



# Unlocking Global Potential Locally

The Impact of International Student Internships in  
Ikaalinen, Finland

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## ABSTRACT

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The current demographic trends in Finland, characterized by an aging population and declining birth rates, have led to a severe workforce shortage. These shifts threaten the stability of the labour market and the nation's economic health. Addressing these demographic challenges is essential for sustainable economic growth and the preservation of the welfare system. This thesis explores the potential of integrating international students from Finnish universities into the local job market as a promising strategy. By examining the role of international student internships, the study investigates how these programs can help retain talented graduates, thereby mitigating workforce shortages and enhancing economic stability.

The research is grounded in key concepts such as internationalization, social capital, and integration, offering a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved. Despite limited literature on this specific integration, the study underscores the valuable skills and perspectives international students bring, which drive innovation and economic growth.

Empirical data were collected through survey and interview with TAMK's international students and the CEO of Ikaalisten Kehitys, revealing both benefits and challenges of internships. Findings indicate that internships provide essential practical experience, enhance employability, and build professional networks for international students. However, significant obstacles such as language barriers, limited internship opportunities, and a lack of local networks were identified. Moreover, the reluctance of Finnish companies to hire international talent complicates the situation.

This research provides valuable insights into the integration process, offering recommendations for improving the employability and retention of international students in Finland.

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**KEY WORDS:** international students, internship, integration, workforce shortage

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**GLOSSARY or ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS**

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
HR	Human Resources
TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Higher education is undergoing transformation, expanding beyond borders and facilitating global knowledge exchange. There is a growing trend of increasing numbers of internationally mobile students, with diverse destinations emerging. Typically, these students obtain a student visa or permit to pursue tertiary or higher education in their chosen destination country. The Institute of Statistics reported a notable rise in international students from around 4.1 million in 2012 to approximately 6.4 million by 2021. (Migration Data Portal, 2023.)

With over 20 000 international students enrolled in higher education institutions across Finland (Study In Finland, 2024). The intersection of diverse cultures and perspectives is becoming increasingly prevalent. This phenomenon presents a unique opportunity for local companies to unlock global potential within their own communities.

On the other hand, these foreign students encounter numerous challenges in kickstarting their careers in the country. A significant majority of international students leave Finland after graduation in search of better job opportunities. Recent studies on international talents in Finland indicate that foreign degree students generally find living in Finland enjoyable. However, it's noteworthy that nearly half of these students are inclined to leave Finland after they finish their studies. (E2 Research, 2023).

Concurrently, Finland is facing a critical labour shortage that is impacting its entire economy. This pressing issue stems from a combination of factors, in 2018, Finland faced a significant demographic challenge with one out of every ten people aged 75 or older. However, projections suggest that by 2030, this ratio will climb to 14% (UNECE, 2021). Besides, the birth rate has been on a decline, dropping to 1.32 children per woman (Nordic Statistics Database, 2023). Moreover, there's a growing demand for skilled professionals. With expe-

rienced workers retiring, various industries are grappling with a talent shortage, which poses a barrier to economic growth and innovation in the country.

The urgency to address this workforce gap is underscored by the realization that sustainable solutions are imperative to secure the nation's competitive edge in the global market and ensure the continued vibrancy of its labour force.

The thesis delves into the dynamic realm of international student mobility and its implications for local businesses. As the academic and professional worlds intersect, it is imperative to explore how international student internships contribute to the local workforce and, more specifically, how human resource practices play a pivotal role in this integration.

## **1.2 Objective and purpose**

This research aims to comprehensively investigate how international student internships can enhance inclusive work environments and promote the retention and integration of students into the local working life from an HR perspective in local companies in Ikaalinen. The primary objectives are as follows:

The main goal is to explore how international student internships can address workforce shortages, improve talent management, and enhance inclusive work environments in local companies in Ikaalinen.

Understand the motivations and challenges faced by local companies in Ikaalinen when hosting international student interns.

Identify the obstacles encountered by international students in integrating internships and starting a career in Ikaalinen after completing their studies.

Explore potential solutions to facilitate international students in securing internships and contributing productively to the local economy.

By addressing these objectives, this study seeks to provide insights into the potential benefits and challenges associated with international student internships, offering valuable information for local businesses, educational institutions, and policymakers.

The Ikaalisten Kehitys is actively working to connect international students with local companies, aiming for a mutually beneficial win-win relationship on both sides.

The purpose of this research is to comprehensively examine the impact of international student internships on local companies in Ikaalinen with a specific focus on Human Resources practices. This study aims to understand how Human Resources strategies can enhance the advantages of hosting international students.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The integration of international students into the workforce through internships has significant implications for both the hosting community and the students themselves. However, the specific impact of international student internships on local companies and the development of working life in Ikaalinen remains an underexplored area of research.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering sustainable economic growth and ensuring that the evolving working environment meets the needs of a diverse and dynamic workforce. Building on the above, the central research question is:

How can international student internships be effectively structured and managed to reconcile the divergent objectives of local businesses and students, thereby promoting a harmonious, inclusive, and mutually beneficial work environment in Ikaalinen?



The following sub questions are formulated to delve deeper into the main research question and provide more focused answers:

- What are the key advantages that international students bring to local businesses in Ikaalinen?
- What challenges do local companies face in integrating international students into their work environment?
- What strategies can Ikaalisten Kehitys employ to effectively connect businesses with international student talent?

## **2 THESIS PLAN**

### **2.1 Thesis commissioner**

In response to the intensifying global competition for talent, Ikaalisten Kehitys has been a vital force in local development initiatives, particularly those focused on attracting and integrating international students. Recognizing the crucial role of global talent in addressing workforce challenges linked to factors such as population aging, Ikaalisten Kehitys has played an instrumental role in implementing programs to position Ikaalinen as an appealing workplace.

Commissioned by Ikaalisten Kehitys, this study explores the impact of international student internships within the local community. Despite the existence of initiatives, international students face persistent challenges in securing internships during their studies and employment opportunities post-graduation.

The study aims to illuminate the current employment status of international students in Ikaalinen and investigate the key factors influencing their chances of finding employment within the local community. With the research title encapsulating the essence of unlocking global potential locally, the thesis endeavours to contribute to the overarching mission of Ikaalisten Kehitys.

Likewise, the involvement of Ikaalisten Kehitys as the commissioner of this thesis not only adds invaluable firsthand experience but also provides insightful perspectives into the local dynamics. This practical engagement enhances the depth and relevance of the study, enriching the exploration of how international student internships impact Ikaalinen.

Anticipating that the findings will provide valuable insights into the experiences and expectations of international students, this research aims to contribute meaningfully to Ikaalisten Kehitys ongoing efforts. By understanding the specific challenges faced by international students in Ikaalinen, the thesis seeks to improve the effectiveness of local strategies for facilitating successful transitions

into the workforce, thereby fortifying Ikaalinen's position as a welcoming hub for global talent.

The study will employ a mixed method research approach, based on a survey and semi-structured interview, to capture a holistic understanding of the employment dynamics for international students in Ikaalinen. Through this commissioned research, the thesis aspires to contribute meaningfully to Ikaalisten Kehitys mission, ensuring that the experiences of international students align seamlessly with the vision of a vibrant, inclusive, and thriving local community.

## **2.2 Significance of the thesis**

In the backdrop of a globalised world, the influx of international students into Finnish educational institutions is not merely a statistical figure but an enriching mosaic of diverse talents, skills, and cultural nuances. However, these students often face challenges in navigating the transition from academia to the workforce, and this is where the significance of well-structured internships comes to the fore.

Understanding the symbiotic relationship between local companies and international students is not only pertinent for the individual success of these students but also holds the key to addressing workforce shortages and fostering a more inclusive professional landscape. The city of Ikaalinen, within its unique blend of tradition and innovation, becomes the canvas for this exploration.

internship holds significant value for students, particularly international ones, as it encompasses four vital dimensions: career development, networking, reinforcing academic knowledge, and cultural adaptation. Among these, networking and cultural adaptation stand out as crucial aspects, particularly for students aiming to establish themselves in the host country. The ability to build professional connections and adapt culturally are deemed primordial, especially for those with intentions to continue residing in the country.

The significance of this research is multifaceted and extends across various dimensions. At its core, the study addresses the pressing need to understand how international student internships influence local companies and contribute to the development of working life in a unique community like Ikaalinen. By exploring the experiences and expectations of international students, the research aims to shed light on the challenges they face in securing internships and subsequent employment in the local context. In doing so, the study directly aligns with the objectives of the Ikaalisten Kehitys, the thesis commissioner, which actively engages in local development initiatives.

The findings have the potential to inform the enhancement of strategies aimed at attracting and integrating international talent in Ikaalinen. Additionally, the research adds nuance to existing literature by focusing on HR practices as a crucial factor in the integration process. Beyond academic contributions, the study holds practical implications for the local community, businesses, and policymakers, offering insights that may foster a more inclusive and vibrant professional landscape in Ikaalinen.

## **2.3 Concepts**

### **2.3.1 International student**

Internationally mobile students refer to individuals who travel across international borders to pursue educational opportunities in countries outside their own (UNESCO, 2024). This academic journey involves navigating multiple contextual transitions, including relocation to a new country, adaptation to a different educational system, and enrolment in programs for higher educational degrees (Jindal-Snape & Rienties 2016,53).

International students exhibit varying patterns of mobility. Some undertake an entire study program abroad, spanning several years to complete a bachelor's course, while others opt for shorter durations, such as a single semester or academic year. Different terms, such as "temporarily mobile," "short-term mobile," or "credit-mobile" students, distinguish those with brief study periods. In con-

trast, students committed to the entirety of their studies abroad may be termed "degree-mobile" or "diploma-mobile" students. (Teichler 2017,189-190.)

The rationale behind these distinct types of mobility is evident. Degree-mobile students seek a complete immersion in a new educational system, intending to acquire a degree that attests to their advanced competencies in the host country. Conversely, temporarily mobile students aim to experience another educational system temporarily while spending the majority of their study time in their home country. For these students, studying abroad serves as a contrast or supplement to their domestic education, with the expectation that their home institution will recognize the study achievements during the period abroad as equivalent to those obtained locally, avoiding the need for additional study duration. (Teichler 2017, 190.)

### **2.3.2 Internationalisation**

In higher education, internationalization denotes a purposeful endeavour by universities to extend their influence globally. It involves expanding the spatial reach of universities beyond borders through the mobility of students, scholars, knowledge, programs, and providers (Larsen 2016,10). The objective is to cultivate a more interconnected and globally aware learning environment, promoting cultural exchange and elevating the overall quality of education (De Wit & Leask, 2015).

Over the past two decades, internationalization in European higher education has evolved from a peripheral concern to a central factor, often referred to as mainstreaming. The globalisation of societies and economies has undeniably heightened the impact of competition and market processes on the implementation of internationalization. Different motivations and approaches characterize internationalization, with mainstreaming emphasizing a more integral, process-based approach, aiming at enhancing the quality of higher education and the competencies of staff and students. However, the reality falls short of these aspirations, as internationalisation in higher education is often characterised by an

activity-oriented or instrumental approach, leading to misconceptions about its nature (De Wit 2017, 9–12).

The term "international education" (or "international higher education") is frequently used to highlight curricular elements of study programs designed to foster student's competencies in international environments. This may include foreign language training, the provision of knowledge on other countries or cross-national features (e.g., international law, international trade), international comparison, and various activities contributing to international and intercultural understanding (Teichler 2017, 181).

Student mobility is not solely perceived as beneficial for academic progress and subsequent employment; it is believed to impact the overall personality and subsequent life of mobile students. The concept of "learning from contrast" suggests a transformation in reflective thinking, fostering awareness of diverse options and solutions in life. Exposure to knowledge about other countries, social settings, and cultural environments, along with the development of social skills, is anticipated to aid in navigating different environments. Advocates for increased internationalisation in higher education also anticipate a rise in respect and tolerance for other cultures and lifestyles (Teichler 2017, 204-205).

### **2.3.3 Internships**

Internships in higher education represent a dynamic intersection between academic learning and real-world experiences. These curricular internships, integral to undergraduate courses, unfold within diverse settings, spanning private firms, the public sector, and university environments (Stewart.A et al, 2021, 66). The nature of these internships, whether optional or mandatory, is contingent upon the specific course requirements, with students mandated to acquire course credits for successful degree completion.

Employability interventions, as orchestrated by career services, manifest through internship schemes designed to provide all graduates with invaluable work experience (O'Connor & Bodicoat 2017,441). These interventions recog-

nise internships as a fundamental component of higher education, offering students practical exposure and application of their academic knowledge within various professional areas (Stewart.A et al, 2021,17).

Understanding the multifaceted impact of internships requires a comprehensive exploration of the benefits they bring to students, employers, and academic institutions. (Stewart.A et al, 2021,30).

Internships offer a wealth of benefits to students, employers, and academic institutions alike. For students, internships provide invaluable exposure to real-world career environments, helping them explore various career paths and develop crucial job search skills. They also facilitate the building of professional networks and enhance employability, often leading to future job opportunities or academic credit. Employers benefit from internships by gaining access to motivated and talented individuals, offering them a chance to assess potential future employees and infuse fresh perspectives into the workplace. At the institutional level, internships strengthen ties with alumni and the local community, contribute to curriculum enhancement, and improve retention and graduation rates. (Goplani et al, 2020.)

For a comprehensive exploration of the impact of internships on undergraduate student's regular studies, Silva et al. (2015) delve into the intricate dynamics surrounding this symbiotic relationship. Furthermore, the nature and format of internships significantly influence post-graduation job prospects. Mandatory internships offer insights into labour market expectations, enabling the design of tailored study programs, while facultative internships, though providing students with choices, may signal less commitment to on-the-job learning, potentially impacting employability (Silva et al. 2015, 708).

#### **2.3.4 Social capital**

Social Capital is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the advantages derived from social connections. At its core, social capital reflects the resources embedded within an individual's network of relations and holds significant im-

portance for both employees and organisations (Ben-Hador et al. 2021). Personal social capital, representing the foundational level of social capital within organisations, plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's social position and access to resources (Keskiner et al. 2021).

Similar to economic and cultural capital, social capital is synonymous with power, reflecting the social background and initial position of individuals. Consequently, one's history and network of connections can significantly influence their access to social capital, thereby impacting their opportunities and outcomes (Keskiner et al. 2021).

Diversity in the content of social ties further amplifies the role of social capital by facilitating the flow of resources and best practices among individuals and teams (Tasheva & Hillman 2019, 753). By fostering connections across diverse groups, social capital contributes to a more inclusive and dynamic environment, enhancing collaboration and innovation within organizations.

Understanding the dynamics of social capital is essential for organizations seeking to leverage their networks effectively and individuals aiming to navigate the complexities of the social landscape. By recognizing the value of social connections and investing in the cultivation of social capital, both employees and organizations can enhance their social position and achieve greater success in their endeavours.

### **2.3.5 Integration**

The term "integration" encapsulates the process of settling in, engaging with the host society, and undergoing social changes following immigration. Upon arrival, immigrants are tasked with "securing a place" for themselves, encompassing finding a home, employment, educational opportunities for their children, and access to healthcare facilities. Beyond these tangible aspects, integration involves establishing social and cultural connections, fostering cooperation with individuals and groups, familiarising themselves with and utilising



host society institutions, and gaining recognition and acceptance in their cultural specificity. (Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx 2016, 11.)

In the European Union (EU) context, integration is defined as a dynamic and reciprocal process involving mutual accommodation among immigrants and residents of EU Member States (European Commission). Over the past half-century, the concept of integration, explored in European research, has evolved from a primary focus on the settlement of newcomers to a more intricate and multifaceted understanding (Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx 2016, 190).

Integration of international students is multifaceted, encompassing four distinct dimensions. Academic integration involves evaluating grade performance and intellectual development throughout their studies, with the degree of integration determining their persistence or likelihood of dropping out. Economic integration is often measured by the participation of newcomers in the labour market, yet challenges such as language proficiency, lack of work experience, complex visa procedures, closed professional networks, or discrimination may hinder job prospects for international graduates. Cultural integration centres on understanding the rules, norms, and cultural expectations of the host society, with foreign language proficiency playing a crucial role. Social integration, crucial for employment opportunities, is evident the engagement of international students in social networks, local communities, and various activities, including neighbourhood events, academic and student organisations, leisure clubs, and voluntary organizations (Li & Pitkänen, 2018).

## **2.4 Research methodology**

### **2.4.1 Research approach**

This study will employ a mixed methods research design to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of international student internships on local companies and the development of working life in Ikaalinen. Mixed methods research aims to bridge this gap by integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches within social research methodology. Supporters of mixed methods

acknowledge that certain concepts are amenable to quantification, while others are not. Through the integration of both approaches in a research project, proponents argue that the objectives of explanation and understanding can be effectively attained (Hall 2020, 10).

- Quantitative component: Utilising surveys to gather quantitative data from international students. The survey will include closed-ended questions to assess specific aspects such as perceived benefits, challenges, and overall satisfaction.

In the quantitative phase of this study, data will be collected through a web-based survey using Office 365 Forms. Access to Microsoft Forms, included in Microsoft Office packages, facilitates the creation of online surveys or questionnaires. Development tools or software can simplify the process of creating online surveys (Moises & Torrentira 2020, 81).

Employing a web-based platform like Microsoft Forms, which is accessible across various devices, is more effective than traditional methods such as spreadsheets or paper for collecting audit data. (Causton et al. 2021.)

Online surveys are widely recognized for their simplicity, accessibility, and effective data management capabilities, making them a commonly utilised tool. This approach aligns with the objectives of the study, providing a convenient means to engage with a diverse pool of participants. Surveys play a significant role in gathering evidence related to various social issues. The term "social survey" refers to the study of social phenomena through surveys conducted on both small and large population samples, with the aim of understanding their current status (Pandey & Pandey 2015, 84).

- Qualitative Component: Conducting semi-structured interview with representative from Ikaalisten Kehitys. This interview will allow for in-depth exploration of experiences, perceptions, and the contextual nuances of the impact of internships.

In many cases, the qualitative method is shaped to investigate specific findings from the quantitative method, providing deeper insights or clarifications. (Hall 2020, 87.)

Thorough development of a semi-structured interview guide in qualitative research enhances objectivity and reliability, thereby increasing the credibility of the study findings. (Kallio et al. 2016.)

One approach could entail initiating the research with a qualitative interview to explore the subject matter, followed by employing a quantitative survey method with a sizable sample size to enable the researcher to generalise the findings to a larger population. Alternatively, the study might commence with a quantitative method aimed at testing a theory or concept. (Creswell 2009, 31.)

Semi-structured interviews adhere to predetermined questions similar to structured interviews but allow interviewers the flexibility to pose follow-up questions on certain topics where additional information is deemed essential. (Hall 2020, 77.)

#### **2.4.2 Data collection procedures**

Surveys: Administering online surveys to local companies and international students. The surveys will be designed to capture quantitative data, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of experiences and perceptions.

Interview: Leading a semi-structured interview with Ikaalisten Kehitys representative will provide a valuable opportunity to gain insights directly from an organisation actively involved in local development.

#### **2.4.3 Ethical consideration**

All information gathered during the research, comprising responses from surveys and transcripts from interview, will be securely stored in a protected data

repository, accessible solely to authorized personnel. The storage system will employ robust security measures, including two-factor authentication, to maintain the confidentiality and integrity of the data. Participants can be assured that their responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity. They were explicitly notified of their voluntary participation and their right to withdraw consent at any point by informing the data controller. Following the completion and acceptance of the thesis, all data will be permanently erased to comply with data protection regulations and preserve the privacy of participants.

#### **2.4.4 Data analysis**

**Quantitative Data:** Utilising statistical analysis software to analyse survey responses, employing descriptive statistics and inferential analysis to identify patterns and correlations.

The data collected through the web-based survey using Office 365 Forms will undergo rigorous analysis to uncover key insights. Graphical representations such as graphs, bar charts, and pie charts will be employed to visually examine and interpret the data. There are other types of static visual images that may be used to collect observational data (Saunders et al. 2019, 421). This analysis aims to reveal relationships between variables, identify trends, and understand the distribution of data values.

The initial phase of data exploration will involve observing individual variables, focusing on specific amounts, trends, and percentages in data values. Subsequently, a comparative analysis will be conducted to unveil interdependencies between variables. Within quantitative analysis, calculations and diagram drawing are usually undertaken using analysis software ranging from spreadsheets such as Excel (Saunders et al. 2019, 565). This Utilising the capabilities of Excel, the analysis will extend to the creation of graphs, pie charts, and tables to visually represent key findings.

The qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interview with Ikaalisten Kehitys will be analysed thematically. The transcripts will be systematically re-

viewed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights related to the impact of internships. Through a thorough exploration of the qualitative data, the study aims to extract meaningful information that addresses the research questions and contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the impact of international student internships on local companies in Ikaalinen.

Likewise, the data analysis will be guided by the overarching objective and research questions of the thesis. By systematically exploring the data, the study aims to extract meaningful information that addresses the research questions and contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the impact of international student internships on local companies in Ikaalinen.

## **2.5 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is structured into four sections: introduction, theoretical framework, research methodology and analysis, and conclusion.

The opening chapter provides the study's background, outlines the research objectives, purpose, and questions, and details the research methodology and overall structure of the thesis.

Moving to the second chapter, the focus is on the theoretical framework and research. This section defines key concepts such as internationalisation, international students, and corporate internships. It provides insights into post-graduation employment, particularly in Ikaalinen, and examines potential human resource practices and strategies for retaining international talent.

The third chapter investigates into the research methodology. It encompasses the data collection process, a description of research outcomes, and a quantitative analysis of questionnaire results. Likewise, this chapter includes a discussion of the findings.

The concluding chapter offers recommendations to enhance the integration of international student internships in local companies in Ikaalinen, followed by a summary of the key findings.

### 3 RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 International students questionnaire

The International Student Survey was answered by a total of 80 respondents via an online questionnaire using the Office Form survey tool. The survey comprised 16 questions, including multiple selection and two open-ended questions, and it was available online for two weeks to gather sufficient responses from TAMK students. The survey was conducted in May 2024 and was published in a news article on TAMK's Intranet. All necessary permissions and guidelines were followed meticulously throughout the process, ensuring the research was conducted ethically and in accordance with TAMK's standards. The survey aimed to gain insights into the experiences and challenges faced by international students in Finland, particularly regarding securing internships. It sought to identify the key obstacles these students encounter, their methods for searching for internship opportunities, their levels of Finnish language proficiency, and their overall integration into Finnish society. The data collected from the respondents is presented below.

##### 3.1.1 Study program

The first aspect analysed was the current study programs of the respondents. As shown in the figure 1 below, the majority are bachelor's degree students, making up 78,75% of the sample. Master's degree students account for 17,5%, and 3,75% are enrolled in other programs, such as PG Diplomas.

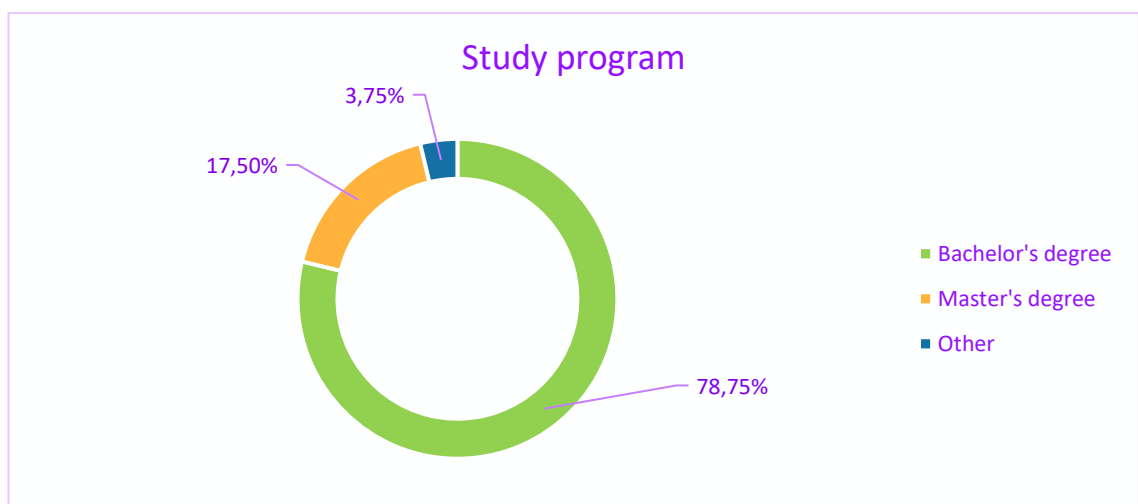


FIGURE 1: Percentage of respondents by current study program.

The analysis indicates a higher representation of undergraduate students among the international student population surveyed.

### 3.1.2 Field of study

The field of study was examined to understand the academic disciplines represented. The bar graph in figure 2 illustrates the diverse range of academic disciplines among international students.

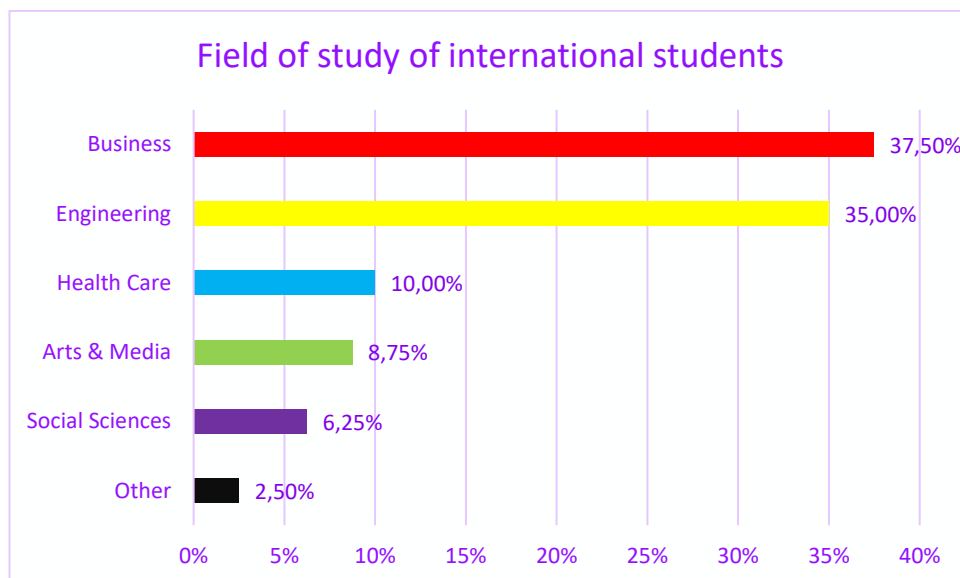


FIGURE 2: Percentage of respondents in different study fields.

Business is the most represented field, with 37.50% of respondents, followed closely by Engineering at 35%. Health Care comprises 10% of the participants, while Arts & Media account for 8.75%. Social Sciences are represented by 6.25%, with other fields constituting 2.50%. This distribution highlights the varied academic pursuits of international students, with a notable concentration in Business and Engineering.

### 3.1.3 Expected year of graduation

International students were asked about their expected year of graduation.



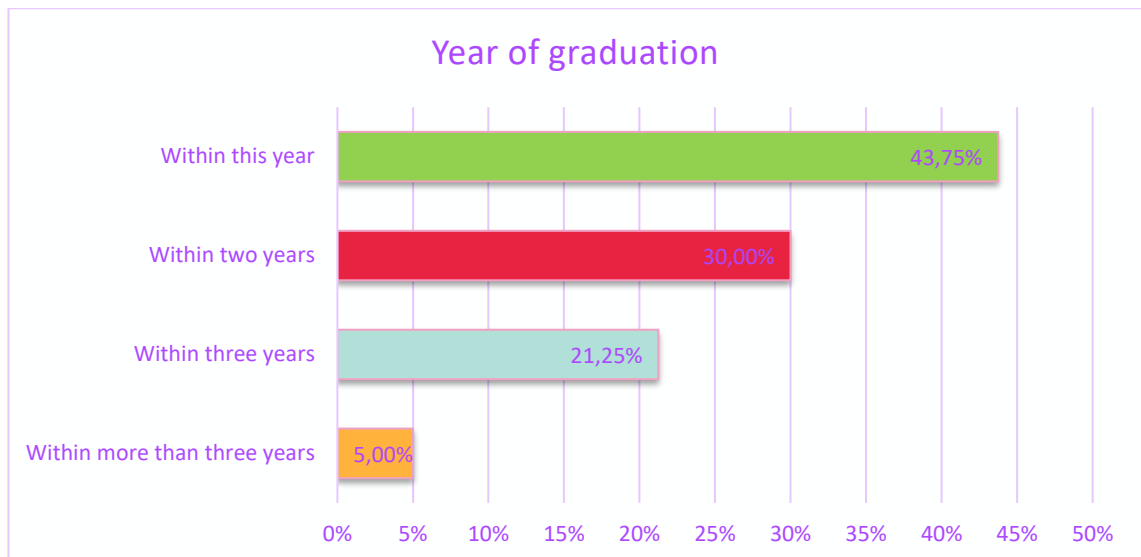


FIGURE 3: percentage of respondents expecting the year of graduation.

The bar graph in Figure 3 shows that approximately 43.75% of respondents expect to graduate within the current year, indicating a significant cohort nearing the completion of their academic programs. Besides, 30% anticipate graduating within the next two years, while 21.25% foresee graduation within three years. A smaller percentage, 5%, indicated an expected graduation timeline beyond three years. The figure underscores the diverse timelines for graduation among the respondents, reflecting their progression through their academic programs and their potential readiness to enter the workforce or pursue internships.

### 3.1.4 Motivations for studying in Finland

The motivations behind pursuing education in Finland were also analysed.

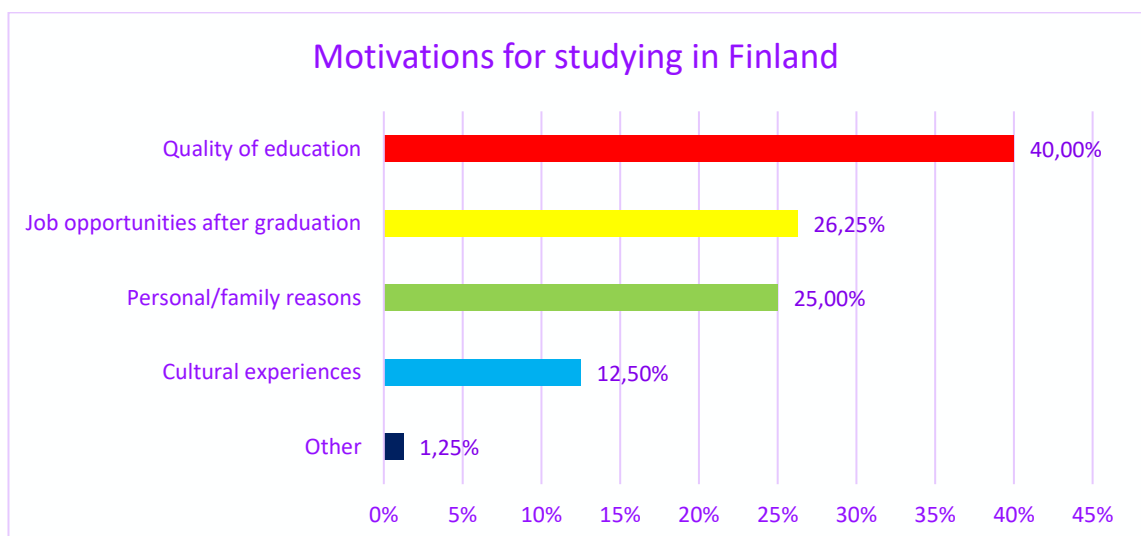


FIGURE 4: percentage of key motivation to study in Finland.

The bar graph in Figure 4 illustrates that the majority of respondents (40%) cited the quality of education as the primary reason. Job opportunities after graduation motivated 26.25% of respondents, while personal or family reasons influenced 25% of the students. Cultural experiences were a factor for 12.5% of respondents. A small portion, 1.25%, provided other reasons for choosing Finland for their education. These responses highlight the diverse factors that attract international students to Finland, with a strong emphasis on the perceived high quality of education and future job prospects.

### 3.1.5 Search methods for internship opportunities

The methods used by international students to find internship opportunities in Finland were evaluated as displayed in figure 5.

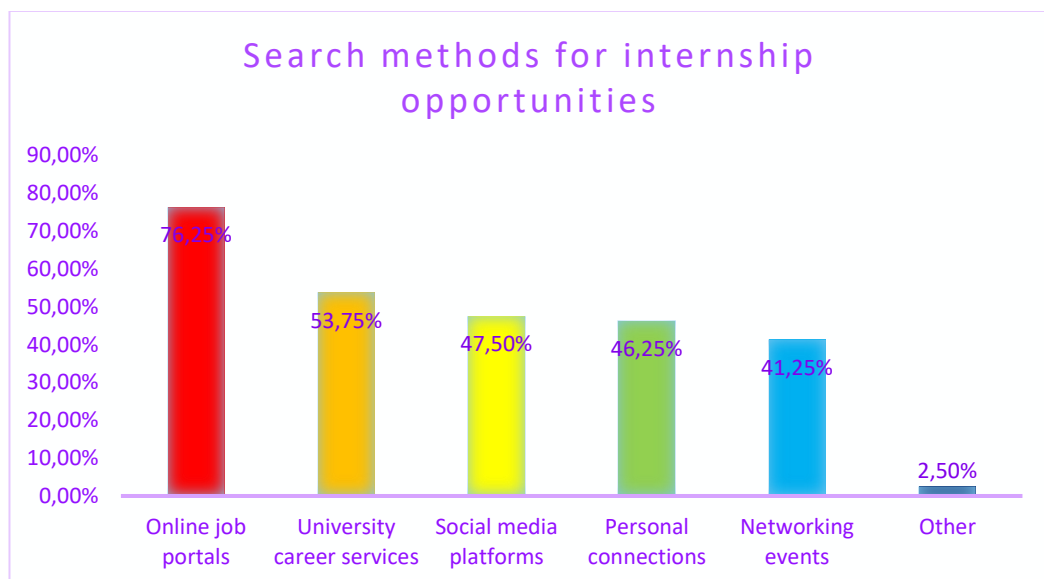


FIGURE 5: Percentage of internship search methods used by international students.

The responses revealed a clear preference for online job portals, utilised by 76.25% of respondents. University career services were also a key resource, used by 53.75% of students. Social media platforms and personal connections were similarly significant, with 47.50% and 46.25% of respondents, respectively,

highlighting the value of both online and personal networks. Networking events were less commonly used but still notable, attended by 41.25% of respondents. A small percentage, 2.50%, mentioned other methods, emphasizing the primary reliance on the most common channels for internship searches.

### 3.1.6 Interest in training opportunities in Ikaalinen

Interest in pursuing an internship in Ikaalinen was assessed to gauge student interest in the local opportunities. The pie chart in figure 6 below shows the responses.



FIGURE 6: Percentage of international students interested in taking an internship.

Most respondents, constituting 55% of the total, expressed a clear interest in such opportunities, with 44 out of 80 students indicating a willingness to participate. Moreover, a significant portion of respondents (30%) expressed uncertainty, highlighting a need for further information or clarification before deciding. Conversely, 15% of respondents stated that they were not interested in pursuing an internship in Ikaalinen. These findings suggest a notable potential for internship placements in the region, contingent upon efforts to address the uncertainties and concerns expressed by international students.

### 3.1.7 Challenges in finding internships

The challenges faced by international students in securing internships were a crucial part of the survey. The bar graph figure 7 highlights these challenges.

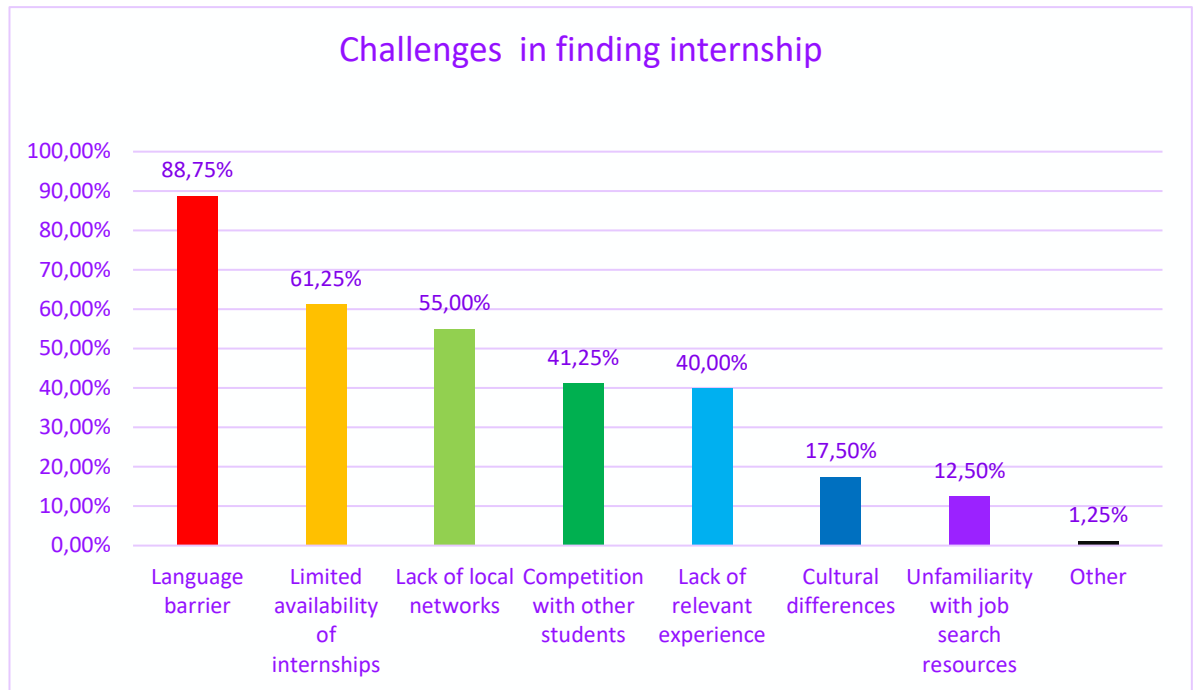


FIGURE 7: Challenges faced by international students in finding internships.

Language barrier emerged as the most significant obstacle, with a substantial 88.75% of respondents citing it. Following closely, 61.25% of students highlighted the limited availability of internships as a major challenge. Lack of local networks also posed a considerable issue for 55% of respondents. Meanwhile, 41.25% mentioned competition with other students, and 40% identified their lack of relevant experience as barriers. Cultural differences were cited by 17.50% of respondents, while 12.50% noted unfamiliarity with job search resources. A small percentage, 1.25%, mentioned other miscellaneous challenges. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of the obstacles encountered by international students in their pursuit of internships in Finland.

### 3.1.8 Employment status related to the study field

The pie chart in figure 8 below presents the employment status of international students relative to their field of study.

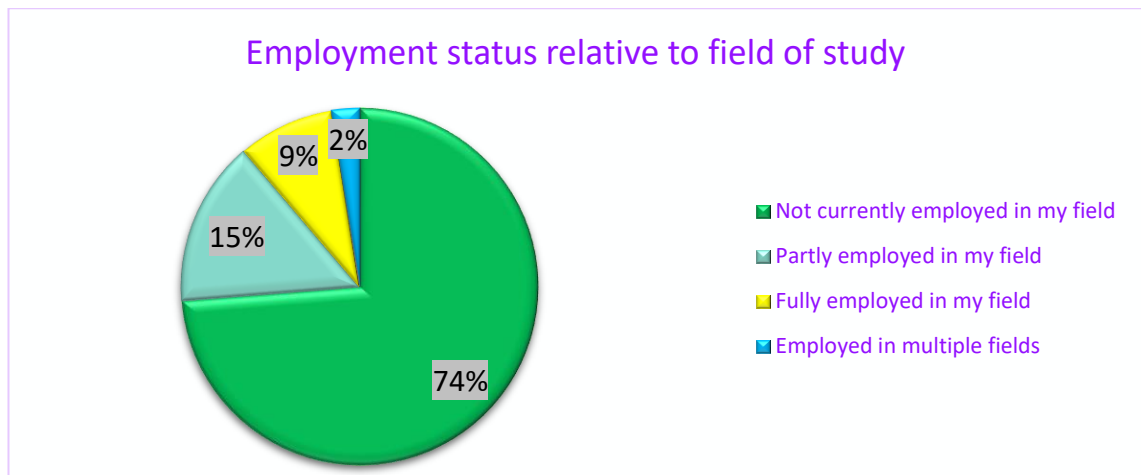


FIGURE 8: Proportion of employment aligned with academic field.

According to the results, many respondents (74%) indicated that they are not currently employed in their field of study. A smaller proportion, comprising 15% of respondents, reported being partly employed in their field, while 9% stated they are fully employed in their field. A minor portion of respondents, representing 2%, reported being employed in multiple fields. These findings suggest that a significant portion of international students may be facing challenges in securing employment directly related to their academic specialization.

### 3.1.9 Starting a career and living in Finland after completing studies

To understand the future plans of international students, the survey assessed their interest in starting a career and living in Finland post-graduation. The pie chart in figure 9 provides a detailed breakdown of the responses.

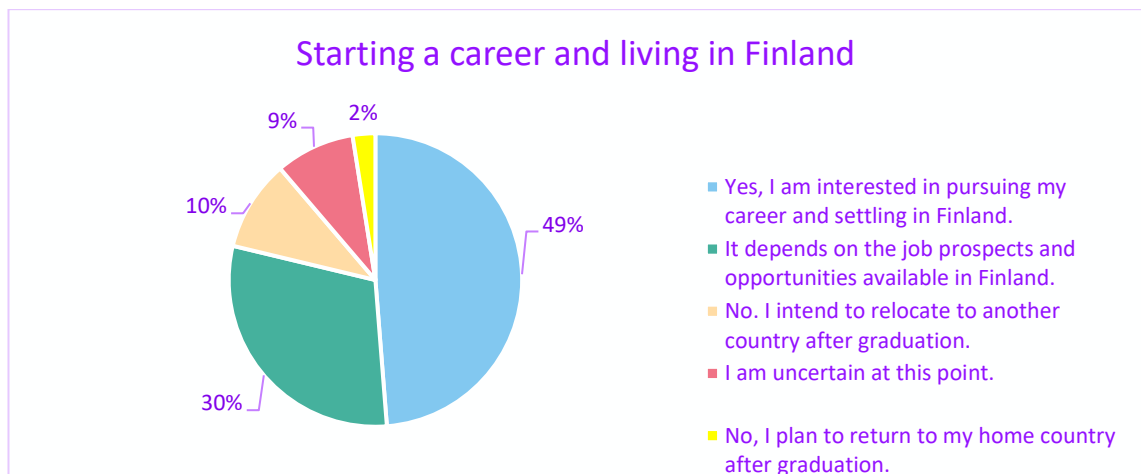


FIGURE 9: Post-graduation career plans for international students.

Based on the responses collected, it is evident that a considerable proportion of students are interested in pursuing their careers and settling in Finland. Approximately 49% of the respondents expressed this preference. Moreover, 30% of respondents stated that their decision depends on the job prospects and opportunities available in Finland. Conversely, 10% of respondents intend to relocate to another country after graduation, while 9% remain uncertain about their post-graduation plans. Only a minimal fraction of respondents, representing 2%, plan to return to their home country following graduation. These findings shed light on the varied aspirations and considerations among international students regarding their future career paths and geographical locations for settling.

### 3.1.10 Proficiency in Finnish

To assess how Finnish language proficiency affects the ability of international students to secure training placements, the survey included a specific question on this topic. The figure 10 below illustrates the responses.

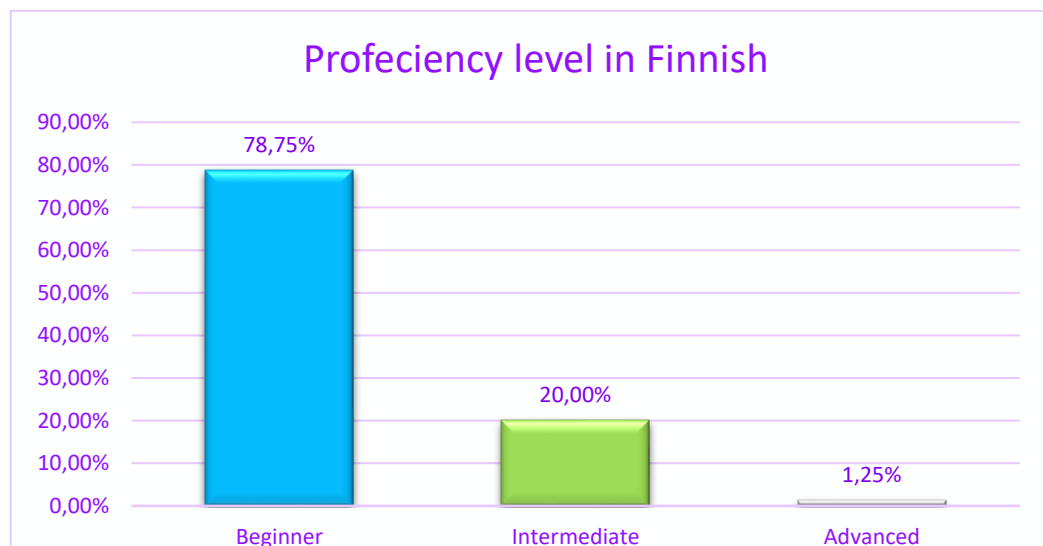


FIGURE 10: Percentage of self-assessment level of Finnish language proficiency among international students.

It is evident that most of international students, comprising 78.75% of respondents, rated their proficiency in Finnish as beginner. Meanwhile, 20% of respondents assessed their proficiency level as intermediate, indicating a moder-

ate level of competency in the language. Conversely, a minimal proportion of respondents, representing only 1.25%, considered themselves to have advanced proficiency in Finnish. These findings underscore the predominant presence of beginners among international students in terms of Finnish language skills, with fewer individuals possessing intermediate or advanced proficiency levels.

### 3.1.11 The impact of Finnish proficiency on training placement

The survey sought to explain the role of Finnish language proficiency in securing training placements for international students. The figure 11 below illustrates the responses.

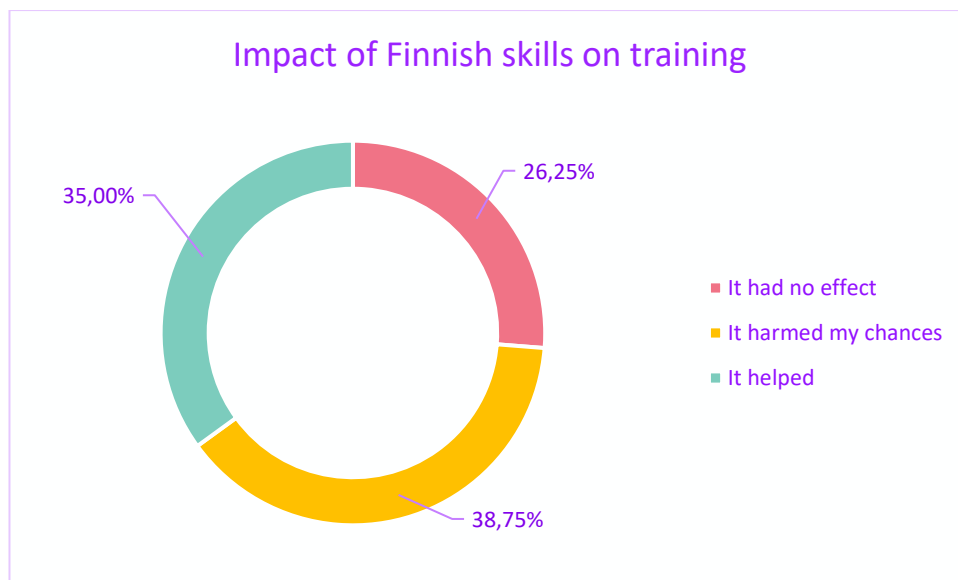


FIGURE 11: Finnish proficiency's influence on training.

The data reveal that 35% of respondents felt their Finnish proficiency helped them secure a training placement. Conversely, 38.75% of respondents felt that their Finnish proficiency harmed their chances of securing such placements. Interestingly, 26.25% of respondents believed that their proficiency had no effect on their ability to secure a training placement. These results emphasize the complex interplay between language proficiency and internship opportunities for international students in Finland, suggesting a need for further investigation into the specific factors influencing these perceptions.

### 3.1.12 Integration in Finland during studies

The level of integration experienced by international students during their studies in Finland was analysed. The figure below presents the findings.

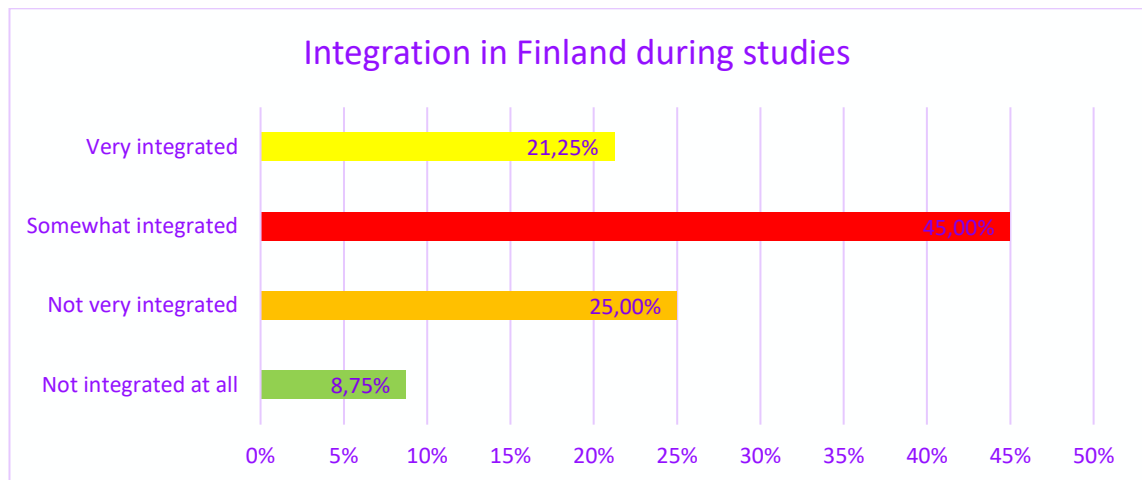


FIGURE 12: Integration during studies in Finland.

Among the respondents, 21.25% expressed feeling very integrated, indicating a strong sense of belonging within the Finnish community. A larger portion, comprising 45% of respondents, reported feeling somewhat integrated, suggesting a moderate level of assimilation into Finnish society. On the other hand, 25% of respondents indicated feeling not very integrated, while 8.75% reported feeling not integrated at all. These findings highlight the diverse experiences of international students in Finland and underscore the importance of fostering an inclusive environment to support their integration efforts.

### 3.1.13 Perceived employability enhancement

Respondents shared their views on how internship experiences influenced their employability and career prospects. The figure below provides a summary of their responses.



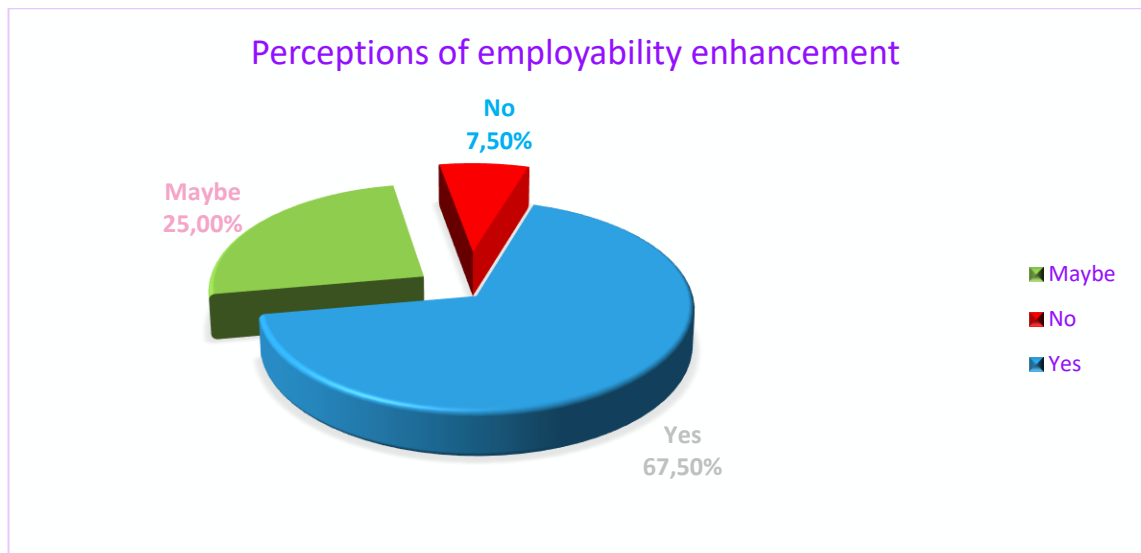


FIGURE 13: Perceived impact of internship experience on employability and career prospects.

The pie chart illustrates that a significant majority of respondents, comprising 67.50%, expressed confidence that their internship experience would indeed enhance their employability and career prospects. In contrast, a small percentage, specifically 7.50% of respondents, held the belief that their internship experience would not contribute positively to their future career opportunities. Meanwhile, 25% of respondents remained uncertain about the potential impact, indicating a need for further clarity or assessment of the benefits of internships on their professional trajectory.

### 3.1.14 Factors influencing decision to leave Finland

In exploring why international students might decide to leave Finland after their studies, several factors were considered. The bar graph in figure 14 demonstrates the various influences on their decisions.

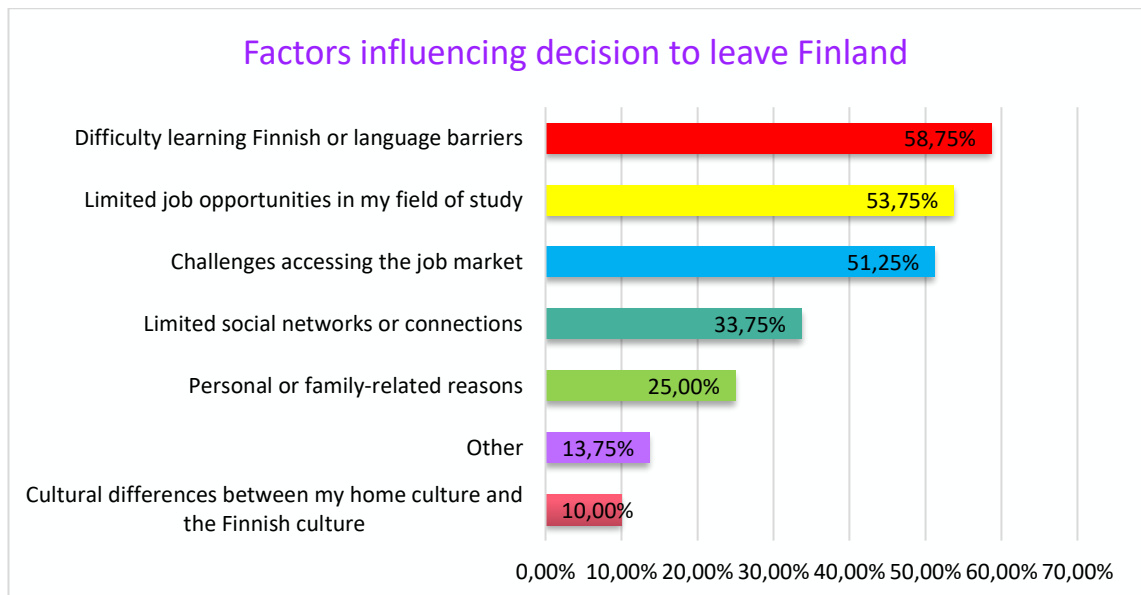


FIGURE 14: Factors influencing decision to leave Finland.

Language barriers and difficulties in learning Finnish were the most cited factor, affecting 58.75% of respondents. This underscores the significance of language proficiency in accessing job opportunities. Furthermore, limited job opportunities in their respective fields of study were a significant concern for 53.75% of respondents, highlighting challenges in aligning their skills with available positions. Accessing the job market presented obstacles for 51.25% of respondents, indicative of broader issues related to job availability and competition. The importance of social networks and connections was evident, with 33.75% of respondents citing limited networks as a factor influencing their decision. Cultural differences between home culture and Finnish culture played a role for 10% of respondents, underscoring the importance of cultural adaptation. Ultimately, personal or family-related reasons influenced the decision for 25% of respondents, illustrating the multifaceted nature of their considerations.

### 3.1.15 Struggling to find internship and measures to tackle the issue.

The respondents were asked question, "What, in your opinion, are the reasons why some students struggle to find internships?" This open-ended question allowed international students to share their experiences and recommendations. Many cited the language barrier as a significant obstacle, with many companies requiring Finnish proficiency, even when the working language is English.

This issue is compounded by a lack of internship opportunities that do not require Finnish, leading to heightened competition for available positions. Moreover, some respondents noted that local companies often prefer hiring Finnish students, citing a lack of trust or comfort with foreign interns. Another major challenge is the limited availability of internship positions, which is exacerbated by high competition among students.

Respondents also pointed to a lack of local networks and connections, crucial for securing internships, and a general lack of practical experience among students, which employers often expect even for training roles. Cultural differences and a reluctance from employers to hire international students also play a role, with some respondents feeling that Finnish companies do not give international students enough chances to learn on the job, expecting extensive prior experience instead.

Furthermore, logistical challenges of commuting to internship locations in regions like Ikaalinen, limited local accommodations, and the fact that many internships are unpaid, making it difficult for international students to support themselves financially, were also mentioned. In general, a combination of language barriers, limited internship availability, cultural, logistical, and network-related issues complicate the internship search for international students in Finland.

The second open-ended question explored the potential solutions to improve internship opportunities for international students in Finland. International students suggested several measures to improve internship opportunities in Finland, emphasizing the need for companies to invest in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and lower Finnish language requirements. They advocated for more internships conducted in English and proposed that universities, such as TAMK, play a more active role in connecting students with companies. Enhanced integration programs, higher-quality Finnish language teaching, and specialized guidance from universities were also recommended. In addition, respondents called for more paid internships that do not require Finnish skills, government incentives for employing international students, and increased awareness within Finnish society about the benefits of hiring international talent.

These measures aim to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for international students seeking internships in Finland.

### **3.2 Interview with the CEO of Ikaalisten Kehitys**

The interview with the CEO of Ikaalisten Kehitys was conducted on 12 April 2024. It was recorded to ensure accuracy and reliability. The interview provided valuable insights into the landscape of internship opportunities for international students in the region. Comprising seven questions, it delved into various aspects such as the availability of internships, selection criteria for international students, motivations for local companies to offer internships, challenges faced by companies, and suggestions for enhancing the internship experience. An open-ended question allowed for additional comments or suggestions from the CEO, enriching the understanding of the organization's perspective on internships for international students in Ikaalinen.

#### **3.2.1 Internship availability in Ikaalinen**

In response to whether there are enough internships for international students in the Ikaalinen area, the CEO of Ikaalisten Kehitys confirmed that while there are internship opportunities, they are currently insufficient. The CEO believes there are opportunities to increase the number of internships available to international students. Ikaalisten Kehitys has recently initiated a project aimed at attracting international students to the region by facilitating internships with local companies. This project is in its early stages, and the CEO hopes to see more international students participating soon.

#### **3.2.2 Criteria for selecting international students for internships in Ikaalinen**

Regarding the criteria for selecting international students for internships, the CEO explained that a key criterion is their ability to speak some Finnish, even if only for small talk. The required level of Finnish proficiency varies depending on the specific position. The Ikaalisten Kehitys representative also emphasized the

importance of international students being aware of Finnish work and life culture, which can differ significantly from their home countries. The CEO acknowledged that local companies in Finland are often hesitant to recruit international talent, preferring to take a cautious approach.

### **3.2.3 Motivations for local companies to offer internships to international students in Ikaalinen**

When asked about motivations drive local companies to offer internships to international students, the interviewer highlighted several key motivations driving local companies to offer internships to international students. Firstly, the looming shortage of skilled workers in the future is a significant factor. Companies are keen to train international students to take on more responsibilities, ultimately helping them to grow and integrate into the business as valuable team members. Moreover, Ikaalisten Kehitys is actively working on a project designed to bridge the gap between international students and local businesses. This initiative not only benefits the companies and students but also aims to contribute to the overall development of the Ikaalinen municipality.

### **3.2.4 Challenges faced by local companies in offering internship opportunities in Ikaalinen**

Responding to inquiries about the challenges that local companies in Ikaalinen face when offering internship opportunities, the CEO mentioned several challenges local companies encounter when offering internships to international students. One major difficulty is identifying suitable positions that align with the skills and needs of students. Furthermore, providing internships requires a significant budget to ensure proper guidance and supervision throughout the training period. Many companies lack the necessary resources to allocate a dedicated supervisor for interns, making it challenging to support international students effectively.

### **3.2.5 Enhancing the internship experience for international students in Ikaalinen**

Responding to the question, "What are the challenges that local companies in Ikaalinen face when offering internship opportunities?" the CEO of Ikaalisten Kehitys suggests that local companies need to change their mindset towards international students and recognise the crucial role these students can play in the company's development and growth. Understanding the mutual benefits can foster a more welcoming attitude. In addition, companies should carefully consider and clearly define the positions they can offer, ensuring detailed planning regarding guidance and supervision to provide a comprehensive and supportive internship experience.

### **3.2.6 Enhancing connections between businesses and international student talent**

In addressing concerns about the key challenges international students face when seeking internships or employment opportunities in Ikaalinen, the CEO proposed several ways to strengthen the connection between international students and local businesses. First, creating videos that highlight the benefits for both parties can help raise awareness and showcase success stories. Moreover, organizing more events to facilitate direct interactions between international students and local companies would raise stronger relationships. Lastly, establishing a dedicated platform where international students can showcase their skills and where companies can post job offers would provide a comprehensive overview and make it easier for businesses to recognize and recruit international talent.

### **3.2.7 Key challenges for international students seeking internships or employment in Ikaalinen**

From the CEO's perspective, when asked, "What are some of the key challenges international students face when seeking internships or employment opportunities in Ikaalinen?" the interviewer identified several obstacles that interna-

tional students encounter when looking for internships or job opportunities in Ikaalinen. One major challenge is the commute from Tampere, where many students reside, to Ikaalinen, where the companies are located. Moreover, finding suitable accommodation can be difficult, although Ikaalisten Kehitys is actively seeking solutions for this issue. Language barriers and cultural differences also pose significant difficulties, affecting both communication and the integration process. Lastly, the quality of life in Ikaalinen is not as robust as in Tampere, especially regarding recreational activities and hobbies, which can influence the attractiveness of the area for international students.

### **3.2.8 Final thoughts and suggestions**

In closing, the CEO expressed optimism regarding the ongoing project aimed at enhancing opportunities for international students in Ikaalinen. Emphasizing that the project is still in its early stages, the interviewer hopes for continued progress and expansion. The CEO envisions a process that other municipalities can adopt, serving as an example of effective organization and outreach to attract international students. By sharing knowledge and best practices, the project aims to foster greater familiarity and engagement with international student communities, in the end benefiting both the students and the local region.

## 4 DISCUSSION

Finland is grappling with a significant demographic challenge characterized by a declining birth rate and a growing demand for skilled professionals across various industries. The CEO of Ikaalisten Kehitys has confirmed that the looming shortage of skilled workers in the future poses a significant barrier to economic growth and innovation within the country. Recognizing the inevitability of highly skilled immigration to sustain its economy, Finland is increasingly focusing on fostering inclusive work environments and promoting the retention and integration of international students into the local workforce. However, the integration of international students into the job market through internships presents a multifaceted phenomenon with implications for both the hosting community and the students themselves.

Despite the opportunities provided by internships, international students face numerous challenges when integrating into Finnish society and securing employment opportunities, whether through internships during their studies or in long-term positions post-graduation. A significant number of international students are currently pursuing bachelor's degrees, with business and engineering being the most represented fields. The majority of these students expect to graduate within the current year, indicating their readiness to enter the workforce or pursue internships.

International students primarily choose to study in Finland for the high quality of education, with employment prospects after graduation being a secondary motivator. These degree-seeking students aim for full immersion in a new educational environment to earn a degree that demonstrates their advanced skills and knowledge in the host country (Teichler, 2017).

Interest in pursuing internships in Ikaalinen is notably high, with the majority of respondents indicating a willingness to participate. However, a considerable portion expressed uncertainty, underscoring the need for additional information or clarification. In addition, most respondents search for internship opportunities through online job portals and university career services, while social media



platforms and personal connections also play significant roles. apparently, The CEO of Ikaalisten Kehitys mentioned several ways to strengthen the connection between international students and local businesses. These include creating videos that highlight mutual benefits, organizing more events to facilitate direct interactions, and establishing a dedicated platform where international students can showcase their skills and where companies can post job offers. These measures aim to foster stronger relationships and increase the visibility of international talent.

However, international students face several significant challenges in securing internships in Finland. The most notable obstacle is the language barrier, followed by the limited availability of internships and a lack of local networks. Relatively, most respondents indicated that they are not currently employed in their field of study, with only a smaller proportion being partly employed. Despite these challenges, a significant majority of respondents believe that their internship experience would enhance their employability and career prospects, reflecting the value of career services employability interventions (O'Connor & Bodicoat, 2017).

Integration during studies in Finland is another critical aspect, with many students reporting a moderate level of assimilation into Finnish society. However, a considerable percentage of international students still feel not integrated. Therefore, Exposure to diverse cultural environments and the development of social skills are anticipated to aid in navigating different environments and fostering integration (Teichler, 2017; Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx, 2016).

A significant proportion of students are interested in pursuing their careers and settling in Finland after completing their studies, their decision depends on the job prospects and opportunities available in Finland. Despite the fact that, nearly half are inclined to leave Finland after graduation, influenced by factors such as job prospects and opportunities (E2 Research, 2023). The results show that language barriers and limited job opportunities in their fields of study are the most cited reasons for considering leaving.

The proficiency of international students in Finnish is generally low, with most rating their proficiency as beginner. This lack of proficiency significantly impacts their ability to secure training placements, as a key criterion for these positions is the ability to speak some Finnish according to the CEO of Ikaalisten Kehitys. Language barriers and cultural differences also pose significant difficulties, affecting communication and the integration process. Logistical challenges, such as commuting to internship locations and finding suitable accommodations, further complicate the situation.

International students have proposed several measures to address these challenges. They suggest that companies invest in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, lower Finnish language requirements, and offer more internships conducted in English. Additionally, universities should play a more active role in connecting students with companies, providing enhanced integration programs, improving the quality of Finnish language instruction, and offering specialized guidance. Furthermore, increasing the number of paid internships and introducing government incentives for employing international students.

The CEO of Ikaalisten Kehitys suggests that local companies need to change their mindset towards international students and recognize their crucial role in the company's development and growth. Understanding the mutual benefits can foster a more welcoming attitude. Internships offer a wealth of benefits to students, employers, and academic institutions alike (Goplani et al., 2020).

In conclusion, Finland must address the various challenges faced by international students to fully leverage their potential and mitigate the talent shortage. By implementing the recommended measures and fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment, Finland can better retain this talented pool of graduates and fully utilise their contributions to the local economy and society.

#### **4.1 Limitations and future study**

While this research provides valuable insights into the impact of international student internships in Ikaalinen, several limitations should be acknowledged.

Firstly, there is a limited amount of literature and comprehensive sources specifically addressing the integration of international students into the Finnish job market. This lack of resources restricts the depth and breadth of the theoretical foundation of the study. Secondly, the study's scope was limited to a specific geographical area, which may not fully capture the diverse experiences of international students across different regions of Finland. In addition, the interview did not yield substantial information about companies, indicating a gap in the qualitative data collected. The absence of interviews with key stakeholders and company representatives means that the thesis does not fully capture the challenges and opportunities from the perspective of employers.

Future research should aim to address these limitations and expand the understanding of international student internships. Longitudinal studies tracking the career progression of international students who have completed internships in Finland would provide valuable insights into the long-term benefits and challenges associated with these programs. Comparative studies between different regions and countries can help identify best practices and highlight unique factors that contribute to the successful integration and retention of international talent.

Moreover, exploring the perspectives of a broader range of stakeholders, including policymakers, educational institutions, and community organizations, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the ecosystem supporting international student internships. Future studies should also consider larger sample sizes and employ mixed method approaches to enhance the robustness and generalizability of the findings.

Investigating the specific impact of different types of support, such as language training, cultural orientation, and mentorship programs, on the success of international internships would help refine and improve these initiatives. Finally, examining the role of digital platforms and technologies in facilitating networking, mentorship, and support for international students could offer innovative solutions to the challenges identified in this research.

## 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

**Finnish language:** to support the language development of international students and interns, TAMK should provide specialized Finnish language courses tailored to professional settings to better prepare students for the workplace. Besides, it is essential for TAMK to increase the number of study hours dedicated to Finnish language courses and improve the quality of these courses by adopting more engaging and effective teaching methods. Local companies should also take the initiative to create and implement language training programs for international interns, aimed at enhancing their proficiency in both professional and everyday Finnish. Likewise, promoting a bilingual work environment whenever possible would enable international interns to contribute more effectively while continuing to improve their Finnish language skills.

**Internship:** the findings of the research highlight the lack of internship opportunities for international students. To address this issue, local companies should invest in creating more internship positions and ensure these roles are well-structured to provide meaningful experiences. Additionally, companies should provide supervisors specifically tasked with guiding and mentoring international interns throughout their training period. Fostering partnerships between educational institutions and local businesses can facilitate a smoother transition for students into internships, ensuring they gain relevant industry experience and build valuable professional networks.

**Networking:** building upon the established foundation of company visits and collaboration projects at TAMK, it is recommended to enhance and expand these successful initiatives. These activities have proven valuable and continuing them will reinforce the bridge between academia and industry. To further support international students in their career pursuits, TAMK should enhance its career services by offering targeted resources such as interview preparation sessions, and job fairs specifically designed for the needs of international students. These efforts will ensure that students are better prepared to enter the job market.

In parallel, Ikaalisten Kehitys should intensify its role as a connector between local businesses and international students by helping to arrange internship placements and providing ongoing support throughout the internship process. By organizing events and creating platforms for interaction, Ikaalisten Kehitys can help forge enduring relationships and networks that not only enhance the networking opportunities for international students but also provide local businesses with access to a diverse talent pool. These collaborative efforts will significantly improve the employability of international students by providing them with the necessary industry exposure and professional relationships.

Integration: to enhance the integration of international students and interns into the local workforce, local companies should establish cultural training sessions for both international interns and existing employees to foster mutual understanding and reduce cultural friction. Implementing mentorship programs that pair international interns with experienced employees will provide essential guidance, support, and networking opportunities. Besides, designing and enforcing HR policies that emphasize diversity and inclusion will ensure that international interns feel valued and supported within the company. Regularly reviewing and adjusting these policies based on feedback from international interns will continuously improve their internship experience. TAMK should organise cultural orientation programs to help international students understand Finnish workplace norms and expectations. Providing ongoing support throughout their studies, including integration programs, social events, and peer support networks, will further aid their adaptation. Encouraging alumni networks to assist current students in building professional connections and accessing internship opportunities will also be beneficial.

## 6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this thesis has explored the complex dynamics surrounding the integration of international students into the Finnish job market, with a specific focus on the impact of internships in Ikaalinen. The theoretical framework and literature review have provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating international students into the Finnish workforce through internships. Key concepts such as internationalisation, social capital, and integration have been pivotal in framing the discussion. The literature underscores the importance of international student mobility in enhancing global knowledge exchange and addressing demographic challenges faced by countries like Finland.

The insufficiency of specific literature on the integration of international students into the Finnish job market highlights a significant gap, emphasizing the need for more focused research in this area. However, existing studies have shown that international students bring diverse skills and perspectives that can drive innovation and economic growth. The concepts of social capital and integration emphasize the importance of building professional networks and fostering inclusive environments to support the successful transition of international students from academia to the workforce.

On a practical level, this research has identified several key actions that can significantly enhance the integration of international students into the Finnish job market. The findings highlight the critical role of internships in providing international students with practical experience, enhancing their employability, and helping them build professional networks. To maximize the benefits of these programs, it is essential to address the challenges faced by international students, such as language barriers, limited internship opportunities, and lack of local networks. Moreover, the reluctance of Finnish companies to hire international talent aggravates these issues and must be considered when developing comprehensive support strategies.

TAMK and other educational institutions should enhance their career services by offering specialized language courses, cultural orientation programs, and ongoing support to international students. Encouraging alumni networks to assist current students can also provide valuable professional connections and guidance.

Local companies should invest in creating more structured and meaningful internship positions, provide dedicated mentors, and implement inclusive HR policies that support diversity. Furthermore, fostering partnerships between educational institutions and local businesses can facilitate smoother transitions for students into internships, ensuring they gain relevant industry experience.

Ikaalisten Kehitys should serve as a bridge between local businesses and international students, helping to arrange internship placements and offering support throughout the internship process. Moreover, Ikaalisten Kehitys should organize events and create platforms where businesses and international students can interact, share experiences, and build relationships.

Focusing on these practical aspects will allow Finland to better leverage the potential of international students, ensuring their successful integration into the local workforce. This approach will help mitigate the talent shortage and contribute to the country's economic growth and innovation. The combined efforts of educational institutions, local businesses, and policymakers are essential in creating a supportive and inclusive environment that benefits both international students and the broader community.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1. News article in TAMK intranet

### **Impact of International Student Internships in Ikaalinen, Finland: Survey for TAMK International Students**

Calling all international students at TAMK! Participate in our survey to help us understand the impact of international student internships on companies in Finland. Your insights are vital in shaping the future of internship opportunities for students and enhancing local economic growth.

Are you an international student at TAMK interested in internships? We invite you to take part in our survey focusing on the role of international student internships in Finland. Your responses will contribute to valuable research aimed at enhancing internship opportunities and strengthening ties between students and local businesses.

The survey aims to explore various aspects, including the challenges faced by international students in securing internships, the potential benefits of internship experiences, and factors influencing career decisions post-graduation. By sharing your perspectives, you can help shape future internship programs and support the integration of international students into the Finnish job market.

Participation is voluntary, and your responses will be treated confidentially. Your input is invaluable in driving positive change and creating a more inclusive environment for international students in Finland.

The questionnaire will only take approximately 5 minutes to complete. We appreciate your time and contribution to this important research endeavor.

To participate, simply click the survey link and share your insights. Thank you for your contribution to this important research endeavor!

Please find the questionnaire [here](#).

## Appendix 2. International students questionnaire

### **Introduction:**

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire! This research aims to understand the impact of international student internships on companies in Ikaalinen, Finland. Your responses will be crucial in exploring how these internships can benefit both parties and contribute to a thriving local economy.

### **Informed Consent Statement:**

Before you begin, please read the following information carefully:

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Participation is voluntary, and you have the right to refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the university.

Any information you provide will be treated confidentially. Your responses will be anonymised and aggregated for analysis purposes. Data collected during this study will be securely stored and accessible only to authorized personnel.

By proceeding with this survey, you acknowledge that you have read and understood this information and agree to participate voluntarily. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact [Mo-hamed.youssfi@tuni.fi](mailto:Mo-hamed.youssfi@tuni.fi).

### **1.Current Study Program:**

- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Other: (please specify)

### **2.What is your field of study:**

- Business
- Health Care
- Arts & Media
- Engineering
- Social Sciences
- Other: (please specify)

**3. What is your expected year of graduation from your current academic program?**

- Within this year
- Within two years
- within three years
- Within more than three years

**4. What prompted you to pursue education in Finland as an international student?**

- Job opportunities after graduation
- Quality of education
- Personal/family reasons
- Cultural experiences
- Other (please specify)

**5. How do you typically search for internship opportunities in Finland?  
(Select all that apply)**

- University career services
- Online job portals
- Networking events
- Social media platforms
- Personal connections
- Other (please specify)

**6. If given the chance to participate in a training opportunity in Ikaalinen, which is located approximately 50 km from Tampere in the Pirkanmaa region and serves as a vibrant hub for numerous companies across various sectors, would you be interested in taking it?**

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

**7. What challenges have you encountered in finding internship opportunities in Finland?**

- Language barrier
- Lack of relevant experience
- Lack of local networks
- Unfamiliarity with job search resources
- Limited availability of internships
- Competition with other students
- Cultural differences
- Other reason: (please specify)

**8. Are you currently employed in a job related to your field of study?**

- Fully employed in my field
- Partly employed in my field
- Employed in multiple fields
- Not currently employed in my field

**9. Are you considering starting your career and living in Finland after completing your studies?**

- Yes, I am interested in pursuing my career and settling in Finland.
- No, I plan to return to my home country after graduation.
- No. I intend to relocate to another country after graduation.
- I am uncertain at this point.
- It depends on the job prospects and opportunities available in Finland.

**10. How would you rate your proficiency in Finnish?**

- Beginner
- Intermediate
- Advanced

- Fluent

**11. Do you believe your level of Finnish proficiency positively impact your ability to secure a training placement in Finland?**

- It helped.
- It had no effect.
- It harmed my chances.

**12. How integrated do you feel in Finland during your studies?**

- a. Very integrated
- b. Somewhat integrated
- c. Not very integrated
- d. Not integrated at all

**13. Do you believe your internship experience will enhance your employability and career prospects?**

- Yes
- No

**14. If you intend to leave Finland, what factors influenced your decision?**

**Please select all that apply: \***

- Limited job opportunities in my field of study
- Challenges accessing the job market
- Limited social networks or connections
- Difficulty learning Finnish or language barriers
- Personal or family-related reasons
- Cultural differences between my home culture and the Finnish culture
- Other: (please specify)

**Open question: (optional)**

**15. What, in your opinion, are the reasons why some students struggle to find internships?**

**16. What measures do you believe should be taken to address this issue effectively?**



### Appendix 3. Struggling to find internship

Explanations to question "What, in your opinion, are the reasons why some students struggle to find internships? "

"Language barrier, no one wants to employ."

"Too few positions that don't require Finnish skills and too many people competing for them."

"Language barrier and the delta of the difference between their home culture and Finnish culture, not to mention lack of opportunity."

"Language barriers and lack of internship opportunities (especially in Tampere)."

"Language barrier and limited jobs, especially nowadays."

"Limited access to placements because of language barrier."

"Limited number of internships, preference towards local students, changing attitudes towards foreigners in Finnish society."

"Limited internship placement."

"Limited opportunities if you're not fluent in Finnish."

"Limited amount of companies accepting interns."

"Too many people competing for limited positions."

"High competition for the existing positions."

"Universities often produce far too few graduates to meet industry demand."

"Many require or prefer people who speak Finnish language."

"Lack of trust for foreigners within Finnish businesses."

"Lack of networking."

"Companies are not giving students chances to learn on the job as many expect you to have racked up lots of experience for an internship that is meant to be a period of training."

"Lack of motivation for employers to hire foreigners."

"Nepotism in the Finnish job market. Employers often don't hire non-Finnish speakers even though the company working language is English."

"They consider international students as a burden."

"Cultural differences between their home culture and Finnish culture."

"Finnish society deprives foreigners of opportunities."

"Many international students have to get a part-time job, and if an internship is not paid, that could be an issue."

"Connections, personal motivation, and self-initiative."

"Lack of practical experience."

"Laziness. They don't try hard enough."

"Lack of any reference and job in the specialized field."

"I did not look for an internship."

...

#### Appendix 4. Measures to tackle the issue

Explanations to question "What measures do you believe should be taken to address this issue effectively?"

"Companies in Finland should invest in diversity, equity, and inclusion and also be more open to employing international students."

"Lower requirements regarding the language level in a job position."

"Make English a general language for communication."

"I think it would help a lot if TAMK can be the bridge between international students and companies. For example, TAMK could organize students to visit big companies in their field (I noticed that there are student unions organizing such activities, but at least the ones I saw are just in Finnish), and teachers from TAMK could be a reference person for international students."

"Make it more accessible to everyone."

"More acceptance of non-Finnish speakers."

"The Finnish language should not be mandatory when applying for an internship. Encourage projects coordinated between universities, enterprises, and global corporations. Encourage students who have occupied internships and alumni to enhance the relationship between enterprises and universities. Many international students have work experience, so the university could leverage their networks to connect with enterprises and global corporations to enhance its reputation."

"Companies should employ English speakers."

"Openness to international markets and stronger integration programs."

"More internships and greater openness to conducting company operations in English."

"Slowly get to know people and apply for as many jobs as possible."

"Offer more international internships."

"As well as integration and immersion of foreigners into Finland, native Finns also need to learn to welcome and help with the integration. If foreigners are not welcomed, there is no room for integration."

"Increase placement areas for the nursing students."

## Appendix 5. Interview questions

Q1. Are there enough internships for International Students in Ikaalinen area?

Q2. What criteria do local companies consider when selecting international students for internship placements facilitated by Ikaalisten Kehitys?

Q3. What motivations drive local companies to offer internships to international students?

Q4. What are the challenges that local companies in Ikaalinen face when offering internship opportunities?

Q5. In your opinion, what areas or aspects could be improved by Local Companies to further enhance the internship experience for international students in Ikaalinen?

Q6. How can Ikaalisten Kehitys improve its connections between businesses and international student talent?

Q7. From your perspective, what are some of the key challenges international students face when seeking internships or employment opportunities in Ikaalinen?

Q8. Lastly, is there anything else you would like to add or any suggestions you have?