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**AFRICAN STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE ON  
INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE FINNISH HIGHER  
EDUCATION**

**Master's Thesis in Education**

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## **Tiivistelmä – ABSTRACT**

Internationalization in higher education has been delineated to have positive effects on students and graduates. With numerous higher education institutions in Finland, little is known about the involvement and perspectives of international graduates from these institutions. Hence, this study explores the African student's perspectives on internationalization of the Finnish higher education.

The snowball sampling technique was used to identify African graduates from diverse African countries and various degree programmes. Data was collected by questionnaires and interviews from fourteen African graduates from two higher education institutions in Jyväskylä. Aspects of both the conventional and summative content analysis methods were used for data analysis.

The findings professed that several factors affected these African student's learning such as their motivations to study in Finland, expectations, personal experiences, knowledge and skills gained plus intercultural exposure. Other factors such as good teacher student relationships, diverse classroom interactions, the flexible nature of programmes and well equipped school facilities like libraries also facilitated their learning especially because the above factors are not common in most African universities. However, language barriers, the cold impersonal attitude of Finns, lack of employment opportunities, limited practical/field training, few international lecturers and unbalanced curricula were constraints in the internationalization process and degree programmes.

To enhance the Finnish internationalization process and international degree programmes, recommendations from these graduates such as networking with other higher education institutions, educational practitioners, businesses, and governments, improving pedagogical practices, balancing curricula contents, incorporating practical training and the employment of more foreign lecturers are a few fundamental steps to be considered.

**Asiasanat – Keywords:** *Internationalization, African students, student perceptions, Finnish higher education institutions, international degree programmes, pedagogical practices.*

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Research has attested the significance of internationalization in higher education as a medium for the fostering, development and exchange of international knowledge, skills and expertise leading to a global rise in international cooperation, economic growth and productivity (OECD, 2010). Internationalization in higher education has also been perceived as the movement of people from one geographical region to another for educational purposes, also known as study abroad (Juknyte-Petreikiene, 2006) and a process of understanding cross-border relationships and cultural diversity within an educational environment (Croese, 2011).

Consequently, there has been a wide array of expectations of this process which include the ability of international programmes to prepare graduates for the international labor market, given that practical training abroad inevitably enhances learning and produces competent workforce ready to face the challenges of the global market (NAFSA, 2007). Today, however, international degree programmes and lecturers are faced with multiple challenges to adopt international curricula and modern pedagogical styles that address the diverse needs of a multicultural population (Croese, 2011). With the wide range of international activities which include a huge variety of study programmes that have attracted foreign students into higher education institutions (Altbach & Knight, 2007, 290) in Finland, I became curious to know how Finnish higher education institutions (known as one of the best worldwide) involves, integrates and meets the needs of these diverse student populations. With the influx of skilled educated migrants from Africa to Finland in search for better information, opportunities, exchange of skills and knowledge, jobs and better wages (Lowell & Findlay, 2001), the perspectives of these disadvantaged or minority group of international students who encounter new experiences in their host country (Croese, 2011) quite different from their countries of origin was of particular interest to me.

Due to the rapid increase in cross-border activities, global competition and industrialization, the focus on internationalization in higher education became more essential in Europe as well as the Scandinavian countries (Teichler, 2004) where there exist an urgency to study the experiences, involvement and perspective of foreign students (one of the actors)



engaged in the internationalization process. This kind of study has been carried out in English-speaking higher education institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia (Kondakci, Van den Broeck and Yildirim, 2008) but very little research has been done on this subject in non-English speaking nations like Finland. In addition, given that some of the common goals of the Bologna process, the Leuven Communiqué and the Bucharest Communiqué towards European higher education is enhancing the quality of higher education, and fostering the active participation and involvement of teachers and students in the management of higher education and the Bologna process (European Commission 2009), minimal or no research has been undertaken with respect to minority students (in this case Africans) involvement and perspectives of the Finnish international degree programmes and the internationalization process in general.

Therefore, one of my motivations to carry out this study as a foreign African student in a Finnish higher education institution was this. I obtained a Bachelor's degree in Curriculum Studies and Economics at the University of Buea in Cameroon and was eager and excited to pursue a Master's Programme in the field of Education. My university being the only English university in Cameroon at the time offered very few Masters Programmes. This urged me to go in search of an international Master's Programme in the field of Development and International Cooperation with a major in Education. I was curious about the international aspect of the programme because I wanted to learn and share my knowledge with students from other parts of the world and to experience what educational systems are like especially in the developed world. I was equally of the impression that the success of developed nations lie in their more advanced educational systems and I wanted to learn and compare how education was carried out in the developed countries as opposed to the developing world.

## **1.1 Background of Research**

Internationalization in higher education became a focal point in policy debates and research during the 1990s (Enders, 2004). Due to the similarities that exist between internationalization in higher education and globalization, it is worth noting that they have slightly different focuses. While globalization addresses economic and academic issues, internationalization focuses on

academic policies and practices adopted by higher education institutions and individuals though their ultimate goal is addressing the needs of the ever advancing globalized industrial world (Altbach & Knight, 2007, 290-291). Some academic policies and practices associated with internationalization in higher education include the exploration of the experiences of the actors (foreign and local students, academicians, administrative staff and management members) involved in the process (Kondakci, et al., 2008) and the involvement of international students and faculty staff in the learning process (Jones, 2010).

These academic policies and practices are essential due to the complexity of internationalization in addressing the needs of a vast culturally diverse educational population (Kondakci, et al., 2008). In the past, nation states were the main determinants of the nature, characteristics and quality of higher education institutions (Enders, 2004) and these institutions performed multiple functions of producing resources that will serve the economic, political, social, cultural and educational needs of nations (ibid). Currently, the voices and perceptions of students and administrative staffs in contributing and enriching the quality of the internationalization process in higher education institutions are essential. Moreover, with the rising interest of employers seeking international experiences and university mission statements promoting internationalization in higher education (Bender, Wright and Lopatto, 2009), it is important to discover (from the perspective of the foreign student) the extent to which higher education institutions in non-English speaking nations like Finland, practically train, involve and integrate international students in the learning process and international degree programmes.

Furthermore, equal study opportunities, tuition free education for all (whether nationals or foreigners), wide range of study programmes at the universities in Finland attracted me to study in the country regardless of its subarctic cold temperate climate. However, during my studies in which I have learned a great deal, I was faced with many other kinds of realities. Some of which stemmed from the fact that even though Finland places a very high value in education (Väljörvi et al, 2007) and recently in internationalization of education and attracting foreign scholars into their programmes, the integration of these graduates/scholars especially from marginalized groups (like the Romas) or immigrants from outside the European Union like people of African descent into the Finnish labor market has been slow (Hansen 2000; Hoffman, 2007). Even with the popular notion that there is a considerably declining labor force and ageing population [Research and Innovation Council of Finland (RIC), 2009] which should attract

highly qualified graduates into the Finnish labor market since they have been educated in the Finnish educational system, the case is presumably not true for many foreign African graduates as would be seen later in the discussion section of this study. Despite the fact that as far back as 2003, a good percentage of Finns advocated that Finland should employ more skilled foreigners such as experts, students, language teachers (Jaakkola, 2005), the preference was to employ these immigrants in cleaning jobs, as taxi drivers and newspaper distributors (ibid). From observation, this became the fate for many African scholars who graduated from higher education institutions in Finland.

Given the above scenario, I began to wonder if there are deficiencies in the internationalization process, international curriculum and programmes in Finnish higher education which does not provide the graduates with the relevant skills and tools necessary to survive in the domestic and international labor markets. I also questioned the fact that are university authorities, professors, policy makers and educational administrators in Finland interested in what happens to graduates from universities after completion of their studies? I researched and realized that very little attention has been given and research done in respect to follow up of alumni from Finnish international degree programmes.

Hypothetically, African students were chosen for this study because the African philosophy of education, classroom and learning experiences in their countries of origin are quite different from the Western ideology of education. With the African philosophy of education, the teacher is the all knowing and the students' role is to absorb the knowledge presented by the teacher (Eaves, 2009). Classroom dialogue is controlled and permissible only by the teacher, otherwise it is regarded as challenging the teacher's authority (Eaves, 2009) and there exist a huge gap between students and school authorities, staff and administration as opposed to the western ideology where the reverse is the case (Eaves, 2009) that is classroom dialogue, posing questions and challenging the teacher for better understanding is encouraged (Eaves, 2009).

Africans within the two higher education institutions concerned with this study are one of the minority groups of international students whose voices and perspectives need to be heard since they encounter different challenges in a foreign land and could possess useful ideas for quality augmentation of Finnish degree programmes. The focus was on African graduates from two institutions of higher education, the University of Jyväskylä and the University of Applied Sciences in Jyväskylä. Participants of the study were graduates from six different international

degree programmes and five African countries namely, Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe and Kenya.

## **1.2 Significance of the Study**

Even though there exist some literature on the assessment of the internationalization process and international degree programmes in higher education in Europe, little research has been done in this field in Finland with a focus on students' perceptions, expectations, experiences and recommendations as relevant tools that could enrich these programmes and process. This study might hopefully raise awareness and make a contribution to existing knowledge on the impacts and learning outcomes of Finnish international degree programmes from an international perspective, in this case foreign African students. Not only will their perspectives, contributions and recommendations improve international curricular in Finnish Higher Education, but foster a change and improvement in pedagogical practices to meet the needs of diverse groups of learners (Yorke, 2003, 231). This study is a combination of a non-cognitive and self- assessment of graduates learning outcomes on how their courses assisted them in the development of skills, knowledge, interpersonal relationships, roles, behaviors, feelings and motives (Nusche, 2008). This type of assessment has also been carried out in countries like Australia, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil and it can act as a means of data collection on employment rates and further studies on graduates that is create a relationship between education and employment (ibid, 22).

This study shows the vastness of the perspectives of graduates on the internationalization process and will hopefully be a technique used by many higher educational institutions in the Western and African countries to improve on pedagogical practices and the quality of international programmes. In recent times, the evaluation of learning outcomes for students in higher education has become a focus depending on what the results are meant for (De Boer, Jongbloed, Benneworth, Westerheijden & File, 2012, 51). Previous research on the experiences of international students from their degree programmes stresses the importance of students/graduates' feedbacks as indicators of the quality of learning in higher education institutions (Pukelis, 2011). There exist multiple techniques for measuring and evaluating

learning outcomes of students/graduates (ENQA, 2005). Nusche (2008) defines learning outcomes as certain benefits, achievements, skills and advantages a student/graduate gains as a result of learning. These learning outcomes should be long-term since the graduate requires these skills for future applications, problem-solving and other life situations. Some instruments used in the evaluation of the learning outcomes include cognitive assessment tools that measure the skills, intellectual ability and applicability of knowledge gained (ibid). Another instrument is the generic skills outcome tool that evaluates students' process of thinking, problem-solving, comprehension, critical thinking and applicability of knowledge gained in different situations (Pew, 2007). The idea is to get graduates to perform a self evaluation of the learning process throughout their studies. These different tools were used during data collection from two institutions of higher education in Jyväskylä, Finland.

The results from the data collected will hopefully raise awareness for academicians, policy makers, professors, lecturers, higher education administrators and curriculum developers on the significance of international student's voices (through their experiences, expectations, learning outcomes and recommendations) in enhancing international curriculum and upgrading pedagogical practices necessary to satisfy/meet learner's and societal/labor needs. The findings from this research might motivate higher education institutions in Finland to carry on this practice which could also hopefully be developed and implemented in several institutions of higher education in Africa. Given that I have great interest in internationalization and quality improvement of international degree programmes and practices, it is vital for me to know the perspectives, motivations, experiences, expectations and recommendations of graduates from these programmes and in this case graduates of African descent.

### **1.3 Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is structured and organized into seven chapters. Chapter one provides a brief introduction and background of the study and my motivation to investigate the involvement and perspectives of African graduates on the Finnish higher education. It also includes the significance of the study. Chapter two focuses on existing literature related to the research topic, the internationalization process of higher education from a global to a European perspective, the

goals of the Bologna process, the Leuven Communiqué and the Bucharest Communiqué as well as the internationalization process in Finland. The theoretical framework of this study is presented in chapter three which focuses on student involvement and specifically Astin's theory on student involvement in higher education. Major concepts related to this research such as integration, social justice and student's connectedness to the internalization process in Finnish higher education institutions have been discussed. Also, in order for a student to feel connected and involved in a learning process and benefit from it, they should feel included and not excluded. Therefore, the concepts of inclusion, exclusion and social justice within higher education institutions which are also seen as development hubs are explored. The research problem, questions and objectives are discussed in chapter four. Chapter five on research methodology focuses on the research paradigms (qualitative research methodology) and the selection of participants through the snowball technique. It also includes the demographic features of the research participants. Data collection procedures are discussed and analytical tools (conventional and summative content analysis tools) employed which are descriptive of African student's perspectives on Finnish higher education. Chapter six embodies the findings and discussions followed by the outcome of the study which are related to the four research questions. The research questions which represented the main themes are linked to the theoretical framework and literature review in this section. The chapter ends with recommendations from participants with respect to the study. Lastly, chapter seven comprises of the conclusion, limitations of the study and suggestions for further research in this field.

## **2 INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

### **2.1 Context of the Study**

Finland is known for its high quality education as ascertained in consecutive years since 2002 for its exemplary performance in the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) results (Hargreaves, Halasz and Pont, 2007; Välijärvi, Linnakylä, Kupari, Reinikainen and Arffman, 2007). This no doubt has attracted foreign students, educational researchers, professors, educational policy makers to Finland in search of the key to such successes. Some of the reasons mentioned are equal educational opportunities for all students whether foreigner or national, narrowing the gap between high and low performers, working in pairs/ groups in classrooms, out-of-class activities which enhance learning and confidence plus respect given to the highly qualified teachers/professors (Välijärvi, Linnakylä, Kupari, Reinikainen and Arffman, 2007).

Most lecturers and professors at the universities or higher education institutions and polytechnics have a doctoral or a licentiate degree. Their contributions towards students learning outcome is crucial since Finland places very high values in education (Välijärvi, Linnakylä, Kupari, Reinikainen and Arffman, 2007). Students, lecturers and professors are all in a learning process in international and intercultural milieus where great learning and mutual understanding occurs as ideas and experiences are exchanged and shared (Jones, 2010, 16). However, the effectiveness and successful outcomes of international programmes for foreign degree students depends on the competences and clarity in instructions, explanations as well as the elimination of cultural stereotypes by lecturers and professors (Ryan and Viète, 2009). Given that higher education institutions in Finland employ such highly qualified professors and lecturers, who possess a sense of responsibility and concern for all students (Hargreaves, et al., 2007), it is vital to be cognizant of students' connectedness with these lecturers and the programmes, students' perspectives on the quality of teaching, their participation in the learning process and international environment and the impact of international curricular on them as foreign degree students. This kind of awareness has been at the forefront in many higher education policy debates, the Finnish education policy thinking and its results critical for further improvement and development of international programmes and higher education institutions in general (FNBE,

2010, 15; Hargreaves, et al., 2007). Given that Finnish lecturers are highly trusted due to their high qualification, networking and self evaluation processes to improve teaching and learning is fundamental to development in higher education (ibid).

Finnish education has been free till 2010 for all students whether national or international and at all levels of education from primary to university levels. The Finnish educational system comprises of kindergartens, basic comprehensive schools, upper secondary schools, vocational schools, polytechnics and universities with an underlying principle of equal opportunities for all. In 2011, tuition fees were introduced in some universities and polytechnics around the country for international students but a majority of the international degree programmes in higher education institutions are still tuition free. The issue of tuition free education has been a force of attraction for many international students to higher education institutions in Finland. Thus, Finland has been witnessing an increase in the number of international students by 1,237 in 2007 and 2008 (UNESCO 2009, 2010). This is also as a result of Finland's excellent performances at the PISA and world education ranking as earlier mentioned which has been a trend since the years 2000 till present day as stated by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2010) and other online sources such as Our Times (Signs of Our Times, 2008), the Pearson Foundation.org., (Lombardi, 2005). This high quality education has been associated with teacher and student's mutual involvement in the learning process where flexibility in teaching style yet conformity with the curricular is essential and equal learning opportunities are available to all (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2010; Signs of Our Times, 2008; Lombardi, 2005). Such practices are infused to a certain degree at all stages of educational achievement including higher education institutions thereby attracting foreign students to study in Finland. The University of Jyväskylä witnessed an influx of about 792 foreign students from 84 different countries between 2007 and 2008 which constituted 5.1% of the total student's population. The largest group of degree students came from Russia, China, Hungary and Canada (University of Jyväskylä; Foreign Students in 2007).

This study focuses on a minority group of African graduates from two universities located in Jyväskylä. Jyväskylä which is the seventh largest municipality located in Central Finland has a population of about 132,062 inhabitants. It is known as an education city comprising of the University of Jyväskylä, University of Applied Sciences, vocational and high schools. The University of Jyväskylä has been the second largest producer of Master's level



graduates in Finland (Goddard, Etkowitz, Puukka, and Virtanen, 2006) for seven years in a row (University of Jyväskylä Annual Report, 2008). In 2011, the University of Jyväskylä was the third largest producer of Master's level graduates in the country after the University of Helsinki and Turku respectively (University of Jyväskylä, 2011).

## **2.2 The Internationalization Process from a Global to a European Perspective**

According to the 2007 global statistics, more than 2.8 million students have studied in educational institutions abroad leading to a 4.6% increase from 2006 (UNESCO 2009, 2010). There has been a significant increase in this trend since the late 1990's in countries like Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom and some Asian countries like China, Japan and Singapore (Lee, 2008). Despite the rapid increment of the international population at higher education institutions, research has revealed that international programmes and standards, experiences, patterns in education, student enhancement and capacity development in higher education need augmentation (Wells, 2009). Improvement in the training of teachers and students alike towards multiculturalism, shifts towards student-centered learning, constructing coherence in educational systems whether at entry levels or within the process, adapting the curricular to the needs of the learners thus making education more attractive (Education Council 2001, 6-8; Jones, 2010) are contemporary discourses, issues and trends in higher educational institutions worldwide.

Europe is no exception in its efforts towards improving the quality of higher education institutions and the internationalization process. This was evident after the launching of the Bologna Declaration of 1999 which urged reforms in the quality of European higher education to make it more comparable, competitive and attractive for both Europeans and international scholars and students (European Commission, 2013). One of its priorities included improvement in the quality, cooperation and competitiveness in higher education within Europe. This process has been enforced every second year by ministers in charge of European higher education where they meet to measure the progress and set goals for action (European Commission, 2013). The Bologna process has been supported by other processes like the Prague Communiqué of 2001, the Berlin Communiqué of 2003, the Bergen Communiqué of 2005, the London Communiqué of

2007 and recently by the Leuven Communiqué of 2009 and the Bucharest Communiqué of 2012. Some of their common goals have been the promotion of the mobility of students, academic and administrative staffs, students and teacher's involvement in the Bologna process, student's participation in the management of higher education and ultimately ensuring a quality higher education system (ibid). The processes aim to foster transparency, visibility and shifts in educational practices that will enhance capabilities, skills and growth for future generations (Keeling 2006, 203-223), thereby creating a Europe of knowledge (European Commission, 2013). Another priority of the European Union's agenda is to support measures aimed at modernizing the content and practices of higher education institutions thereby enhancing the teaching quality of study programmes and human resources through the exchange of knowledge and mutual learning thus promoting the European Union as a centre of excellence in education and training (European Commission, 2013).

### **2.3 Past and Current University Practices**

As far back as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, universities had a close relationship between the society and administrators (rulers) since they were known to provide the necessary theoretical base that will raise skilled personnel for the proper functioning of states (King, Bjarnason, Edwards, Gibbons, and Ryan, 2004, 3-4). Practical and specialized training were not a characteristic of university training rather the function of jobsites, sometimes home training and other specialized institutions (King, et al., 2004, 4). With the emergence of the nineteenth and twentieth century's, early theorists like Humboldt, Kant, Hegel and Weber later apprehended the necessity of a more holistic approach to university education which incorporated research to the teaching and learning processes (ibid). Research and specialization were perceived as the sources of new knowledge, national and international recognition as universities became competitive. Today, research is proving that in order to improve the relevance and quality of higher education, practical experiences should be included in courses, employers and labor market institutions should be involved in the design and delivery of programmes in order to acclimatize the curricular to meet current labor market needs and foster employability and entrepreneurship (European Commission, 2011).

With the emergence of the accreditation systems in the twenty first century and the huge diversity of courses and systems especially in universities in the United States that boost the internationalization process, European universities began to emulate these practices common in U.S. state universities (King, et al., 2004). Students could study in other universities and related programmes and their credit transferred to complete their degree courses (ibid). Accreditation boards were elected to review and evaluate the performances of state universities and this was meant to raise the academic standards of universities (ibid). Europe equally began this process as universities around the world competed to meet with the ever growing challenges of globalization. A huge step in the development of the Bologna process was the recognition of the significance of international cooperation among universities. In order for universities to function as agents of change, be renown in today's competitive society and build the necessary skills/ capacities in students to meet the challenges in the twenty first century, collaboration, dialogue and cooperation between universities, educational practitioners, businesses, governments and the society is inevitable (Bourn, Mckenzie & Shiel, 2006; Hansen & Lehmann, 2006).

## **2.4 Internationalization of Higher Education in Finland**

Internationalization of the curriculum and programmes was triggered in Europe during the 1980's due to global competitiveness in the labor market and in higher education institutions. These higher education institutions and polytechnics in Finland offer a wide range of international programmes which has attracted considerable numbers of foreign students from around the world and an increasing number of African students. There are about 550 study programmes in English offered at higher education institutions in Finland which range from short to long term courses (Centre for International Mobility (CIMO), 2012). Degree programmes usually take two years and more to complete and there are over 390 such programmes in Finland leading to a Finnish higher education certificate that is a Bachelor, Masters or Doctoral degree (ibid). The Finnish higher education institutions use the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to measure the student's achievement. This includes course descriptions and load (what students are expected to learn), learning outcomes/ achievements, the duration of a particular programme and the promotion of student exchanges and mobility within

Europe (European Commission, 2009, 9). Even though the issue of internationalization of higher education curriculum and programmes has been on the top agenda of many EU countries, the measurement of their quality has been a topic of controversy (De Wit, 2010). The Finnish Minister of Education stated that high quality education and research gives Finland a competitive edge and recognition in the global market (Ministry of Education, 2009) and the development of the nation's economy and productivity largely depends on the educated workforce and experts/graduates from higher education institutions and polytechniques (ibid). Finland's recognition that there is great and unexploited potentials in internationalization impelled it to place internationalization of higher education at the top of the government's agenda (ibid) and made the mobility, immigration of students, teachers and researchers, and increment in the number of international degree programs and international activities a priority (Ministry of Education, 2009). Consequently, there has been a tremendous influx of students from the South to the North (Altbach & Knight, 2007) and in recent years from especially Africa and Asia to Finland.

This internationalization process requires the cooperation and support of all the actors such as the various ministries, businesses, corporations, students, university/educational administrators, regional actors, teachers etc. For example, an assessment of the successes of students from renowned universities like the University of Phoenix in the United States stems from their partnership/ collaboration with firms and other universities or higher education institutions in other countries (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Some of their strategies have been to increase multiculturalism in the educational environment as well as the work force aiming to better innovative ideas, creativity and the building of potentials among its residence and to enhance the quality and attractiveness of higher education institutions through international programmes and activities (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Still, the anticipation is that this research will bring forth useful information that will contribute towards augmenting the quality of international degree programmes and the internationalization process in Finnish higher education through the voices of a minority group of African students. It is also an effort towards realizing some of the goals of the Bologna process earlier mentioned. The ministers of higher education made promises at the Budapest-Vienna Declaration of 2010 on the European Higher Education Area to listen to the critical voices of the staff and students (European Higher Education Area; 2010).

### **3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The key concepts in this study are student involvement, connectedness, integration, inclusion/exclusion and social justice within higher education programmes and the internationalization process. In order for students to be involved, they need to feel motivated and connected to that process. Some of the motivations for internationalization include knowledge acquisition, the richness of international curriculum, the diversity of international activities and promoting quality in international higher education institutions (Altbach & Knight, 2007). This quality can be perceived through international students' experiences and perceptions of international programmes, pedagogical practices and development in higher education. Bourn, McKenzie and Shiel, (2006) argue that a university's curriculum is the best criterion of its international nature. Therefore, part of the theoretical framework will be a description of the concepts of inclusion and exclusion that is the extent to which students feel integrated and involved in higher education's international curricula within the Finnish context given that these institutions are seen as development hubs.

#### **3.1 Student Involvement in Higher Education**

Astin's theory of student involvement in educational spheres refers to one who shows enthusiasm and has interest in what they study, takes initiative, is regularly on campus, devotes energy to his studies, interacts with other students and faculty staff, participates in extracurricular activities, student organizations and enjoys student life (Astin, 1999, 518). This refers to the fact that students will dedicate energy, time and interest to something they feel they are a part of and to building a structure they are engaged in. This on-going process (involvement) varies per student and could be measured quantitatively depending on how much time a student devotes to his studies or qualitatively that is how much the student enjoys, learns and benefits from a given lesson (Astin, 1999; Krause, 2005). Astin says the accomplishment of educational policies, practices and learning relies eminently on students involvement at all levels of the university

structure which contributes positively to a range of outcomes such as satisfaction, achievements and academic successes (Astin, 1999; Krause, 2005).

Some activities in which international students are engaged in include; in and out-of classroom activities, extra-curricular activities like social clubs, interacting with peers and faculty staff for scholarly purposes which ultimately leads to student satisfaction (Farley, McKee and Brooks, 2011). For example, student's involvement has been experimented in some Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) development where educational practitioners have fortified students learning and writing skills by fully engaging them in a variety of pedagogical initiatives coordinated by three collaborating universities which included academic projects, research, producing resources, courses, drop-in advice clinics and activities to enhance both staff teaching and student's learning (Hartley, Hilsdon, Keenan, Sinfield & Verity, 2011). In order to produce high quality learning experiences and staff development, the educational administrators worked with students and recent graduates of their programmes to produce interactive resources, engaged students in their research projects, mentoring, reviews of academic material, open forum for questions and dialogue which became part of their community of practice (Ibid).

With the internationalization of higher education institutions and programmes, universities are now characterized by diverse student populations, activities, abilities and educational backgrounds which pose a challenge on how to engage and satisfy multiple needs of the diverse student population (Krause, 2005). Therefore, there exist a crucial need to explore the needs and experiences of under-represented or disadvantage groups of international students for whom the higher education environment is a foreign one (Ibid). Academic staffs play a vital role in the engagement process which will enrich and improve student's experiences (ibid). In this rapidly advancing interdependence world, the ability to listen, understand and reflect on multiple voices and perspectives is crucial (Bourn, Mckenzie & Shiel, 2006). Given that this study focuses on African student's involvement and perspectives of the Finnish higher education, it is worth noting some of the pedagogical practices experienced by these foreign student's in their countries of origin compared to pedagogical practices experienced abroad (in this case, the Finnish higher education system). Astin (1999) describes various existing pedagogical styles compared to modern approaches to pedagogy practiced in Finnish higher education institutions.

Astin explains the model of pedagogy also known as the subject-matter approach in which he describes common pedagogical practices in institutions of higher education especially in many developing countries with limited resources and high student teacher ratio. This is a pedagogical process in which professors who are masters of a particular subject matter are seen as the all-knowing while the students are considered a bunch of empty vessels to be refilled with knowledge and information from text-books on that subject. The learners become more or less passive and this type of pedagogy is best for students who are good listeners, consider reading a hobby and have a long attention span. It is not a good approach to slow and visual learners with a short attention span. Pedagogical evaluation in such cases depends on the course syllabi of the professors and not on what he thinks the students have learned. A reflection of Astin's subject-matter approach is that of Haberman's (1991) theory on the pedagogy of poverty in which the teacher "gives information, asks questions and requires only specific responses, gives direction, prepares assignments, reviews assignments, administers assessments, marks scripts and grades students. This also, is a very common scenario in many institutions of higher education and again especially in developing countries which has an adverse effect on the quality of education in these countries (Benbow, Mizrachi, Oliver & Said-Moshiro, 2007). Teachers in this situation are the all knowing and should not be challenged. There is very little interaction between the teacher, students and school administrators. There exist minimal interaction in class between the students and practical applicability of theories learned is almost absent. This pedagogical style kills creativity, innovative thinking and entrepreneurial abilities. It raises questions such as; why do graduates from universities feel powerless to start up their own businesses, enterprises and find it hard to find jobs with all the knowledge gained from so many hours and years of schooling?

However, from the theory of student involvement and given that no single pedagogical style benefits all as articulated by the individualized theory by Astin (1999), different approaches to pedagogy are exercised in Finnish higher education institutions. The individualized approach focuses on the curricular contents and instructional methods most beneficial to the individual students, that is the most preferred and effective approach to learning which meets the student's needs. One common approach in higher education institutions such as Finland is the practice of the subject-matter theory which focuses on the compulsory courses that need to be taken by all students in a particular programme and the individualized approach which emphasizes the

importance of electives (Astin, 1999). Most educational curricular use both approaches to learning (ibid). Another eminent aspect of the individualized theory for students is independent learning. An explicit example of independent learning is the “Book exam” strategy widely used and common in Finnish higher education institutions where students are required to read independently specific literature and books related to a particular course and write an exam on this material at a given time without prior classroom work, optional discussion groups and little guidance from the professor. It is also a similar process to online learning. With this model, the individual studies at his own pace according to the surrounding circumstances (such as instructions and other activities). Student’s objectives in this case are attainable at varying times since to some, the length of time it takes to complete a given programme matters (quantitative) while to others, obtaining decent grades is paramount (qualitative) (Astin, 1999). However, this approach to learning is quite expensive since each student requires personal attention and given that it focuses on electives, there is a wide choice of subject matter. Consequently, there are numerous avenues to this pedagogical style. Since one shoe size does not fit all, it is difficult to fathom which pedagogical approach fits a particular group of learners with varying learning needs.

Astin explores two hypothesis on student involvement in which he states “the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program and the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement” (Astin, 1999, 519). He iterates that educators should focus more on what students do and less on what they do and points out that student involvement could be experienced at an academic level depending on how much time the student dedicates to his studies and activities, student-faculty interaction, student-peer interactions etc. In summary, the theory of student involvement is a pedagogical approach whose principal objective is the empowerment of the student (Astin, 1999). This includes, what the student does, how students spend their time, whether the students are obtaining the necessary skills they desire, how motivated and engaged are they in the learning process (ibid). It is about how much the student learns to practically utilize the skills acquired and use the knowledge and theories learned in everyday life and context (Morrice, 2009). It is learning by doing through actions, positive attitude and active participation in the developmental process. Student involvement goes beyond



educational environments to that connectedness and integration in the society around them and how the society can benefit from them. Morrice (2009) states that literacy can be defined in terms of context, culture, cultural groups and social class but it also pertains to the translation of knowledge into identity and action. Therefore, higher educational institutions are charged with the responsibility of producing graduates who will make substantial contributions to society and the economy through their experiences, initiatives and contributions (Bourn, McKenzie & Shiel, 2006). This will be inevitable through positive student learning outcomes and improved curricula.

### **3.2 Connectedness in Higher Education**

The concept of connectedness extends the idea of student involvement to meaningful interaction and Zyngier (2003) expounds on a connected education as one that is intellectually provoking, relevant, meets the needs of the different learners and the society they serve. He suggests that education as a whole and pedagogy should not only be engaging, interactive and mentally stimulating but promote improved outcomes. Improved educational outcomes in this case refers to the ability of the graduates to apply the skills and knowledge gained from schooling to their daily lives, workplace/ labor force or the ability to become entrepreneurial/ innovative upon completion of the degree programme (European Qualification Framework (EQF), 2008; Savickiene, 2010) that is having a degree of value (Callan, Ewell, Finney & Jones, 2007). Students from low socio-economic backgrounds and developing countries desire such improved learning outcomes (Zyngier, 2003). Therefore, as much as there is a good degree of teacher-student interaction in Finnish higher education institutions, pedagogical styles need to maintain active student centered learning, innovative thinking, establish links between studies and the community/work places, encourage beyond school learning and the use of community resources.

The expectations of governments are that higher education institutions, educational administrators and students should contribute to economic progress (York, 2006). Hence, curricula contents and pedagogical practices should not only focus on meeting economic, market and industrial needs (Apple and Beane, 1999; McLaren, 1999; OECD, 2002; UNICEF, 2002), rather, content and subject relevance as well as engaging students in critical thinking, problem

solving and cooperative work are vital components of a productive pedagogy (Zyngier, 2003; Pew, 2007) and student engagement (York, 2006). A productive pedagogy by Zyngier (2003) refers to one that links society and individual needs, is inclusive with equal opportunities for all, serves the needs of those concerned and exposes the learners to the society's networks. However, there is a challenge on how teachers can connect students to their society in a natural way where their skills are explored and utilized. In addition, institutions of higher education need to critically reflect and reconsider transformative curricular, question what education really is and its place in the society (Gale, 2000). While the Finnish society on the other hand will need to integrate and accommodate an empowered and skillful generation of graduates who desire equal opportunities to put the knowledge acquired and innovative ideas into practice. This way, teachers and students will feel valued, empowered and motivated to contribute in the building of a just society (Callan, Ewell, Finney and Jones, 2007).

Learning experiences of students and graduates will only be enhanced and utilized if there is change from the top to the bottom and collaboration between and within educational institutions, administrators, governments, teachers, pedagogical practices and students (Callan, Ewell, Finney and Jones, 2007). Change at any level is an arduous process (McLaughlin, 1998), be it pedagogical practices, institutional processes or societal values. Nevertheless, in order for students to derive maximum benefits from many years of schooling, teachers need the motivation and enthusiasm to develop patterns and techniques within the school system that will meet their needs and those of the learners (ibid). In order to achieve this, teachers cannot be left alone (Day, 1999) since the concept of change is hard to predict and educational programmes are dependent on the mechanism of change (Korthagen, Kessels, Koster, Lagerwerf & Wubbels, 2001). Teaching is a learning process which requires action and reflection.

From Korthagen's (1985) model on experiential learning, education should be a process of action, reflection, realization, recognition and recall of fundamental knowledge, designing surrogate methods and trial of new lines of action to improve previous processes. With this model, learning outcomes of students can be enhanced and their experiences after graduation utilized as a tool for further improvement of international programmes. Teachers/ lecturers can reflect on what they want, their patterns of action, what they think and feel as well as what their students want, students actions, what students are thinking and how they feel (their experiences) (Korthagen, Kessels, Koster, Lagerwerf & Wubbels, 2001). The process of searching for

answers to these thoughts and questions leads to connectedness and advancement in the learning process. Korthagen et al., (2001) refer to the augmentation in educational processes, programmes and experiences in which the foundation stems from practical problems and concerns experienced by students throughout their learning process.

Due to the significance of connectedness in education, Hansen and Lehmann (2006) categorize universities/ higher education institutions as development hubs since the international environment, curricular and exchange programmes at universities are agents for capacity building leading to sustainable development and change. Their article *Universities as Development Hubs* focuses on partnership and collaboration between universities, local communities, businesses and other institutions of higher education where exchange of ideas on sustainable development is pursued. They stress on certain criteria that needs to be met in order for universities to function as agents of change. One of such criteria includes the involvement of employers and labor market institutions in the design and delivery of programmes, supporting staff exchanges and including practical experience in courses which can help attune curricula to current and emerging labor market needs and foster employability and entrepreneurship. Also, proper monitoring by educational institutions of the career paths of their former students can further inform programme design and increase relevance (European Commission, 2011). Other criteria include innovative societies which require the functioning of a National Innovation System (taking into consideration all activities and actors) for the well-being and sustainable development of that society. Most importantly, the activities of higher education institutions should comprise of combined efforts in the formulation of modern curricular that are centered on problem-solving and project-based learning (Hansen and Lehmann, 2006). This will no doubt lead to more student participation and involvement in the learning process. Thus, without certain systems put in place such as an open dialogue between all the actors (universities, the government, businesses, the private sector, students), nations will not benefit from the flow of resources into and within their countries since education is a two-way learning process in which all the actors involved learn and benefit from the ideas and experiences of one another (Bourn, McKenzie & Shiel, 2006).

The idea of open dialogue among all members within an educational environment plus associates to educational institutions such as governments, businesses, organizations and the society is a fundamental step in developing educational institutions, contents/ programmes and

culture. Dialogue with graduates from these institutions of higher education who have been core participants in the learning process, will further enrich educational processes, culture and programmes in Finland. Wegerif (2010) says dialogic space within educational environments enables participants to develop the ability to think critically, reason from varying perspectives, question, and reflect on diverse ideas without competing with each other. It is a forum for all actors associated with the educational sphere to fully explore diverse ideas and understanding with the purpose of arriving at a unanimous solution (ibid). Within a dialogic space, there is no right or wrong opinion; all suggestions are valued at some stage in the discussion. The diversity of opinions bring forth useful knowledge and the truth plus research has shown that bias in educational environment leads to disparities in learning outcomes (Matthews, 2010).

In this study, the focus on foreign African students emerged due to the fact that within the international educational milieu, students from diverse backgrounds and cultures are bound to feel some degree of social exclusion which inhibits them from achieving or deriving maximum satisfaction from their international degree programmes. Social exclusion though from a school perspective, refers to students who are at a disadvantage and have distinct social issues and problems (Paugam, 1993; Nasse, 1992) given that they are in a foreign country studying in an educational system completely different from what they are familiar with. Schuetze and Slowey (2002) also define social exclusion as educationally and socially disadvantaged population which includes immigrants and ethnic minority groups. Foucauld (1992) asserts that social justice will impede social exclusion or limit it considerably. Nasse (1992) describes social exclusion within an educational environment as the absence of communication between all the actors involved (educational administrators, students, teachers, experts, governments, businesses, and graduates from international degree programmes). This lack of communication hinders educational institutions from benefitting from the rich and varying experiences of these graduates from international backgrounds and these experiences will increase the richness of international degree programmes as new ideas emerge in the process. In this study, the assumption is that the existence of this type of communication will also enhance the confidence of these graduates and assist them to feel a sense of belonging in the Finnish educational system/ society and to know that they are equally valued in the fostering of development within that society.

### **3.3 Inclusion and Social Justice in Higher Education**

Inclusion and exclusion are binary concepts frequently discussed at national and international spheres where one is the opposite of the other (Edwards, Armstrong and Miller, 2001). Inclusion generally refers to positive connotations while exclusion is associated with negative view points (ibid). However, some characteristics of internationalization that includes people, institutions and countries entail features such an integral socio-economic focus whereby higher education institutions address problems experienced by populations in a joint manner, which affects their integration into society considering the relationships that exist between education and the society (Ramírez, 2011). Also, democratically involving all socio-educational stakeholders such as grant donors, institutional authorities, academicians, students, businesses and the society at large in decision making in higher education is crucial (Ramírez, 2011). Another characteristic of an internationalization process that is inclusive is to employ knowledge that is relevant in the societies where the higher education institutions are located (ibid).

Higher education institutions today comprise of multicultural student populations and engaging these students/graduates has become a challenge yet a focal point for many of these institutions (Bourn, McKenzie & Shiel, 2006). In situations where educational institutions have not fully utilized and recognized these diverse student voices, the students have felt excluded, disconnected and disengaged from the institution and this has eventually affected their learning outcomes (Votteler, 2007; Libbey, 2004; Fielding, 2004a, 2004b; Certo, et al., 2003; Matthews, 2010). Exclusion and inclusion in this case, are defined in terms of foreignness (Silver, 1994) where graduates (of African descent) from international degree programmes in Finland feel deprived or undervalued since the skills and knowledge acquired from higher education is not utilized within the Finnish society. Two decades ago, Majava & Penttinen (1991; quoted in Salt, 1992, 488) stated that the socioeconomic status of working foreigners in Finland is higher than that of Finns and 30% of foreigners are found in white collar jobs compared to 13% of Finns. Yet, most of the foreigners in these skilled positions are Germans and Swiss in contrast to Africans and Asians in low-paid unskilled jobs (Salt, 1992, 488). Even though Coleman, (1992) describes the natural state of decline in Europe's population due to the ageing population and low fertility rates. This calls for a suitable work force which will provide services, generate income and tax revenues necessary to support this ageing population. He affirms that "domestic

supply of labor is insufficient to meet labor demand;” hence more work force is needed. This implies that more human resources and diverse student population will lead to greater innovative and diverse ideas/perspectives which will lead to higher productivity within educational institutions and work places at large (Lee and Janda, 2006). Despite these circumstances, the skills of foreign graduate students especially from Africa and Asia are still underutilized (brain waste) leading to high exodus from Finland to other countries in search of better opportunities or engaging in unskilled jobs like cleaning, taxi driving, newspaper distribution etc.

African international degree students and graduates are viewed as the “at risk category”, who may not experience personal fulfillment and satisfaction (Silver, 1994; Lee and Janda, 2006). In order to deal with this, the prevalence of social justice, social inclusion and integration is inevitable within higher educational institutions (Lee and Janda, 2006). Silver (1994) defines these terms as the existence of a social connection or bond between the individual and the society where “a national consensus, collective conscience, or general will ties the individual to the larger society through vertically interrelated mediating institutions (ibid). Since the opposite of exclusion is integration, skilled graduates from higher education institutions should feel included or a part of the society and their higher education institutions even upon completion of their degree programmes. Modern higher educational institutions are required to engage and utilize student’s voice in connection with administrative staff and personnel to reform curriculum and change policies (Fielding, 2004a, 2004b; Fletcher, 2005, 2003a, 2003b; Mitra, 2008; Flutter, 2004, 2006; quoted in Matthews, 2010, 4).

Two decades ago till date, Europe in general and Finland in particular have a growing need for social integration, social inclusion and the practice of social justice which is crucial given their rising ageing population and declining labor force (RIC, 2009). Nevertheless, this integration has been a challenge due to institutional and cultural differences which create barriers that provoke discrimination, stereotypes and exclusiveness even against the will of those concerned (Silver, 1994). This exclusion has been contended to a very narrow extend with a few Africans gaining research positions and jobs in the academic field but a lot still has to be done in institutions of higher education where the voices and contributions of graduates from the universities are heard. Sometimes, the justification is the relevance of certain degrees, nationally and internationally and the limitations of the labor market of the host country in preferring its nationals to secure jobs rather than skilled immigrants (Brzozowski, 2007). At other times the

vindication is the competencies in linguistics (the spoken language of the host country), their overall experiences, age and ambiguity in the quality of graduates / human capital especially pertaining to such category of African descent (Mattoo, Neagu & Özden, 2008, 255-269). However, the social relationships, skills, knowledge and experiences of the excluded and included could bring forth massive growth and development (Silver, 1994).

Given that one of the objectives of education is to produce the next generation of responsible, innovative, productive and socially just society (Kemmis & Lynch, 2002, 1), graduates from these international programmes are key elements in the augmentation of international curricular, pedagogical practices and educational processes. The role of these graduates will hopefully not only benefit institutions of higher education but the society in which they belong and the host country as a whole (Knight, 2002). Student's feedbacks will enhance pedagogy that will embody intellectually challenging activities relevant to student's lives that meet their diverse needs (Zyngier, 2003). Their recommendations will foster educational improvements, increase participation in the society, reduce marginalization and unemployment (Feeney, et al., 2002). With the above practices, a nation can be labeled a socially just society (Gale, 2000). Gale (2000) equally states that the social justice interests of groups should be considered so that their views are seriously engaged in decision-making processes, whether at educational institutions or within the society at large.

Given that current approaches in education call for participatory methods in developing institutions and communities ((Fielding, 2004a, 2004b; Fletcher, 2005, 2003a, 2003b; Mitra, 2008; Flutter, 2004, 2006), the experiences, voices and recommendations of these graduates will be an asset to international curriculum developers for higher education programmes and for reforms in pedagogical approaches. Without an appropriate process or institution in place to ensure what happens to graduates upon completion of their degree programmes, the question arises to what extent does the educational institution cater for its resources and treasures upon completion of their degree programmes? To what extent does society utilize these skilled migrants who have gone through so many hours of training? Does society utilize their skills at all? Do these skilled graduates possess the necessary tools to satisfy societal needs? One of the answers is that, there is no single approach to the questions mentioned above. What is obvious is that reforms in pedagogical approaches is not the only step in the augmentation of international degree programmes and students improved outcomes (Zyngier, 2003) but the equal participation

of people (graduates) who have experienced the process. Feeney et al., (2002a) state that education plays a major role in the transformation of society and the participation of all actors concerned in this process is vital.



## **4 RESEARCH PROBLEM, QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **4.1 Student Voice in Quality Assurance**

The European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA, 2005), report on the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in European higher education and emphasize the role of student involvement in quality assurance schemes. The Bologna process in Europe recognizes the experiences of students, interests of employers and pedagogical practices/ teaching and learning styles as fundamental instruments to assess the quality of international degree programmes in higher educational institutions (ENQA, 2007). Some of the purposes of this evaluation are to improve the quality of education, develop educational institutions and improve outcomes in higher Education (Ibid). Countries are using the quality assurance schemes used by others to authenticate the quality of their degree programmes (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009). This process however, has become increasingly complex and dynamic since students, educational administrators, employers, and governments all have diverse expectations given the rapid degree of internationalization at institutions of higher education (Ibid). In some Canadian universities, evaluating and measuring student's learning outcomes demonstrates the value of the internationalized curriculum and these international experiences often act as an impetus to adjust teaching methodologies and analyze the curriculum (AUCC, 2009). Even though the learning outcomes for students is increasingly becoming the hub for the evaluation and measurement of internationalization, the process has not been easily developed and diverse sources have approached this differently (De Boer, Jongbloed, Benneworth, Westerheijden, & File, 2012; AUCC, 2009).

Due to the complexity and competitive nature of the global world with its rapidly advancing technological, social, political and economic structures, universities are under pressure to improve the quality and standards of their curriculum, activities, teaching and learning processes and overall quality of graduates for the labor market (Bartell, 2003). Some efforts made by institutions of higher education have been an increment in the number of international activities and programmes which attract foreign students and exchange of knowledge (Altbach & Knight, 2007). With the influx of these foreign students in this case from Africa to English-speaking developed nations and in recent times to non-English-speaking

countries in Europe like Finland, international curricular, contemporary teaching and learning styles need to be adapted to enhance the quality of students' learning experiences (King, Bjarnason, Edwards, Gibbons, & Ryan, 2004). Recent research in the U.S., Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom and Europe suggest that pedagogy should be more team-based, skills-based and student-centered (King, et al., 2004), since the accomplishments, progress and impacts of international degree programmes on graduates is a valid assessment of the quality of the degree programmes, international curricula and pedagogical approach to learning (Orsingher, 2006).

Notwithstanding, Finland is renowned for her high quality education but there exist a gap in research on the assessment of international curricular from the graduates perspective. Given that since the year 2002, Finland has been in the top three positions with regards to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results organized by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Hargreaves, Halasz and Pont, 2007; Välijarvi, et al., 2007), this has gone a long way to boost the educational potentials of Finland internationally. This has equally attracted top international educators in search of the secret to Finland's educational successes. However, are these positive learning outcomes and teaching techniques experienced by students at higher education institutions? Through feedbacks from graduates of these international programmes, teaching patterns could be revised and international degree programmes improved to meet the needs of specific groups of learners. There is little information available on the relationships between international degree students, lecturers, educational administrators, stake holders and international degree programmes in Finnish higher education. It would be beneficial and informative to policy makers, educational managers/administrators, teachers, students and the international community to be aware of the successes and avenues for improvement in the Finnish higher education through the experiences of foreign graduates. Shouldn't graduates and students play a principal role or be a vital component in the development of the internationalization process in Finnish higher education institutions especially since their perspectives, experiences, engagement and learning outcomes vary in different educational settings and should be investigated accordingly (Libbey, 2004).

## 4.2 Objectives and Research Questions

Though there has been some research on the internationalization of curricula in higher education institutions, some studies suggest that the quality of international degree programmes can be enhanced through the assessment of student's learning outcomes. Thus, the objective of this research is to explore African students' and graduates' involvement and perspectives of the Finnish higher education through their experiences and learning outcomes. Sequentially, the research seeks to analyze the motivation of these international student's to study in Finland, their expectations of their various degree programmes and how these expectations were met. Also, to examine how involved and connected these African students were to their various international degree programmes and the learning process. Their overview of studying in Finnish universities will be affirmed by their experiences, learning outcomes and achievements. Furthermore, their future aspirations and recommendations on how to enrich and improve the quality of these international degrees were asked. Thus, the four research questions are:

- 1) What was the motivation of African students to study abroad?
- 2) What were the expectations of African students concerning their international degree programmes and how were these expectations met?
- 3) What are the learning outcomes (experiences) of the degree programmes from the perspective of African students with respect to; their achievements, involvement and participation in these programmes, employment and applicability of knowledge gained?
- 4) What are their future aspirations and recommendations for the improvement of their various international degree programmes?

## **5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter commences with the research paradigm chosen for this study and reasons why I chose the qualitative content analysis methodology with a focus on aspects of the conventional and summative approaches to interpret meaning from data collected. The purpose of this research is to explore the African students' involvement and perspectives on the internationalization of the Finnish higher education through their experiences, expectations, and learning outcomes/achievements and how their international degree programmes met their expectations. Recommendations were made by these African graduates for quality improvement of their degree programmes. A wide variety of international programmes were selected to represent differences in pedagogical approaches and programme styles as well as the extent of student involvement in these programmes.

### **5.1 Research Paradigm**

The research method chosen for this study is the qualitative research method which is subjective and focuses on individual experiences and views (Schwandt, 2001). Precisely, the technique used is content analysis which targets aspects of the conventional and summative approaches to interpret meaning from the content of text data collected (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). These approaches are descriptive of the phenomena being studied and provide richness and insights to the data collected (Creswell, 2007). In this case, the phenomena under investigation are the involvement and perspectives of participant's in the internationalization of the Finnish higher education. Hence, this research provides a more in-depth understanding of each individual's perceptions and values of their study period at higher education institutions in Jyväskylä, Finland.

For data analysis, aspects of the conventional content analysis tool are used for the study considering that coding categories are derived directly from the text data, research findings are addressed in the discussion section of the study and the discussions include how a summary of the findings will contribute to knowledge in that field plus suggestions for practice, teaching and future research (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, 1279). The benefit of using the conventional

approach to content analysis is that direct information is derived from the diverse perspectives of research participants to capture the complexity without imposing pre-conceived categories (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Also, parts of the summative content analysis are employed where the discovery of latent or underlying meanings of key words or content followed by context interpretation are used.

## 5.2 Research Participants

The snowball sampling technique which is a type of purposive sampling was used (Yin, 2011) in the selection of participants (African graduates), who had studied in higher education institutions in Jyväskylä. Initially, I contacted nine African graduates from my degree programme and other degree programmes that I personally knew and felt that they could contribute to this study and they in turn suggested other graduates for the research. A total of eighteen graduates were eventually contacted by phone and through emails. Out of the eighteen respondents, fourteen participated in the study while the other four could not participate due to very busy schedules.

The selection of participants was based on African graduates who had been through the Finnish higher educational system with the aim that these participants would offer relevant and substantial information concerning the topic under investigation as suggested by the purposive sampling technique (Yin, 2011). These participants originated from the West, East and Southern Africa and included eleven males and three females with three between the ages 20-30, nine between the ages (31-40) and two between the ages (41-50). African graduates were selected for two reasons; to represent the phenomena investigated and to ascertain that they felt included in their educational environment and Finnish society at large. Of the fourteen respondents, ten were graduates/ students of the University of Jyväskylä while four were graduates from the University of Applied Sciences (see table 1). All fourteen respondents had been international degree students of various faculties and departments at both universities. From the University of Jyväskylä, five had been students of the international degree programme, *Development and International Cooperation* with different specializations like Social and Public Policy and Education while two of them had participated in the international degree programme on *Educational Leadership*, one respondent graduated from the international programme on

*Nanosciences/ Chemistry*, another from *Aquatic Sciences* and one from the international programme on *Computer and Information Systems* (table 1). Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of these fourteen African graduates who provided detailed written answers on the questionnaires and written follow-up answers for clarification.

*Table 1: Research Participants: African Graduates from the Universities in Jyväskylä (N=14)*

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<i>Area of Study/ Specialization</i>	
Development and International Cooperation	5
Educational Leadership	2
Logistics Engineering	2
Nursing and Health	1
Hospitality	1
Computer Information Systems	1
Nanoscience Chemistry	1
Aquatic Sciences	1
<i>Country of Origin</i>	
Cameroon	6
Ghana	1
Kenya	2
Nigeria	4
Zimbabwe	1
<i>Education in Host Country (highest level Completed)</i>	
Bachelor's Degree	4
Master's Degree	8
Doctorate	2
<i>Graduates from Universities in question</i>	
University of Jyväskylä	10
University of Applied Sciences	4
<i>Current Occupation</i>	
Doctoral graduate working as a Researcher at the University of Jyväskylä	1
Doctoral graduate job hunting	1
In the process of obtaining doctoral degrees	2
Master's Degree graduates job hunting	6
Bachelor Degree graduates pursuing other Master's Degree programmes	2
Bachelor Degree graduates job hunting	2

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Also, from the University of Applied Sciences, two respondents were graduates from the international programme *Logistics Engineering*, one from the *Nursing and Public Health programme* and one from the international degree programme on *Hospitality* (table 1). However, at the time of data collection, two participants had completed their Bachelor's Degree programmes and six of them had completed their Masters Degree programmes all engaged in other activities (table 1). Two others had moved on to pursue a Doctoral Degree programme at the University of Jyväskylä and are still in the process, two others had continued to pursue a Doctoral Degree Programme and were now graduates and the other two had moved on to pursue Master's Degree Programmes (table 1) at the University of Jyväskylä and at the University of Vaasa.

### **5.3 Data Collection**

The qualitative data for this study was collected through open-ended questionnaire questions sent by email (Appendix 1), further questions for clarification sent by email (Appendix 2) and follow up interview questions for clarification of points raised (Appendix 3) by the participants. At first, an email explaining the purpose of the study (Appendix 4) with a questionnaire attached containing 12 open-ended questions was sent to all fourteen participants from varying degree programmes who were all willing to take part in the study. Detailed responses were required from the participants through which they were encouraged to express themselves as much as possible. Fourteen detailed responses were received by email from which, some of the responses that needed further clarification were sent by email to some respondents and more detailed answers were provided in text format. Face-to face follow up interviews were carried out with some of the respondents to provide further clarification on points mentioned in their responses and notes taken in the process. For confidentiality purposes, access to the data is limited and the responses are discussed anonymously without any personal details.

Previous research and literature guided the selection and formulation of questions and the questionnaire design. These questions were chosen based on their ability to bring forth data that will respond to the main research questions. The questionnaire was sent to my supervisor who assisted in restructuring some of the questions. Then, a pilot testing was conducted as suggested by Yin (2011) with two individuals who also assisted with the modification and restructuring of

some questions. Of the two people chosen, one is a doctoral student from my international degree programme on Development and International Cooperation who has had some experience with research and the other is a senior researcher at the Finnish Institute for Educational Research in the team of higher education. I believed that these two individuals have useful knowledge and rich experiences related to this research that will guide me through this section of the study.

## **5.4 Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed using aspects of the conventional and summative content analytical tools. Steps taken with the conventional content analysis tool as suggested by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) were that data was read repeatedly to get a sense of the whole, categories were derived from key words mentioned in the data, followed by creating links between these categories and lastly, relevant concepts and findings from the study that will contribute to knowledge in this area and recommendations for practice, teaching and further research are mentioned in the discussion section of this study. Portions of the summative content analytical tool used were discovering the latent meaning of concepts or words used within the context of the data through follow up questions and interviews for clarification with the participants (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Each response was carefully analyzed using the above mentioned tools and categories such as the internationalization process, integration, higher education, social life, language barriers emerged from the data to elucidate the graduate's perception of their studies and recommendations for the improvement of their international degree programmes. The participant's responses were equally examined to show their link with concepts from the theoretical framework like involvement, inclusion, connectedness, integration and social justice and also important is the interconnection between the responses and research questions. Central themes were identified in the responses and grouped accordingly. These major themes included the motivation to study in Finland, expectations during their study period, degree of achievement during and after their study period and aspirations upon completion of their international degree programme which were related to the four research questions defined in chapter four (4.2).



The responses from the twelve questions and follow up written plus interview responses were grouped to address each of the four main research questions and related themes to avoid the loss of important data. These themes are directly related to the four research questions. The responses to the questions one and two addressed the research question one (Figure 1) which involved the motivation to study in Finland.

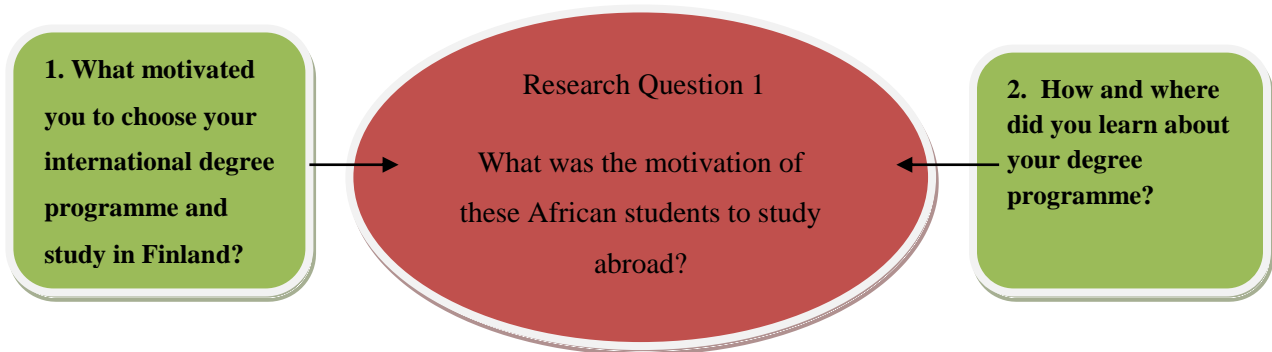


Figure 1: Questions addressing research question 1 on motivation of African students

The responses to questions three and four directly addressed research question two (Figure 2) on the expectations of the African graduates and how these expectations were met. Responses to the questions five, six, seven, eight and nine addressed research question three (Figure 3), on the learning outcomes/experiences, level of achievement, applicability of knowledge gained and employment opportunities upon completion of their degree programmes.

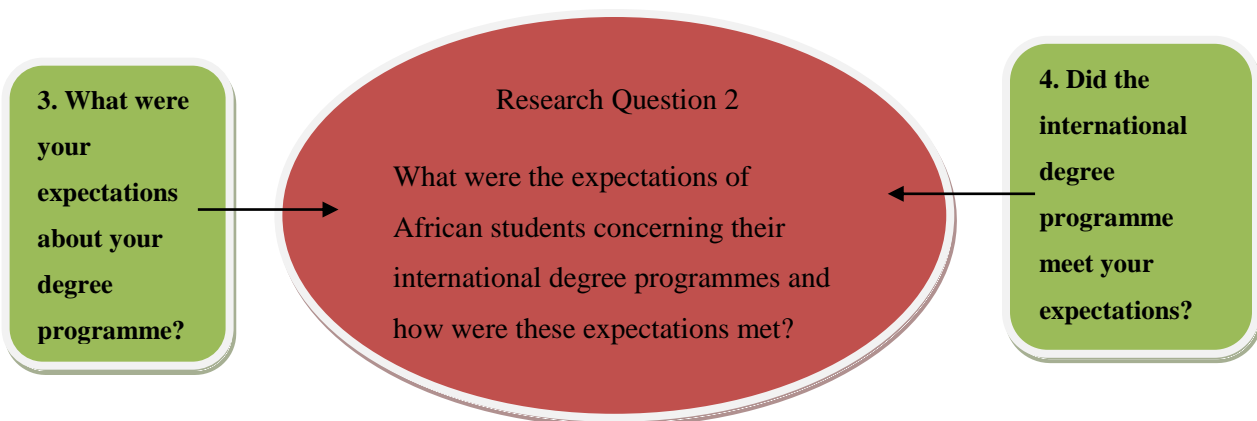


Figure 2 Questions addressing the research question 2 on expectations of African students

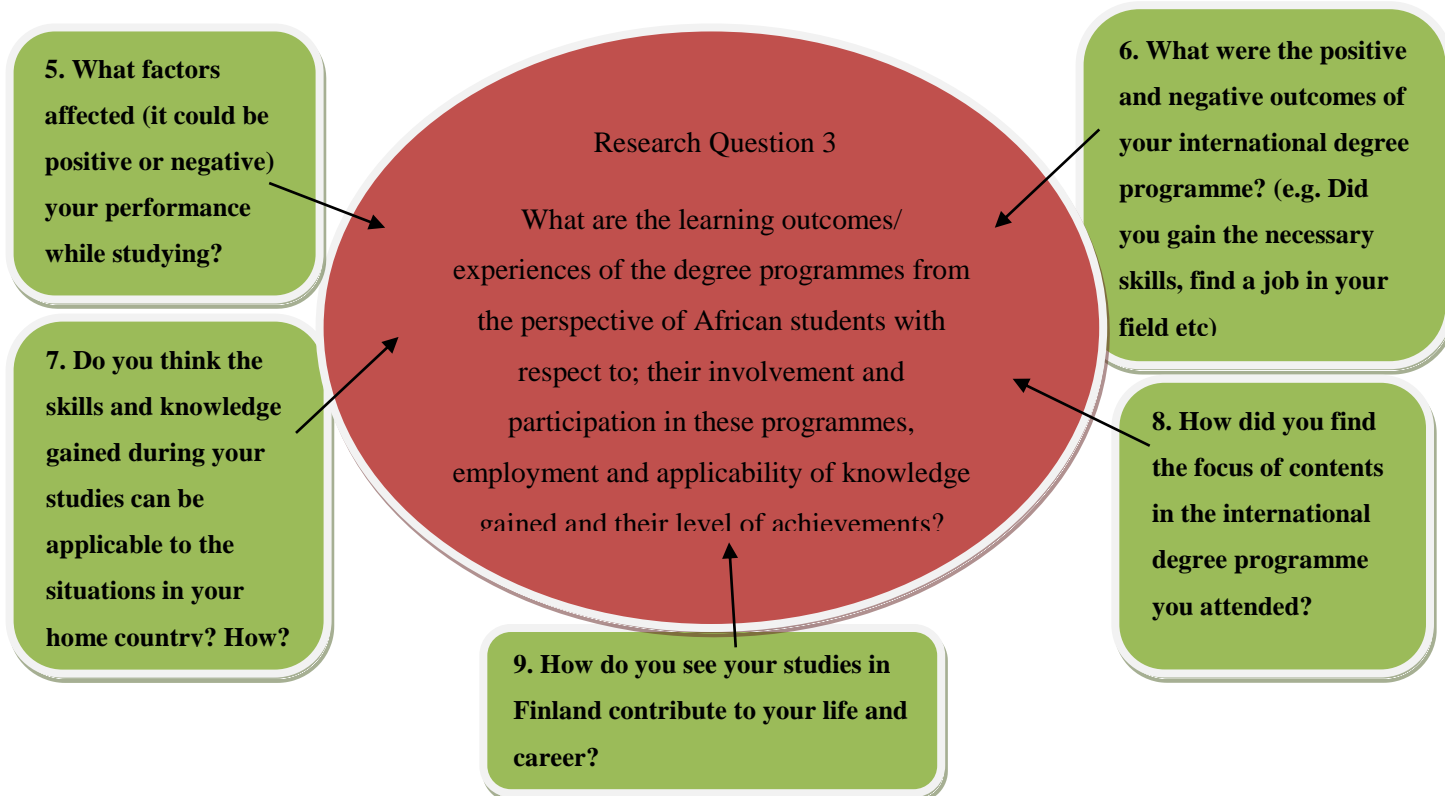


Figure 3: Questions addressing the research question 3 on the learning outcomes/experiences of African students.

Lastly, responses to the questions ten, eleven and twelve portrayed the aspirations of these graduates/students and their recommendations for further enhancement of their degree programmes and the internationalization process which responded to research question four (Figure 4) as illustrated.



Figure 4: Questions addressing the research question 4 on the future aspirations and recommendations from African students

Pink color: main research questions

Green color: Questions from the questionnaire sent to respondents

## **6 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Findings from the data analysis and categorization are presented in this chapter and the relationship between the themes embodied in the four research questions will be discussed. The themes include motivation to study abroad, expectations before and during the entire study period, level of achievement of the graduates and their future aspirations upon completion of their degree programmes.

### **6.1 Motivation to Study Abroad**

The African graduates' responses to the research question one indicated that besides personal motivation to study abroad, the benefits and opportunities associated with internationalization constituted a major attraction to study in Finland. Brennen (2006) defines motivation as the degree of effort an individual exerts towards achieving a certain goal and this motivation comes from the individual. However, there is a degree of expectation on the other hand that higher educational institutions that promote internationalization also have the responsibility to provide the necessary tools that will boost student's motivation to attain their academic and future goals. In higher education, the adult learner has responsibility for their own motivation (Pew, 2007). When these fourteen African graduates were asked what motivated them to choose their international degree programmes and study in Finland, several reasons emerged such as tuition free education.

Eight respondents out of the fourteen mentioned free education as a motivational factor, while another mentioned that certificates obtained abroad are rated higher than the ones obtained in Africa. Two others indicated that their motivation comes from the fact that there is good quality education in Europe while another said that the programme package looked fascinating from the course brochure. Three others commented that their international programmes were closely linked to their future work plans while another mentioned that his international programme was unique and only one of its kind offered in Europe. Three others said that their educational background was related to their degree programmes and another remarked that Finland is a technologically advanced country. Two of the respondents were motivated because

Finland is internationally known for its high quality education especially due to their outstanding PISA results while two others were motivated because of the cultural diversity and international nature of the programme. One participant wanted to know more about Aquatic ecosystems, two wanted to gain practical, administrative and problem solving skills in their fields as well as learn about development issues, while another was motivated due to Finland's global reputation in the fields of mobile and information technology. The two Kenyan respondents were motivated due to the positive reputation of the Finnish education in their home country whereby one of them participated in the student exchange programme in Finland which gave him the impression of better quality education in nursing and health care. One respondent was curious about the Finnish higher education, while another remarked that not many students had come from his home country (Cameroon) to study in Finland during his days and studying here would have made him stand out in the Cameroonian intelligentsia when he returned home. One participant was motivated to study in Finland because of family ties since her husband was pursuing a Doctoral Degree programme here.

From the above mentioned factors that motivated these African graduates to study in Finland, it can be deduced that techniques employed to attract international students into Finnish higher education institutions include, free education for all (whether nationals or foreigners), the diversity and availability of multiple international programmes, Finland's excellent global educational reputation as demonstrated by its PISA results and more reasons mentioned above. As much as some of these motivational factors could be intrinsic or extrinsic, Pew (2007) states that in higher education adult learners are responsible for their own motivation. However, this motivation needs to be fueled by educational administrators, lecturers and instructors by providing a conducive learning environment where knowledge and skills in critical thinking and problem solving are acquired and where the varied and multiple needs of students are met (Pew, 2007; Pont, 2004). "The adult learner should be placed at the centre of the learning process that must be understood as an inclusive process covering multiple objectives and responding to different motives for learning – underpinned by professional, personal or social reasons" (De Oliveira Pires, 2009, 149). This implies that motivation to study has a big role to play in learning outcomes, future aspirations and pedagogical practices.

As part of self-motivational factors, ten out of the fourteen respondents found out about their international degree programmes through the internet and the Finnish university web pages.

Four others got information about their degree programmes from friends, some of which were already studying in Finland. One respondent got information through her husband who was studying at one of the Finnish universities, while another learnt about the programme through his exchange period in Finland, yet another through the Finnish Embassy in Nairobi and one through an advertisement posted in an online developmental platform.

## **6.2 Expectations about Specific International Degree Programmes**

Cognizant of the motivational factors that attracted these African graduates to study in Finnish higher education institutions, the second main research question seeks to explore their expectations of the international degree programmes they enrolled in and how these expectations were met.

### **6.2.1 Students' expectations concerning the international degree programmes**

From the responses, the five students from the international degree programme “Development and International Cooperation” articulated that they expected the programme to be international, touching on current issues faced by developing countries and finding practical solutions to these problems like managing development projects. Another graduate from the programme had very high expectations, to gain the necessary knowledge and skills that will enable him work with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and have enough field experience. While another also expected to learn about development strategies and acquiring lots of practical experiences in development cooperation. Yet another equally had very high expectations from the title of the programme and the perceived value to be accrued in the field of development. One other student from the same programme who was among the early batches mentioned that he expected to receive lectures during his study but mostly experienced independent learning and book exams. This was unusual compared to his experiences from his country of origin where lectures dominated. He also expected more interaction with the lecturers but this was not the case and a rather new experience. He added that he expected a unanimous graduation date for all students

like in his country of origin but was surprised that students graduate anytime they are done with their studies.

On the other hand, the two students/ graduates from the international degree programme on “Logistics Engineering” stated that they expected a complete internationalization from all aspects of the programme, a good mastery of subject matter by the lecturers with a good command of the English language and internationalization in the classroom through social interactions and some extra-curricular activities. In Benton’s (2006) work (quoted in Pew, 2007, 21) on the *7 Deadly Sins of Students and Professors* he states that “a student culture of self-indulgence is enabled by the failure of professors to maintain expectations in the classroom” and “students and professors have entered into a mutual pact of low expectations”. Pew (2007, 21) explains that “one of the low expectations may be that instructors are clinging to a teacher child-centered model of education (e.g., pedagogy), when an adult–adult, non-traditional student-centered model may be more effective (e.g., andragogy).” The other student expected to acquire sound education to develop expertise knowledge and be empowered for a life of significance. This student was eager to study in an international environment where all the necessary facilities to enhance his learning will be provided and lots of practical training available since engineering is a more practical than theoretical field.

Also, the graduates from the programme on “Educational Leadership” expected to gain broader and global views on school leadership which will enhance personal leadership qualities and to obtain better and more innovative ideas to be implemented in their home countries. In addition, one respondent wanted to learn the secret about the success of the Finnish educational system known as one of the best worldwide. The other student expected to gain the necessary skills and competences in issues of pedagogy and educational leadership on the national and international scale.

Another graduate from the international degree programme on “Aquatic Sciences” expected his programme to prepare him for postgraduate studies while one of them from the programme on “Hospitality” indicated that he expected quality education in Finland due to the positive reputation they have about Finnish education in his country of origin. The student from the degree programme in “Nursing and Health” expected to acquire knowledge and skills in international nursing which will equip him to serve in any multicultural environment, nationally and internationally in the health care sector. The graduate from Nanoscience/Chemistry

programme expected a high quality and competitive education which will also increase the level of employability of the graduates. Lastly, the graduate from the international degree programme on “Computer Information Systems” expected ground breaking theories and hands on practical experiences in both academic and professional environments.

Therefore, it can be conceived that a majority of the respondents were motivated and expected high quality education in Finland due to Finland’s successes in education like Finland’s outstanding performances in the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) results (Hargreaves, Halasz and Pont, 2007; Välijarvi, Linnakylä, Kupari, Reinikainen, Arffman, 2007; OECD, 2011) known globally. Again, most of them expected to acquire the necessary international skills, expertise and practical training experiences in their area of interest that will give them an advantage in the job market due to their international experience and this is closely linked to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to study abroad. Almost half of the respondents or more expected to gain some multicultural experience through social and academic interactions while a few respondents expected that education in Finland should be of better quality than in their countries of origin. Overall, they had high expectations of the internationalization process which ranged from the international activities (within the classroom and beyond), social interactions to, knowledge and skill building through practical training.

### **6.2.2 How the Expectations were met?**

The responses to the fourth question on the questionnaires answers the second part of main research question two which is “*How did the degree programmes meet their expectations?*” From the international degree programme, “*Development and International Cooperation*”, four of the graduates responded that their expectations were partially met while the expectations of one graduate were not met. A common concern from all five graduates of the programme was the absence of practical work/training during the course implementation and more of theoretical training was provided. Of the five graduates from this programme, one mentioned that his expectations were partially met due to the fact that they were the second batch of the new programme and lots of experimenting on developing the programme was done with them. Another graduate mentioned that his expectations were partially met because the programme



contained all the courses he expected. Yet another from the same programme mentioned that the programme narrowly met her expectations because she thinks developmental studies is more field work than in the classroom and very little assistance was offered to students' search for internship placement where they could practice concepts learned in the classroom. One student remarked that his expectations were partially met because the courses gave him some knowledge about developmental issues in Africa and some skills in project management though he expected more courses to be provided in that area.

While students from the international degree programme on "Educational Leadership" mentioned that their programme met their expectations quite well even though one of them still had unanswered questions but he felt that a huge part of his curiosity was satisfied. This student stated that *"One of my expectations is to learn from and observe how the education system in Europe works. I have seen that and I can appreciate the ease to learn compared to the aggressive pattern in my home country. What has made it easy can be attributed to the free education policy of the Finnish government. Another positive aspect of my learning here is that my cultural exposure and education has been enriched due to the many 'cultures' I have been exposed to as a student."*

One student from the international degree programme on "Logistics Engineering" reported that the programme did not meet his expectations while the other said that it met his expectations partially and he listed some pros and cons of the programme:

*"About the pros, I was able to get myself well acquainted with the industry and working life. During my stay in my institution, I had the opportunity of visiting the biggest sea port in Europe located in Rotterdam (Netherlands). I also visited the second largest in Europe located in Antwerp (Belgium). I learnt so much during my stay in those two European countries. I was able to familiarize myself with inland waterway transportation, cargo handling and automation. I visited so many industries undertaking logistics services. Here in Finland, I can say I visited almost all the important logistics industries just to get a better understanding of the course. About the cons, I was taught by some lecturers that could not deliver (I meant that they could not convey their message to the students in a way that they can understand easily. I don't dispute the fact that they don't know their subject matter well enough but how they can lecture so that a layman can understand is the issue). Our technical drawing teacher is a typical example, before you will graduate*

*from my department; you must have passed all his five courses (five difficult Engineering courses) including Technical drawing. Many students passed these courses through narrow escape (grade 1 or 2). If you can pass these courses very well, then you must have been taught somewhere else otherwise you cannot understand to the extent that you can have good grades. I can say most of them are intelligent but we could not understand them when they are teaching. I was not expecting this at all. There were also prejudices and injustice which did not favor the international students most especially Africans. You may not also be allowed to represent the school in some competitions just because you are not a Finn. Finnish groups are selected all the time to represent the school regardless of their performance (whether good or bad). The trip to Estonia and Germany is a typical example; Two Finnish groups were chosen to represent the school in those countries. It was clear to everybody that they were not the best groups not even the second best. I feel that our lecturers should be happy when we are making progress in our career, not on the contrary. If you acquire sound education and you don't have good grades to move forward, you have wasted a certain percentage of your life just like that.”*

The graduates from other international degree programmes like “*Computer Information Systems*” remarked that on a positive side, the theories and academic set up was top notch and lecturers were supportive whereas on a negative perspective, the practical components of the courses were largely absent making it difficult to link up theories learnt with the real world. The other student from the programme on “*Hospitality*” said his expectations were also partially met because he acquired his certificate quite fast; there was flexibility in education, no discrimination, equal treatment, fairness and a fun environment. While on the other hand, he thought some of his lecturers were unskilled in terms of language, there wasn't proper monitoring and mentorship. The graduate from “*Nanosciences/Chemistry*” indicated that overall his expectations were met but improvements are encouraged. From “*Aquatic Sciences*” the graduate said that his expectations were not met because “*I wanted to write my thesis on parasite related issues in fish rather than sexual selection in whitefish as was the case*”. And finally the graduate from “*Nursing and Health*” reported that his expectations were partially met because of the interactive nature of his courses with students from very diverse nationalities. His lecturers had long work and teaching experiences which added to the rich dynamics of the classroom. He also acquired lots of skills in his field.

Therefore, eight of the graduate's expectations were partially met while the expectations of another three graduates were not met and two graduates were satisfied that their expectations of their degree programmes were met. Some of the positive reasons included the acquisition of international knowledge, skills, supportive lecturers (as mentioned by one of the graduates), multicultural exposure (as mentioned by two other graduates) and relatively more ease and flexibility in the educational system in Finland compared to their countries of origin. Conversely, one issue of great concern for most of the respondents was the absence or lack of practical training/fieldwork and little or no exposure to real life situations which makes it challenging to link theories learned in class to real life situations. Another issue of concern was prejudice and injustice encountered by one of the respondents while easy delivery of subject matter by some lecturers as a result of language barrier was another area of concern for about three of the respondents. One of the respondents also expressed concern about the acquisition of good grades as a vital tool to forge on in today's society. Astin's (1999) theory on student's active involvement in the learning process, Zyngier's (2003) concept of a connected and modern pedagogical practice that embraces the needs of learners by engaging them in practical aspects of the learning process, Krause' (2005) concept of engaging diversity and multiple perspectives to enhance the quality of education and student's motivation (Brennen, 2006) in higher education institutions are relevant in addressing the above concerns stated by some of the respondents.

### **6.3 Learning Outcomes/ Experiences of African Graduates**

The third research objective explores the learning outcomes/ experiences of the degree programmes from the perspective of African students with respect to; their involvement and participation in these programmes, employment and applicability of knowledge gained and their level of achievements. Learning outcomes play a vital role in achieving the goals of the Bologna Process (Pukelis, 2011). Some of these goals include ensuring high quality education across institutions of higher education in Europe, introducing credit transfer and accumulation systems that assess study performances, the active participation of both teachers and students in the Bologna process and the promotion of an attractive European higher education area (European Commission, 2010). These learning outcomes/ experiences are vital in determining the quality

of degree programmes and the augmentation of curricular (London Communique, 2007, 51). Learning outcomes refer to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding upon completion of a learning process and how this knowledge and skills can be translated and applied to everyday practice and work life/ competences (European Qualification Framework, 2008; Savickiene, 2010).

Responses from the participants with regards to their learning outcomes could be cognitive (knowledge and understanding), psychomotor (skills based) and emotional (attitudes and values) according to Bloom's taxonomy on the classification of learning domains (Savickiene, 2010). Their experiences could also be perceived in terms of the degree of internationalization, integration, involvement and connectedness felt by these participants during their study period. Questions five included what factors affected the student's performance while studying, while question six referred to the positive and negative outcomes of their degree programmes and if it was possible to find a job in their field. Question seven was related to the practical applicability of the skills and knowledge gained even in their home countries, while question eight pointed to their perception on the focus of contents in their specific international degree programmes. Question nine sought to examine how these graduates' studies contributed to their lives and career. These learning outcomes/ experiences of the graduates will be presented according to the study programmes.

### **6.3.1 Graduate's Involvement and Participation in the Programmes**

#### ***Development and International Cooperation Programme***

Several factors boosted the internationalization process, graduate's studies/experiences and learning outcomes/ in this programme. Their international experiences are listed here below, with numbers of statements made (n):

- *Teacher-Student relationship*: There exist a good teacher-student relationship within the programme which implies teachers are approachable and always willing to assist compared to home universities in countries of origin. Some of the graduates attested that their supervisors were very supportive and encouraging (7).

- *Availability of facilities to ease learning:* Graduates from this programme appreciated the fact that there is easy access to the internet and well equipped school facilities like the library that facilitated learning (2).
- *Nature of the programme:* Some of the graduates mentioned the flexible and relaxed nature of the programme and studies where students study at their own pace compared to their home universities where this is not the case (7).
- *Tuition free education:* An added advantage reported by some of the graduates is the tuition free education implying less financial burden and more focus on studies (2).

Due to the above positive international learning experiences, some skills gained and positive learning outcomes shared by graduates of this programme include; Analytical skills (3) from Master's thesis writing, organizational skills from development studies, research skills due to independent study (2), intercultural competence (3) and team working skills as a result of group discussions and class interactions with students from diverse backgrounds, skills to design and manage a development project and skills to understand situations in country of origin and invent solutions to problems. Some of the graduates said their knowledge and perspectives were broadened on the complexity of issues faced by developing countries which need to be analyzed from different angles, while others gained knowledge on development theories and goals. In summary, some believed that their skills could be adaptive/ applicable in their home countries and elsewhere (7) and in the training of NGO staff to execute sustainable projects.

*Focus of International Programme Content:* With regards to the programme content, one participant indicated that it focused on the interaction between developed and developing countries and highlighted some of the ills of developing countries proffering solutions to them. Others communicated that the programme content focused more on developing countries (4) but touched on some issues in western countries while some participants revealed that the focus was more on the developed nations (8) therefore, the skills and knowledge gained may not be applicable to developing countries in like manner.

The negative factors that affected graduate's studies, experiences and learning outcomes included:

- *Financial constraints:* The expensive nature of the Finnish economy (2) and the rapid depletion of funds prompted some of the participants to engage themselves in work and study simultaneously which affected their studies negatively (4).
- *Visa and other constraints:* Difficulties obtaining study permits (visas) in time led to a late start in the programme for one participant thus affecting her studies. Also, high staff turnover in the department which posed issues of adaptability, easy familiarity and continuity for both staffs and students, led to a drop in the performance of one participant. More still, one participant reported that the programme is not well structured which implied that lots of improvements and assistance is needed in areas like internship searches etc.
- *Language Barrier:* Some participants noted that there are limited courses offered in English. Thus, the Finnish language is a barrier to communication and some lecture materials are only available in the Finnish language (5).
- *Independent Studies:* One participant raised the issue of book exams which is a form of independent studies with no lectures. This participant noted that this form of study limits one's understanding of any given text or material.

Some negative effects on learning outcomes and the development of skills due to negative learning experiences include; Difficulties and delay with thesis writing because of minimal assistance with Master's thesis writing especially at its early stages and limited courses offered on research methodology. Also, some participants indicated that they acquired very few skills due to the lack of practical training (11) and ability to translate theoretical knowledge into practice. This consequently limited their understanding of the theoretical knowledge gained and future applicability of knowledge in work environments. Though learning can be transferable, the context, set-ups and structures are different in developing countries (Africa) (3) making applicability of knowledge a challenge in such circumstances.

Nevertheless, improvements are vital for the focus of programme content as suggested by the participants. These improvements include; a balanced focus on issues faced by both developing and developed countries with western experiences and examples on how current levels of development were attained. One participant suggested that more courses are needed in the field of development and more attention plus assistance should be given to internship

searches (2). Focus on partnership with local, national and international Non-Governmental Organizations as well as developmental organizations is critical and improvements are necessary in terms of the programme title and content in order to achieve better students' involvement and participation in the programme.

### *Educational Leadership Programme*

The positive international experiences of the two participants from this programme included;

- *Multiculturalism and diversity:* Multiculturalism and diversity within the programme enriched graduate's perspectives and diversified their views on issues (3) related to the programme.
- *Classroom Atmosphere:* The graduates enjoyed a high level of participation and involvement in the programme because of the conducive classroom atmosphere for learning where the views and opinions of everyone could be freely expressed no matter how reasonable or unreasonable opinions were (2).
- *Nature of the courses:* The courses offered sufficient time to write and submit assignments and group work was encouraged. One participant liked the system of assessment in the programme because it is stress free.

As a result of the positive international experiences, the two participants from the programme gained the following skills; leadership and management (human, material and time) skills (2); coordination, goal setting and strategic planning skills, interpersonal and evaluation skills. One of the participants felt more equipped to take on leadership roles than ever before and learned that inclusiveness is a vital component in leadership that is it involves engaging parents, school administrators, students/ children in the process and assisting them realize the importance of the roles and functions they perform. He now has a new perspective about leadership compared to his country of origin where leaders exercise more "dictatorial" roles which forces political, educational, social and family institutions to suffer a decline.

- *Focus of programme content:* One graduate reported that the programme focused on leadership and issues in educational administration irrespective of the context, while the other mentioned that the focus was on education in developed countries and so many of

their solutions cannot solve the problems in developing nations. He said the problems faced by the African continent are multi-faceted and require multi-faceted approaches to solve them.

Some negative factors that affected the studies and learning outcomes of the two graduates from this programme include:

- *The attitude of Finns:* the participants mentioned the cold, impersonal attitude of Finns as a hindrance to learning and sharing of views since such an attitude limits richness in learning experiences and opportunities to ask questions directly about “strange” things concerning the Finnish culture instead of always relying on books and the internet. These participants preferred to learn about the Finnish culture from its citizens but this was difficult due to a lack of communication and the Finns’ reluctance to open to other cultures (4). This caused the graduates to feel a certain degree of exclusion (see chapter 3) from the community.

Some suggestions by these participants to improve the content of the programme include: More focus and emphasis on shared leadership practices (which includes teachers, principals, students, educational stakeholders, and companies) is needed. Also, the curriculum should include approaches to problems faced by other continents (2) and more innovative approaches to educational inquiry given that the realities and structures in country of origin (Africa) are quite different from western countries and the transfer of skills, knowledge and experiences might be challenging and require innovative ideas. In summary, these graduates think there is still room for improvement of the degree programme.

### ***Logistics Engineering Programme***

Due to the advantages of internationalization, some positive learning experiences of the two graduates from this programme include:

- *Foreign/ Visiting lecturers:* Visiting lecturers from the United Kingdom, United States, Austria and some from Finland improved the graduate’s performance and understanding due to amazing teaching skills, illustrations and competences.



- *Classroom Atmosphere:* One of the participants reported that the classroom interaction between students and lecturers was good and they benefitted from their interaction with other international students (6).

Nevertheless, there were some negative aspects of the internationalization process that need improvement such as:

- *Language barriers between lecturers and students:* the participants explained that some of their Finnish lecturers (intelligent people) had difficulties expressing themselves, explaining concepts and subject matter or passing on information in English appropriately due to low English proficiency. Consequently instructions were taken wrongly, applicability of knowledge learnt was done incorrectly and the outcome was bad performances (3).
- *Prejudices:* Some of the participants said they encountered prejudices from both lecturers and students due to misconstrued ideas about students from certain nationalities like Africans (3). Therefore, to an extent they did not feel connected to the programme.
- *Absence of social life:* Part of this disconnection from the programme resulted from the closed attitude of the nationals which does not encourage socialization and harsh weather conditions which causes weakness, depression, difficulties waking up to school etc (2).
- *No financial aid:* the absence of financial aid from the government or higher education institution is not encouraging and international students have to work to keep up with their financial commitments.

The two participants each gave some merits and demerits of the programme. One of them mentioned that the programme is relevant, flexible and contemporary since the skills gained are highly needed especially in industries to reduce excess inventories which are usually expensive to manage. However, that participant said he did not gain any new skills. The other participant asserted that the programme exposed him to real life situations thus some theories learned were understood. He feels confident if placed in a work environment because of the skills gained during practical training. They agreed that there is little focus on issues of developing countries probably because of the programme location.

### ***Hospitality Management Programme***

Some of the positive international learning experiences of this participant are:

- *No interruption*: This participant was happy because he was able to complete his programme within the required time frame since his studies were not interrupted by strikes or the pressure of paying school fees compared to his country of origin.
- *Programme execution*: He reported that his classes were very interactive and this broadened his knowledge, understanding and his ability to solve problems due to exposure to real life projects with companies in Jyväskylä.

Notwithstanding, this participant had some issues with the programme. He acknowledged that the skills gained during his studies can only be applicable to Finland and some European countries since teaching is European centered with fewer challenges. He was concerned about applying skills gained to situations in Africa which are quite different from Europe because examples were not cited beyond Finland and the European Union. He equally addressed the issue of a lack of employment opportunities especially for international students even after being exposed to real life projects with companies in Jyväskylä.

### ***Nanosciences/ Chemistry Programme***

The participant from this programme professed that his programme provided him with the necessary high level scientific skills needed in the job market and hence he is currently employed though his skills can still be utilized in better ways (in search of a better job).

However, he still thinks that the programme requires some improvement because it has been designed to be implemented in developed countries since some of the equipments are too expensive for developing countries. Also, he thinks there is a limit to student competition within the programme which challenges students to work harder. Overall, he stated that the field of study is quite contemporary and could be introduced in his home country provided facilities (which are quite expensive) are made available.

### *Aquatic Sciences Programme*

The positive international learning experiences communicated by this participant included the interactive classes which were enhanced by sufficient practical and field training (3). Consequently, he acquired presentational skills and obtained his degree within the specified duration of the programme since the programme met some of his expectations.

Nonetheless, he hopes certain aspects of the internationalization process can be improved like incorporating more fun in the classroom. While studying, he realized that there was no fun during his courses since his class only contained African students. He also suggested that there should be more emphasis on learning the Finnish language and appealed for the provision of more post graduate positions (and opportunities for Africans) and links to job opportunities within this field.

### *Nursing and Health Programme*

This participant pointed out some of the positive outcomes from his degree programme by stating that he gained some skills and knowledge from lectures and clinical practices conducted in English which can be applicable in his home country since the roles of nurses in both worlds (developed and developing countries) are similar to a certain extent. He further adduced that the programme focused on the promotion of health care and prevention of diseases which are major goals in both worlds (developed and developing countries).

Notwithstanding, language barrier was a major factor that affected his studies and learning outcome. The Finnish language is required during practical training for communication between clients, staffs and students but due to inadequate Finnish language skills, he did not acquire the necessary skills and knowledge from practical training.

In summary, relevant points were raised from the different international degree programmes under three main categories; factors (positive and negative) that affected learning outcomes, the learning outcomes (positive and areas for improvement) and focus of content in the various programmes. From the numerous factors that affected the learning outcomes of all fourteen respondents, a few factors (both positive and negative) were dominant since they were mentioned by many more respondents. From a positive perspective, half of the respondents praised the good, interactive and supportive relationship that existed between the teachers and

students. This approachable nature of the lecturers improved their performances and facilitated their learning especially because such relationships are rare in their universities of origin (in Africa) where teachers are seen as the all knowing, should not be challenged and are superior authorities who are tough to approach as stated by Haberman's (1991) theory on the pedagogy of poverty and this affects the quality of learning in these countries (Benbow, Mizrachi, Oliver, Said-Moshiro, 2007). Two participants mentioned the well equipped university facilities like the libraries, internet access which broadened their knowledge and eased learning. Also, half of the respondents remarked on the flexible nature of their degree programmes where students learn at their own pace compared to their home countries (in Africa). While another two participants commented on the free education offered by the Finnish Society as a commendable step towards internationalization and education for all given that these respondents felt less stressed while studying since it was one less financial burden. It is worth noting again that flexibility in teaching styles and equal opportunities to education for all are some of the reasons for Finland's successes in the PISA results and with education in general (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2010; Signs of Our Times, 2008; Lombardi, 2005). In addition, three respondent's perspectives/views and understanding were enriched due to the diversity of students within their programmes, while about half of them appreciated the interaction between the students (other international students) and teachers within the classroom and two others noted that the view points of others were valued within their respective classrooms. The above mentioned factors greatly enhanced the respondent's learning and Astin's (1999) theory on student involvement explains that students feel part of a process when they encounter the above mentioned scenario. Krause (2005), Bourn, Mckenzie and Shiel (2006) emphasize the importance of diversity within study programmes as a tool to increase understanding and enrich discussions and experiences were multiple voices prevail within an educational environment. The cordial relationship and interaction between teachers and student and between students in an international environment are vital components of an inclusive and a connected education as suggested by Zyngier's (2003).

However, there were some negative factors that impeded learning at varying extents. About four respondents expressed concern that working (newspaper distribution and cleaning) and studying affected their performance negatively. This is due to financial constraints since one of the respondents mentioned that there was no financial aid from the government or educational

institution and two others were not aware of the expensive nature of the Finnish economy. Five respondents mentioned the Finnish language as a barrier to communication, reading and understanding some course material and the delivery of some courses. This implied that some lecturers (though very intelligent) had limitations (low English language proficiency) in explaining certain concepts to students in a way that the students could clearly understand and this affected students performances. Also, the language barrier limited interaction between the students and some lecturers and this also limited the number of courses available to the English speaking students which implied that some students had to take book exams to make up for their credits. One of the respondents remarked negatively to book exams as a process that limits understanding and interaction due to independent studies. Furthermore, three respondents commented on the cold impersonal attitude of the Finns which limited interaction, sharing of views and ultimately reduced the richness in experiences. Moreover, about three respondents felt some form of prejudices within their programme from misconstrued ideas others had about Africans.

From the theory of exclusion, Silver (1994) states that institutional and cultural differences create barriers that provoke discrimination and exclusiveness and exclusion could be due to incompetence in linguistics or the national language spoken by the host country (Mattoo, Neagu & Özden, 2008, 255-269). Exclusion can be defined as the lack of communication between all actors (students, teachers, and administrators) within an educational environment (Nasse, 1992) and this will have a negative impact on their learning outcomes (Votteler, 2007; Libbey, 2004; Fielding, 2004a, 2004b; Certo, et al., 2003; Matthews, 2010). Therefore, even though about half of the respondents experienced a certain degree of inclusion, others also felt excluded at different times during their studies.

A major factor of concern that affected the learning outcomes of most respondents was the lack of practical/field training, hands-on experiences and exposure to real life situations during their studies. This posed the challenge to utilize and transfer skills gained and knowledge acquired when confronted with real life situations or becoming entrepreneurial. Gale (2000), Nusche (2008), European Qualification Framework (2008) and Savickiene (2010) assert that learning has taken place when knowledge and skills can be translated and applied to everyday practice and work life/ competences.

### **6.3.2 Employment and the Applicability of Knowledge and Skills Gained**

Brennen (2006) states that the ultimate goal of any educational institution is to provide students with the knowledge and skills that will empower them to become productive members of the society. The wide range of skills acquired by these 14 respondents can be seen from the positive outcomes of their degree programmes. They include; analytical, research, intercultural competences skills, designing and managing projects as well as team working skills. Some of these skills like team working, collaboration and intercultural competences are essential in today's labor markets (Lakes, 2005). Even though about half of the respondents mentioned that their skills can be adaptive to their home countries and elsewhere, another half of the respondents expressed concern about transferability of these skills when confronted with real work situations especially if these skills are to be used in their home countries (in Africa) where the social, political, economic, educational and family structures are quite different and issues faced quite complex. Two respondents also mentioned the lack of employment opportunities within their fields and the absence of links to job opportunities as a deficiency in the internationalization process of their degree programmes. They believed that graduates should be able to secure decent jobs locally, nationally or internationally upon completion of an international degree programme especially within their host country (Finland) where they have been trained with its rapid ageing population and high need for a working population that will boost Finland's economy.

This implies that the international degree programmes should diversify their curricula content to include strategies that will address multiple scenarios and issues faced by other continents as suggested by some of the respondents. This diversification should be based on the course participants present which will encourage sharing experiences from the student's place of origin thus promoting an integrating inclusive and a connected learning environment. In addition, international programmes and or educational systems should be designed to meet the diverse needs of learners (York, 2003) and empower them to think innovatively, critically, solve problems (Bourn, McKenzie and Shiel, 2006) and secure decent jobs in today's complex and competitive society.

### *Focus of Programme Content*

Another issue that emerged was the focus of the programme contents. The complexity and competitiveness in today's society with its varying social, political and economic structures place universities under pressure to balance out and improve the quality of their programmes, courses, curricular, activities and the teaching and learning processes (Bartell, 2003; Bond, 2006). Four respondents mostly from the Development and International Cooperation programme reported that the programme content focused more on issues faced by developing nations and they would have been interested in equally learning about techniques used by the developed nations in their advancement. While the majority of respondents indicated that their programmes focused more on developed nations especially within the European Union and Finland. The transferability of skills to structures that are entirely different across the globe was an issue of major concern for more than half of the respondents. However, these respondents advocate for a more balanced focus of contents within their curricula and courses where the issues of both developed and developing countries are addressed, and course contents and curricular that stimulate innovative and critical thinking. They proposed programme contents that are fun, interactive, open opportunities for employment, partnering with other educational stakeholders and companies, build entrepreneurial abilities, and lay strong emphasis on the study of the Finnish Language and practical training plus much assistance should be provided to students on the search for internship opportunities. A part of the internationalization process and augmentation of the curriculum occurs when the experiences and suggestions of students are shared with all educational stakeholders (AUCC, 2009).

### **6.3.3 Level of Achievement**

Students/ graduates level of achievement is measured by the degree of learning, skills acquired, advantages and competences gained during years of schooling Nusche (2008). This involves numerous practices which include the extent of teachers and students' involvement in the learning process, flexibility in teaching and learning styles yet conformity with the curricular, equal learning opportunities for all and many more factors (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2010; Lombardi, 2005). Motivation is directly related to a student's level of achievement

(Brennen, 2006) and in Finland, this level of achievement is measured through the European Credit Transfer System (European Commission, 2009). Responses to question nine were categorized under the benefits of the internationalization process, higher education and integration which delineate the level of achievement of these fourteen respondents through their experiences while studying in Finland and its contributions to their lives and careers (Table 2).

*Table 2, Positive Level of Achievement*

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Positive level of Achievement</i>
The Internationalization Process	Finnish language skills improved
	Feels empowered to operate in different parastatals and acquired some degree of expertise in his field due to field and practical training
	Increased international profile tremendously because of opportunities to travel abroad for lectures, conferences and research
	Broadened and enriched knowledge on cultural differences & societal issues. Gained adaptive and analytical skills
	Development in multicultural nursing, hence better placed to work in a multicultural environment
	Free education has been beneficial
Higher Education	Independent studies encouraged independent thinking instead of always relying on teachers (2)
	Improved research ability and skills (2)
	Completion of the degree programme equipped her with useful knowledge about her home country
	Learned to work and study simultaneously (multi-tasking) due to flexible nature of education (can re-take exams which are not too challenging if not satisfied with grades )
	Good educational planning and proper implementation assisted with personal planning in accordance with degree programme
Integration	Learned a lot about punctuality and the ease of self expression without fear of molestation



(n.) = the number of times the points were raised or addressed.

From the positive perspectives of the respondents, the above mentioned factors have increased their level of achievement and equipped them for life and career opportunities. The above categories portray the benefits of the internationalization process in higher education. Some of the advantages of internationalization mentioned include learning an international language (Finnish Language), enriched knowledge of diverse cultures and societies, exposed graduates to international traveling opportunities to participate in conferences and lectures abroad, offered opportunities for international training during field or practical training etc. Also, the higher education institutions under study offered the participants research skills, self-confidence and maturity to study and think independently without always relying on lecturers, equipped participant with useful knowledge about home country and improved one participant's ability to multi-task that is work and study simultaneously given the flexible nature of studies in this higher education institution. One participant felt integrated or comfortable in his programme because he could express himself freely without fear of molestation or abuse.

However, the concerns of these participants were grouped in four categories (Table 3). With respect to employment opportunities, participants expressed that they have not been able to secure decent jobs locally, nationally or internationally upon completion of their degree programmes. This presumably could be due to the fact that they are Africans and need to work harder to prove their worth given that there exists some stereotypes about certain cultures or nationals as mentioned by one participant. The ultimate goal of any educational institution is to provide students with the knowledge and skills that will empower them to become productive members of the society Brennen (2006). Therefore, these higher education institutions should create strong partnerships and collaboration with local, national and international businesses, enterprises, corporations where students could carry out field and practical training thus preparing them and establishing a connection for job opportunities. Furthermore, the contents of these international programmes should be balanced that is addressing issues on an international scope focusing on various continents represented in the programme which will enrich knowledge and understanding through the sharing of experiences and ideas. The participants will feel included and connected to the programme and there will be limited independent studies. Language barriers and the cold impersonal attitudes of Finns were equally areas of concern that

need to be addressed to boost these international programmes and the level of achievement of the participants.

*Table 3, Concerns that affected the level of achievement and complete appreciation of the degree programmes:*

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Concerns</i>
Employment	Currently not secured any job related to field of studies
Opportunities	Small size of Finland makes it less influential in the world market in terms of international employment
	Feels Africans and some foreigners have to work extremely hard to secure jobs and achieve goals
Focus of Programme	Feels more divorced from realities in home country since studies suited and focused on developed nations
Content	Many questions remain unanswered and linger in mind about development issues in Africa
	Felt more knowledge was acquired from home university than from Finnish Education.
	One acknowledged that not every student advocates or approves independent studies (book exams)
	Thinks the age 7 is too late for kids to start formal schooling in Finland
Language Barrier	Language barrier, prejudices and low English language proficiency of some lecturers affected studies negatively.
Cold Impersonal Attitude of Finns	Drabness of social life here could be boring and unproductive. Foreign students tend to form cliques to maintain cheerfulness and communal interaction to boost educational experiences.

## **6.4 Future Aspirations**

Students are the foundation of any educational institution and meeting their diverse needs and aspiration has been a goal of many higher education institutions (Leask, 2001; UNESCO, 2009). Thus, there is pressure on higher educational systems, institutions, stakeholders to adjust educational practices, teaching and learning techniques and approaches that will enable students

achieve their goals and aspirations (UNESCO, 2009; 2010). This is attainable if priority is placed on knowing the diverse needs and aspirations of students/graduates (Krause, 2005). Hence, table 4 below is a summary of some of the future aspirations of all 14 respondents which addresses the research question 4 which is “*What are the future aspirations of African graduates and their recommendations for the improvement of their various international degree programmes?*” This information is deduced from their responses to questions ten, eleven and twelve in the questionnaire and categorized as presented in Table 4.

*Table 4, Future Aspirations*

<b><i>Categories</i></b>	<b><i>Future Aspirations</i></b>
Advance studies in Finland	Will like to advance studies in Finland (7) that will be useful to Africans since she has many unanswered questions
	Is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Finland
	Advance study (Master’s degree) in Finland in nursing and health care to gain further skills for international assignments in research, education and administration
Work in Finland	Wish to work in Finland (3) in a small or medium sized Information Technology (IT) company
	Continue to be employed in Finland and remain highly competitive and professional.
Relocate to other countries	Relocate and further studies in another country (4) to become more proficient in proffering solutions to problems in the educational sector
Return home	Will like to return to home country to impart knowledge and skills learned to other nationals (5) as a university lecturer
Sociable life	To study in a more vibrant community and develop a more sociable outlook on life (2). The cold attitude of the Finns is unfavorable.
Closed nature of the Finnish society	The closed nature of the Finnish society provides little room for integration especially in the labor sector (3)
Nearness to Family	To advance studies in area of specialty preferably in an environment closer to family (2)
Freedom of	It is easy to get a job in his field if one speaks and understands the Finnish language. If

Expression	not, then one is doomed to unskilled jobs such as newspaper distribution & cleaning which do not require Finnish language skills. Reason why it is better to find jobs in English speaking nations (2).
Employment	Difficulties securing a job in Finland in area of specialty due to language barrier (2)
Purposes	In search of better job opportunities and more international work experience (9)
	Preference to work in developing countries to practically utilize acquired knowledge

(n.) = the number of times the points were raised or addressed.

From the table 4, it can be deduced that half of the respondents would like to pursue further studies in their various fields in Finland and less than half of the respondents elsewhere. While less than half of the respondents would like to work in Finland, the majority of them would prefer to relocate and work elsewhere of which five of the participants expressed the desire to return home someday either upon completion of their degree programmes or after gaining some international work experience after a few years of work.

Some major barriers or concerns adduced included the closed nature of the Finnish society which makes integration a strenuous and tough process especially as a foreigner, the Finnish Language as a barrier to communication and job search/ integration and the cold attitude of Finns repel the skilled and productive labor force to other nations who benefit from them. Other reasons for the migration of these skilled graduates as mentioned above include social reasons like the search for a more sociable life, nearness to family and the search for freedom of expression without language barriers. It is worth recalling that two decades ago up to a few years back, Coleman (1992), Wells (2009) and RIC (2009) mentioned the natural state of decline in Europe's population (and Finland in particular) due to the ageing population and low fertility rate which calls for a rise in the working population that will raise taxes and revenues necessary to support the economy, yet from this study more than half of the skilled graduates aspire to move to other nations in search for better job opportunities for reasons already mentioned above. This is an example of social exclusion within the Finnish Society which requires a productive labor force and social connection or bond between the individual and the society where "a national consensus, collective conscience, or general will ties the individual to the larger society through vertically interrelated mediating institutions (Silver, 1994).

### 6.4.1 Recommendations from Respondents

Recommendations for the improvement of the various international degree programmes have been presented in Table 5 by the fourteen respondents through their responses to question twelve on the questionnaire. (Also see previous section on learning outcomes/experiences for more recommendations).

*Table 5, Recommendations for Enhancing International Degree Programmes*

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
	<i>Development and International Cooperation Programme</i>
Practical/ Field Training	Practical training should be a vital component of all international programmes since most professions require valuable skills and hands-on experiences (prepare graduates for global labor markets) (4)
Partnership with Organizations	More exposure, partnership and networking with local (in Jyväskylä), national (in Finland) and international organizations, governments/ NGOs and businesses. (3)
	Strong emphasis on company/industrial /governmental <b>internships</b> which will enrich student’s experiences, resumes and practice of theories learned thus increasing their chances in finding jobs upon graduation(5).
Internationalizing the Programmes	Employ more English speaking and international lecturers since the programmes are international and multicultural. This will bring new and diverse perspectives/ approaches to the programmes (3)
	Lecturers should avoid injustices and prejudices. All students should be treated equally whereby all their contributions are valued. Lecturers should give clearer instructions and be willing to assist students at all times (2)
	In a multi-cultural classroom and international programme, lecturers should avoid explaining certain things in Finnish since the programmes are taught in English.
Independent learning	Discard “book exams” because it is not an effective way of learning
	Encourage more inter-cultural/international group work and interactive discussions with the facilitation of the lecturer (3). Engage students in challenging projects and brainstorming exercises in search for solutions to problems (2)
Language barrier	Design a compulsory six month Finnish Language course for all students at the beginning and end of their study period. This course should be quite intense and compulsory that is learned entirely in Finnish to assist foreign students acquire the

	necessary language skills for better integration in the society (2)
Focus and restructuring of programmes	More organization needed in terms of the courses that is more courses needed in the field of development. More English courses needed
	Include courses focused on other continents due to the international nature of the programme (3) for example more courses focused on public health issues in developing countries
	Programmes should be less intense by discarding unnecessary courses and allow more time for students to socialize, relax or take interesting courses in other departments
	Research method courses should be adequately taught because of its importance in thesis writing (2)
	More assistance rendered to students on internship search since it has been a struggle for many (2)
	Collaboration between all stakeholders in programme execution. For example, (medical departments, pharmacy, laboratory, radiology, nutritionist, social workers, psychologists/ psychiatrist) are needed in nursing and health care where each department is allocated sufficient time with the students. This will improve understanding, the acquisition of diverse skills and knowledge during practical training especially for non-Finnish speaking students.
	The titles of programmes should match programme contents (avoid misleading students). For example, Aquatic Sciences programme should be “Environmental Sciences or Engineering.”
	Encourage more group research and essay writing because students will research on a given topic which will enhance their understanding (2)

(n.) = the number of times the points were raised or addressed.

## **7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter is comprised of three sub headings: The conclusions drawn based on the findings, the limitations of this study and the implications for further research. This study reached its objectives to understand the African students' involvement and perspective on internationalization of the Finnish higher education through the research questions. The conclusions made on the basis of the findings are reported below.

### **7.1 Conclusions**

From the study, there is now evidence that numerous factors have motivated African students to study in Finnish higher education institutions. Some of these factors include the desire to obtain international degrees that are preferred in global labor markets, the good quality of education in Finland which is internationally recognized, the urge to acquire international knowledge, skills and experiences through practical training and work abroad, the uniqueness of some international programmes, the possibility of acquiring free education for all (both nationals or international students), the relationship between the international programmes and previous educational backgrounds and many more reasons. These motivational factors encouraged African students to search Finnish university web pages and the internet for international programmes in Finland. Some of these students obtained information from friends, relatives and Finnish Embassies.

This motivation was followed by expectations of the internationalization process and programmes which included: acquiring and broadening international knowledge touching on current and global issues, gaining international skills through practical/ field training and engaging in projects, programme titles that match programme contents, more interaction with lecturers, meet foreign and national lecturers with a good command of the English language and good mastery of their subject matter, learn the secret of Finland's successes with the educational system, expectations of social interactions and lots of extracurricular activities and an increase in the level of employment upon completion of the degree programmes. However, for a majority of the students, their expectations were partially met.

Some strong positive factors that boosted the graduate's international experiences and enhanced learning outcomes were --- good teacher/ student relationships, interactive classes and exchange of knowledge with other international students, the availability of facilities such as well equipped libraries to ease learning, tuition free education which implied less financial burden, flexible, contemporary and relaxed nature of the programmes where students study at their own pace plus freedom of expression in classrooms without fear of molestation. As a result of these positive factors, the students gained multiple skills such as intercultural competence skills, team working skills, research skills, some practical training experiences etc.

Education in Finland is regarded as one of the best globally due to its highly qualified lecturers. However, lecturers in higher education institutions still require intercultural and additional training in order to eliminate cultural stereotypes, promote and encourage more interactive and conducive learning environments for all (both national and international students) as well as embrace new ideas and technologies that will be instrumental in their future careers. This further training will prepare lecturers to meet the challenges of diverse student populations and the internationalization process which includes international activities. Moreover, since education is a dual learning process, lecturers in Finland require further training in the English language (if they encounter difficulties communicating their subject matter) and learning to incorporating issues faced by other continents during course delivery to create an all inclusive learning atmosphere.

Numerous positive attributes were advanced concerning the international degree programmes. Nevertheless, the qualities of these programmes need to be enhanced by employing more international lecturers to increase diversity in pedagogical approaches and ideas, promote modern teaching techniques that link international students to their environment and improve networking with other educational stake holders, institutions, the government and businesses. These programmes need to enforce practical and field training activities with numerous stakeholders to ensure their students obtain the necessary skills and competences through internship placements.

From the future aspirations of these graduates, it is obvious that a majority of the African graduates are partially satisfied with the outcomes and experiences of the internationalization process in Finnish higher education institutions. The fact that about half of the participants aspire to further their education in Finland to gain more knowledge is evidence that Finland



provides good quality education. However, since a majority of the participants aspire to relocate to other countries in search of better work opportunities and more international work experience, is evidence that there is poor integration of these skilled African graduates in the Finnish labor market. In addition, it would be a challenge for these African graduates to implement skills learned in their countries of origin due to a lack of practical or hands-on experience since some of them aspire to return home after gaining international work experience. Furthermore, another limitation of the internationalization process is that African students experience a lack of social life due to the cold impersonal attitude of Finns and their inability to freely express themselves because of language barriers which forces them to flee to other nations to enjoy a more sociable life style. Notwithstanding, some of the participants would like to work in Finland if the opportunities arise.

In summary, the participants made recommendations for the augmentation of the internationalization process and the enhancement of the degree programmes in higher education institutions in Finland. Some recommendations included making practical training an indispensable component of the course content, partnering with local, national and international organizations to assist in course implementation, internship placements and eventually work placements since the necessary skills would have been attained through work experiences, employ more foreign lecturers to diversify approaches to the teaching and learning processes, balance curricular content to have a global outlook on issues faced by other continents and not European centered, encourage more international and diverse group learning and group projects and eliminate independent learning like book exams which limit understanding. More emphasis is placed on learning the Finnish language for easy integration of foreigners, offering more courses in English and further assistance with research methodology which is a vital component of any research work.

The above is evidence that internationalization of education and international activities enhance cross-cultural students/ teacher's perspectives, learning, understanding and skill development (Altbach & Knight, 2007) and it also enriches international curricula through the active participation and inclusion of foreign student's voices in curriculum design. The development of Finland's economy and productivity largely depends on the integration of skilled labor/ graduates from higher education institutions (Ministry of Education, 2009) especially due to the rapid ageing population in Finland (Wells, 2009; RIC, 2009).

Therefore, one of the steps forward is proper integration at all levels within the society commencing from educational institutions which have a great impact on the proper functioning of society (King, Bjarnason, Edwards, Gibbons, & Ryan, 2004). There is a growing need for higher education institutions to foster effective strategies that will address the challenges of our global competitive world and secure a place for these institutions within it (De Boer, Jongbloed, Benneworth, Westerheijden, & File, 2012). Another effective strategy will be the continuous evolution of teaching techniques that are all inclusive, student-centered and meets the needs of diverse groups of learners (Leask, 2001). This will be possible through continuous partnership, collaboration and dialogue with organizations, businesses, universities, the society and governments that utilize these talents and can contribute in their training and the successes of international degree programmes (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

## **7.2 Limitations of the Study**

My curiosity about the successes and ability of the internationalization process in Finnish higher education to meet the needs of diverse groups of learners was heightened from my studies in the international programme ‘Development and International Cooperation’ with a major in Education. As I went through the degree programme, I was eager to do research on a topic related to education and the developing countries. During my studies, I questioned lots of international students about their motivations to study in Finland, what they expected from their international degree programmes, how these expectations were met, what had been their experiences studying in a foreign country, what were their aspirations and how applicable was the knowledge gained from their studies abroad to situations in their home countries? I was particularly intrigued by responses I got from my African friends who acknowledge that the educational, social, political, family structures and challenges of the Western countries were very different from the issues faced by developing countries and in this case African countries. The international programme on “Gerontology” stood out to me because the concept of old people’s homes is not common in Africa where nuclear family sizes are quite large and accommodate lots of extended family. So, these thoughts together with my motivations previously expressed in the introductory chapter of this study led me to investigate the African student’s involvement and perspectives on the internationalization of the Finnish higher education.

### *Validity in the research*

With the numerous thoughts running through my mind, I had an idea of what I wanted to focus on which was reframed and restructured by my supervisor. I also, shared ideas with some students, graduates, friends and lecturers from whom I got lots of motivation to carry out this study since a majority of them believed that student's perspectives on the internationalization process of the Finnish higher education was a good source for enhancing the process and making it more dynamic since these graduates had firsthand experience. Others thought that it would be a good medium to express their feelings and thoughts about the internationalization process and agreed to participate in the study. Eventually, my supervisor ascertained that this study will be relevant to Finnish international degree programmes since it would provide information on the effectiveness of the degree programmes and areas of the internationalization process that require improvement. Through this, some of the experiences of the graduates and the practice of skills and knowledge gained from the international programmes were envisioned.

After receiving lots of guidance from my supervisors on the research proposals I presented which was a huge struggle given that at the time, I had very diverse ideas and not strong research skills, I began to contact the participants for the study through emails and by phone. Some of these participants also referred me to their friends who were happy to participate in the study. Initially, I intended to carry out interviews with the participants but due to their busy schedules and locations, I was advised by the researcher at the Finnish Institute of Educational Research to send a questionnaire with open ended questions by email to the participants and encourage them to respond providing as much detail as possible. With the interviews, I was convinced I could get more detailed responses from the participants. However, since as many as fourteen respondents were willing to participate in the study from different locations in Finland with busy schedules, the open ended questionnaire strategy was preferable because I could reach out to all and they were comfortable sharing their experiences through this medium. With this approach, I was sure no information would be lost as opposed to transcribing data and further explanation or clarification on points raised were addressed during follow up interviews and written responses sent by email. With the assistance of a doctoral student, researcher at the Finnish Institute of Educational Research and my supervisor, my questionnaires were prepared. When the responses were received, I sought advice from some doctoral students who instructed me to read through the responses several times and emerge with related themes.

This was an intense and challenging procedure since I had a lot of rich data and worried about losing some information. I was also concerned about presenting this information according to degree programmes to illustrate the perceptions of these African students as per their degree programmes. Initially, my analysis was chaotic but with the guidance of my supervisor, four main themes emerged sequentially which represented the four main research questions. The findings and data then answered the research questions accordingly plus the main research questions are well correlated.

With the identified themes, I had to reorganize and rewrite portions of the literature review and theoretical framework to ensure that they were related to the research questions and issues under investigation. This was quite a challenging phase for me because of the scarcity of current literature on the subject and adjusting previously written work to suit the defined themes was not an easy task. Updates were made on the introductory chapter, literature review, research methods section, findings presented and discussed, conclusions drawn and recommendations for further research were presented. Since all conclusions arrived at answered all research questions in the study, internal validity was achieved. It is interesting that some of the findings on the African perspectives of internationalization in Finnish higher education were similar to other related studies on internationalization and the student's voice or perceptions of higher education carried out in the United States and Australia. Therefore, the study was reliable to a certain extent since some of the results were consistent.

Basically, this study was intended to investigate how the Finnish internationalization process had met the needs of African graduates in preparing them for future careers. Most of the participants focused, cited examples and referred to their degree programmes since they were familiar with it. Some also made mention of the Finnish society as a whole which they thought was linked to their future plans and aspirations.

#### *Ethical review*

Generally in research, ethical considerations ranging from proper citations and referencing to data collection and the presentation of findings is crucial. In this qualitative research, effort has been made to reference all information and ideas from others and any unreferenced information was unintended. Numerous ethical issues were considered before data collection to protect the privacy of participants. For instance African graduates were considered from degree

programmes that had produced numerous African graduates. The research objectives were clearly stated in an introductory email to all participants and assurance given about concealing their identities. Permission was obtained from participants with regards to direct quotes and interestingly participants were comfortable with the process.

Participants were encouraged to share detailed responses to questions and in the event where insufficient responses were provided or data was unclear, further clarification was obtained by email or through interviews in which notes were taken. It is worth mentioning that all responses were willfully and voluntarily provided by the participants who were assured that the data provided was only intended for the study. No mention was made of participant's names and no third party present during data collection or clarification. PDF copies of this study will be shared with all participants as an appreciation for their contributions. Issues of trust and cultural sensitivity did not emerge since all participants were of African descent with very similar cultures. English was the language of communication during the data collection process since all participants had studied in English though it was not the mother tongue of some participants and formal language used to ease understanding. It is possible that there is relevant information related to this study which is published in Finnish and with my low Finnish language proficiency, not much could be done about it though I believe if there was some important material available, my supervisor would have brought that to my attention. Overall, writing this thesis has been an incredible learning, interesting and fascinating process which was spiced by challenges but eventually rewarding.

### **7.3 Implications for Further Research**

Further research on this topic is encouraged with a little twist of comparing the perspectives of other nationalities on the internationalization of the Finnish Higher Education. This will produce very rich information for further improvement of degree programmes and international curricular as well as teaching and learning styles. Also, it will be interesting to learn about the perspectives of the internationalization process from other groups of African graduates, larger sample populations and other nationals from different higher education institutions in Finland. The recommendations from the respondents are vital assets for any educational institution to

accomplish its goals, produce valuable human resources that will serve the needs of the Finnish society, improve the quality of international degree programmes in Europe, thereby moving several steps towards achieving some of the goals of the Bologna Process.

It was fascinating and much appreciated to glean very honest responses from the respondents and their willingness to provide this information and even further clarification. Even though the respondents enrolled in their international degree programmes at varying times, their contributions were all valuable because it shows the growth process taking place within these international degree programmes and the universities at large.

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## Appendix 1: Questionnaire

### Questions to Participants

**The African Voice/Perspective on Internationalization of Finnish Higher Education and their Recommendations as Relevant Tools for Quality Improvement of the International Curriculum**

#### PERSONALITY:

**Sex:** Female [ ] Male [ ]

**Age Group:** 20-30 [ ] 31-40 [ ] 41-50 [ ] Above 51 [ ]

**Nationality:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Area of study/ specialization:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### ABOUT STUDIES:

**Please do not be limited by the space provided below. You can answer on a separate sheet of paper. Thank you.**

- 1. What motivated you to choose your international degree programme and study in Finland?**

*Answer:*

- 2. How and where did you learn about your degree programme?**

*Answer:*

- 3. What were your expectations about your degree programme?**

*Answer:*

**4. Did the international degree programme meet your expectations?**

*Answer:*

**5. What factors affected (it could be positive or negative) your performance while studying?**

*Answer:*

**6. What were the positive and negative outcomes of your international degree programme? (e.g. Did you gain the necessary skills, find a job in your field etc)**

*Answer:*

**7. Do you think the skills and knowledge gained during your studies can be applicable to the situations in your home country? How?**

*Answer:*

**8. How did you find the focus of contents in the international degree programme you attended?**

*Answer:*

**9. How do you see your studies in Finland contribute to your life and career?**

*Answer:*

**10. What are your current and future aspirations now that you have obtained your degree?**

*Answer:*

**11. Would you like to continue to study in Finland, work in your field here, return home or relocate to other countries?**

*Answer:*

**12. How would you improve your international degree programme?**

*Answer:*

## Appendix 2: Questions for Clarification

In question 3, what did you mean by "quality education"? Can you give me a few components that could be incorporated into a program to improve the quality of it?

In question 4 please give me examples of some of your expectations that were met during your studies and some that were not met.

Did you gain any skills throughout the program? Please give me some examples.

Were your lectures interactive? Was your class diverse (different nationalities represented) examples please?

In question 6, you mentioned that you were able to complete your program without interruptions. What kind of interruptions were you referring to?

In question 9, how flexible is the education? Can you explain further the negative impact of the Finnish education on you as a foreign African student? I was not too clear with that.

Do you think obtaining a job in the UK in your field of studies would be easy? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Can you please clarify this phrase in question 12, "More challenging work situation". Is that a recommendation or an objection?

In question 4: Did the international programme meet your expectations? You said 'NO'. Why?

Did you get enough practical or field training? Were your classes fun?

Why do you think your international degree program focused more on problems of developed nations rather than in developing countries?

If you were asked to re-design your international degree program, what recommendations would you give (even to your lecturers) and what will you discard to improve the quality of your degree program?

How will changing the title of the program improve its quality? Are there other recommendations you will like to suggest to improve the quality of the program?

You mentioned engaging other stakeholders in the Finnish Health and Social Care Programmes. Which stakeholders are you referring to? Please give me some examples.

What are your future plans and where will you like to work?

Please clarify this statement “I think a bit of more organization is needed in terms of courses.”

### **Appendix 3: Interview Questions**

1. Which years did you study and graduate from your master's program?
2. I understand that there was very little interaction between you and the lecturers and even your classmates. Therefore, do you have any suggestions to improve this kind of interactive learning since lectures alone does not necessarily mean there will be much interaction in the classroom.
3. Out of curiosity, employing English lecturers into a programme does not necessarily provoke creative thinking and discussions within the classroom. Also, group work is not a guarantee that everyone participates in the process since the lecturers are not always present during these group assignments. Do you have any suggestions to overcome such challenges?
4. When you mentioned that some of the lecturers did not know how to deliver their lessons, what did you mean by that? Did you think they did not know their subject matter well enough and it was more of a teacher centered approach (that is just lectures), or was it more student centered (more interactive learning among the students)?



## **Appendix 4: Cover Letter to Respondents**

Dear Friends,

I hope you all are doing well. As part of my Master's thesis on the African students' involvement and perspective on internationalization of the Finnish higher education, I wish to appeal for your honest responses to the attached questionnaire.

My interest is seeking the opinions of African graduates concerning their motivations to study in Finland, what you expected of Finland and the degree programme before arrival, while studying and how these expectations were met. Also, it will be nice to know your overall international experiences while studying in higher education institutions here given that the entire experience might be very different from your countries of origin. Do you think that the knowledge gained here could be applicable to situations in your home country? For example, most of our African countries do not have old people's homes because our relatives live with us. Therefore, how will someone who studies gerontology utilize their skills in an African setting? Or how can we apply educational practices learned here to situations in our home countries with large class sizes and limited human resources? These questions are just to stimulate us to think about our experiences while we studied here. What are your future aspirations now that you have completed your degree programme and lastly, please share some recommendations for the improvement of your various degree programmes.

One reason for this qualitative research is that valuable experiences, contributions and perceptions from graduates are ignored by curriculum developers, academicians and policy makers in relation to the above subject. I will be most grateful if you could respond to the following questions as best as you can. Please feel free to elaborate on any of the questions and all responses no matter the length will be much appreciated.

Your privacy will be protected. I might quote some of your responses in my thesis but names will not be mentioned. In case of direct quotes, the respondent will be notified and I will avoid altering your responses.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by email or on my mobile phone (0458029599).

My sincere appreciation and thanks to you all for taking time to assist me in this process. I look forward to your responses.

Best regards,  
Claudine