SAVONIA

DEVELOPING MULTICHANNEL, CROSS-BORDER CUSTOMER SERVICE

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Abstract

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Abstract

The major goal of the research was to determine the perspective and satisfaction towards multichannel cross-border customer service and qualitative admission process for international students. Likewise, this study was composed to investigate the usage of current communication channels and explore the potential needs of overseas undergraduates.

This final thesis focused on running and planning a students' satisfaction survey and reviewing the data and results received from the survey.

Theories about educational institution admission services and procedures, the international impact on Finnish economy, multichannel services overview, customer satisfaction and experience fundamentals were intently observed to create a consistent theoretical foundation to build this research.

In practical scope, the survey was quantitative and was designed as an Internet questionnaire and sent to foreign students of Savonia University of Applied Sciences. The questionnaire involved questions to identify the research objectives and goals. The final results show that most of the students seem to be slightly satisfied with the admission services of Savonia UAS. The international students' central concerns were the English proficiency of admission personnel and the communication channels while applying to the programmes.

Alternatively, interview with Savonia Admission Services was conducted as a qualitative method to specify the current situation of the Savonia UAS admission process for the foreign students.
Data from external sources was used to supplement reliability of the research and endorse the study findings.

Keywords
multichannel communication, customer service, foreign students, cross-border relationship, admission services

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1 INTRODUCTION

The research area of the final thesis was to analyze and explore are foreign students satisfied with Admission Services at Savonia University of Applied Sciences. The research was mostly based on the opinions of international students from Kuopio and Varkaus campuses. The information was used to make the recommendations on how to develop the Savonia Admission Services towards multichannel and cross-border approaches. Furthermore, some background knowledge about the universities' admission process was added so that the reader can better understand the results of the survey.

The personal motivator for this thesis originates from the author's sourcing experience during the application period to Savonia UAS. A great motivator for the research was to find out the other foreign students' opinion about the Savonia Admission Services and the communication channels. Moreover, the researcher had a big interest in the data retrieved and analysis created during this study process, whereas, they are of practical value to the Savonia Admission Services team and are the foundation for the suggestion for the multichannel communication improvement plan. Some of the difficulties that the researcher had to face in this study were that there were no previous studies about the cross-border customer service in Savonia Admission Services, so almost all the needed information was found from the literature and the external sources data.

1.1 Choice of Study

The study was about a customer survey for Savonia UAS foreign students, and contemporaneously the target was to inquire how to develop the Savonia Admission Services their multichannel and cross-border approaches. The idea of this thesis was started up on the thesis supervisor's initiative and was supported by the researcher since her interest in the survey results and study process.

1.2 Research Objective

The objective of the study was to investigate how customer service of Admission Services for international students at Savonia UAS could be effectively enhanced. The main purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between the customer service quality values and general students' satisfaction with the admission office service through conducting the survey.

The goal was also to optimize the channels of customer service in admission office for setting up an easier cross-border customer service process for both the admission officers and the international students of Savonia UAS campus in the nearest future. In overall results, there were some suggestions for potential improvements or communication devices.

1.3 Research Methodology

The best way to understand whether students are satisfied with the admission office services is to ask them. The survey met the international student's perceptions and satisfaction level with the admission office service. The research process applied the quantitative survey methodology and as supplementary to a structured type of questionnaire, some open questions were added to derive complementary information and feedback. The individual respondent of the online survey is not alluded, and received forms were not published. Due to the cooperation only with foreign students, the survey questionnaire was conducted in the English language.

Eventually, the researcher procured suggestions and recommendations for improving the implementation of multichannel communications based on students' feedback. This qualitative analysis helped the researcher identify specific reasons and opinions that could not be detected from the quantitative analysis.

The researcher used Webropol 2.0 application for creating an online survey, and this program helped to structure techniques such as large number of the respondents and successfully analyze the data. The link to the online survey on Webropol 2.0 was sent out via the university email invitation to all international students of Savonia UAS. The Webropol 2.0 form can be found on the Savonia Reppu intranet.

1.4 Limitation of the Research

The limitations of this research were:

1. The research was available only for foreign students from English Degree programmes at Savonia University of Applied Sciences.
2. This study does not involve collations between the foreign students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as all the participants of the research are conceived as members of the international student community as a whole. Also, a gender correlation was not analyzed for the same reason.
3. The study was limited by the probability that students may not take part in the survey process or may not fully understand the survey questions.
4. The results of the survey may not be integrated to other admission offices at other universities or institutions.
5. The research was not able to display the level of integrity of those students surveyed.

2 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE ADMISSION POLICY

The admission office is intended to guarantee the proficient service to prospective, current and former students in the scopes of admissions, registration, graduation, transcripts of records and finally, admission office has to maintain the friendly atmosphere that appreciates multiculturalism and mutual respect. Also, beyond recruiting foreign students, there is an ethical obligation to provide programs and services that support both their academic and personal success (Arthur, 1997).

The following guidelines describe the methods in which the admission policies of most universities or polytechnics should be represented and performed. The principle of these regulations is to ensure the fairness of the admission process.

There are three sections of admission regulations. First, the *legislative* regulation determines the valid factors of an admissions policy, i.e., standards and aims characterizing the qualities of the students looked for that can be applied to the applicant pool. Second, the *administrative* regulation interprets admissions standards and goals into procedures for attracting a corresponding applicant of qualified applicants, for distinguishing among them and for persuading those who best fit the admission criteria to attend the university. Third, the *monitoring* regulation includes common assessment both of the qualification of the standards establishes admissions policies and the efficiency of administrative practices in fulfilling the norms and targets (Almanac, 1980).

One of the main legislative procedures in the institutional priorities that states a strategic requirement of a university which takes into consideration the admission criteria. For instance, the standards of engineering faculty, some particular nationality or geographical diversity. Institutional priorities can change annually (Mamlet & VanDeVelde 2011, 14). At universities, the order of preference is more frequently a warrant from the legislative procedures to educate the top students as defined by Grade Point Average or overall educational success.

As administrative regulation, there are several functions academic administrators are responsible for:

- they enlarge the attendance and perception of the particular university through marketing, promotional and recruitment activities to future students and their parents, high schools, universities and the general public
- they guarantee that whatever the decision on their application, each will receive full and impartial consideration under the prevalent admissions policy
- they increase the mutual academic relationship between the university and high schools, colleges, and educational agencies (Almanac, 1980).

The monitoring regulation is accountable for transparency of the admission process at the university. Transparency is a term used to define an admission process that is readily understandable by the students, where the aspects valuable decisions are clearly described and shared with the public. Assuming that if there were transparency – if students and parents could see exactly how

the universities make their decisions – then the process would not feel unequal or arbitrary (Mamlet & VanDeVelde 2011,15). Also, the monitoring regulation is responsible for assuring that the admissions process is reaching its goals and working within the limits set by appropriate authorities exists at all levels of the University management.

2.1 General Admission Process for International Students in Finland

The main information about the application process can be found on the webpage of Study in Finland. It gives enough and clear instructions of admissions for foreign students. Also, it provides the other site link where students can find the appropriate applications to fill out to start applying for the particular programme. But in any case, applicants should check all the admission-related details directly with the institution and usually Bachelor's degree courses conducted in the English language are suggested by polytechnics/Universities of Applied Sciences.

The admissions procedures according to the webpage of Study in Finland

1. Find the right degree programme
Applicants should start by selecting the degree course(s) and identifying what kind of details and criteria of the specific degree programme, for instance, entry requirements, language skills, application period, etc. There are several options how students can search for the available degree programs:

- on the webpage of Study in Finland database
- on the Studyinfo.fi application site
- on the institutions' Admissions information pages.

2. Check the eligibility criteria
After choosing the degree programme, applicants should review the eligibility and the detailed entry requirements with the university/UAS offering the degree program.

3. Check the application time
The application times may vary from one programme to another. The main application period for Bachelor's degree programmes is in January annually, for studies commencing in autumn. The university Master's programmes have their application periods in most cases between early December and January/February. A small number of UAS Bachelor programmes may also offer a spring term intake option, for which applications are usually sent in September.

4. Check whether you need to sit an entrance exam

Entrance exams are mainly required for UAS Bachelor level admission, but also for example in some UAS Master's degree courses. Students should check out all the exam-related details with the university/UAS they are planning to apply to.

5. Apply online

All the degree courses in Finland have their admissions via the application system at Studyinfo.fi. In the joint application system, students can apply to up to a maximum of 6 (six) degree programmes with one application. On top of these, applicants can apply to any number of degrees that may have a 'separate admission'.

In all questions relating to the application, students should be in contact with the Admissions Office of the university/UAS they are applying to.

If undergraduates have completed the qualification they are using for applying outside the EU/EEA area, there is an application processing fee, regardless of their nationality. The Application fee section for information should be seen.

6. Sit the entrance exam if needed

It is common practice in Finnish higher education to have entrance examinations, especially at Bachelor level. Entrance examinations are as a rule also required of international applicants. If a student is an eligible applicant, he/she will receive an invitation to the entrance exam. Exams are usually held in Finland, but some institutions may organize exams abroad as well. Students should contact the Admissions Office of the institution they are interested in for detailed information on the entrance exams, possible sample tests, pre-reading material, etc.

7. Wait to receive notification of acceptance

If the applicant is accepted as a student, he/she will get an official letter of admission from the Finnish university/UAS. The placement has to be confirmed by the applicant.

8. Welcome to Finland!

An accepted student can start arranging the formalities. Non-EU/EEA citizens usually need a student residence permit. The hosting university can advise undergraduate on student accommodation issues.

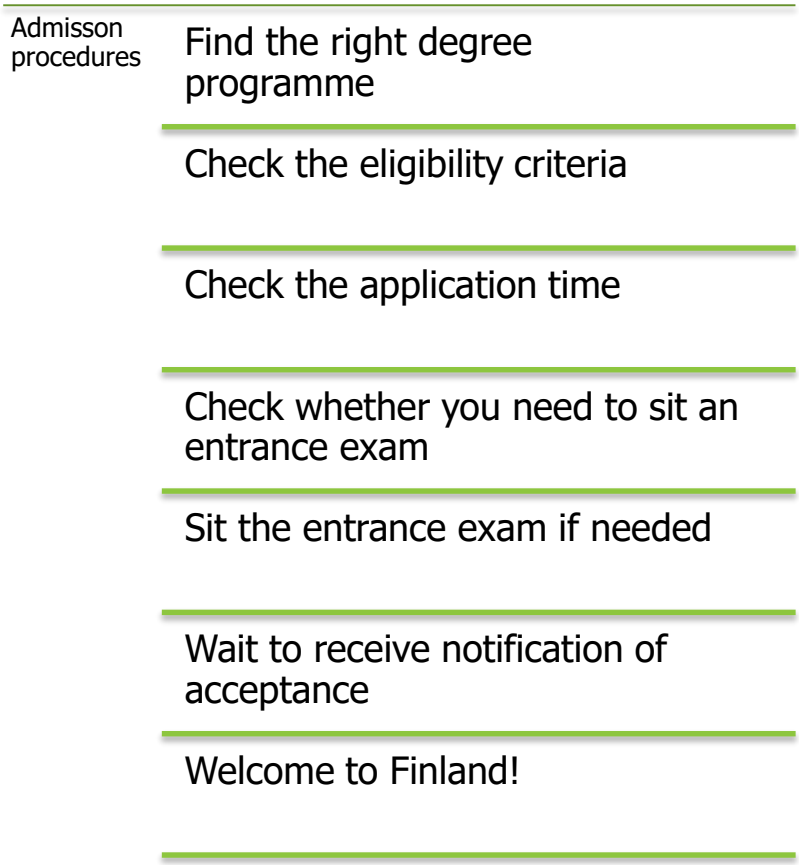

FIGURE 1. The Admission procedures in a nutshell (Study in Finland 2016.)

2.2 Overview of Savonia UAS

There are about 6,500 students including more than 300 international students at Savonia UAS. The starting point of education and training are the needs of working life. Savonia UAS promotes its know-how and expertise by co-operating with companies, educational institutions and international networks through education, research and development projects. The co-operation is based on open interaction. Flexibility and employability of our study programmes are the best guaranty for the student´s career development (CIMO 2015).

2.3 Savonia UAS Admission Procedures

This information was taken from Savonia UAS webpage, and it gave better inside view of admission procedures and the special criteria of the admission process for the international students in 2016. Furthermore, there are interview statements of admission officers, and the interview was reported to clear some specific issues and admission frameworks.

Eligibility in 2016 separate application period

Eligibility to apply for higher education studies can be obtained with following qualifications:

- a foreign degree or qualification which gives eligibility for higher education in the awarding country (e.g. a high school diploma, an upper general certificate of education, a higher secondary school certificate). The qualification must be completed by the end of the application period.

To prove their eligibility to apply, those applying for a non-Finnish qualification certificate must submit a copy of the final certificate used as the basis for application by the 3 February 2016 to Savonia UAS Admission Services. In addition to copies of certificates, each applicant must submit a copy of his or her qualification certificate translated into Finnish, Swedish or English by an official (authorized) translator if the original document is in none of these languages. Such translations must be signed and stamped by the translator.

There is an exception: EU/EEA citizens can apply even if the degree certificate is completed during the spring of the application period (upper secondary education). The admission of such EU/EEA – applicant is conditional until Savonia UAS has checked the applicant's final degree certificates (and translations if needed). The degree certificate must be ready at the latest by 15 of July 2016.

Language skills requirements in 2016 separate application period

Non-EU/EEA CITIZENS must provide an English language certificate. To prove the applicant's English language skills, he/she must provide one of the following minimum requirements:

SAT test: a total score of at least 600 from the modules Critical Reading and Writing taken after 1 January 2013
IELTS score: academic level 6.0
TOEFL score: 550 paper-based test or 79-80 internet-based test
IB-examination: grade 4 in advanced level English
Reifeprüfung Examination: grade 7 in advanced level English
EB-examination: grade 6.00-6.95 in advanced level English
Cambridge ESOL's Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE), level C
Cambridge ESOL's Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) level C1
Cambridge IGSCE Certificate, level C
Pearson test of English (General test level 4 and Academic 51)
There is no limit to the period of validity of the Cambridge ESOL's Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE), the Cambridge ESOL's Certificate in Advanced English (CAE), the Cambridge IGSCE Certificate. TOEFL and IELTS test results are valid for two years. TOEFL score results are only accepted directly from the Educational Testing Service. The TOEFL code for Savonia University of Applied Sciences is 5747.

The English language skills certificate is not required from those applicants who hold an upper secondary level certificate or a Bachelor's or Master's degree completed in English in the United

Kingdom, Ireland, the United States, Canada, Australia or New Zealand as well as a Bachelor's or Master's degree completed in English in an EU/EEA. EU/EEA CITIZENS or to those applying for a Finnish qualification certificate do not need to provide an English language certificate.

Discretionary Admission

Criteria for discretionary admission in 2016 separate application period

Savonia University of Applied Sciences uses the discretionary admission in 2016 admission process as follows:

If the applicant has already studied at Savonia UAS in the international degree programmes as an exchange student and has been awarded a transcript of records, the applicant is considered to have adequate mathematical-logical skills and language skills. The applicant is exempt from the SAT test (in International Business) and language skills test. In addition to copies of qualification certificates, the applicant must submit an official copy of the Savonia UAS transcript of records to Savonia UAS Admission services by post or as email attachments.

Russian citizens who will complete their education and receive their final certificate in summer 2016 can apply to Savonia UAS with a temporary certificate and an authorized translation of it. Also, an applicant must also submit a language skills certificate, and when applying to International Business, also a SAT test result. The admission of an applicant is conditional until the final certificates, and authorized translations of them are checked (when studies begin in September 2016). The degree certificate must be ready at the latest by 15 of July 2016. An applicant who uses discretionary admission must fill in the online application form at www.studyinfo.fi and send copies of relevant certificates to Savonia UAS Admission Services by post or as email attachments by 3 February 2015 at 3:00 p.m. Finnish time.

Applicants with a refugee/refugee-like situation in 2016 separate application period

If an applicant is a refugee or in a refugee-like situation and is unable to submit documentary evidence of his/her qualification, she/he can still apply to Savonia UAS. If an applicant has a valid language skills certificate, she/he will go through the normal application process. If an applicant doesn't have the language skills certificate, Savonia UAS will guide her/him to Savonia Open UAS Study path.

The applicant must have an official decision attesting to his/her refugee status (a decision on asylum or a residence permit granted by a need for protection). The applicant must submit a copy of such decision to Savonia UAS Admission Services by post or as email attachments by 3 February 2016 at 3:00 p.m. Finnish time. (Savonia UAS webpage 2016)

2.3.1 Interview Results of Savonia Admission Services

Furthermore, there are interview results of admission officers, and the interview was reported to clear some specific issues and Savonia UAS admission process. This interview was conducted on 10.02.2016 via university's email. The interviewees were two Savonia Admission Services representatives.

1. Could you explain the goals and mission of Savonia Admission Services?
   "Admission Services is responsible for admission processes together with study fields and other representatives of Savonia UAS. We help and guide prospective applicants and actual applicants."
2. Does Savonia Admission Services consider itself as student service or counselor service as it also helps students to solve their problems during applying?
   "We consider Admission Services as counselor services since we help applicants during the whole application process (before applying, during the application period, after applying, after results are out and after confirming their study places). Before newly accepted students start their studies, we will check their certificates. Only after certificates have been checked accepted students become students, and the counseling is shifted to Student Offices, Tutor Teachers, and Student Counsellors."

3. What is the structure of Savonia Admission Committee?
   "ARENE, Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences confirms the recommendation for admission criteria for all Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland. Each UAS will decide if they follow the recommendation or make exceptions. At Savonia UAS, the Vice President confirms each year the Admission criteria for the forthcoming year."

4. Does Savonia Admission Services have transparency during the admissions? If "yes", could you explain what kind of procedures you have to demonstrate this transparency?
   "Yes. Everything we do is transparent. All information (admission criteria, criteria for student selection, information on possible entrance exams) is available at Studyinfo, Opintopolku, and Savonia's website. Applicants are treated equally, and same rules and regulations apply to all."

5. How many intakes does Savonia UAS have per year?
   "Intake varies yearly. In 2015, the intake was 70 students (30 Mechanical Engineering and 40 International Business). In 2016, the intake is the same."

6. What kind of channels Admission Services would like to have or improve for suitable and productive communication with international students?
   "International applicants use mainly email and phone to contact Admission Services. Some applicants also visit us at the Microkatu campus. We feel this is fine as it is."

7. Any suggestions for better admission services are welcome.

"We could serve our applicants better if we somehow could make them read all instructions and information given on Studyinfo, Opintopolku, and Savonia's website. We find it problematic that some of our applicants don't read instructions how to apply and which documents to submit by when. They might not be aware of admission criteria or requirements of student selection (for example SAT test, English language certificate, motivation letter). We don't know how to make it better since all information is published well ahead before the application period starts."

2.4 International Students at Finnish Universities

Nowadays students from all over the world look for the universities which will provide them with remarkable, distinctive and individual academic background. An education system is a mainstream resource in the export market, and it is considered as a central economic investment to local economies. The worldwide demand for international higher education is indicated to expand in a great measure. Demand is predicted to increase from 1.8 million international students in 2000 to 7.2 million international students in 2025 (Böhm, Davis, Meares and Pearce 2002). International education comprises all components of perspective and perceiving mentality and it goes to show the awareness while individuals may view life differently, they also have something in common. Therefore, the dualism of international students is leading to the diverse tentative educated and linguistic qualifications outcome in an exceptional contribution that will form the universities to global institutions.

However, the situation of international education in Finland mainly depends on the globalization of Finland's economy itself. According to the Prime Minister's Office statement, as a small country in Scandinavia, Finland's economy extremely relies on cross-border trade and international markets. Thus, to reinforce globalization process and relieve the social problems caused by an aging society, engaging and encouraging the best foreign students in the Finnish labor market after their graduation seems to be the solution.

In conformity with Finnish National Board of Education, polytechnics and universities have the use of extensive autonomy. The procedure of both polytechnics and universities is based on the independency of education and research. They arrange their administration, settle on student admission and frame the contents of degree programs. At this moment, the Finnish educational system has to refine student services and develop a transparent admission process for international students to have higher results with the economic globalization. For this reason, the admission office shall be regarded as the one of the important departments at the university, and that is why it is essential to investigate this topic to develop the proper customer service for international students at Savonia University of Applied Sciences.

In a rival educational marketplace, the image of educational institutions defines their capacity to provide high-quality academic and customer services. The main jeopardy is treating foreign students as an output without considering their roles in a rich cultural exchange, and how their future expertise may help with the particular country's economy (Montgomery 2010).

The growth of a number of foreign students has begun the debate of several new and future subjects in institutions' student services and high-quality customer services, with overcome challenges in promoting and valuing diversity. Institutional and public surveys have been done, and universities around the world are seeking for the essential student support and international student support system development (Montgomery 2010).

During thirty years, the number of international students has been expanding to a large extent in almost every developed country. These students reflect various cultures, languages, and communication patterns inside and outside the university, and these results in more diverse cross-cultural communication and studying surroundings for native students. This group of alumni consists of powerful ambassadors to promote student exchange further and to maintain new international project partnerships. In addition to academic advantages, foreign students are one of the major investments to institutional and fiscal revenues as they spend on taxes relating to the spending and salaries.

Universities and polytechnics invest fair amounts of time and resources in recruiting international students and improving strategies and sustain programs for both newcomers and on the campus. These programs commonly focus on practical information related to immigration requirements cultural adjustment and settling in (Andrade & Evans, 2009). On rare occasions, the arranged pre-arrival programmes focus on English language support or understanding of academic expectations, and also involve students in actual coursework to prepare them for a successful linguistic, academic, and cultural transition.

According to the Strategy for the Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions, released by the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland already has a genuinely international higher education community in 2015. As one indicator, the number of foreign degree students had increased to 20 000. As explained in Faktaa (2014), higher education institutions have been encouraged to recruit students from abroad, and the number of degrees taken by foreign students has been among the funding criteria of higher education. Higher education institutions have also worked to provide designated services to international students. Finnish higher education offers more than 300 degree programs in English, it is possible to study in English in all universities of applied sciences and universities:

- universities are more research based institutions that teach theory and the academic side of certain subjects
- polytechnic universities, on the other hand, are all on the practical side, preparing graduating overseas students for the future careers in applied fields (Study in Finland).

It is important for the economic effect that foreign undergraduates who complete the Finnish higher education institution will stay in Finland and become integrated into the society and the labor market. International students are depositors in geographical and social mobility. But they may face many

problems. Some have good individual, governmental or institutional backup. Others do not (Montgomery 2010). Hence, the main feature of campus internalization includes the training of campus personnel to achieve the competencies to endorse international academic initiatives (Arthur 2004).

According to Statistics Finland, the ten most common countries of origin of international higher education degree students in Finland in 2014 were: Russia (3044), China (1963), Vietnam (1619), Nepal (1149), Estonia (858), India (759), Pakistan (705), Germany (650), Nigeria (639), Iran (594).

TABLE 1. The most common destination countries and countries of origin of degree students in 2014 (Faktaa 2014.)

International students in Finnish HEIs	Students
Russia	3044
China	1963
Vietnam	1619
Nepal	1149
Estonia	858
India	759
Pakistan	705
Germany	650
Nigeria	639
Iran	594

The campus personnel, including admission office, has to acknowledge that international students who come from another culture can have different thinking, expectations, and behavior. Therefore, foreign undergraduates usually are confronted with challenges before, during and after the application process that is quite distinct from domestic students' experience. First, to find an appropriate programme, to hand in applications and send documents overseas, to take several examinations and finally wait for the positive response of the institution. These factors may imply stressful atmosphere before they even start their classes (Montgomery 2010).

3 MULTICHANNEL CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Multichannel merely implicates that there is more than one approach for customers to contact the company for support by phone, email, live chat, social media, and simplified self-service options such as knowledge bases and online communities or forums. By definition, customers are the main company's source of revenue. At this moment, in many ways, a firm's most profitable financial core group is its customer base, and developing technological potentials to recognize, measure and manage relationships with each of those customers individually (Peppers et al., 2011).

Customers choose customer service in the channel that is the most suitable and portable for them to utilize at the time they have a problem or question – whether that's the phone, email, chat, web self-service, social media, or some other channel. Beyond that, they want the experience, including the quality of service and the information they obtain to be coherent no matter which method they use to reach the company.

Customers' habits have changed, they now have an expectation of high-quality sales and service experiences across any channel. As long as each major channel—phone, email, chat, social media, and self-service—assumes its measure of requisitions, customer service organizations have need of suggesting a combination of the following types of communication:

- one-to-one: one support agent helps one customer at a time, generally by phone, email, or in-person/in-store
- one-to-many: one support agent helps multiple people at a time, through live chat, video chat, or SMS text messaging, or where there is a single resource, such as a knowledge base or FAQs, available to customers
- many-to-many: there are multiple means of reaching many people, often through online forums or customer portals, and social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, where customers and agents can all participate in the conversation (Zendesk guide).

According to the Zendesk guide to multichannel customer support, the rising volumes of customer cooperation, the starting of new channels (i.e. social media), and the advanced company focus on customer loyalty require companies to redefine their current performance management strategy. Opening new channels increases contacts; it also raises expectations that company will provide better service. This is a good thing, but the organization must live up to it. To optimize and get the benefits of multi-channel support, company needs:

- unified tools and processes
- cross-channel communication (e.g., when a request moves from email to phone, or from social media to email)
- a strategy for monitoring volume and engagement
- at least one live or very humanized channel.

Unified tools and processes

As explained by Zendesk guide, valid multichannel support needs the potential to capture all requests in a unified tool. Having one agent answering email in one system while another tweet from a different system can lead to that classic problem where the right-hand does not realize what the left is doing which is all too often the case.

The main advantages of using a unified tool include:

- nothing falls through the gap: by decreasing the number of locations the organization needs to monitor, agents can be more efficient
- sequence and cohesion: a single tool guarantees cohesion in support the mission and goals, and makes it easier to be consistent
- lower switching costs: with fewer tools, agents become more focused and incur less switching costs than when trying to use and monitor multiple tools
- transparency: even when different agents are handling different channels, tickets collected in a single tool can be viewed by everyone. This is especially useful when customers make multiple contacts about a single issue using multiple channels.

Cross-channel communication

Customers are often changing over between channels when connecting with the company. They may appeal to one channel to research the service, and another to request service. They may email with a question, and then call before the personnel can react.

It is substantial that any records staff gathers on the customer's interactions progress with the customer. This is often a technical problem—a chat system not able to communicate with the system—further reinforcing the need for a unified customer service platform. Not only should the customers be admitted transferring across channels, but the channels should also be connected, so that data flows easily between those channels.

TABLE 2. Snapshot of Key Findings by the Numbers (Genesys 2010.)

90	Percent of consumers who have interacted across multiple channels in the past year.
44	Percent of consumers who state that "better human service" is the best way to improve cross-channel conversations.
29	Percent of consumers who would like customer service to leverage Twitter to communicate with them.

8	The number of frequently-used types of cross-channel conversations that consumers say occur.

Cross-channel conversations occur when a consumer initiates a request or poses a query in one channel, and then continues that same conversation through multiple contact methods to reach a resolution. Cross-channel conversations have had a major impact on customer service expectations for consumers across all age groups, not just for those who are younger and more tech-savvy (Genesys 2010).

Strategy for monitoring volume and engagement

It is a comprehensible value of integration of multiple channels, but it is also essential to recognize the difference between each channel, and it will require personal treatment and strategy. The steps which company should take for better channel support are to monitor social media, to respond to emails and Facebook posts promptly, to organize competitive support teams and to elevate the experience by creating consistent messaging across all communication systems.

Self-service options

While self-service and email support are often enough to resolve customer issues, supplying a live channel chat, phone, or even Twitter is critical. It may seem counter-intuitive to increase live support at the same time company is offering self-service options, such as a well-known knowledge base or prosperous customer forums, but the more customers can do on their own on the web, the more live support becomes relevant. There must be a way for customers to reach a human when they cannot resolve their issue through self-service or a delayed email interaction. In preparation for that consumers are still reverting to phone support when their first attempt to get help is unsuccessful.

Providing access to multiple channels can be both an opportunity and a challenge for the company, as the roles of agreements and new channels are still emerging. Companies need to evaluate their present communication channels and designate how to make interactions more convenient across multiple channels. It is imperative that an enterprise attracts consumers on the customers' terms or risk losing them. To summarize, companies need to become more personalized in their overall treatment of consumers by integrating customer data and developing processes that recognize the value and history of each customer (Genesys 2010).

3.1 Electronic Customer Relationship Management

As reported by Peppers and Rogers (2011), customer relationship management (CRM) is a technology or software solution that serves as the tracking data and information system about customers to empower better customer service. It is also considered as the major frame in decision-making with

the final goal of increasing the value of the customer base through better relationships with customers, generally on individual bases.

The interactive era has accelerated the adoption of the Internet source and therefore, e-CRM appeared. Electronic customer relationship management includes the adulation of Web channels into the complete organization CRM mission with the goal of driving the subsequence within all channels, mutually with sales, customer service and support (CSS) and marketing initiatives. It can support a complementary customer experience and great customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and revenue. E-CRM is enterprise using information technology to associate internal organization resources and external marketing strategies to understand and accomplish their customers' needs.

Conforming to Lee (2009), customer service in organizations can be improved through combining the Internet with CRM activities to create e-CRM processes. When incorporated appropriately into the daily organizational processes, e-CRM can:

- reduce the cost of communicating with customers
- provide web-based opportunities for self-service activities, thereby reducing administrative overhead
- integrate the delivery of services, production, and derive value chain cost savings
- raise the demand of product or service through Internet marketing
- improve customers' interaction with the firm, leading to service improvements.

The use of web-based services between providers and customers enables enterprises to be much more prepared in delivering services. E-CRM allows a company not only to communicate with its customers but to prolong its interactions with customers. In fact, it is troublesome to find a service provider without a website presence, but the level of customer cooperation is still insufficient. Anecdotal evidence certainly suggests that there is a lack of interactive exchanges between customers and service providers, and thus the current e-CRM services are not being used to their full potential. The reasons are manifold, but central to the question is the managers' understanding of what the customer cares about, and what kinds of interaction are indeed possible given a set of organization resources (Lee 2009).

3.2 Importance of Customer Satisfaction and Experience in Multi-channel Service

Customer satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, is the feeling a customer has about the extent to which their experiences with an organization have met their needs (Hill et al., 2007). According to Lee (2009), service quality has been recognized as one of the main fundamentals to influence on the participant retention and long-term profitability of a company. Service quality has to meet or exceed the standards and expectations of participants to satisfy customers. Thus, service quality allows top

management to distinguish strength and scopes for improvement the features of the services that they can manage to develop their competitive benefits.

After all, customer anticipates satisfaction assessment about service and product; customer satisfaction should not be involved in quality functions of service. Firstly, customer satisfaction is wider in area than service quality, which is solely one feature of a customers' level of satisfaction. Secondly, product or service must be experienced to anticipate satisfaction assessment, but that is not an integral part of the background for developing a viewpoint about the quality. Thirdly, although most quality management academics and practitioners would subscribe to the user-friendly access rather than technical access, assessments of satisfaction are commonly much more subjective and emotional than quality assessments (Hill et al., 2007).

Moreover, the solid entity of CSM (customer satisfaction measurements) is about inquiring the stage which an organization is doing best what matters most to customers and pinpointing the best opportunities for improving that performance. A good customer satisfaction survey is consequently based on customers' most important requirements thus that it can ensure certain, effectual information to the organization and it would help to achieve the larger profit from investing in actions or changes to develop customer satisfaction.

The main significant characteristics of an accurate CSM process are:

- using the objectives of the customer as the foundation for CSM systems
- estimating the respective importance of customers' requirements
- basing the headline measure that is monitored over time on a composite index that is determined according to the relative importance of its components
- identifying the areas where the organization is failing to meet its customers' requirements as the basis for actions to optimize customer satisfaction (Hill et al., 2007).

Proactively design in the customer experience

Knowing customers' inclinations and preferences will help companies easily identify opportunities for improvement across the current channel network. Businesses must adapt to their customers' needs and behavior, and proactively design and manage the total customer experience across all channels by:

- understanding their customers' current channel behaviors and needs
- establishing cross-functional teams to develop a multichannel vision, roadmap, and capabilities that align with the overall business model, taking into account customer expectations, social and technological trends, and competitive capabilities
- designing, testing, and piloting "ideal" scenarios to validate the broader strategy, and garnering execution sponsorship from senior executives across the enterprise

- measuring and refining multichannel deployment to gather intelligence on customers and channels. By capturing data from each channel interaction and building it into the CRM tools, companies can progress to a more intelligent and intimate relationship with their customers
- upgrading, integrating and rationalizing all channels' technological foundation, from architectures to applications.

In today's economy where operating costs continue to increase, companies must do more with less. Taking a more sustainable and flexible approach to developing an integrated multichannel platform can result in the following benefits:

- accelerated customer acquisition through better product/service information and research support
- differentiated customer experience through superior services and features
- reduced costs and increased efficiency through lower-cost channel substitution and self-service
- by taking these steps, businesses can track and reduce the overall cost of customer interactions across their channels, and eventually decrease the cost of customer acquisition and retention to build market leadership (Cheigh et al., 2011, 8).

Nowadays, customers prefer to receive an enhanced concentration on the service and support. They would like not only to get faster and more efficient problem solution when they appeal to the company concerning service, but they also would like to obtain a stable and effective service experience on the channels that they use to source the service. When the phone communication proceeds to be the major medium of service interaction, the utilization of other channels such as email, chat, web self-service, social media, and mobile service is considerably growing as customers search for a more convenient service experience. Quite frequently, the call made to the contact office is the output of an unsuccessful self-service experience or an ineffective service consideration on another channel. (Dutta, 2012)

4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The data collected from the questionnaire survey is reported and analyzed in this chapter. The results of the questionnaire survey and interview are examined to determine the aspects which affect customer satisfaction in admission office service.

Online surveys are constantly utilized in education study work, as they are an advantageous method to collect records for the research. The questionnaire survey for foreign students was created and managed as part of this study. The following chapter describes the survey design, methods, implementation and data analysis.

4.1 Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship between variables. These variables, in turn, can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures (Creswell 2014, 4). Quantitative research imposes external standards: results are coded and analyzed as numerical values while qualitative data are analyzed using the language or actions of the respondents (McDowell et. al., 1998, 16)

Qualitative Research

Qualitative data, in the form of words and observation, predated quantitative data in the academic study. They were the mainstay of biology, history, and law and, much later, of sociology and political science. Qualitative data are interpretative; they generate concepts, typologies, and theories. Methods for collecting qualitative data are open-ended and iterative; they include the analysis of written documents, open-ended interviews (often group interviews) and direct observation, including participant observation (McDowell et al., 1998, 16). Qualitative research is elaborated to be individually appropriate for achieving a comprehensive understanding of basic reasons and driving forces. It ensures conception into the setting of a problem. At the same time, it often produces outlines and hypotheses for later quantitative research.

Qualitative and quantitative styles stand in sharp contrast to their approach to collecting data. Quantitative approaches are standardized and focused; close attention is paid, for example, to training interviewers to use a standard approach for all people in the sample. Qualitative data collection techniques are typically open-ended and iterative, being modified during the progress of the investigation, rather as a police inquiry would follow leads (McDowell et al., 1998, 19)

TABLE 3. Qualitative and quantitative methods (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 110,204.)

Qualitative Methods	Quantitative Methods
Emphasis on understanding	Emphasis on testing and verification
Focus on understanding from respondent's /informant's point of view	Focus on facts and/or reasons for social events
Interpretation and rational approach	Logical and critical approach
Observations and measurements in natural settings	Controlled measurement
Subjective 'insider view' and closeness to data	Objective 'outsider view' distant from data
Explorative orientation	Hypothetical-deductive; focus on hypothesis testing
Processed oriented	Result oriented
Holistic perspective	Particularistic and analytical
Generalization by comparison of properties and contexts of an individual organism	Generalization by population membership
Based on meaning derived from numbers	Based on meaning expressed
Collection results in numerical and standardized data	Collection results in non-standardized data requiring classification into categories
Analysis conducted through the use of diagrams and statistics	Analysis conducted through the use of conceptualization

4.2 Survey Design and Implementation

Designing and implementing a survey is a planned process of gathering information on a specific topic by asking questions of individuals and then concluding the results to the individuals defined by the respondents. The process commits five specific steps. Figure 1 represents the process of designing and implementing a survey:

FIGURE 2. Survey process (Survey fundamentals 2010.)

According to Carey V. Azzara (2010), the design goal of the questionnaire is to meet research objectives by obtaining valid data from recipients who are selected and competent as required. Results are expected to deliver insights for the customers.

Therefore, a questionnaire's primary purpose is to gather data to address research and business objectives. To help accomplish these objectives:

1. Ease the respondents tasks
    - Achieve and maintain respondent involvement
    - Minimize respondent fatigue
2. Ease the programmers', interviewers', and analysts' tasks
    - Facilitate data management
    - Expedite data analysis (Carey V. Azzara 2010, 19.)

Understandable, brief and direct survey design is required to receive final outcomes that import substantial information to be evaluated and utilized. The survey was named "Admission Satisfaction Survey for International students". It contained several types of survey response options, including multiple choices, open-ended questions with a text field. The response pattern was selected for each question originally, based on the type of the question. The survey was executed by the Webropol 2.0, a web-based program for online surveys. The researcher also used the supporting data in this research in the form of books and the Internet to source out a necessary information for this study.

As was mentioned previously, both qualitative and quantitative analysis methods are used as a particular research for Savonia's Admission Services. A questionnaire survey was implemented for the international students of the university. Only one interview was conducted to collect the information from the admission personnel of the university about their opinion which related to the service and communication channels.

4.3 Data Analysis

This research was conducted for Savonia University of Applied Sciences to develop better customer service for international students in admission office department. Therefore, from all Savonia's students, the researcher chose only 229 current and several former foreign students from both campuses Kuopio and Varkaus. The researcher got 26 completed answers back. Hence, the response rate within international recipients was 11 %. Overall, the received answers were sufficient and gave enough information for the basis of development. In total, 203 students did not answer the survey questions. One of the reasons why the response rate is so low, because the researcher did not use any other approaches to boosting it (no provided frequent reminders) and, additionally, the survey period was not long, only two weeks, from 1.02.2016 till 14.02.2016. Also, it can be that students were not motivated enough to take part in this study, for example, there were no rewards, and it could be the best way by guaranteeing the survey is worth students' time and attention. Using the extrinsic source of motivation may operate the sample to include more responses from those who need that form of stimulation. The survey was kept brief. The proposition here is that the less time it takes to complete a survey, the more likely students will participate in the survey. Therefore, the research questionnaire only consists of 14 questions.

4.3.1 The Programme of the Study

The first question was asked just to categorize the participants for a detailed description of obstacles or benefits that each degree student faced during applying to the particular programme. The fields of the study are Industrial Management, International Business, and Mechanical Engineering. A total of 26 survey feedbacks were derived, 15 foreign students of which were from Bachelor of Industrial Management programme, eight other students from BSc. International Business programme and three international students from Bachelor's Mechanical Engineering programme. The respondents' separate programmes are presented in Figure 3.

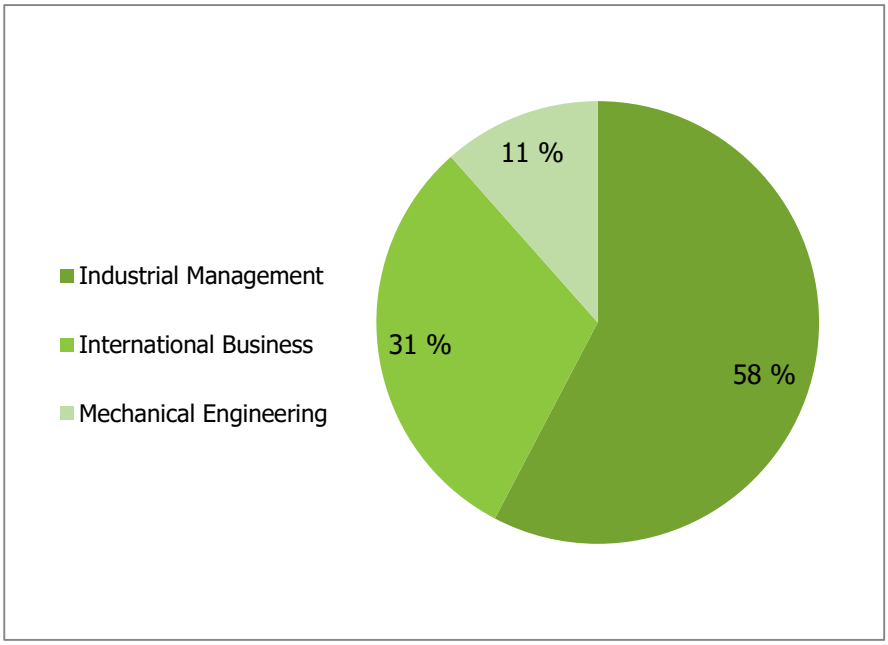

FIGURE 3. Question 1. What is your programme of study?

4.3.2 The Year of Applying to Savonia UAS

The majority of foreign students applied in 2012, and the number of them is 11 out of 26 students. Next year, five students marked it as their application period, then in 2014 only four international students out of 26 applied in that year and finally the remaining six students applied in 2015. The researcher also sent the questionnaire to those few students who started their programme in 2010 and 2011, but there were no responses. Probably, some of them still continue their studies but do not check the university email frequently, or they just do not have so much time to answer, the same situation could be with some of the current students.

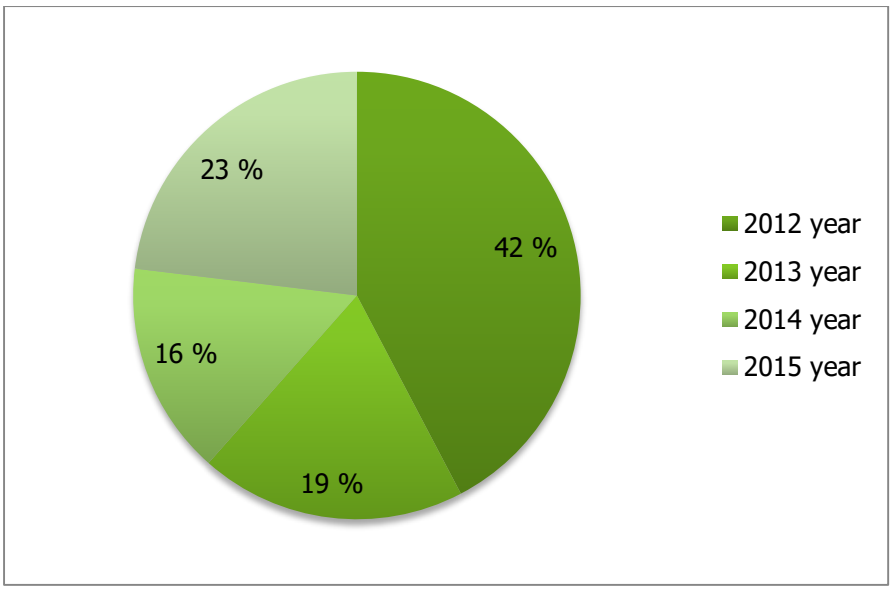

FIGURE 4. Question 2. When did you first enroll at Savonia UAS as a graduate student in this degree program?

4.3.3 The Location of the Campus

Respondents were also asked where their campus is located, and 50 % of them answered "Kuopio" and other 50 % - "Varkaus". Even though Savonia UAS Varkaus campus does no more admit international applicants, and nowadays not so many international students are left there, foreign students from Varkaus campus were more active in this survey than recipients from Kuopio.

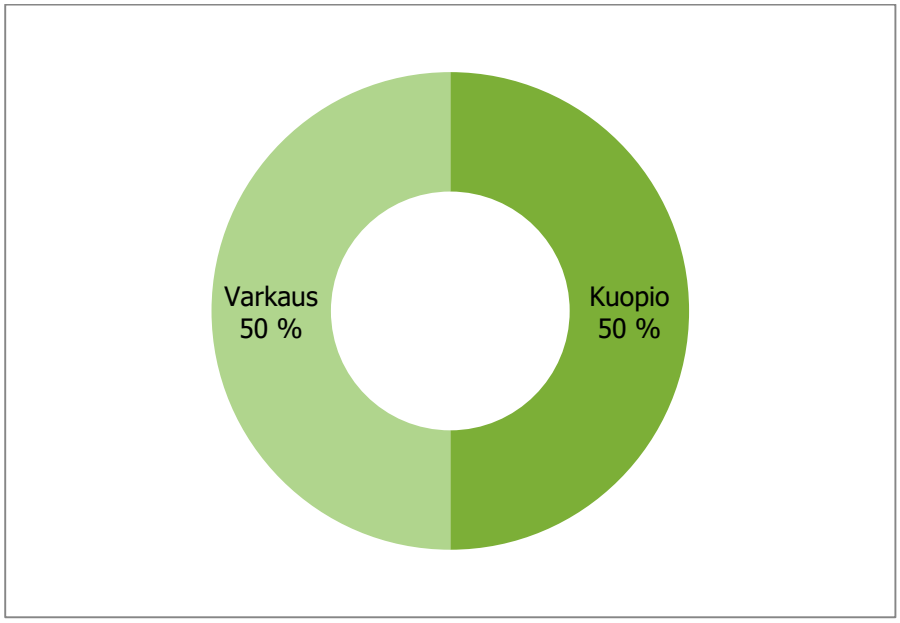

FIGURE 5. Question 3. Please state, where is the location of your campus?

4.3.4 The Application Method

58% of the respondents proceed their applications to Savonia UAS programme by themselves and other 42 % students were applying through the study abroad agencies. Perhaps, the major reason why most of the foreign students submitted their applications by themselves is that it is free, applicants do not have to be concerned about hidden or additional costs. Overall, the whole application elaborates inexpensively.

According to the webpage of Study in Finland, applying on his/her own gives the student more benefits. Sending your application through an advisor will not give applicant any advantage in the student selection process. The Finnish higher education institutions choose their students solely on the basis of the admission requirements, and no agency can "secure" or "guarantee" student a study place, no matter what they claim in their advertisements. In other words, an agency or consultancy has no say whatsoever in the student selection procedures. Information provided by this kind of agencies and consultancies may be unreliable, misleading, or even completely untrue and fraudulent. If the applicant has completed the qualification he/she is using for applying outside the EU/EEA area, he/she needs to pay an application fee. The student needs to do this personally on the Studyinfo.fi website. A consultancy or an agency cannot do this on applicant's behalf. Instead of paying some agent or consultancy for (potentially wrong and misleading) advice, the student might wish to save money for official and necessary costs (visa processing fees, insurance, travel, living costs, etc.) (Study in Finland 2015).

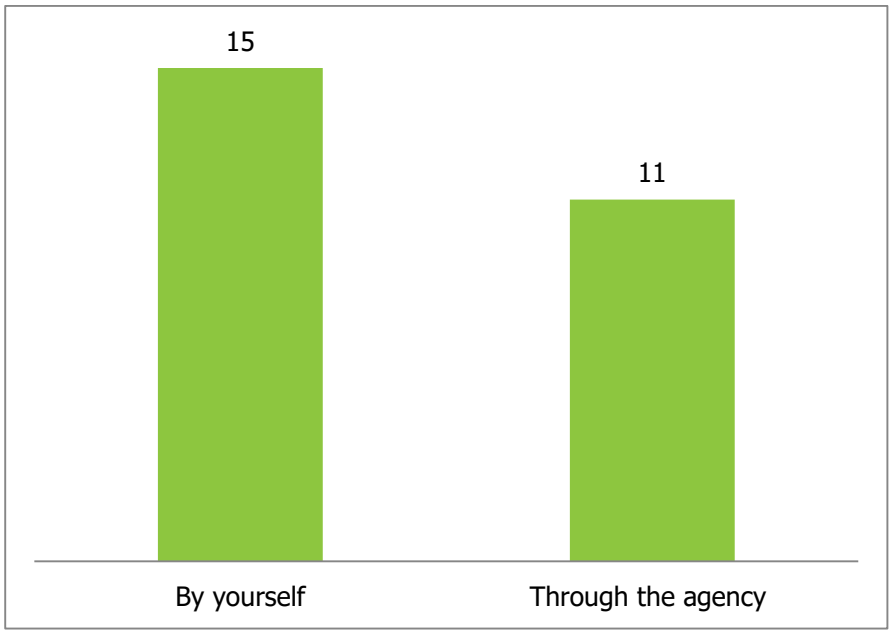

FIGURE 6. Question 4. How did you apply to Savonia UAS?

4.3.5 Response Time of Admission Office

The collected data shows that 58% of the recipients identified as "good" the admission office's responding rate and 30% of the students matched as "excellent". Only 8% of the respondents ascertained that the admission's staff response time was "satisfactory" and other 4% was not certain how to answer, simply did not understand the question's content or did not even contact the admission office directly.

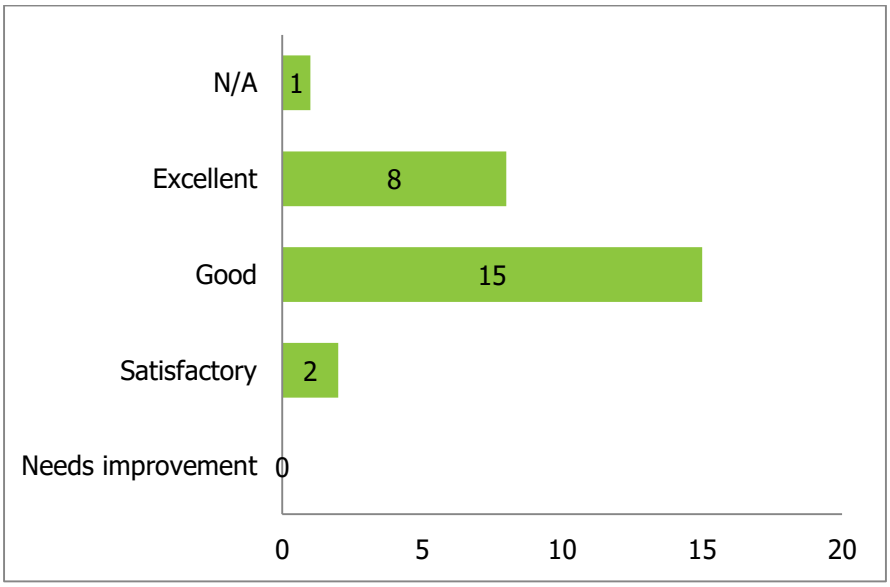

FIGURE 7. Question 5. Admissions staff responded to your questions and concerns promptly.

4.3.6 The Admissions Policies and Procedures

As seen from FIGURE 8, the admission policies and procedures were quite clear to 50% of the respondents who answered "good" and 27% identified as "excellent". It appears that 15% of the students were slightly satisfied with the admission procedures, and 4% was not contented at all and marked as "needs improvement". 4% of the recipients did not identify their opinion, and it could be again the same reason that was mentioned above.

FIGURE 8. Question 6. Admissions policies and procedures were clear while applying to the program.

4.3.7 The Notice of Acceptance

The next question was about admission acceptance letter and whether students received it at the right time. It is really important that students get the acceptance letter on schedule. The main responsibility is not only on the admission's personnel. Also, an applicant must return the letter of acceptance on time. Hence, it is essential to check email address listed and add admission office email to the address book to avoid having important information sent to the "junk" folders. Usually, international applicants are notified by email, and it is momentous to track notices regarding the application and admission status.

According to the respondents' answers, most of the students, 38% point out as "good" and 35% of the students matched as "excellent", as the result the majority of responded students received their admission acceptance letter in time. And other 27% of the recipients were somehow satisfied.

FIGURE 9. Question 7. You received notice of your acceptance promptly.

4.3.8 General Evaluation of Savonia Admission Services

In this section, researcher utilized the ordinal scale question for identifying the students' satisfaction level with admission office service in seven categories. The first category was chosen as "Friendliness/Courtesy" of admission personnel, and 54% ("excellent") and 35% ("good") of foreign students appreciated the admission staff's amiability and only one respondent found it "satisfactory and other one student identified as "N/A". The second rating was "Communication" with admission office, and 50% of the international students set out as "good" communication experience and 35% marked out as "excellent". The third category was about "Service quality" of admission office. The majority of respondents evaluated the service quality as "good" and "excellent". The next category

was "Reliability" of admission personnel and according to this survey, it has a high level of reliability within international students ("excellent" - 46 %, "good" - 31%). However, next section "English language level" does not have high results compared to the previous categories, seven students found it "satisfactory" and other two identified it as "needs improvement" in admission staff's language proficiency, thus in percentage number is 27% and 8% respectively. The "Professional manner" category had "excellent" evaluation from 12 (46 %) respondents and "good" from nine (35%) students. Only one (4%) respondent marked as "Needs improvement" and other four (15%) recipients assessed as "Satisfactory". The "Admission office service responses" section has substantially high outputs, 12 recipients answered to this section as "good" and ten others defined as "excellent", three students identified as "satisfactory" and only one student could not answer this question.

TABLE 4. Question 8. How would you evaluate Savonia Admission Office Department in the next categories?

	Needs improvement	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	N/A	Total	Average
Friendliness/Courtesy	0	1	9	14	2	26	3.65
Communication	1	3	13	9	0	26	3.15
Service quality	0	5	10	11	0	26	3.23
Reliability	2	2	8	12	2	26	3.38
English language level	2	7	9	8	0	26	2.88
Professional manner	1	4	9	12	0	26	3.23
Admission office service responses	0	3	12	10	1	26	3.35
Total	6	25	70	76	5	182	3.27

4.3.9 General Communication of the Admission Services

The following section of the survey was designed to find out the admission staff's communication ability to handle the student's problem and to explain clearly the next steps. The results of this question can be seen in the figure below.

Providing an excellent overseas student experience is one of the main goals of the university. A major part of that experience refers to the communication with students. It should also be noted that the cooperation of the academic and admission staff at the universities emerges to have a considerable impact on students' overall satisfaction with the communication – and so there is a very important role to be performed locally in bringing the improvements.

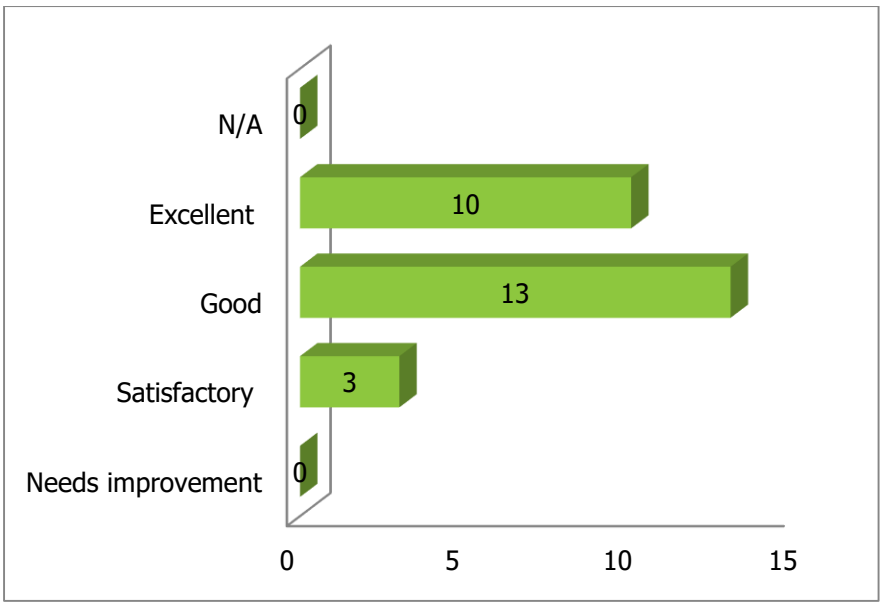

FIGURE 10. Question 9. The Admissions Office staff communicated with you in a manner that resolved your problem or allowed you to understand the next steps.

Exactly 50 % of the respondents answered as "good", 38% as "excellent", only 12% of the students evaluated it as "satisfactory" and it means most of the international students had a decent communication experience with the admission office.

4.3.10 The Communication Channels

Figure 11 illustrates that most of the recipients (62%) prefer to use e-mail as the major communication tool and the second place takes "office visit" with eight (31%) of answers. Only two (8%) of the students used webpage to contact the admission office, and no one chose phone as the communication channel. The main argument why 26 foreign students did not match the phone function could be that it is too costly to call to the international phone line. The webpage alternative was utilized as an Internet communication channel. The bulletins and journals were not mentioned, since prospective or current overseas students will end up contacting via e-mail or by phone with admission office on all occasions, and also, this method was not considered in this study because it is quite old-fashioned. Other than the communication channels identified by the researcher, the respondents also concentrated on the visit office option. This commonly refers to current foreign students who already are on campus and can easily contact the admission office in person. It is important to have face-to-face communication for appealing situations and problems that would be difficult to solve through online communication.

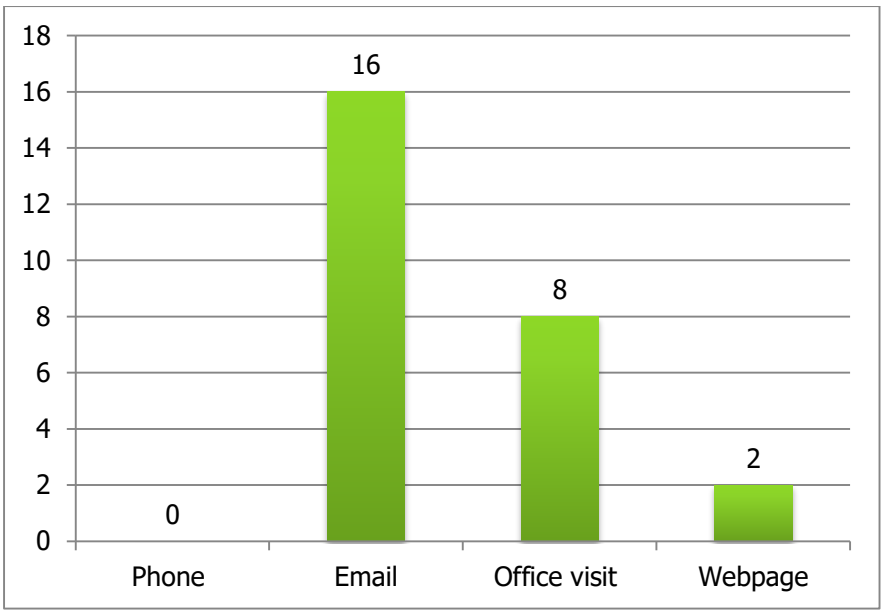

FIGURE 11. Question 10. What channels did you use to connect with Admissions personnel?

4.3.11 Availability of the Admission Personnel

Respondents were also asked about the admission personnel's availability on phone, e-mail and in person. The aim of this question was to inquire the accessibility of the admission office to the international students. As seen from the figure below, the results clearly indicate that the respondents find it overall easy to contact with admission staff, 13 (50%) of respondents identified it as "good" and other seven (27%) matched it as "excellent". Only four (15 %) of recipients replied to this question as "satisfactory" and two (8%) remain students did not know how to answer.

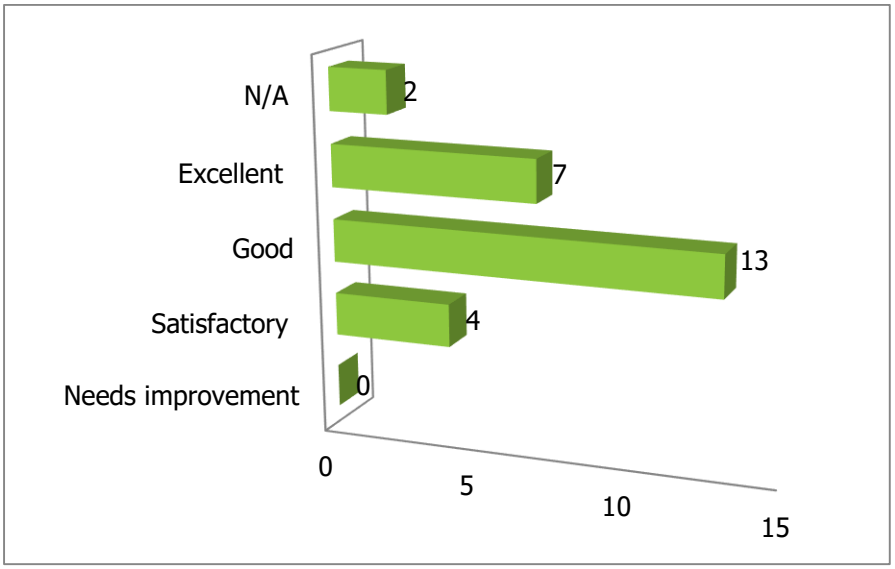

FIGURE 12. Question 11. When you contacted the Admissions Office, did you find the personnel to be easily available by phone, e-mail, or in person?

4.3.12 Feedback from International Students

In the end of questionnaire, there were open-ended questions. Thereby, foreign students could suggest new and more useful channels to communicate with admission personnel. A considerable number of extended answers was obtained. The respondents obviously tend to confide their opinions, which show their concerns on the matter. The researcher investigated what types of communication channels were applied in the admission process, how these communication channels were used, which channels were more effective, and how to improve communication techniques.

TABLE 5. Examples of responses to "What kind of communication channels would you suggest for improving the admission office service?"

What kind of communication channels would you suggest for improving the admission office service?
"Skype or WhatsApp for better communication and free calls."
"I would suggest having more available hours on the phone."
"Email."
"Webpage."
"To improve the communication channels, I think, it would be a good idea to make a group chat (for example) with supervisor teachers, older students or tutors and new students who were just applied to Savonia. It could help freshmen to get more useful information before coming to the university about studying, leaving, traveling, etc. or to get any help regarding accommodation, transportation or any other issues. The purpose of this chat is that every person could ask any question and others also can see the reply. Also, the teacher could post some important information for all the students to such a group chat and everyone can see it. Another idea is to have a tutor for every fresh student; it is a good thing that every student has someone to rely on in case he/she has any trouble."
"E-mail, or can add some channels for example Facebook."
"Maybe could add Facebook as a contact way."
"Maybe they can get a team leader in every group. Then it is easier for the manager and group members to get in touch."
"Office visit (knowledge of languages)."
"Take more activities."
"Phone."
"Video call is excellent because sometimes we need to save time and practice speaking."

A sufficient number of replies was about improving e-mail. It is the main and favorite source of receiving information; probably there were several critical issues about sending and receiving messages via e-mail within international students, e.g. the important messages or acceptance letter could go to junk e-mails. The next impactful channels were social media (Facebook) and group chats (Skype and WhatsApp), international students want to interact more with admission staff, other students, and teachers to receive more information in a less official environment and to be involved in the conversation. Also, another benefit of these channels is that they are less expensive

than a phone. In essence, participants in survey demonstrated that they had a relatively low level of satisfaction with current communication channels, especially the university website, the e-mail, and the phone. They had an adequate interest in looking for alternative communication channels. Students also expected that the university would focus on improving these three major communications

4.3.13 The Students' Level of Satisfaction

International students were asked about their satisfaction level with Savonia's admission office. As Figure 13 demonstrates, by percentage 62%, the level of satisfaction within foreign students is a "good" rating scale, 27% of the students matched it as an "excellent" level of satisfaction. Solely 12% of the recipients identified their gratification as "satisfactory".

Student satisfaction is related to the convenience, essential support or positive atmosphere and students reveal and demonstrate this experience during good service. The level of students' positive feeling or satisfaction is bonded with students' being able to find competent information providers to meet their academic and admission issues. The students' ability to pre-organize and bring into action their self-concepts as students or viewing themselves as a valuable component of the university is also referred to as their positive experience of satisfaction.

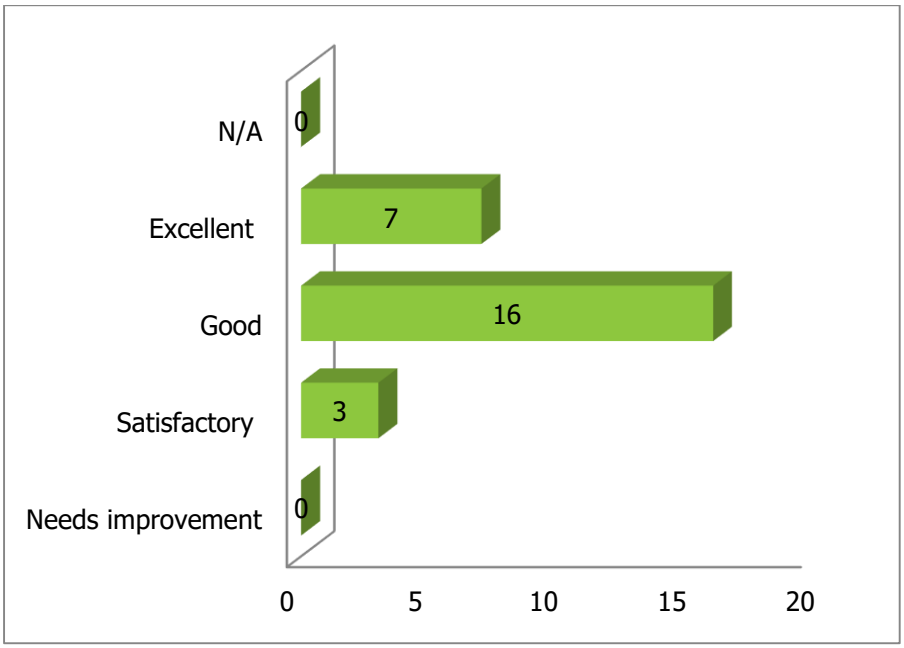

FIGURE 13. Question 13. What is your level of satisfaction with the Admission Office of Savonia UAS?

4.3.14 Feedback from International Students

Eight students provided extensive comments about improvements of Savonia's admission service and answered to this open-ended question.

TABLE 6. Examples of responses "How could Admission Office Department improve the service for students?"

How could Admission Office Department improve the service for students?
"They need to improve the English language skills because it is hard sometimes to communicate with admission office staff especially when it is some important issue. And also, they have to be more proactive in solving the studies or some documents related subjects."
"They have been doing a good job."
"Better English, for better mutual understanding. For foreign admission: Why do Oxford, Cambridge, etc. accept student translated school reports (with the schools stamp on it) but Savonia UAS has to have it translated by an official, court-approved translator? This way it is much more pricey and inconvenient and also caused stress time-wise, since there was only one week time between getting my grades and them arriving translated in Finland."
"I have applied to Savonia through the agency that took the responsibility to prepare necessary documents and to contact the university regarding my admission. Thus, I have not met any problems while applying. I could find all the important information and admission requirements on Savonia website as well as by asking the representative of the agency I was applying through. All the steps of the application process and the list of application materials were clear, and the entrance examination was held in my hometown, which was very convenient for me as the applicant. However, I faced a problem with the admission notice. I was expecting to get the email with the confirmation of my admission. However, I did not. Then I checked my name from the list of students who were accepted to the University and, I found my name. So I think the important point for the improvement of admission service is to make sure that every student is informed (by email or phone) of his/her acceptance and able to follow up with the further process."
"They can give more suggestions and ask more by Email."
"Everything is OK."
"Make an opening plan for peer students."
"Put more information in public place."

Above concerns touched upon mostly the English language skills of admission staff and therefore, most of the students had some communication problems, it could lead to misunderstanding the procedures or overall admission process.

One student came up with the Savonia's translation official documents rules and hence student had quite a stressful period because of that. Another student did not receive the admission acceptance letter by e-mail or phone, only when he/she checked the admission list, the student found out that she/he was finally accepted. This can result to the student's dissatisfaction with the admission's service.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Electronic Communication Channels

The obtained results of this research designate that electronic communication channels have become important broadcast devices among the institutions, university personnel, and students. The independence from the intensity of time and distance and the approachability of different data resources can allow university staff and students to communicate with autonomy and versatility. Electronic communication channels comprise e-mail, the Internet, websites and social media platforms. This channel can be used for one-to-one, group or mass communication. It is a less subjective way of communication but very productive.

5.1.1 Facebook

Like most of the young people nowadays, students are highly technology-dependent, having need of information in real-time mode, quick comments and have precedence for getting a brief overview of information, delivered using multimedia approaches. Also, foreign students prefer using Facebook as the social media tool. Savonia UAS already have some Facebook pages, but usually, it concentrates on domestic students and does not have enough useful content for overseas students. On other hand, it could be considered by the university as a challenging way to access this method for admission services. The social media is identified as an active dialog and obligation, which requires considerable time, resource and commitment to be successful.
With consideration to this research, it is recommended that improving the effectiveness of already established Savonia UAS Facebook pages and adapt them also to foreign students as well as to domestic students, should be a priority:

- develop good practice methodological principles on the use of social media and new media for communicating with existing students.

5.1.2 E-mail

E-mail is one of the most effective ways to communicate, and this method has a higher rank of efficiency in time management. The capability easily to archive and access messages at later time impacts students' channel preferences. Email remains a powerful channel for its ability to overlay the three-device environment of a smartphone, tablet, and personal computer.
There are some steps that could help to improve the quality of messages, accessibility and better performance of communication channels:

- using plain and standardized titles to avoid occasionally deleting or neglecting important messages
- providing technical support to help students in solving some problems with e-mail or e-mail list

- including hyperlinks guiding to outer web pages where students can find relevant specifications and details of the topic
- sending genuinely important e-mails several times to elude ignoring messages, failing to see them, filtering them straight to "junk", or delete them.

5.1.3 Website

According to conducted survey, only minor of the students used Savonia webpage to contact the admission office and still there was a suggestion to improve this particular communication channel. Therefore, it is strategically important to sustain and design functional web pages to make the information accessible and apparent:

- constant updating the university's website could attract new applicants and prospective students
- updating the website's content gives valuable information to current students and freshmen
- developing online news and information channels in English for Savonia webpage
- improving integration of existing online channels, such as Reppu Savonia and Savonia webpage
- creating forums for current, prospective and former students for better interaction with university personnel and teachers.

5.1.4 Voice Chat and Skype

Voice chat and Skype have a great number of benefits that could lead to a more effective way to communicate and share information:

- saving money, the basic version of Skype is free, as the chats and calls to other Skype users
- saving the time; voice chat lets customer multitask efficiently – one can keep on chatting, while accessing documents, sending emails, and even text chatting
- real-time communication, Skype allows applying instant messaging, also allowing the customer to share documents and quickly move to voice or video if necessary
- group chats option.

5.2 Face-to-face Communication (office visit)

Nothing can substitute the importance of face-to-face communication. Nevertheless, some prospective or current students cannot allow themselves to visit admission office or simply lack of time. Therefore, it is not always feasible or economical. Nonetheless, many foreign students still prefer face-to-face communication when they need in-depth discussion, or they do not completely understand some point. Hence, it is important to meet in person for addressing situations and problems that would be difficult to solve through online communication. Face-to-face communication is particularly suitable for discussion because there is instant feedback from the listener. Face-to-face com-

munication provides the speaker with a much better opportunity for agreement and mutual understanding. It is a suitable channel, especially for admission personnel, it enables them to coordinate and consult foreign students with more comprehension of the problem. A personal contact is effective, one simple 5-minute conversation could eliminate 15 back and forth emails. Building the relationship between a person of the admission office and an applicant could lead to more productive problem-solving process. There is a perception of the community because people are better able to socialize and interact with one another.

5.3 Phone

Nowadays, the most popular device to communicate verbally is a phone. It connects with individuals free of distance. It displays the sound and helps people to communicate at any movement and from any location. Usually, the international applicants use this communication method after the failure of employing other channels, e.g. there is not enough admission information on the university website, etc.

Certainly, phone is the most extended and vast device for communication, but there are some advantages and disadvantages of the communication by phone.

TABLE 7. Advantages and Disadvantages of phone communication.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Time saving. When action required taken instantly, it is best to send a message verbally.	The call has to be made in a proper time to reach the admission personnel.
Immediate feedback. Students can get quick answers to the various issues.	The discrepancy can happen during the call. So, the reverse result of expected plan may occur.
Some Internet calls can be free, e.g. WhatsApp or Skype.	Using Internet calls can be impossible if other party does not have special programs to call for free.
Cost savings for domestic or current foreign students with cheap phone calls inside the country.	Expensive to call through international phone lines, not so useful for applying students who are outside Finland.
Versatility. By the need of the situations, verbal instructions can be changed easily and for these cases maintain the formalities are not necessary. So it is quite flexible and valid.	Indistinct speech. Sometimes the recipient fails to understand the meaning of a message due to the habitual or foreign accent of the speaker.
Correction of mistakes: If any fallacy is expressed at the time of oral communication. It was possible to reclaim at that time or within a very short time.	Creates misunderstanding: Foreign students often start communicating without having organized speech properly earlier or just being too nervous. So, it is possible that student may not

	be able to make herself/himself correctly to explain with the admission staff. As a result, misunderstanding may occur.
Performance: With the help of alteration in the tone, pitch, and intensity of voice, the speaker can convey shades of meaning. This factor also contributes to the effectiveness of oral communication.	The probability of skipping the main purpose: Sometimes, the main subject may be skipped to express a word for communicating. Hence, expected result may not be achieved.

In consonance with the survey results, 26 international students did not use the phone approach at all. It was already assigned to inconvenience and high price of the international calls. But it also indicates that speaking to an admission officer can be a very stressful experience for overseas students, especially by phone. Nevertheless, applying or current students should feel free to contact the admission officers because they represent an institution and they believe in its mission, and it is their duty to help and guide students.

6 CONCLUSION

With this survey topic, the researcher was able to obtain somewhat results to this study problem. One of the major arguments was to identify the overseas students' satisfaction level with admission office service and overall experience while applying to the programmes at Savonia UAS.

When concluding the survey outlets, it can be seen that the Savonia Admission Services is doing a quite solid job in ensuring the quality of the service and guiding the foreign students during the application period. As proof of this, the results of satisfaction level with admission service are relatively high. Nevertheless, Admission Services team is confronting some problems with practicing more multi-channel approaches which most of the international recipients want to receive from the service. The question is: "How to improve the existing channels and implement new channels to admission service?" The answer is in multichannel customer support, creating consistent customer experiences across all channels, optimizing the webpages, and other channels. Internal objectives and incentives must be leveled. The capacity and costs of specific activities in each channel should be measured to recognize the most promising potentials for the optimization.

For the future, the researcher suggests that this kind of investigations and surveys would be done after every application period in Savonia UAS, this could give a statistical overview of the admitted and not admitted foreign students' experience. This method could improve admission office services in a superior way. This improvement could be implemented quite easily, solely sending brief surveys to the international students who applied after the deadline of application period and there would be a bigger chance that more students would complete the survey than this time.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERNET SURVEY

(ONLY FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS)

Greetings,

I am writing on behalf of Savonia University of Applied Sciences to request your participation in a brief online survey.

I am working on my Bachelor's final thesis, Research Multi-channel, Cross-border Customer Service.

The purpose of this survey is to determine the level of satisfaction with Admission Office service and also to identify the valuable opinions how to improve the service and communication channels for foreign students of Savonia UAS.

The questionnaire is very laconic and will only take about 10 minutes to complete. Please click the link below to go to the survey website (or copy and paste the link into your Internet browser).

https://www.webropolsurveys.com/S/7E24BECEB02FDA26.par

Your participation in the survey is completely voluntary and all of your responses will be kept confidential.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation. Feedback from our students is very important to us.

Best regards,

Aziza Tazhiyeva

SAVONIA

Admission Satisfaction Survey for International Students

1. What is your program of study? *

_____

_____

_____

2. When did you first enroll at Savonia UAS as a graduate student in this degree program? year *

_____

_____

_____

3. Please state, where the location of your campus is. *

○ Kuopio

○ Varkaus

4. How did you apply to Savonia UAS? *

○ by yourself

○ through the agency

5. Admissions staff responded to your questions and concerns promptly.

○ Needs improvement

○ Satisfactory

○ Good

○ Excellent

○ N/A

6. Admissions policies and procedures were clear while applying to the program. *

○ Needs improvement

○ Satisfactory

○ Good

○ Excellent

○ N/A

7. You received notice of your acceptance promptly. *

○ Needs improvement

○ Satisfactory

○ Good

○ Excellent

○ N/A

8. How would you evaluate Savonia Admission Office Department in the next categories? *

	Needs improvement	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	N/A
Friendliness/Courtesy	○	○	○	○	○
Communication	○	○	○	○	○
Service quality	○	○	○	○	○
Reliability	○	○	○	○	○
English language level	○	○	○	○	○
Professional manner	○	○	○	○	○
Admission office service responses	○	○	○	○	○

9. The Admissions Office staff communicated with you in a manner that resolved your problem or allowed you to understand the next steps. *

○ Needs improvement

◯ Satisfactory

◯ Good

◯ Excellent

◯ N/A

10. What channels did you use to connect with Admissions personnel? *

◯ Phone

◯ Email

◯ Office visit

◯ Webpage

11. When you contacted the Admissions Office, did you find the personnel to be easily available by phone, e-mail, or in person? *

◯ Needs improvement

◯ Satisfactory

◯ Good

◯ Excellent

◯ N/A

12. What kind of communication channels would you suggest for improving the admission office service?

_____

_____

_____

13. What is your level of satisfaction with the Admission Office of Savonia UAS? *

◯ Needs improvement

◯ Satisfactory

◯ Good

◯ Excellent

○ N/A

14. How could Admission Office Department improve the service for students?

APPENDIX 2: SAVONIA ADMISSION SERVICES INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am a bachelor's degree student in Industrial Management programme at Savonia UAS, Varkaus campus.

I am in the process of writing my final thesis and I am collecting data for that purpose.

For my final thesis, I am very interested in identifying the methodology of Admission process or procedures for prospective or current international students.

And also, I am conducting the online survey for foreign students to identify their level of satisfaction with admission service and what kind of communication channels they would like to have while contacting with admissions personnel.

The purpose of this email is to ask for your assistance as Admission Officer or adviser to answer several questions via email to conduct better research.

Please ask any questions that you have about participating in this study at any time.

Yours sincerely,

Aziza Tazhiyeva

Interview date: 10.02.2016

1. Could you explain the Savonia Admission Services goals and mission?
2. Does Savonia Admission Services consider itself as student service or counselor service as it also helps students to solve their problems during applying?
3. What is the structure of Savonia Admission Committee?
4. Does Savonia Admission Services have transparency during the admissions? If "yes", could you explain, what kind of procedures you have to demonstrate this transparency?
5. How many intakes does Savonia UAS have per year?
6. What kind of channels Admission Services would like to have or improve for suitable and productive communication with international students?
7. Any suggestions for better admission services are welcome.

APPENDIX 3: SAVONIA ADMISSION SERVICES CLOSING PERIOD

IMAGE1. Savonia Admission Services is closed 7-11.03. The next week will start the application period.