



SEINÄJOEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
SEINÄJOKI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Alieu Jabbi

SeAMK's Double Degree Program in Graduate's Employability

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Thesis abstract

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Author: Alieu Jabbi

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The aim of this thesis was to do research on the Double Degree program offered by SeAMK in cooperation with their partner institutions, and to study how completing this program had contributed to the graduates of the Double Degree program finding employment.

The thesis provides information about international and global competencies, and why those skills are important and valued in today's working life. During the writing process, interviews were conducted by the author to obtain qualitative data from the Business and Culture Faculty's Double Degree graduates. The reason why this research method was chosen was to allow the interviewees to talk about their experiences broadly, without narrowing it down.

The thesis also covers SeAMK's Double Degree as a whole, what processes it requires from the student, and the requirements that must be fulfilled in order to complete the Double Degree program and to receive the Double Degree certificates.

The empirical part of the thesis presents and analyses the interview results and presents the Double Degree program's perceived effects on employability. Based on the conducted study, the Double Degree program enhances the graduate's employability by increasing the value of their intellectual human capital.

¹ Keywords: International competencies, globalization, internationalization, Double Degree, employment

SEINÄJOEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

Opinnäytetyön tiivistelmä

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on tutkia SeAMKin ja SeAMKin partnerikorkeakoulujen yhteistyössä tarjoamaa kaksoistutkintoa sekä tutkia, kuinka tämän kaksoistutkinto-ohjelman suorittaminen on vaikuttanut valmistuneiden työllistymiseen.

Opinnäytetyö tarjoaa tietoa kansainvälisestä sekä globaalista osaamisesta ja siitä, miksi nuo taidot ovat tärkeitä ja arvostettuja nykypäivän työelämässä. Kirjoittamisen aikana suoritettiin haastatteluja, joissa kerättiin kvalitatiivista tietoa liiketalouden alan kaksoistutkinnon suorittaneilta valmistuneilta. Tämä tutkimusmenetelmä valittiin siitä syystä, että haastateltavat saisivat mahdollisuuden kertoa laajasti omista kokemuksistaan ja jotta haastattelujen vastauksista ei tulisi suppeita.

Opinnäytetyössä käydään läpi myös SeAMKin kaksoistutkinto kokonaisuudessaan, minkälaisia prosesseja se vaatii opiskelijalta, sekä vaatimukset, jotka täytyy täyttää kaksoistutkinnon suorittamiseksi ja tutkintotodistuksien saamiseksi.

Opinnäytetyön empiirisessä osassa esitetään ja analysoidaan haastattelujen tulokset sekä esitetään kaksoistutkinnon vaikutukset tutkinnon suorittaneiden työllistyvyyteen. Tutkimustyöhön perustuen kaksoistutkinto-ohjelman suorittaminen parantaa sen suorittaneiden työllistyvyyttä kasvattamalla heidän inhimillisen pääomansa arvoa.

¹ Asiasanat: kansainvälinen osaaminen, globalisaatio, kansainvälistyminen, kaksoistutkinto, työllistyminen

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Terms and Abbreviations

B2B	Business-to-Business
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DD	Double Degree
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
HR	Human Resources
IC	Intercultural Competence
ICC	Intercultural Communication Competence
IMICC	Integrated Model of Intercultural Communication Competence
OPH	Opetushallitus / Finnish National Agency for Education
QS	Quacquarelli Symonds
SeAMK	Seinäjoen ammattikorkeakoulu / Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
UAS	University of Applied Sciences

1 INTRODUCTION

In the present day's internationalizing world, students have the possibility to conduct part of their studies abroad as an exchange student in foreign a university. One of the largest channels for a student to go study abroad is Erasmus program, which has made it possible for a number of students in Europe to be able to travel abroad and conduct studies abroad for one semester or one academic year (Di Pietro 2013). In 2019, Erasmus program helped 9,090 Finnish higher education undergraduates in their international projects and mobilities (European Commission 2019). Overall Erasmus program funded over 444 000 international mobilities in 2019, including undergraduates from higher education institutions, international practical trainings, and international staff mobilities (European Commission 2019). Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences has 195 partner universities abroad, out of which 15 are Double Degree partner universities (SeAMK 2020). Several European universities and universities of applied sciences have exchange study agreements with partner universities inside and outside Europe. These partner universities in cooperation with each other take care of matters regarding the exchange periods abroad. Students who study internationally are more competent in situations and projects demanding international knowledge, which might occur in working life (Di Pietro 2013).

Academic studies have concluded, that studying internationally will enhance the employability of job seekers. During their exchange period, undergraduates can learn or enhance their international competencies and skills, which are appreciated when it comes to graduate's employability. Language skills or international communication competencies (ICC) are one of the most recognized skills adopted from studying abroad. However, international studies produce other benefits and advantages too. Being forced to adjust into foreign cultures enhances permissiveness and cultural susceptibility, which are both needed in nowadays multicultural working environment. Companies are having ongoing searches for candidates who are able to work and interact with people from varying backgrounds, countries, and cultures. By analyzing data received from conducting a poll targeted for people working in HR, it concludes that companies hiring workforce are more likely to consider hiring an applicant who has international competencies gained from international studies and exchange periods. Moreover, studying abroad is seen to enhance the applicant's cultural tenderness, open-mindedness, and adaptation towards varying work

environments. International studies and exchange periods are found to be a reason for students gaining more self-assurance, which can give the applicant an advantage when applying for a position. This is supported by a datum which indicates that after completing a study period abroad and learning about foreign cultures, the applicant or student tends to share more of their international experiences to point out the competencies they have acquired, compared to applicants with no international competencies (Di Pietro 2013). As mentioned, studying abroad enables students to receive skills such as ICC, cultural knowledge, flexibility, and adaptation skills, which are the reasons why SeAMK in cooperation with their partner universities launched the Double Degree program; to support students learning and growth through international studies, thus giving them an advantage in future labor markets (SeAMK 2020).

Goal and success-driven undergraduates tend to have aspiration towards the incorporation of internationality and exchange periods in their studies, which reflects their success and value in employability after they finish their higher education institution studies (Di Pietro 2013). Erasmus Impact Study states that undergraduates who had been studying abroad had grown their employment advantage approximately 42% on average (European Commission 2014).

It has been discovered that even though some types of employer educations are not centered on fulfilling the organization's requirements, the employer education can enhance the employability of the employee, who benefits from it by expanding one's expertise and competencies in the fields where he/she does not generally work (Weinert 2001, 65-66).

In the thesis following terms occur frequently 'international', 'intercultural', and 'global'. These terms can be confused with each other. For that reason, the author clarifies the terms. According to Lourenço (2018), the term international describes the meaning of connections among countries and cultural backgrounds. In addition, internationalization concerns similarly the variety of cultures which appear in nations, societies, and organizations. In that sense, the term intercultural is applied to talk about the characteristics of internationalization at home. The term global is used to describe something meant on universal or worldwide scale. All of the terms supplement one another, thus jointly providing fullness and profoundness in the progression towards internationalization.

1.1 Employability

The term employability can be defined in several ways. According to Divan and McBurney (2016), employability is a collection of accomplishments consisting of competencies, information, insights, and individual's own characteristics which make the individual more probable to get hired and to be prosperous in one's career. Guilbert et al. (2015) state that employability consists of three co-dependent dimensions of understanding. Understanding the reason why, for example inspiration, individuality, and uniqueness. Understanding how, for example competencies, information, and know-how. Lastly, understanding whom, for example contacts, networks, and prestige.

According to a research conducted by Quacquarelli Symonds, 60% of recruiters worldwide consider applicant's global education as an advantage. QS research states that over 80% of recruiters ongoingly search for workforce with international education. The research results indicate that fluency in English language is seen as a major feature which is searched for during recruitment process. Some recruiters found international education to be an advantage merely for graduates who would work in the same country as where they had conducted their studies, whereas various recruiters found international studies to be a competitive advantage in all of their recruited employees with international studies. The QS research concludes that preponderance of recruiters globally appreciate international experience during the evaluation of graduate's application for employment (Top Universities 2016). The QS research suggests that international studies and experience increases graduate's employability.

It is commonly seen that the theory of employability enhancement is not restricted only to preparing a proficient CV and performing adequately in job interviews. Moreover, the enhancement of employability includes improving graduate's intuition and intellect to the extent that they develop into proficient learners and are skilled enough to apply their skills and knowledge in several varying circumstances throughout their careers (Smith et al. 2018).

1.2 Thesis purpose

The purpose of the thesis is to examine, how completing SeAMK Double Degree program effects on graduates employability. SeAMK in cooperation with their partner universities have launched a Double Degree program, which allows the student to receive two bachelor's degrees from two different countries. The thesis will cover aspects regarding the possible benefits of DD in labor markets and how the employers see the applicant's completion of DD program. Motivator for the thesis topic is inquisitiveness towards DD program and how it can possibly enhance graduate's employability in labor markets. The thesis can work as a motivator for students, who are considering participating in DD program. The thesis provides concrete information of DD process and its results, which can encourage the student towards DD program. The thesis focuses on Double Degree graduates in the faculty of business, and interviews will be conducted with these graduates. However, SeAMK does offer a Double Degree program possibility also in the faculty of engineering.

In a report called Globalization in Finland: Granular insights into the impact on businesses and employment, it is stated that 500,000 Finnish positions are dependent on overseas demand, either through straight demand from the manufacturer, or indirect demand through subcontractors and wholesalers (Statistics Finland 2020). This stipulates the fact that international expertise and competencies are needed in several ways, regardless of the area of business in Finnish economy.

1.3 Thesis structure

The first chapter of the thesis covers topics related to an increasing rate of exchange studies in higher education institutions. It presents the Erasmus+ program and contains statistics of Finnish students' international mobilities. In the first chapter there are covered also the reasons why students have an aspiration to go study in a foreign country and foreign university. Introduction chapter also explains briefly international competencies which students learn during their international mobility periods.

The second chapter defines Erasmus program, and contains statistics of the Erasmus program and Finnish students' international mobilities. It also includes figures regarding Erasmus program mobilities and explains the results of Erasmus Impact Study.

The third chapter presents international competencies in-depth. It explains what types of international competencies exist, and how those competencies can be exploited, developed, and learned. The chapter also presents models of international competencies and goes deeper into international communication competence and its dimensions.

The fourth chapter demonstrates the concept of Intellectual Capital and focuses on its human capital dimension in-depth. The chapter explains intellectual capital's relation to international mobility periods and employability.

The fifth chapter demonstrates the internationalization of Finnish companies. It includes statistics of increasing foreign contacts in the current work environment, and the growth of internationalization. It also contains statistics of Finnish subsidiaries abroad, and statistics of foreign subsidiaries in Finland.

The sixth chapter contains comprehensive information of SeAMK's Double Degree process. It explains how the process is conducted, and the specific requirements of each section. It covers the exchange studies, internationally conducted internship, thesis writing process, and graduation elements of DD.

Chapter seven includes information about the interviews and target group. It explains how and where the interviews were conducted, and the limitations which occurred due to coronavirus situation.

Chapter eight includes the interview results and thematic analysis. It explains in-depth the interviews and the questions discussed during the interviews (Appendix 1). The author has constructed pie charts and bar charts based on interview questions, which are then explained on a deeper level in the written part of the chapter.

Chapter nine presents the conclusion based on the interview results. It summarizes observations about international competencies which were presented in the theoretical part of the thesis. Also, it concludes the interview results, and presents the impacts of Double Degree program on graduate's employability. Chapter nine also includes the authors views considering DD program in the future, and recommendations for future research.

1.4 Research method

During the thesis writing, the author will conduct personal interviews of SeAMK Double Degree program graduates. Qualitative data will be received from the interviews, which the author will analyze, and conclude results based on the interviews. There are several qualitative research methods, out of which the author has chosen to conduct personal in-depth interviews with the desired target group. By interviewing the target group, the author will gather qualitative data from first-hand experiences of the SeAMK Double Degree graduates. During the interview open-ended questions will be asked, which allows the interviewee to reflect their own perspectives and thoughts in-depth. Bhandari (2020) describes qualitative research as a term that means gathering and examining non-numerical data, which can be for example notes, recorded video material, or audio. Qualitative research methods are used to comprehend notions, thoughts, attitudes, and experiences. It can be utilized to collect deeper awareness in order to find a solution. Qualitative research is recognizing individuals and their perspectives and trying to understand their point of view in the way as they see it (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault 2016).

The qualitative method aims to explain and reason, and it is implemented to find out the how and the why of certain actions, experiences, and ideas. It aims to explain why those above-mentioned topics perform and exist in a certain situation and circumstance (McLeod 2019).

The qualitative approach relates to the aim of profoundly comprehend a certain topic or issue. The focus is to generate thorough and demonstrative data, which leads to comprehending varying elements of the issue or topic in question (Almeida, Faria & Queirós 2017). According to Gaille (2018), qualitative research bases itself on inquiries that are unrestricted. He states that it gathers information in an alternative way. Rather than presenting inquiries having a small number of specific answer options as in a survey, it enables individuals to present their own ideas and experiences.

Qualitative approach is implemented to comprehend ideas, knowledge, beliefs, and feelings. Qualitative research allows the researcher to receive information on a deeper level on subjects which the researcher does not fully comprehend. Qualitative approaches consist of personal interviews in which unrestricted questions can be asked, verbally expressed statements and notes and literature analyses that discover to learn about theories and ideas.

Quantitative approach is indicated in numerical data, statistics, diagrams, and charts. Quantitative approach is implemented to assess or verify hypotheses, a theory, or presumptions. Quantitative research is utilized to create consistent general facts considering certain subject (Streefkerk 2019).

Where the quantitative approach is able to underline existing tendencies for certain subjects, qualitative approach is able to expose these tendencies and demonstrate why they exist (Naresh 2021).

McLeod (2019) states, that quantitative information reflects amounts, in other words it is numerical data. On the contrary, qualitative information describes emotions, experiences and other factors that are possible to see, but are not possible to calculate.

When research is built on an individual's own experiences and thoughts, the received information is comprehensive and reflects on a deeper level than in a quantitative approach. The intricacy of individual's actions implies that details and nuances can be overlooked if deeper level of understanding individual's experiences are ignored. These details and nuances can be seen and obtained by presenting the word "why" to the respondents. People conducting research implement qualitative research methods since it allows the researcher to gain deeper and more comprehensive information. If a respondent gives a negative answer to a specific question, the researcher is able to proceed towards understanding why the respondent answered so, or why the respondent has a certain mindset (Gough 2020).

The author had compiled a list of questions, which were presented during the interviews. This type of personal in-depth interview is called a semi-structured interview (Almeida et al. 2017). According to Almeida et al. (2017), the semi-structured method allows the interviewees to describe their thoughts and experiences broadly. The data received from these interviews is encompassing. Moreover, they enable the possibility to present sequel questions, inquire supplementary data, provide an explanation for preceding responses, and create a cohesion that links together multiple subjects. In addition, this type of interview provides a relaxed environment, where interviewees might be open for discussion of topics on a deeper level.

There are limitations in qualitative research method. Qualitative research as a process is time-consuming. In addition, the results of qualitative research can be questioned, since its results cannot be always replicated due to small sample size. The trustworthiness of qualitative research relates to the study's coherency (Leung 2015).

The existence of research methodology-based reasoning for generalizing the results of a certain research is infrequent. Hence, the importance of replicability in qualitative approach and its research results is crucial in order to generalize its results. Generalization means a proposition or an assertion about a certain subject, which relates to more than one person, crowd, subject, or circumstance (Aquino 2018).

Based on the observations and answers during the interviews the author will in the empirical part of the thesis create a thematic analysis of the interview results.

Thematic analysis is a way to analyze qualitative data. The researcher studies the qualitative data and looks for words, patterns, phrases, subjects, or experiences which frequently appear during the interviews (Caulfield 2019).

Thematic analysis can be divided into six phases. In the first phase, the researcher gets acquainted with the data gathered from the interviews. The researcher studies the data and writes down jottings. In the second phase, the researcher creates preliminary keywords. These keywords are notes for the researcher. By establishing keywords, the researcher begins to construct the information into preliminary themes. During the third phase the keywords are constructed into themes. This phase includes effective analysis of the keywords and themes. In the phase four the researcher studies through all the keywords and themes to the point where the data is understood clearly, and it is unique. In the next phase the themes are determined and given names. Based on the description and content of each theme, in the sixth phase the researcher is able to create a report about the qualitative data. This process is called a thematic analysis (Mortensen 2020).

2 ERASMUS PROGRAM

The Erasmus program was founded by European Commission in 1987. The objective of the Erasmus program is to fund international exchange programs and international mobility periods. Erasmus program enables European students to broaden their educational goals, and to experience living abroad (Basecamp).

European Commission's report called Erasmus Impact Study states that hiring companies prefer hiring applicants with international competencies and skills. Erasmus Impact Study had nearly 80 000 responses from undergraduates, universities, organizations, and companies from 34 European countries participating in the Erasmus+ program. The study underlines the correlation between international studies, employability, and international competencies. According to the study, expanding network, desire to travel and study abroad, and developing language skills were a primary reason for studying abroad. However, the study also states the fact that 85% of the undergraduates were driven towards exchange period abroad by an aspiration for higher employability and higher value in the labor market (Tucker 2016).

Statistics collected from recruiting parties indicate, that 92% of those are searching for international and transversal competencies in applicants when recruiting. Transversal competencies can be described as open-mindedness and inquisitiveness towards new tasks. It also includes readiness, and capabilities to create solutions for obstacles and challenges in the work environment. The Erasmus Impact Study underlines the result which concludes that Erasmus graduates indicate growth in values of these capabilities and were discovered to have 23% lesser unemployment rate five years after finishing their degree compared to graduates without international studies or internationally conducted internship, as shown in Figure 1. (European Commission 2014).

EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT ERASMUS STUDENTS

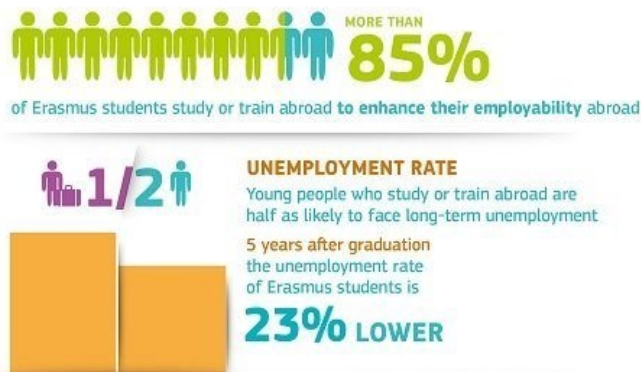


Figure 1. Employment and Career Development Erasmus Students (European Commission 2014).

A survey conducted by Finnish National Agency for Education (OPH), states that individual character development and individual improvement in general are advantages, which frequently come up in polls regarding international exchange periods. Students have acquired skills such adaptation, and increased confidence and trust in themselves. In Figure 2, there are listed the answers of which skills and competencies were gained the most from international mobility periods. Also, inquisitiveness and broaden perspective towards different matters had increased as a result of international exchange period. Over 80% of the survey answers from students agreed to these statements. A majority of the students also had a common sentiment in increment of their independence in individual studying, improvement in teamwork skills, and they feel more confident in making independent decisions, and more confident when encountering problems. In addition, students also discovered that exchange period got them interested in and driven towards internationalization in future labor markets. Exchange study period abroad grew the student's curiosity in globalized assignments, and in finding employment in a foreign country in a global environment (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019).

THE MOST COMMON BENEFITS OF THE EXCHANGE PERIOD FOR THE STUDENT (agree or completely agree, %)

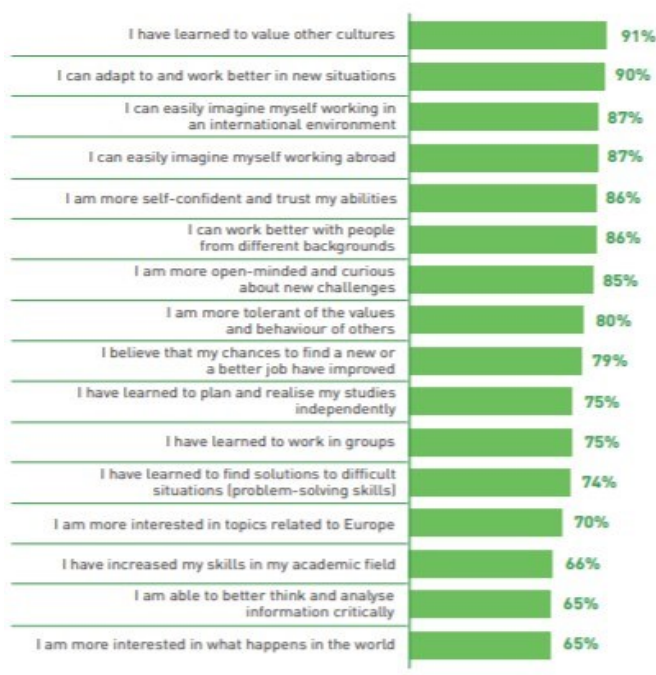


Figure 2. Most common benefits of the exchange period for the student (OPH)

66 percent of the students with international experience from exchange periods felt that their sectoral skills and abilities had grown due to the international mobility period. Moreover, the international mobility period enabled their new point of view. 78 % of the students said that the international mobility period gave them competencies, which according to the respondents they would have not acquired without going to study abroad.

According to the Finnish National Agency of Education (2019), 84% of the respondents said that aspiration to stay in a foreign country and encountering new individuals were the major reasons for an international mobility period. Other motivators towards the international mobility period were developing verbal communication skills in a foreign language was answered by 73%, and an aspiration to discover other cultures and gain cultural knowledge was answered by 63%, as shown in Figure 3.

17% of the Finnish students stated that the exchange period had been mandatory element of their degree program. Compared to Erasmus+ students coming to Finland from another country, Finnish students going abroad under the Erasmus+ program have distinct standards of in which country they want to go to complete their exchange studies. Finnish

students focus on the city itself, the country, and the language. Matters like the level of education and the status of the university are less focused on. On the contrary, the students coming to Finland tend to focus on things such as the level of studies and the quality of university. They are also more likely to ask for information about the university from students who have gone to the university in question (Finnish National Agency of Education 2019).

Therefore, it could stipulate the fact, that Finnish students tend to a certain extent focus more on self-development in personal characteristics such as learning the language in the host country, fluency in foreign languages, gaining cultural knowledge and international expertise, and expand their international network. The fact that foreign students coming to study in Finland value matters such as the status of the university, and the quality of studies, would suggest that foreign students appreciate what the exchange period looks like on certificate from employers' point of view.

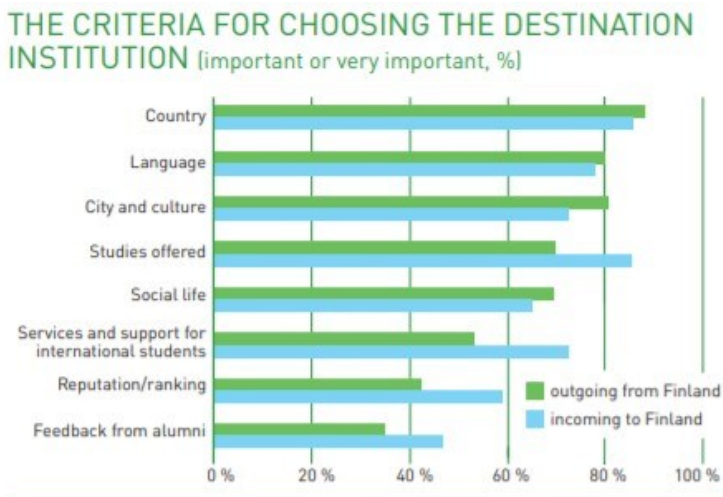


Figure 3. The criteria for choosing the destination institution (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019)

3 INTERNATIONAL COMPETENCIES

International competencies are also often referred to as global competencies. In nowadays working life the atmosphere is becoming more and more international, when it comes to group work and projects. Due to globalization, it causes challenges to the new upcoming workforces since they need to adapt skills and competencies which are valued and needed in current work life in order to be efficient and capable in one's position. Nowadays, all of the jobs require international skills to some extent, for example, language skills and cultural knowledge are needed in today's working life (Ala-Louko 2017). Studies relating to international capabilities might enhance the understanding of ethnicities and lead to courteous encounters in progressively multicultural civilizations (PISA 2018). International and intercultural competencies are often described as knowing how to act efficiently and suitably in multicultural circumstances. Under these types of circumstances correct behavior is necessary for a successful encounter (De La Garza 2019).

International capability is a series of skills with multiple components. Internationally capable persons are able to investigate domestic, international, and culturally diverse topics, comprehend and value varying viewpoints and attitudes. They are also able to work together efficiently and thoughtfully with people from different cultures and proceed for liable procedures when it comes to durability and united wellness (PISA 2018).

Being internationally competent means that the individual possesses understanding, information, and capabilities that can be utilized to explore, value, and comprehend the globe and cultures effectively. In order to be internationally competent, the individual must have skills such as the ability to think critically, solve issues, aspiration to acquire knowledge, understanding different viewpoints, and value discrepancies among individuals (Global Competence 2018).

According to Ala-Louko (2017), due to the rapid globalization in the working life, the cruciality of international know-how, multicultural communication and teamwork competencies are increasing in the labor market. Because the working life and the skills which are valued in the working life are changing, the employers will focus more on skills such as cultural knowledge, language skills, adaptation, and teamwork skills as indicated in Figure 4. These

competencies are necessary, and it is inevitable to possess at least some of these skills when working and/or applying for a position in current and in future labor markets. The Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) carried out a research in cooperation with Demos Helsinki in 2013. Their aim was to study how global skills and competencies are valued from employer's perspective, and how having these skills effect on the employability of the new employee when hiring (Ala-Louko 2017).

European Commission has defined employability as 'A composite of understanding, information, skills and capabilities, and individual's own characteristics which makes the graduate to be more probable to be hired and succeed in one's profession (Teichler 2018).

There are four key elements of being an internationally competent individual. Firstly, the individual must have the ability to analyze problems and circumstances from domestic, universal, and social perspectives of importance. For example, deprivations, financial interrelation, exodus, imbalance of equality, circumstantial threats, tensions and wars, and ethnic discrepancies. The second element is the ability to comprehend and value other viewpoints and mindsets. The third element is the capability to create affirmative interplay with the individuals from other countries, indigenous, religions, societal or cultural environments. The fourth element is the ability to operate productively when it comes to environmental enhancement and common wellness. All the key elements are subsidized by four inalienable parts which are information, competencies, mindsets, and principles (Engel, Rutkowski & Thompson 2019).

According to Teichler (2018), global skills and competencies consist of fluency in other than native languages, having information about different nations, understanding various methods of thinking and logic, being able to analyze contrastively, recognizing and being familiar with other cultures, knowing how to manage with new individual's, and promoting universal ethics.

An effective way of developing these competencies is studying abroad in a foreign country, encountering new cultures, and stepping out of the comfort zone. All these above-mentioned steps are fulfilled when undergoing the Double Degree program.



Figure 4. Traditional and Extended Competencies Developed Through International Experiences (Ala-Louko 2017).

The international mobility period might have favorable impacts on multiple elements of international competence, such as inner preparedness, tolerance and broad-mindedness, thoughtfulness towards multiculturalism, and broader viewpoint towards historical matters (Schenker 2019).

According to research done by Cologne Institute for Economic Research, hiring companies reckon that applicants who have international capabilities will have effective overall performance, and are seen more competent for international assignments which require communicative skills in foreign languages, global interactions and working in multicultural groups. Hiring companies tend to focus more on personal characteristics such as communal competencies and field-specific know-how in the hiring process. However, according to the study applicant's international experience can alter hiring processes the outcome. The study was requested by the German Academic Exchange Service (Redeem Project 2016).

3.1 Model of Intercultural Competence

The idea of intercultural or multicultural nationality is a set of competencies, information and mindset or approach which are required from an individual in societal interactions (Vegh & Luu 2019).

Intercultural competence consists of three elements, which are cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies (Bennett 2014). The cognitive element of IC consists of

understanding different cultures, general knowledge, and particular cultural knowledge. The affective element of IC includes one's inquisitiveness about other cultures, cognitive suppleness, aspiration to understand, and permissiveness when interacting with other backgrounds and cultures. The behavioral element of IC consists of the capability to know how to interact with individuals who have different traditions, varying backgrounds, and varying cultures. In addition, the behavioral element also includes knowing how to listen to these above-mentioned individuals, how to find solutions, compassion and collecting knowledge. With the aim of learning international competencies, there has been created a model by Darla Deardorff, often referred to as the "Pyramid Model" of IC (Günçavdı & Polat 2016). This is supported by Pinto (2018), who states that attitudes are seen as the central element from where the enhancing of IC can begin. By starting with that element, the enhancing also affects the other features of IC. The element of attitude consists of matters such as respecting other cultural backgrounds, open-mindedness and broadened perspective, aspiration to explore, and increased tolerance towards insecurities. The element of knowledge and understanding include self-knowledge, and profound insights and information concerning ethnicities. The element of skills includes examination and explanation, assessment, and correlation in findings. Those skills are required in order to receive information. Furthermore, these skills are needed to apply the received information in practice. The combination of those above-mentioned elements results in desired external and internal outcomes (Figure 5).

Efficiency is seen as the capability to reach an individual's objectives in a certain interaction, whereas correctness is seen as the capability to practice that efficiency in a way which is suitable towards the other individual(s) (Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith 2017).

IC has been defined in over 100 different ways in today's academic journals, research, and articles. In 2006, Deardorff created the first contrastive assessment considering varying attributes of IC. Deardorff looked for unanimity among the numerous models and the characteristics of those models. The model which Deardorff suggested contains the capability of efficient interaction and suitable demeanor. Efficiency in the sense that person is capable of reach their objectives in their contacts, and suitable in the sense that the person will not harm cultural policies or customs in multicultural conditions. These capabilities build on a person's information about other cultures, competencies, and ways of thinking. To be

an interculturally capable person, it is presumed that individual's take part in societies according to the way how the unspoken guidelines expect. In societies the population establishes a so-called principled group, where the participants share mutual values and ethics (Vegh & Luu 2019).

The model of IC can be perceived as something which is in progress, as a lifetime lasting evolving procedure (Vegh & Luu 2019). According to O' Toole (2018), it is suggested that an individual should possess competencies from these four elements in order to develop their international and intercultural competence. In Figure 5 the four elements have been specified, and the competencies within each section have been shown in-depth.

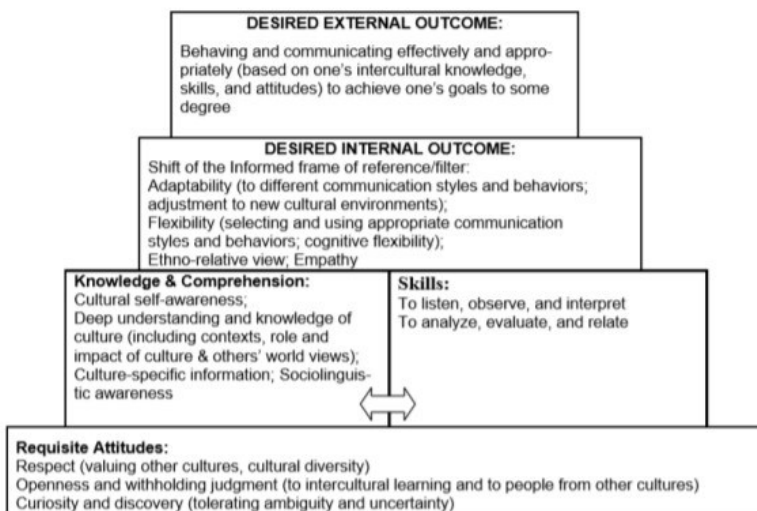


Figure 5. Deardorff's Model of Intercultural Competence (O'Toole 2018)

Deardorff's model of IC consists of the elements within the concept of IC. The model underlines the connections and coaction of among those elements. The appeal of IC as a field of research is due to its direct functional significance (Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith 2017).

The first element is referred to as 'requisite attitudes'. This element includes overall respect and openness to intercultural learning and other cultures, and underlines tolerance towards uncertainty. This element is seen as the starting point to develop IC. The next element is referred to as 'knowledge and comprehension'. The element underlines factors such as

cultural self-awareness, understanding cultural aspects in-depth, and cultural-specific knowledge. This element also contains a skills section, in which abilities like listening, observing, and interpreting are mentioned. The third element is referred to as ‘desired internal outcome. It includes adaptability and flexibility, knowing how to use one’s IC in practice. The fourth element is referred to as ‘desired external outcome, which consists of effective and appropriate behavior, overall implementation of one’s international competencies. Deardorff has underlined that the process of IC development can also be indirect instead of being direct and the process can go through the elements in a circular way (Günçavdı & Polat 2016). Figure 6 presents Deardorff’s circular IC development model

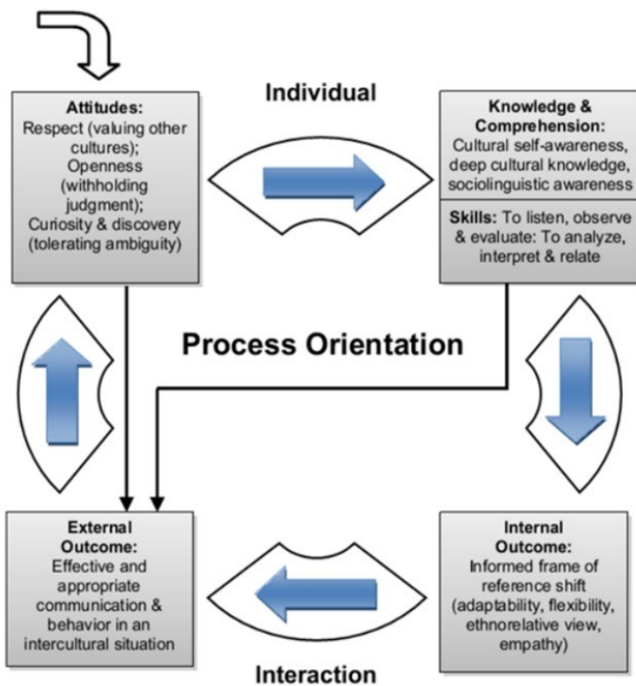


Figure 6. Deardorff's Circular Process Model of Intercultural Competence.

According to Deardorff and Arasaratnam-Smith (2017), from higher education international mobilities to nationwide multiplicity courses the potentiality of IC utilization appeals to individuals who comprehend the cruciality of IC in today’s multicultural circumstances.

There are also other models created of IC. These models contain varying number of elements, in which the competencies are divided. The author has chosen to go in-depth with Deardorff’s model, since it was found to perform efficiently for the thesis topic. Günçavdı and Polat (2016) state, that Brent Ruben has created a model divided into seven

dimensions, Michael Byram has created a model divided into five dimensions and Alvino Fantini created a model with four dimensions.

3.2 Intercultural Communication Competence

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is a concept that is used for referring to competencies which are required while interacting with people from other backgrounds, countries, or cultures.

ICC is seen as a crucial factor in order to establish efficient communication between people who might not have the same native language and/or come from varying backgrounds and cultures.

Information in ICC indicates the intellectual knowledge individual must possess about other individuals, the situation, and the standards of suitability that work in a certain cultural environment. Motives consist of emotive perceptions of what individuals have when they foresee and in reality interact in culturally diverse situations. Attitudes/emotions relate to the sentimental or efficient condition that one achieves while interacting with an individual from another culture. Intentions are described as the something what is guiding individual's choices in a certain multicultural encountering. Actions related to the implementation of the efficient and proper behavioral aspects. Respect is indicated by spoken and unspoken statements (Stokes Rice 2021).

Ala-Louko (2017), listed the main ICC aspects to be motivation, attitudes and emotions, knowledge, and behavior and skills. Motivation needed to interact efficiently and properly towards others. Knowledge in ICC underlines open-mindedness and cultural intelligence to know how to act in multicultural interactions. In order to know the language properly, and to behave in a respectful and neutral way, the ICC skills and abilities are essential. According to Stokes Rice (2021), ICC is defined as the capability to communicate and interact efficiently and correctly in a variety of cultural situations and environments. IC consists of several elements. Important elements of ICC are to be motivated, endurance of ambiguity and general understanding of self and others.

Today's world is under ongoing internationalization, and can be described as a place in which individuals from varying cultures are meeting in a growing rate. When individuals have discussions in a multicultural atmosphere, they can not avoid communicative obstacles like cultural stereotypes and preconceptions, distinctiveness of identities, and lack of linguistic and interactional skills. By enhancing one's intercultural communication competence, can solutions for the above-mentioned problematic situations be found. Intercultural communication competence contributes as an essential ability for individuals to deal with and create profound relationships in globalized world (Dai & Chen 2014).

Interaction is the foundation of any company's prosperity. Company consists of endless exchanges of information among several factions. For example, supervisors, personnel, associates and customers. Efficient and productive interaction guarantees smooth distribution of information among all the factions. Thus, decreasing possible confusions, frustration and distrust (Vaughan 2018). and It is undeniable, that interaction and communication are the major factors in order to have a successful and efficient company. In a company where personnel operate with one another to reach their goals, communication is the key to make those goals reachable (Blazenaite 2012). Communication is the backbone of all corporate interaction. Without communication, companies cannot hire workers, retain their workers, or enhance their workers careers. Lack of communication in other words means no enterprise. Employees in companies use more than 70 percent of their time in interactions with other people. The interactions can be face-to-face conversations, business meetings, calls over the phone, emails, or different types of communication. Inadequate communication leads to problems within the company. Enhancing communication among the company employees is a key factor of the company's possible success. Personnel with varying cultural backgrounds is a possibility for significant achievements, but also for significant difficulties (Laroche & Rutherford 2007, 99).

There are multiple models of ICC. To a certain extent, all of the models consist of the same key elements and dimension, thus supplementing one another. One of the most recognized models is called Integrated Model of International Communication Competence or IMICC.

According to Appenrodt (2013), and Nadeem, Mohammed and Dalib (2017), IMICC is model of ICC regarding cultural aspects and its generality of ICC. IMICC comprises of five

elements. The elements of IMICC are compassion, inspiration, an international mindset and/or encouraging mindset regarding individuals from different ethnic groups and backgrounds, and capability to observe and pay attention. Compassion is described as person's capability to participate in mentally and passionately to interactions, by adapting one's actions. Inspiration stands for individual's curiosity to connect with individuals from varying cultural backgrounds. International mindset refers to sincerity regarding varying ideologies of life. The capability to observe and pay attention refers to the intensity of individual's devotion in a certain interaction.

According to Dai and Chen (2014), ICC has four dimensions, which are divided into smaller components. The dimensions are personal attributes, communication skills, psychological adaptation and cultural awareness, as seen in Figure 7.

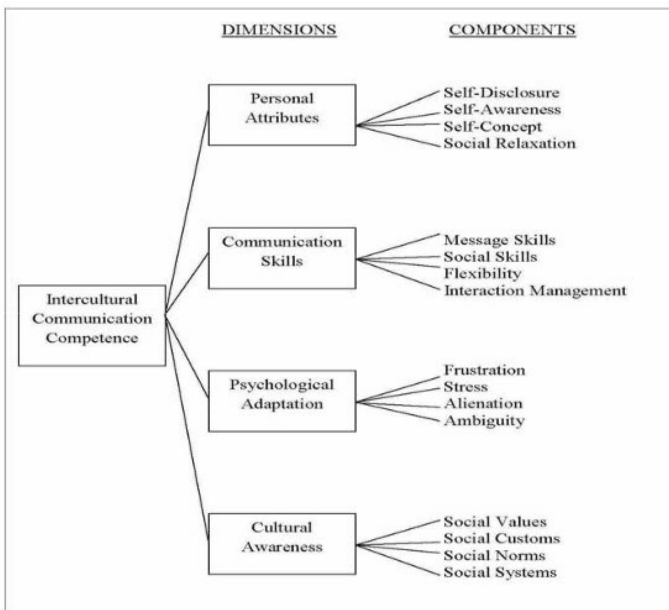


Figure 7. The dimensions and components of intercultural communication competence (Dai, X & Chen, G. 2014.)

Considering intercultural communication competence, it is worth to mention also cross-cultural competence. These two terms can be mixed with each other, so clarifying them helps to understand the differences. Intercultural describes the situations where individuals from other cultures meet, interact, and communicate with each other. Whereas cross-cultural refers to comparing these cultures, and differences regarding two different cultural

parties (González 2011). Intercultural communication recognizes the cooperation between several cultures in one location. Moreover, intercultural communication exceeds cross cultural communication in concentrating on the effective interactions, which are frequently happening between cultures. Cross-cultural communication refers to the contrast of these cultures in question (Global Arena).

In addition to linguistic differences between cultures and countries, in intercultural interactions also nonverbal behavior differs. Factors such as personal space, acceptance of physical contact, gestures, and tone are elements of interaction that need to be recognized in multicultural situations (Laroche & Rutherford 2007, 102). ICC can ease the communication with individuals from other ethnicities. Person with ICC is linguistically competent to the extent, that their cultural knowledge and information is built-in with their spoken competence. Moreover, this built-in combination consisting of linguistic skills and cultural knowledge indicates that these individuals are cognizant of the subtleties of other's ethnical traditions and culture to the extent of that they understand the substances, beliefs, and morals of other cultures (Wilberschied 2015).

The author has completed a course regarding cross-cultural and intercultural elements, where different cultures were examined, and their traditions and varying behavioral tendencies were analyzed. In addition, the course also reflected cultural stereotypes and dealt with verbal and non-verbal communicative actions. The author has found these studies beneficial and has been able to exploit such matters in personal life. In Table 1, there are listed course objectives and topics from a similar course.

Objectives	Topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop the students' intercultural competence and increase cultural awareness • To understand the meaning of cultural background in communication situations • To understand the characteristics of your own culture and those of the other students in the group • To learn about the Finnish culture and the Lappish culture in theory and in practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theories of culture • Culture and communication • Verbal and non-verbal communication • Stereotyping • Culture shock • Study of the own culture • Finnish culture and communication • Lappish culture

Table 1. Objectives and Topics of a Course 'Intercultural Communication'

4 INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL

Intellectual capital can be defined as the worth of organization's worker's expertise, competencies, educational background, or any knowledge or skill which the company is able to exploit to gain competitive advantage (Chen 2021). According to Igielski (2018), the key factor of companies increasing their intellectual capital is the element of human capital. In the contemporary business environment, enterprises are not able to succeed only by investing in raw material assets and low-cost workforces. Intellectual capital is as important as other resources of a company. Igielski (2018) also concludes, that the theory of intellectual capital is created to explain its cruciality and necessity when it comes to increasing company's competitive advantage.

The concept of intellectual capital can be divided into three different elements: human capital, relational capital, and structural capital (Figure 8). The author goes in-depth with the element of human capital, since the thesis topic is regarding that element.

Currently the theory of intellectual capital is gradually understood as one of the most valuable premediated resources of such companies' economies that are based on information. In economies based on information, enterprises do not concentrate alone on inventions of modern goods, services, advertising, studies, and improvement of activities, but moreover focus specifically on the improvement and administration of company's intellectual capital. Human capital consists of worker's expertise, competencies and skills, abilities, and innovativeness. Thus, the element of human capital is recognized as the significant element of intellectual capital. It has been stated that worker's create and obtain intellectual capital through their approaches, expertise and experiences, and intellectual flexibility. Expertise and experiences cover skills and educational background, whereas approaches cover social interaction element. In addition, intellectual flexibility is related to problem-solving and ingenuity (Khalique, Shaari & Isa 2011).

Double Degree process increases one's intellectual capital value through international expertise, thus DD students are seen as a more valuable asset for a company compared to students with no international studies or international experience. Intellectual capital is the result of what the employee is able to give to the company considering one's competencies,

knowledge, and personal characteristics. As seen in Figure 8, human capital is separated into values such as knowledge and skills, competencies, flexibility, education, and creativity. All of which are obtained and/or increased through international mobility periods and during completing Double Degree program. Intellectual capital's relational element includes the aspect of social networks, which is also developed through international mobility periods.

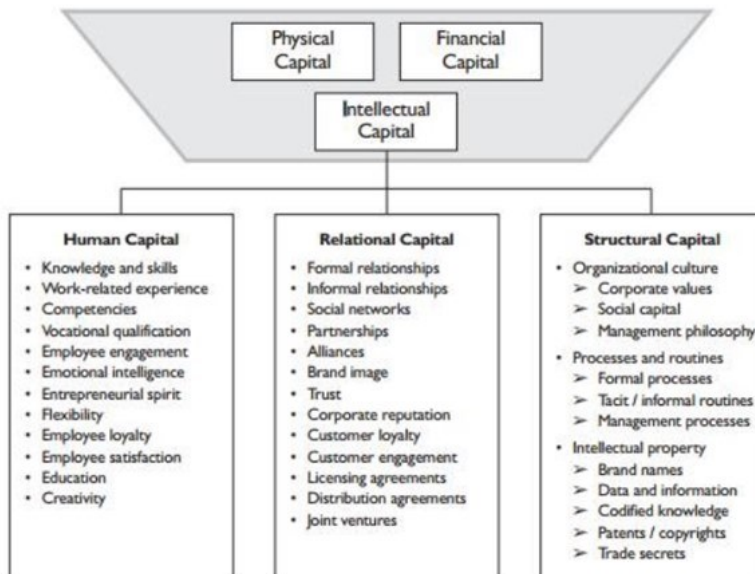


Figure 8. Elements of Intellectual Capital

Human capital consists of the competencies, capabilities, and knowledge of the workers' in a company. If the workers are effective, they will increase the efficiency of the company. Matters which reflect on the adept expertise are for example educational opportunities, real experience from work or internships, programs, courses, and educational conferences. Social competence of human capital regards interaction skills, the capability to communicate and connect with individuals in a productive manner. Social competence improves teamwork and perceptiveness of the workers (Abdulaali 2018).

A similar way as a company needs funds and material assets, competent personnel is an essential element and contributing factor of company's prosperity. In other words, companies require employees that are knowledgeable, competent, employable, and effective. People themselves can make increase company's intellectual human capital by educating themselves, acquiring skills and knowledge, and by creating networks among colleagues, associates, and other individuals in everyday life (Juneja).

Human capital is a vital asset to an organization when aiming for successful economical and competitive achievements. The capability of companies to compete in aggressive economies is dependent on company's personnel's amount of information and competencies. Workforce is the utmost important asset of a company. Thus, it is undeniable that company's capability to thrive in competitive economies and markets is dependent on their personnel's abilities, know-how and devotion, and the efficiency and productivity of this personnel (Dubra 2019).

According to Berntson, Sverke and Marklund (2006):

The fact that education and competence development were positively associated with perceived employability indicates, that career investments may enhance individuals' career success and perceived prospects of acquiring alternative employment. Human capital, indicated by education, competence development and job tenure, has a positive relationship with perceived employability.

Carrol, Ryan, and Elliott (2021) reckon that DD graduates have increased employability, because they are able to provide more human capital. DD graduates possess a superior variety of competencies compared to graduates with one normal degree. This is acknowledged in the labor markets. This is indicated by the fact that DD graduates are more probable to find employment.

Studies indicate that emotional intelligence relates strongly to individual's employability. In addition, enhanced competencies related to communication and interaction increased the level of individual's employability from employer's point of view. Moreover, capabilities related to solving problems and finding solutions, as well as creative and critical thinking were found to be important features contributing to one's employability (Jonck 2014). All of the above-mentioned skills which increase the level of graduate's employability can be developed or enhanced through international mobility periods such as SeAMK's Double Degree program.

5 INTERNATIONALIZATION OF FINNISH COMPANIES

Finnish companies and their economies have internationalized through four changes: global economy, the internet, increase of educational level, and companies' employers moving and adapting to foreign countries (Demos 2013). Finnish companies had relatively minor global operations before the 90's. Before that, most operations which were done abroad were sales related. The internationalization of Finnish companies meant that they sold products abroad, and this was mainly B2B sales by big industrial companies in the field of wood, paper, and electronics business. Recession in Finland in the early 90's was a changing point for Finnish globalization. After the recession smaller Finnish businesses started to move their operations abroad. Hiring international expertise to Finland, opening subsidiaries in USA, Great-Britain, China and eventually in India. One of the biggest success stories of Finnish companies' globalization is Nokia. Nokia's success was based on global production chain and understanding global markets. One key factor why Nokia was successful, was because they understood the importance of cultural knowledge and international expertise in marketing and solutions. Operating under multicultural circumstances requires international competencies such as language skills, adaptation, teamwork skills, flexibility, cultural knowledge, and perceptiveness (Demos 2013).

5.1 Foreign companies in Finland and Finnish subsidiaries abroad

According to Statistics Finland (2020), there were 4,400 foreign companies having operations in Finland. These foreign companies employ close to 18,2% of the working staff in Finland. In the field of manufacturing these companies employed 78,700 workers, and wholesale and retail trade employed 50,700 workers. Internationalization inside Finland caused by foreign companies is increasing annually.

Figure 9 presents the number of foreign affiliates in Finland in 2019, and the number of employees being employed by these companies in question. These multinational companies include numerous different cultures, countries, and backgrounds in their personnel, demanding international competencies, expertise, and skills.

	Number of affiliates	Employees (FTE)	Turnover (million euro)
Sweden	1,119	75,643	21,446
United States	710	27,981	12,860
Germany	379	25,473	12,957
United Kingdom	465	23,929	4,928
Japan	124	9,908	3,859
France	143	10,264	3,866
Switzerland	129	14,464	4,654
Russia	21	934	3,615
Denmark	218	19,783	5,158
Netherlands	161	11,358	3,337
Norway	208	16,109	4,921
Italy	46	4,292	1,589
Ireland	39	3,171	1,267
Luxembourg	114	5,448	1,473
Austria	37	3,118	1,364
Estonia	122	3,673	984
Belgium	34	576	244
Other	371	22,738	9,779
Total	4,440	278,861	98,302

Figure 9. Foreign affiliates in Finland in 2019 (Statistics Finland 2020).

In 2018, Finnish companies operated in 139 nations, and had 5,430 subsidiaries in these nations. Finnish subsidiaries abroad hired in total of 281,390 employees. In the field of machinery and metal manufacturing Finnish subsidiaries employed 53,090 people, and in the field of electrical and electronics production they hired nearly 44,900. Figure 10 presents the number of employees hired by Finnish subsidiaries (Statistics Finland 2020).

	Number of employees ¹⁾	Personnel costs (EUR million)	Gross investments in tangible assets (EUR million)	Turnover (EUR million)	Number of affiliates
EU 15 countries excl. Finland					
Finland	176,275	12,585.5	1,907.7	77,269.5	1,979
EU 28 countries excl. EU 15	105,113	2,550.6	626.0	17,761.1	1,324
Europe outside EU	64,259	2,242.2	585.4	24,794.3	761
Asia and Oceania	143,056	4,224.6	584.9	29,593.2	769
North America	48,597	5,267.3	517.4	26,190.6	314
Central and South America	30,681	859.8	100.0	5,611.7	177
Africa	6,399	236.8	28.5	1,232.5	110
All country groups, total	574,380	27,966.8	4,349.8	182,452.9	5,434

Figure 10. Finnish affiliates abroad by country group in 2018 (Statistics Finland 2020).

6 SEAMK'S DOUBLE DEGREE PROGRAM

Completing SeAMK Double Degree program means that the student does their exchange period in one of SeAMK's international DD partner universities, where the student studies two semesters (60 ETCS). The student must also complete their five months-long internship either in an international company or entirely abroad (SeAMK 2020). During the exchange period the student must follow a syllabus, which has been approved by both the home university and the host university. The structure of the syllabus is cross-checked by both universities to ensure that the courses completed in the host university will also be recognized by the home university. The student must prepare a learning agreement, where all the courses that student will be studying are specified. After finishing the exchange period and/or practical training, the student moves onto write their thesis. In order to complete the DD program, the student must write the thesis and the maturity test in English. During the thesis writing process there will be thesis supervisors from the home university and from the host university. By completing the two semesters in host university and passing the courses that have been approved in the learning agreement and syllabus, finishing the five months lasting internship in an international company or abroad, and writing the thesis in English with supervisors from both universities, the student will graduate from the DD program and receive certificates from both home university and home university (SeAMK 2021).

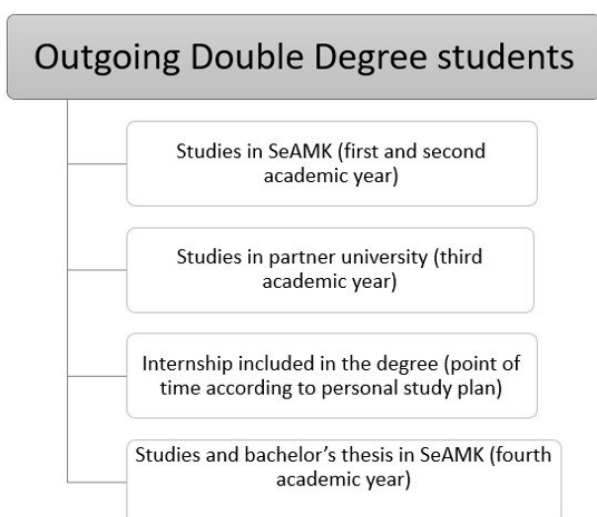


Figure 11. SeAMK outgoing student's Double Degree process (SeAMK - International Office 2020)

The DD program will give an advantage for the graduate student in the labor market, since they have two certificates as a proof of both studying and working internationally, which reflects their international competencies such as language skills and cultural knowledge, and abilities to work and study in multicultural teams and environments.

In addition, the Double Degree of International Business degree, SeAMK offers Double Degree opportunities in cooperation with their partner universities also in Business Management, SME Business Management, Automation Engineering, and Information Technology (SeAMK 2021).

SeAMK offers a master level Double Degree of International Business Management in cooperation with Aschaffenburg University of Applied Sciences, Germany. Also, in the faculty of engineering SeAMK offers Double Degree opportunities with Aschaffenburg UAS (SeAMK 2021).

6.1 SeAMK's Double Degree program partner universities

According to SeAMK website of International Partner Universities and Networks (2021), SeAMK has Double Degree partner universities in the field of business in the following countries:

- Bulgaria (1 university)
- Czech Republic (2 universities)
- China (1 university)
- Germany (6 universities)
- Hungary (1 university)
- Lithuania (1 university)
- The Netherlands (1 university)
- Russia (1 university)
- Spain (1 university)

6.2 SeAMK's Double Degree program process for outgoing students

6.2.1 Exchange studies in SeAMK's Double Degree program

SeAMK DD process is started on the third academic year of studies. After studying and completing two academic years in SeAMK, the student is able to go study the third academic year abroad in the Double Degree program partner university of SeAMK. In the partner university the student will complete studies and courses which are predetermined in the learning agreement and crosschecked by both universities to see that the courses are adequate. During the academic year in partner university, the student is ought to study 60 ECTS (SeAMK 2020). The learning agreement and syllabus have to be approved by the head of degree program. The head of degree program also ensures that the student meets the requirements of participating in the Double Degree program. The student must complete the studies in partner university acceptably. When the studies in partner university are completed, the partner university will send the transcript of records to SeAMK, where the head of degree program will validate and approve them (SeAMK - International Office 2020).

6.2.2 Internship in SeAMK's Double Degree program

As part of the Double Degree program the student conducts their internship internationally. This means either doing the internship abroad, or in an international company. The internship is 5 months long, and the student will do their internship during their fourth year of academic studies (SeAMK 2020). The head of degree program ensures, that the internship company, institution, or organization meets the requirements of the Double Degree program (SeAMK - International Office 2020).

6.2.3 Thesis writing in SeAMK's Double Degree program

In the fourth year, the student also writes their bachelor's thesis. The thesis and the maturity test are both written in English (SeAMK 2020). The head of program in SeAMK will in cooperation with the academic representative from the partner university ensure, that the thesis meets all the thesis requirements and criteria of both universities (SeAMK - International Office 2020). During the writing process, the student is supervised by two thesis

supervisors. The supervisors from SeAMK and partner universities cooperate with each other regarding the bachelor's thesis in question.

6.2.4 Graduating from SeAMK's Double Degree program

When the student has finished all three parts of his/her Double Degree program, their study counsellor ensures that all the necessary studies are completed, that the internship is conducted, and the bachelor's thesis is written. After this, the student is entitled to apply for the Double Degree certificate. The head of degree program verifies the completion of the Double Degree program with the partner university and validates the receiving of the Double Degree certificate to the study secretary and informs the partner university about the student's graduation. After everything is validated and all the aspects covered and approved, the study secretary in SeAMK sends the student's transcript of records to the partner university. The partner university will then send their graduation certificate to the student (SeAMK - International Office 2020).

6.3 Statistics of outgoing SeAMK Double Degree students

Over 50 students from the faculty of business in SeAMK have participated in the Double Degree program during their studies. Those students consist of International Business students, Business Management students, and SME Business Management students. Considering the destination countries, the majority (76%) of SeAMK Double Degree students chose Germany as their target country. 12% of the outgoing students went to Czech Republic, 10% chose China, and both The Netherlands and Hungary were chosen by 4% of the students. As mentioned, majority of the students went to Germany, and the universities in there were Hannover UAS, Aschaffenburg UAS, Technische Hochschule Nürnberg and Würzburg-Schweinfurt UAS. In Czech Republic, the universities were Škoda Auto University and Mendel University in Brno. Students who chose China as the destination country went to Sanda University. In the Netherlands, the university was Fontys University of Applied Sciences, and in Hungary the university was University of Sopron (SeAMK International Office 2021).

6.4 What students obtain from studying abroad

In addition to receiving certificates from two universities, the student will gain advantages in other areas too. According to Shulsinger (2017), studying abroad improves the student's fluency in foreign languages. This will be useful when considering moving on to working life in the future, where nowadays language skills are needed and demanded due to internationalization and multinational companies with multicultural work environments. The student also learns about different methods of learning and teaching, since in other countries the teaching techniques often vary. This allows the student to gain perspective towards other ways of doing things, thus allowing the student to get something to compare, and to crosscheck different methods. Internalizing that will be useful in the future, if the person encounters group work or projects in working life where he or she will have to interact with people from other countries and cultures. According to West (2015), study periods abroad result in ICC, increased fluency in foreign languages, and consciousness of worldwide matters.

When students study abroad, they are enabled to get familiar with other ethnicities and cultures. Undergraduates frequently engage in study abroad periods to find rare cultural experiences at the same time as they are obtaining and enhancing their competencies. Students must manage and deal with possible misfortunes and problems by themselves when studying abroad, which results in improvement of self-sufficiency. International mobility periods broaden student's perspectives and mindset. They enable the student to comprehend and evaluate issues from a global aspect. Acquired cultural knowledge support one's objective thinking, helps to endure discrepancies, and understand and value dissimilarities among people. International experience is important in current internationalized work environment. Moreover, it gives the student competitive advantage in multicultural circumstances. Living abroad enhances one's fluency in foreign languages, thus making them more competent for positions requiring international interactions (Top Universities 2021).

There are also several other perks when a student is conducting a part of their studies internationally. As mentioned before, language skills and cultural knowledge are important skills that are valued in today's labor market, but those skills are not the only advantages which international studying presents. Career-wise international studies give student more

chances to expand their network, which the student can exploit when moving onto working life. International connections are valuable nowadays globalized world. In addition, also teaching methods vary between countries, in which case learning with a different method enables the student to encounter new perspectives and different type of expertise for his/her studies, thus easing the utilization of the studies in future (Environmental Conscience).

According to Redwine et al. (2018), students who have undergone international mobility period enhanced themselves in three components which include internal, external, and intellectual component. They conducted a research which stated that internal component covers individuality and influence, as features that define one's distinctiveness. In this component emotional intelligence and self-confidence were found to be the most improved features. External component relates to improved features, which can be exploited when interacting with other individuals, particularly with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Most improved features in this component were coping with disagreements, and increased self-confidence and ease while engaging with people. In addition, individuals increased their ability to be patient. The intellectual component relates to understanding and information. Understanding refers to the difficulty of determining and evaluating reality and its significance, whereas information relates to comprehending problems and to consciousness towards universal interests matters. Enhanced features in the component of intellectuality related to being more aware of world's intricacy. Students were also able to acquire new methods of learning and apply them in practice.

7 INTERVIEWS

The author chose the interviewees based on their educational background. The target group for the thesis was Double Degree program graduates from the faculty of Business. In the interviews there were both Finnish degree students, and students who had come to Finland and to SeAMK from abroad to study a full degree and participated in the Double Degree program during their studies.

The author had compiled a list of questions to be asked during the interviews. All of the interviews followed a clear structure. The atmosphere during the conversation was informal, which in some cases led to follow-up questions from both parties. The author found this to be useful since it provided deeper insight of interviewees experiences and thoughts. In the beginning of the interviews, the author asked for permission to record the interview for later analysis. The author also informed the interviewees, that the records will be deleted after the analyses are done. All of the interview questions were related to SeAMK's Double Degree program (Appendix 1).

Considering the prevalent coronavirus situation and the fact that some of the interviewees no longer live in Seinäjoki or in Finland, the interviews were conducted online or over the phone. The platforms used for the interviews were Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom and phone calls. In total of seven interviews were conducted during the thesis writing process.

8 RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS

After analyzing the interview answers, the author will present the made observations based of the interviewees' answers.

The majority of the interviewees saw the opportunity to receive two bachelor certificates to be a main driver towards completing a Double Degree program. The certificates are a proof of internationally conducted studies and reflect the graduate's international expertise. Like mentioned earlier in the theoretical research part of the thesis, employers appreciate international experience gained through international mobility periods and internationality in studies. The interview answers support this claim, since it was brought up multiple times that employers are impressed by two certificates from two different universities. In addition, the Double Degree is seen as something that students want to have on their CV.

SeAMK students are interacting and studying together with foreign exchange students coming from abroad to SeAMK. Recommendations and information from these students have encouraged SeAMK students towards completing DD in partner university. Receiving firsthand information from partner university students lowers the step towards participating in Double Degree program. The Double Degree program is seen as an opportunity to gain international experience, learn about other cultures, and as a place for personal character development.

The majority of the interviewees found the studies in partner university to be useful (Table 2). Universities abroad have different types of teaching methods compared to SeAMK, which allows the student to acquire new perspectives and learning methods. Thus, the student will have broader perspective towards education and personal learning. Host universities occasionally offer courses, which cannot be studied at SeAMK. Completing these courses at the host university supplements the student's education, which makes them feel more competent. Studying in host university has to some extent increased interviewee's leadership and performance skills, which can be exploited in working life.

On the other hand, following the strict syllabus at the host university could mean that the courses which must be studied are not corresponding to student's field of specialization at SeAMK.

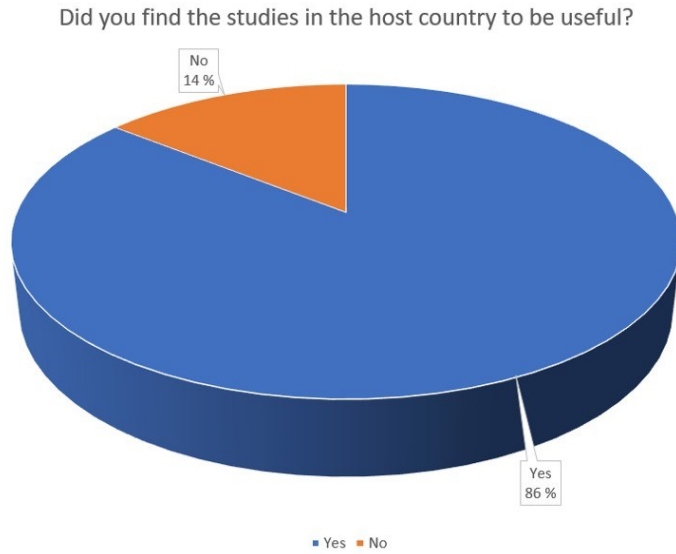


Table 2. Pie chart based on interview question

One aspect that the author aimed to cover during the interviews was the duration of exchange period in Double Degree program (Table 3). The majority of the interviewees thought, that one year (two semesters) is enough in order to culturally integrate in the host country and the host university. One academic year is enough to learn international competencies and meet more people from varying cultures to expand international network and gain cultural knowledge. Based on the interview answers, it is inferential that studying only one semester would not be enough to integrate socially and culturally to the host country and university.

A minority would even add a third semester for personal challenge, but from an educational perspective one year is adequate. On the contrary, some answers suggested that one year is not enough to integrate fully into other culture, since the exchange period covers major areas in education and life.

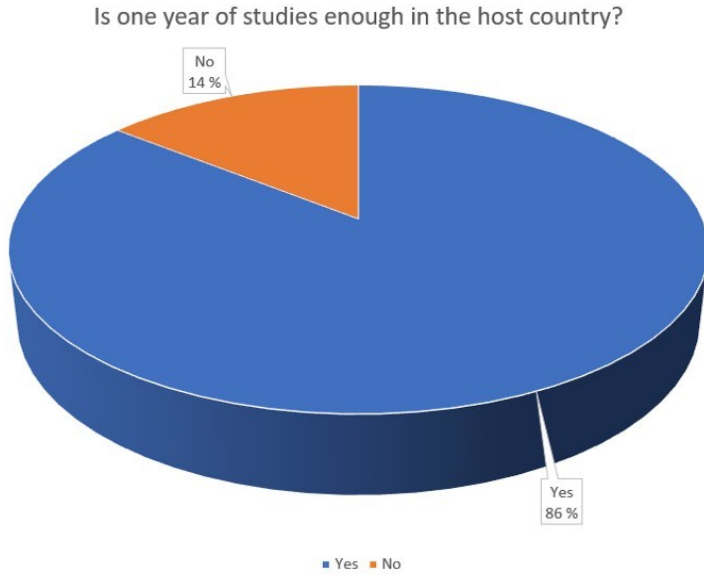


Table 3. Pie chart based on interview question

All of the interviewees agreed that there is no need to add cultural education in the host universities (Table 4). Approximately half of the universities offered cultural education for the incoming students. Living among and interacting with locals and studying with native students was unanimously found to be a more effective way to learn about the host country’s culture, than studying cultural courses in the university.

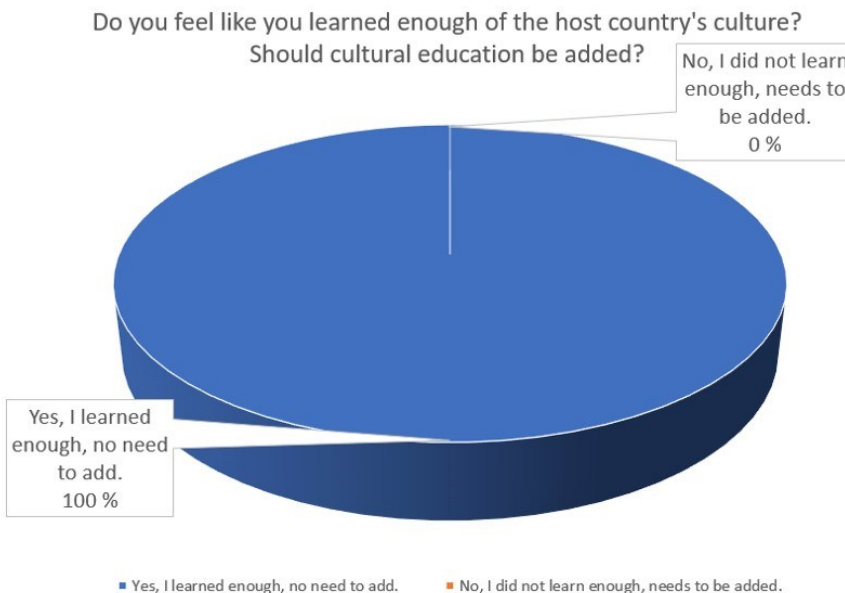


Table 4. Pie chart based on interview question

During the interviews, the author aimed to cover the subject of did the interviewees find the internationally conducted internship to be useful. 100 % of the interviewees found the internationally conducted internship to be useful. It is beneficial to be working and a foreign work culture and environment. During an international internship, the student learns how business is conducted in a foreign country, which can be seen as an advantage later on in working life. Completing the internationally conducted internship increases one's confidence, which lowers the step to aim towards internationalization in one's future career. It was brought up, that some companies require international experience from the applicant when recruiting. The internationally conducted internship provides international experience. The majority of interviewees felt that internationally conducted internship brings value to one's CV. It is also an opportunity to implement and develop one's international skills and competencies in real working life.

During the interviews, the author asked the interviewees if Double Degree has been beneficial for them in the labor market, or in their post-graduate studies. All of the interviewees thought that completing the Double Degree program has been beneficial for them to some extent (Table 5). The interview answers indicate that recruiters appreciate international experiences. Interview answers support the theoretical part of the thesis, where it was stated that international experience is valued and seen as an advantage in recruitment process.

The Double Degree process on CV reflects the applicant's cultural knowledge and international expertise such as linguistic skills and international networks. Moreover, it reflects to applicant's courage to go out of their comfort zone, their open-mindedness and broad perspective towards multicultural circumstances and international tasks. However, it seems that the concept of Double Degree is not widely known among recruiters. When the concept of Double Degree is explained, it is appreciated, and impresses recruiters. Completing Double Degree has helped graduates to receive internships, to be considered for a position in a company, and to get into master level post-graduate studies. In working life, competencies obtained during the Double Degree program have been exploited in positions and assignments such as customer relationships, customer management and international sales. In addition, these competencies act as a base for future personal development.

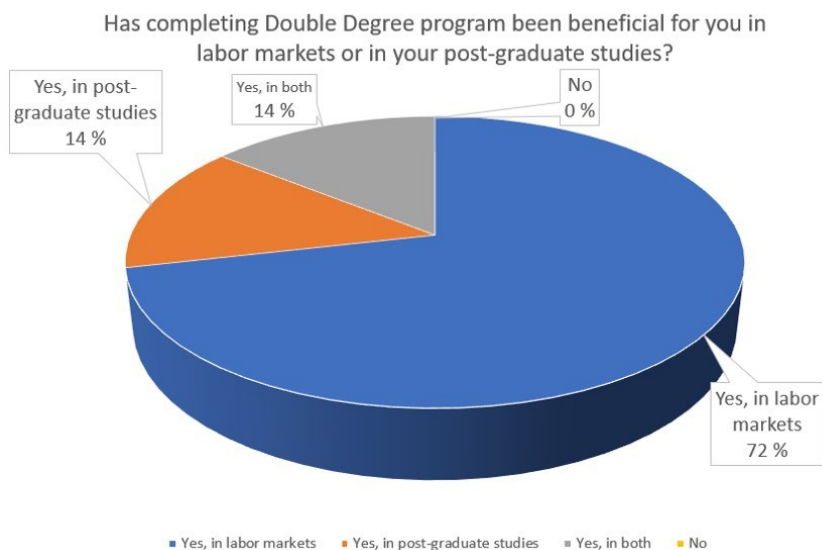


Table 5. Pie chart based on interview question

International competencies that were learned or enhanced during DD varied among interviewed students. The majority of the interviewees experienced an improvement in social skills, language and communication skills, and cultural knowledge (Table 6). These were the main competencies acquired or developed through the Double Degree process. Other skills acquired or enhanced during DD problem-solving skills, courage and confidence, teamwork skills, increased stress tolerance, and expanded international network. There are similarities between the skills and competencies presented in Table 6, and in Figure 2 of the theoretical research part of this thesis. In addition to previously mentioned skills, part of graduates experienced improvement in their time-managing skills, as well as enhanced discipline to follow their personal timeframes. Cultural knowledge can be exploited when encountering intercultural interactions in face-to-face, as well as to the extent of knowing how to paraphrase emails addressed to a representative of a certain culture or country.

The ways interviewees have been able to exploit their Double Degree program and the competencies acquired relate strongly on communicative and language skills. Fluency in foreign languages and cultural knowledge has a strengthening effect on work relationships, as well as customer relations. These competencies are useful in avoiding conflicts and misunderstandings. Part of the interviewees have been able to exploit their international networks acquired during DD in their current position. In addition, international studies and internationally conducted internship are both chances to gain field-specific expertise, which increases graduate's intellectual human capital for a company. Cultural knowledge has also

helped DD graduates in their post-graduate studies. Country-specific cultural knowledge can be exploited if continuing studies in the same country where DD was completed.

On the contrary, some answers stipulate that the Double Degree process and two certificates themselves have not been beneficial for graduates, but rather the enhanced competencies, personal attributes, and characteristics have provided them advantages needed working life.



Table 6. Bar chart based on interview question

9 CONCLUSION

During the Double Degree program, students learn international competencies and skills, which are needed in today's working life. These competencies contribute to student's ability to work in multicultural circumstances, international environments, and global assignments. The interview results indicate, that 100% of the interviewees have learned international competencies to some extent.

Based on the interviews, others have found the Double Degree to be more beneficial in labor markets or post-graduate studies than others. Depending on the current position, international competencies might not be needed. However, all of the interviewees agree, that when encountering multicultural situations, international competencies are valuable. International studies and internationally conducted internships during the Double Degree process provide broader educational background and international expertise for student.

Although it did not occur during the interviews, if the students have been employed merely because they had completed the Double Degree program and have two certificates from two different universities, the recruiters do see The Double Degree on CV as an advantage and as a proof of international expertise. A part of the interviewees had been considered for a position because they had completed the Double Degree program.

Based on the interview results, it is not possible to conclude, if the completion of Double Degree was the fundamental key factor for the graduate to find employment. However, based on the interviews, it has unquestionably had a positive impact on one's employability. Furthermore, completing SeAMK's Double Degree program enhances the student's employability as a result of increasing the graduate's intellectual human capital.

9.1 Future

In the future, it would be interesting to see the recruiter's perspective considering SeAMK's Double Degree program in employment. This would give a broader perspective towards the thesis topic. Moreover, discussing the differences in how Double Degree certificates from

different countries and universities are interpreted by the recruiters, would be beneficial for students aiming for an international career in a certain country.

Due to the prevalent coronavirus situation, universities have implemented virtual exchange study periods. Could these virtual exchange studies also be applied to the Double Degree program's exchange studies? On the other hand, virtual exchange studies supplant the element of encountering other cultures and ethnicities physically in real life. IC includes skills that could possibly be developed and improved through virtual exchange studies. However, are students willing to or interested in participating in the Double Degree program without the element of living and physically studying in a foreign country?

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions

1. What reasons got you interested in completing Double Degree program instead of normal Finnish degree?
2. Did you find the studies in host country to be useful? Why/why not?
3. Is one year of studies enough in the host country? Why/why not?
4. Do you feel like you learned enough of the host country's culture? Should cultural education in the host country be added?
5. Did you find the internationally conducted internship to be useful? Why/Why not?
6. Has your Double Degree been beneficial for you in the labor market or in your post-graduate studies? If so, in which way have you noticed it?
7. Do you feel like Double Degree process taught you international competencies or skills? If so, what kind of competencies or skills?
8. In what kind of position are you currently in working life, and do you feel like you can exploit the Double Degree in your current position?