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Mentoring as a Holistic Approach to Social and Academic Integration.

A mentoring initiative for first year IB students at SeAMK.

Thesis work

Spring 2020

Business and Culture

International Business Bachelor of Business Administration

SEINÄJOKI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Thesis abstract

Faculty: Business and Culture

Degree Programme: International Business

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Title of thesis: Mentoring as a Holistic Approach to Social and Academic Integration.

Supervisor: Päivö Laine

Year: 2020

Number of pages: 49

Number of appendices: 1

Students from the IB programme at SeAMK face different type of challenges than the students in other degree programmes. For instance, academic, social and cultural integration are the main determinants when students consider dropping out or continue studying until graduation. Research has shown that mentoring the students helps as a guide to encouragement and direction towards future development of their careers. This thesis aims to determinate that a mentoring initiative during the first year of studies will bring a holistic approach to the students in terms of academic and social integration resulting in student loyalty.

Based on a review literature on student loyalty, mentoring, academic and social integration. A questionnaire was created in order to interview students from different years in the IB programme. The interviewees were carefully selected in order to represent a variety in age, gender and cultural background. The results of the interviews indicate that students often struggle to integrate socially or academically in the institution.

In this study the author recommends that a mentoring initiative could help the students to integrate holistically into the university lifestyle. Besides, the incrementation of student performance and decreasing the number of students dropping out.

Keywords: mentoring, student integration, academic integration, student loyalty, social integration.

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Terms and Abbreviations

SeAMK	Seinäjoen Ammattikorkeakoulu.
IB	International Business.
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.
BBA	Bachelor Business Administration.
RQSL	Relationship Quality-based Student Loyalty.
USA	United States of America.
GPA	Grade Point Average.
VE	Virtual Enterprise.
ESF	European Social Fund.
UAS	University of applied sciences.
SeiES	Seinäjoki Entrepreneurship Society

1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to research if a mentoring initiative would benefit the IB programme at SeAMK. Students from all over the world come to study at SeAMK's international business programme, together with domestic students they have the opportunity to meet new people, socialise and work in multicultural teams. Together with this amazing opportunity also comes all the different challenges of a multicultural community.

The author had the opportunity to complete his internship at SeAMK with the role of assistant for the IB programme, giving him the opportunity to interact with the students in a deeper way.

This study is important because students go through a process of adaptation during the first year of their studies which can be crucial for their personal life, performance and future career. Therefore, based on theories of mentoring and student integration the author has created this thesis in order to promote a mentoring initiative that will allow students to fully reach an academic and social integration resulting in student loyalty which will benefit both, the student and the institution.

1.1 Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK).

SeAMK is situated in Southern Ostrobothnia (Etelä-Pohjanmaa) in the capital city of Seinäjoki. SeAMK offers high education and research, development and innovation services. Declaring itself as a Multidisciplinary institution, seventy-five percent of the students are in eighteen different bachelor's degree programmes, two of those programmes are though in English language (International Business and Nursing) in addition to this, they offer double degree programmes in the fields of technology and business. There are also eight master's level programmes related to six of their educational fields, the master's degree can also be earned in English (Master's Degree in International Business Management). The total number of full-time students is 4800 and 350 staff members offering eleven programmes for more than 180 exchange students every semester (SeAMK 2020).

Faculties at SeAMK:

- School of Business and Culture
- School of Food and Agriculture
- School of Health Care and Social Work
- School of Technology

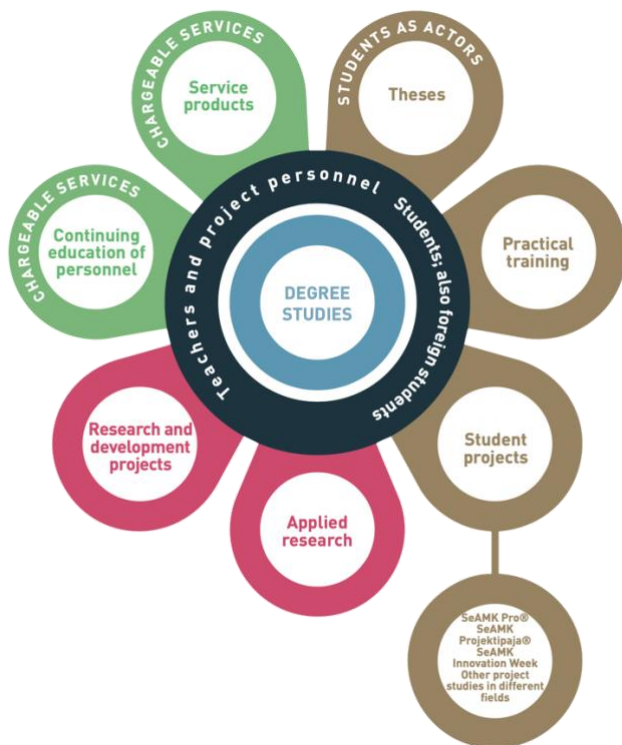


Figure 1. A modern, versatile and multidisciplinary University of applied sciences

SeAMK's Mission is preparing professionals for the future, producing high level research while promoting innovations and welfare.

The Vision 2020

“International and Entrepreneurial SeAMK – Best for our Students”
(SeAMK 2020)

1.1.1 International Business programme

SeAMK's International Business programme is fully taught in English. According to SeAMK's website the programme objective is to help the student to build business competence in international environments and in order to achieve this, the student will focus on developing, planning and running entrepreneurship activities in a global environment (SeAMK 2020).

In addition to this the student has the opportunity to enhance his communication skills in different languages. While English is the main language for all of the courses, the student will be able to learn other languages by taking courses based on his (her) curriculum, allowing them to become more competent in the global operation of companies (SeAMK 2020). Schnorr mentions this in her blog "Effective communication is at the heart of every business – conversations with customers, suppliers, colleagues and partners" (Schnorr 2018), in order to communicate we need to learn more about how to write or speak a new language, it's about being sensitive to others cultures specifically in the business world (Schnorr 2018).

The structure for the IB programme is known as "a Degree Programme in International Business" but the degree is called "Bachelor of Business Administration, BBA"

The structure of the programme is the following; During the first year the students work on a virtual enterprise, in this part of the programme the students are divided in multicultural groups and they must be able to run and develop a virtual business guided by their professors. In the second year their knowledge in international business will increase by taking courses with exchange students in the area of management and digital business.

During the third year the student has the facility to do an exchange semester abroad in one of the partner universities around the world. The IB programme offers the opportunity for students to earn a double degree with one of the many SeAMK's partners institutions. A period of practical training is fundamental for students to gain work experience. Therefore, SeAMK's wide network is available for students to do a practical training in the Seinäjoki region. The thesis work is commissioned by an

organization or a company and this is usually done during the last semester of studies. The length of the studies is 3.5 years, 210 ECTS credits (SeAMK 2020).

1.2 Aim of this thesis

The main goal of this thesis is to take a look at the students' experiences during their first year of studies in the International Business programme, knowing that the first year of the students in higher education can influence their decision to continue in the same school, degree programme, or even influencing the desire to graduate. The author is familiar with the student integration process since he has been a student since the year 2017. Besides, the author did his internship in SeAMK as an assistant for the IB programme for a period of five months.

This thesis is designed with the intention to emphasize the importance of social and academic integration of the student into the university, by researching theories on student loyalty. In addition to this, a number of students were interviewed in order to gain a deeper understanding about their integration at SeAMK.

The author's desire is to initiate a mentoring initiative that will allow the student to integrate holistically in the university. Once the student feels fully integrated this will give as a result student loyalty.

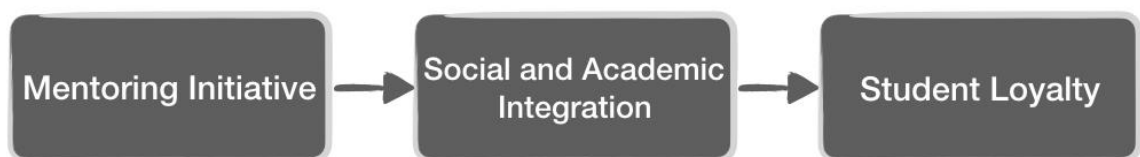


Figure 2. Mentoring Initiative

The figure above is the visualization of the author regarding the mentoring initiative, leading to social and academic integration, giving this as a result student loyalty.

1.3 Structure of this thesis

The first chapter introduces a general overview of the company case SeAMK and the international business programme being the main area which this thesis centrally focuses on. Furthermore, I included the aim of this thesis explaining the reasons why this study is important for the company, following by the structure of the thesis.

The second chapter presents the background theory of the thesis, analysing different topics crucial for this study and explaining the importance of human interactions, relationship quality-based student loyalty, student satisfaction, and the difference between mentor and a coach.

The third chapter will demonstrate the importance of mentoring in higher education, using examples from other universities as well as challenging our way of thinking about mentoring students and how to do it. This chapter also includes the research methods and the limitations of this thesis.

The fourth chapter demonstrates that interviews are highly important in this process of gathering information, the interviews done with the IB students illuminated the path to follow in order to gain student loyalty in the future.

The fifth chapter describes an analysis of the answers given by the students during the interview.

The sixth chapter brings a proposal for a mentoring initiative in the first-year students of the IB programme.

The seventh chapter includes the conclusions of the study according to the developmental areas of the students.

2 Background Theory on Mentoring

In the theoretical background, one of the main theories will be discussed; Relationship Quality-based Student Loyalty “RQSL” (Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen 2001). The RQSL model was born in the combination of the extent literature about services marketing theory and Tinto’s (1975) model of student drop-out behaviour. Other literature such as books, journals, blogs and interviews have been gathered in order to obtain the results for this study.

Another theory is about mentoring programmes in higher education institutions. For this second model the author is adopting the study from the book on “Mentoring Undergraduate Students” by the authors; Gloria Crisp, Lunsford, L. G. & Pifer, M. J. (Crisp et al. 2017).

The author is able to recognize the importance for a mentoring programme for first year students of the International Business programme, students from different countries and cultural backgrounds arrive in Seinäjoki for the IB programme every year. Many of the students are as young as 18 years old; for the most of them it is the first time they are living by themselves with no parents, new friends and in a totally new environment.

Via observation and being a student himself, the author of this thesis has noticed that many of the students tend to feel discouraged after the first year of studies due to the lack of academic or social integration. After many conversations with fellow students, it seems appropriate to encourage the SeAMK management team to implement a mentoring programme, starting with the first-year students of the IB programme. The recommendation comes to this programme first because of the diversity of students that come from different cultures. Some of them find it easy to adapt while some others struggle to feel part of the group, the culture or the institution. This is not only applicable to foreigner students but also to Finnish students.

Some of the older students are able to offer mentorship to the younger students and there have been positive results as the following example shows;

When Kristina arrived in Seinäjoki at the age of 19 years old, she found herself living in a shared apartment with people she did not know. It was the first time she left her family to go to another country to study. With limited knowledge about adulthood life she had the opportunity to meet a person who later became her mentor. Thanks to this interaction she was able to feel more confident in her studies while gaining new perspectives in life. Kristina also has learned that SeAMK as educational institution is willing to support her present and future endeavours (Zasenko 2019).

The author of this study had the opportunity to do an internship for the IB programme for a period of five months. Throughout his experience he was able to mentor the IB19 students, encouraging them and visit them during classes. The IB assistant also helped the students to adapt in a multicultural environment within their class as well as the adaptation process to live in Finland. By doing this he received a positive feedback from the students, recognizing that it was helpful to have him as a mediator between the students and the teachers.

Therefore, a mentoring programme during their first year of studies could represent a positive impact in their lives, allowing them to develop social and academic integration which will give as a result student loyalty. Bergamo's research mentions three powerful variables in terms of student loyalty, the first one is the quality perceived of the institution services, the second is satisfaction in education, the third one is emotional commitment (Bergamo et al. 2012).

2.1 Human interaction and the need for relationships

Dan Roberts asserts in his article "Why Humans Need Connection" that humans are connected since the beginning of their creation, this exists in our DNA and it's strong as the need for food or water (Roberts 2018). Nature tells that a baby in gestation needs to be attached to the mother's womb in order to survive, this makes sense when looking at a new-born baby, the need for warmth and care are vital for his/her healthy development. In the "Schema Therapy" theory, Jeffrey Young tells more about the need for attachment, children's core developmental needs are the need for safety and protection in order to freely express emotions and feelings (Young 2007). In the book "Attachment Theory", the main discussions are about children

and adults who willingly become attached to their caregivers usually family members. When people are able to develop this kind of attachment in their early life, this could help them to strengthen their relationships in the future (Slade & Holmes 2014).

Therefore, it is understood that human interaction is important for the mental and physical health of a person. Having relationships is a major anchor in life specially when undergoing through negative situations like illness, stress or simply when things go unexpected (MED-EL 2018).

People are able to develop relationships no matter the culture they are born into, relationships and human interaction are important in order to success in life. These were the words of Arnold Schwarzenegger's speech at the University of Houston. "We need other people in our life" (Schwarzenegger 2017).

Considering these theories, the author of this study understands that interpersonal relationships are beyond culture, and people from any cultural background have the need to connect with other humans in order to take an active part in society, this can be applied to every stage in life from babies, children at school, adolescents with their friends, adults in romance relationships and mature adults.

2.2 Relationship Quality-based Student Loyalty

"Relationship Quality-based Student Loyalty" model, developed by professors; Thorsten Hennig-Thurau, Markus F. Langer and Ursula Hansen (Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen 2001). The RQSL model proposes that relationship quality and integration to the university system are the enticement for student loyalty. The RQSL model has been created by the combination of theories such as; services marketing, literature on student loyalty, Tinto's (1975) model of drop out behaviour and the concept of relationship quality. Figure 3. Describes the variables of relationship quality mentioned in this thesis.

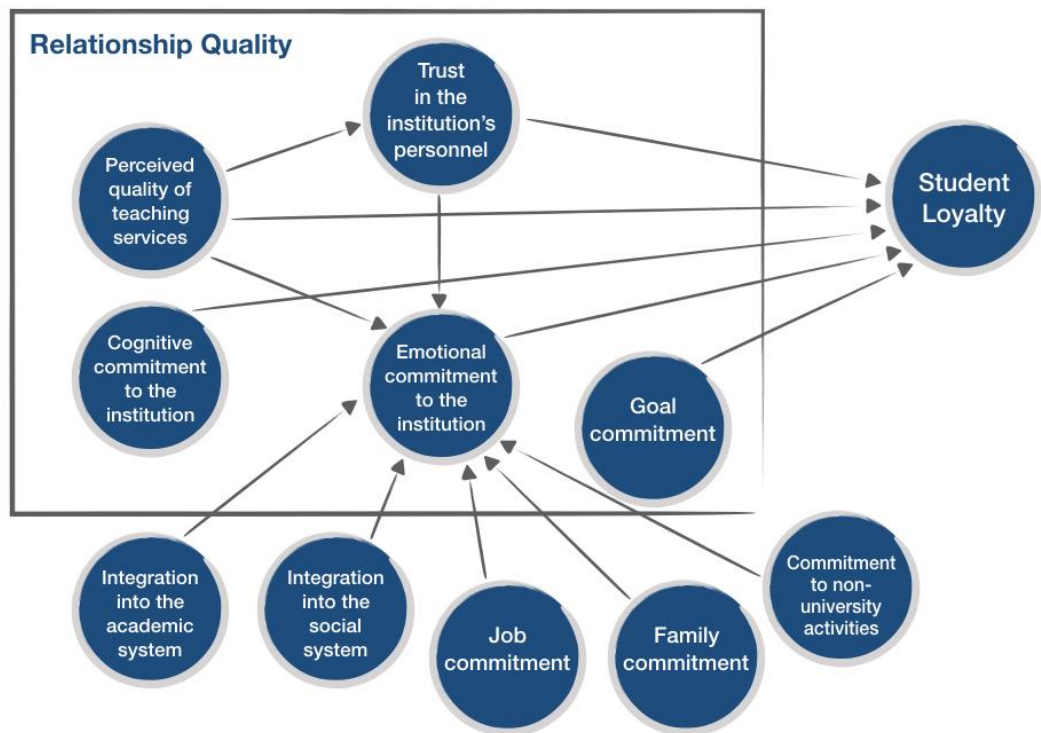


Figure 3. Relationship Quality

Adapted from Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen 2001

Relationship quality is construct in three main concepts; **perceived quality of teaching services**, **cognitive commitment to the institution** and **trust in the institution's personnel**. Focusing on these three areas could help to increment the rates of student loyalty according to the relationship quality theory. These results will be validated during the process of the empirical part of this thesis.

Educational institution such as SeAMK, belong to the body of relationship marketing, the students playing the customer part and the staff providing high quality of knowledge are playing the part of the sellers or service providers. Furthermore, this implicates companies building a relationship with their customers in order to provide a better service (Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen 2001). Anderson (1995) states that when companies are able to maintain a tight relationship with their customers is when they perform better, this is the concept called; Relationship Marketing.

The advantages for the university to retain their students and create student loyalty, are not only during the time the student is active and enrolled in courses, the advantages of student loyalty go further than having students graduating. Berger and Lyon stated that retention is the ability of the educational institution to graduate students that have enrolled in such institution (Berger & Lyon 2005).

2.3 Student Integration

This theoretical model aspires to describe the processes of the relationship between the students and the universities built on six different areas that have an effect on the student's academic life.

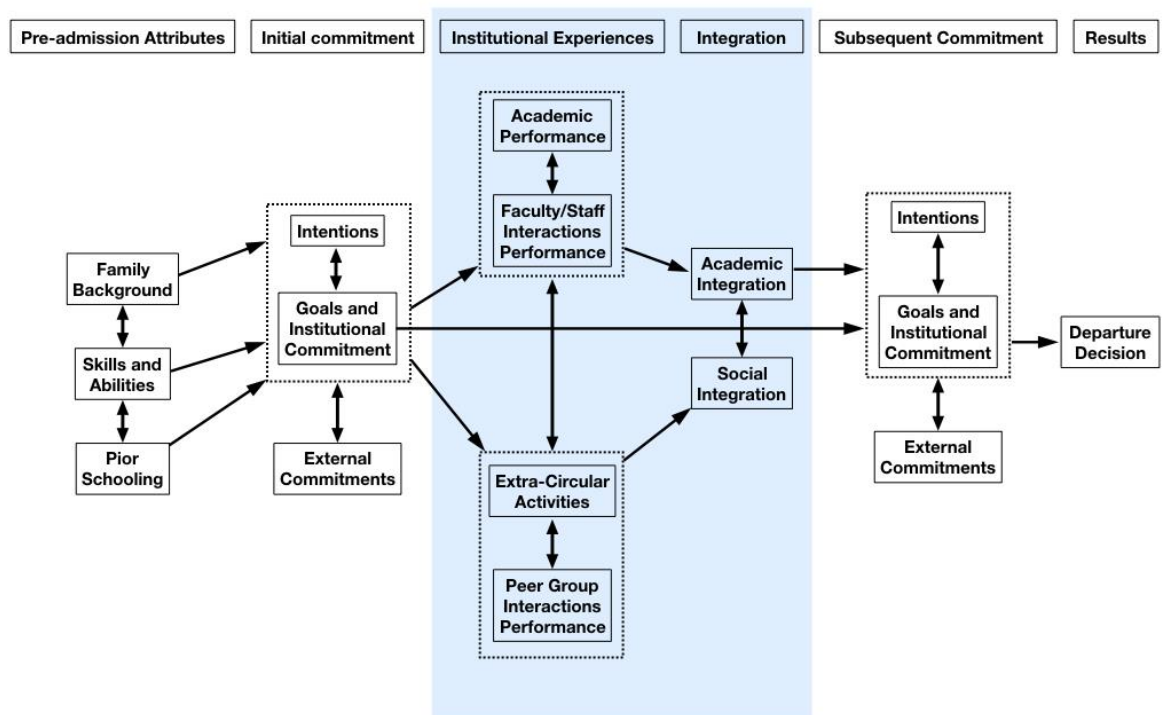


Figure 4. Tinto's Student Integration Model

Pre-admission attributes is an area conformed by how the student has been influenced before going to the university, determine the student's prior education, his/her abilities and skills and the family background. **Initial commitment** is about establishing the first goals, the level of commitment to these goals can influence his/her decision to graduate, initiates the intention to graduate or not. If the student has low expectations to conclude the studies is likely to drop out at some point. **Institutional experiences** are related to the interaction of the student and the academic structure of the university. This particular area is divided in two parts, structural and normative. Structural is the formal part the student seen the overall infrastructure of the university and perceive the quality of teaching and the interaction with the staff. Normative is informal, the student is able to evaluate the interaction with peer while taking part of extra-curricular activities. **Integration** is the area where students process the experiences of interaction in academic and social environment. When these areas develop a commitment in the student life the chances for graduation increase, other areas like jobs, finance and external opportunities have a say in the way the integration will operate for the student and are influential factors in the student's intention to graduate. **Subsequent Commitment** is found once the student has reached a level of integration, subsequent commitment is the last step before graduation.

Nonetheless each student's background, abilities and prior education, the core of this model is commitment and integration.

When focusing on student loyalty, the areas of student integration (Academic and Social Integration) must be considered in high priority in order to obtain the desired results, Tinto addresses that the student integration model is based on the relationship between the institution and the student (Tinto 1995) and in order to build this relationship between the two parties a mentoring programme is highly recommended. Mentoring is the most accepted method for an effective mechanism of positively influencing undergraduate students (Eby & Dolan 2015). Student loyalty should therefore be recognized as an extending multi-phase term from admission to retirement and beyond (Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen 2001).

Academic Integration

Academic integration takes place, when the university and the students are able to connect intellectually (Karp, Hughes & O'Gara 2010). Following Tinto's argument that once students in higher education are able to integrate to the university system, the degree of commitment towards the institution will increase (Tinto 1993). The definition of this concept goes hand by hand to the company case in this thesis. When the students' competences are able to meet with the academic requirements of the lectures and courses, is when the magic happens, the student feels challenged enough and encouraged to move forward with the task ahead.

Social Integration

Alba and Nee described in their journal that, social integration is a mechanism through which newcomers or minorities become part of the host society's social structure (Alba & Nee 1997). This definition fully relates to the case in this thesis where foreign students come from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds and a good number of domestic students also join the programme. Consequently, the students have to go through the process of adaptation to the new environment and fitting with a multicultural group, seemingly work in groups and social activities will take place.

2.4 Student satisfaction

The definition of Student Satisfaction can differ depending on the type of study or approach used. In this thesis, student satisfaction is defined from the perspective of education.

According to Elliot and Healey, student satisfaction is a “short term attitude resulting from an evaluation of student’s educational experience” (Elliott & Healy 2001), asserting that the achievement of such satisfaction becomes real when their initial expectations are meet or exceed (Al-Sheeb, Hamouda & Abdella 2018).

The Student Satisfaction Report 2019 (Studyportals.com 2020), aims to analyse the student satisfaction as well as areas where institutions could improve in order to provide a better service. The report for the year 2019 includes data from more than 45 thousand students including both domestic and international students, 151 universities and 209 nationalities.

Here are the findings of the report:

- There was more satisfaction among international students than domestic students.
- Admission process.
- Student-teacher interaction.
- Quality of study programme.
- Student diversity.
- Quality of student life.
- Career development.
- Level of difficulty.
- Campus infrastructure.
- Cost of living.
- Scholarship and funding.

The universities in Scandinavia are among the highest ranked in terms of student satisfaction, while universities in America and Oceania where on average level.

In the category of Student-teacher relationship, the most satisfied students worldwide were Mexicans and Brazilians, while students from the USA, Canada and the Near East were very satisfied, furthermore, the most critical in this area were students from Latin and German-speaking Europe.

This results clearly advise us that student-teacher relationship and interaction are merely cultural. Students from around the world are declaring that the relationship with their teachers is one of the most important areas during their time in higher education and during their preparation for professional life.



Figure 5. Student Satisfaction Map 2019

During the first year of the student experience, it is vital to be able to reach student satisfaction. That first year will determine and boost the student's motivation to complete his/her degree and performance through their study experience.

The table below represents the student feedback for UAS during the student's graduation phase.

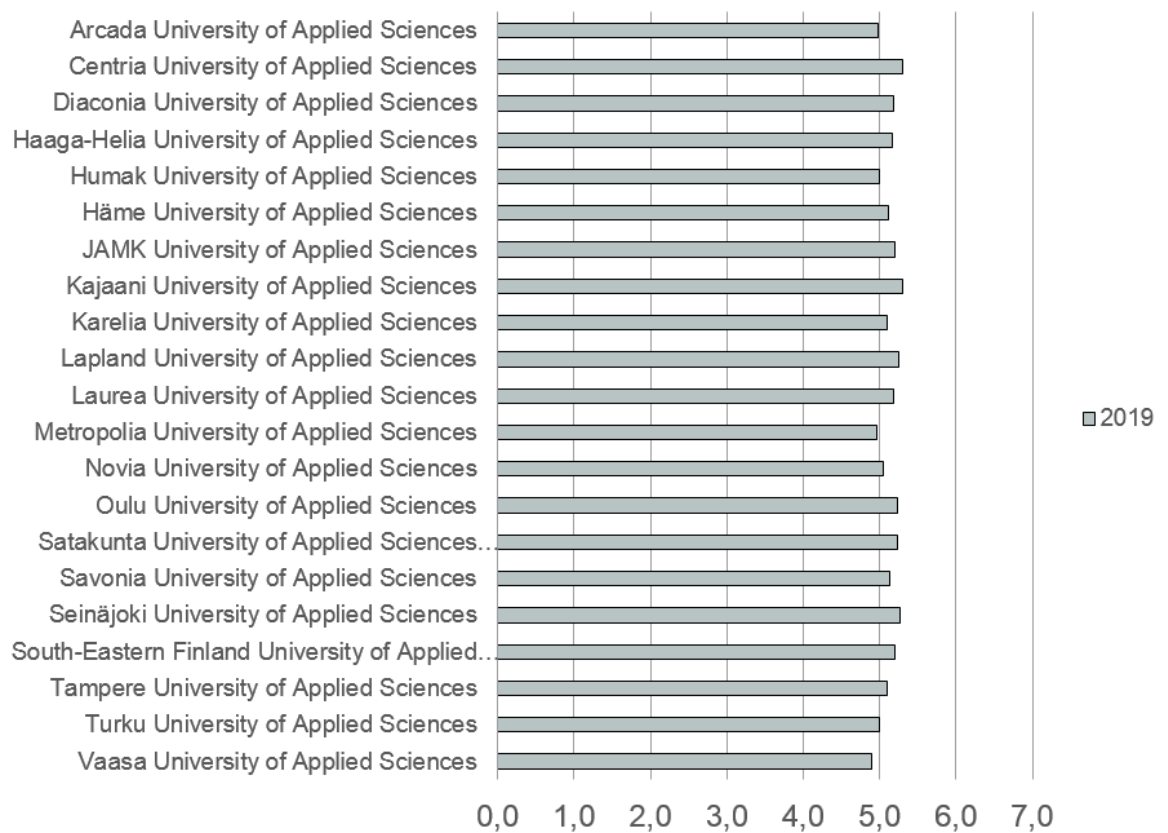


Figure 6. Student feedback (UAS qualification).

When students graduate from SeAMK they reply to a nationwide survey AVOP feedback questionnaire ranking the education they have received. SeAMK is located in one of the highest rated UAS in Finland (Student feedback 2020).

Student barometer at SeAMK

Student satisfaction survey, known as a student barometer, is conducted regularly every two years in all degree programmes at SeAMK. It is an important tool in the quality assurance system of the university of applied sciences.

The aim of the student barometer survey is to assess the quality of education in order to further develop study and supervision practices. The study examines students' assessments of study, study guidance, study arrangements,

internationality and working life connections, as well as the institutions' support services. One of the issues to be evaluated is the student's views on the development of their entrepreneurial skills during their studies.

3 Mentoring in higher education

3.1 Definition of Mentor

On the website merriam-webster.com the word Mentor is defined as; “a trusted counsellor or guide’, with synonyms such as; coach, counsel, guide, lead, pilot, shepherd, tutor (Merriam-webster.com 2020), other definitions can be found like; adviser, instructor, teacher, trainer.

Mentor is first used in the Odyssey being one of the two major ancient Greek epic poems credit to Homer, (En.wikipedia.org 2020). Odysseus went away to fight the battle of Troy, his absence lasted for about 20 years, leaving his baby son named Telemachus under the supervision of Mentor, his long-time friend. The goddess Athena went to visit Telemachus transformed as Mentor, then she decided to teach him more about his father (Homer. & Pope 2019).

Nowadays the word mentor is used for a positive, influence guiding another younger person’s life. The personal relationship where a less experienced person looks up to a person that has more knowledge is well known as a mentorship, the (usually younger person becomes a protégé or mentee to the (usually) older person, the Mentor (En.wikipedia.org 2020).

3.2 Difference between a Mentor and a Coach

Mentoring has been considered as an effective tool for transferring knowledge and developing relationships (Kahle-Piasecki & Doles 2015). Therefore, in this study is essential to recognize the differences between a coach and a mentor and in what phase in life is better to use one or the other.

The table below shows the major differences between a coach and a mentor. This table is an extract from the book “Harvard business essentials” (Luecke & Ibarra 2004).

Coaching and Mentoring: Key Differences		
	Coaching	Mentoring
Key Goals	Correct inappropriate behaviour, improve performance, and share skills that the employee needs to accept new responsibilities.	Support and guide personal growth of the mentee.
Initiative for Mentoring	The coach directs the learning and instruction.	The mentored person is in charge of his learning.
Volunteerism	Through the subordinate’s agreement to accept coaching is essential, it is not necessarily voluntary.	Both, mentor and protégé participate as volunteers.
Focus	Immediate problems and learning opportunities.	Long-term personal career development.
Roles	Heavy on telling with appropriate feedback.	Heavy on listening, providing a role model, and making suggestions.
Duration	Usually concentrates on short-term needs “as-needed” basis.	Long-term.
Relationship	The coach is the coachee’s boss.	The mentor is rarely the protégé’s boss. The mentor should not be in the other person’s chain of command.

Figure 7. Coaching and Mentoring: Key Differences

A coach service should be used in order to develop a skill, enhance a talent and assists professionals to reach their goals and expectations. It helps improving behaviour in teams in order to help an organization to advance forward. Often leaders take a one-on-one session with a coach instead of going to public conferences.

The help of a mentor is about motivation, helping the professional to advance in his/her career and life development. The mentor will inspire the mentee to look at the different perspectives in life and career, while having an open-minded attitude, the person can adapt to different situations, the mentor and mentee interaction is highly relational.

IB students should be able to find mentors and coaches in life in order to succeed. There will be moments where the service of a coach will be the solution for their professional development or performance, and there will be other times where the friendship of a mentor will be the difference maker in their personal development and life decisions.

3.3 How could SeAMK benefit from a mentoring initiative?

Based on my personal experience as an intern for the IB programme, adding a mentoring initiative in SeAMK can be assumed to be useful to create a deeper connection between the institution and the students were both parties can benefit from the already mention initiative, becoming even more competent in their social and academic integration to the university. The previous remarks are yet to be tested in the empirical process, after analysing the responses from the student interviews.

By becoming more competent in these areas, the students will be able to appreciate the opportunity given to them, to study, to be part of the education system and to grow in their understanding of the efforts made by the staff to provide them quality education.

The students will become aware of the cultural differences within their group, which is a key factor for the present time as a student and for their future development as business executives. Persistence and academic achievement in university has a clear positive outcome when the students are mentoring by a faculty member (Crisp & Cruz 2009).

During the first year of studies, the undergraduates go through a time of adaptability, understanding, and self-questioning process. Making them vulnerable to discourage, distraction and depression. Having a mentor for the first-year students will develop stability during this process, helping them to reflect in the effects of the challenges they are facing. Reflecting on experiences encourages insight and complex learning (Costa & Kallick n.d.). After one year of faculty mentoring, students with mentors have high-ranking GPAs (Grade Point Average) and are therefore more likely to remain in university as opposed to other students without mentors (Campbell & Campbell 1997).

3.4 Who is using mentoring initiatives?

Finland is serious about mentoring initiatives. The Suomen Mentorit association describes their programme as a year-long process in which Finnish Mentors offer their own mentor to a highly educated young person. The aim of the activity is to help the newly graduated young person to start his/her career and to transfer the latest knowledge and skills of the young people to the professional career. The purpose of the Trainee program is to support the employment of young people, and to ensure that the new skills of recent graduates are effectively transferred to working life. Over 500 people have become mentors with Suomen Mentorit supporting more than 2300 people (Suomen Mentorit 2020).

There are a number of universities in Finland using a mentoring programme for their students, for example;

The **University of Helsinki** is offering a mentoring programme for all students of the University of Helsinki allowing the students to choose the type of mentoring they

would like to have, according to the questions on the fields of interest and goals. Their programme has been ongoing since 2012 having the opportunity to invest in 480 students from 9 faculties, this effort coordinated between the department of career services and alumni team. (Mentoring programmes | Instructions for students 2020).

The **University of Oulu** has a mentoring programme for domestic and international students though in English for foreigners and in Finnish language for domestic students. The programme enforces mutual benefit, for the mentor and the mentee. The mentor's benefit relies on the relevance of knowledge he/she can acquire while mentoring a younger student and learn about the current courses the university is offering nowadays. The benefit for the mentee is on the information and knowledge he/she can receive from the mentor's experience in working life. The mentoring programme consists in one-on-one meeting organized by the university three times during the programme (the starting meeting, the middle way meeting and the final meeting) (Mentoring 2020).

The **University of Turku** includes a multidisciplinary programme for students in order to help them to transition into working life and development. The programmes offered are not only for bachelor students but also for master students, doctoral candidates and post-doctoral researchers, as a part of this initiative is the mentoring programme for staff and for persons with disability. The mentoring programme lasts for one year and the meetings are once a month (Mentoring 2020).

Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (Seinäjoki UAS) mentoring initiative, is focus on helping the students with the transition from student to working life. The project was founded by the European Social Fund and developed in SeAMK in cooperation with the alumni association by promoting network and providing practical information to the students. Mentors are graduates from every degree programme with a minimum of three years of work experience. These mentors will coordinate strategies with the assign student or mentee in order to increase their future aspirations in professional life. The meetings often take place once per month and the students are allowed to enrol any time around the year (Alumni Activities | SeAMK 2020).

Many students have been benefited from the different mentoring programmes offered by the universities in Finland. Currently there are a number of students thankful for those mentors that have invested time and wisdom into their lives. The universities mentioned above have mentoring programmes where the mentor is an older person with years of working experience. Some of them belong to an alumni group or university partners, but none of them mention about an initiative where the students can have an internal mentor assisting the students while studying, most of the students must rely on the counsellor, tutors or student services offered in the university.

3.5 Research methods

The research method chosen for this thesis is a qualitative method, since the year 2017 the author has been student and has taken the time to talk with his fellow classmates. Furthermore, the author has also done his internship at SeAMK as an assistant for the IB programme for a period of five months, part of his work description was to mentor the first-year students during their first semester (this was done as a trial period and experimental phase of the internship). Obtaining positive results and good feedback from the mentored students is the reason why the author has move forward to write this study about this particular topic.

Two methods for research have been chosen in this study; Interviews and Observation. The selected group of people who has been chosen for research are a certain number of students from the different IB programmes, IB17, IB18, IB19.

Interview

There are 10 open questions that will be asked during the interview, the questions are covering 4 areas relevant to the study; social integration, academic integration, mentoring (student care) and student satisfaction. The purpose of these questions is to gain insight about the student perspective regarding their integration to a new

environment, their interaction with other students and the institution and whether or not they are able to take advantages of the services available to them.

The interviews will be implemented with local and foreigner students. The reason for this is to get a multicultural perspective since the IB programme is an international programme.

Observation

Observation is another method of research that was produced by the author during his time of internship time at SeAMK's IB programme. The opportunity to approach the first-year students in the IB programme gave him the opening to talk to them and realize that sometimes, they needed extra help to understand some concepts taught in class.

By getting closer to the students, it's easier to understand what they are going through when adapting to their new environment, it was obvious that the foreigner students needed extra help to acclimate to the new setting in many areas of their life. It is clear that one day of orientation at arrival is not enough.

During the internship period, it was easy to notice the students reacting positively to the notion of having an older student assisting them in class, even sharing experiences of the past and advising them about how to move forward with certain assignments or courses. In addition to this, having someone between students and the university staff seem to have a good result for the IB19 class, they are more comfortable asking for advice to an older student who has been around before approaching to the teachers.

3.6 Limitations

With this thesis the author does not pretend to solve the issues, problems or change the way of proceeding, instead, he would like to share the perspective obtained from

the students in the different years of the IB programme, the re-search for this study will be focused on four main groups previously mentioned. These groups have shared their perception during the first year of study at SeAMK and have given good ideas for implementation in the future. A mentoring programme seems to be a way to improve the student-teacher interaction, allowing the students increase their academic integration at the university, as mentioned in the Student Integration Model by Tinto (Tinto 1975).

Another limitation is the number of students that can be interviewed during the research period, since this study is based in the international business programme there is only one group per year. Therefore, there will be a limited number of students that will be interviewed per group.

4 Survey

The interviewee selection was applied according to the purpose of the study, approaching current IB students from three different years, IB17, IB18 and IB19. One half of the students are domestic, and the second half are foreign students taking part of the full degree programme of international business.

At the beginning of each interview it was mentioned to every student that their answers will remain anonymous in order to give them more freedom to answer each question. Although the interview was in an informal format, there was a structure followed by the interviewer in order to gather the answers in a systematic way. The interviews took longer time than the author estimated at the beginning of the study each interview was about thirty minutes long. The students did not seem to be bothered by this issue.

The questionnaire is divided into four different categories: social integration, academic integration, mentoring (student care) and student satisfaction. These categories correspond to the main topics in this study. Including them in the questionnaire is fundamental in order to understand the perspective of the interviewee during his/her first year of studies.

The type of questions used in this questionnaire were a collection of questions that the author and his classmates asked each other a number of times at the beginning of their studies. Using a method of observation and informal conversations the author saw convenient the selection of questions suitable to be included in the questionnaire.

The interviews were carried out face to face and via video call with the students, every question has been carefully answered and in some cases some questions led to secondary questions in order to gain deeper information about the topic.

The student's responses have been analysed in the four categories previously mentioned, forming a dynamic interpretation of their overview during the first year of studies. By comparing each answer and grouping them to each of the categories I was able to identify and interpret the student's perspective towards the institution

regarding integration and satisfaction, deducing whether or not a mentoring initiative would be ideal for SeAMK at this time.

There was a total of eight students interviewed for this thesis. The fact that corona virus was spreading, and the lockdown was announced at the time when the research of this thesis was being done, affected the number of the interviewees I was able to reach.

5 Results of Interviews

The results of the interviews are based on the student's answers and it has been divided in four different categories, student integration, academic integration, mentoring (student care) and student satisfaction.

5.1 Social Integration

5.1.1 Social integration in extracurricular activities.

The most common social activities the students take part are sports events organized by the student union. Quiz and chill is an event that gathers students promoting group activities in a form of questions and answers of different knowledge, the location of this particular activity is off campus. SeiES (Seinäjoki Entrepreneurship Society) is a non-profit organization that provides students with entrepreneurial activities in order to develop and inspire students towards entrepreneurial mindset, meeting once a month the students gain opportunities to develop their network. Hangouts activities are for those who would like to meet new people, gathering both domestic and foreigner students in order to get to know each other. These activities are not about parties but rather create opportunities where social skills and personal development could come into practice.

Six out of eight students have mentioned that during their first year of studies they were able to engage into social activities like: Quiz and chill, sports and SeiES at least once a week, allowing them to meet new people and to learn about the student culture at SeAMK. Even though it is specified that parties are not part of social activities we know that parties belong into social integration category. The same six students mention that they have also attended parties during the first year of studying at SeAMK.

The other two students responded that they did not take part of many activities because they did not feel comfortable enough, they mention that parties take much more attention and the publicity put into them is higher than the other activities.

5.1.2 Social integration in class.

The group work experience draws students out of their comfort zone in order to adapt to the style and way of working among different cultures and people from different backgrounds such as religion, language and cosmovision.

The IB programme has a particular study module called Virtual Enterprise (VE), all the students who participated in this interview have done or are doing this course in the current time. Many of the answers derivate from the VE experience, in chapter one of this thesis VE is described as the biggest course absorbing about eighty percent of the first year in the IB programme.

All of them agreed that in groupwork there seem to be some kind of work overload on some team members This usually happens to those members who have shown leadership skills or have a lot of self-initiative. Having this kind of work overload soon becomes one of the biggest issues for the team creating problems related to misunderstandings and miscommunication. The participants of this interview quickly realized that having these problems of communication have affected their performance and their focus on learning.

Four out of eight students pointed out that there was not enough teaching about culture, they would have wanted to learn more about cultures before being set up in transcultural situations such as working with people from different cultures.

Considering the fact that half of the students are foreigners. Cultural views are seen with a different perspective. People coming from abroad are more sensitive to cultural awareness because they visualize themselves in a different culture even before they move to Finland. Therefore, each of the student background may impact in a different way the outcome of the answers in the questionnaire.

In a positive side of doing groupwork, the students agreed about it being a very good experience getting to know new people and work together with people from different cultures: it brings a challenge but also a lot of new learning experiences.

On the other hand, two students feel like working alone it is a better option, finding a better way to work and to get better grades.

The teacher-student interaction makes a high impact in the student's life in order to learn and develop themselves in working life. Teachers often acting as a role model for the students makes a difference in the way the student performs in class.

All the students agreed that teachers and staff are easily approachable, whether in class or when they are in their office, teachers have shown availability to meet students and help them when they have questions or comments related to their course.

5.2 Academic Integration

5.2.1 Staff acting on the students' best interest.

In order to evaluate academic integration, the questionnaire included three questions related to this category. Each student answered the questions about their perception regarding the staff and teachers at the university academically speaking. Furthermore, the students also gave their comments about their feelings when delivering assignments and doing exams. Nonetheless, they also shared about their intellectual abilities towards the courses.

Students have different opinions regarding the staff performing in their best interest and development. Five out of eight students have a positive perception towards the administrative staff, making them feel that things are done efficiently and for the benefit of the student. Students feel that teachers are very nice people and they can be very helpful in class and after-class hours for questions related to courses. A student from the IB19 programme mentions the benefit to have a teacher assistant in order to clarify definition of concepts that were not clear for the students during class.

Students feel that the teachers have good intentions towards them and behave like they want to act in the best interest of the students but failing in making them feel that they are not interested in their development.

Six out of eight students have the perception that some teachers tend to do their job in order to justify the fact that they are doing their job and not with the intention to share their knowledge. These students feel that their teachers do not have much interest in their education or their personal development. The teacher's ability to teach is limited to those who are able to speak very good English and to those who keep their class material relevant and up to date.

5.2.2 Academic performance.

Students understand that assignments are part of the courses and essential part of their learning process. They expressed that in many of the courses offered by the IB programme some of the assignments are too easy and too many of them, making them feel a little stressed and not been able to focus on learning but rather in deliver assignments on time in order to pass the course.

The students expressed that in some courses they feel disappointed and discouraged when they know that the teacher might not read the assignment that took them many hours or even days to complete. The feeling increases when they don't receive any feedback from the teacher about the work done.

While doing exams the students are happy that the course grades are divided between assignments and exams. This helps them to release pressure from one thing to the other.

5.2.3 Course requirements.

They feel that the courses are easy to pass but they end up questioning their own learning outcome from them. Furthermore, many of the courses seem to have a checkbox of things that need to be done in order to pass but not focusing on making sure the student adopted something from it.

Another average answer is regarding the groupwork among the courses. The first year of the IB programme includes a course where all of the tasks are conducted within the team bringing pressure to the students to not only deliver good

assignments but also making sure that the whole group performs in a systematic way dividing the tasks and presentations. This brings a challenge at first but later on the challenge becomes very uncomfortable due to the difference of working in multicultural teams.

5.3 Mentoring (Student Care)

5.3.1 Care services.

Student care is such an important aspect of every university. It makes sense to have a good care services in order to keep students encouraged and motivated when difficulties appear in their lives. Commonly students face challenges in their academic, social and personal life, distracting them from their learning and development process.

The students in this interview were able to share their perspective about the care services at SeAMK.

Students acknowledged the existence of the services and felt well attended by them at the very beginning of their studies, perhaps during the first and second month of their initial period of their studies at SeAMK. After that first period of two months they do not feel much cared for, the initial excitement begins to fade away and then the struggle begins. Having said this, it's worth mentioning that at the beginning they do not go through many difficulties but until the third or fourth month of their studies is when the support is highly required.

While some of the students have used the services in order to find encouragement, guidance or answers to their questions, other students have not used these services as they find a gap between the students and the services, due to the lack of persistence in the promotion of student care.

5.3.2 Mentoring students.

This question about mentoring (question 9) was initially added to the interview only for students of the IB19 programme due to a new initiative that started during the academic year of 2019-2020. This initiative consisted in hiring an assistant for the IB programme in order to assist the teachers but also the students in their everyday life concentrating on academic and social integration as well as their personal life as far as they allowed.

I decided to include this question for all student who participated in this interview giving previously a brief introduction about mentoring. The IB19 students' response was very positive to the assistant initiative. They really like having an assistant during their first year of studies. It added a personal care that was not only for the first couple of months at university but an ongoing support. The students were able to receive a better understanding about culture awareness and working with multicultural teams. They mentioned that working with an assistant gave them the feeling that they were being mentored and coached academically giving more confidence for an overall performance with their peers from different cultures.

For the rest of the students who did not had a mentor or a teacher assistant, the question was formulated more like an idea. The reaction about that idea seemed to be something that would benefit the class specially those coming from abroad. Besides some of the older students have talked with IB19 students and they have shared the benefit of having someone between the class and the staff filling the gap.

The overall outcome of this category has a positive response towards the institution, students are grateful to have different options to turn in case they need to talk to someone, but if the institution is not able to provide an ongoing support in academic, social and personal mentoring the students tend to lose motivation to continue with their goals and performance as they intended.

5.4 Student Satisfaction

Even though there are differences in the way some students perceive social and academic integration in their personal life, still they have enjoyed the experience of studying at SeAMK. They understand that also the university is in a continuous development process. So far all of the students agreed that they would apply to SeAMK if the opportunity of doing it all over again will present. They recognized that the institution has been good to them and the more time they spend studying the more improvements the university does in order to provide them with a good experience as university students.

Some of the students know that the universities in their countries could not provide the same quality of services and experiences they are living here, some other students have expressed that has been a life changing experience, while others feel that their expectations have been exceeded during this period. The answers to this category are related in a general review of their life as university students and includes academic and social life.

5.4.1 Referring the IB programme

Real student satisfaction comes in to play when you ask the question about recommending your university or your study programme.

The students recognize that the IB programme has the ability to open many doors for students to connect with people from different cultures learning with them and from them, making this one the richest experiences in their young life. Due to the fact that the programme promotes internationalization the students are drawn to work with students from different backgrounds, cultures, religions and languages. All of the courses are taught in the English language allowing the students to improve their language skills and learning all of the terminology used in business. The teachers are open and available to talk with open minded attitude giving the students the freedom to approach them if necessary.

5.4.2 Summary

The answers collected from the interviewees were analysed and interpreted by the author of this study. A total of eight students participated in the interviews, representing a variety in age, gender, cultural background and different study year. Having in common the same study degree programme. Despite the differences the students have, some of the answers were very similar in some of the categories, making the analysis of the research highly interesting.

The main difference between the answers was merely in the area of culture and academic. Foreign students focused a little more on the need of cultural education, as mentioned before foreign students are more culturally oriented. While domestic students focused more in being academically challenged. This response is due to the fact that the domestic students were receiving education in Finland before going to higher education, and perhaps it is a little more difficult to find major differences in the system.

6 Mentoring programme proposal

The following proposal recommends a strategic approach for first year IB programme students. After a qualitative research and theories explaining the need for student integration, seems appropriate to include three main responsibilities for the person holding the role of “Student facilitator”. This mentoring initiative suggest that student integration at SeAMK could become a natural part of their practices.

Part of this initiative is suggesting that the candidate taking over this position, could be a person with a wide expertise in multicultural mentorship, with the ability to connect with students and not been a student. The mentor should be working on a full-time basis so that the students know the person is available during school hours, assisting the teachers of the VE course and becoming a mentor for the first-year students. The suggested role can be called “Student Facilitator”, this role can be categorized in three areas; Personal Mentoring, Group Mentoring and Assistant to the teacher. An essential part of the facilitator is not only to be limited to be a mentor to the students but also acting as a coach. As the table describes in chapter 3.2 of this thesis, the differences between a mentor and a coach. The facilitator must be able to find the balance between both in order to holistically influence the students.

The benefit of mentoring initiatives in the academic sector are to benefit both the student as well as the institution. The student benefit with this initiative is in a very personal level. Having a mentor while facing the university challenges, increases the possibilities for the student to find him/herself in a more confident development process. In addition, this will teach them to rely on mentors in the future for every stage in life. The benefit for the institution relies on a better performance of their students. Loyal students learn to perform for the benefit of the institution and not only for their own gain. Giving as a result endurance and resistance for dropping out, motivation for graduating on time, and wherever the future takes them they will be proud of been SeAMK alumni.

First year students will eventually become second and third-year students. These students should not be left out without a mentor. Therefore, the mentor should continue with his role in a different modality. The first-year group will merge together with exchange students in order to take on different study modules during their

second year making group mentoring difficult to apply. Personal mentoring in the other hand, will be the ideal as they move on with their studies.

1- Personal Mentoring

It is widely known that SeAMK provides professional services that students can use in case they need them, personal services such as; student services (Samo), counsellor, pastor, psychologist and tutors. So far, not many students use these services for various reasons, some of them do not feel with total freedom to talk about their issues to someone they don't know, some others did not have knowledge those services existed due to the lack of promotion about them.

While this mentoring initiative may seem similar to the already existing services it does not pretend to replace but rather complement them. What differentiates this initiative from the current services is the personal approach that is offering.

The mentor could help the students to understand cultural issues in a more personal matter other than just ignore the issues and hoping that things get better with time. Offering availability during business hours in order to talk to students whenever an issue arise visiting the workgroup and helping the group to settle right in the moment. Coaching the students in presentations and assignments, not helping the students to do their work but rather coaching them in order for them to present a better work in class. By doing this the teachers can expect better presentations and the students gain more confidence. At the end of the day the students are in a developmental process and learning social skills will be essential for then when entering the business world.

2- Group Mentoring

As mentioned by the students in the answers of the surveys and in my practical training as an assistant for the IB19 programme, I was able to recognize that has been helpful to have a "person in between", someone who can be the link between the teachers and the students in order to feel comfortable talking about courses,

teaching quality, general knowledge about SeAMK and assisting students that don't dare to ask questions in public. It is easy to approach to a person who they trust and feel comfortable with.

3- Assistant to the teacher

This particular part of the role has two purposes, one is, to assist the teacher in certain parts of the VE courses, not teaching when the teacher is not there, but rather assisting the students if they have questions or when they are working in their teams and the teacher is busy with another team. Also, the assistant can help with coaching the teams before presentations or assignments. Doing this will increase the quality of performance by the teams in their different tasks.

With mentoring initiative is how I believe the students can reach Academic and Social integration, once the student feels fully integrated to the university the result will be student loyalty.

7 Conclusions

The conclusions of this thesis are based on the impact that a mentoring initiative could have in the developmental categories of the student.

Social Integration. A mentoring initiative will encourage the students to participate in all sorts of social activities mainly focusing in those activities that relate to their development and increase their chances to gain academic advantages such as more credits. Leisure activities are part of their social development as well.

Academic integration. Motivated students are good students. Academic mentorship will allow the student to be motivated when doing assignments and presentations. The students will be coached before presentations and assignments in order to build self-confidence in class and for the corporate world. As proven in the research, a mentor will be a link between those students who don't feel comfortable enough to approach the teachers when they have questions about courses, grades, cultural misunderstandings.

Mentoring. The purpose of mentoring itself is to help the mentee to embrace his/her own value and purpose. Mentoring will also help students to find a cultural adaptation between social and academic performance. Group mentoring will allow the students to have a mediator when issues arise, simulating the business environment as when people have issues at work. Students will learn cross-cultural and problem-solving skills.

Student satisfaction. Students are generally satisfied with the service and education provided at SeAMK. This initiative will continue empowering the institution in order to increase student loyalty. Loyal students will graduate on time, reducing the number of dropouts and increases performance. Furthermore, the students will graduate and be proud of their alma mater.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Social Integration

- 1- How often do you take part of social activities such as sports, quiz and chill, SeiES, hangouts (any other, extracurricular activities, parties don't count)?
- 2- What are your thoughts about doing group work?
- 3- How do you feel about approaching the teachers when you don't understand something related to the course their teaching?

Academic Integration

- 4- What does the university staff do, in order to make you feel that they are acting in your best interest?
- 5- How do you feel when you are delivering assignments or doing exams?
- 6- How do you know that your intellectual abilities match with the intellectual requirements of the courses?

Mentoring (student care)

- 7- When have you used the student services provided at SeAMK? Such as; Tutors, Samo student care services, Counsellor, Pastor, Psychologist.
- 8- What kind of benefits did you find in having an assistant teacher/mentor during your first year of studies at SeAMK?

Student Satisfaction

9- If given the opportunity, would you apply to SeAMK again?

10- Why would you refer the IB programme to a friend?

