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A Study on Retainment of International Students in the Kainuu Region

Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration (BBA)

Kajaani University of Applied Sciences, School of Business

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**KAMK • University
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Abstract

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Title of the Publication: A Study on Retainment of International Students in the Kainuu Region

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This thesis focused on studying international students at Kajaani University of Applied Sciences (KAMK) to remain in the Kainuu region after graduation. This thesis is research-oriented, aiming to locate factors affecting retention in Kainuu.

The beginning consists of a literature research, which includes articles and books supporting the topic. The literature mainly focuses on theories regarding retention and motivation.

The second part includes a qualitative research in the form of an interview, in which eight current international students in KAMK were interviewed. They were asked 12 questions related to motivational factors, employment, and attractiveness of Kainuu. The results do not present a comprehensive list of factors affecting retention, but the author believes it gives a general guide on the main ideas around motivation in remaining in Kainuu after graduation.

After the literature research, the research methodology and the results were introduced, followed by suggestions for the region. Also, the success of the thesis was evaluated, as well as further research possibilities were introduced.

Tiivistelmä

Kirjoittaja(t): Niiranen, Tommi

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Tämä opinnäytetyö keskittyi tutkimaan Kajaanin Ammattikorkeakoulun (KAMK) kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden pysyvyyttä Kainuussa valmistumisen jälkeen. Opinnäytetyö oli tutkimuspainotteinen ja pyrki paikantamaan tekijöitä, jotka vaikuttavat pysyvyyteen Kainuussa.

Opinnäytetyön alku sisältää taustatietoa opinnäytetyön aiheeseen, sekä kirjallisuutta tukemaan tutkimusta. Kirjallisuus käsittelee enimmäkseen pysyvyyttä, mutta myös motivaatiota esimerkiksi Maslowin tarvehierarkian kautta.

Kirjallisuuskatsauksen jälkeen opinnäytetyössä toteutettiin laadullinen tutkimus haastattelun muodossa. Tutkimusnäytteeseen osallistui kahdeksan kansainvälistä tutkinto-opiskelijaa, joille esitettiin 12 kysymystä työllisyyteen, työllistymiseen, motivaatioon, sekä Kainuun houkuttelevuuteen liittyen. Tutkimushaastattelut toteutettiin Microsoft Teamsin välityksellä vallitsevan koronapandemian takia. Tutkimustulokset eivät välttämättä esitä koko totuutta kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden asenteista ja mielipiteistä pysyvyyteen liittyen, mutta kirjoittaja uskoo tulosten esittävän laadukasta ja hyödyllistä tietoa. Kerätyn tiedon pohjalta onnistui luomaan kehitysehdotuksia Kainuun ja KAMK:n toimintaa ajatellen.

Opinnäytetyön viimeinen vaihe sisältää tutkimustulosten temaattista analysointia, sekä tulosten pohjalta tehtävien kehitysehdotusten esittelyä. Lisäksi tutkimuksen onnistuneisuutta arvioidaan, ja lisätutkimusmahdollisuuksia esitetään.

Foreword

This thesis presents the findings regarding the motivation of international students to remain in the Kainuu region after graduation. It also provides improvement suggestions to the Kajaani University of Applied Sciences and the Kainuu region to increase the retention of international students as skillful workers. As this research concludes the students' point of view, further research opportunities occur to help Kainuu combat a declining population.

The journey from the beginning to this point has been demanding and difficult, to put it bluntly. Hence, I would like to express my most generous gratitude towards my thesis supervisor, Ruey Komulainen. Thank you for your constant uplifting, passionate teaching, which eventually awakened my sincere interest in human resource management (HRM). Thank you to Kirsi Sievers, who always helped and supported me with study-related issues, all the way from the application period to this day.

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Kajaani, November 2020

Tommi Niiranen

List of Abbreviations

SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
KAMK	Kajaani University of Applied Sciences
HRM	Human resource management
ELY	Centre for Economic Development, Transportation, and the Environment (ELY center)
EU	The European Union
RQ	Research question
RQ1	Research question 1
RQ2	Research question 2

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the thesis

1.1.1 Kainuu Introduction

Kainuu region sized 22,687 km², is located in the middle of Finland, on the Eastern national border. The region has 72,306 inhabitants (Tilastokeskus 2020a, 10), while Kajaani, the capital of Kainuu, had 36,709 inhabitants at the end of 2019 (MDI 2019). Forecasts suggest that the population development of the region will be harmful in the upcoming years, despite the high level of migration. With the current development, the population is expected to be as low as 67,100 by 2036 (Kalliokoski 2018; Komulainen et al. 2019, 205-206). Also, the workforce structure in Kainuu is entering an era of a crisis due to large older generations in the workforce entering retirement soon, while younger generations are leaving Kainuu to study in other cities (Kainuun liitto 2017). Population development is shown in figure 1.1 below.

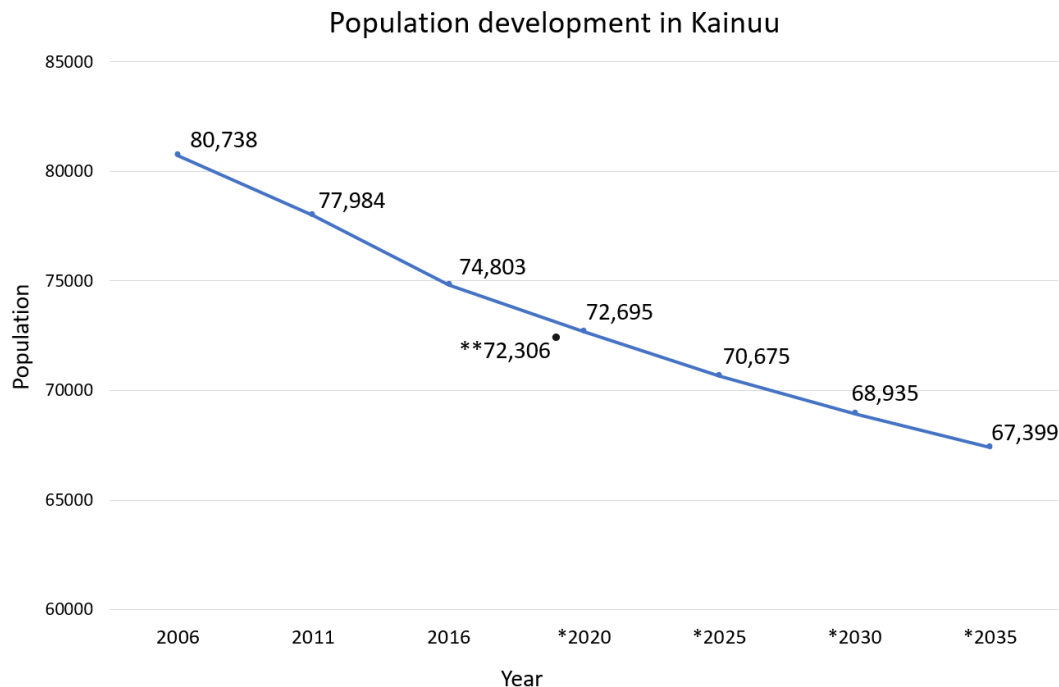


Figure 1.1: Population development in the Kainuu region (Kainuun liitto 2017; Tilastokeskus 2020a, 10)

*Forecasts

** Real population in 2019 (Tilastokeskus 2020a, 10).

As can be seen from Figure 1.1, the population is decreasing at a rapid pace. The reality portrays a more severe change in the population development as in 2019 the population was 72,306, 389 inhabitants less than the forecast for 2020 (Tilastokeskus 2020a, 10; Kainuun liitto 2017). If the development continues at such a rate, the 2035 population will likely be closer to 66,000 than the forecasted 67,399.

Kainuu's capital, the city of Kajaani, is also the home of Kajaani University of Applied Sciences, where thousands of students study for bachelor's and master's degrees each year. As a university of applied sciences offering international degrees, Kainuu attracts students worldwide, but re-employment after graduation as employees in the region appears to be low. This trend is not an exclusive issue in Kainuu. According to Salla Jantunen (2018), international students are mostly satisfied with education quality but lack guidance in the job application. In addition, only 44% of the foreign graduates were employed in Finland after five years of graduation (Jantunen 2018).

1.1.2 International Students in Kainuu

In Autumn 2020, Kajaani University of Applied Sciences had 329 students studying for international degrees, out of which 138 are international students. Most international students arrive from Russia (28), Vietnam (15), and Nigeria (10). Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, the development in the number of international students is challenging to forecast, according to Sanna Laukkanen (2020), the study secretary of KAMK. Despite the pandemic, KAMK plans to have 15-20 starting positions for each international degree in Autumn 2021. Approximately 60% of the new international degree students are expected to be foreigners. (Laukkanen 2020.) Unfortunately, there is no data available regarding the retention of international graduates, but if the national retention rate of 44% (Jantunen 2018) is applied, the number of remaining international graduates would be 60. Table 1.1 presents the information about the current international students below.

Nationality	Number of students
Russia	28
Nigeria	10
Vietnam	15
Other	85
Total	138
*Retention (44 %)	60

Table 1.1: International students in KAMK and the forecasted retention in Kainuu after graduation (Laukkanen 2020; Jantunen 2018) *The retention percentage is based on Jantunen's (2018) article about retention of international students in Finland.

1.1.3 Employment Situation in Kainuu Region

In 2016, the Kainuu region had over 4,000 registered enterprises, with small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) employing more than 60% of the working population in Kainuu, making them a significant employer in the region (Komulainen et al. 2019, 206-207). Kainuu needs to offer a wide range of degree studies because there will be numerous vacant positions available from all fields in the upcoming years (Kainuun liitto 2017, 14). It would be beneficial for the region to have a higher employment rate because it increases the wellbeing of the citizens and decreases healthcare expenses (Kainuun liitto 2017, 14).

SMEs are defined by two principles: the number of employees and turnover or balance sheet total. The European Union (EU) divides SMEs into three categories depending on the size of the company. Microenterprises employ less than ten people, small companies over 10, but less than 50, and medium-sized companies employ more than 50 but less than 250 people. Turnover and balance sheet total in microenterprises can be €2 million at the highest while the maximum for small companies is €10 million. The turnover in medium-sized companies can be €50 million, and the balance sheet total €43 million at the highest. See table 1.2 for the SME categories in the EU. (European Commission 2020, 10-11.)

Category	Number of employees	Turnover	Balance Sheet Total
Medium-sized companies	50-250	max. €50 million	max. €43 million
Small companies	10-49	max. €10 million	max. €10 million
Microenterprises	< 10	max. €2 million	max. €2 million

Table 1.2: SME categories in the European Union (European Commission 2020, 10-11)

Approximately 800 entrepreneurs are retiring soon, and most do not have a successor for the business. These entrepreneurs employ around 3,000 employees in Kainuu, making the success of change in ownership crucial. (Kainuun liitto 2017, 27.)

The current unemployment situation in Kainuu is changing rapidly, partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Generally, there are more unemployed people than in 2019, but the situation is recovering compared to spring 2020. The number of layoffs decreased as much as 39% in July compared to June. In addition, there are significant differences in unemployment between the municipalities in Kainuu; for example, the unemployment percentage in Sotkamo is 9,2 while in Puolanka, it is 15,3. The unemployment in the entire region is 12,5%, which is slightly better than the national percentage (14,7%). The number of unemployed job seekers in Kainuu was nearly 4,000, circa 13% more than in the previous year. (Heikkonen 2020.)

1.2 Problem Statement

The Kainuu region is entering a dangerous era of mass-retirement of the larger generations. Also, people are leaving the region at a rapid pace. Although migration is positive in the region, it is not enough to fill the employment gap once the younger generation enters the workforce (Kainuun liitto 2017). Kajaani University of Applied Sciences attracts young students worldwide, but unfortunately, most international students leave the region upon finishing the degree, as occurs in other areas of Finland (Jantunen 2018). Retainment of these young talents could decrease the severity of the change in workforce and population.

Due to the factors stated above, the research problem is to study international students' willingness to remain in the Kainuu region and enter the workforce. Additionally, exploring the possible reasons for leaving the region after graduation will be studied, and possible barriers for

employment experienced by international students will be explored. The research problem is the declining population in Kainuu and how to solve and reduce the severity of the situation. To put it bluntly, attract, and retain international students from Kajaani University of Applied Sciences in Kainuu.

1.3 Research Aims

The research aims to locate the motives of the international students to remain and join the workforce in Kainuu by conducting an interview. A qualitative research in the form of an interview was chosen because it provides an opportunity to collect detailed data from the respondents relatively quickly (Boyce & Neale 2006). Interviewing fits the tight schedule for writing the thesis. The research also aims to produce more information about the attractiveness of the Kainuu region and the possibilities for improving the retention of international students, which further strengthens the choice of interviewing as the research method.

Based on the results and analysis, conclusions for factors affecting motivation and retention will be made, and recommendations for improving the Kainuu region's attractiveness among international students will be introduced. Naturally, the results will be available as a basis for further research in the future.

The main research questions (RQ) focus on finding the factors affecting international students' motivation to remain in Kainuu after graduation and how international students' retention could be improved in the region.

RQ1: Which factors affect the motivation of international students to remain in the Kainuu region after graduation?

RQ2: How to improve the retention of international students in the Kainuu region?

1.4 Thesis Structure

The introduction section states background information for the thesis and the thesis topic. The introduction sets the scene for the current situation in the Kainuu region, both employment and population-wise. It also explains the existing situation with the retention of international

graduates and looks at the current international students at Kajaani University of Applied Sciences. In addition, it includes the problem statement as well as the research questions.

The second chapter takes a more in-depth glance at the literature supporting the research and providing more information. The main focus is on retention, but motivation is also a part of the research.

The third chapter focuses on the research methods, in which the chosen data collection method will be introduced, as well as the process of the data analysis. This chapter also introduces the sampling methods used in the research.

The fourth chapter focuses on the analysis of the collected data. It includes the respondents' general description, introduction to the results, and conclusions based on the results.

The fifth chapter includes a discussion related to the research results. Also, suggestions for improvements are explained based on the conclusions made from the research. The final chapter is the conclusion of the entire thesis.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Motivation

Motivation is something every human possesses. It is essentially something that drives our decisions and actions. On the contrary, the lack of motivation causes inefficiency in taking action. Everyone feels unmotivated sometimes, but it is not a permanent state. Cherry (2020) suggests that motivation guides us and our actions towards the goals we are reaching for. In addition, motivation stems from different forces, such as biological and emotional forces, and can be described as to why someone does something (Cherry 2020).

Motivation is divided into two types: extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation arises from outside factors, not from within the person. These factors could be different rewards, such as money and praise. Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, comes from within a person. These kinds of factors could be, for example, dreams and experienced success. (Cherry 2020.) With approximately 44% of international graduates remaining in Finland after graduation (Jantunen 2018), it is essential to locate these extrinsic and intrinsic motivators to improve retention.

Intrinsic motivation is something that motivates if we enjoy the activity or task at hand. If considering international students, there needs to be something in living and working abroad that accentuates their intrinsic motivation. Understanding intrinsic motivation and leveraging upon it might be difficult since intrinsic motivation arises from different tasks for different individuals. People feel intrinsic motivation often as meaningfulness or enjoyment, and the root cause for doing something is pure willingness to do it without fear of punishment or hope for rewards. (Thomas 2020.)

Extrinsic motivation places challenges on organizations and individuals. If a person has received a reward in some extrinsic form, such as praise or money, one begins to expect the same reward for similar tasks or accomplishments. There could be an issue if these kinds of rewards are no longer available in the future. On the other hand, the expectation for extrinsic rewards could create continuous motivation in the long run. (Legault 2016, 2-3.) When considering international students in Kainuu, could the expectations of extrinsic rewards help them to remain in the region?

Motivation is not the sole factor for foreigners coming to Finland to study. According to Lewin (2009), students these days are more motivated to apply for an exchange due to increased

globalization. Also, studying abroad acts as a gateway for applying for a job abroad as well. This phenomenon is described as 'global citizenship' because national borders are beginning to be blurred due to companies operating in several countries – even continents. (Lewin 2009.)

2.1.1 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs must be one of the most popular motivation theories when considering individuals' behavior. Analyzing the international students' motivation could help understand the motives for remaining in the Kainuu region after graduation. It could also help to develop the plans to improve retainment in Kainuu.

Motivation will be an essential aspect for international students if they want to remain in the Kainuu region after graduation. Maslow's needs theory suggests that there are five different levels of needs that people attempt to fulfill. Reaching to fulfill those needs creates motivation in an individual and improves work efficiency. (Kaur 2013.)

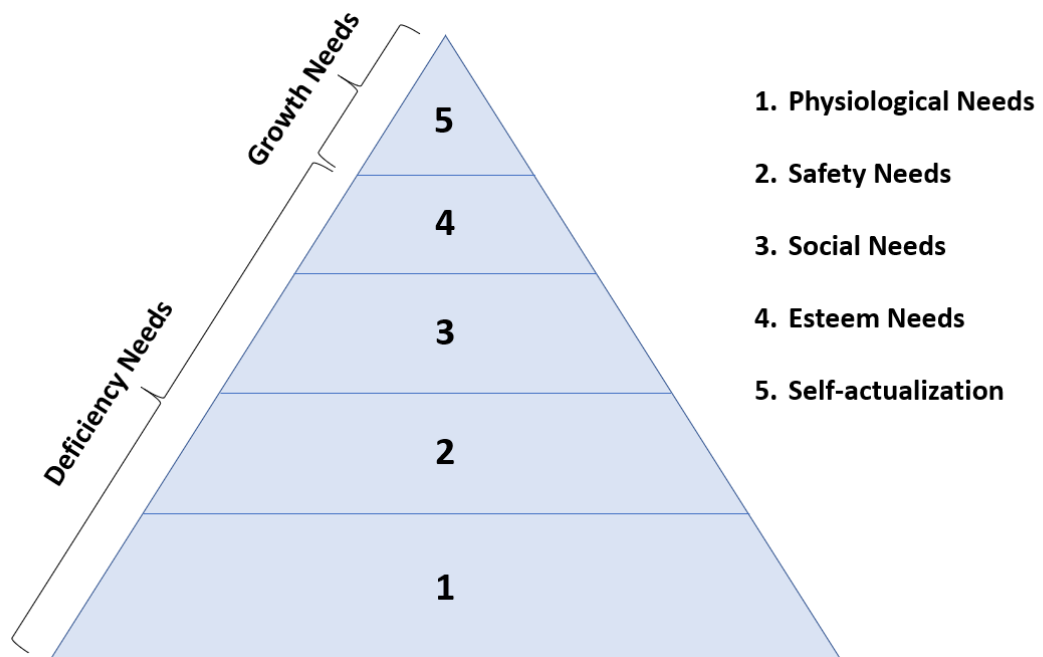


Figure 2.1: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Kaur 2013)

In order to reach a level in the hierarchy, lower levels must be reached first.

1. Physiological needs are the most basic needs, which must be fulfilled to proceed to the other levels. This level includes food and shelter and a salary, which is adequate to afford

to live. (Kaur 2013.) In Finland, the average salary was 3,140€ in 2019 (Tilastokeskus 2020b). According to Karppinen, some workers come to Finland because the salary is much higher than in the home country (Karppinen 2020). Factors also contributing positively to physiological needs include clean air and water (Kaur 2013). Finland has the cleanest air in the world, and drinkable water is available from the tap (McCarthy 2018; VisitFinland n.d.).

2. The second level of needs focuses on safety. The level indicates an individual's need for a safe working environment without fear of harm or threat. When comparing the safest countries to work in, European and especially Nordic countries point out. Finland was the 14th safest country to work in, while Iceland held the first place. The rankings are based on the Global Peace Ranking. (Kaur 2013; Burton 2019.) Moreover, Finland offers a three-level healthcare system consisting of public, private, and organizational levels. Additionally, the comprehensive social security system, including child benefits, is available to permanent residents in the country on small terms to EU, EEA, and Switzerland citizens. (EU-healthcare 2020; InfoFinland 2020a.)
3. The third level consists of social needs. On this level, the focus is on the need to be loved and accepted in the community. Social needs can be helped to achieve by companies as well when different social events are organized. (Kaur 2013.) In Finland, employers can organize employee wellbeing days (TYKY). These TYKY-days are accompanied by offering a safe and healthy working environment, as well as excellent leadership. (Tykypäivä.net 2020.)

Additionally, support for work-life balance and family leave is examined based on an EU directive, which must be in the Finnish legislation in 2022. Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government aims to improve the balance of work and leisure, resulting in more time with family and friends. (Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö 2020.) Possibilities to fulfill social needs in Finland appear to be on a great level.

4. The fourth level focuses on the need for feeling respect – from within and others. Companies can quickly help to reach this level by introducing a reward management system in the organization. (Kaur 2013.) Moreover, equality between genders is written in the law. Discrimination is a crime, and people must be treated with equal respect in working life. In addition, support for minorities is available, and Finland offers a possibility to apply

for asylum if one has experienced oppression, for example, due to his/her sexual orientation. (InfoFinland 2020b.)

The first four needs are defined as 'Deficiency needs' because they arise from the lack of something, such as food. Motivation arises once these needs are not fulfilled. (McLeod 2020.)

5. The final level is self-actualization, which means that an individual has reached the fullest potential. Employees who have reached self-actualization are vital human resources to organizations. (Kaur 2013.)

Maslow suggests multiple ways to achieve self-actualization. It is not about achieving perfection in everything, but rather understanding personal limits and strengths. Reaching self-actualization requires passion and hard work towards goals, as constant learning and development is needed. Self-actualized people make their own decisions, understand the reality of situations, and are comfortable when they feel uncomfortable. Creativity is also an attribute contributing to self-actualization. (Raypole 2020.) As working becomes more autonomous than before, creativity and creative thinking are encouraged more in Finnish companies (Degerman 2016). This, on the other hand, could help international students reach self-actualization.

The final need is defined as 'growth needs' because the need is not dependable on deprivation, but rather the desire to reach higher as an individual. Once these growth needs are reached, one can reach the highest level in the hierarchy, called self-actualization. (McLeod 2020.)

Maslow revised the hierarchy of needs later during his life (As cited in McLeod 2020). The added levels are 'cognitive needs,' 'aesthetic needs' and 'transcendence needs,' as shown in Figure 2.2. (As cited in McLeod 2020.) Interestingly, self-actualization is not on the top of the hierarchy anymore (As cited in McLeod 2020).

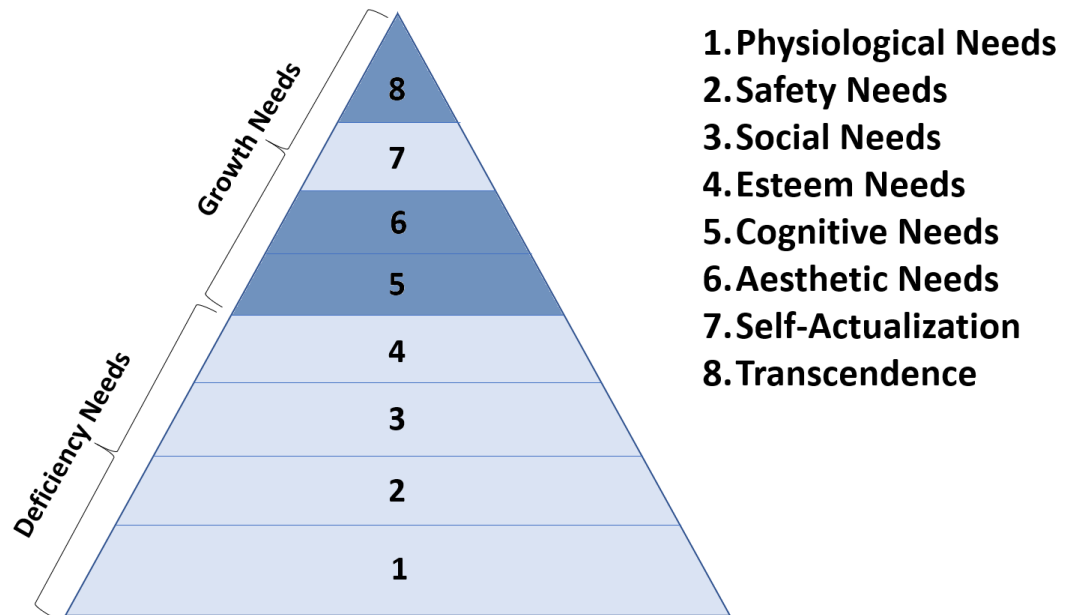


Figure 2.2: Maslow's extended hierarchy of needs (as cited in McLeod 2020)

- The cognitive needs (5th level in the 8-stage hierarchy) consist of the need for exploring more in life, and it is purely about the knowledge, understanding, and curiosity of an individual (as cited in McLeod 2020). In the international students, exploration of the new country and opportunities could fit in this level.
- Aesthetic needs are on the 6th level on the 8-stage hierarchy, including the willingness to seek beauty and balance (as cited in McLeod 2020). Presumably, the diversity of the landscape in Kainuu could contribute to the fulfillment of aesthetic needs.
- Finally, transcendence needs are on the top of the modified hierarchy, and these needs relate to mystical needs, such as something experienced in nature (as cited in McLeod 2020). These needs could be fulfilled in Kainuu, where the diverse nature is seen as a strength that attracts people (Kajaanin kaupunki 2019).

It is crucial to know which levels apply to international students to motivate them. According to Maslow (as cited in Kaur 2013), if the level in the hierarchy of needs is already reached, it discontinues motivating in the future. Finding the motivational factors of the international students is therefore valuable for the research.

Based on the needs theory, Finland has a lot to offer to international workers. International students can have a higher salary than in most countries, which satisfies the first level's needs (Tilastokeskus 2020b; Karppinen 2020). In addition, Finland is among the safest countries to work in, which further improves the attractiveness of remaining in the Kainuu region and joining the workforce (Burton 2019). Finland also incorporates employee wellbeing on a broad scale, and it focuses on the work community and the working environment (Työterveyslaitos n.d.), which could help fill social needs.

It is difficult to analyze which factors could help to fulfill esteem needs. Whitmore (2016) suggests that earning respect from others is tied around professionalism and general behavior towards others. Kindness and respectfulness towards co-workers could help to earn respect from others. (Whitmore 2016.)

Reaching self-actualization requires time and devotion. Maslow (1965, 111-114) suggests that one needs to find the 'calling' in life to reach the fullest potential. Self-actualization also requires individualism, selflessness, and honesty. It is ultimately the state in which individuals are genuinely themselves because fulfilling this need requires self-knowledge. Also, knowledge and intelligence are a significant part of reaching self-actualization because the level is about constant learning and willingness to do well in something. (Maslow 1965, 111-114.)

For the international students remaining in Kainuu to reach their fullest potential in self-actualization, they must be passionate about their jobs and see work as a constant learning experience. Companies could help individuals to achieve self-actualization by training the personnel regularly.

2.2 Retention

2.2.1 Choosing a place abroad

Choosing a destination country to study in is not an easy task and presumably affects the willingness to remain in the country after graduation and enter the labor force.

As Kaliyati cited (2009), money is not the only factor affecting the choice to move abroad to study or work. In addition to money, people seek to improve the quality of living, proper healthcare,

high-quality education possibilities, and a safe environment to live in. (As cited in Kaliyati 2009, 24.)

Hooijen, Meng, Reinold, and Siegel (2017) suggest different “hard locational factors” affecting the willingness of graduates to retain or migrate. Graduates are mostly interested in the availability of vacant job positions when considering the location. These days, a comprehensive public transportation network is a significant factor affecting the retention of graduates since low-cost work transportation attracts. Finally, language is also a significant factor because adequate skills in a local language can be a precondition for a job position, but language proficiency increases retention as well. (Hooijen et al. 2017.)

As opposed to “hard locational factors,” Hooijen et al. (2017) introduce “soft locational factors.” These factors are not as significant compared to hard locational factors, and they include climate, living environment, and possibilities for free-time activities. Although hard locational factors are at the core of attracting students, soft locational factors are at the core of improving retention. Living environment, referring to the proximity of nature and urban environment, plays a significant role in retention. (Hooijen et al. 2017.) See Table 2.1 for the hard and soft locational factors.

Hard locational factors	Soft locational factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Available job opportunities - Low-cost public transportation - Language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Climate - Quality of the living environment - Possibilities for free-time activities

Table 2.1: Hard and soft locational factors affecting migration and retention (Hooijen et al. 2017)

Individual characteristics play a role, as well. Younger people are more likely to migrate after a job or love, while older people are likely to settle down. In addition, the tendency for migration is higher for international graduates, but familiarity with a specific region or area could affect the decision to migrate. (Hooijen et al. 2017.)

The reputation of the Finnish education system also plays a role, according to Palomäki (2013). Finland offers a different style for learning, such as learning diaries and essays instead of traditional lectures. Also, the safety of the country is seen as an essential factor. The Finnish welfare society and higher levels in salaries, as well as better employment possibilities, were also important reasons for entering Finland in the first place (Liukas 2018).

2.2.2 Improving retention

Retention of international graduates is low in the entire country (44%) (Jantunen 2018). During the past decade, universities in Finland have improved their regional connections to generate work-life connections (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2019). The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture states that universities in Finland must pay careful attention to integrating and cooperating with companies, from application to post-studies (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2019).

Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences have introduced focused career services to improve retention, offering courses and workshops related to the Finnish working life, employment services, and job application. The negative aspect of this is that the services reach only a fraction of international students, despite students wishing for employment-related education. (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2019.)

Career opportunities at the specialist-level are often tied to networks. International graduates in Finland have inadequate connections to the working life and networks in the Finnish labor markets. Therefore, improving these connections must be held on a high priority during the studies and after graduation. (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2019.)

The importance of retention of international graduates has been realized in Canada as well. Retention is a key for regions with declining populations to improve the labor force's situation and obtain young talents. The Canadian government has introduced a "Study and Stay" program to improve international students' retention, which could be considered equivalent to Finland's retention policies (Canadian Bureau for International Education 2018; Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2019.)

Kainuu attempts to improve attractiveness in the future development of the region and its marketing. The aim is to emphasize the strengths of the region and portray, for example, the labor market, internationality, and a good living environment in a positive way to improve the appeal of the region. (Kainuun liitto 2017, 46-47.)

2.2.3 Previous research on retention of international graduates

The Canadian government researched the retention of international graduates back in 2017 in the form of a survey. The survey was sent to 9,000 individuals, out of which 1,161 responded.

Two hundred eighty-seven of those were prospective international students, mainly from India, Brazil, and Nigeria. The survey results revealed that 67.6% of the respondents were planning to apply for a permanent residence in Canada, while 65% expressed the willingness to work in Canada after graduation. See figure 2.3 for the research results of prospective students in Canada. (Canadian Bureau for International Education 2018.)

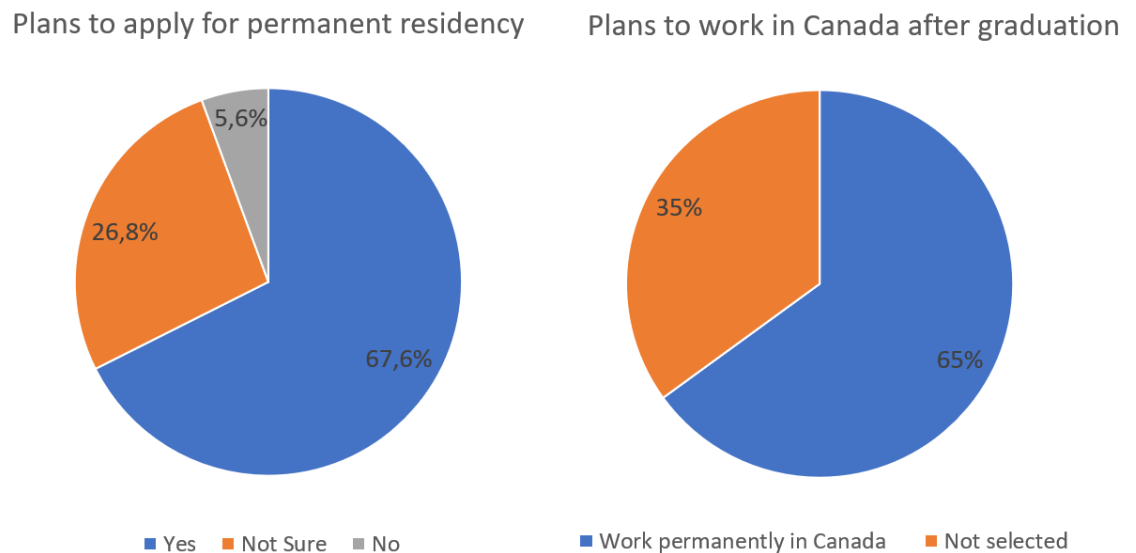


Figure 2.3: Survey results of prospective international students' plans in Canada after graduation (Canadian Bureau for International Education 2018)

A similar survey was aimed towards current international students in Canada as well. This survey was conducted in 2015, and the survey consisted of a wide range of higher education institutions. In total, 3,424 responses were used in the analysis, and the results were slightly different compared to the prospective students, as can be seen from Figure 2.4. (Canadian Bureau for International Education 2018.)

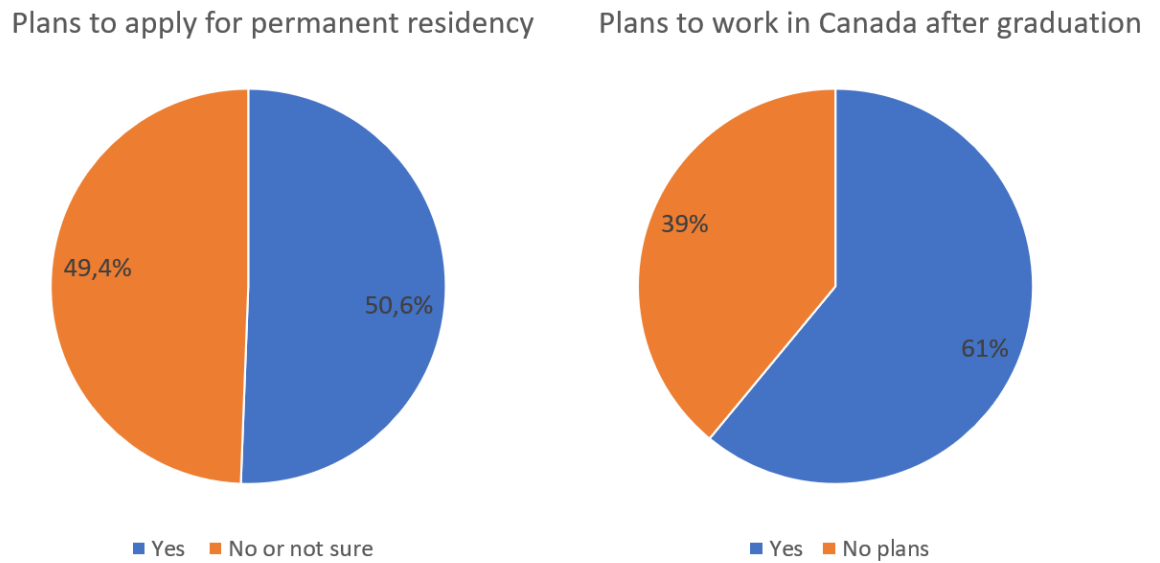


Figure 2.4: Survey results of international students' plans in Canada after graduation (Canadian Bureau for International Education 2018)

The change in applying for residence is significant, possibly due to the experiences international students have received in Canada (Canadian Bureau for International Education 2018). It is important to remember that one of the official languages in Canada is English, while Finland has Finnish and Swedish, which limits the job search possibilities among international students. International students in Finland often feel like the required level of Finnish in working life is too high, which is not possible to be reached during the degree studies (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2019). There is a significant difference in retention if 61% of the current students in Canada decide to remain in the country after graduation, opposed to Finland's 44% (Canadian Bureau for International Education 2018; Jantunen 2018). This aspect, willingness to apply for a job in Finland after graduation, will also be studied in the research part of this thesis.

2.2.4 The attractiveness of the Kainuu region

The aging and decreasing population is a significant issue for the labor force in Kainuu. In addition, the companies in Kainuu are growing, requiring more employees, further increasing the demand for a skillful workforce. Therefore, it is crucial to improve the attractiveness of the region. (Kainuun liitto 2017, 26.)

The importance of improving attractiveness is already acknowledged in Kainuu, and the new regional program focuses, for example, on the development of education at all levels, innovation, and improvement of industries. The utmost importance lies within securing the university center and Kajaani University of Applied Sciences operational possibilities, and the development of online education is a significant part of it. (Kainuun liitto 2017, 27.)

The brand of the Kainuu region is focused closely on nature and the easiness of living. Kainuu aims to attract families, and the key is to market effortless living with all the services nearby, such as schools, daycares, and shops. In addition, the apartments and properties are told to be inexpensive. (Kainuun liitto n.d.)

Exploring the attractiveness of Kainuu in the research could help to indicate which actions have been practical and which need improvement when considering retention.

3 RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Qualitative Interview

The data collection method was interviewing. The sample consisted of eight current international students studying business at Kajaani University of Applied Sciences. The interviews were recorded with a mobile phone to make analyzing the data simpler.

The interviews were held remotely via Microsoft Teams due to the increase in Covid-19 cases in Finland. This, on the other hand, increased the possibilities for interruptions during the interview if the respondent was not in a quiet location.

3.1.1 Interview Guide

The interview guide works as a list of all the topics and questions reserved for the interview. In addition, further questions occurring during the interviews can be utilized, producing more in-depth data. See chapter 8: Appendices for the interview guide.

3.2 Data Analysis

3.2.1 Data Security

Data security was held in a high priority during the interviews, data analysis, and data storing. All the gathered data was saved primarily on the laptop of the author. The recordings of the interviews were transferred from a mobile phone to the laptop immediately after the interviews. Microsoft Onedrive was used to store the data as a backup if data retrieval would have been needed. All the data-storing locations were protected with passwords, and outsiders had no access to the data.

The gathered data was anonymous, meaning the respondents were not identifiable from their answers. The stored data was deleted once redundant for the writing process of the thesis. All

information regarding data security, data processing, and anonymity was explained to the respondents before the interviews.

3.2.2 Analyzation Process

The interviews were recorded with a cell phone. After the interviews were done, the recordings were immediately transferred to a laptop, and the data was transcribed using online software. The used software was the dictation possibility of Microsoft Word as the author has used it before with a positive outcome. The transcribed data was in a text form, from which the actual analysis began. The first step was to study the gathered data carefully, followed by coding, indicating the general main points of the answers. Based on the coding results, a thematic search began, in which more prominent themes were formulated from the codes. After the preliminary themes were located, analyzing the suitability of the themes and naming them commenced. Finally, at the end of the thematic analysis, began the process of writing the final report. (Caulfield 2019.) The simplified process of the thematic analysis step-by-step is presented below:

1. Studying the research data,
2. Generating initial codes,
3. Locating themes,
4. Analyzing the suitability of the themes,
5. Naming the themes,
6. Writing the research report. (Caulfield 2019.)

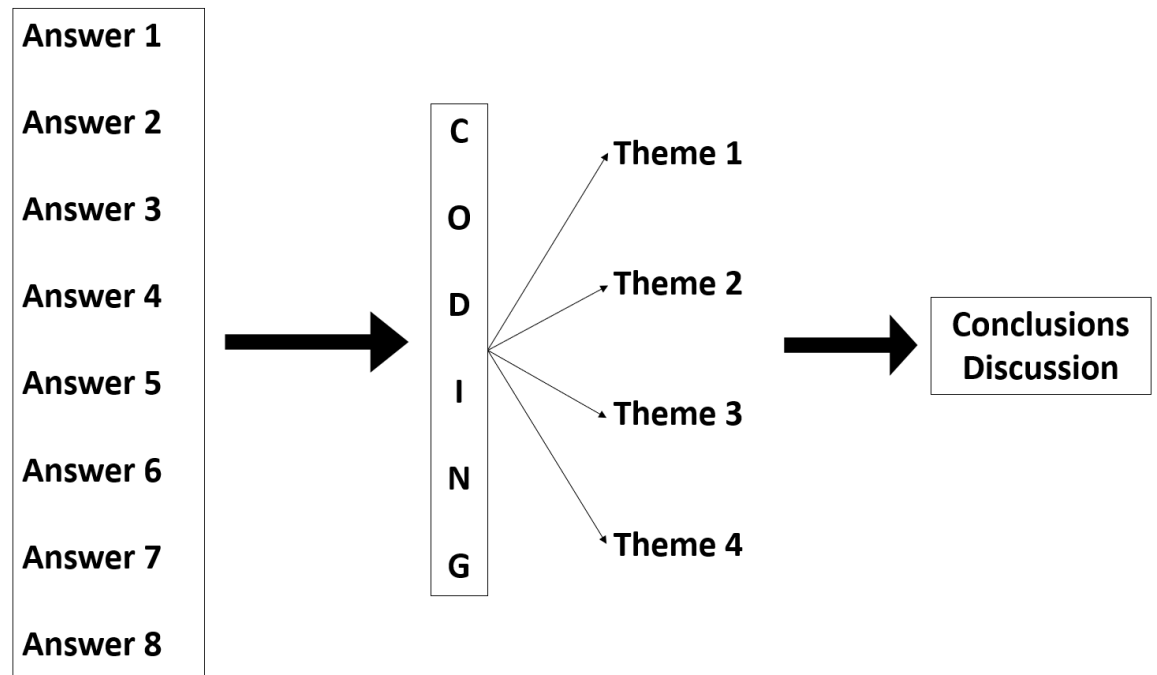


Figure 3.1: The process of data analysis (Caulfield 2019)

3.3 Sampling Methods

The sampling method chosen for the research is purposive sampling, meaning the interviewees were chosen based on the suitability for the research. In addition, convenience sampling methods were applied since the interviewees are reachable through the networks of the author. (McCombes 2020.)

In the research, the plan was to locate eight degree students at KAMK with an international background. Also, focusing on the business field in this research could provide a more coherent sample and increase the findings' value because the results are gathered from a narrow sample. The interviewees should also have some experience in Finland, so the sample was drawn from second- and third-year students. The methods for the sample withdrawal are visible in Figure 3.2.

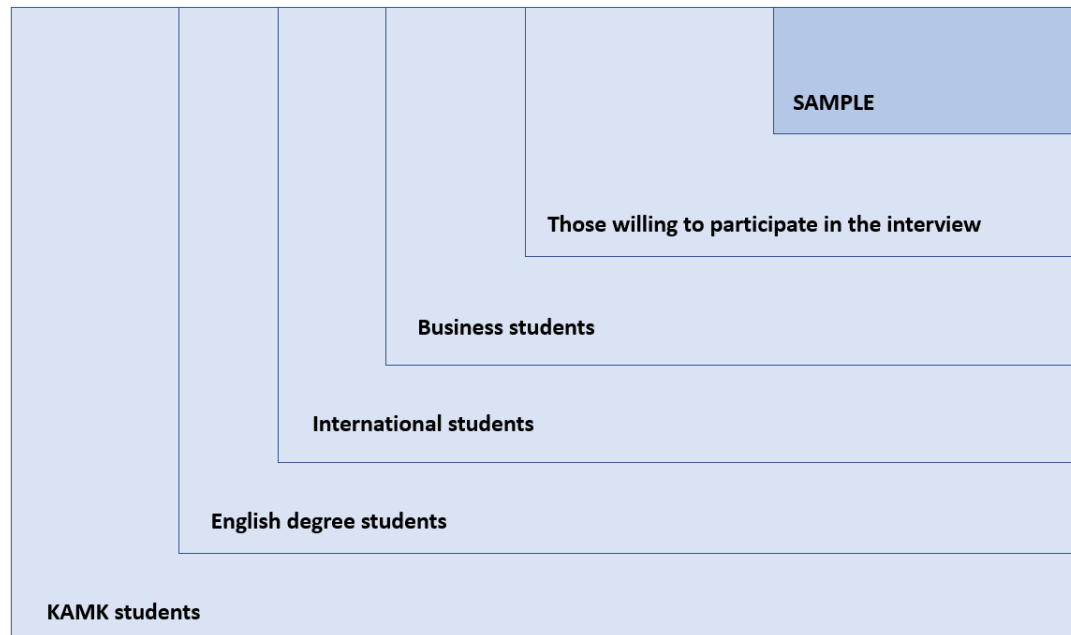


Figure 3.2: Detailed methods of sample withdrawal

There is a possibility to conduct more interviews if eight interviewees' answers are not enough to formulate the thematic analysis. This decision is based purely on the author's evaluation of the interview results. The limitation of this approach is that acquiring extra participants is time-consuming.

3.4 Research Evaluation

The research has been successful if the following statements are fulfilled:

- The research question will be answered.
- The answers provide a possibility to make coherent conclusions.
- The research provides new information and is useful for the thesis.
- The research aims are fulfilled.

3.4.1 Reliability and validity

The most significant risk affecting the reliability of the research was the number of interviews received during the research phase. Eight interviews were not that many, but the author believes it was enough for a bachelor's level thesis and to formulate the thematic analysis. The interview questions were formed in a way that the answers would provide rich data from the respondents.

The most significant risk affecting the validity of the research was respondent bias, meaning the interviewee does not give an honest answer for some reason. The interview setting must be warm and welcoming, creating an open environment to answer without hesitation. On the other hand, if the interviewee is in a restless location, it could significantly impact the answers. During and after each interview, field notes were written, in which the general observations from the interview were recorded. Based on the evaluation of the author, some answers could have been omitted if the confidence in the honesty of the interviewees was lost.

4 RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1 Results of the Thematic Analysis

The interview questions focused on the three main points of the literature: employment, motivation, and attractiveness of the Kainuu region. The interview also included two ‘yes, no, or maybe’ questions. These questions provide a possibility to compare with the previous research conducted in Canada (Canadian Bureau for International Education 2018).

Employment-related questions focused on soft and hard locational factors, as job opportunities were a significant factor affecting migration (Hooijen et al. 2017). Moreover, questions considering employment possibilities and job applications were asked to provide data for suggestions regarding the employment services in KAMK. Employment services reach only a small part of international students in Finland (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2019), meaning the services must be improved to serve the students better.

The questions about motivation aimed to locate the needs that must be fulfilled in Kainuu for the students to remain connected to Maslow’s extended hierarchy of needs. Additionally, questions about plans were asked to provide insights into what motivates the students currently. Furthermore, the results regarding needs will be connected to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, introduced in the literature section.

The final theme focuses on the attractiveness of the Kainuu region. Questions were formulated to locate the perceived barriers to the retention the international students in Kainuu might have. In addition, the strengths of the region currently, as well as what attracted the international students in Kainuu in the first place, were explored in the interviews. Table 4.1 below reveals the discovered themes, how the interview questions supported the themes, and how the literature supports them. ‘yes, no or maybe’ interview questions (two questions) are excluded from the table.

Theme	Interview questions	Support from the literature
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Have you received help in finding employment in Finland? -From which parties have you gained support to job search in Finland? -What kind of help would you like to have for a job search and from whom? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Maslow's hierarchy of needs -Hard and soft locational factors -Previous research results from Canada
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What would motivate you to stay in Kainuu? -What kinds of personal needs must be fulfilled in Kainuu so that you would stay here? -Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Maslow's hierarchy of needs -Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation
The attractiveness of the Kainuu region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What makes Kainuu an attractive place to live in? -Do you have plans to apply for a job in Finland after graduation? -What motivated you to come to Finland in the first place? -What barriers are there for you to remain in Kainuu after graduation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hard and soft locational factors

Table 4.1: Connections between themes, interview questions, and literature

4.2 Interviewee Profile

The research sample had eight interviewees studying business at Kajaani University of Applied Sciences either for a second or a third year. 50% of the interviewees (4) were female, while the second half consisted of males (4). The ages of the interviewees varied between 19 and 26. The sample consisted of multiple different nationalities from four different continents, but specifications of the nationalities and the detailed coding results are not stated to protect the privacy of the interviewees. General information about the interviewees is compiled in table 4.1 below.

Gender	Male: 4 (50%) Female: 4 (50%)
Ages	19-26
Continents represented	Africa, North America, Europe, Asia

Table 4.2: General information about the interviewees

4.3 Employment

General questions regarding employment plans after graduation were asked, among other questions focusing on motivation and retention of international students. 75% of the interviewees (6) admitted having applied for a job in Finland, while 100% of respondents stated to have plans for applying for a job in Finland after graduating from Kajaani University of Applied Sciences. (See Figure 4.1.)

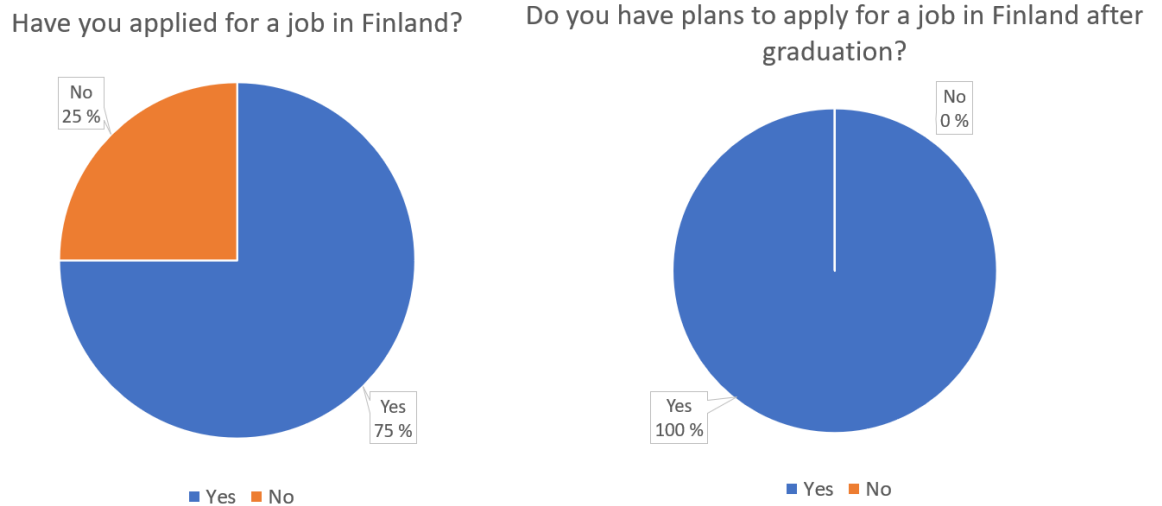


Figure 4.1: Results of questions regarding employment in Finland

When comparing to the survey conducted in Canada, it appears that the international students in Finland are more open to applying for a job in Finland after graduation than international students willing to apply for a job in Canada (100% versus 61%). See figure 4.2 for the comparison. (Canadian Bureau for International Education 2018.)

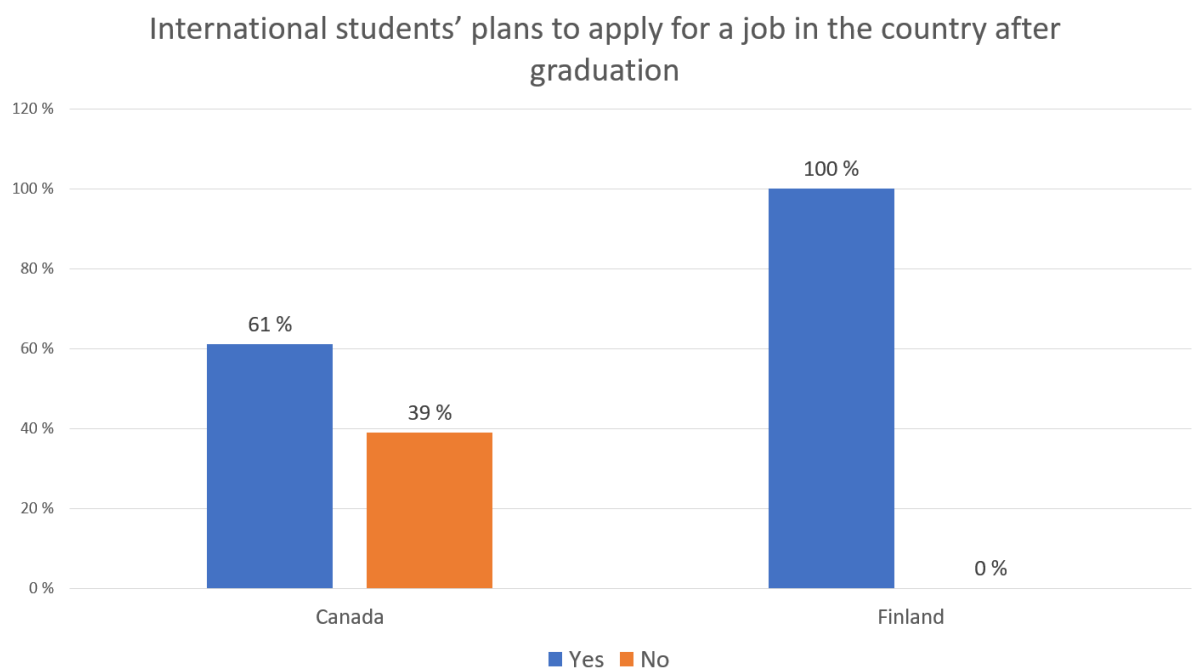


Figure 4.2: Comparison of international students' plans to apply for a job in Canada and Finland after graduation (Canadian Bureau for International Education 2018)

4.4 Motivation

The biggest motivation for international students in Kainuu to remain in the region after graduation is highly connected to future opportunities. The primary driver for motivation is available job opportunities, but further study opportunities were also mentioned during the interviews.

As career opportunities were an essential factor for the motivation of the international students, it is worth exploring their employment. 75% of the respondents had already applied for a job in Finland, but few had received a job position (See Figure 4.1). Although the students have a high motivation to apply for a job in Finland after graduation (see Figure 4.1), half of the students (50%) were beginning to feel unmotivated to apply for vacant positions because of constant disappointments. Finding employment in the Kainuu region turned out to be a significant issue, and often the international students did not even receive a reply from the companies they had applied to. Many of the students (37,5%) stated to have applied for entry-level jobs outside their study field but receiving a job was still tricky.

First, a few of the students (25%) expressed an interest in learning and experiencing more as a factor affecting the decision to enter Finland in the first place. Moreover, international students in Kainuu have personal needs, which they want to fulfill to remain in the region after graduation. The vast majority (87,5%) expressed that social connections, whether friendships, professional networks, or even love, positively affected the willingness to stay in Kainuu. Finally, approximately a third of the interviewees (37,5%) explained that needs for safety and a safe environment in general and calmness of the living environment are also factors contributing to either remaining in the region or migrating to other areas. The unique nature of Kainuu is something that attracts most of the international students interviewed (87,5%) and was one of the motivators for international students to stay in the region after graduation. Based on the results, levels 1-3, 5-6, and eight in Maslow's extended hierarchy of needs apply to the international students interviewed.

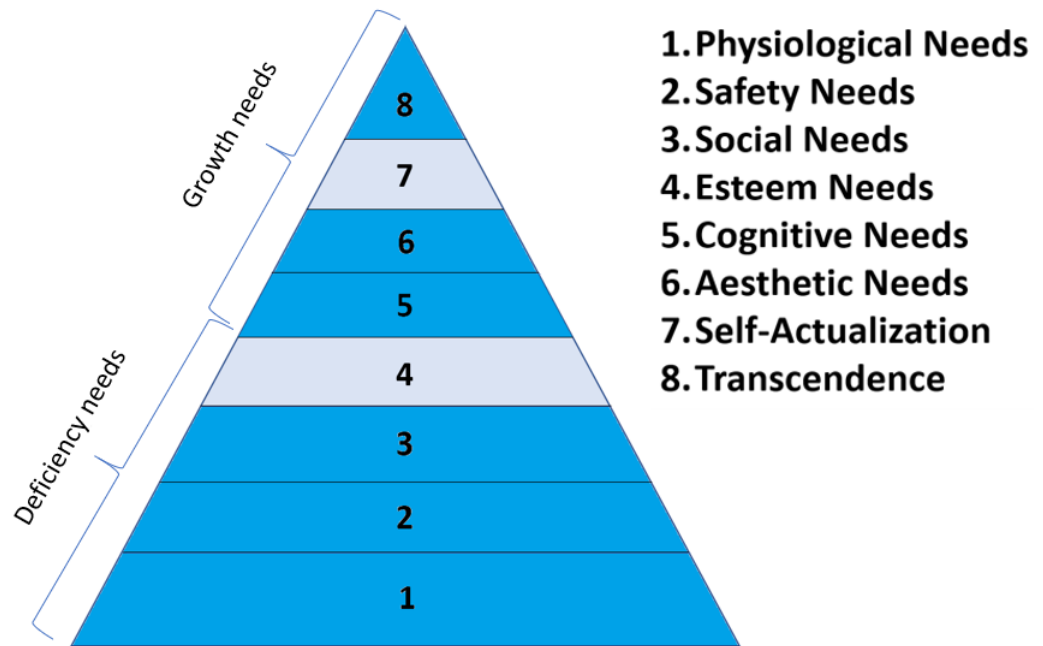


Figure 4.3: Levels in Maslow's extended hierarchy of needs applicable to international students in Kainuu

1. The physiological needs of the international students focus mainly on finding a job with a salary that enables suitable living conditions.
2. The safety needs are expected to be fulfilled in Kainuu in order to remain. These needs are supported by the calm environment of Kainuu and the low population in the region. Safety attracts international students who have already established families. The safety needs are also fulfilled through financial safety, meaning there is no stress regarding money.
3. The social needs receive fulfillment during studies through new friendships, as well as possible romance. In addition, general acceptance from society is needed.
5. The cognitive needs and the fulfillment of these needs is connected to the pure desire to learn and experience more.
6. The aesthetic needs could be partly fulfilled by the beautiful scenery in the Kainuu region, as well the difference nature has during the four seasons in a year.

7. The transcendence needs or spiritual needs could be partly fulfilled in the unique nature of the region, as these needs are often related to something experienced in nature (as cited in McLeod 2020).

Based on these needs activated in Kainuu, further development in the region and KAMK could be formulated to increase the retention of the international students. The results regarding personal needs are presented in table 4.3 below.

Need	Number of Answers	Supporting codes from the analysis
1. Physiological Needs	7 (87,5%)	-Available job opportunities -Future study possibilities -Finding a job that covers living expenses.
2. Safety Needs	3 (37,5%)	-Kainuu is safe and calm to live in -Safety for a family in the region
3. Social Needs	7 (87,5%)	-Established friendships and other connections -People in Kainuu are nice -Love, relationship
5. Cognitive needs	2 (25%)	-New experiences -Learning more
6. Aesthetic Needs	7 (87,5%)	-Beautiful scenery -Winter scenery
7. Transcendence Needs	7 (87,5%)	-Unique, peaceful nature close to the city, which helps to relax

Table 4.3: Research results regarding needs (as cited in McLeod 2020)

The drivers for motivation are mainly from the extrinsic side of motivation. These motivational factors can be connected to Maslow's extended hierarchy of needs, revealing how the factors contribute to different needs projected on the hierarchy of needs. On the contrary, locating intrinsic motivators for retention was perhaps slightly unsuccessful. 25% of the respondents declared to have had the willingness to enter Finland in the first place to experience and learn more. Finding a suitable job to cover living expenses was important to 37,5% of the interviewees. The different extrinsic and intrinsic motivators are combined in Table 4.4.

Level of needs	Extrinsic Motivation	Intrinsic Motivation
1. Physiological needs	-Career opportunities -Study opportunities	-Finding a job that covers living expenses.
2. Safety needs	-Safe environment to live in -Safe place for family	
3. Social needs	-Friendships, love -Networks	
5. Cognitive needs		-Learning more -New experiences
6. Aesthetic needs	-Beautiful scenery	
8. Transcendence needs	-Unique, peaceful nature close to the city	

Table 4.4: Maslow's hierarchy of needs combined with extrinsic and intrinsic motivation of the international students

4.5 Retention

There is motivation and willingness to remain in Kainuu, as 100% of the respondents expressed having plans to apply for a job in Finland after graduation. However, there are multiple barriers

to stay in the region after graduation. A vast majority (87,5%) informs that the most significant barriers for retention are job vacancies. 75% of the interviewees stated having trouble discovering vacant job opportunities in which they could work in English. Nevertheless, there are English jobs available, but 100% of the respondents consider the required Finnish proficiency in jobs too high and impossible to be reached during university studies. Additionally, language barriers are not limited to the working life, as the students sometimes have difficulties conducting daily errands with the Finnish bureaus and shops, as was the case with 25% of the answerers. These factors are related to hard locational factors, as Hooijen et al. (2017) suggested. On the other hand, the importance of public transportation among international students in Kainuu does not significantly affect retention, as Hooijen et al. (2017) portrayed.

Even if the international students in Kainuu experience difficulties with the Finnish language from time to time, most of them (62,5%) expressed an interest in migrating to bigger cities in Finland, such as Espoo and Helsinki. These cities attract with better opportunities and a more accepting environment towards foreigners. Moreover, students migrate to other regions to study in universities since there are none in Kainuu. This also affects the retention of the Finnish population (Krogerus 2020).

Another barrier for retention is cultural differences, to which language also contributes. The international students in Kainuu experience the culture differently, with a few of them (37,5%) having issues integrating into the Finnish society. A few of the interviewees (37,5%) had experienced racism or discrimination based on their background, and two students (25%) considered it a barrier for employment in Kainuu, not to mention retention.

Most of the international students (75%) had applied for jobs earlier in numerous ways. The international students appear to be independent and utilize online job portals and networking possibilities when seeking employment. On the other hand, the students' networks in Kainuu act in a significant role as well. These networks consist of other students at Kajaani University of Applied Sciences, as well as staff members. Teachers have a significant role in introducing job opportunities to international students, which was also pointed out by half of the interviewees. Not surprisingly, international students were almost entirely unaware of the career services available at KAMK, as is the case in the entire country (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2019). Only two students (25%) were aware of the existence of the employment services but admitted not having enough information about them.

4.6 The attraction of the Kainuu Region and Finland

The international students in Kainuu found KAMK in various ways. Finland was seen as a country with high-quality education by a fourth of the interviewees (25%), while the tuition fees are inexpensive compared to other countries. Finland was also considered a safe location to migrate to and have a family (25%). 25% of the interviewees found KAMK through international exhibitions, in which the university had been introducing unique degree programs, such as esports business. Additionally, recommendations from KAMK alumni (12,5%) affected the decision to apply to KAMK as well. Kainuu had been seen in travel exhibitions, which caught the interest of some students (25%). Expanding the attendance in such exhibitions should be considered to increase awareness of the region and Kajaani University of Applied Sciences.

Kainuu region attracted the interviewees (100%), especially the beautiful nature surrounding Kajaani. Kainuu's strengths in attracting young international students are low-cost residences compared to bigger cities in Finland. In addition, Kainuu is a calm region with a low population, but this was also seen as a negative aspect by few respondents (25%). The people in Kainuu, on the other hand, were seen as kind and talkative (25%), almost abnormal compared to the stereotypes of a quiet nation. Finally, approximately a third (37,5%) find Kainuu attractive due to available free-time activities around the year. Especially possibilities for sports were stated to be a significant positive factor for retention.

When dividing the findings into hard and soft locational factors, Kainuu attracts in the form of job and study opportunities. The second hard locational factor is language, which significantly affects foreigners' lives, from job opportunities to everyday communication (87,5%). On the other hand, the language was not seen as an issue when entering Finland, but it is affecting the decision to remain. This differs from the supportive literature (Hooijen et al. 2017, 2214-2215), as language is a soft locational factor based on the results, affecting retention instead of attractiveness. Additionally, according to a few interviewees (37,5%), language also contributes to cultural differences, making it occasionally difficult to adjust to the new country. Soft locational factors are highly connected to the environment in Kainuu. Nature is near the city centrum, and there are plenty of leisure activities, also connected to the nature aspect. Finally, the kind and talkative people in Kainuu were seen as an attractive feature of Kainuu as well.

Connections between the needs, hard and soft locational factors and extrinsic and intrinsic motivation can be made based on the results. Job and study opportunities contribute to physiological

needs and are at the core of the region's attractiveness. These are also the only hard locational factors located. Social needs are connected to soft locational factors, such as language, culture, and people. On the other hand, cognitive needs are connected to leisure activities, in which international students can experience something new. Finally, aesthetic and transcendence needs are linked to nature in Kainuu. The connections between Maslow's extended hierarchy of needs, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, and hard and soft locational factors are visible in table 4.5.

Level of needs	Extrinsic/Intrinsic motivation	Hard/Soft locational factors
1. Physiological needs	Extrinsic -Career opportunities -Study opportunities	Hard -Job opportunities -Study possibilities
2. Safety needs	Extrinsic -Safe environment to live in -Safe place for family	
3. Social needs	Extrinsic -Friendships, love -Networks	Soft -Language, culture -People
5. Cognitive needs	Intrinsic -Learning more -New experiences	Soft -Leisure activities
6. Aesthetic needs	Extrinsic -Beautiful scenery	Soft -Nature
8. Transcendence needs	Extrinsic -Unique, peaceful nature close to the city.	Soft -Nature

Table 4.5: Results connected to supportive theories

4.7 Conclusions of Results

The thematic analysis resulted in three main themes. The themes were employment, motivation, and the attractiveness of the Kainuu region.

A clear connection between employment and motivation to remain in Kainuu was located. Motivation to remain in the Kainuu region circles highly around job opportunities, but study possibilities were also mentioned. When considering personal needs, physiological, safety, social, cognitive, aesthetic, and transcendence needs were applicable to the international students in the Kainuu region.

There are many perceived barriers to remaining in Kainuu, out of which language is the most significant factor. The language barrier affects employment possibilities and mundane life in the form of communication in the Finnish bureaus and shops. In addition, discrimination and racism were considered to decrease the willingness to remain in the region drastically.

Employment is a problem among international students. Foreigners have fewer opportunities to apply for a job in Kainuu due to the lack of English job openings. Also, the Finnish proficiency required in English jobs is perceived to be too high and unable to be reached during the degree studies. Furthermore, international students often applied for jobs outside their field of study and are frequently left without a reply from the companies regarding job applications.

Hard locational factors affecting the attractiveness of the region were job and study opportunities, as well as language. The most critical soft locational factors are the unique nature of Kainuu, which is close to the city centrum of Kajaani. Kainuu offers numerous leisure activities around the year, and the people are kind.

4.7.1 Located improvement points

Based on the results, points of improvement and development were identified. The author's development ideas are explained more in detail in chapter 5: discussion and recommendations.

As the retention connects to available jobs, the development of the career services at KAMK is essential to improve the employment possibilities of the international students. Employment was

a significant motivator to remain in the Kainuu region, and 100% of the interviewees plan to apply for a job in Finland after graduation.

There are barriers to retention, also affecting job search. International students at KAMK desire a change in language education and hope for more cultural education.

Increasing awareness of the Kainuu region and Kajaani University of Applied Sciences is primarily a way to increase the number of international students in Kainuu. The improvement points are presented below.

1. Improving the employment possibilities of the international students.
2. Improving language and culture education at KAMK.
3. Increasing awareness of the Kainuu region and Kajaani University of Applied Sciences.

5 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results stated in chapter 4: research results, the author presents ideas for improvement options. Hopefully, these options would increase the number of international students remaining in Kainuu after a long period of time. Additionally, recommendations for future research possibilities are presented. The improvement points are as follows:

1. Improving the awareness of the Kainuu region and KAMK.
2. Improving language and culture education at KAMK.
3. Improving the employment possibilities of the international students.

5.1 Improving Awareness of the Kainuu Region and KAMK

Some of the international students found KAMK and Kainuu through travel and study exhibitions. Investing in these kinds of exhibitions in the future is advisable, as it increases awareness of the opportunities in Kainuu and the region in general. Also, increasing the number of attendances in exhibitions globally should be considered, if the budget allows, as it could increase the chances of foreigners entering the region. 25% of the interviewees had found KAMK and Kainuu through exhibitions. Studia-fair is a domestic study exhibition taking place online this year, and Study World is an exhibition taking place, for example, in Asia and Africa, and the desired exhibition market can be chosen (Studia 2020; UKEAS 2020). Finally, as most of the interviewees declared nature as one of the most attractive factors in Kainuu, it could be utilized in marketing on both domestic and global levels.

5.2 Improving the Employment Possibilities of the International Students.

The international students' motivation to remain in Kainuu after graduation is highly connected to the available jobs in the region. On the other hand, employment possibilities are low due to Finnish proficiency and inadequate networks.

Employment is tied to multiple motivational factors also found on Maslow's extended hierarchy of needs. For example, physiological and safety needs are related to the salary received from working, thus increasing the importance of employment to fulfill those needs.

Since employment possibilities were a significant factor affecting the willingness to remain in the Kainuu region after graduation, support from KAMK should be available to all students.

As the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture stated, the employment services in Finnish higher education institutes reach only a fraction of international students (Opetus- ja kulttuuri-ministeriö 2019). Most interviewees had not heard of the services at KAMK, while few students said that they had used the services in the form of courses.

For example, Kajaani University of Applied Sciences should more actively inform of the existence and possibilities of the employment services through email. Teachers and other staff members should actively remind students of the existence of these services as well. In addition, the services should be variable to serve the students better. The services requested by the interviewees included receiving help with networking (50%), as well as finding job openings. Moreover, international students would like to receive information about the Finnish working life and job interview training (37,5%).

Organizing seminars regarding employment in Finland could provide a possibility to improve the employment possibilities of international students. The seminars could also cover the topics requested by the students, meaning they would benefit more from the seminars. Also, specialized employment counseling services could be helpful for international students and were hoped among the interviewees (75%). These counseling services could help individuals with anything, as the services should be tailored to the students' needs better to combat employment barriers (Smith 2014, 43). Finally, employment services could be incorporated into the curriculum of the international students somehow because unawareness of the services is currently common.

Seemingly, the employment services in KAMK serve a useful purpose, but in the current format require further development. Formulating a workgroup around a project, which focuses on improving and developing comprehensive employment services at KAMK could increase the benefits of these services in the future. The workgroup could consist of KAMK staff, as well as students. Improvement and development of the career services open a possibility for further research in the future.

KAMK has already taken the initiative to improve the employment possibilities of foreigners in Kainuu. The project collaborates with the regional Centre for Economic Development, Transportation, and the Environment (ELY center) and employment offices. The project aims at integrating international students into working life during their studies. (Kajaanin Ammattikorkeakoulu 2020.)

5.2.1 Networking

Networking is a significant factor affecting employment possibilities on a specialist-level (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2019); hence, it is essential to support the formulation of networks during studies.

Finding employment during studies, as well as a practical training place, could be easier through networking. Some international students (25%) had received job positions through teachers' networks, which was also seen as a positive way to network in the region. On the other hand, further utilization of the teachers' networks is desired, and teachers could have guest lecturers or contractors for assignments more often. Assignments completed for companies in the region were seen as a positive side in the degree studies, meaning connected work-life assignments should be conducted in the future as well.

The international students expressed a desire for exhibitions (25%) to meet representatives of the local companies and create networks. KAMK has organized career events earlier, but currently, the pandemic probably prevents organizing these events. On the other hand, organizing a webinar or an online discussion around this topic could lower the barrier to enter the networking event from both the students' and companies' sides. While it might not be as beneficial as a live event, it still provides an opportunity to create connections inside the region.

5.3 Cultural studies

The international students in Kainuu experience the language studies to be too narrow compared to the requirements of the professional environment, even if applying for an English job position. The Finnish language places difficulties because of its uniqueness. KAMK offers three "Finnish for foreigners" -courses during the degree studies, but the courses do not serve reality. According to

the interviewees (37,5%), the courses only provide basics when the interest to learn is more focused on the business environment and vocabulary. Moreover, the number of courses taught in KAMK is too low and is not enough, meaning the students do not reach the desired level of language proficiency during the three courses. KAMK should consider offering additional language courses in free-choice studies, as demand for more language courses exists.

Although learning the basics of a language is essential, the topics of the language courses could focus more on the business environment and culture. This is the case with the Swedish course, which is mandatory for the Finnish students. The course teaches basics from the language but thoroughly introduces business vocabulary. Additionally, international students would prefer broader teaching regarding spoken language, which is more widely used in Finnish society.

Language is not the only part of a culture; nonetheless, it is a significant part. Educating the culture alongside languages is an efficient way to integrate foreigners into a new society. Integration speed is peaking when a person lives in another country and works or studies there. Additionally, cultural study trips could help to integrate an individual even more. (Chen & Yang 2016, 173.) Kajaani offers possibilities for visiting culturally meaningful locations, such as the museum. Study trips should be considered to help cultural integration among international students. Table 5.1 summarizes the most significant findings and development ideas of the research.

Research question	Findings	Development ideas
RQ1: Which factors affect the motivation of international students to remain in the Kainuu region after graduation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Job and study opportunities. -Social connections. -Attractiveness of Kainuu's nature. -Safe living environment. -New experiences, possibilities to learn more. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Development of career services at KAMK to increase employment possibilities of international students. -Improving cultural education at KAMK could increase possibilities for connections in the region. -Kainuu's nature could be utilized more in marketing.
RQ2: How to improve the retention of international students in the Kainuu region?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -International students have low employment possibilities. -Lack of Finnish skills. -Lack of networking in the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increasing possibilities to study Finnish in schools to improve competency. -Utilizing KAMK personnel's networks in school assignments and locating jobs. -Organizing useful seminars regarding working and job applications in Finland. -Organizing career events could increase the possibilities for networking.

Table 5.1: Summary of the findings and development ideas

5.4 The success of the research

The author believes the research was successful, as both of the research questions were answered. The research questions were: Which factors affect the motivation of international students to remain in the Kainuu region after graduation, and how to improve the retention of international students in the Kainuu region? Although the research sample was tiny, the interviewees answered openly and provided plenty of valuable material for the research. Therefore, the rich data provided a possibility for the thematic analysis, out of which points of improvement were located. The author believes the research findings are beneficial for the development of the activities of the region, which also contributes to the success of the research.

Similar research is possible to be conducted in the future, as the interview guide is in the appendices. This could be a valuable research opportunity to compare how the situation in the region has evolved.

5.5 Further research possibilities

The primary possibility for further research could consist of quantitative research, in which the sample size could be more extensive compared to this qualitative research. On the other hand, as this research focused on the student's perspective, further research could focus on employers' interests to hire a foreigner, providing more contrast to the employment issues of the international students. As mentioned earlier, this research could be carried out again in the future. By comparing the results, an analysis of the effectiveness of the actions taken to improve the retention in the region could be made. Finally, research regarding the improvement options would positively serve this research, especially considering the employment services.

6 CONCLUSION

Kainuu region's population development is entering a crisis, as the number of inhabitants decreases rapidly. Moreover, while the older generations are entering retirement, younger generations migrate to other regions to study. This causes a significant gap in the workforce, which cannot be filled by immigrants. Hence, improving the retention of international students would increase the number of young, skilled workers in the region. Also, increasing retention could decrease the severity of population development.

This thesis included a qualitative research in which eight current international degree students were interviewed, aiming to locate motivational factors affecting retention in the region after graduation. Additionally, finding ways to improve the retention of international students was the aim of the research.

Based on the results, aims for the research were reached, and improvement suggestions were formulated. International students are motivated to remain in the Kainuu region if there are available job and study opportunities. On the other hand, language has a significant role when applying for a job as the language proficiency reached during studies was perceived to be too low compared to the requirements of job positions. Kajaani University of Applied Sciences (KAMK) and Kainuu were often present in exhibitions, which caught the interest of the students. Moreover, the unique nature of the region and leisure activities are among the strengths of Kainuu, increasing its attractiveness.

Attracting international students in the region is essential; hence Kainuu and KAMK should invest in attending study and travel exhibitions globally to increase the awareness of the possibilities in the region. In addition, KAMK should develop its employment services, which could help international students with employment-related issues and networking. An increase in the number of Finnish courses is also advisable, as it could increase the chances of receiving a job position in the region after graduation, therefore improving the overall retention.

As the research focused on the students' point of view, further research opportunities could explore the companies in the Kainuu region. The research could focus on the factors affecting the willingness of the companies to employ foreigners. Further research is also possible regarding the development of employment services in KAMK, and conducting the research in this thesis again to see how the results have changed over time.

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8 LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview Guide

Thesis: Interview guide

Tommi Niiranen LBI18S

Before the interview: Conversation with the interviewee, small talk. Attempting to make the person feel comfortable and open to answer to the questions.

- This interview is a part of my bachelor's thesis which studies the retention of international students in Kainuu region.
- The aims for the interview are to locate factors affecting the general motivation towards staying in Kainuu, as well as find the problems with retention.
- You were chosen as a respondent to the interview because of your willingness to participate. You are also a full-time degree student in KAMK from an international background.
- The data from the research will be analyzed anonymously and no other person is going to have an access for the recordings.
- The interview data will be stored on my personal laptop, as well as phone. In addition, backups are saved to Microsoft Onedrive. Every location is secured with a password. The data will be completely deleted after the thesis has been approved, approximately in December.

1. Motivation

- What motivated you to come to Finland in the first place?
- What are your plans for after graduation?
- What would motivate you to stay in Kainuu?
 - What kinds of personal needs must be fulfilled in Kainuu so that you would stay here?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

2. Retention

- What barriers are there for you to remain in Kainuu after graduation?
- **Have you applied for a job in Finland?** (Yes/no)
 - Have you received help in finding employment in Finland?
 - From which parties have you gained support to job search in Finland?
 - What kind of help would you like to have for job search and from whom?
- What makes Kainuu an attractive place to live in?
 - **Do you have plans to apply for a job in Finland after graduation?** (Yes/no/maybe)
- Free comments to add on the topic?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW:

Write notes

- How did the interviewee answer? (nervous, relaxed?)
- How was the interviewing atmosphere (noisy?)
- Was the recording usable? (clear voice)

Other field notes?