

# How can they have seamless acculturation?

-Health and wellbeing of international nursing students in Novia

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## Summary

International students' decision to move abroad to further their studies is extremely challenging. This transition comes along with different challenges that they encounter in the host country. Despite the presence of the challenges of which some are inevitable the international students require seamless acculturation. This study aims to address the challenges faced by international students by providing possible solutions to ease their acculturation process thus improving their health and wellbeing.

Six international nursing students studying at Novia University of Applied, Vaasa participated in the semi structured interviews. They describe their experiences studying and living in Finland, they give suggestions that can help them and future coming international students have seamless acculturation that is essential for their health and wellbeing- Deductive analysis is used in analyzing collected data.

The results indicate that international students receive some support from professionals in the institution. Different suggestions are given that can support international students to have seamless acculturation. Extra-curricular activities can assist in the acculturation of international students since they can interact and communicate with others, acquire new friends, learn the local language and acquire knowledge of different cultures. An extra-curricular activities app is created to create more awareness of the available extra-curricular activities.

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# 1 Introduction

International students move abroad to further their education in different countries. Some of the international students have considered furthering their education in Finland because of the country's good higher education system. More than 20,000 international students are coming from different parts of the world pursuing different education on different levels in higher education institutions in Finland (Study in Finland, 2020; The Finnish National Agency for Education, 2020). The decision that international students make to study in a foreign country is extremely challenging because they encounter different challenges (Campbell, 2012, p. 206). There are different challenges experienced by international students such as health issues, acculturation, culture and communication. These challenges will be further discussed in this thesis.

Novia University of Applied Sciences is a Swedish speaking institution in Finland with campuses located in different bilingual (Finnish and Swedish speaking) coastal regions within Finland: Vaasa, Turku, Raasepori and Pietarsaari. The institution offers Bachelor's and Master's degree programs in Swedish and English language. This has provided international students the opportunity to study in English. The English nursing program is offered in Vaasa campus and annually the institution receives international students from different countries joining the institution (Nordregio, 2021; Novia University of Applied Sciences, 2021).

Exposure to a new culture can be experienced when one relocates to another country. It can be difficult to maintain one's own culture, interact with other cultures and participate in cultural groups. Berry discusses four strategies of acculturation namely assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization (Berry, 1997, p. 9). When international students experience a challenge or challenges during acculturation it can result in them having acculturative stress (Bertram et al., 2014, p. 108) which can be detrimental to their health and wellbeing. Oleribe et al. (2018, p. 2) stated that there are several definitions of health however there have been critiques on the World Health Organisation's definition of health.

International students are exposed to a new culture in the host country that they reside in. Therefore, when international students interact with the locals of the host country they both become informed and familiar with each other's culture and they acknowledge the cultural similarities and differences. Becoming aware and knowing other people's cultures helps promote cultural competence. Having local friends is essential for the acculturation of

international students (Campbell, 2012, pp. 219–222) however Li and Pitkänen (2018, p. 111) found that it is difficult for international students to acquire local friends in Finland due to insufficient local language skills.

There is little research that has been carried out on the acculturation of international students in higher education institutions in the host countries. This is because their move to the host countries is considered temporary and they are a foreign group that their arrival to the host countries is considered to have fewer problems therefore they are expected to acculturate on their own (Li & Pitkänen, 2018, p. 107). This leaves the international students to be the most vulnerable foreign group to acculturate in the host countries.

The host higher education institutions are the main source of support for international students. The host higher education institutions play a major role in improving the international students' lives within the institution and the community (Cho & Yu, 2015, pp. 13–14). Wellbeing is achieved by having more positive feelings and lesser negative feelings. Higher education institutions and some organizations strive to improve the wellbeing of international students but there is inadequate information on what they can do (Alharbi & Smith, 2018, p. 23).

My motivation in choosing this topic is because international students experience different challenges in the host country that they move to and some of the challenges are inevitable. It came to my attention that most research examined the challenges that international students face while less research has examined solutions to help them deal with the challenges that will enable them to have seamless acculturation. The challenges they experience interferes with the health and wellbeing of the international students. I also noticed that this research has not been conducted in Novia. Therefore, this study seeks to examine possible solutions that will enable the international students to have seamless acculturation that promotes their health and wellbeing. This work is done in cooperation with the international coordinator of Novia.

## **2 Aim and research questions**

When international students move abroad they experience different challenges as they try to acculturate to the new environment. Therefore, the interest in this topic was raised from the need for acculturation and support for becoming integrated. This study aims to address the challenges faced by international students by providing possible solutions to ease their acculturation process thus improving their health and wellbeing.

The research questions are:

1. What are the factors that can ease the acculturation of international students?
2. What are the interventions that can help improve the health and wellbeing of international students?
3. How can the different cultures be understood and respected?
4. What are the factors that can promote effective communication?

## **3 Background**

This thesis is built around the following concepts: health, acculturation, culture and communication. The concepts are obtained from the research questions that are to be addressed in this study. These concepts will be discussed in this chapter as well as information of international students studying in Finland.

### **3.1 Health**

There are several definitions for health (Oleribe et al., 2018, p. 2), according to World Health Organization (2020) health is “a state of complete of physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization, 2020). However, there are critiques on the WHO’s definitions of health this is because the word complete is used in the definition this is viewed to be absolute and challenging to measure. This has also raised questions as to whether it is realistic for a person not to have any physical, mental and social challenges (Oleribe et al., 2018, p. 2). Newton, Dooris and Wills noted in Europe the WHO book on Health Promoting Universities which was published in 1998 never resulted in the creation of a European Programme corresponding to Healthy

Cities, Health Promoting Institutions and Health Promoting Hospitals (Newton et al., 2016, p. 58).

Eriksson defines health as becoming in connection to greater wholeness to an individual's integration in life. Health is a movement that comprises three different levels: doing, being and becoming. Movement takes place when people encounter several challenges, needs or desires. Health as doing indicates that health is assessed by the outer objective criteria. Health as being means that individuals are aiming at having balance and harmony. Health as becoming means that suffering is not new to an individual. Therefore, health is both a movement and integration (Eriksson, 2006, pp. 56–57).

People's encounters in having a purpose in life are vital for their health. Even though people experience suffering they may acquire energy which comprises of faith, hope and love to become in health by having great respect for glory and holiness in life (Hemberg et al., 2016, pp. 394–398). Some individuals also believe that “health is wealth” this is because when an individual lacks good health then the person or community does not have the capability of functioning fully. Therefore, health is vital for people to be productive and happy (Oleribe et al., 2018, p. 2).

### **3.1.1 Mental wellbeing**

Mental wellbeing is a state that a person recognizes one's abilities, can handle the usual ups and downs in life and can work efficiently and effectively and be involved in society (World Health Organization, 2020). However, this definition differentiates hedonic wellbeing (being satisfied with life) and eudaimonic wellbeing (operating well psychologically) (de Cates et al., 2015, p. 195). Mental wellbeing is a state that a person is full of energy and enthusiasm, can work efficiently and effectively, acquire great relationships with other people and be involved in society. Mental wellbeing can be improved when a person meets individual and social goals and plays a role in the community (Mental Capital and Wellbeing, 2008, p. 10).

Mental wellbeing is the basis for positive health and efficacious functioning of people and society. Mental wellbeing is multi-dimensional and comprises emotional wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, social and family wellbeing. Mental wellbeing is viewed as a social asset. At a personal level mental wellbeing assists people to handle the demands of their daily living and things that they did not expect to occur. At a social level mental wellbeing promotes greater and sustainable social relationships and societies (Newbigging & Heginbotham, 2010, p. 12).



Mental wellbeing is achieved when an individual connects with others, becomes physically active, continuously learns, gives to others and becomes mindful. People are social beings and it is healthy for them to spend time with others for instance family or friends to promote their mental wellbeing. Spending time with others allows an individual to share one's encounters and receive emotional support from others. Social connectedness makes an individual feel a sense of belonging and feel worthy. It is also important for an individual to be active in life by indulging in physical activities not only is it important for one's physical health but also it promotes mental wellbeing since what the body does can influence the mind. Therefore, being physically active enables an individual to develop a positive mood hence prevents depression or anxiety. Being active promotes an individual's mental wellbeing because it increases their self-esteem, self-control and they can tackle challenges (Moodzone, 2018, pp. 512–513).

Mental wellbeing is attained when a person continuously learns or develops new skills for instance learn to play an instrument or cooking new foods, meet others and build relationships since in some cases it involves interactions. Developing new skills makes a person feel they have an achievement in life, satisfied and one becomes confident in what is learned this promotes their mental wellbeing. Giving to others can be done in several ways for instance being kind to others or volunteering in society and building relationships with others. Giving to others enables one to feel positive, become happy and satisfied with their deeds and this promotes their mental wellbeing. It is important to be mindful by being aware of the present moment that is how one thinks and how one feels. Being aware of the present allows a person to live a joyful life and have a better understanding this promotes their mental wellbeing (Moodzone, 2018, pp. 513–514).

Individual mental wellbeing can be measured. Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale is a scale that was developed in the United Kingdom to measure the wellbeing of people in different settings even in schools. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale entails eudaimonic and hedonic attributes of wellbeing (Clarke et al., 2011, p. 488).

### **3.1.2 Physical wellbeing**

The food and drinks that people consume daily can positively or negatively have an impact on their health and life. The lifestyle that people live has an impact on their lives. Exercising more often enables an individual to be happier and have low stressors in life. Therefore, individuals who have an increased level of physical wellbeing have control over their health,

frequently exercise, make good choices on what they consume and have sufficient sleep. It is essential for people to have sufficient sleep, exercise more often and consume healthy food to improve their physical wellbeing (Kruger, 2011, pp. 327–328).

Individuals that are not physically active are vulnerable to non-communicable illnesses such as type two diabetes, coronary heart disease, breast cancer and this is a global issue because it has health impacts (Lee et al., 2012, p. 6). Therefore, to prevent the issue of not being physically active people need to incorporate a planned physical or sports activity in their daily lives. This results in physical activity being recognized as a way of preventing and improving physical activity as the duty of public health. Having frequent physical activity improves physical wellbeing and growth of individual resources and social contacts and helps to promote a person's physical fitness. Good physical fitness helps improve a person's quality of life (Krug et al., 2013, p. 1).

Adults need to have a minimum of 2.5 hours per week on average physical activity. If one indulges in vigorous activity then he or she needs to spend 75 minutes (World Health Organization, 2020). When performing an activity one is required to do it for a minimum of 10 minutes with no breaks (Krug et al., 2013, p. 1). Rathnayake and Ekanayaka indicate that physical health is a vital factor for the life of students because it can interfere with their performance at the university and occupational life. Therefore factors that interfere with their physical health should be addressed (Rathnayake & Ekanayaka, 2016, p. 1030).

### **3.1.3 Social wellbeing**

Social wellbeing is the assessment of a person's situation and functioning in the community (Keyes, 1998, p. 122). Social wellbeing comprises of social contribution, social integration, social acceptance, social actualization and social coherence. Social contribution is an individual feel that their activities are appreciated by the society. Social integration is an individual feel that they are part and belong in the society. Social acceptance is being able to accept others regardless of the differences. Social actualization is having belief in others to develop positively. Social coherence is having an interest in the community (Blanco & Díaz, 2007, p. 63). Social wellbeing is associated positively with being involved in society, neighborhood health, being satisfied as well as being happy. People who are involved in the community feel socially integrated and appreciated than those who do not participate in the community (Keyes, 1998, pp. 130–133).

Having other people in a person's life is vital for one's social wellbeing. For example, acquiring new friends or a person feeling good when he or she is having a good time with friends is part of social wellbeing. There is a difference between the effect in relationships and social connectedness. People who encounter increased social wellbeing will relate with others positively. Individuals with an increased sense of wellbeing normally have positive relationships with other people. It is advisable to spend spare six hours daily to interact with other people to promote social wellbeing (Kruger, 2011, p. 327). People with social wellbeing can handle well difficulties in social roles. Young individuals are required to actively indulge in social activities since it helps in their growth and health. In several countries' health promotion is among the major aim of their health plans (Javadi-Pashaki & Darvishpour, 2018, p. 2).

#### **3.1.4 Subjective wellbeing**

According to Huppert and Cooper subjective wellbeing is the encounters that individuals go through in their lives (Huppert & Cooper, 2014, p. 2). Subjective wellbeing is a measure of how individuals evaluate their sense of individual wellbeing and the way they analyze their lives. Hence, it is a measure that reveals the level at which an individual views their involvement in their surroundings (Sibley et al., 2015, p. 2).

Subjective wellbeing comprises of correlated components: being satisfied with life, good and bad affect. Affect is the good and bad moods and emotions. Being satisfied with life is a cognitive sense of satisfaction with life. Both affect and satisfaction signify individual's assessment of their lives and situations. Subjective wellbeing entails both good and bad affective encounters of a person. High subjective wellbeing comprises of good affect and being satisfied with life as well as other areas in life for instance work and leisure. A person or community can have high subjective wellbeing in one of the components and low on the rest. Therefore all the components need to be evaluated. Subjective wellbeing is encountered when individuals can achieve their goals (Diener & Suh, 1997, pp. 200–205).

Subjective wellbeing scales do not measure the level at which individual adapt in a new surrounding instead it offers an indication on the degree in which an individual who moved to a new surrounding have been able to adapt to the new surrounding and have retained a sense of wellbeing (Sibley et al., 2015, p. 3). Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) was developed from the Quality of Life Scale by Cummins and his co-workers (Cummins, 1996, pp. 560–562). PWI is a scale that is used to measure the subjective wellbeing of individuals. It entails

questions that ask of individuals satisfaction with seven areas of life which includes: standard of living, individual's health, relationship with other people, achievements in life, connections in the society, individuals safety and future security (Lau et al., 2005, pp. 404–405).

### 3.1.5 Objective wellbeing

Objective wellbeing is wellbeing at the level of the community and the objective facts of people's lives (Huppert & Cooper, 2014, p. 2). Objective wellbeing is experienced when external factors affecting individuals' wellbeing are met to increase the quality of their life (Costanza et al., 2007, p. 269).

Objective wellbeing is experienced when one can recognize their ability as human beings and the community present them opportunities to be in existence, recognize their ability as human beings and can accomplish what they require to live a fulfilled life. Therefore, objective wellbeing comprises of these factors: stable income, housing status, education, quality of social and natural surroundings, safety and security and being able to have social and civil rights. These factors cover both material wellbeing and quality of life (Alatartseva & Barysheva, 2015, p. 38).

Objective wellbeing corresponds to an external view of wellbeing. Objective wellbeing is also referred to as economic wellbeing although it does not completely correspond with economic development because it relies on economic and non-economic factors as shown in the figure below (Ivković et al., 2014, p. 9).

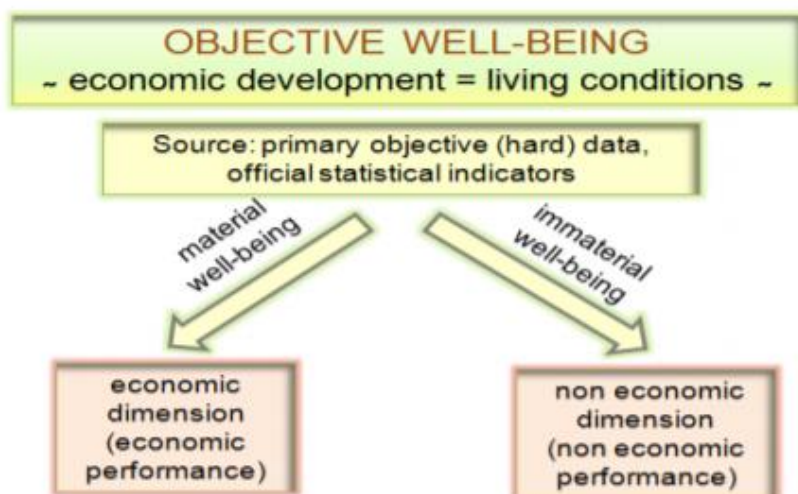


Figure 1: Dimensions of objective wellbeing (Ivković et al., 2014, p. 10)

Objective viewpoints of wellbeing are vital since they offer a wide variety of economic and non-economic indicators that represent the objective health of the community that can be observed (Ivković et al., 2014, p. 10). Both objective wellbeing and subjective wellbeing are essential for the wellbeing of people. Although objective wellbeing is characterized by external factors while subjective wellbeing is characterized by internal factors.

### **3.2 Acculturation**

Acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological change that occurs when a person is experiencing a new culture (Sam & Berry, 2010, p. 472) and it is not a place that individuals arrive at (Handelsman et al., 2005, p. 60). Acculturation is a situation that individuals experience upon moving to a new place with a different culture from their own culture. For them to live according to the new culture they change and do not live according to their culture (Redfield et al., 1936, p. 149).

A person who moves to a new country encounters a new culture and experiences the challenges of having to maintain one's own culture and interacting with other cultures and taking part in the cultural groups (Berry, 1997, p. 9). Berry (1997) came up with a framework to help understand acculturation and there are four strategies used in his framework namely assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization. Assimilation strategy is when people do not want to stick to their own cultural identity instead they want to spend more time in other cultures. Separation is when individuals stick to their own culture and do not want to be in contact with others. Integration is when individuals maintain their own culture at the same time they interact with other cultures. Marginalization is the inability to maintain one's own culture and lack of interest in having contact with others (Berry, 1997, p. 9).

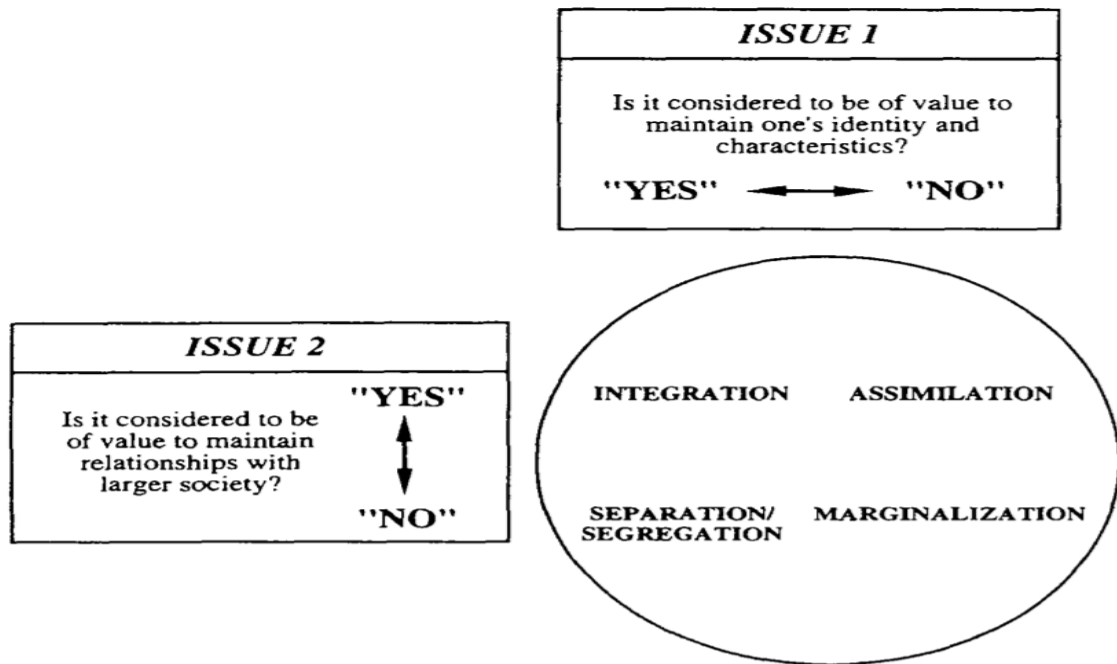


Figure 2: Acculturation strategies (Berry, 1997, p. 9)

Individuals in a new environment that has a new culture do select the acculturation strategy to use for them to acculturate in the community. The acculturation strategy that they select is influenced by the level of acculturative stress that they have encountered. In integration an individual encounters very little stress and he or she attempts to engage and adapt to the culture and creates contact with the community. In assimilation an individual attempts to engage in their culture but has less interest to have contact with the community and this results in moderate acculturative stress. In separation an individual does not engage in the new culture as well as having contact with the community. In marginalization an individual does not attempt to adapt to the new culture or have contact with the community and this results in high acculturative stress (Kalra & Sharma, 2014, p. 19)

Researchers have indicated that acculturation is a continuous process and individuals acculturate differently depending on age, sex, socioeconomic status and religion. Psychological adaptation is vital and helps to decrease the level of acculturation stress for instance anxiety, depression and self-esteem (Kalra & Sharma, 2014, p. 19).

A study conducted by Jasinskaja-Lahti and her colleagues on foreigners living in Finland indicates that in Finland majority of the hosts preferred integration-assimilation or assimilation and foreigners living in Finland who preferred separation perceived higher discrimination than those who chose integration or assimilation. Although most of the foreigners living in Finland preferred separation or integration-separation. The results from

the research also found that both separation and integration are adaptive for foreigners living in Finland (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2003, pp. 93–94).

### **3.3 Culture**

Culture is the knowledge acquired by a group of people. The knowledge encompasses values, beliefs and lifestyle. This has an impact on how they think, make decisions and how they behave. The knowledge is passed from one generation to another (Leininger & McFarland, 2002, p. 47). Culture is the way a particular group of people lives their life which encompasses beliefs, values, traditions, norms, dressing, language, the way they think and the way they behave. Culture has an impact on how individuals live their life, their identity and how they relate with people who are from their culture and people from other cultures (Papadopoulos, 2006, p. 10). Culture is a learned global view shared by a particular group passed socially from one person to another or from one generation to another this has an impact on their values, beliefs, customs and the way they behave which is mirrored in the language, cuisine and materials (Burchum, 2002, p. 7).

Culture is mostly unconscious has a great impact on health and illness. Health care providers are required to acknowledge, respect and incorporate patients' cultural beliefs and practices into their care plan. The health care professional should be culturally aware, culturally sensitive and have some level of cultural competence to be able to incorporate health beliefs and practices into their care plans. Cultural awareness enables one to appreciate other cultures and cultural sensitivity enables one not to do or say things that will offend people from other cultures (Purnell, 2005, p. 8).

#### **3.3.1 Cultural competence**

Cultural competence is a process that entails continuously acquiring more knowledge and skill that is concerning the aspects of cultural awareness, knowledge, understanding, sensitivity, interaction and skill (Burchum, 2002, p. 10). According to Campinha-Bacote (2002, p. 181), cultural competence is a continuous process that health care personnel constantly aim at attaining their capability to work successfully in accordance to the client (person, family, society) culture.

Some models were developed to help increase cultural competence in nursing (Nyback, 2008, p. 32). Campinha-Bacote's model of cultural competence shows that cultural competence is a continuous process and health care professionals can use the model to

provide quality care for people from different cultures putting into consideration their different cultures. The model consists of five stages: cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skills, cultural encounters and cultural desire (Campinha-Bacote, 2002, p. 181). These stages will be discussed later in this thesis.

Purnell developed a cultural competence model that is used by different healthcare disciplines though the model has been categorized to be complicated and holographic. The model contains twelve constructs that affect culture and four stages of cultural competence (Purnell, 2002, pp. 193–196). The model illustrates that cultural competence is a process and has different stages which include unconsciously incompetent, consciously incompetent, consciously competent and unconsciously competent (Jeffreys, 2005, p. 42).

For consciousness to take place an individual should be aware of one's cultural values, beliefs and practices and be aware of cultural diversity. Conscious incompetence is encountered when an individual is aware that they do not know about other people's cultures. Conscious competence takes place when an individual becomes educated about other cultures confirms the generalization of the client and offers care according to the client's culture (Jeffreys, 2005, pp. 42–43). Unconscious competence is hardly achieved by the health care providers and it is risky since people's differences are found in certain cultural groups. It is vital for them to constantly aim at being consciously competent (Jeffreys, 2005, p. 43; Purnell, 2005, p. 9).

Papadopoulos, Tilki and Taylor developed Papadopoulos, Tilki and Taylor (PTT) model for cultural competence to be used by the health care providers when they are providing care for patients coming from different cultures. The model has different stages namely: cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural sensitivity and cultural competence (Papadopoulos, 2006, pp. 9–10).

The cultural competence of health care professionals ensures that the care they provide is culturally appropriate and caters for the culture of the clients. Therefore, culturally competent care is valuable, safe and fulfilling to the clients because their cultural needs are met (Burchum, 2002, p. 10).

Cultural competence promotes understanding and relations of different cultures. It also changes people's perception of other people's cultures; therefore, it is vital to understand their culture. As people interact with others they establish a shared social world and cultural competence which helps prevent misunderstandings that might arise between individuals from different cultures (Nieto & Zoller Booth, 2010, pp. 408–412).



Cultural incompetence care can lead to cultural blindness, cultural imposition, cultural bias and cultural pain (Leininger & McFarland, 2002, pp. 51–52). Cultural blindness is a situation when a person does not realize how some situations can be viewed by other cultures because of the thought that one's culture is better or superior (Leininger & McFarland, 2002, p. 52). An individual is referred to be blind because he or she does not know the differences and similarities of different cultures and they offer the same treatment to all clients. Providing the same care to all the clients hinders the provision of care according to the client's culture (Jeffreys, 2005, p. 43).

When culture imposition is experienced by the clients from health care providers it leaves them vulnerable since they are expected to do things or things done to them according to the health care professionals' culture and not according to their culture. A person who is culturally bias is unable to work well with people from different cultures because they have fixed thoughts. This can lead to negative relationships with patients and colleagues. The majority of the nurses learn about psychophysical pain but hardly about cultural pain. Cultural pain may occur when a health care professional says or do something that is not in line with the clients' culture (Leininger & McFarland, 2002, pp. 51–52).

### **3.3.2 Cultural competence in educational sectors**

In educational sectors cultural competence is experienced when teachers can teach effectively students that are from various cultures (Moule, 2011, p. 5). Cultural competence encompasses actions, mindsets and policies that are placed for the professionals that allow them to work successfully with people from different cultures (Cross, 1989, p. 13). Cultural competence is a continuing process though complicated and it is viewed to be a difficult process. The cultural framework comprises macro-level factors that affect patients' health conditions and the quality of health care offered. The cultural framework also proposes teaching and learning methods that are essential to enable the students to develop cultural competence (Koskinen et al., 2012, p. 318).

Being aware of other cultures is important and helps in the teaching of every student. Lack of cultural competence can lead to misunderstandings between the lecturers and international students. However, teachers that are aware of other cultures can relate well with the international students and this helps to prevent misunderstandings. Also, the international students should be aware of the classroom culture of the host country to ease their integration and the local students can gain cultural competence from the cultural diversity of the

institution. Therefore, institutions that work towards intercultural understanding are viewed to be valuing and respecting diversity (Nieto & Zoller Booth, 2010, pp. 417–422).

International students do experience new teaching and studying approaches when they are in a new country. The exams are set in a way that they are not conversant with and they can be required to have discussions in class (Goldis & Cuza, 2012, p. 193). Research conducted by Alshafi and Shin shows that Saudi students were not conversant with the Australian education system and it was challenging to them because their system of education was mostly writing exams and they did not have oral presentations. In Australia, they were evaluated based also on oral presentation (Alshafi & Shin, 2017). Also, there are cultures that the students are not required to speak unless they are asked by the lecturer to do so. In some cultures the students are required to learn by heart what they have been taught instead of querying and sharing their ideas (Goldis & Cuza, 2012, p. 193).

International students when they are in a host country they are exposed to a new culture that has different norms and values and this can lead to cultural differences which can also lead to isolation from the locals. This was found among the Taiwanese students studying in America who came from a culture of collectivism. However, in America they encountered an individualistic society (Swagler & Ellis, 2003, p. 433). International students experience problems adapting to the new teaching and studying culture and adapting socially in the host community. The difference in culture that international students encounter in a new environment includes the way of living, traditions and values which can affect them mentally and emotionally (Gu, 2009, p. 45). Therefore international students need to receive cultural competence because culture difference affects them academically and socially (Alshafi & Shin, 2017, p. 55).

### **3.4 Communication**

Communication is a vital skill however people learning a foreign language encounter difficulty communicating on various levels. Therefore, for the non-native speakers to communicate easily they are required to have a way that they can convey their ideas well (Hua et al., 2012, p. 832). The native speakers and learners when they communicate they have difficulty having the required expression or grammatical structure to have the message that they have to convey understood (Faucette, 2001, p. 1). In healthcare effective communication between the nurse and patient leads to effective nursing care (Sheldon et al., 2006, p. 141).

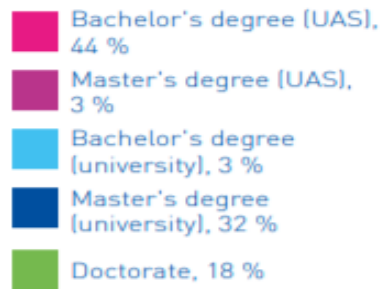
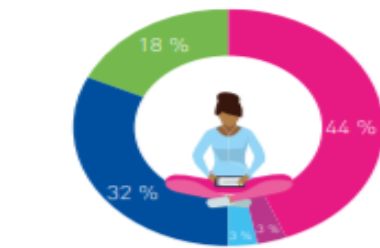
Language barrier occurs when a person is not able to communicate with others because they have different languages thus hindering them from understanding each other. Individuals who travel to another country experience a language barrier. International students experience a language barrier which is a major issue since it leads to helplessness, stress and anxiety. One should be fluent in a language to have effective communication and understanding with others. Therefore, when the international students are not competent in a language it can affect their studies because they are unable to understand their lecturers and other students as well as participating in class (Goldis & Cuza, 2012, pp. 191–192). Previous research conducted by Alshafi and Shin on Saudi students studying in Australia indicates that they were not able to perform well in their academics because they were evaluated based on participation in discussions and oral presentation and this required them to be fluent in English (Alshafi & Shin, 2017, p. 68)

Intercultural communication is communication that occurs between people who are from different cultures (Gudykunst, 2003, p. 1). Intercultural communication incompetence hinders effective intercultural communication to occur and this has a negative impact on the international students' mental wellbeing (Lê & Yue, 2013, p. 120). When international students are not able to communicate in a foreign language it hinders their interaction with others in the host society. Inability to understand another language and communicate affects their wellbeing (Goldis & Cuza, 2012, p. 192).

### **3.5 International students in Finland**

Finland has a good higher education system and this has attracted the interest of many international students to travel to Finland to further their education. In Finland, there are more than 20,000 international students in higher education institutions that is universities and universities of applied sciences (Study in Finland, 2020). International students come to Finland to pursue different education on different levels and this includes Bachelors, Masters and Doctorates. Though a high number of international students are pursuing their bachelors. They come from Europe, Asia, Africa, North America and Latin America. However, the highest number is from Asia and the majority of the students are from Russia, Vietnam, China and Nepal (The Finnish National Agency for Education, 2020).

## FOREIGN STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION



## CONTINENT

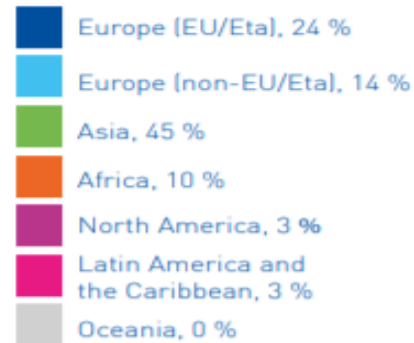
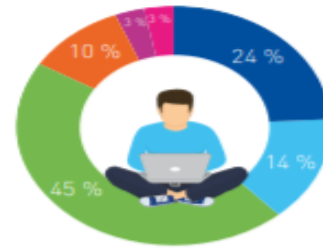


Figure 3: International students' statistics on level of education and continents (The Finnish National Agency for Education, 2020)

## 4 Theoretical framework

Campinha-Bacote model (2002) the Process of Cultural Competence in the Delivery of Healthcare Services perceives cultural competence as a continuous process that health care personnel constantly aim at attaining their capability to work successfully in accordance to the client (person, family, society) culture. According to the model, health professionals should view themselves as becoming culturally competent instead of being culturally competent. The process comprises of five concepts namely cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skill, cultural encounters and cultural desire (Campinha-Bacote, 2002, p. 181).

Culture awareness is creating consciousness of culture and how culture influences values and beliefs. Cultural awareness incorporates an understanding of an individual's own culture. Self-examination of an individual's cultural background enables an individual to start identifying one's beliefs that are ethnocentric, biased or prejudiced. The understanding that one has enables him or her to appreciate other cultures and be able to tell the differences and similarities of other cultures apart from an individual's own culture (Burchum, 2002, p.

7). However, lack of cultural awareness can lead to cultural imposition by the health care professionals to their clients (Leininger & McFarland, 2002, p. 51)

Cultural knowledge is a process of receiving education about different cultures and ethnic groups. When receiving knowledge of different cultures and ethnic groups health care professionals should concentrate on integrating health related beliefs, cultural values, illness occurrence and prevalence and treatment effectiveness (Lavizzo-Mourey, 1996, p. 919). Cultural knowledge is vital because it helps one to understand other people's cultures (Burchum, 2002, p. 7).

Health care professionals receive knowledge of the patient's health related beliefs and values by being acquainted with their global view. Patients' global view illustrates how a person understands illness and how it directs one's thinking, doing, and being. Health care professionals need to know about the frequency of the illness in different ethnic groups. They need to know about the treatments for different ethnic groups. When health care professionals are receiving knowledge they should keep in mind that in each ethnic group people are also different and they should handle a person as an individual and avoid stereotyping. Hence, health care professionals should perform cultural assessments for every patient (Campinha-Bacote, 2002, p. 182).

Cultural skill is being able to gather required cultural information of a patient's issue and meticulously conducting physical assessment established on culture. This process requires one to be able to perform cultural assessments and physical assessments established on culture (Campinha-Bacote, 2002, p. 182). According to Leininger (1978), cultural assessment is a "systematic appraisal or examination of individuals, groups, and communities as to their cultural beliefs, values, and practices to determine explicit needs and intervention practices within the context of the people being served" (Leininger, 1978, pp. 85–86).

Cultural skill is needed when a health care professional is carrying out a physical assessment on patients from different ethnic groups. A health care professional is required to know the patient's physical, biological and physiological differences to perform precise and relevant physical evaluation (Campinha-Bacote, 2002, p. 182). Therefore, culturally skilled health care professionals can perform accurate and appropriate health assessment on individuals from different cultures (Burchum, 2002, p. 10).

Cultural encounter is a process that enables a health care professional to be able to have a one on one interaction with patients from various cultures. In case of language barrier, a professional interpreter should be used to help in the communication between the health care professional and the patient. Unprofessional interpreters should not be used because they do not know medical terms but if they are used the health care professional might end up not obtaining the required and relevant information (Campinha-Bacote, 2002, p. 182).

Cultural desire is an inspiration of health care professionals to want instead of to have to. It involves the four discussed stages of cultural competence. Cultural desire entails caring and it is vital for health care professionals to have a genuine desire to offer care to patients according to the different cultures. Cultural desire entails a real passion for being open and flexible with people, acknowledge differences and create similarities and one should be ready to learn from people about different cultures (Campinha-Bacote, 2002, p. 183). This learning is a lifetime process and is known as cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p. 123).

## **5 Methodology**

Qualitative research method is chosen for the study since it aims at capturing and explaining how international students narrate their health and wellbeing and the process of acculturation during their study time and how it can be supported.

### **5.1 Qualitative research methodology**

Qualitative research is a type of social inquiry that is used to find out participants' encounters, behaviors, feelings and what is vital in their lives (Holloway & Wheeler, 2009, p. 3). Qualitative research is people centered and it gives the participants enough room to talk about their encounters in life, express their attitude, tell how they feel and air out their opinions (Ellis, 2016, p. 26). Qualitative research is used because the study aims to find out the problems experienced by the participants and come up with ideas to assist solve the problems. Therefore, the objective of qualitative research is to help understand social phenomena from the opinions and encounters of the studied group (Brookes, 2007, p. 32; Pope & Mays, 1995, p. 43). Qualitative research helps to learn more about the phenomenon and obtain in-depth and new understanding (Dongre et al., 2010, p. 1).

Qualitative research data is obtained from narratives provided by the participants. The qualitative method used to collect data is interview since it is a suitable method to help answer the research questions. The interview helps to find out participants' encounters, cultures and situations in depth. The research questions influence the selection of the method that is used for the study. After the collection of data the next step is the analysis of data. In data analysis the concepts in the background are used as themes from the transcribed material a search is made to find all quotations that link to themes that are clustered into categories. Further search is made to find all quotations that link to categories that are clustered into subcategories (Gerrish & Lathlean, 2015, p. 22; Speziale et al., 2011, p. 21).

## **5.2 Data collection**

Interview is used as an instrument for data collection. For this study semi structured interview with open-ended questions is used (appendix II) this enables the participants to share their experiences on the topic of study. The advantages of using interviews are that more information is received from the participants and they give well thought answers. The discussions are better since it allows both parties to be on the same page during the interview sessions. The disadvantages of using interviews are that the collection of data more so data analysis is time consuming and tiresome (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 10; Glasper & Rees, 2016, p. 99; Holloway & Galvin, 2016, p. 104).

A semi structured interview guide is used (appendix II) which assists in the coverage of every topic that should be covered. The semi structured interview gives room to change the sequence of the questions to keep the discussion flowing instead of having a typical question and answer session (Gerrish & Lathlean, 2015, p. 260; Glasper & Rees, 2016, p. 99; Holloway & Galvin, 2016, p. 90). Prior to the main interview a pilot interview is conducted to identify areas that require improvements. Piloting is essential especially when interviewing since it gives room to practice how to use the recording device. Piloting helps avoid any mistakes that may arise during the main interview (Gerrish & Lathlean, 2015, p. 397; Glasper & Rees, 2016, p. 99). After the pilot interview the main interviews are conducted. The participants study at the university level in the second and third year of their studies. The participants give their consent before the interview takes place. The interview is recorded and then transcribed (Gerrish & Lathlean, 2015, p. 260).

### **5.3 Qualitative data analysis**

The analysis is built around the following concepts: health, acculturation, culture and communication which are described in the background. The concepts guide the analysis by forming the data analysis. The purpose of using qualitative data analysis is to make sense of the different, numerous and non-numeric data (De Chesnay, 2014, p. 1). Qualitative content analysis is used because it assists in analyzing high volume of text that is obtained from the transcribed interview (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 114).

Deductive analysis is used for this study. According to Elo & Kyngäs, the stages for deductive analysis are preparation, organizing and reporting. The recorded interviews are transcribed and then a categorization matrix is created to assist in the analysis of the collected data. The analysis matrix consists of themes which further in the analysis process generate categories and subcategories. The concepts guiding this study are health, acculturation, culture and communication that are presented in the background. These concepts are used as themes in the analysis matrix and manifest content analysis is adopted. The analysis process begins with clustering quotations under the themes the clustered quotations form categories. The next step is to cluster quotations under categories to form subcategories. (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, pp. 109–111; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 111).

## **6 Ethical consideration**

Ethical issues put in place by the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics are used as guidelines during the research. The guidelines are observed during the entire period of data collection. The participants are provided with clear information about the study to gain their consent so that they can participate in the study. The participants are informed about the study that is what the study entails, the aim of the study and the length of the interview. The participants are informed that the participation is voluntary and they can withdraw at any point during the interview therefore participants' autonomy is respected (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2020).

The data collected from the participants are protected this means that the recorded data and transcribed information are stored safely. Storing the data safely ensures that the information provided by the participants is treated with confidentiality and used for the aim of the study. Participants identity is kept anonymous although the information that they provide is used in the study (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2020).



## **7 Conduction of the study**

The participants study at the university level in the second and third year of their studies. I directly approached some participants and through them I used snowball method to acquire other participants. To those who showed interest a letter of consent (appendix I) was sent to their email informing them what the interview is all about, the aim of the study, the duration of the interview, they are informed that the participation is voluntary and they can withdraw at any point, the information that they provide will be kept anonymous and confidential. A pilot interview was conducted on 10.11.2020 but it is not included as part of the collected data during analysis of this study.

There are six participants in the interviews three are in the second year and three are in the third year of their studies. Prior to the main interview the participants gave their consent that they are willing to participate in the interview by replying to the email that contains the letter of consent. Due to the corona situation some of the interviews were conducted via the telephone while some of the participants opted for face to face interview. However, recording is made in all the interviews which are conducted on 12.11.2020-31.12.2020.

## **8 Results**

Results are presented in this chapter. The concepts in the background study that are: health, acculturation, culture and communication will be used to create a categorization matrix. The quotations from the transcribed information which relates to these concepts will be clustered to form categories and subcategories. Six participants who participated in the semi structured interviews share their experiences and give suggestions on what can be done to promote their health and wellbeing.

Table 1: Categorization matrix for data analysis

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>CATEGORIES</b>	<b>SUBCATEGORIES</b>
<b>HEALTH</b>	Extra-curricular activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mental issues</li> <li>- Acquiring new friends</li> </ul>
	Support system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Psychologist</li> <li>- Nurses and doctors</li> <li>- Student Planner</li> <li>- Teachers and teacher tutor</li> </ul>
	Exercise	
<b>ACCULTURATION</b>	Language classes/courses	
	Social contact/Interaction	
	Environment and seasonal changes	
	Housing	
<b>CULTURE</b>	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Finnish culture</li> <li>- International students' culture</li> </ul>
	Dressing	
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	Opportunities to exercise language skills	
	Awareness of available activities	

## 8.1 Health

In health I found these categories: extra-curricular activities, support system and exercise. In the extra-curricular activities category I found subcategories: mental issues and acquiring new friends. In the support system category I found these subcategories: psychologist, nurses and doctors, student planner, teachers and teacher tutor. International students should indulge in extra-curricular activities because from there they can acquire friends that help promote their wellbeing. It is also important for them to indulge in physical activities for

them to be physically fit and it is good for their health. Having good health enables one to function well in the society that they reside in.

### **8.1.1 Extra-curricular activities**

Having extra-curricular activities within the institutions is vital and international students participating helps promote their wellbeing as some might be going through mental issues or even not having friends that make them feel lonely and interferes with their wellbeing.

#### **Mental issues**

Some of the participants stated that international students experience mental issues such as anxiety, depression and loneliness. These mental issues can interfere with their mental wellbeing therefore they suggested that the school should work towards having more extra-curricular activities with economic support so that they can spend their spare time with other people to improve their mental wellbeing.

Organizing more extra-curricular activities for the international students promotes their wellbeing since they are experiencing acculturative stress. However, the international students require economic support on the organized extra-curricular activities because the extra-curricular activities might not be pocket friendly and this can hinder the international students from participating in the extra-curricular activities.

*“the school can also try to organise more extra curriculum activities available for all try to make them either cheap or free.... if students like the tutors can discuss among each other and may be try to see how they can organise some activity for all the students that can also improve the wellbeing when it comes to anxiety, depression and loneliness” (Respondent 2)*

International students lack family and friends to spend time with when they are in a foreign country. Therefore they feel lonely, stressed and some can end up being depressed which interferes with their health, mental wellbeing and this can have a negative impact on their academic performance at school. Therefore, the institution should work towards providing economic support on the organized extra-curricular activities so that the international students can spend their spare time participating in extra-curricular activities than them staying at home. As much as international students go abroad to study their experiences should be made fun and interesting by them being able to participate in different activities, meeting different people and receiving help when they need it. These enable them to create good memories of their studies abroad.

### **Acquiring new friends**

International students need to acquire new friends when they move to study abroad because their friends and family are in their home countries. Lack of friends can lead to loneliness. To promote the social wellbeing of the international students there should be activities, events and social gatherings that expose the international students to other students and people living in Vaasa. These platforms enable them to interact with others, know each other better and make friends with them.

International students can acquire friends through different activities for instance playing football, indoor soccer (futsal) and table tennis (ping pong). The activities allow the international students to build relationships with other students. However, international students require economic support for the activities offered by the institution. Receiving economic support encourages international students to participate in the activities.

*“to make the students like may be a discount or an offer to make them go there and play football or futsal whatever it is and play ping pong and they can make like good friends may be they are international students also instead of like so, it will be away of them being able to make friends from those clubs.” (Respondent 5)*

International students do interact with the local students on very few occasions. However, the international students and local students should interact more often. Organizing an event such as cultural day enables the international students to mingle and interact with local students from this event they can build friendships since they will know each other better by telling where they come from and becoming familiar with each other’s culture.

*“a cultural day in school cause I would love I would really love opportunity to mingle the other like with the Finnish and the Swedish students because that’s something I don’t get to do a lot whenever we do it its really interesting.” (Respondent 2)*

By going to church or attending social gatherings international students can expand their territories. When they go to church they can meet other people that they share the same religion and they can acquire new friends from there because they share the common interest that is religion.

*“Going to church or social gatherings church and it helps it promotes is good.” (Respondent 5)*

International students can acquire friends within the community that is the people residing in Vaasa (locals and immigrants) by inviting them to an international café organized by the institution. This event allows the international students to talk and mingle with people living in Vaasa because where food is involved people have to talk since they may want to know more about the food the person they are talking to and one conversation leads to the other. By doing this the international students can meet and make friends not only with students at the institution but also with other people living in Vaasa (locals and immigrants).

*“if we make food from different countries and then we like we put it to all the local people in Vaasa that Novia school will be opening their doors and they have made foods from different countries and they are inviting you to come and taste the food yea because then it’s like we mingle with the society.” (Respondent 3)*

Activities, events and social gatherings are some of the platforms that international students can acquire new friends. International students should be encouraged to participate in activities by the institution providing economic support and having different activities so that they can participate in what they are interested in. International students who participate in extra-curricular activities have the opportunity to meet people from different cultures, interact with them, learn from them and become friends with them. Some of the new friendships can be built based on a common interest in the activity they do or religion. The institution should inform international students of the available religions in Vaasa by giving them websites of the different religions in Vaasa or giving them flyers when they join the institution. The institution should organize the international café yearly in autumn when the first year students join the institution so that the international students can have an opportunity of knowing and making friends with other students and people living in Vaasa at the early stages of studying abroad. Acquiring new friends helps prevent loneliness and promotes the social wellbeing of international students.

### **8.1.2 Support system**

International students do experience several challenges some of which are inevitable therefore they require a support system that can help them navigate through the challenges that they are experiencing. The institution has professionals who assist students when they are facing different challenges. The participants have received help from the psychologist, nurses and doctors, student planner, teachers and teacher tutor at the institution.

## **Psychologist**

The institution has a psychologist who helps students both academically and when they are facing difficulties in their personal life. The international students receive help from the psychologist when they have problems and they are advised on different study methods to help them excel in their studies but those who do not seek help should be advised to do so.

International students receive help from the institution's psychologist whenever they have any challenge. The institution's psychologist provides support to students experiencing different challenges with their studies and personal life. The services provided by the psychologist are free.

*“I was going through some problems with some students and then I was I needed motivation to do my thesis so I was able to use the school psychologist which is free and he is willing to help you in your studies and if you have difficulties you know also in your personal life somehow he is could he is willing to help you.” (Respondent 1)*

Some international students come from countries that have tropical climate. However, in Finland these international students experience different seasons. They find it very difficult to cope with the seasons in Finland and some can fall out in some seasons. Therefore, these international students should be encouraged to seek help from the institution’s psychologist when they are experiencing any difficulty in coping in any season. The psychologist offers help that promotes the international student’s wellbeing.

*“we could tell them to speak out if they experience like falling out in this season cause in this season you can like actually develop depression and stuff so we could help them tell them if you feel you know like you are falling out of course we have a psychologist that school gives we could tell them you just book an appointment and go talk to them.” (Respondent 3)*

The free psychologist services offered by the institution have been beneficial to international students. International students receive help from the psychologist whenever they are experiencing any challenge. However, international students should be encouraged to visit the institution’s psychologist whenever they have a problem because some of them come from countries whereby visiting a therapist is not considered to be a way of solving problems instead they have other ways of solving problems.

### **Nurses and doctors**

The institution has nurses and doctors who provide health care services to the students. The international students use the health care services and they are satisfied with the health care services. However, some international students have health problems and they require some education on healthy eating habits or nutrition.

International students are satisfied with the health care services offered at the institution. The health care personnel provide excellent health care services to the international students and in case there is a referral to a specialist the international students experience a short waiting time for them to receive treatment.

*“I have used the health care services and it was really amazing I got the opportunity to be directed by the school nurse to a specialist and the waiting time was really short so I really enjoyed that.” (Respondent 2)*

The health care personnel are understanding and friendly they make the international students feel comfortable when they seek health care services even if international students are scared of the procedure that the health care personnel have to perform. International students receive advice concerning their health from health care personnel.

*“they are like really good people they understand you they make you feel comfortable even though you are in a situation where you are like am really scared or I don’t want but they really make you feel comfortable they are really nice they talk to you really nicely and they give you advices about your health.” (Respondent 3)*

However, international students require education on nutrition or healthy eating habits since some of them have health problems and they do not know the type of foods they should consume in Finland. It might be difficult for them to find some of the foods that they used to consume in their home countries because those foods are not available in Finland.

*“back in our home town or country the type of food that we used to eat according to the environment was different and that was ok and good maybe but the same kind of food maybe if we want to eat here might not suit with the environment so like I think like some we should have like some type of education as a student and like what type of food should we eat or like especially like some of us we have health problems but we don’t know where to go and ask for and so like some education should be given to us.” (Respondent 6)*

International students are satisfied with the health care services offered at the institution however they need education on the type of foods they should consume in Finland since they are not able to find all types of foods that they used to consume in their home countries. This will help them because some of them have health problems and they are unable to find the foods they used to consume in their home countries. Some of the international students tend to stick to foods that they are familiar with and they end up lacking some nutrients in their meals which is detrimental to their health. Other international students can develop some food intolerance while they are studying abroad therefore they should report the situation to the health care personnel and they need education on the type of foods they should consume. Therefore, education on nutrition or healthy eating habits will help the international students consume food that is safe and good for their health.

### **Student planner**

The institution has a student planner who helps students organize and plan their studies. International students who lag behind with their studies due to various reasons receive help from the student planner who engages the international students when making a plan for their studies and their views and opinions are put in place to have a plan that best fits each international student.

The institution's student planner assists international students to plan their studies. This is helpful for international students who lag behind with their studies due to various reasons. International students discuss the progress of their studies and the challenges they are facing with the student planner. The student planner works together with international students to make a study plan that is suitable for them so that international students can proceed smoothly with their studies. This promotes their mental wellbeing.

*“the school usually have this the student planner and also you get to meet so when she sees that ok you studies is not going as it should.....you get to discuss about your studies and how it’s going for you in that way it’s pretty good because in that way it helps to strengthen mental wellbeing of the student so in that way if you tell her you are facing difficulties so then you try to see how to make it work for you like the way like how it suits you best they are able to listen to your opinion and see how it works best for you.” (Respondent 1)*

The student planner at the institution provides help for international students. Some of the international students can be lagging behind with their studies because of the different challenges that they are experiencing that have a negative impact on their studies. Therefore, having a student planner who works together with international students to ensure they make



a plan that best suits international students improves the mental wellbeing of international students. The support that international students receive from the student planner enables them to progress well in their studies since international students do not have to figure it all out by themselves.

### **Teachers and teacher tutor**

The teachers at the institution are friendly, supportive and understanding. When international students are experiencing academic challenges or personal challenges the teachers are willing to provide support to them.

The institution has a good learning environment that allows international students to communicate with the teachers via email when they have any question or enquiry and most of the teachers are prompt in responding to the emails. Therefore, international students can receive help from the teachers whenever they need it regardless of the proximity.

*“we have this nice learning environment where we can email our teachers any time and then whenever they can they try as much as possible to reply to us yea and they do most of them they do it quiet fast yea so that makes it easy for me like since I struggle quite a lot there are teachers who are available to help me.” (Respondent 2)*

Teachers at the institution friendly, understanding and supportive. When an international student misses a class due to various reasons and is unable to understand what was taught. The teacher makes sure that the international student understands whatever was taught that is unclear for the international student. This enables the international student to proceed well with the studies.

*“teachers especially they are very friendly and understanding and whenever I had any problem like in case am skipping a class or in case am not getting something I ask again and again the teachers are they are really good.” (Respondent 4)*

International students are satisfied with the teachers' support because the teachers are concerned about international students' studies and they support international students whenever they need help.

*“I feel satisfied because when you have a teacher that are really concerned about your studies and your everything in school.” (Respondent 3)*

The teacher tutor always checks up on the international students annually to find out how they are faring on with their studies and life in general. Therefore, international students can discuss with the teacher tutor the progress of their studies and their personal life. In case the international students are facing any challenge the teacher tutor advises accordingly.

*“I know our school tries to do that I think every may be twice in a year we get a day with our tutor and she gets to talk to us and ask how everything is.....I have had the opportunity to have one on one counselling session with the teacher and that was really amazing.”*  
(Respondent 2)

International students are satisfied with the teachers because they are friendly, helpful understanding, patient and concerned about their studies. This creates a good learning environment and promotes good teacher-student relationships. International students can receive help from the teachers wherever they are by sending an email to them. Also, the different online platforms (Teams, Webex, Zoom) that the institution has been constantly using since corona started have made it easy for the international students to have discussions and meetings with the teachers when they have questions or experiencing any difficulties. The teacher tutor helps international students not only academically but also with their personal problems and at times the teacher tutor refers international students to the people who can provide the help that they need. This improves the wellbeing of international students since they can receive help whenever they need it.

### **8.1.3 Exercise**

Exercise is good for health and people should indulge in exercise. However, most international students do not indulge in physical activities. Therefore, the institution should have clubs that offer physical activities for international students to participate in.

Most international students do not indulge in exercise because they might not know the positive impact that exercise has on their health and wellbeing. International students should incorporate exercise into their daily life to promote their health and wellbeing.

*“am sure it is not with us might be with some students but many like me am not so good I don't pay much attention to this exercise and training and all but it is quite good that we should do like we don't may be understand the importance of this like we should this is one other thing for international students like we should understand this should be part of our life exercise and training all these things.”* (Respondent 6)

There is a need for different sports clubs that international students can join. The sports clubs can comprise volleyball, football, table tennis (ping pong) and indoor soccer (futsal). Having a variety of sports clubs allows the international students to choose and participate in sport or sports that they are interested in.

*“people need like an institution to have like sport clubs like may be volleyball club or football whatever it is and ping pong or like this futsal.” (Respondent 5)*

International students should indulge in exercises because exercises will keep them fit and improve their health and wellbeing. The institution can form clubs that students can do exercise like running, jogging and have different sports clubs to allow the international students to join the clubs that they are interested in. The institution can enquire with the international students before they join the institution about the sports they like so that they can form the clubs before the students begin their studies.

## **8.2 Acculturation**

In acculturation I found these categories: language classes or courses, social contact or interaction, environmental and seasonal changes and housing. For international students to acculturate to the new environment they need to learn the language that they can use to interact and communicate with the locals (students and non-students). They will also experience changes in the environment and weather. Therefore, they should be advised on how they can cope during different seasonal changes in Finland. International students require an apartment to live in when they move abroad so they should be informed of the available housing companies available in the area that they reside in.

### **8.2.1 Language classes/courses**

The institution provides basic language courses and informs the international students about other places that they can continue learning the language. By them learning the language they have an opportunity to learn about the Finnish culture.

The institution offers free language courses and it is good that the institution does inform the international students about other language schools that are in Vaasa where they can go to for them to further their language skills.

*“they were able to provide language classes for free and they were able to promote other places where you could learn the language.... I think since the language is an option because with the language you get to learn the culture so that then it’s a good idea.” (Respondent 1)*

The institution offers a basic level of the local language courses. It is evident that the international students can hardly communicate with the locals (students and non-students) with the basic level of the local language that they have learned. Therefore, there is a need for more teaching hours to be organized for the international students to learn the local language more.

*“we have this Finnish language yea its basic, but I feel like yes if they could if it’s possible may be, they could increase the hours of this language course that they gave at school.” (Respondent 3)*

It is good that the institution offers both Swedish and Finnish language courses to international students since they are both official languages in Finland. This enables the international students to interact and communicate with both Swedish speaking and Finnish speaking locals (students and non-students) on a basic level. However, the institution should offer more language classes because the basic level of the language courses they offer is not sufficient for the international students to use to communicate well with the locals (students and non-students) or other people. Though the institution informs international students about the language schools in Vaasa at times it is difficult for some of them to attend the language schools because of their tight schedule at school. It is easier for them to attend the language classes at the institution since it is incorporated into their school schedule.

### **8.2.2 Social contact/ Interaction**

International students can have social contact with other international students and local students through different settings that are in the classroom, through activities and programs like meet ups. This enables the international students to interact with their fellow international students and local students and they learn from each other.

Some teachers organize joint classes that accommodate the international students and the local students. The joint classes allow international students to meet the local students. Through the joint classes the international students have an opportunity to mingle with the local students and make friends with students from different cultures.

*“I think a few teachers do it I thinks it’s really important for international class to mingle with the Finnish and Swedish classes, so you get to it even that room for people to make friends outside their culture.... I feel like if they make it an environment where classes interact that brings like that breaks the ice and may be make people open to making friends from people in Finland.” (Respondent 2)*

Having different activities enhance interactions between international students and local students. Having different clubs at the institution will enable the international students to meet the local students and from those clubs the international students can interact with local students.

*“if we can interact with the locals the only interaction part is through clubs.” (Respondent 5)*

Programs like having meet ups enable international students to meet other international students that are in different years of study, international students studying different programs and the local students. The international students can meet students from other cultures and interact with them. This makes them feel better and they feel they fit in the society when they are still new in Finland.

*“programmes like making them meet something like that that can be helpful because they are many different cultures different people from different cultures so it would really be helpful to make them even feel better fit in in their early stage that they arrive” (Respondent 4)*

There should be more joint classes organized in different courses because it is a platform that enables both international students and local students to easily interact and learn from each other. Activities and programs are also other platforms that can bring together international students and local students. Through the activities and programs students can interact and learn about each other’s cultures.

### **8.2.3 Environment and seasonal changes**

International students come from different countries and when they come to Finland they experience a new environment. Some of them come from countries that the weather is different from the Finnish weather. Therefore, they need to be informed about the environment they are residing in so that they can understand it better and be prepared for the changes that will arise since Finland has four seasons.

International students should be informed about the environment in Finland, the weather and the seasons so that they can understand the environment that they are residing in. When international students are made aware of the environment and weather changes this enables them to be prepared for the different changes in seasons and weather in Finland.

*“help the international students like in one way or the other to make sure that they actually understand the environment that they are living ... if they could like have a way of you know teaching us about this whole environment so we can get to familiarise ourself about it would be really a good thing.” (Respondent 3)*

Some of the international students come from tropical countries that do not experience the four seasons. Therefore, the seasonal changes can be challenging for them. They should be made aware of the seasonal changes and how they can cope during different seasons.

In Finland, there are four different seasons. The international students should be advised on what to do in every season to promote their wellbeing. In summer they need to have blackout curtains since during summer the days are longer than nights and they will have a problem sleeping if they have curtains that are not blackout curtains. During winter the nights are longer than the days they need to go out during winter even when it is dark instead of locking themselves at home since it is not good for their wellbeing.

*“summertime when it’s difficult to sleep maybe we could tell them what to do like having you know like heavy thicker curtains we could help them so they could sleep well we could also you know with this dark time you know dark and cold I think we could you know encourage them that they should not just be you know being inside the house you know at that time they could try to go out.” (Respondent 3)*

International students come from different countries. Some come from countries that have different types of weather and environment from that of Finland. When they come to Finland they should be assisted on how they can adjust to this inevitable change. In Finland, there are four seasons so when the international students join the institution they should be informed about this during the orientation week so that they can understand the environment that they are going to live in. They become psychologically prepared for the changes that will take place and they know what to do when the changes arise for instance having blackout curtains during summer. This improves their mental wellbeing.

#### **8.2.4 Housing**

The institution should advertise more apartments to the international students since they might not know where to receive such information. They might have preferences on where they would like to live but they might not ask about the available options.

There is a need for international students to receive more information about other housing companies that are available in Vaasa because some of them would prefer to live in certain areas or places but because they are new in Finland they only go with the information that they receive concerning apartments. Therefore, they settle for the apartments that they are informed of even though there might be other options that they have not been informed about.

*“I feel like one of the ways that a school can promote that is by may be advertise more houses cause when someone is new in a country they might not know where to look for a different house yea and some people might even be shy to ask.” (Respondent 2)*

International students do have different preferences in the type of apartments or areas that would like to live in. Most of them prefer living in areas that are close to their school but the student housing companies do not have all apartments close to the school that the international students are studying. Some international students live far from their school but there can be vacant apartments close to their school owned by different housing companies. In most cases, international students are aware of the information provided by the institution for instance student housing companies. Therefore, the institution should inform international students of other housing companies in Vaasa so that it will be upon them to decide the housing companies that they want to rent the apartment from.

### **8.3 Culture**

International students come from different countries and have different cultures. In culture the categories that I found are education and dressing. In the education category I found subcategories which are Finnish culture and international students' cultures. When international students encounter different cultures they need to acquire knowledge of the different cultures so that they can understand and respect other people's cultures. If they do not understand each other people's culture it might lead to misunderstandings and cultural conflicts.

### 8.3.1 Education

When international students acquire knowledge about other people's cultures they can understand and interact well with them. International students need to acquire knowledge about the Finnish culture because through that they can understand the Finnish culture. Teachers educate the international students about the Finnish culture although there is a need for the student tutors to educate the international students about Finnish culture and the institution should have a course about the Finnish culture. International students are allowed to educate others about their own cultures. When the students become educated about each other's culture it promotes cultural competence within the institution.

#### Finnish culture

Teachers play a role in educating international students about the Finnish culture. The institution has Finnish teachers who educate international students about the Finnish culture. The teachers give international students scenarios or tell them stories about the Finnish culture. The international students learn about the Finnish culture from the scenarios and stories that the teachers tell them. The teachers may think it is just a story they are telling the international students. However, the international students find this helpful because they become educated about the Finnish culture.

*“the fact we also have teachers from Finland I think that you know in most occasion you know they give us scenarios about Finnish culture because they are Finnish themselves so they have made they have in many times in many occasions that they tell us about their culture and I find it like really amazing because they are actually helping us to understand their culture more than actually they could think.” (Respondent 3)*

In Finland, it is appropriate to address the teachers by their first names. However, this is considered to be inappropriate in other cultures. The teachers do remind the international students that according to the Finnish culture it is fine for them to address the teachers by their first names.

*“teachers always are always willing not willing, but they are always reminding us a few things like how to address a teacher try to call them by their first name it's not rude.” (Respondent 2)*



There is a need of having a course on culture so that the international students can be educated about the Finnish culture. The course should be incorporated into the curriculum of the programs that have international students.

*“like having a course that will have like three lessons or four lessons just to talk about culture to talk about how things are done here.” (Respondent 3)*

The student tutors can help first year international students who have never been to Finland. When international students join the institution they can be paired with a student tutor. The student tutor can either be a Finn or an international student who has lived in Finland for a long time since they understand the culture of the foreign country better. The student tutors can inform the international students about the Finnish culture.

*“some they just came to Finland so I feel like for those they should actually like you know help them for example having a tutor fulltime.... Finnish person yea so like it could be also like somebody that have lived here for ten years..... so, they could help them you know like show them around you know tell them about the culture how things are done here.” (Respondent 3)*

It is good that teachers help educate the international students about Finnish culture from scenarios and stories that they tell them. Since the international students are living in Finland it is best if they learn more about Finnish culture. Therefore, the institution should offer a course on Finnish culture. Although the institution provides student tutors to the first year students the international students should be provided with a student tutor who is either a Finn or a foreigner who has lived in Finland for a long time because they are also in a position to understand the Finnish culture better having lived in Finland for a long time. The student tutors might have more time to spend with the international students and they can educate international students about Finnish culture. Therefore teachers, provision of a course on Finnish culture and student tutors can help to educate the international students about the Finnish culture which enables them to be culturally competent about the Finnish culture and help prevent cultural conflicts which might arise due to cultural incompetence that can interfere with the wellbeing of international students.

### **International students' culture**

International students have different cultures because they come from different countries. International students are provided the opportunity in some courses to educate others about their culture which promotes understanding of different people's cultures and also teachers have shown the desire to know about other cultures during different lectures. The different cultures that international students make them tackle some issues differently.

International students are allowed to give presentations about their countries in some courses. The presentation allows the international students to educate others about their country and culture. This enables the international students to be aware and knowledgeable about the different cultures that exist within the institutions.

*“we are allowed like to come up with discussion like a presentation you present to the class and most of the time it's not graded so you don't feel the pressure to make so impressive you just need to say what you feel comfortable and about your home country and so I think things like that are really nice.” (Respondent 2)*

The teachers have shown a desire of knowing about international students' cultures. During the lectures they have shown a desire of knowing how some things are done in the different cultures of the international students.

*“you could actually see the teacher asking about your culture asking where you are coming from how you do things in your home country.” (Respondent 3)*

International students have had opportunities to interact with local students studying cosmetology when they organize events at the institution. This allows them to learn and share ideas when cosmetology students implement cosmetic treatments on international students. The event allows the local students to learn about the countries and cultures of the international students.

*“we have students taking cosmetology so international students are always welcomed to participate ... the environment was really nice because you get to interact to talk and to share ideas I remember one girl she was really interested in working abroad so she wanted to hear my views about like (\*) how people are so that was really fun way of interacting with them.” (Respondent 2)*

International students lack a full understanding of the Finnish culture. During lectures when a teacher asks a question the international students answer the question. However, the answer that international students give is a wrong answer according to the Finnish culture. This is because the issue presented by the teacher is tackled differently in Finland hence having a different answer. On the other hand, the same issue is tackled differently in other cultures. This shows that international students have a different culture from the Finnish culture and when they are presented with an issue they tackle it according to their culture.

*“when the teacher asks question like I will have different way of answering question..... I might give answer to something in my way in Finland it might be wrong no this is not the way it will not help you this will not work but back in my country that will work and might be the best thing.” (Respondent 6)*

There is a need of organising a seminar so that the international students can educate others about their cultures and the Finnish students can educate international students about their culture. In the seminar the students can have tables where they share about their country using pictures, artifacts and present to others about their cultures. This can be organized when the first years join the institution so that they do not only meet students in their classes but also meet other students from other classes and programs.

*“if we can have a day where international students and also the Finnish students we can have like a seminar were people have different table where it could be a table about (\*) and then if there are pictures to show it there are artifacts also present so that people get to see about different cultures because I don't think that something that has been done in school and it could be really nice in the first year so that also international students get to meet cause some time that's also an issue you tend to know the international students in your own class.” (Respondent 2)*

Different cultures have different ways of tackling the same issue. When international students educate others about their country it enables them to understand and respect each other's culture. Events organized by the cosmetology class have enabled the international students to interact with local students and educate them about their country and culture. There is a need for the institution to organize a seminar based on culture to help students learn about each other's cultures. The seminar should be held annually in autumn the first weeks when new students join the institution so that they can learn about other students' cultures. This will increase the cultural competence of international students during their early days in Finland. Teachers' desire of knowing international students' cultures has

enabled them to learn about other cultures. This helps the teachers understand the different cultures of the international students and helps prevent misunderstandings. Therefore, understanding other people's culture promotes cultural competence within the institution.

### **8.3.2 Dressing**

The institution respects every student's culture and they are allowed to dress according to their culture if they wish to do so. International students appreciate the fact that the institution respects international students' culture since they can dress according to their culture or religion.

*“They respect how I you know they give your personal space how you dress.” (Respondent 3)*

The way international students dress can be part of their culture or religion. The institution allows every student to dress according to their cultures and religions. This shows that the institution respects the international students' cultures and religions.

## **8.4 Communication**

Communication occurs between two or more people. In communication the categories that I found are opportunities to exercise language skills and awareness of available activities. International students should learn the host country's local language so that they can communicate with the locals (students and non-students). Although the international students learn the local language in class they need to exercise their language skills by communicating with the locals (students and non-students) so that the international students can build their confidence when communicating in the local language.

### **8.4.1 Opportunities to exercise language skills**

There is a need for international students to be offered opportunities to exercise their language skills. This can be done through activities and events that allow the international students to interact with the locals living in Vaasa and the local students within the institution.

The locals living in Vaasa can be invited to the institution or the international students can approach the locals at the Vaasa city center with the help of a teacher so that the international students can have the opportunity to practice their language skills by speaking with the locals

and not just learning the language in class. The locals can help the international students speaking the language since they help them how to pronounce different words and correct them when they make a grammatical error.

*“they could do something like you know having people to come to our school then we can actually like talk with them like we do this you know like in real life not just learning and of course there is a difference when I talk with another international student there is a difference rather than if I talk with a Finnish real Finnish person there is a difference of course if I talk with an international person we have learned the same language in class.....going out to the city you know try to help us the teacher to help us to talk to get people to communicate with..... to practice just language” (Respondent 3)*

There is a need for international students to have events or activities that can be held within the institution so that they can practice their language skills. The institution can organize a day that the international students have coffee together with the local students and have conversations with each other either in Finnish or Swedish. This is a fun way for international students to practice their language skills.

*“like always finding those activities where that will not necessarily not force but will make the like they will give the opportunity for people to either practice the language that they have like get the opportunity to use the language skills that they have acquired that’s really important so they can make a day where international students class with the Finnish and Swedish class a day where you can like sit have coffee and talk yea in Finnish or Swedish yea that would be nice.” (Respondent 2)*

International students should not only rely on the institution on improving their language skills but they should make a step of finding other places that they can practice their language skills. Therefore, they can visit organizations or clubs in the local municipality. The organizations can help them practice their language skills because they will be able to interact and communicate with the locals.

*“like non-governmental organisation like clubs social clubs that helps like different matter of the community like to the elderly may be you can like you know interact like in a position in different activities.... the only thing is like go to the organisation especially not Novia but maybe the local municipality.” (Respondent 5)*

The institution should have activities and events that can be held at the institution or in the city of Vaasa to help the international students communicate in Finnish or Swedish. This will enable the international students to interact and communicate with the locals (students and non-students) in Finnish or Swedish. They will be able to practice the language skills and build their confidence to speak the local language. Also, the institution can send an email to the first year students when they join the institution as well as the old students informing them about available clubs and organizations in Vaasa where they can go and practice their language skills. This will help improve their language skills and communication in the local language. When international students receive such information it is difficult for those who are interested to ignore such information.

#### **8.4.2 Awareness of available activities**

The institution needs to create more awareness on the available extra-curricular activities because some of the international students would like to participate but they are not aware of the available extra-curricular activities.

Information about available activities organized by the institution should be made easily available to all international students so that the international students that are interested in any activity can have a chance to know about the upcoming activity and participate in the activity. Lack of information about the available activities makes it impossible for international students to participate in the activities. They would love to participate in the activities but unfortunately they lack information regarding available activities.

*“if the school can set in a way that its clear enough for everybody to see cause it’s am in the third year and have never participated in any extra curriculum activity provide by the school and I would really want to but I haven’t had the opportunity to know where I could get like where I could get more information” (Respondent 2)*

Information regarding extra-curricular activities should be more accessible for international students by sending notifications of upcoming or changes in activities and events on the institution's app. Due to the current corona situation the student tutors can organize activities online for instance online games so that international students can have an opportunity to participate in the activities online, interact and keep in contact with other students. This will help improve the mental wellbeing of international students when they have people to interact with as much as the interaction is online.

## **9 Discussion**

The chapter of discussion is divided into two subchapters, the first chapter focuses on the results of this study. The second subchapter focuses on the chosen method, the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen method and the trustworthiness of this study.

### **9.1 Discussion of results**

In the discussion of the results the focus is to achieve the aim of the study which is to address the challenges faced by international students by providing possible solutions to ease their acculturation process thus improving their health and wellbeing by addressing the research questions which are 1) What are the factors that can ease the acculturation of international students? 2) What are the interventions that can help improve the health and wellbeing of international students? 3) How can the different cultures be understood and respected? 4) What are the factors that can promote effective communication? The results are compared and contrasted with the background, theoretical framework and previous research.

#### **9.1.1 Health**

The findings show that international students experience loneliness, anxiety and depression since they are away from their family and friends which is detrimental to their health and wellbeing. There is a need for the international students to have more extra-curricular activities for instance sporty or physical activities and events and receive economic support on the extra-curricular activities. The events can be organized at the institution for the students for instance having cultural day and international café whereby people living in Vaasa are invited to the institution. These activities and events will enable the international students to interact with other people and acquire friends. International students can also expand their territories by attending social gatherings or religious places where they can meet others and make friends. The findings support previous works by Kruger (2011, p. 327) and Moodzone (2018, p. 512) they noted that human beings are social beings therefore they need to have other people in their life like acquiring new friends who they can spend time together, build relationships with them and broaden their social connections these makes one feel very happy and secure. These promote people's social wellbeing and mental wellbeing. Also, when people participate in physical activities it changes their brain they develop a good mood which helps improve their mental wellbeing and helps prevent depression and anxiety.

Most of the international students are physically inactive since they do not indulge in exercise because they might not know the positive impact of it. Therefore, the institution should have sporty or physical activities that international students can participate in to improve their physical wellbeing. This finding supports the argument by Krug et al. (2013, p.1) that when one is physically active it promotes one's physical wellbeing and physical fitness that is essential for them to have quality of life. World Health Organisation (2020) recommends that adults should indulge in physical activities a minimum of 2.5 hours a week however those who participate in vigorous activity can do it for 75 minutes.

From the findings, it is evident that the institution offers support to the international students that are essential for their health and wellbeing. They receive professional help from the institution's psychologist who offers help to international students who are facing challenges with their studies and personal life and the services are free. Contrary to the findings Finnish Students Health Service indicates that since January 2021 the students have to pay health care fees at a subsidized amount of 71,60 euros annually that covers all the health care services that they receive within the institution (Finnish Students Health Service, 2021).

International students are satisfied with the health care services offered by the doctors and nurses within the institution. However, international students require education on nutrition or healthy eating habits since some of them have health problems and they need to consume food that is good for their health. This finding agrees with Kruger (2011, pp. 327-328) statement that the food that people eat can be good or bad for their health therefore they need to consume healthy foods.

The student planner assists international students to plan their studies even if one is lagging behind the student planner listens to the international student's opinions and makes sure that the plan that they make together suits the international student. The institution has a good learning environment that enables students to reach their teachers via email whenever they have questions or enquiries and most of the teachers are fast in responding to the emails. The teachers are friendly, helpful, concerned and understanding when an international student has a problem they can inform them about it and they are willing to help. The teacher tutor checks up on the academic progress of the students and she can assist on personal issues as well or refer the international students to the people concern if she is not able to assist. The support they receive from the institution is essential for their wellbeing. These findings are consistent with the previous work by Cho and Yu (2015, p. 21) who reported that the support



from the university has a positive impact on international students making them to be satisfied with school life and decreases their mental stress.

### **9.1.2 Acculturation**

The findings show that the acculturation of international students can be made easy by them learning the local language of the host country. According to Nordregio (2021), Finland has two official languages Finnish and Swedish. Novia University of Applied Sciences (2021) Novia offers Swedish and Finnish language courses to international students and they inform them about the language schools where they can learn the languages more. However, there is a need for Novia to offer more local language classes because they only offer basic local language courses to the international students that are insufficient for them to communicate well with the locals (students and non-students). The findings are in alignment with the previous study by Sherry et al. (2010, p. 45) they found that there was a need for the international students to have additional classes for the local language for them to improve their language skills.

Some teachers organize joint classes that enable the international students to interact with the local students. The other platforms that can allow the international students to interact with the local students are having different activities like clubs and having meet up programs so that international students can meet students from other cultures interact with them making the international students feel a sense of belonging. The activities and programs expose the international students to other students with whom they can mingle and interact with. The findings support the previous work by Blanco and Diaz (2007, p. 63) who noted that individuals who are socially integrated into society experience social wellbeing.

Some of the international students come from tropical countries. There are four seasons in Finland making it difficult for some of these international students to adjust to the new weather. Therefore, they need to be made aware of the environment that they are living in, the different seasonal changes and what they need to do during the different seasons. When it comes to housing the institution needs to inform the international students about other available housing companies in Vaasa so that they can choose the apartments that best suit them.

### 9.1.3 Culture

The findings show that it is possible to achieve cultural competence if international students are educated about the Finnish culture and the international students educate others about their cultures. Teachers do educate the international students about the Finnish culture. There is a need for international students to have a course that they are taught about the Finnish culture. The student tutors can also educate the international students about the Finnish culture. The student tutors should either be a Finn or a foreigner who has lived in Finland for a long time because they know more about the Finnish culture. Previous studies by Burchum (2002, p. 7), Campinha-Bacote (2002, p. 181) and Lavizzo-Mourey (1996, p. 919) indicated that being educated about other people's cultures enables individuals to become knowledgeable about different cultures and this helps them to be able to understand other people's cultures hence this promotes cultural competence.

On the other hand, Finnish students should be educated about the international students' cultures. There is a class that allows international students to present about their countries and students can learn about other cultures. The event organized by the cosmetology students allows the local students to interact with the international students and learn about their cultures. The teachers have also shown the desire to learn about the international students' cultures. The findings support the work by Campinha-Bacote (2002, pp. 182-183) that having an encounter with others from other cultures enables an individual to become aware of the different cultures and learn about their cultures. Showing a desire to learn about other people's cultures promotes cultural competence. The results mirror previous research by Li and Pitkänen (2018, p. 112) on the integration of Chinese students studying at higher institutions in Finland. The cultural competence between the Chinese students and locals was achieved through the 'Friendly Family' program. The program enabled Chinese students to be paired with a Finnish family with whom they could interact and learn each other's culture. Contrary to the findings Sherry and her colleagues suggested that agents of international organizations that are recognized in the society can come to an institution to give a seminar regarding their culture (Sherry et al., 2010, p. 45).

Lack of full understanding of Finnish culture can be experienced from the different answers that international students give in class. International students might have different answers to solving an issue that works in their country but that answer is wrong in Finland because the issue is handled differently in Finland. The findings support Alshafi and Shin (2017, p. 55) argument that international students need to become culturally competent since cultural differences can interfere with them academically.

There is a need for the institution to organize a day for a seminar to allow students to educate others about their cultures. This can be done by international students and Finnish students presenting their country to others using pictures and artifacts. This can be done when the first years join the institution to enable the international students to meet other students. This finding is concurrent with Sherry et al. (2010, p. 44) work they found that there was a need for the institution to organize “International Students week” to allow the international students and local society organizations to showcase their culture to others.

There is cultural competence experienced in the institution because of the presence of cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and cultural encounters and cultural desire. The international students are allowed to dress according to their culture or religion, this shows that the institution respects other cultures. The findings concur with Nieto and Zoller Booth (2010, pp. 421- 422) who stated that institutions that understand other cultures are seen to value and respect diversity. Previous work by Campinha Bacote model (2002, p. 181) indicated that cultural competence is a continuous process that comprises of five stages: cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skills, cultural encounters and cultural desire.

#### **9.1.4 Communication**

From the findings it is evident that international students need people that they can practice the language skills that they have learned from the institution. There is a need for the institution to invite the locals residing in Vaasa to the institution or a teacher to accompany international students to the city so that they can communicate with locals in the local language. Also, the institution can organize a language day that the international students can communicate with the local students in Finnish or Swedish as they drink coffee together. However, international students can visit organizations within Vaasa municipality where they can indulge in different activities. This will enable them to interact with the locals in the local language which will help them improve their language skills and build their confidence in communicating in the local language. This is consistent with Sherry et al. (2010, p. 45) research that suggested that informal conversational groups for the international students with the locals would help the international students improve their verbal skills and build their confidence in communicating in the foreign language. The findings support previous work by Goldis and Cuza (2012, p. 192) they noted that international students need to practice the language skills that they have learned because it helps them to be able to communicate with the locals. However, when international students

are unable to understand and communicate in the local language it hinders their interaction with the locals which affects their wellbeing. The findings are also in agreement with Li and Pitkänen (2018, p.112) they stated that international students need to have good local language skills for them to be able to acculturate in the new local society.

International students are not aware of the available activities within the institution. When international students lack this information about available activities within the institution they are unable to participate as much as they would want to. Therefore, the institution should have the information regarding activities more accessible to all international students.

## **9.2 Discussion of methods**

In this subchapter the method for data collection, method for data analysis, trustworthiness of the study, background of the study and theoretical framework used in this study are discussed.

### **9.2.1 Semi structured interview**

Qualitative research is used for this study since it strives at obtaining information from the international students regarding their health and wellbeing during their acculturation in the new environment and what can be done for them to have seamless acculturation. An interview guide question is prepared before the interview. The interview guide contains open ended questions that aim at answering the research questions. Interviews are used to collect data the semi-structured interview guide helps during the interviews to ensure that the questions that aim at answering the research questions are asked. A semi structured interview is used because it enables to deepen the discussion with the participants to ensure that specific topics are discussed and the participants have the freedom of discussing aspects that are of their interest (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 10; Glasper & Rees, 2016, p. 99). Both face to face interview and telephone interviews are conducted depending on the preference of the participants. Prior to the interview a pilot test is conducted it is vital to conduct the pilot test because it gives a chance to ensure that the questions are well understood by the participants and to practice using the recording device that is to be used in the interviews (Gerrish & Lathlean, 2015, p. 397).

The pilot test done is not used in the data analysis. I directly approached some participants and through these participants I used snowball method to obtain other participants. To those who showed interest a letter of consent is sent to them via email to obtain their consent. The

interviewees are six international students studying nursing at Novia University of Applied Sciences. The international students are in their second and third year of studies. The first year international nursing students could not participate in the study since they are not in Finland because of the corona situation hence they do not have experiences to share about studying in Finland. The six participants share their experiences of studying and living in Finland and they give different suggestions on what can be done so that they can have seamless acculturation when they are in Finland and for those international students who will come to Finland in the future which will help improve their health and wellbeing. The recorded interview is then transcribed (Gerrish & Lathlean, 2015, p. 260). The recorded interview is stored safely and the participants' identity is kept anonymous the information they provide is used purposely for this study.

### **9.2.2 Deductive analysis**

Qualitative content analysis is used in data analysis since it assists in analyzing a high volume of text from the transcribed interview. Deductive analysis method is used in data analysis. Deductive data analysis entails three stages preparation, organizing and reporting. A categorization matrix is created to assist in data analysis. The categorization matrix has themes, categories and subcategories. The concepts in the background that are: health, acculturation, culture and communication guiding the study are used as themes. Manifest content is adopted and from the transcribed material all quotations that link to themes are clustered into categories. A further search is made and all quotations that link to the categories are clustered into subcategories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, pp. 109–114; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 111).

### **9.2.3 Background**

There are different challenges experienced by international students that affect their health and wellbeing. In the background the concepts used are health, acculturation, culture and communication. The concepts used are obtained from the research questions and they help in addressing the research questions thus being able to achieve the aim of the study. There are previous researches used to describe the challenges experienced by international students while studying abroad. It is important to first know about the challenges faced by international students before searching for solutions that can help solve the challenges that they experience. The background is used to construct interview questions that enable the participants to describe the experiences they have had in Finland and they are also able to

give suggestions on what can be done to address the challenges they experience to promote their health and wellbeing during their studies and stay in Finland. The concepts in the background are also used in the data analysis. The concepts are used as themes in the categorization matrix which guides this study. Therefore, the concepts in the background guide this study.

#### **9.2.4 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework chosen for this study is Campinha Bacote's model of the process of cultural competence in the delivery of health care services. The model consists of five constructs: cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skill and cultural desire. This model is chosen because when international students move to a foreign country they experience different challenges as they are exposed to different cultures also the host country experience different cultures. Therefore, there is a need for the international students, local students, professionals within the institution and the locals to become culturally competent.

Cultural competence is a continuous process that individuals go through and international students experience new cultures in a foreign country. Therefore, the international students and the host institution should undergo the process of becoming culturally competent. They should become aware and receive education of other people's culture this will lead to respecting and understanding the different cultures. They will also appreciate and acknowledge the similarities and differences of different cultures. However, lack of cultural competence can lead to cultural incompetence which results in misunderstandings of people from different cultures. If international students experience cultural incompetence it can lead to cultural conflict which will interfere with their wellbeing. Therefore, cultural competence leads to seamless acculturation of the international students which is essential for their wellbeing.

#### **9.2.5 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is an important constituent of the research process. For a researcher to achieve trustworthiness he or she need to lay a foundation of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Amankwaa, 2016, p. 121). Credibility of this study is attained because there is truth in the presented data. Interview is used during data collection; the participants share their experiences about their stay in Finland and they give possible solutions that can help solve the challenges they are facing. The collected data is then transcribed and analysed. The transcribed material is checked by the supervisor to guarantee

trustworthiness. The findings of the study are based on the participants' responses. Transferability is the likelihood that the results from the study have meaning to other people who are in the same situation. The research provided sufficient and precise information that allows others to gauge if the results of this study can be transferred to other settings. Dependability is achieved when researchers' results are credible. Since this study is credible if other researchers are provided with the same data they would find similar results. (Cope, 2014, p. 89; Speziale et al., 2011, p. 49).

Confirmability for the study is achieved because I obtained the results of the study from the participants' responses regarding their experiences and their suggestions given during the interviews. On the categorization matrix the concepts in the background of the study are used as themes and quotations from the transcribed material are clustered to form categories and subcategories (Tobin et al., 2003, p. 390).

## **10 Limitations of the study**

The participants in the study are international nursing students at Novia in Vaasa in the second and third year of their studies. However, the first year international students studying nursing should have also participated in the study. Unfortunately, I could not interview the first year international nursing students because they are not in Finland due to the corona situation. They have been attending the classes online from their various countries; therefore, they do not have any experience of studying and living in Finland. Therefore, I leave this for future research. Future research should not only have international nursing students as participants in the study instead international students studying other programs in Novia should participate in the study as well. It is only international students that are interviewed in this study. However, the employers in the institution should have been allowed to participate in the study so that they can tell what they do to promote the health and wellbeing of international students. Therefore, this may need future research.

## **11 Conclusion**

This study examined possible solutions that can make international students have seamless acculturation that can promote their health and wellbeing. The international students described their experiences studying in Finland. They described the different challenges that they experience during their stay in Finland some of the challenges are inevitable. They provided some suggestions that can be used as solutions to enable them to have seamless

acculturation hence promoting their health and wellbeing and that of international students coming to study in Finland in the future. The suggestions provided by the participants are to help in tackling issues such as health, acculturation, culture and communication that international students experience.

Based on the findings it is notable that international students experience loneliness since they are away from their families and friends. The loneliness that they experience can be detrimental to their health and wellbeing. Therefore they require support during their stay in Finland. The findings indicate that having extra-curricular activities is essential for the acculturation of international students since it opens doors to them having interactions and communicating with other people, acquiring new friends, learning Finnish and Swedish, learning about other cultures, all these promote the international students' health and wellbeing.

Creating awareness of the available extra-curricular activities will enable the international students to participate in the available extra-curricular activities. Therefore I have created a prototype app for extra-curricular activities (appendix III) and named it, [Extra-curricular Activities App](#) (Donata Oyuga, 2021) that is easy to use one needs to only follow the instructions. The first page allows international students to use the app in the language that they prefer English, Swedish or Finnish. The international students are also able to select sign up if it is their first time to use the app or select sign in if they have signed up already. The second page consists of all available activities and events organized by the institution for instance cultural day, swimming, international café, chatting in Swedish and Finnish. The date and time when each of the activities and events is taking place are given also the location that the activities and events will happen is indicated. The third page provides the international students an opportunity to participate in the activity or event and become a member of the club that they wish to join by signing up for it. However, those who intend to participate only can also select that option.

On the fourth page international students who select the option of becoming members of any club should pay the membership fee. The international students can either choose to pay per semester or for the whole academic year. However, those who want to participate only they will be charged according to the charges of the activity or event that they intend to participate in. If the international students need to pay they select the “proceed to payment” which will take them to the next page. However, if the activity or event is not charged they can select the “skip button” which will take them to the sixth page. On the fifth page international



students can make the payment by filling in their bank card details and billing address. Once the payment is successful international students can proceed to the sixth page where they can leave a comment in case they have any or they can ask any question in case something is unclear for them. On the seventh page international students are provided with the social media handles of the organizing team for the activities and events that they can follow if they wish to do so.

The extra-curricular activities app will enable the institution to become aware of the number of participants in the various activities and events. The institution can find out what kind of activities or events the international students are most interested in based on the participation. The solutions mentioned in this study should not only apply to international nursing students studying at Novia but also should apply to other international students in other programmes or faculties or even be used by other institutions within Finland so that the institutions can promote the health and wellbeing of all international students in Finland.

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Appendix I

**INFORMED CONSENT**

Dear students,

My name is Donata Oyuga a nursing student at Novia University of Applied Sciences. I am currently writing my thesis on **HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**. The aim of this study is to address the challenges faced by international students by providing possible solutions to ease their acculturation process thus improving their health and wellbeing. For this study, a semi-structured interview will be conducted that will last for 20 minutes. The interview will be recorded and then transcribed; the recorded and transcribed information will be stored safely until the completion of my thesis thereafter it will be destroyed. The information that you provide will also be kept anonymous and confidential, it will be used purposely for this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have a right to stop whenever you wish. Your consent to participate in this study is highly appreciated. If you have any query, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best Regards,

Donata Oyuga

E-mail: [donoyu@edu.novia.fi](mailto:donoyu@edu.novia.fi)

The information that has been provided regarding the study is well understood and I will voluntarily participate on it.

Participant name:

Participant signature:

Date:



**INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS**

<b>Main question</b>	<b>1. What were dreams before coming to Finland and have you been able to fulfil them?</b>
Sub questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A) How long have lived in Finland and how do feel about your stay in Finland?</li> <li>B) How have you managed to build new relationships during your stay in Finland?</li> <li>C) What do you do during your spare time?</li> <li>D) Can you tell me about your experience when communicating with others?</li> </ul>
<b>Main question</b>	<b>2. Can you tell me about your experience studying at Novia University of Applied Sciences as an international student?</b>
Sub questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A) What makes you satisfied and what creates problems for you?</li> <li>B) Which extra-curricular/spare time activities offered by the institutions are you aware of? And do you participate? Why/not</li> <li>C) Can you tell me about your experience of the institutions teaching and studying method?</li> <li>D) What services that Novia offers have you used? (Health Care, study counselling and other)</li> <li>E) How have you acculturated to the new environment?</li> <li>F) What has the institution done to assist you with your acculturation?</li> <li>G) What can be done to make acculturation smooth for international students?</li> <li>H) What can be done to ensure effective communication between international students and the locals?</li> <li>I) What programs can help bring together the international students and the locals?</li> </ul>
<b>Main question</b>	<b>3. What does cultural competence mean to you?</b>
Sub questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A) How have you experienced cultural competence within the institution?</li> <li>B) What can be done to achieve cultural competence?</li> <li>C) What can be done to promote cultural competence?</li> <li>D) Can you tell me about the challenges you experienced when trying to acculturate?</li> </ul>

<b>Main question</b>	<b>4. Can you please tell me about factors that promote or inhibit the wellbeing of international students?</b>
Sub questions	A) What can be done to promote the health and wellbeing of international students? B) If you could change something regarding your studies at Novia UAS, what would it then be? Mention 3 important things.

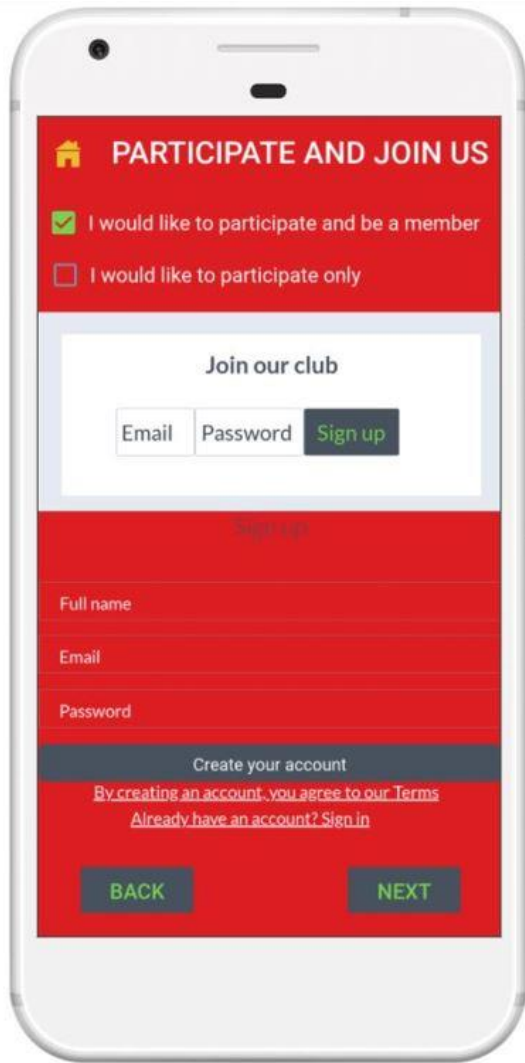
**EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES APP**



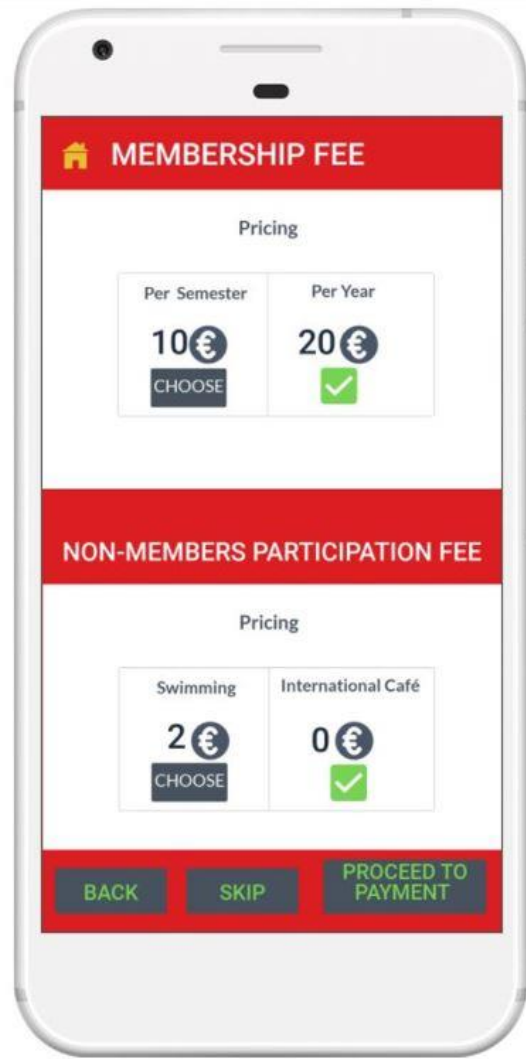
PAGE 1



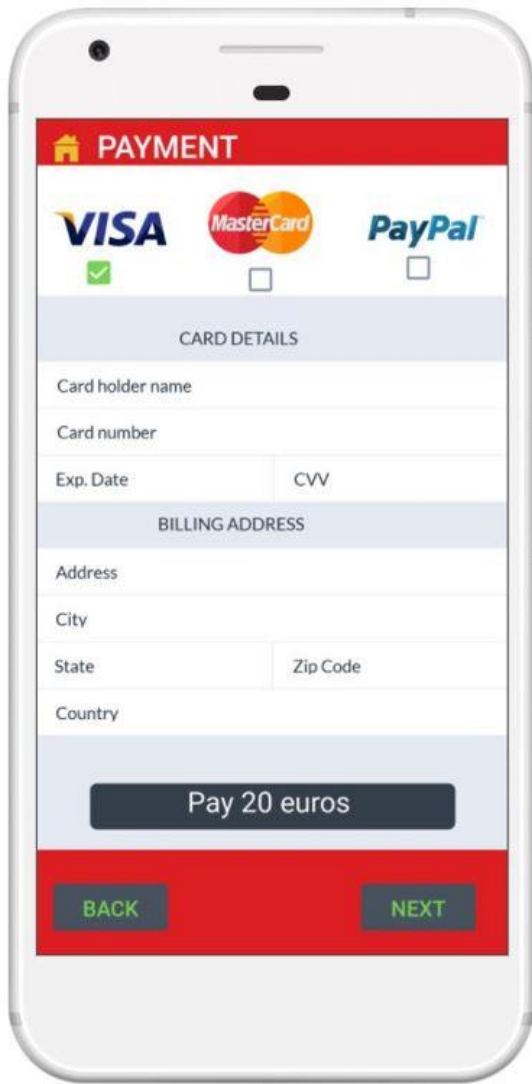
PAGE 2



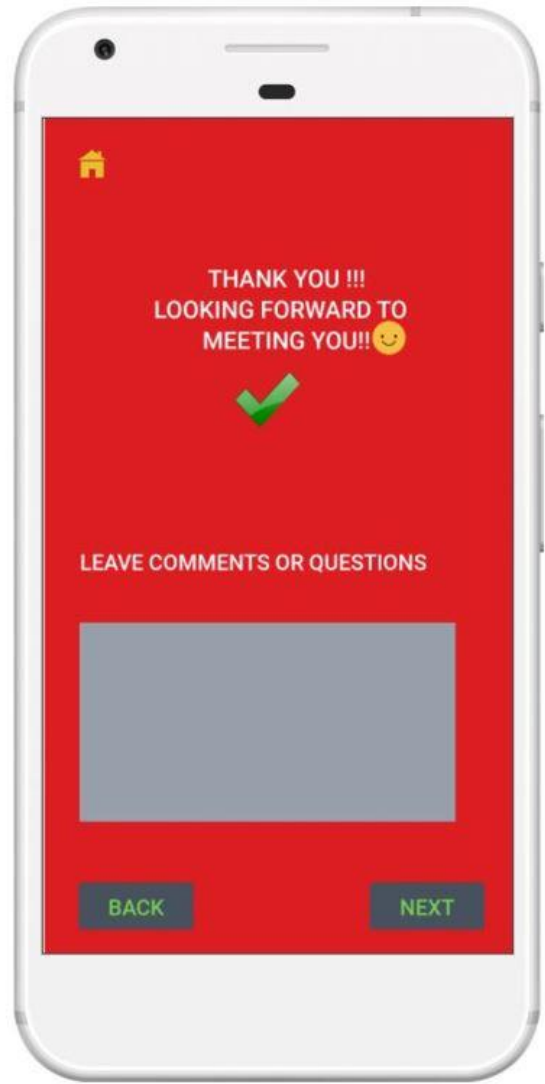
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