



# International Students Alumni Network

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This thesis aimed to research International Students Alumni Network at TAMK University of applied sciences. This research incorporates constructs such as strategies that can be adapted to engage International Students Alumni with their alma mater. In addition to this, the research also includes exploring challenges faced by the International Students Alumni in general. Overall the purpose of this research is to determine factors that influence building and strengthening the relationship between the University and International Students Alumni.

The theoretical framework discusses networking, branding, and social network theories. Qualitative research method was used. The data were collected from members of the international students' alumni group and also from current students. A set of questionnaire was designed to collect information to answer the research questions.

The outcome of this research illustrates that there is an immense need to activate an International students' alumni network association, which includes past students, current students to perpetuate valuable support to build the University's strong heritage and help students in different matters.

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Keywords: TAMK, International students alumni, International students alumni network

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**GLOSSARY or ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS (choose one or other)**

TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences
cr	credit
ISA	International Students Alumni
ISAN	International Students Alumni Network

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Many universities have a system for graduating students called alumni network, Alumni networks are essential for universities because they can help in creating strong relationships between past students and their alma mater. There is a mutual benefit for both the university and its alumni. As the topic suggests, Alumni network is a significant factor in assessing the quality of education and degree provided by any university. It is through Alumni network it is possible to benchmark and evaluate the work-life of graduated students. Through this benchmark and evaluation, future challenges faced by the Alumni can be mitigated. The alumni network is a clear example of the kind of people that institutions produce with such great expertise. Active alumni network benefits the university by offering their support to the current students.

International students' alumni or past foreign students are students who travel to the countries other than their own to complete either full degree studies or in partial fulfillment of their education. In many parts of the world, former university students are recognized as an asset to their institutions as they serve as a brilliant former student in an alumni network. The history of universities attests that alumni network has been a part of university life for almost 180 years, but much has changed in recent years. With the global outlook for infrastructure and technology, recent communication patterns, globalization, and the European Union's softening boundaries for its member states, the world is progressively accessible. This variation in the world poses new challenges for universities and their alumni network in the view that aspiring students will have the opportunity to choose their favorite universities and are not limited to choose the University close to their endpoint (Harvard 2012.)

This research discusses how these challenges can be eradicated with building a formidable alumni network.

The important part of the study focuses on finding out strategies that will be used to enable a dynamic international Students' Alumni Network and Highlight the key elements which are missing in the current alumni network model of TAMK University of Applied Sciences. The research is carried out through reviewing

theoretical framework on branding, networking, and social network theories.  
Significance of the study

This study of International Students' Alumni Network can be a tool for understanding the various benefits of alumni networks. The active alumni in the alumni network offer their valued time to suggest career plans to current students, and alumni network has a real-life benefit for students. This enriches the students' knowledge and gives them a competitive edge in today's threatening job market. The alumni network of a school is one of the mainsprings of students' engagement in job opportunities. Alumni can help students get positioned at organizations and workplaces related to their aptitudes.

### **1.1 Research questions**

In relevance to the purpose of research, the following research questions will be discussed:

- How can TAMK motivate students to become an active member of the network?
- How can TAMK benefit from the International Students' Alumni Network?
- What are the strategies TAMK can adapt to develop a strong International Students' Alumni?

### **1.2 Limitations**

There are some limitations related to this research study. For instance, the number of respondents is limited to active members of the alumni network of TAMK. The research was planned to collect at least 60 responses from the survey questionnaire but received 31 responses. This can be attributed to the reachability of international students' alumni. The Student Counsellor for International Business (BBA and Master's), suggested sending the survey questionnaire via LinkedIn and Facebook group he has, which was the main means to contact past international students.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Alumni networks are considered an essential key factor for the competitiveness of a university in the last decade. Incorporation of the financial resources and human capital in alumni relations has resulted in extensive opportunities for venture capital, endowments, pro-bono services, new programs, and research projects (Hall 2011.)

Furthermore, alumni networks have a crucial role to play in the ranking of the universities. In this regard, several strategies and networks have been employed for the active alumni network in a university. Alumni relations can be categorized into six forms, based on graduation year, and campus attended, academic major, profession, the industry area, and the current residence. Alumni networks have become an essential part of the university business development units as they are playing a significant role in fundraising and program innovation (Nann 2010.) It is found that alumni associations in private universities yield 8.7% of the total budget of the University in the United States of America (Altbach & Knight 2016.)

Alumni network can be strengthened via the employment of a comprehensive framework based on the ensured memorable and excellent experience during studies, maturity in the alumni network and wide-spread spirit of connectedness, the maturity of all the members based on the age factor, and the availability of the opportunities for donations for certain specific purposes (chiavacci 2005.)

### **2.1 Internationalization of the alumni networks**

"Alumni" originates from Latin and can be generally translated into "professional tégé." The alumni networks had their conventions in the eighteenth-century United States, where they were utilized to make money related security for the schools through gifts. Be that as it may, the current alumni networks are substantially more than gathering pledges associations. The test looked in the second decade of the 21st century is the internationalization of the alumni networks



(Arnold & Paulus 2010.) The students increment the brand estimation of the colleges, draw in nearby colleagues, which are after internationalization, just as are the potential hotspots for global business associations after graduation. There is likewise a significant potential in utilizing the universal alumni to publicize the foundations in their various nations to potential students (Roblyer et al. 2010). A fruitful global alumni network depends on two angles: networking and branding.

### Networking

To vanquish the physical separation and the social and social contrasts of the alumni, the school brings to the table improved networking apparatuses and methodologies (Cohen & Barabási 2012.) Networking mainly brings the exchange of information between people with common interests, and Networking helps Universities and organizations to stay connected with people of their interest.

### Branding

A reliable brand is one of the crucial components in pulling in previous students to become dynamic alumni. Without a reliable establishment brand that is reflected in a robust alumni network, there is little any expectation of progress (Narloch 2016.) Branding is essential to create value for your product; it adds value and a unique impression to the services. Similarly, university alumni are brand of a university which represents universities.

## **2.2 The core of networking**

"Networking" is the trading of data or administrations among people, gatherings, or establishments" (Cohen & Barabási 2012.) The word was first presented and utilized in the year 1967 (Cohen & Barabási 2012.) This is just a single clarification to the term that is more muddled and sweeping than we can ever envision. From numerous points of view, networks are the fundamental components that make our reality. From the vast and complex networks that make the environment to the World Wide Web that associates people from all around the globe to one another, it is clear that networks are wherever on the planet encompassing, affecting and controlling us. As nearly anything can be and is alluded to as network-ing, and nearly everything has to do with networking, it

tends to be genuinely disappointing to attempt to pinpoint the term for a specific use.

Narrowing the expression "Networking" As the creators watch the expression "networking," it is clear that it requires the right setting to fill the needs of the proposal. Barabási began the first experience with networking through renowned mathematicians called Euler, Erdos, and Renyi. These researchers were one of the first to numerically demonstrate speculations concerning the framing and working of networks, as such, how the networking procedure functions.

It is conceivable to clarify the irregular network hypothesis by utilizing an old-style model about a gathering. In this model, a gathering with a hundred visitors is collected. The visitors do not have any acquaintance with one another already. Usually, the visitors will frame little groups of a few people and begin to become more acquainted with one another. On the off chance that one of the visitors is given a clue about an extraordinary wine served in the gathering, the visitor with the data will spread it in the gathering. At that point, as the individuals meander from gathering to gathering, so is the data spread around everybody in the gathering (Zhu 2009.)

In the case of the arbitrary network in the gathering, it is conceivable to observe the imperceptible connections between the little gatherings of individuals, or hubs, and the way that it takes just a single individual, or connection, for the data to spread. Another critical component, from the perspective of the global alumni networks, is the Six Degrees of Separation thought (Zhu 2009.) The central matter behind it is that in the advanced world, everyone can be connected through six different people. This, as indicated by Barabási, is the consequence of the cutting-edge innovation, the Internet, and the steady snare of correspondence through messages and different techniques. These hypotheses and ideas give a positive sign of the potential outcomes behind a universal alumni network. The geographic impediments have decreased, and the capacity to remain associated with individuals around the globe makes the universal alumni network attainable.

### **2.2.1 Networking in the academic environment**

The worldwide alumni network is, to some degree, like the case of the gathering exhibited. Various arbitrary people, from everywhere throughout the world, are placed into a similar environment, the school, and left there to make informal communities. They wind up sharing data and getting to know one another. To make it increasingly intricate, the visitors leave the gathering, yet they likewise leave the nation and spread the world over. To handle this issue, the creators turned their concentration towards networking techniques and research in the school environment. For instance, an organization made a restrictive school-network for alumni, where the school and organizations network with one another (Teo 2015.)

It presents the originator of the organization and clarifies how the alumni trust the select network as it is just attached to the school. This is a superior alternative than open interpersonal organizations like Facebook or LinkedIn. This would demonstrate that to some degree shut network, intranet, might be an ideal encompassing for the proper correspondence between the school and the alumni and different elements. Notwithstanding, it is expressed that the critical component is the intensity of physical networks and that they are increasingly successful in, for instance, spreading data in the market. This shows. Additionally, the individual associations' students make during their examinations are sufficiently able to proceed later on and in business life.

Another significant player in the worldwide alumni networks could be found in the possibility of proposal advertising. The thought, specific networks, or people can impact encompassing networks or people. To put it another way, a few people can persuade others to act with a particular goal in mind. This incorporates techniques, for example, informal showcasing otherwise called client to a client promoting. Adjusting this plan to the universal alumni network, a probability in encouraging an arrangement of physical networks is classified "Nearby Umbrella Networks," in nations or zones where a few of the previous students originate from or move to. The pioneers of the umbrella networks, named Local Alumni Leaders, would arrange their umbrella networks and go about as the people of intensity that inspire different alumni to act as per the necessities of the global alumni network (Knight 2015.)

The World Wide Web is somewhat nearer, as it is probably going to assume a significant job in the universal alumni network. The World Wide Web is not an irregular network at all, and that goes for our general public overall too. The creator alludes to Gladwell's analysis, where a gathering of 400 individuals was concentrated to get data about the number of social connections they had. The average number was 39 connections, and the most noteworthy was 118 connections on the off chance that the general public was an irregular network, at that point, the most elevated number of connections could not be so high (Green & Safonkina 2018.) On the off chance that the Web as an arbitrary network, the likelihood of there being a site with 500 or over approaching connections would be fundamentally zero, demonstrating that centre points do not exist in the irregular network Web.

Presently what does this have to do with anything, one may inquire. Everything, because through understanding the components of an active network, the creators will have the option to make an establishment to a fruitful global alumni network without understanding the components behind the Web and society when all is said in done, it is beyond the realm of imagination to expect to recognize the simple communication device that would be a center point for the alumni. Similarly, it would not be conceivable to arrange neighborhood umbrella networks with nearby alumni pioneer going about as center points for their nearby alumni (Knight 2015.)

The primary explanation is the reality that although the standards behind network are the equivalent, the instruments and strategies change. A universal organization needs to contemplate distinctive social practices, similar to dialects, to figure out how to make a network (Knight 2015.) A national organization is, essentially, adjusted to the nearby traditions and ways.

### **2.3 The core of branding**

"Branding" is "the advancing of an item or administration by distinguishing it with a specific brand." The word was first utilized in 1913 (Narloch 2016.) It does not help if one is new to the importance of "brand." It is "an imprint made by igniting with a hot iron to bear witness to fabricate or quality or to assign proprietorship." In other words, and an advanced setting, a brand is just a picture made around a

specific item or item gathering. The client-based brand value (CBBE) model is a decent spot to begin (Narloch 2016.)

The initial step is to set up a personality for the sought-after brand. The subsequent advance is to recognize a significance for the brand. As a third step, one needs to take a look at the right brand reactions, and the last advance is to fashion the necessary brand.

Narrowing the expression "branding." Research clarifies how a reliable brand carries extraordinary advantages to an organization. It delivers benefits, for example, more noteworthy client faithfulness and little weakness to rivalry and emergencies. It additionally clarifies how a reliable brand influences client conduct. On the off chance that an organization needs to raise costs, a reliable brand makes the client more support ready for the change. Setting this into the instructive environment, it could mean a circumstance where a change happens in the training field. A reliable school brand gives the students and colleagues a quiet perspective (Myrick et al. 2011.)

It is not sufficient to know the theory behind structure a brand if the item or organization being referred to does not meet the prerequisites of the client. As the challenge between school increments, bogus promoting or making a bogus brand has been a perceived issue among people in general and the potential students. The main point of view is that the brand picture and character must be built up through a working item. Whatever the item or administration is, to assemble a reliable brand, it needs to meet or go over the desires for the clients.

### **2.3.1 Branding in the academic environment**

A reliable brand makes enthusiasm for the item being referred to. For the instance of college, the item they are selling is instruction and information, both to the students and conceivable accomplice organizations and other elements. A working global alumni network is significant for any school, basically because of the brand's worth and promoting channels, which become accessible through the universal alumni. Alumni, who are glad for their school, are a financially savvy approach to deal with the school band. Moreover, they can go about as an agent

of their school, a minister of sorts, in their neighborhoods (Kurtulan & Aydın Kılıç 2017.)

Rivalry in the instruction business is expanding comprehensively and broadly. The world is decreasing through globalization, and this vast affects the establishments of advanced education in the First World Countries (Sharma 2017.) An ever-increasing number of individuals from the creating nations look for advanced education, and the organizations of advanced education contend in pulling in the most splendid of them. Simultaneously, these organizations are progressively keen on the potential training deals showcases in creating nations.

The specific criteria for a working global alumni network are the networking techniques and apparatuses used to make and maintain it. In this investigation, the creators previously recognized the right surroundings to utilize the expression "networking." Looking at the theory of arbitrary networks by Rényi, presented by Barabási (2003), to the global alumni network, questions emerged about how the networks could be maintained after the students graduate and spread far and wide.

Nonetheless, the Six Degrees of Separation theory demonstrated that even though individuals are spread the world over, it is as yet conceivable to make networks connecting individuals on account of present-day innovation. This gave the creators confirmation that a global alumni network could be made and kept up by utilizing, for instance, social media instruments. In the overview, the respondents checked this and expressed numerous apparatuses, like Facebook and LinkedIn, to be conceivable for the utilization of the global alumni network (Bennett & Kane 2017.) These were additionally the instruments that were generally well known among the respondents. Another networking instrument, the alumni intranet, was introduced. This selective network might be utilized to keep up the official alumni register, present restrictive offers, and administrations coordinated to-wards the alumni and allow the alumni to offer their administrations to the school.

Notwithstanding connecting the alumni with the school staff, it is additionally conceivable to utilize the intranet to interface the alumni to the students and the key colleagues. This could make open doors for every one of the clients of the

intranet and present the alumni with a chance to help the organizations in their internationalization procedure. As indicated by the overview results, a more significant part of the respondents would be keen on helping neighborhood organizations internationalize, and the lion's share of the respondents was additionally keen on utilizing the intranet if it got accessible (Bennett & Kane 2017.)

## **2.4 Social network analysis**

This analysis is a theoretical framework to understand the systematic and structural workings of a network. It was first utilized by a psychiatrist, Jacob L. Moreno, and psychologist, Helen Jennings to study social groupings (Moreno 1932.) Later it was utilized by anthropologist, W. Lloyd Warner (Warner 1941.) After that, many scholars utilized this framework to understand the networking between social groups, which transformed this framework. The advent of social media platforms also revolutionized this analysis approach as media forums started playing a crucial role in networking between several individuals transnationally. So, basically, this framework has four specifying characteristics as it analyses social networks:

- It requires the sentiments or intuitions that connect social actors with each other forming binary links.
- It records and collects data on social relations to analyze them to understand what formulates a network and links social actors.
- It utilizes graphic imagery to understand the data and patterns of a social network.
- It then constructs models that are computational or mathematical in nature to present that data collected and processed.

## **2.5 Issues in the current alumni network models**

The alumni network models are not intended to serve the necessities of the worldwide alumni. The creators distinguished some specific issues for the worldwide alumni network that ought to be remembered (Teo, Lim & Lai 2011.) Instances of these issues, as indicated by the creators:

### **2.5.1 The separation factors**

The physical separation of the global alumni and the host school can be an extraordinary issue when the previous students spread far and wide post-graduation. Current innovation has made it convenient to keep in contact with individuals around the globe easily. Social media, like Facebook and LinkedIn, email, and other specialized instruments, can fill in as an extraordinary apparatus. However, they cannot supplant the physical absence of quality brought about by the geo-realistic separation. Alumni gatherings, visiting the previous schools, and other physical contacts are unquestionably increasingly troublesome (Crisp & Cruz 2009.)

Time zones are additionally an interesting point. At the point when an individual is bolstering messages to Facebook in Jyväskylä during the available time, a graduate living in the United States is sleeping soundly. Moment correspondence is therefore troublesome, and the message is destined to suffocate in the steady pool of updates in the Facebook divider. This is only one case of the challenges looked because of the time zone contrasts.

### **2.5.2 The cultural factors**

The globalizing world makes cultural conflicts. For instance, how individuals impart separates from how Chinese individuals speak with one another. Nourishment culture, language, religion, business culture, and numerous other subjects are culture subordinate and, therefore, potential issues (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2017.) Even though the previous students have gotten increasingly universal and acquainted with other societies during their time in the host school, the issues may happen on the off chance that they come back to their nations of origin and adjust back to their local societies because of social weight. The cultural factors influence alumni associations as these students belong to different countries and traditions. These students face problems in communication with other countries students and cannot build strong professional relationships.

Similarly, alumni students, when they are understudying in a particular University, they face challenges to follow the norms and moral values of that country. Moreover, cultural factors impact the performance of alumni networks in making



business connections due to differences in culture, which further leads to generating problems related to job opportunities.

### **2.5.3 The social integration factors**

Countless potential experts leave Finland and come back to their nations of origin or some other nation that is all the more engaging. Stable worldwide alumni networks can be fundamental, as they can be utilized as encouraging groups of people for the graduating students and help the alumni secure positions and fit into the way of life forever (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2017.) One of the principal reasons for alumni associations is to help a system of previous alumni who will help to raise the profile of the college. Much the same as most other college understudy associations, alumni associations plan to unite similarly invested people. Be that as it may, in contrast to sororities, cliques, and other understudy associations, alumni programs are available to all alumni and offer a more extensive systems administration scope.

In case the student is making a beeline for graduation in two or three months or has quite recently completed a degree, joining the alumni association is a decent method to get a foot (or three) in the entryway. Something to recall about alumni associations is that they need the students or members to succeed.

It is nothing unexpected then that most alumni associations offer an assortment of vocation administrations. These can be anything from the previously mentioned activity fairs to things like resume workshops, work postings, and online assets for work searchers. These can be incredible instruments for building the vocation or discovering approaches to amplify the procuring potential (King 2006.)

At the point when the student is understudy at the college, the student or member of the alumni association was a piece of a network that offered a wide range of energizing advantages – free shows, understudy limits, verse readings, craftsmanship displays, library, games, and various things that make the college one of a kind and dynamic.

Furthermore, university alumni associations comprehend significantly after graduation, and numerous students keep on feeling associated with their college,

the foundation is the reason numerous alumni associations keep their connection with the college. Numerous associations have unique alumni get-togethers, and others give individuals free passes to college games, life-time email administrations, protection and banking administrations, and limits (King 2006.)

Another significant motivation to join alumni association is not just about limits and employment propositions provided by the University. The alumni association is presumably instrumental in prosperity. One of the principal reasons for alumni associations is to enlist new ideas. Furthermore, alumni associations are incredible assets for approaching international students – many honor grants (financed by gifts from alumni), and the quality of a school's alumni association can be the main factor for approaching students.

The graduating class can benefit the university in offering help voluntarily; the graduate class will probably have an abundance of experience and abilities to impart to current students using talks and bulletins. Making a connection with graduated class is useful because drew in graduates are significantly more prone to need to "offer back" to the University; that could be, for instance, Graduated class additionally gives their vital time to offer vocations backing to current understudies through original plans, for example, the licensed Professional Mentoring Program, work shadowing, and expert systems administration openings (Sarapin & Morris 2015.)

Many universities are utilizing innovation to build availability between current students and graduated class as they have an extremely mainstream e-organizing framework. Creative, tech-accommodating advances like the models above are probably going to interest twenty to thirty-year-olds, and engaging them is getting progressively significant. Twenty to thirty-year-olds – those conceived during the 1980s to the 2000s – presently make up a critical segment of the present graduated class (D. Weerakkody 2004.) Numerous colleges are using advanced promoting to stand out enough to be noticed, giving specific consideration to versatile showcasing – as 91% of UK twenty to thirty-year-olds, and 76% of recent college grads all-inclusive claim a PDA (D. Weerakkody 2004.) Online networking nearness is an unquestionable requirement as well, with 92% of recent college grads on Facebook, 42.1% on Twitter, and 37.5% on Snapchat (Sarapin & Morris, 2015.) An accentuation on experience, for example, the

Alumni Blog, would likewise be helpful, as twenty to thirty-year-olds frequently esteem encounters over belongings.

College alumni frameworks exist to advance dynamic and progressing connections among graduates and their institute of matriculation. Be that as it may, it is a significant test of how to improve tutoring among alumni and current students. Long-range interpersonal communication is an incredible asset for individuals to meet and connects dependent on common interests. Then again, information mining is another incredible asset used to comprehend the immense measures of information that are created by social associations, to upgrade the administrations being given.

The time has come to structure and utilize interpersonal organization style alumni framework. Tutoring programs, including e-coaching programs, which consider organizing, including on the long web range informal communication, ought to be a crucial part of the enrolment and maintenance of our students and in fortifying college programs.

Alumni are one of the most significant advantages for any college. They are the individuals who speak to the college in reality. Numerous alumni systems were at first begun from local gatherings of alumni united for college raising support exercises. Afterward, these systems gradually picked up included significance in the advancement of the colleges due to their immense effort potential that advantages the college and helps current students in their professional ways.

The alumni bunches have been in presence for quite a long time, and they are continually changing with time (Sarapin & Morris 2015.) There have been significant changes in the ongoing years with the improvement of the Web and long-range informal communication that powers the alumni framework to experience massive changes. Thus, it is incredibly significant for colleges to concentrate on the alumni systems and discover approaches to upgrade their development and advancement. It is imagined that such alumni frameworks are useful not exclusively to the colleges yet in addition to alumni and current students. It could fill in as a stage for current students to collaborate with their senior alumni and get coaching from them concerning professional ways, real desires, etc. From the alumni perspective, the advantages of taking part in alumni

bunches enable them to remain in contact and meet their colleagues, teachers, and college workforce, considerably following quite a prolonged during past graduation. It likewise enables alumni to share proficient or individual exhortation, investigate typical premiums, and to energize new open doors in a collective manner (Stevick 2010.)

### **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research methods are techniques and strategies that are used to gather data or evidence for the research. The data is used to discover the facts and information that has not been researched before. In research methods, there are two approaches for gathering the data. These two approaches are a quantitative research approach and a qualitative research approach. For this research study, the qualitative research approach was used to investigate the factors and characteristics that influence the recognition of the importance of International Students Alumni Networks in TAMK university.

The qualitative research approach is mainly investigative research. It is used on a broader aspect in order to gain a deep understanding of principal reasons and opinions and helps in a greater understanding of the problem.

The data collected are non-numeric and determines the process of decision making and gives a complete insight into the phenomenon. This research focuses on deeper details that cannot get from a quantitative research method (Beirão 2007.)

In qualitative research, the data is collected through different methods; the data is collected through group discussions, individual interviews participations and observations, online surveys, case study research, and record keeping.

#### **3.1 Data collection**

The qualitative methodology used in this questionnaire. A questionnaire was designed to collect views of International Students' Alumni regarding the best ways of contacting TAMK, their needs, benefits, and services for the mutual benefit of TAMK and International Students' Alumni.

The primary data was collected through an online platform to reach the past international students alumni group. A questionnaire was developed and sent to a sample of 60 past international students of TAMK University via LinkedIn and Facebook group. Out of 60 students, 31 responded, which was enough to prove the validity and reliability of the data. According to Patton, the primary data is

gathered by utilizing primary resources, i.e., Questionnaires that are intended to gather firsthand information. (Patton 1990.)

This data will be valuable to analyze how to strengthen the network between ISA alumni and TAMK. Furthermore, the facts collected from this questionnaire will also be useful in thinking about how ISA can connect with the current students.

### 3.2 Research design

This research was designed particularly to determine the existence of ISAN at TAMK University by collecting information from past international students about the value and scope of ISAN.

Precisely, an electronic questionnaire was distributed among past international students of TAMK to collect information about the contribution ISA to their alma mater the impacts alumni group have on current students and how TAMK University can benefit from formidable alumni association (Shapiro 2011.)

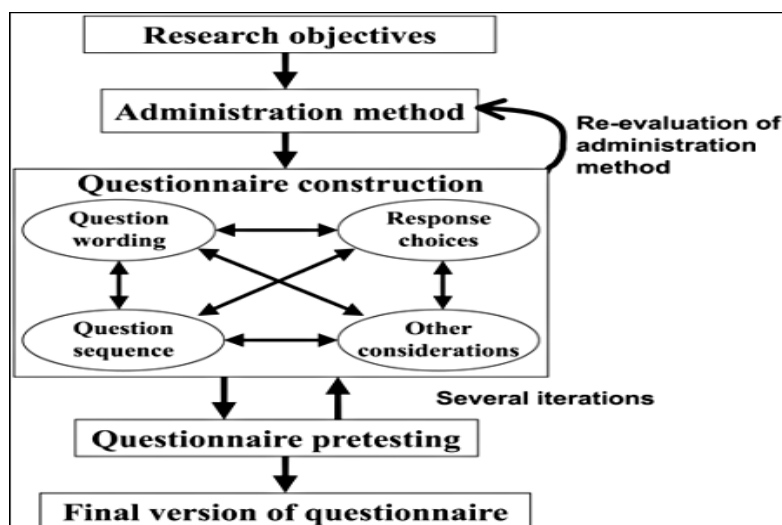


FIGURE 1 Research design

This diagram shows that the administration method/research methodology will design after the research objectives. In this research study, the author applied a questionnaire survey that consists of four elements question wording, sequence, selection of questions asked by the respondents, and other variables that are necessary for answering the research objective/questions. After designing the questionnaire survey, the research uses a pretesting method to verify and

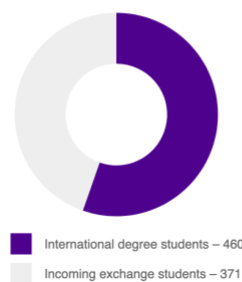
evaluate the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. If the researcher didn't get the required answers to the research study, then re-evaluate the questionnaire and change the questions. Subsequently, the researcher gets the responses through the respondents to answer the research questions. The researcher applied this approach while developing a research questionnaire survey.

### 3.3 Population and sample

The population selected for this thesis was a graduating class of a past era, graduating from TAMK University. The population of the International graduated students, according to the TAMK alumni statistics from 2016 to 2018, remained under 90 students graduating per year. The population was limited to an examination study that included students who had been in contact with the university via Facebook and LinkedIn group of TAMK alumni. The sample size that was selected N =60, out of all alumni graduated students. At the time this study was conducted, the TAMK University had a very limited email address in the database for past international students.

#### Internationality

Number of international students 2018



Non-Finnish graduates by degrees and Vocational Teacher Education	2016	2017	2018
Bachelor's degrees	60	63	66
Master's degrees	4	4	20
Vocational Teacher Education	2	4	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>90</b>

Figure 2. Internationality TAMK statistics (Annual Review TAMK 2018)

### 3.4 Reliability and Validity of the questionnaire

The reliability and validity of the questionnaire are most important to provide authentic and valid information to the audience and to fulfill the purpose of the research. The validity test of the questionnaire depicts the importance and

uniqueness of the thesis. The reliability of the questionnaire fulfills and demonstrates the extent of its validity of the thesis.

### **3.4.1 Reliability of conducting an online questionnaire**

The research is conducted via an online questionnaire survey to get the findings of the research questions. The sample was past international student. Technology and digital media are used to strengthen research work and research design. The purpose of open-ended questions was that the respondent can express their attitudes, emotions, and feeling (self-expression) openly without limitations. The answers more detailed and provide people the platform for freedom to express their idea, thoughts, and encouraging critical thinking and creativity.

### **3.4.2 Questionnaire**

A questionnaire consists of multiple concise questions, and open-ended questions were created via google forms. Open-ended question allow respondents to answer freely without limitations. It makes respondents feel valued and give them an insight that their opinion is important. questionnaire them the opportunity to share their personal opinion regarding the needs, services, and benefits of ISAN to TAMK.

An electronic questionnaire is considered the best method for data collection from different correspondents as it saves time and money both. A questionnaire with open-ended questions were sent to 60 past international students of TAMK.



### **3.4.3 Purpose of the questionnaire**

The questionnaire for this thesis consisted of four parts and had a total of 10 questions related to different domain questions. For this purpose developing ISAN, The questionnaire focused on their experiences in job search, work-life, and university life and benefits of ISAN activities that would benefit the University. The questionnaire also identify the best way for the ISAN to stay in contact with University.

The questionnaire included in this research study is divided into four main parts. The first part included questions about the degree completion and in which subject, also about the employability of the international alumni relevant to their field of studies. The second part of the questionnaire deals with the challenges and issues that past students face in finding jobs. The third section contains the questions about communication channels ISA prefer to use to stay in contact with TAMK university administration.

The last part of the questionnaire consists of questions about how the alumni network of TAMK University can benefit graduate students and how they can become an asset to the university, including current students. Whether they want to offer their services as mentors or share their skills and experiences or they only want to join TAMK University alumni network events occasionally

The results of the survey questionnaire were analysed using graphical analyses. The themes related to different domains, include degree completion dates and employability, the challenges and issues that ISA face in finding jobs in Finland.

## 4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

For this research study, 60 past students were targeted to respond to the questionnaire. The first part of the survey comprised questions regarding degree completion, as shown in Figure 3 that the targeted group of major degree programs was asked about alumni network building, and out of 60 alumni-only 31 responded to the questionnaire.

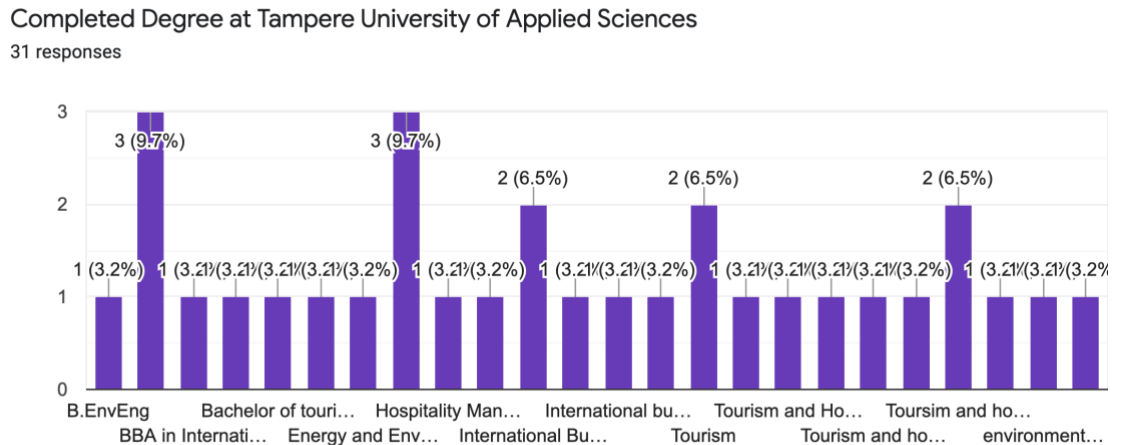


Figure 3. Targeted degree programs of Alumni network

Major Degree Programs	Responses
BBA (international business)	12
Tourism and hospitality management	11
Bachelor of environmental engineering	7
Nursing	1

Table:1 Major degree programs

The data collected is processed rationally with the help of graphs and models. It has to be noted that social structures are immensely important in this analysis as they define the behavior of connectivity between actors. Basically, cohesive communities or groups are linked by a common element that can vary from direct interactions to sentiments. Here, the Theory of six degrees of separation also assists in realizing how close a community can be even if one individual has not directly met another individual. However, social interactions in a dense grouping

like Alumni Network will be greater in intensity as people will have more binary links with each other due to common educational institutions; as a result, this will drive more interactions between them.

The present study examined associations of alumni opinions of the excellence of their relationship with their previous educational faculty/staff, their (past) student involvement, and their alumni faithfulness. The development of the ISAN at TAMK University could openly benefit both the University and the alumni. This research examined some of the reasons why the alumni do or do not feel involved with the institution from which they have graduated.

First, information was needed on how often alumni use social media. Though the framework provided by Forrester Research was an excellent springboard to start this research, it was necessary to find out how often the alumni actually use social media, and what platforms. After the social media channels were set up, actions were needed to measure how successful the methods were. Then a follow-up questionnaire was required to measure how well the current network worked.

#### **4.1 International students employability**

The second part of the survey questionnaire included questions related to the employability and challenges faced by international students searching for jobs in Finland after graduation.

Figure 4 shows that only 9.7% of ISA are still unemployed while a large amount of 83.9% of the alumni s are employed, which is a good indicator for TAMK University.

Are you employed?

31 responses

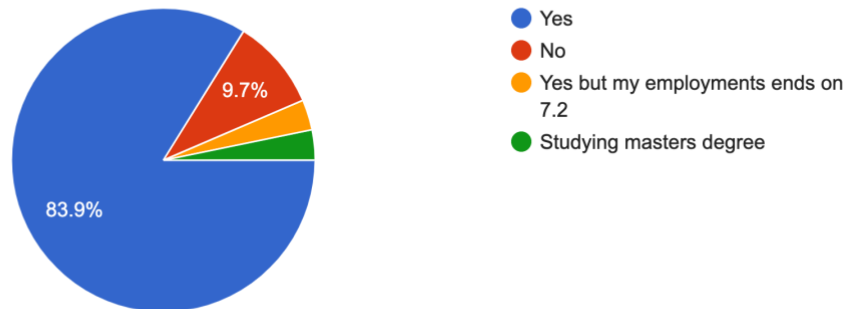


Figure 4. Employment percentage of past students

#### 4.1.1 Employment after graduation

The question was aimed to observe the unemployment period of international students after graduation. It is not as easy to find out jobs as few majors are knotted directly to particular career fields. For example, if international graduated students wish to become a teacher, it likely would need to complete an education program and finally sit for an accrediting exam. The same applies to majors in nursing. For international students in a few cases, it becomes difficult to find jobs in Finland after graduation.

As Figure 5 indicates that after completing their graduation, 12.9% had to wait for a job for one year, and 32.3% of students were remained unemployed after completing their studies. Besides 51.6%, student got employed in the initial period after completion of education from TAMK University.

How long have you been looking for a job after graduation?

31 responses

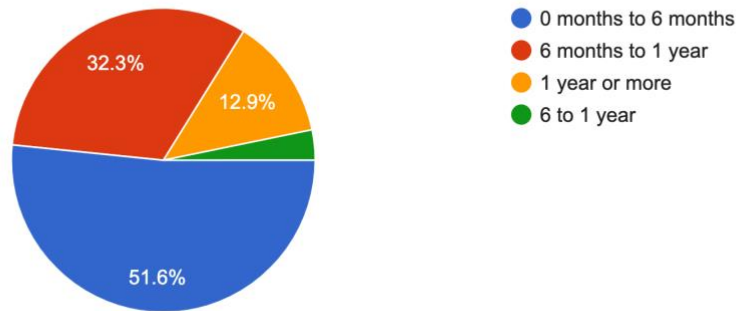


Figure 5. Analysis of employment period.

## 4.2 Field of work

The questions aimed to find out the occupational fields in which most international students are currently employed. The results of Figure 6 indicate that 16.1% of students have trade field jobs, and only 6.5% of students have jobs in the education sector. In addition, 25.8% of graduate students have their jobs in business management and finance fields.

Field of work  
31 responses

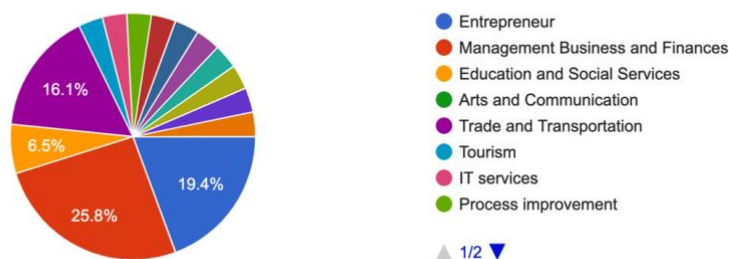


Figure 6. Analysis of occupation

### 4.2.1 Field of work relevant to the studies

Fresh international graduates remain naïve even if they have recognized the right track. Getting the advice of professionals such as mentors of alumni groups about jobs and interviews can help to choose the right track. Even graduated students of TAMK can take the help of counselors and members of the alumni group; it can help them in identifying weaknesses and give instructions to blow the

interview. As Figure 7 shows that 25.8% of students responded that it was easy to find out jobs in their field of studies, but a large number of international students 74.2% responded that it was quite difficult to find jobs related to their field of studies. It is clear that a minor number of students have a relevant field of work with their degree.

74.2% of international students endorse that uncertainty to get a job is a big challenge. It is a common thing for fresh graduates to find the procedure of transitioning into the 'real world' a difficult one, but the situation of uncertainty can be overcome if one is completely prepared. The anticipations at work are not always what they perceive; it can be against their expectations (Susan 2002.)

After graduation was it easy to find a job in your field of studies?

31 responses

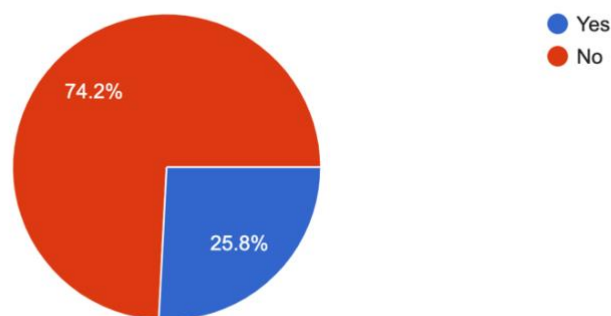


Figure 7. Analysis of occupation relevancy to the studies

#### **4.3 Major challenges faced by an International student alumni in finding jobs in Finland**

There are several challenges faced by international graduates these days, particularly in job search. It may be creating a good impression at first interview or applying for the right job. Similarly, Figure 8 shows that having no proficiency in Finnish language becomes a hindrance in job-hunting in Finland; this process can be tedious if the applicant has little or no work experience. According to result 93.5% of international students from 31 students responded that the language barrier is a big challenge for first-time job seekers, but they should not feel

discouraged because most companies these days also offer training and offer jobs with English as the working language.

Figure 8 shows 83.9% respondents answered that lack of experience is also another big challenge in getting a first job while 38.7% said that not having higher education degree also reduce their chances. Another challenge is cultural difference faced by about 9.7% international students because they have no clue about the market rates for jobs that interest them. 3.2% of the respondents were current students; who also could not find a job easily due to not being an alumni.

This series of questions related to the employment and occupation relevant to the studies were asked to understand the challenges faced by an international student alumni in the job market after graduation and if their studies contribute in finding jobs related to their field of studies.

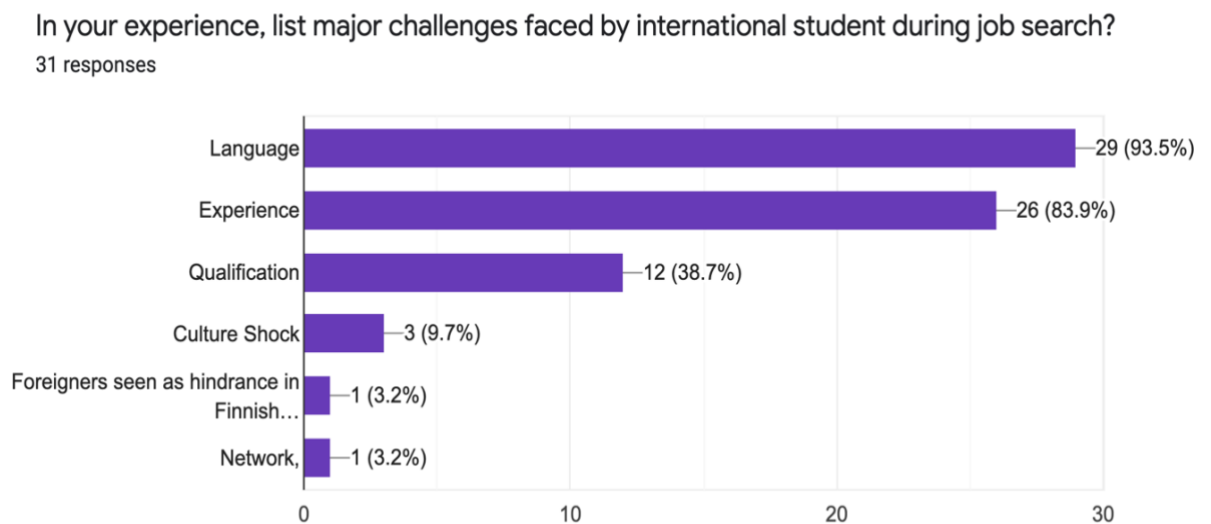


Figure 8. Challenges for international students

#### 4.4 Medium of Communication with Alumni Group

The third part of the survey determines the ways of communication past students adopted to contact TAMK University. It also highlighted the reasons students did not contact TAMK and what essential platforms they prefer to be connected with TAMK.

According to Figure 9, 9.7% of the international alumni students replied that they stayed in touch via email, and 6.5% participated in University events. Most students stayed in touch via alumni groups as 25.8% international students have access to the alumni groups,

The results indicate that most of the students stayed in contact via alumni groups, which shows that alumni groups and associations can increase engagement with TAMK University.

After graduation did you stay in contact with Tampere University of Applied Sciences If yes, then how?

31 responses

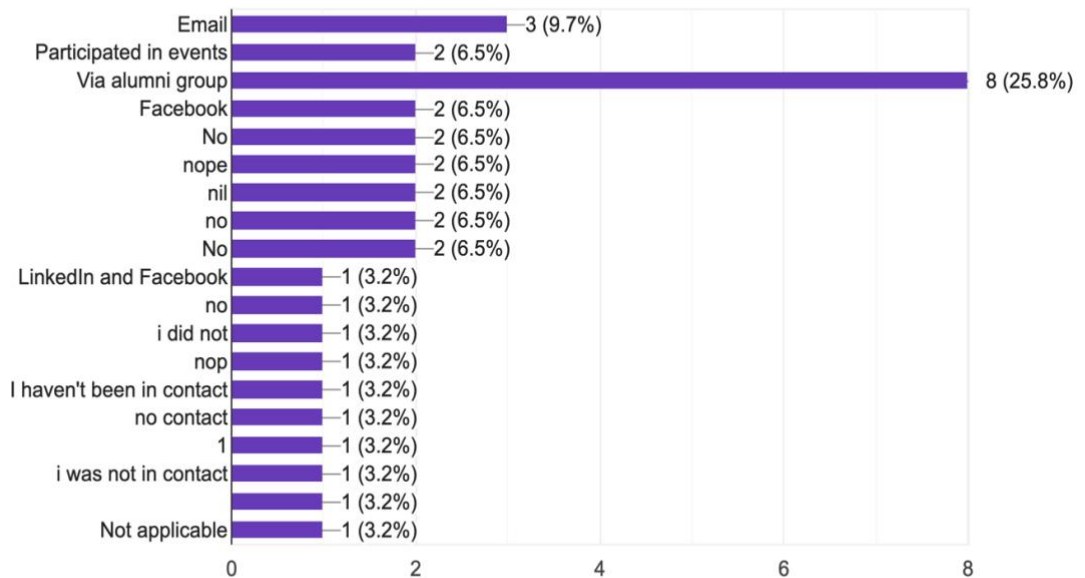


Figure 9. Analysis of communication after graduation

#### 4.4.1 Reasons for no contact



This question explains the reasons past students did not stay in contact with TAMK. Figure 10 shows that most of the ISA, about 58.1% of them do not receive any emails or newsletters from TAMK. There are many reasons why students did not remain in touch with TAMK. 54.8% were busy in their daily life routines and migrated to some other countries. On the other hand, 58.1% of students did not know that the University has its own international alumni network for former students. According to the results, the highest number of students had stayed in contact via social media.

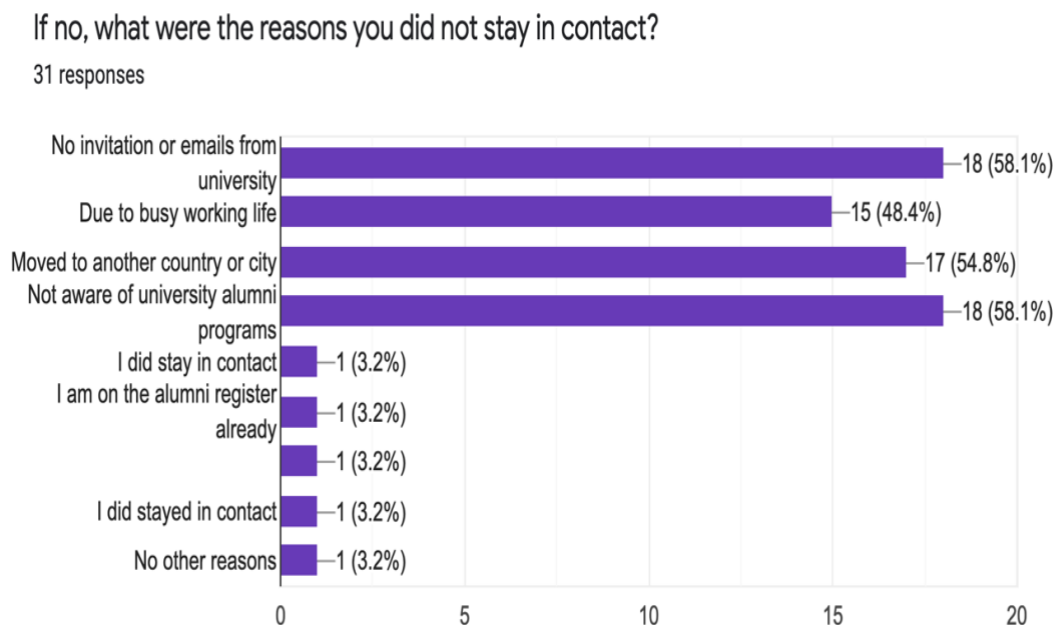


Figure 10. Reasons for not being in contact with TAMK

#### 4.5 How alumni groups can benefit from the University and current students

The last part of the survey questionnaire analyzed benefits and needs for the Alumni network, which can benefit Universities and current students. Figure 11 shows that 74.2% of ISA are interested in offering mentoring to current students, and 58.1% seemed to offer career guidance to current students. An alumni can also benefit from current student by sharing the experiences of job searching, tips on giving successful interviews, and relevant job skills. International students alumni associations can be very beneficial for current students and incoming international students for guidance.

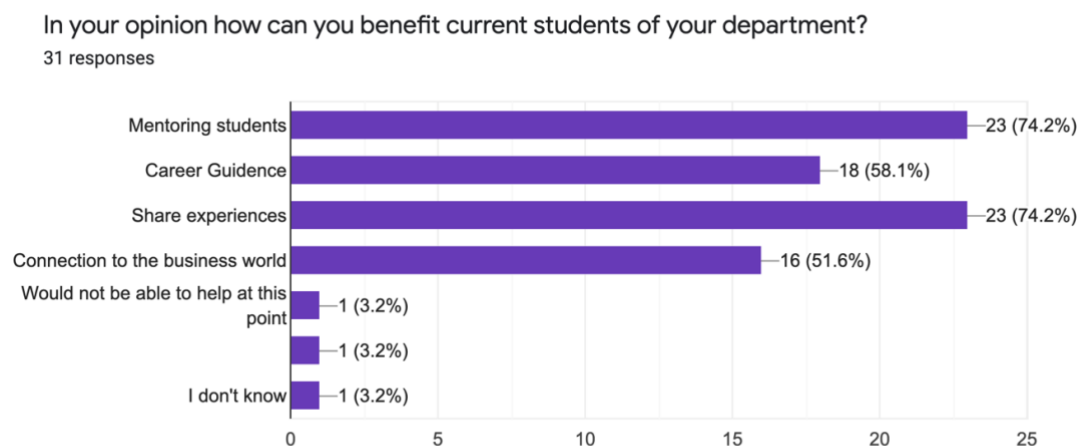


Figure 11. Benefits past students can offer University

#### 4.5.1 Suggestions and advantages of alumni network

According to the results shown in Figure 12, It is recommended that TAMK University organize some visits for alumni network members' students and get them to have the opportunity to understand the businesses of TAMK alumni and hear about their careers. The results revealed that the international students are highly concerned 87.1% in hearing to become members of the alumni association and to contribute by promoting the brand value of TAMK University on social media platforms. On the other hand, 54.8% are interested in visiting the TAMK University as a guest lecturer, and 74.2% are ready to offer mentoring services. This might offer more training activities for the students, and probably it would be easier to get training places from their own study field, and the searching process wouldn't be that challenging.

Similarly, Alumni networks perform many activities, not just relating to teaching about careers and recruiting new students. Alumni students can benefit current students by participating in educational and social events at university, as they are a piece of a network that offered a wide range of stimulating advantages. TAMK University can ask for their suggestions or for feedback on a shortlist that has already compiled. Before committing to any idea, it's important to confirm that the University community wants or needs that activity. However, If the purpose of organizing the activity is to promote networking amongst the alumni, the options for socializing are limitless. According to the results, many of the international students alumni are interested in participating in activities promoted by the alumni association.

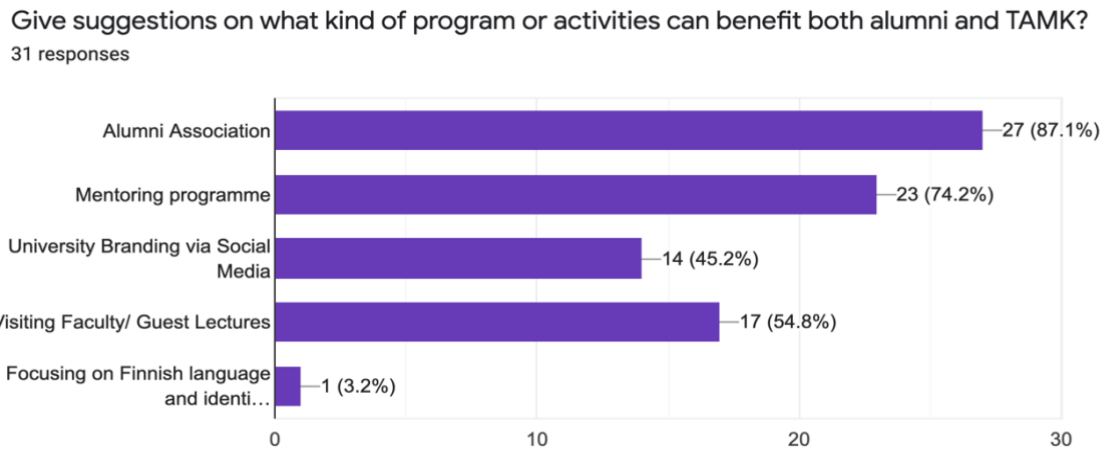


Figure 12. Suggestions of program and activities which can benefit both alumni and university

## **5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The International Students Alumni Network, ISAN aims to operate and have intentions to unite student union organizations within the University. In any case, unlike sanctuaries, staff, and other student associations, alumni networking programs are available to all students and offer a wider range of structure management of alumni students at TAMK University. Many students, who are heading straight to graduation in a few months or have recently completed degree, must join alumni progressing membership to get a good way to get a foot (or three) on the road. In TAMK, although, there is already existing International Students Alumni Associations, there are some deficiencies which have been found through this research.

### **5.1 Recommendations**

TAMK university of applied sciences, as most of the other linguistic and business schools, needs a strong alumni network that serves as brand ambassadors globally. Unfortunately, the existing alumni network at TAMK is falling short of engagement by the past international students.

In order to strengthen the International Students Alumni Network, TAMK needs an implementation of the following recommendations. It is recommended that TAMK creates a registration portal for the alumni in order to communicate activities, events, and newsletters, which will act as a constant reminder to the alumni and keep them updated with the University's activities. As the alumni network is an asset to the university, members of the alumni can be invited as guest lectures, counseling workshops and, organizing experience sharing sessions. The guest lecturers and others could also act as a method of enhancing the interest for engagement among the alumni and the current students.

The results of the study illustrate that most of the international students prefer alumni group associations to be connected to the University. Thus, it is recommended for the TAMK university to network with international alumni students and develop an international alumni association, which will help TAMK and its international students to become an international alumni brand.

## 5.2 Conclusion

To conclude, the results of this study proved that quality actions are required to improve the operations of the International Students Alumni Network. These actions are important indicators of student engagement with the ISAN. The current alumni network of TAMK is lacking the connection with past international students, which is needed to develop and strengthen the ISAN.

The findings in this study also shed new light on the contributions an international students alumni can give to the University, by being an alumni ambassador, a mentor or by helping the current students in information about the job market.

This research study provides basic and useful experiences about the importance of building relationships and connections between alumni students and educational staff. The quality of past relationships with alumni networks is based upon establishing positive expectations and feelings of alumni knowledge and experience, which can be seen in many worldwide universities where devotion depends on non-financial alumni networks and other commitments.

Additionally, the findings of this study also indicate that teaching experts need to establish relationships with the ISA International Alumni Students. This is possible by sharing alumni information about the operations of the alumni with the teaching staff, for example, by providing guidance and support to TAMK educational experts regarding the development and understanding of the alumni network's interests. This can lead to making effective decisions to include alumni network members into teaching 'by offering them some entry-level positions (Lasse. et al 2007.)

The results of the survey explain that there is an essential need for an International students alumni network, as many international students expressed interest in joining the alumni association. University current students and educational co-workers are an almost unlimited source of new ideas for the school that can be obtained by arranging conferences. Analysis of these conferences may be the next step in the TAMK to support and maintain the structure of the global alumni network. After all, an ISAN is an essential element

for promoting the brand image of TAMK. Finally, it is imperative to point out that this study is of incredible value, for the International Students Alumni Network of TAMK.

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<http://annualreview2018.TAMK.fi/stats/>

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Survey questionnaire

Name \*

Gender \*

Male

Female

Birth `Year

Phone Number

Completed Degree at Tampere University of Applied Sciences \*

Year Studies Started \*

Year Graduated \*

Are you employed? \*

Yes

No

Other:

How long have you been looking for a job after graduation? \*

0 months to 6 months

6 months to 1 year

1 year or more

Field of work \*

Entrepreneur

Management Business and Finances

Education and Social Services

Arts and Communication

Trade and Transportation

Other:

After graduation, was it easy to find a job in your field of studies? \*

Yes

No

In your experience, list major challenges faced by the international student during a job search? \*

Language

Experience

Qualification

Culture Shock

Other:

Would you consider continuing further studies at Tampere University of Applied Sciences? \*

Yes

No

If yes, what would you like to study? \*

Your answer

After graduation, did you stay in contact with Tampere University of Applied Sciences? If yes, then how? \*

Email

Participated in events

Via alumni group

Other:

If no, what were the reasons you did not stay in contact? \*

No invitation or emails from university

Due to a busy working life

Moved to another country or city

Not aware of university alumni programs

Other:

What will you suggest the best way to connect the alumni to Tampere University of Applied Sciences? Give your opinion \*

Alumni Community

Alumni Events

Offering training courses

Other:

What benefits do you prefer from the Tampere University of Applied Sciences? \*

Free training courses

Alumni Discount Program (Not Available Yet)

Enjoy Access to the Library

Other:

In your opinion, how can you benefit current students of your department? \*

Mentoring students

Career Guidance

Share experiences

Connection to the business world

Other:

Give suggestions on what kind of program or activities can benefit both alumni and TAMK? \*

Alumni Association

Mentoring programme

University Branding via Social Media

Visiting Faculty/ Guest Lectures

Other:

Would you like to join the Tampere University of Applied Sciences alumni register? (Agreeing on this, my information gathered from this questioner is saved in TAMK's alumni register. And these can be used for TAMK alumni & Tampere Alumni networking purposes) \*

yes

No

I am already a member

If you want to join TAMK Alumni Network, please provide your email