applied sciences. (<http://ec.europa.eu>) This allows the students to graduate on time, and they do not necessarily have to take similar courses again in Finland. However this system is not yet in use, but will become a part of the vocational school system next year. Also Turun ammatti-instituutti will start using ECVET next year, and according to Ms Suominen, the ECVET application has already been attached to the newest Leonardo da Vinci-grant applications. The same applies to Sataedu as well as Salpaus. All the international coordinators also stated that in the future when the partnership is created, the Memorandum of Understanding document will be used, which is part of the new ECVET system and will state the rules and regulations that the new collaboration is required to meet.

The majority of the schools chosen for the research have the Leonardo da Vinci grant in use for the students who wished to study abroad. Having a possibility to apply for a study grant such as Leonardo da Vinci gives the students more possibilities to look for practical training places abroad, knowing that they will get some financial support while working abroad, even if the company offering the training placement would not pay any salary for the intern. Each school also has their own mobility grant that they can issue for the students. This amount was varying from 300€ to 600€ in total, it was delivered before the practical training as a whole and was particularly meant for those students who were applying for the practical training without the Leonardo da Vinci grant, or found their training placement by themselves and not through the school's collaboration partners.

Three out of four schools also did not have any limits of how many students are allowed to go abroad for practical training per year. Sataedu was at the moment the only one that had set a limit of 20 students for both, fields of services and fields of technology. According to Mr Kemppinen, the head of the international affairs of Sataedu, this is not a permanent solution, and is valid for now when the school is financing the practical training through its own mobility fund. Sataedu has applied for Leonardo da Vinci funding for the next year, and if the school receives the grant, this means that the new project will allow 10% of all the students to go abroad yearly. Moreover, since the mobility in Sataedu is still not as common and not in as large scale as in the other schools, they are now trying first to get mobility for each study field through the Leonardo-project, which will mean that around 8 students from each field will get a change to go abroad yearly and get a share of the grant. At the moment Sataedu has around 80 study fields. Furthermore, Mr Kemppinen added that the number set as a limit will most likely be exceeded, since there are a lot of students eager to perform their practical training abroad.

When it comes to selecting which students are chosen to study abroad, the actual selection process to choose the applicants already begins at school. The students who desire to go abroad first need to talk with their group leader, who will check whether the studies of the student have proceeded according to the plan and whether the situation is ideal for him/her to perform the practical training abroad. After this, the students will write their CV in English and a motivation letter, and then the students will be interviewed in English. According to Ms Tyynelä from Tredu, the point of view of the teachers and their opinions have a lot of weight when it comes to deciding whether the student is eligible to perform his/her practical training abroad or not. After that, the final elimination may or may not happen at the side of the company. However, Ms Suominen from Turun ammatti-instituutti states that this is very rare, and the main elimination usually happens inside the school. Nevertheless both coordinators stated that even though they do not set limits for how many students are allowed to go abroad per year, the funding for these practical trainings have limits. The school is not able to give away grants limitlessly, so therefore the elimination process is carried out to make sure that students who deserve to go abroad get this chance.

Schools are also offering different kind of a support for students who are chosen to carry out their training abroad. In Tredu the students have a 4 week training period;

2 weeks of language training and two weeks of cultural training for the students to get familiar with the culture in which they are about to be a part of. Also in Turun ammatti-instituutti they are organizing meetings with former students who have been abroad and who are willing to share their experiences, thoughts and advice. However, in Turku they are encouraging the students more to search for information on their own, since they also have to survive by themselves abroad and gain the knowledge through experiences. Related to this, the school has an internet based course for the students which they have to complete before their practical training abroad. Sataedu on the other hand is organizing a few compulsory courses related to internationality, such as cultural knowledge and extra English language courses, which each student who desires to go abroad has to choose. In addition, Sataedu also has an internet based course for the students which they have to complete before departure.

Considering the practical training in Spain, the majority of schools do not have Spanish lessons organised by them, but the students have the opportunity to choose foreign language courses as elective studies. This was highly recommended especially for students heading abroad. The international coordinator of Salpaus reported that in Salpaus the Spanish studies are possible, but only for some specific fields of studies. However these fields were not specified in the answer received from the school.

All the schools chosen for the research do have a lot of international cooperation going on already, despite whether they had a Leonardo da Vinci grant or not. European countries were especially popular, and particularly schools have a lot of collaboration with the Netherlands and Hungary. The schools were also mentioning other funding opportunities that they have for their students other than Leonardo and their own mobility funds to encourage students to gain experiences abroad. These grants were Comenius, Grundtvig, funds from Finnish National Board of Education, own funds of the cities, Nordplus and other Nordic projects. Each coordinator that the author interviewed also mentioned several ongoing projects that are being planned with institutions abroad. These projects are linked to the new ECVET contract and the new courses will be available for the students after the contract has been specified and approved by both institutions. Knowing that the schools have previous knowledge of creating alliances with the companies and institutions is beneficial also for the Spain Internship SC since it means that the schools already know how things work. Setting the

rules and knowing each other's requirements will be easy once the new ECVET contract comes into effect and the rules are stated in the contract.

The second part of the interview was more focused on how schools are creating the alliances, if they have some requirements concerning the practical training places and whether it is possible to create the collaboration between the school and Spain Internship SC.

When going through the interviews, the author could find out that each school has its own requirements which they considered important when it comes to the benefits that the students will gain from the partnership contract. However there were some similarities that stand out from each interview. One of the priorities was that the students would not have to find the accommodation on their own, and it would be provided by the company or institution. Whether this accommodation was organized in a hotel where the student will be working, or in a dormitory provided by the institution did not seem to matter, as long as the student did not have to spend the entire grant paying for accommodation that he/she will have for the practical training. Like Mr Kemppinen stated at his interview; it would be senseless to move money back and forth if, for example, both institutions could provide the accommodation for each other's students for free. Also Ms Tyynelä from Tredu was very clear that the students should not have to find the accommodation by themselves since for most of them this might be the first time abroad and they expect that the training place provider will take care of the accommodation for them. Ms Suominen from Turun ammatti-instituutti also mentioned that if the institution is providing the practical training place, then they should also provide the accommodation for the student. From the companies the school is expecting some help to find the accommodation so that student does not have to stress about it.

The second similarity that the international coordinators mentioned was that providing some sort of guidance and help to get settled in with the local culture would be beneficial. Entering a new culture can be quite of a shock for most people, and therefore, even though the schools are preparing the students already before the trip, it never quite matches with the reality, and a help to get adjusted in the new home city is appreciated.

The final similarity was trust. Some of the coordinators pointed out that trusting each other is a base for a long lasting and strong alliance which is what the schools are looking for. Mr Kemppinen mentioned in his interview that Sataedu's aim is not to create vast amount of collaboration with different companies and institutions, but create a strong alliance with fewer partners. Also Ms. Suominen mentioned that Turun ammatti-instituutti has trustworthy partnerships with several institutions, but also with student service organizations that have shown that the supervision of the students is working properly within the practical training places and the students are taking care of well.

When the author inquired the international coordinators about whether it would be possible to create a partnership contract between the schools and Spain Internship SC, the response to the question was not a straight "yes" in the beginning. Like Ms. Tyynelä mentioned in her interview, Tredu has not used internship service organizations for the reason that the companies are usually requiring a commission for their services. This would mean that part of the Leonardo da Vinci grant would be spent before the practical training has even started. However this is not the case with Spain Internship SC; the company is aware that the funding the students are receiving is not sky-high, and therefore has created a new program for the vocational school students where students would not have to pay the commission fee. This way the student is able to keep the whole grant and support his/her own living during the training period.

Spain Internship SC also fills the other requirements that the schools were hoping to receive for their students. Most of the practical training places that the company is offering for the tourism, hotel and restaurant students are of the hotels that have promised not just to provide the practical training place for the students but also the accommodation and three meals per day. This ensures that the start of the training period is as easy and smooth as possible for the young students. However there are also some practical training places that are not able to provide the accommodation for the students, and in those cases, Spain Internship SC will find the proper accommodation for the students with help of the accommodation service agency that it is in collaboration with.

Some of the international coordinators also mentioned that they were hoping for some sort of guidance for the students when arriving in the country. Spain Internship SC starts

preparing the interns already before the actual training period starts by providing useful information about the work place as well as the city in which they will stay. The company has also created a facebook page where all the interns will be added, and where the old and new interns can share information before, during and after the practical training. This enables the new interns to receive first hand information about the place they will be going to and hear stories from others.

In addition, Spain Internship SC also arranges city tours for new incoming students. This is especially prominent in Seville where most of the practical trainings take place and where the main office of Spain Internship SC is located. Occasionally the company arranges get-together nights with the interns, but mostly it is the students who arrange happenings and meetings with other interns, to experience something together that is very typical for the culture. As the author has also experienced the internship herself in Seville, she can confirm that the connection between the students is extremely tight, everything is done together and no one is left alone or behind. The author has also been in charge of arranging city tours around Seville, with the aim of showing the new interns their new home city and to get familiar with the surroundings. What is more, in the case of an emergency, Ms Mettomäki can be reached at any time of the day if needed which should provide a feeling of security for the new students.

After the author explained how the process of getting the practical training place goes, and that Spain Internship SC would not charge any commission from the vocational school students who apply practical training place through them, the coordinators were interested in hearing more about the company and what they have to offer for their students. The author received the contact information of the coordinators with whom she had face-to-face interviews and transmitted this information to Ms Mettomäki, who will be in touch with the coordinators to find out if the collaboration will be possible with each school, as well as build the trust between the company and the schools.

4.3 Analysis of the survey

The second part of the empirical research was the questionnaire survey. The questionnaires delivered to the students included 16 closed questions about the students'

interest level in doing their practical training abroad, and especially in Spain, their command of languages and accommodation preferences.

The author contacted each school's student advisor and asked their permission to carry out the survey in their school. Two of the student advisors volunteered to carry out the survey among their students if the author sends the questionnaire to them by e-mail, and within few weeks the questionnaires were delivered to the author by mail. One student advisor did receive the survey by e-mail as she requested, but failed to send the author any replies after that. The fourth school required the author to fill in a research application and get permission from the city to carry out the research.

The application to perform the survey at the school was sent to the city's production manager who is in charge of approving the applications. Approximately one week later the author received an affirmative answer from the city by mail to carry on with the research. Conversely, after the author had received the permission from the city to carry out the survey among the students of Tredu, she was not able to get in touch with the student advisor who had agreed to help the author to collect the data. Therefore the author was not able to collect the data for the survey in time.

The following figures show the results of the answers the author received from the two schools. There were total of 167 respondents, and each, hotel, tourism and restaurant field was represented in the results.

In the first figure (figure 6) the gender distribution of the respondents who took part in the questionnaire survey is shown.

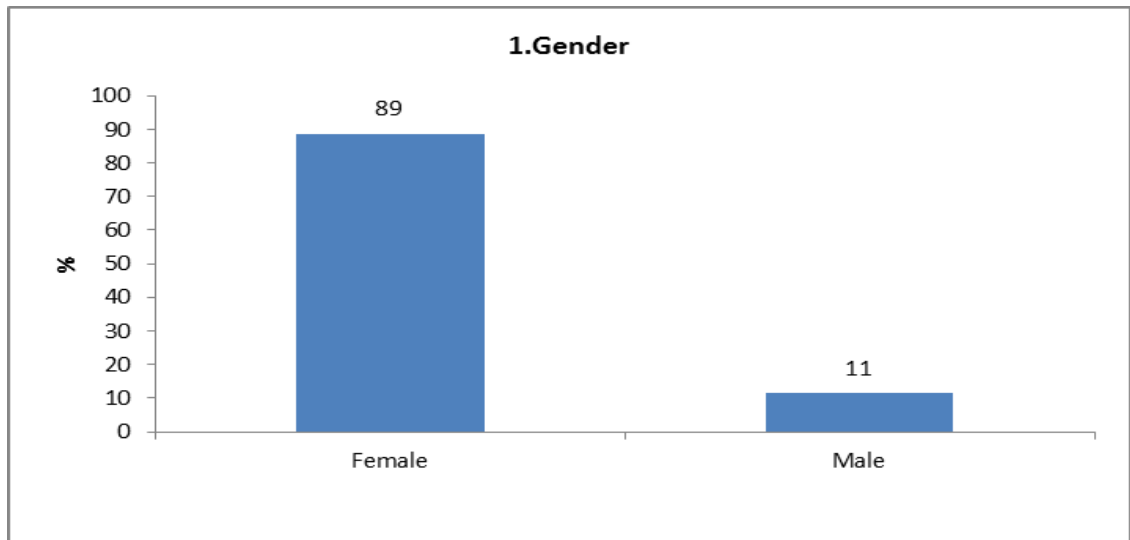


FIGURE 6. Gender distribution of the respondents

Majority of the respondents were females with the amount of 89 percent of all the respondents. However, the result does not show from which field of studies the students are. It is possible that the 11 percent is only from one specific study field which is more popular among male students.

Figure 7 reveals the age distribution of the respondents who took part in the survey. The result shows that half of the respondents were between the ages of 17-19 years old. The second largest group was the students between the ages of 20-22 years old with the result of 26 percent. The remaining two groups; students at the age of 16 and under, and 23 and above, had the equal result of 12 percent each leaving them to be the smallest groups represented in the survey.

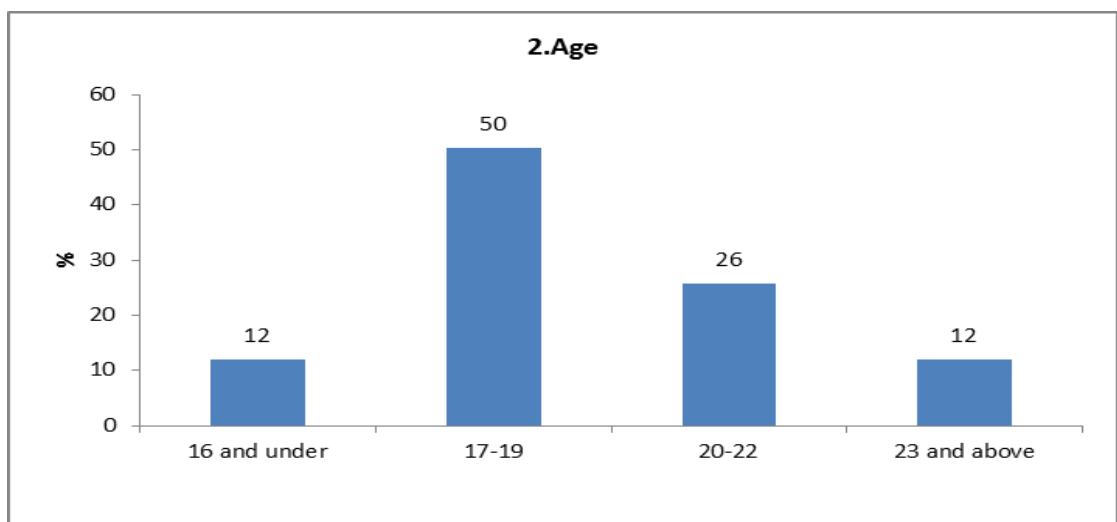


FIGURE 7: Age distribution of the respondents

The age distribution shows positive results to the author considering Spain Internships SC's future plan to expand its services to the vocational school level. Like mentioned earlier in the thesis, the students wishing to perform their practical training abroad should be at least 18 years old. The outcome of the survey reveals that majority of the respondents would meet this requirement with the total of a little over 80 percent of all the respondents. Nevertheless, the result does not reveal how many of the respondents from the biggest group were still younger than 18 years old at the time of the survey, which may lower the overall number of possible candidates significantly.

In the following figure (figure 8), the allocation of the study fields among the respondents is revealed. The study fields chosen for the survey were tourism, hotel and restaurant fields due to the fact that the author herself is studying in a tourism field. The result of the survey shows that the majority of the respondents were also studying in the tourism field, covering the total of 44 percent of all the respondents. The second largest group was the restaurant field with just one percent lower result than tourism field. This leaves the hotel field being the smallest group represented with the total of 13 percent.

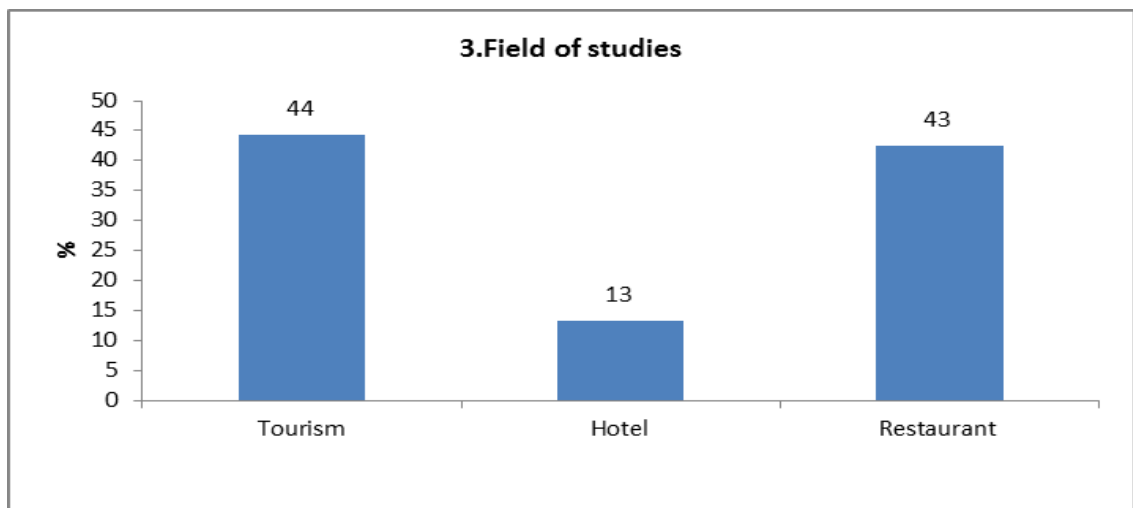


FIGURE 8: Study fields of the respondents

However, like mentioned earlier in this chapter, the questionnaires were delivered to the students by the student advisors, and only for those students who were at the school during the time when the research was carried out. Therefore it can be deduced that by the time of the research, some of the hotel students might have been doing their practical training and could not therefore take part in the survey, which can be seen in the small respond rate among hotel students.

The starting year of the respondents' studies is shown in the figure 9. The result shows that majority of the respondents, 43 percent, started their studies in 2011, which means that they are on their second year of studies at the moment. The second biggest group was the first year students who started their studies in the year of 2012 with the overall result of 35 percent. The smallest group represented was the students who started their studies in 2010 or earlier with the result of 22 percent. The results gained from the figure 7 already gave leading information that the majority of the respondents might be the second year students based on their age. Based on the results gained from this figure, the total number of possible candidates performing their practical training abroad is more than half of all the respondents which again shows positive signals for Spain Internship SC.

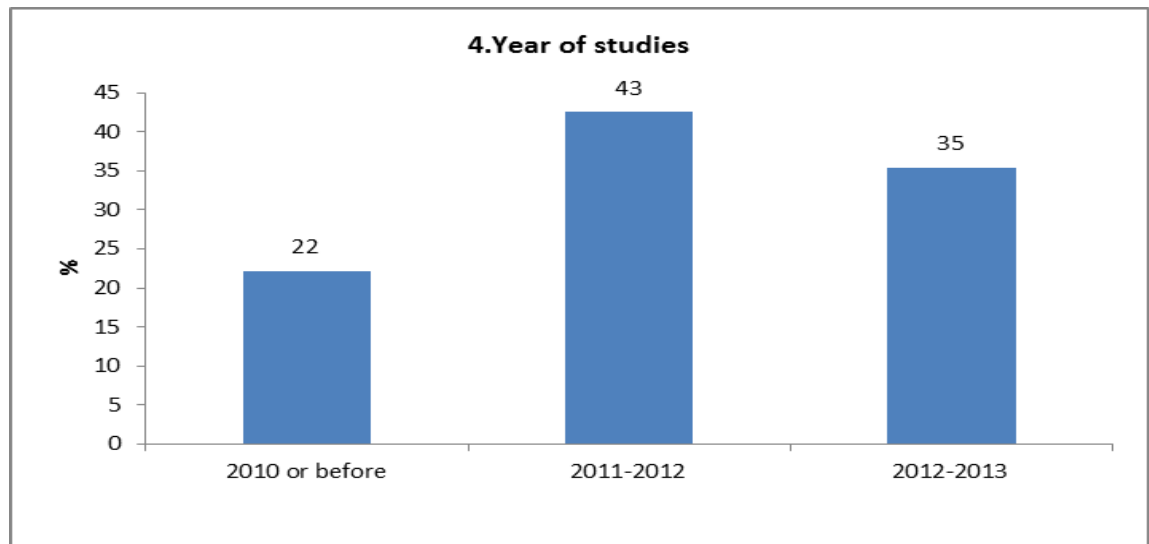


FIGURE 9. Starting year of the studies among the respondents

It was decided that question number five of the questionnaire should be removed from the results due to the fact that the author was only able to perform the survey in two schools out of four. The author wanted to analyse from which schools most of the respondents came and from which school the students were most eager to go abroad. However, the author found this question irrelevant while the thesis process moved on and decided not to add it to the results received from the questionnaires.

The results of the respondents' interest level in performing their practical training abroad is shown in the figure 10. The biggest group, 40 percent of all the respondents indicated that they are extremely interested in performing the practical training abroad.

The second largest group of 23 percent showed to be quite interested, followed by the third largest group of somewhat interested by the overall result of 14 percent. The third and fourth largest groups, who were either not at all interested or did not know, had the same result of 8 percent of the total. This leaves the smallest group to be those who had very little interest in performing their practical training abroad with the result of 7 percent. The outcome of the results shows that over half of all respondents had some interest in going abroad at some point of their studies to perform the practical training. This indicates that even the younger students are eager to gain more international experiences and are willing to move abroad to gain it. This is also useful information for Spain Internship SC in their attempt to offer their services for vocational school students. They can now plan even further the services they are planning to offer for the students since it is obvious that there is a lot of interest among the students to do practical training abroad.

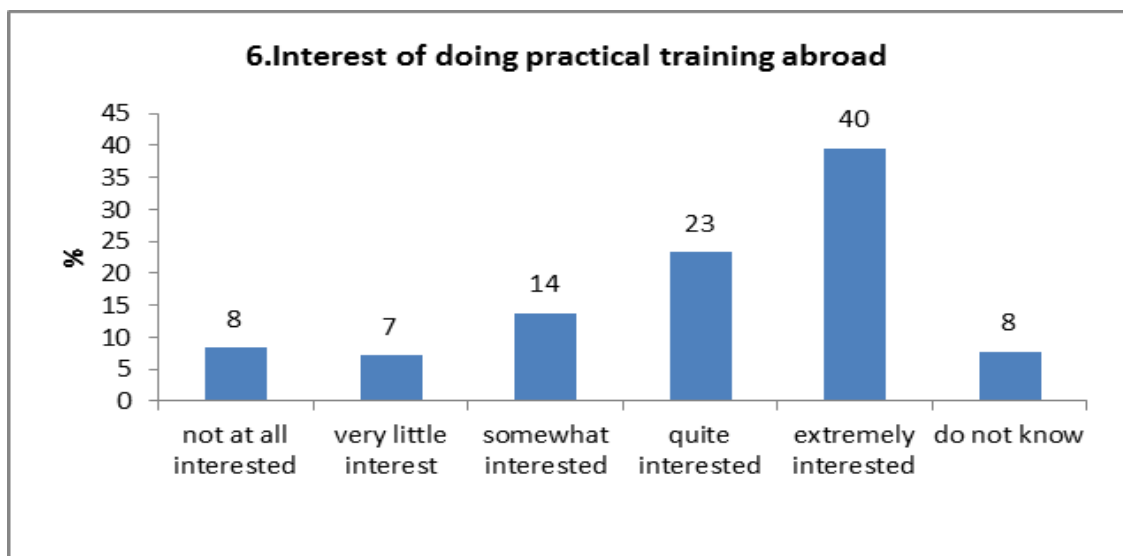


FIGURE 10. Respondents' interest level in performing the practical training abroad

Figure 11 shows the result of the respondents' preferred length of the practical training. Nearly 60 students and the majority of the respondents chose the ideal length of stay to be between one to two months. The second favoured option was two to three months training period chosen by 35 students of the respondents. The third and fourth largest groups had almost the same amount of responses; 18 students of the respondents would like to have a practical training less than 30 days, and 17 students longer than 3 months. 23 students were not able to indicate their preferred length of a training period, and five students would have chosen some other option.

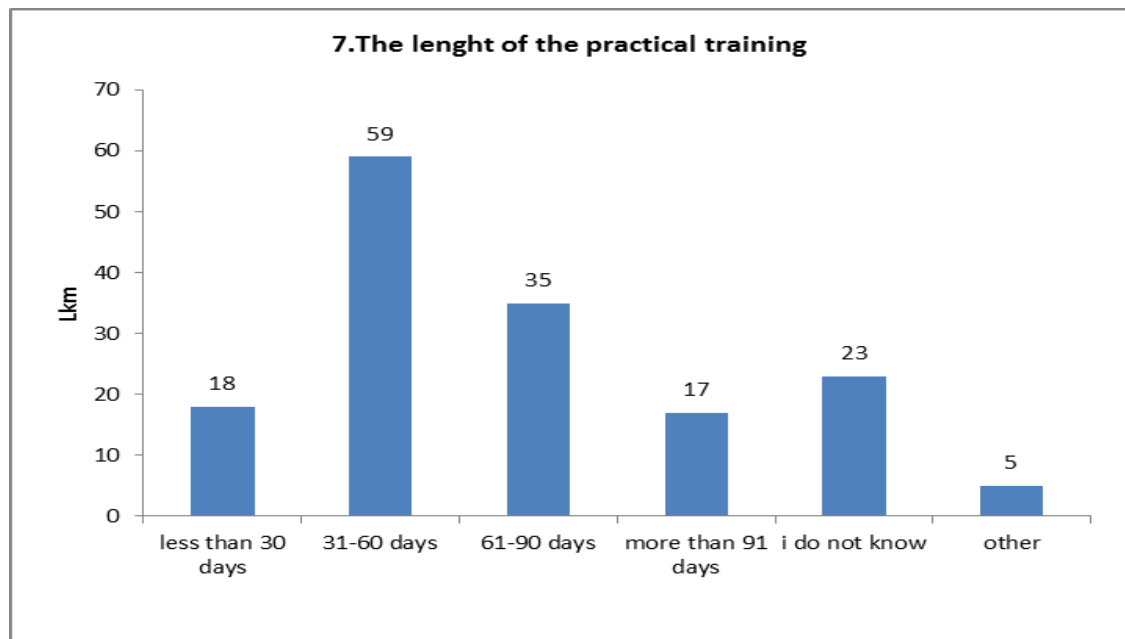


FIGURE 11. The respondents' preferred length of the practical training

The author also asked the students to specify what other length they would prefer if the given option would not be satisfying. Two of the students stated that any length of practical training will do, one preferred nine weeks training period, and the remaining two either two to four months training or a period of one year. According to the international coordinators, one to two months training periods are the most preferred and suggested length for the practical training. During that time the students are able to get most out of their experience and gain new skills.

To find out whether the practical training places offered by Spain Internship SC would also be appealing to the students because of their location in Spain, the author wanted to find out about the students' general interest in carrying out the practical training specifically in Spain.



FIGURE 12. Respondents' interest in carrying out the practical training in Spain

25 percent of the students were either quite interested or somewhat interested in carrying out their practical training in Spain. The third largest group of 21 percent of all the respondents was extremely interested about Spain. Nearly with the same amount of answers, 12 percent of the respondents either had very little interest or were not at all interested with the total of 11 percent. Six percent of the respondents chose the "I do not know" answer which was the smallest group represented. The result reveals that a little less than half of all the respondents would be interested in performing their training in Spain. However, the respondents did not know what type of practical training places Spain Internship SC could offer them, or in which parts of Spain they would be located. The result could change both ways if this information would be revealed.

The following figure 13 shows with whom the respondents would like to perform their practical training. Over half of the respondents, 123 out of 167 would most prefer to perform the training with a friend. 46 students would like to experience the practical training on their own and 23 students with their partner. The remaining 23 students would prefer going abroad with a group.

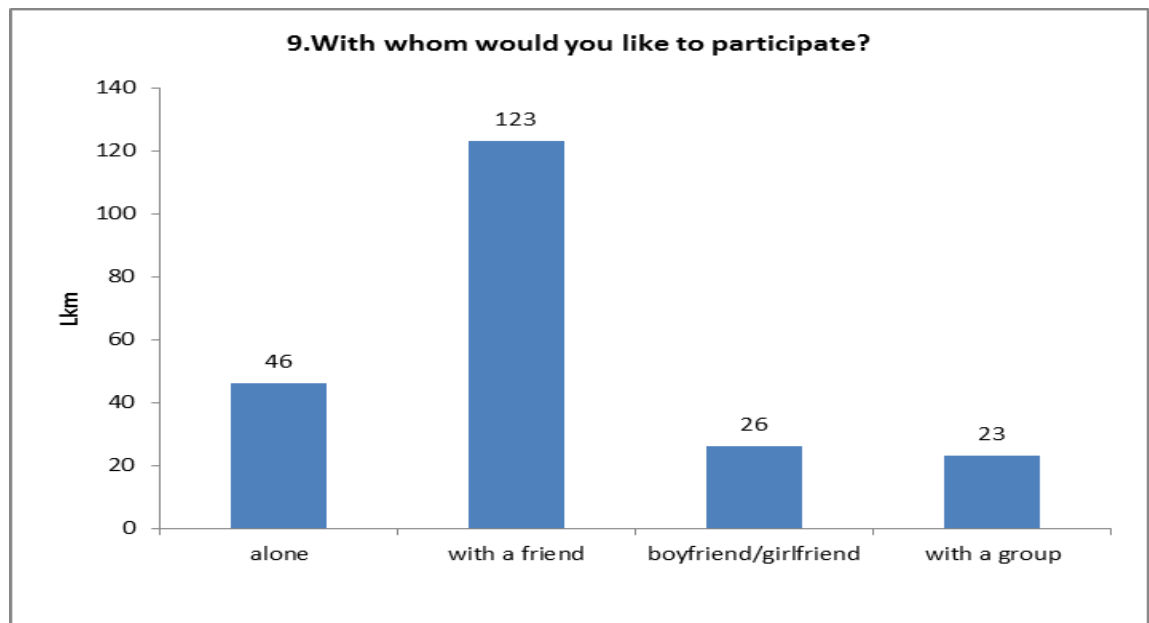


FIGURE 13. With whom the respondents would like to perform the practical training

The result of the figure 13 indicates that most of the students would feel more comfortable and most likely safer to perform the practical training with a friend rather than alone. Going abroad with a friend also reduces the fear and homesickness since there is someone else who is in the same situation with the student.

The figure 14 indicates the respondents' self-evaluated skills in English. The largest group, 48 percent of 167 students evaluated their English skills as good. 21 percent of the students stated that their English skills are fair, and 19 percent of the students considered themselves as fluent English speakers. Only seven percent of the students stated that their English skills are non-existent and six percent considered their English skills to be poor. The result shows that the respondents of the survey have good skills in English which makes it possible for them to perform their practical training abroad without problems, whereas their skills would also improve during their stay abroad. However, the result is based on their self-evaluation. Therefore it is hard to say whether command of English language of some of the students is better or worse than they estimated.

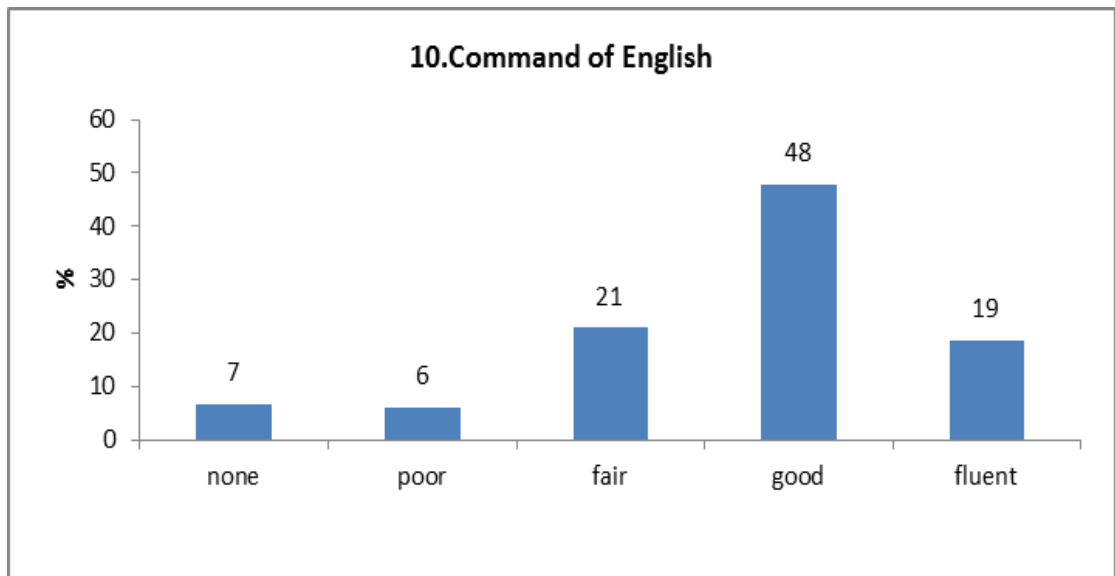


FIGURE 14. The respondents' command of English

Spain Internship SC offers training places in both languages, in English and in Spanish. If the student is able to speak both languages, the amount of possible practical training places that could be offered to them increases. Therefore the author found it important to clarify whether the students have the possibility to study Spanish as a third language in their study programme.

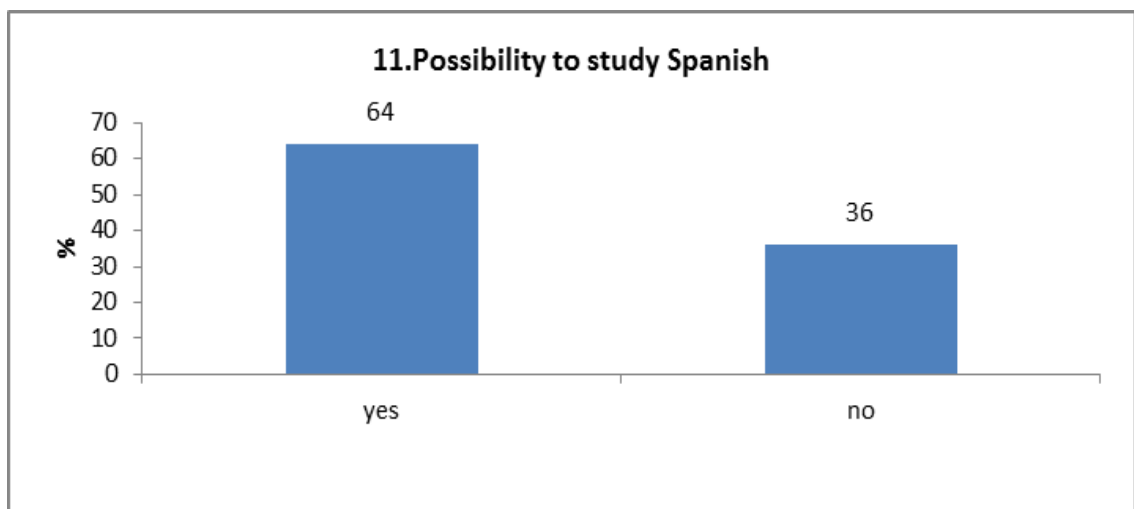


FIGURE 15. Respondent's possibility to study Spanish in their study programme

The result shows that 64 percent of the respondents have the possibility to study Spanish as a third language, whereas the remaining 36 percent do not have this opportunity.

However, the result does not show if the students meant that the possibility to study Spanish is offered in their own campus, or if it is possible as an elective study but in

another institute. The result is coherent with what the coordinators stated in the subchapter 4.2. The majority of coordinators pointed out that it is not possible to study Spanish in their own facilities but it is possible to take Spanish studies as an elective study, but the lectures would be carried out in another institute.

The following figure 16 indicates the respondents' self-evaluated skills in Spanish.



FIGURE 16. Respondents' command of Spanish

The figure 16 shows that the majority, 61 percent of the respondents considered their skills in Spanish to be nonexistent. The second largest group, 26 percent considered their skills as poor, and 10 percent as fair. Only 2 percent of all the respondents considered their skills as good. The result reveals that the Spanish skills of the students are much poorer than their English skills, which therefore means that the possible practical training places that Spain Internship SC would offer them should only require the interns to speak English at work.

The next figure (figure 17) points out the students' interest level of participating in Spanish language lessons in case they would perform their practical training in Spain. The largest group of 55 percent of the respondents would be interested in taking part in the lessons, whereas 30 percent of the respondents would maybe consider it. Only 15 percent of the respondents would not be interested in taking adjunct Spanish lessons while staying in Spain.

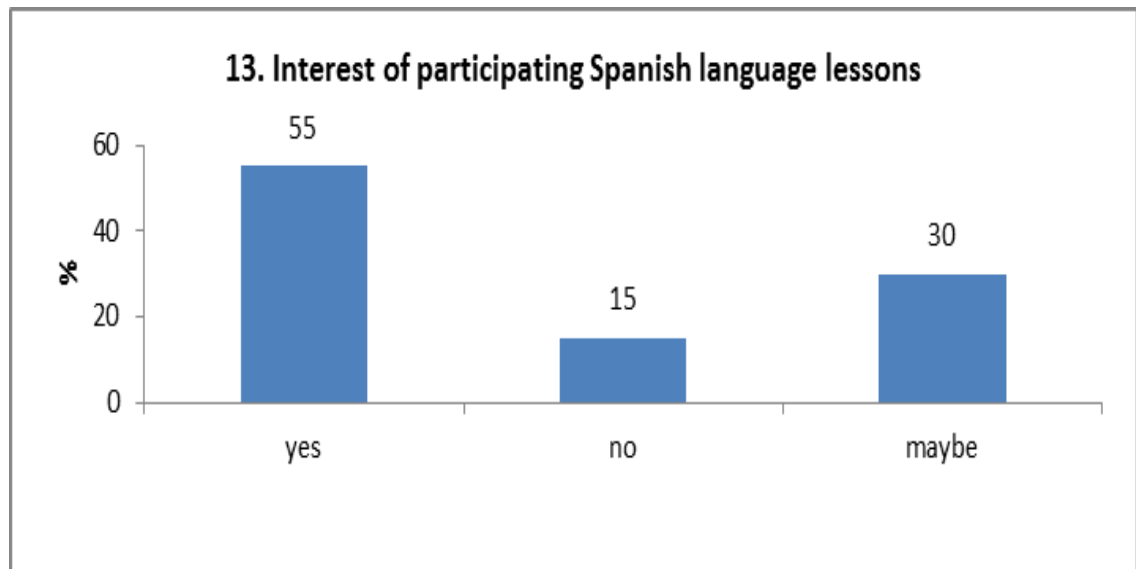


FIGURE 17. Respondents' interest level of participating in Spanish language lessons while in Spain

Even though the result shows that the students are interested in developing their language skills, it does not reveal whether the respondents would be willing to pay extra for the lessons, or would they only participate if the lessons are free of charge.

According to figure 18, it is quite obvious that the amount of international experiences that the respondents of the survey have had is still quite limited. Only 20 percent of the respondents had some sort of previous experience working or living abroad leaving the rest of the respondents not having any experience of staying abroad. However, in the figure 10 earlier it was stated that the students' interest in doing practical training abroad was significantly high, which means that those students who do not have earlier experience can still have the willingness to gain some.

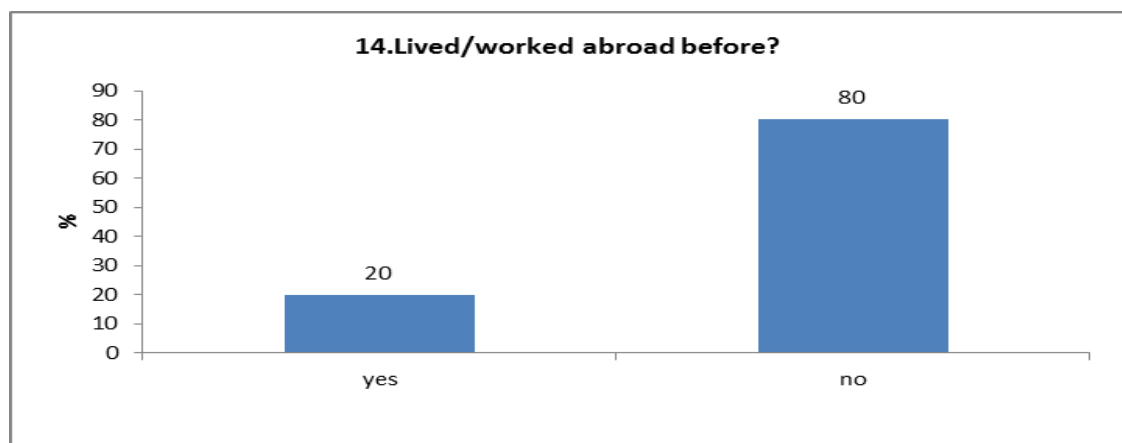


FIGURE 18. Respondents' earlier experiences of living or working abroad

Out of curiosity the author decided to compare what is the interest level of going abroad again of those students who have already experienced it before.

14. Lived/worked abroad before?

6. Interest of doing practical training abroad

<i>%</i>	<i>not at all in- terested</i>	<i>very little interest</i>	<i>somewhat interested</i>	<i>quite interested</i>	<i>extremely interested</i>
yes	14	0	4	18	34
no	86	100	96	82	66
Yht.	100	100	100	100	100
N	14	12	23	39	65

TABLE 1. Interest level of doing practical training abroad of those who have previous experience living/working abroad

Table 1 displays the interest level of doing practical training abroad of those students who have lived/worked abroad before. The result shows that 34 percent of those who have had some international experiences earlier would be interested in doing practical training abroad. The second largest group with 18 percent would also be quite interested in doing practical training abroad, whereas only 14 percent would not be interested in doing practical training abroad. The smallest group of only 4 percent would be somewhat interested in doing practical training abroad.

In the figure 19, the respondents' willingness to share their apartment with other interns while performing their practical training abroad is displayed. The biggest group of 47 % of the respondents would be willing to share the apartment with other interns, whereas nearly as many respondents, 40 percent, would see this solution as maybe possible. The smallest group of 13 percent of all the respondents would not see it possible to share the apartment with other interns but would prefer one of their own.

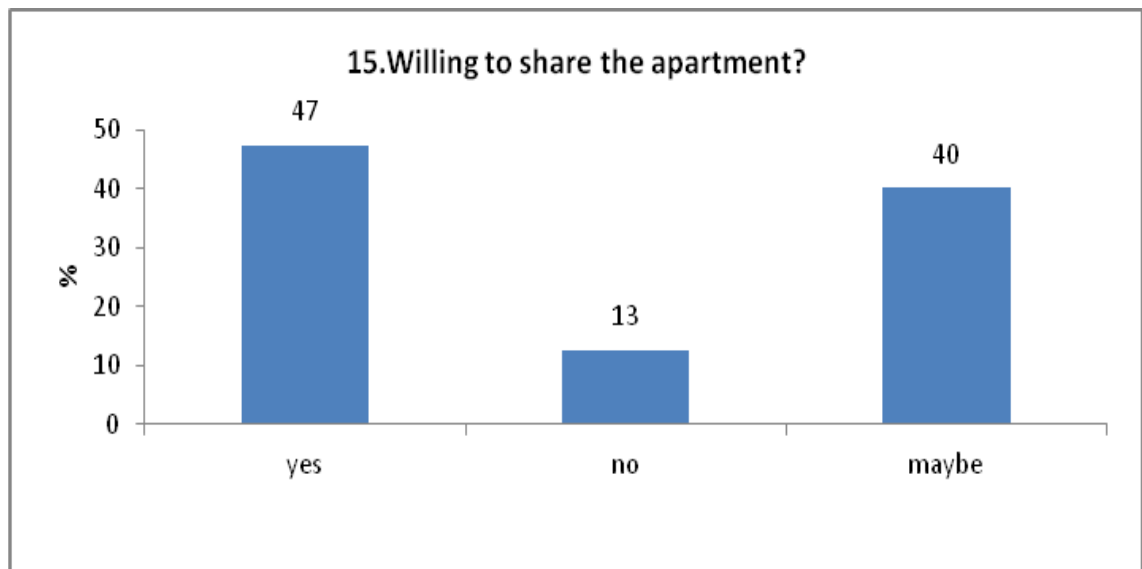


FIGURE 19. Respondents' willingness to share the apartment when performing practical training abroad

The outcome of the figure 19 shows some positive indications and is definitely good information for Spain Internship SC, since most of the apartment solutions they offer via their collaborators are shared apartments. There are also single apartment possibilities, but since the money is usually really tight for the students, the shared apartments are usually the cheapest options and most ideal for the students. Sharing the apartment also gives the students the possibility to learn more about other cultures since the possible roommates may be from all over the world and not just from Finland.

The following figure (figure 20) shows the respondents' willingness to share the same room with other interns, mostly meaning the same sleeping area. The result shows that majority of the respondents, 36 percent would not be willing to share the same room with others but would prefer their own space. 34 percent of all the respondents would possibly be willing to share the room whereas 30 percent of the respondents would be willing to share the same room with other interns.

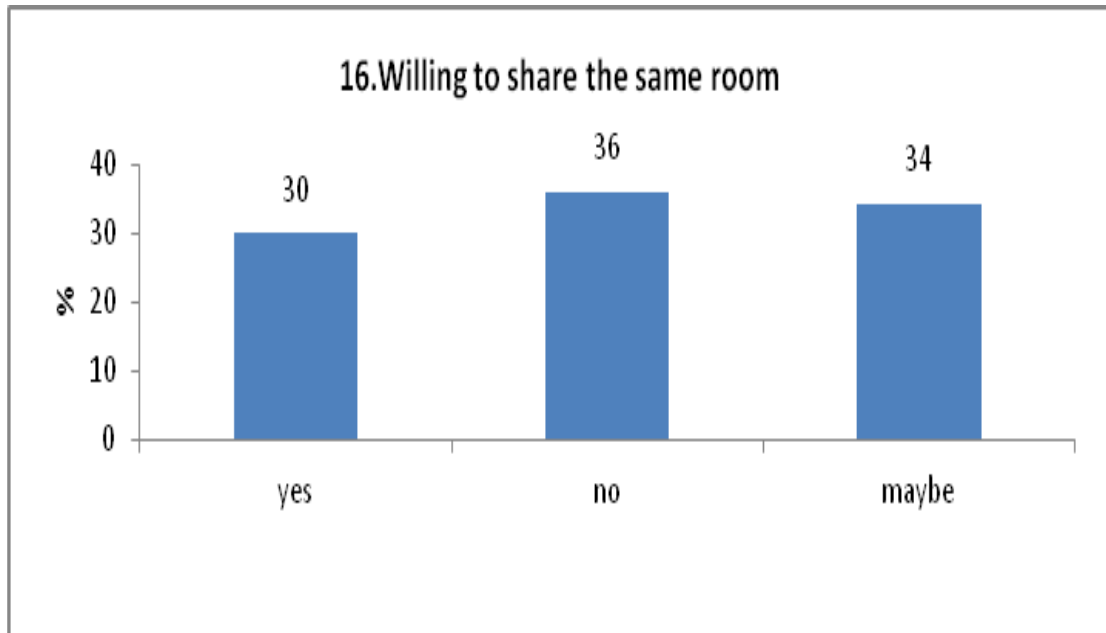


FIGURE 20. Respondents' willingness to share the same room with other interns

The result of the figure 20 did not come as a surprise for the author. It is really common for people to request their own room since everyone needs some sort of privacy, and most Finnish students have not shared their room with anyone before so they don't have previous experience of it whatsoever. Most apartments that Spain Internship SC's collaborators offer do have their own bedroom for each student, but there are few exceptions where the room may need to be shared with another student. The author also experienced this situation in summer 2012 while doing her internship in Seville, and was at first a bit sceptical about sharing the room with a total stranger. However, it ended up being an amazing experience and helped to bond each female closely together making the whole apartment feel like they were a big family.

5 CONCLUSION

This thesis and the research were conducted to find out about the vocational school students' interest level in carrying out their practical training abroad, and how the schools are supporting those students eager to perform part of their studies in a foreign country. Furthermore the author wanted to find out whether there would be a possibility to create collaboration between the schools, their students and Spain Internship SC.

In order to find out the answers to the research questions, the author decided to conduct a survey in the form of questioning by using a questionnaire which was delivered to four vocational schools chosen for the research in collaboration with Spain Internship SC. The purpose of the questionnaire was to find out the students' interest level in performing their practical training abroad, and especially in Spain, their language skills and their accommodation preferences during the practical training. Nevertheless the author was able to receive answers only from two schools out of four which was less than expected. Despite this the author was able to collect 167 filled questionnaires which she decided would be enough to provide useful data. In addition to the survey the author also performed interviews with the international coordinator of the four schools. The main aim of the interviews was to clarify how the schools are supporting the students while abroad and whether there would be a possibility to create collaboration with Spain Internship SC and the schools.

The questionnaires gave the author the quantitative data she needed for her thesis as well as for the company Spain Internship SC for their attempt to create feasible services for the vocational school students who apply for their practical training place through them. The questionnaires were delivered to the schools during the time period of November to January and the student advisors of the chosen schools delivered the questionnaires to the students as well as mailed the filled questionnaires to the author.

Of all the students who took part in the survey, 89 percent of the respondents were females. The majority of the respondents were between the ages of 17-19 years old and studied in the field of tourism. As the age group already indicated, the majority of respondents were on their second year of studies when the survey was carried out.

40 percent of all the respondents expressed being extremely interested in performing their practical training abroad and 59 of 167 students would choose the ideal length of the training period to be from one to two months which was the most common option chosen among the respondents. The students' opinions of performing their practical training in Spain was divided into three clear alternatives; 25 percent of the respondents were somewhat interested, 25 percent were quite interested and 21 percent were extremely interested in carrying out their practical training in Spain. The most preferred companion to carry out the practical training with was with a friend chosen by 123 students.

The self-evaluated skills of English among the respondents were encouraging as the majority of the respondents, 48 percent considered their skills as good. However when the students were asked to evaluate their skills in Spanish, 61 percent replied them to be non-existent, even though 64 percent of the students had the possibility to study Spanish as a third language. Nevertheless, an encouraging 55 percent of the respondents would be interested in participating in Spanish language lessons while working in Spain.

The research also showed that 80 percent of the respondents did not have previous experience of living or working abroad before. If the chance occurred, 47 percent of the respondents would be willing to share the apartment with other interns. Sharing the same room with other interns would not be the desired option for 36 percent of students.

After analysing the answers of the questionnaires, the author conducted the interviews with the international coordinators of each school chosen for the research. The results show that 20 credits is the minimum amount of credits to obtain through the practical training period performed by the students and the training takes place during the academic year. According to the international coordinators, the practical training places are most often found through the institutions and companies the schools collaborate with. It is also preferred that these institutions or companies provide the housing for the interns during their stay abroad.

Each school has mobility funds that they give to those students going abroad. Three out of four schools had the Leonardo da Vinci grant at the moment, but each school also had their own grant which the students can acquire, and the amount of those grants varied between 300-600€ in total. Moreover, none of the schools really limit how many

students can carry out their practical training abroad yearly, but the coordinators pointed out that there is a limited amount of grants given away each year and those should be given to the students who deserve them the most. Hence the selection process in schools is strict.

The schools also provide additional orientation and training for the students going abroad, as well as internet based courses that the students have to complete before departure. However, only one school out of four had Spanish classes organised by themselves for the students who would like to learn the language before their practical training in Spain. Nevertheless, each school did offer the chance to choose Spanish as an elective study but the studies needed to be carried out in another institution.

Considering the collaboration between the schools and Spain Internship SC, the requirements that the schools set for a feasible alliance are: providing the guidance at the destination, finding the accommodation for the student and being able to trust each other. Each of these requirements can be fulfilled by the Spain Internship SC who does assist the students before and during their stay at the destination as well as provides the housing for the students through the housing agency they are in collaboration with. The trust can be gained after the international coordinators have had a meeting with Ms Mettomäki.

The author's main objectives in doing this thesis were to discover the interest level of vocational school students in carrying out their practical training in Spain, and to find out, whether it would be possible for schools to collaborate with Spain Internship SC. The author believes she was able to collect the necessary data for the company to plan its services more efficiently and more suitably to match with the needs of the vocational school students and the requirements of the schools. The author was able to have a face to face interview with three international coordinators of the schools, each of them being curious as to what Spain Internship SC might have to offer for their students if the alliance is created. The contact information of each coordinator was collected and transmitted to Susanna Mettomäki in order for her to take the collaboration process to the next stage.

The author hopes that this information will be useful for the company in the future when planning on expanding its services to other vocational schools. The author has also

received the information that few students of the selected schools have already applied for practical training places through Spain Internship SC, but she hopes that in the future when the possible alliance is made, the amount of the students going to Spain through Spain Internship SC will be increasing.

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APPENDICES

1 (4)

Appendix 1. Questionnaire in English

I'm a student of the Degree Programme in Tourism from Tampere University of Applied Sciences and this survey by using a questionnaire is part of my Bachelor's thesis. This survey is made to find out the vocational school students' interest in doing their internship/practical training in Spain.

Please take your time when answering the questions and read each question carefully. I also hope that you are completely honest with your answers. All respondents' identity will remain confidential and anonymous.

Please circle the appropriate alternative.

1. Gender

- a) Female
- b) Male

2. Age

- a) 16 and under
- b) 17-19
- c) 20-22
- d) 23 and above

3. Field of studies

- a) Tourism
- b) Hotel
- c) Restaurant

4. In which year did you started your studies?

- a) 2010
- b) 2011
- c) 2012

5. Province and municipality where studies are carried out

(Continues)

2 (4)

6. Indicate your interest of doing your internship/practical training abroad. On a scale, 1 represents not at all interested, 2 very little interest, 3 somewhat interested, 4 quite interested, 5 extremely interested. 6= I don't know.

Not at all interested			Extremely interested		I do not know
1	2	3	4	5	6

7. If you are interested of doing your internship/practical training abroad, please indicate how long internship/practical training would you like to do?

- less than 30 days
- 31-60 days
- 61-90 days
- 91 days or more
- I do not know
- Other, for how long? _____

8. Indicate your interest of carrying out your internship/practical training in Spain. On a scale 1 represents not at all interested, 2 very little interest, 3 somewhat interested, 4 quite interested and 5 represents extremely interested. 6= I don't know

Not at all interested			Extremely interested		I do not know
1	2	3	4	5	6

9. With whom would you like to do your internship/practical training?

- Alone
- With a friend
- Boyfriend/girlfriend
- With a group

10. Please indicate your command of English

- a) None
- b) Poor
- c) Fair
- d) Good
- e) Fluent

11. Do you have the possibility to study Spanish at your degree programme?

- a) Yes
- b) No

12. If yes, indicate your command of Spanish

- a) None
- b) Poor
- c) Fair
- d) Good
- e) Fluent

13. Would you be interested in participating Spanish language lessons during your internship/practical training period in Spain?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Maybe

14. Have you lived/worked abroad before?

- a) Yes
- b) no

15. Would you be willing to share **your apartment** with other interns if necessary?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Maybe

16. Would you be willing to share **the same room** with other interns if necessary?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Maybe

THANK YOU!

