The journey of intercultural adaptation – Experiences and perspectives of international students

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the experiences and perspectives of postgraduate international students. Its key objective is to understand the lived experience and internal processes involved in adaptive change. It aims to examine different individual stories in order to map out the journey of intercultural adaptation.

For the study of personal stories, the narrative approach is adopted. This study uses a data set from a case study on the study experiences of students from international Master's Degree programmes at Jyväskylä University. Individual stories are collected and narratives co-constructed. The Dialogical Narrative Analysis (DNA) method is used to derive a typology of ideal types. The analysis process delves into the prior expectations, real-life experiences, reflections as well as the variety of emotions expressed.

The findings point to a variety of adaptation challenges and psychological adaptive tools and strategies. In particular, experiences of difference and ambivalence were repeatedly described. The typology of seven ideal types derived illustrates The Adaptation Epic as follows: *The Journey, Chaos and Order, The Hero, Transcendence, Alchemy, Meditation* and *Rebirth*.

To summarise, adaptive change involves a journey between order and chaos, in which the hero explores dichotomies and ambivalence and performs acts of transcendence, alchemy and meditation. The outward journey into the Other is in fact an inward journey into the self, which ultimately culminates in a rebirth. Lastly, this study affirms the potential of the narrative approach for intercultural research.

Keywords: intercultural adaptation, international students, dialogical narrative analysis

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

Intercultural adaptation as a phenomenon has been studied across a multitude of disciplines. Due to the complex and dynamic nature of the topic, there are a plethora of concepts and approaches within the literature. Emerging integrated approaches for intercultural adaptation have been observed, however they have not yet been empirically tested. Theoretical models for specifically international student adaptation are yet under debate (Smith & Khawaja 2011). Much research has focused on adaptation challenges, adaptive stress and stressors. More recent studies however emphasize on "the impact that intercultural interaction can have on psychological welfare and growth" (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009, 151). Adaptation is increasingly conceptualised as what Jantsch (1980) terms a "self-organizing" human ability. Most recent approaches have been observed to prefer a learning and growth framework (Kim 2015) or resilience framework for adaptation (Pan, 2011).

Adopting Kim's (2001, 2015) integrated theory and model, this study is an interdisciplinary one which takes a holistic approach to examine the phenomenon of intercultural adaptation. This study investigates postgraduate international student experiences and perspectives from a university in Finland. It aims to investigate the journey of intercultural adaptation.

International students in Finland are described to experience "academic, social, financial and psychological challenges" (Calikoglu 2018, 439). Qualitative studies done within Jyväskylä University describe how international students encounter academic, cultural and language shock (Niemi 2018a). Whereas quantitative studies describe their experience of "isolation" and a lack of access to "resources and opportunities" within the university (Kruid, 2017, 47). These recent local studies have focused on the administrative, social and academic support structures provided for international students. However, besides the challenges experienced and the role of the host, the motivations and role of the international student has also been found to be crucial factors for adaptation (Calikoglu 2018). Within recent international studies, researchers have also noted

the role of "intrapersonal" (Ward & Geeraert 2016, 100) or "psychosocial" resources for adaptation (Smith & Khawaja 2011, 707). Hence, whereas external environmental factors have been looked into, internal individual factors have been thus far neglected. In particular, the "coping mechanisms" or adaptive tools and strategies of international students seem to warrant further research (Smith & Khawaja 2011, 706).

The significant research gap on the "lived experiences" of international students has also been highlighted (Smith & Khawaja 2011, 710; Trahar 2011, 46). As a technique within qualitative research, the "lived experience" considers not only the experience itself, but also "how people live through and respond to those experiences" (Given 2008, 490). This study examines international student stories on intercultural adaptation and investigates both what they do and how they do it (Given 2008). Using the narrative approach, this study aims to examine the lived experience and internal processes involved in intercultural adaptation.

At the centre of this study is my personal interest and experience in intercultural adaptation as a 'stranger'. I am myself a student from the international Master's degree programme in Educational Sciences, however I moved to Finland from Singapore three and a half years before the start of my studies in August 2017. I have lived in a few cities across Finland, am married to a Finnish citizen and have good proficiency in the Finnish language. At the time when this study was carried out, I had been living in Finland for almost five years and had my share of stories as a stranger not only in Finland but also back in Singapore. Going further back into my personal migration history, I was originally born in Malaysia and moved to Singapore when I was six years old. Considering my background and experience, I hope to bring both 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives, as well as the 'intercultural' perspective to this research.

Finally, as this study is conducted as a part of Student Life research, it aims to investigate how Jyväskylä University as the host university environment is experienced and perceived by international students. It hopes to help further develop the current Goodie programme and other student support services for the international student community within Jyväskylä University.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

As a multi-disciplinary field of research, intercultural studies have been described to traverse diverse disciplines ranging from "anthropology, communication studies, social and organisational psychology, sociology, marketing, management studies, foreign languages and foreign language education, applied linguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis" (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009, 5). Intercultural research has been described as "disparate, scattered and contradictory" (Dervin 2011, 37). The literature review thus begins with an outline of contested terms related to culture and adaptation.

2.1 Traversing the field of research

2.1.1 Current perspectives on culture

As Williams (1983, 87) puts it, "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language". Baumann (1996, 11) describes how:

> Ethnographers' uses of the word culture have established one essential point of consensus: culture is not a real thing, but an abstract and purely analytical notion. It does not cause behavior, but summarizes an abstraction from it, and is thus neither normative nor predictive.

Indeed, culture is a complex concept and the term itself has often been described as "problematic" (Piller 2011, 9). Piller comments further on the complexity of culture and describes how it "has many different meanings and is used in many different ways, which differ along the dimensions of use, content, scope and status" (2011, 15).

 Street (1993) argues how culture is a verb and not a noun, that is, it is not a 'product' but a 'process'. Whereas Piller (2011, 16) defines culture as "an ideological construct called into play by social actors to produce and reproduce social categories and boundaries". Piller thus also adopts the 'process' view of culture – it is "something people do or which they perform" (Piller 2011, 15).

Following this constructionist view of culture, this study uses the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach to examine the experiences and perspectives of international students at a Finnish university.

Although culture itself as a concept is problematic, the related term 'enculturation' may help develop a better understanding of what is culture. Enculturation is defined as the process in which individuals "adapt to surrounding cultural forces throughout the years of socialisation" (Kim 2001, 47). Children experience their family's culture and the enculturation process within their family through "internalised learning" (Kim 2001, 46-7). Culture is thus best described as "invisible" (Kim 2001, 48). If culture is invisible and enculturation an unconscious process, both individuals and groups are often unaware of how "invisible culture" influences their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

It is perhaps impossible and unnecessary to define what is culture. Piller (2011, 9) argues that "for intercultural communication studies to be meaningful in an increasingly interconnected world, to be sound research and to be socially relevant, they need to eschew a priori definitions of culture". Dervin's (2018) 'liquid' approach to culture conceptualises it as both a creation and process, that is, it is dynamic and evolves. Hence a better approach to culture does not ask what it is but asks how it is. Instead of what, the focus is how. This is a critical issue considered for this study on intercultural adaptation and informs its overall design. This study focuses on how international students describe their experiences and perspectives and how each individual "construct(s) their culture/identity/intercultural competence/sense of acculturation" (Dervin 2018, 40). It is mainly concerned with how international students describe their experiences and perspectives as this provides insight into the intricate internal processes involved in intercultural adaptation.

Whereas the concept of culture remains controversial, the relationship between culture and communication seems well-established. The sociocultural environment has been described as "the universe of information and operative linguistic and non-linguistic communication rituals that gives coherence continuity, and distinction to a communal way of life" (Kim 2001, 46). In other

words, culture is learned through the dual process of input and output or "encoding" and "decoding" (Kim 2001, 36-7). Kim (2001, 36) argues how "adaptation of an individual to a given cultural environment occurs in and through communication".

As this study is interested in the intercultural adaptation experiences of cultural beings within specific cultural contexts, it considers how culture is expressed through communication and how adaptation involves intercultural communication. The integral relationship between culture and communication is described by Kim (2001, 47-8) as follows:

> All the varied cultural patterns, rituals, institutional practices and symbols of group life appear as different modes of communication in and through which each person can approach, negotiate and seek consummation of his or her own personal and social goals.

In other words, the adapting individual navigates different cultures and engages in intercultural interactions through communication. Piller (2011, 16) also argues how "culture is not something that exists outside of and precedes intercultural communication". As this study is interested in how adapting individuals form their sense of culture and intercultural adaptation, it focuses on international student experiences and perspectives. In particular, changes in perspectives are identified by examining prior expectations, real-life experiences and reflections on these experiences.

Notably, a shift towards a more qualitative approach to discourse on culture and intercultural adaptation has been observed within the literature. The dynamic nature of contemporary culture has been depicted through metaphors and analogies. Kim quotes ancient philosopher Heraclitus: "You cannot step into the same river twice, for fresh water is forever flowing towards you" (as cited in 2015, 3). Kim uses water as a metaphor to refer to culture and the image of infinite streams of fresh water to describe the individual's relationship with culture in increasingly globalised and cosmopolitan societies. Similarly, Bauman's (2007, 121) concept of the "liquid modern society" is characterised by "constant change, but no finishing point" and thus "a sequence of incessant new beginnings". Such

metaphors and analogies of fluidity provide profound insight into the contemporary culture of change.

The adapting individual has been described as the "stranger" (Kim 2001, 32). Kim (2001, 32-33) describes "individuals crossing cultures and resettling in alien cultural environments" and "outsiders" who journey across cultures to become "insiders". The 'journey' metaphor suggests the notion of distance as well as the notion of boundaries or territories. Whereas Trahar (2011) has described the increasingly international academic culture and environments within universities as "changing landscapes". These metaphorical depictions of adapting individuals and adaptation are considered by this study as existing adaptation narratives, which it aims to further build upon.

This study focuses on the academic culture and environment within a Finnish university. International students are considered as 'strangers' or 'outsiders'. Jyväskylä University, as the host university, is considered an unfamiliar 'landscape' and changing one. It considers the process of intercultural adaptation as a 'journey' and seeks to understand the international student's 'journey' within an unknown and evolving 'landscape'.

2.1.2   Acculturation, deculturation, integration and adaptation

Perhaps due to the complexity involved with the concept of culture itself, the related concept of intercultural adaptation is yet contested and a range of different terms and definitions are preferred by different schools of thought. Among the literature, the most commonly used terms include acculturation, integration and adaptation.

As one of the pioneering researchers in this field of study, Berry (1970) describes how adaptation studies have evolved over the past fifty years since its beginnings in anthropology. Studies on adaptation continue to advance as increasing global migration has led to growing research on the adaptation process and further development of adaptation models (Smith & Khawaja 2011). However, Ward & Geeraert (2016, 101) highlight how the models "have not kept

apace" with the "increasing globalization, transnationalism and changing demographics" in contemporary society.

Berry's (1997) taxonomy of acculturation attitudes (which includes integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation) presents a linear view of culture. More recently, acculturation theory has been updated with a revised definition by Berry (2005, 698) as "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members". This definition integrates the environmental or sociocultural and individual or psychological nature of intercultural adaptation. However, this study still considers the term 'acculturation' as problematic as it is derived from a "static" interpretation of culture and considers culture as a product or entity, instead of a non-linear process (Dervin 2011).

Integration is another term often used in the literature and has been defined as participating socially within the host environment (Kim 2001, 31). The term 'integration' is however also considered problematic with its overly assimilative approach. Assimilation is the process in which individuals become "absorbed into the native population through convergence in cultural values and personal traits as well as economic and occupational mainstreaming" (Kim 2001, 15-6). Assimilation is related to the concept of the melting pot, which has been heavily debated and ultimately dismissed (Kim 2001). This is because the assimilative approach dismisses individual choice in one's "sense of group identity" (Kim 2001, 25). Indeed, the individual has freedom to choose which social group and to what extent one identifies with it. As this study focuses on international students who have a temporary relationship with their host environment, the term also does not consider the transient nature of their experience of intercultural adaptation.

On the other hand, adaptation is defined by Berry (2006, 52) as "the relatively stable changes that takes place in an individual or group in response to external demands". Notably, Kim (2001) describes how adaptation as a broad term combines specific terms such as acculturation, deculturation and integration. As a proponent of the term 'adaptation', Kim (2015, 5) points out the

"interplay" between acculturation and deculturation and how both processes are involved in change. According to Kim (2015, 5), acculturation is defined as "the acquisition of the new cultural patterns and practices" so whereas acculturation involves "new learning", deculturation involves "unlearning of some of the old cultural elements". Following Kim, this study considers how the process of adaptive change requires both learning and unlearning.

In addition, adaptation as a term suggests the existence of both assimilative and pluralist tendencies in the adapting individual (Kim 2001). A pluralist approach recognizes the individual's choice in the "acceptance (or rejection)" of the host and/or heritage culture (Kim 2001, 25). That is, whilst the adapting individual integrates within his or her cultural repertoire elements of the host culture, at the same time elements of his or her heritage culture are maintained and/or combined with the former.

Hence, this study prefers the term adaptation to refer to the process of adaptive change experienced by international students in a new academic culture and environment. It considers the fluidity of culture, the dynamic nature of one's cultural repertoire as well as individual choice.

2.1.3   Intercultural or cross-cultural

Scollon and Scollon (2000, 2001) differentiate between three traditions of intercultural communication studies – cross-cultural, intercultural and inter-discourse communication (as cited in Piller 2011, 8). Piller (2011) describes these three traditions of intercultural communication research as contrastive, interactive or discursive, respectively. Due to their different conceptualisations of culture and research focus, all three approaches to intercultural communication studies have their respective value (Piller 2011).

Piller (2011, 8) describes how cross-cultural or contrastive communication studies involve "an assumption of distinct cultural groups and investigate aspects of their communicative practices comparatively". Whereas intercultural or interactive communication studies involve "an assumption of cultural differences between distinct cultural groups but study their communicative

practices in interaction with each other" (Piller 2011, 9). Hence, there is a subtle difference between the two terms 'cross-cultural' and 'intercultural', whereas cross-cultural studies focuses on the contrastive elements, intercultural studies focuses on the interactive elements of communicative practices.

According to Scollon & Scollon (2001), inter-discourse or discursive communication studies on the other hand does not involve "group membership and identity" but examines "how and under what circumstances concepts such as culture are produced by participants as relevant categories for interpersonal ideological negotiation" (as cited in Piller 2011, 8). Inter-discourse studies thus focuses on the discursive elements of communicative practices and how culture is used as a mode of discourse.

Following Piller, as studies in both intercultural and inter-discourse traditions do not have any presumptions about culture, this study prefers the term 'inter-' to 'cross-'. This is due to its emphasis on the interactive communication process in which "culture, and particularly cultural difference, is made relevant by and to the participants". When referring to other researcher's work, their preferred terms will be used however this study will use the term "intercultural adaptation" to refer to the topic under study.

2.2   Different approaches to intercultural adaptation

This part of the literature review delves deeper into different approaches to adaptation. A shift towards a more complex and dynamic approach to intercultural adaptation has been observed. The potential of qualitative approaches is also noted.

2.2.1   The push-pull approach

McMahon's (1992) push-pull model, which focuses on the choice of destination and attributes of home and host countries has been often used for the study of international student experiences of intercultural adaptation. This two-dimensional push-pull model is however somewhat limited. Whereas it does

consider both individual variables and host variables, it does not consider the interactions within and between them. Notably, Ward & Geeraert (2016, 102) have proposed for researchers to abandon the traditional "bi-dimensional conceptualisation (heritage and settlement cultures)". Similarly, Calikoglu (2018, 453) points out how international student adaptation involves a multitude of dimensions, including "academic, economic, legislative, political, social, personal and psychological dimensions". In order to address this, Calikoglu (2018, 454) has recommended more qualitative studies on international students.

2.2.2   The ecological approach

Conceptualising the phenomenon of intercultural adaptation requires careful consideration of how interdependent and interactive processes are involved. Recent studies have proposed for researchers to examine it as "a dynamic process" influenced by its "ecological context" (Ward & Geeraert 2016, 98). The emphasis is thus on how intercultural adaptation takes place within a particular sociocultural environment. Hence, the context is considered significant.

The context for this study is the academic culture and environment within the host university and involves a specific cohort of postgraduate international students from international Master's degree programmes in education at Jyväskylä university between 2017-2018. This study thus attempts to map out different features of this unique landscape in which the journey of intercultural adaptation takes place.

From the perspective of student counselling, Stuart & Ward (2014) have pointed to how individual factors function within the wider ecological or environmental context of intercultural interaction. This study considers how individual factors are dependent on environmental factors within the multidimensional and dynamic process of adaptation. In particular, it is interested in the different environmental factors which facilitate or support the adaptation process for international students.

Three different environmental contexts have been identified including the familial, the institutional and the societal (Ward & Geeraert 2016, 100). Ward &

Geeraert (2016) describe how "the school and workplace exert significant influences on the acculturation of young people and working adults". That is, we experience change not only as individuals within society, we also experience it within the classroom or workplace. This study not only examines participant experiences of and perspectives on the study programme (which includes coursework, group work and thesis supervision), it also takes into account described encounters and interactions with their peers (local students or other international students within the university), course lecturers, programme coordinators and other university staff.

2.2.3   The integrated approach

As an interdisciplinary approach incorporating both ecological and communication approaches, an integrated theory for cross-cultural adaptation has been conceptualised which Kim (2001, 31) defines as:

> the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar or changed cultural environments, establish (or re-establish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal and functional relationships with those environments.

More recently, Kim (2015, 4-5) has further developed the theory and updated the definition of cross-cultural adaptation as follows:

> the entirety of the dynamic process by which individuals who, through direct and indirect contact and communication with a new, changing or changed environment, strive to establish (or re-establish) and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal and functional relationship with the environment.

Kim's updated integrated approach thus considers the fluidity of culture as well as the nature of constant change within contemporary society. It considers the complex and dynamic nature of one's cultural repertoire which consists of both assimilative and pluralist tendencies.

This is similar to Morris, Chiu & Liu's (2015) "network approach" in which one's intercultural encounters are characterised by fluidity and includes encounters with different cultures. Kim (2015, 4) proposes a theoretical framework which describes "the dynamic person-culture relationship". To date, it seems there has not been a more holistic theory for intercultural adaptation.

Other approaches in the literature have not been able to adequately address the complex and dynamic nature of culture, communication and adaptation and integrate these interrelated concepts into one cohesive theory for intercultural adaptation.

Firstly, Kim's (2001, 2015) theory focuses on the link between culture and communication. It emphasizes how "adaptation of an individual to a given cultural environment occurs in and through communication" (Kim 2001, 36). That is, the adapting individual encounters and interacts with the external environment via an exchange of information (Kim 2001). Adaptive change happens through the "encoding" and "decoding" of a variety of verbal messages such as signs, symbols and languages or non-verbal messages such as actions, events or non-actions and non-events (Kim 2001, 36). The adapting individual produces output to the environment and uses input from the environment to "generate meaning" (Kim 2001, 36). This study thus examines international student experiences of different intercultural encounters and interactions within the course of their studies. This includes exchanges between them and university lecturers, university staff, thesis supervisors as well as their peers as a part of group work projects or student activities.

Secondly, it considers the adapting individual as an "open system" which is "dynamic and self-reflexive" (Kim 2001, 35). As an open system, the adapting individual "adapts to, and co-evolves with, the environment through all forms of communication" (Kim 2015, 4). This concept of adaptation as a natural human instinct and ability is also adopted by this study, which considers all participants as adaptive and all participant narratives as adaptation narratives.

Thirdly, Kim's (2001, 40) model of adaptation considers the process of adaptation as an evolving and dynamic learning process which occurs over time. The increasing emphasis on "development and growth" within adaptation theory and research has been observed (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009, 158). All in all, the process of adaptation is described as "a dynamic psychological movement in the forward and upward direction of increased chances of success" (Kim 2015, 5). This dynamic progresses in a "continual and cyclic draw-back-to-

leap pattern"(Kim 2015, 6). It shows greater change (which involves greater stress) at the start of the adaptation process, which is expected to decrease over time (Kim 2015, 6). Notably, learning and growth occurs over time through positive and negative cycles.

This study thus considers the experience and process of adaptation as an experience and process of learning. This study follows the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic with its close examination of the experience of intercultural adaptation and learning over time by international students. It attempts to identify the upward and downward movement as well as positive and negative cycles within individual participant trajectories. It thus examines international student journey which starts from adaptation challenges and stress, followed by the process of adaptive change and eventual learning and growth. Specifically, descriptions within participant responses on prior expectations, real-life experiences, changes in perspectives as well as reflections on these experiences are identified and further examined.

Kim's (2001, 40) model also considers the structure of adaptation as a "multidimensional and interactive structure of constituent factors". It considers the ecological nature of intercultural adaptation and the interactive relationship between the adapting individual and external environment. The structure of adaptation is described to consist of both macro- and micro- levels or as both group (socio-cultural) and individual (psychological) phenomenon (Kim 2001). In other words, the adaptation process consists of internal (or individual) and external (or environmental) dimensions which interact and influence each other.

Combining macro-level and micro-level research perspectives thus considers the relationship between the internal individual and external environmental dimensions involved in intercultural adaptation. Kim (2001, 11) describes how:

> To the extent that the individual and the environment co-define the adaptation process, we must integrate the two research perspectives in order to explain the adaptation experience of an individual.

Further research on the interdependence between internal and external factors could provide further insight into the intricate process of adaptation. Hence, besides the experience of supportive individual and environmental factors, this study also explores the relationship between these supportive factors.

Lastly, Kim's integrated theory of adaptation encompasses both long term and short term adaptation. Although international student experiences are considered short term adaptation experiences, they are hypothesized to experience varying degrees of adaptive change as they explore a new and changing host university environment. All international students are considered to experience the process of adaptive change, albeit with variations. During their journey through a new and changing academic culture and environment, perhaps even more intensive levels of adaptation or maladaptation are experienced. This study thus considers the international student as an adapting individual and international student experiences as experiences of intercultural adaptation.

2.3 Embarking on the international student journey

This section of the literature review comprises recent research on higher education and international students as well as related studies done in the Finnish context. All in all, it seems that adaptive change inherently presents both cognitive and emotional challenges. While traversing the higher education landscape, the international student encounters and overcomes different adaptation challenges using different adaptive tools and strategies.

2.3.1 Mapping the higher education landscape

The phenomenon of internationalisation within higher education has been debated (Trahar & Hyland 2011). The higher education environment, as a "changing landscape" of "shifting identities" (Trahar 2011) provides a relevant context for the study of intercultural adaptation. Whereas recent studies have suggested for the "in-depth case studies of individuals who actively seek and

participate in intercultural communication experiences" (Kim 2015, 9). Considering how international students are described by Carroll and Ryan (2005, 3) as individuals who "have chosen to travel to another country for tertiary study", they are considered as suitable subjects being "voluntary" adapting individuals (Kim 2001, 83) and "an increasingly diverse student population" (Trahar 2011, 44).

Smith & Khawaja point out how current adaptation models tend to neglect academic issues, which are in fact "a focal domain for international students" (2011, 704). After all, it is through the host university environment in which the international student may encounter and experience the host country and its culture. Considering this and following the design of the study from which it derived its data, this study examines international student experiences of the academic culture and teaching and learning environment at Jyväskylä University (Niemi, 2018a). In this study, Jyvsäkylä university is referred to as the host or host university environment. This study on intercultural adaptation examines how different international students experience the host university environment through its international Master's degree programmes in education.

The terms globalisation and internationalisation are closely related and have been debated within intercultural theory and higher education literature. Dervin (2016) debunks globalisation as an idea and argues that human interaction has always been intercultural. Similarly, Trahar (2011) describes how the university environment has always been international due to how its research community comprises scholars from different parts of the globe. Intercultural encounters within the university environment have been described to involve "interactions between students and academics from many different backgrounds and contexts" (Trahar 2011, 47).

The phenomenon of "internationalized higher education communities" have been attributed to globalisation (Trahar & Hyland 2013a, 626). As a contested term, internationalisation has been described by Kreber (2009, 2-3) as "an ethos of mutuality and practices" which aims to enhance the quality of higher education. Trahar (2011) points out how the concept of internationalisation

neglects the role of the student who forms an integral part of the academic culture and environment. Similar to the terms acculturation and integration, the term internationalisation is based on an overly assimilative approach to culture.

More importantly, Dervin (2016) highlights how contemporary culture differs in its nature of accelerated change. As a microcosm reflecting broader sociocultural trends, the context of higher education has been recommended for intercultural research to examine how intercultural competencies boost both academic learning and personal growth (Trahar 2011). Going back to the metaphor and analogies of liquidity mentioned earlier in this review, this study conceptualises the higher education environment as characterised by continuous and rapid change, like a young, fast-flowing river. This study considers international student experiences of and perspectives on adapting to this changing landscape as significant.

This study does not go in depth into the state of internationalisation within the host university environment or intercultural competencies of the host or adapting individual, it instead investigates how the host university environment is perceived by international students as well as how its different components are described. Jyväskylä University as the host university environment is considered as rapidly changing landscape which students are to negotiate and adapt to. It focuses on student experiences of and perspectives on the intercultural encounters which take place within the host university environment.

In order to conceptualise the host university teaching and learning environment, Kemmis' (2013) theory of 'practice architectures' and education is used. For the purposes of this study, the concept of education as a 'practice' is used as it possesses a strong awareness of how different practices are derived in different learning environments. Education, as a practice, comprises particular arrangements and conditions defined as 'practice architectures' (Kemmis 2013). Kemmis also describes the nature of practices as "landscapes" and an "ecology"(2013, 8). That is, different practice architectures form different 'practice landscapes' which co-exist with others to co-construct a dynamic eco-system. This concept of "ecologies of practices" is especially useful for this study

as it facilitates the analysis of multiple, interactive, co-existing and interdependent practice architectures (Kemmis 2013, 7-8).

The international student's journey through the higher education landscape thus includes physical, social and semantic spaces (Kemmis 2013). The theory of practice architectures and education is suited for intercultural studies as it considers not only individual and social dimensions, it also includes the "intersubjective space" which comprises of the "sayings", "doings" and "relatings", or the "cultural-discursive", "material-economic" and "social-political" arrangements (Kemmis 2013, 16).

2.3.2   The context: International students in Finland

From the host's perspective, international students are often described to bring economic, cultural and intellectual capital to benefit the host country (Smith & Khawaja 2011). The Ministry of Education in Finland (2009) has outlined its goal to recruit more international students in order to create an authentic and international higher education community, to enhance appeal and quality, to market education as know-how, to strengthen a multicultural society and foster a sense of global responsibility.

From the international student's perspective however, how do they learn and grow from their intercultural experiences? Pan (2011, 601) suggests more research on how adapting individuals "find positive meaning in the adjustment problems they experience in a host culture". As this study considers intercultural adaptation as a process of learning and growth, it is particularly interested in examining changes in perspectives through the comparison of prior expectations, real-life experiences and reflections on these experiences. In particular, the reflections identified within participant responses are argued to indicate the learning and growth experienced as a part of the process of adaptive change.

Previous studies on international students have focused on native English speaking countries and not differentiated between postgraduate and undergraduate students (Calikoglu 2018). Calikoglu (2018, 440) describes how considering the implementation of tuition fees in 2017 and the increasingly

"market-oriented approach" to higher education policies within the Nordic countries, further research could be conducted on non-native English speaking countries and the experiences of postgraduate international students. Kärki (2005) has described how students would have higher expectations once they have to pay tuition fees.

Within Jyväskylä University, related studies have been done on international students and adaptation. These studies have explored international student perspectives on the academic and teaching and learning environment (Niemi 2018a), the perception of belonging and integration (Kruid 2015) and the push and pull factors involved in student enrolment (Kong 2016). Hence, the internal dimension and individual factors involved in international student experiences of adaptation have been thus far neglected. This study considers this and thus focuses on the lived experience and internal processes involved in the international student's journey.

Calikoglu (2018) has proposed for more qualitative studies on the expectations, experiences and motivations of international students. Cantwell, Luca and Lee (2008) differentiate between student dispositions, experiences and expectations in which dispositions refers to their opinions and rationales, experiences refers to their challenges and expectations refers to their hopes and goals. Similarly, this study considers both international student experiences and perspectives as relevant. For this study, international student experiences refer to the adaptation challenges and emotions encountered whereas international student perspectives refer to prior expectations and reflections. The nature and role of challenges, emotions, expectations and reflections are considered as key components of the internal processes involved in adaptive change.

2.3.3   Challenges ahead – preparing tools and strategies

Within the literature, adaptive stress is an established concept. However as the term "stress" is considered by this study as problematic with its negative connotations, the term "adaptation challenges" is preferred. The obstacles ahead for the international student journey are referred to as "adaptation challenges",

whereas the resources for the adapting individual's disposal are referred to as "adaptation tools".

Besides adaptation challenges and adaptive tools, another term used in this study is "adaptive strategies". Adaptive strategies could be described to comprise of adaptive attitudes, traits and behaviours. Within adaptation literature, the term "resources" is often used to describe supporting individual or environmental factors alongside the terms "coping strategies" or "coping mechanisms". This study prefers the terms 'adaptive tools' and 'adaptive strategies' as it considers the agency of the adapting individual.

However, what does the international student journey itself entail? Smith & Khawaja (2011) describe how the international student may experience an array of changes in life being in a different culture and environment. All in all, adaptation challenges for international students can be categorised into: language issues (including English language proficiency in academic and student life), academic issues (including academic stress, expectations and different teaching and learning styles), sociocultural issues (including individual personality and group factors), discrimination issues (including discrimination on campus and off campus) and practical issues (including financial, accommodation and transportation) (Smith & Khawaja 2011, 702-3) (See Figure 1):

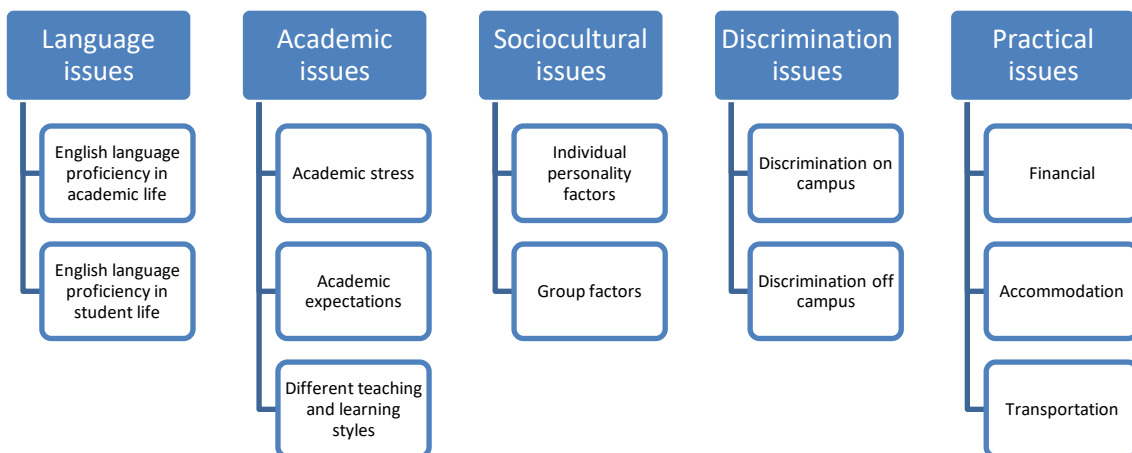| Language issues	Academic issues	Sociocultural issues	Discrimination issues	Practical issues
English language proficiency in academic life	Academic stress	Individual personality factors	Discrimination on campus	Financial
English language proficiency in student life	Academic expectations	Group factors	Discrimination off campus	Accommodation
	Different teaching and learning styles			Transportation

FIGURE 1. Diagram of adaptation challenges experienced by international students (Smith & Khawaja 2011, 702-3)

Previous studies suggest a relationship between the occurrence of changes in life and the emergence of psychological issues in international students (Searle & Ward 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Spencer-Oatey & Franklin (2009, 165) point to "the affective and cognitive adjustments" which adapting individuals often have to undergo. Hence it seems that adaptive change is especially challenging to the psyche of the adapting individual.

Among adaptation literature, much has been said on negative emotions involved in adaptive change. Ward & Geeraert (2016, 100) describe how negative emotional reactions are frequently experienced by adapting individuals. More serious maladaptive symptoms have been broadly categorised into "culture-shock" and even "hostility or aggression toward the host environment" (Kim 2001, 188). Hence, it seems that yet another adaptation challenge concerns psychological issues.

Within the literature, adaptive stress is considered to initiate the process of adaptation. Ward & Geeraert (2016) describe how adaptive stress indicates the necessity to tackle adaptation challenges and gets the adapting individual ready to react to the new culture and environment and undergo adaptive change. Stress is thus a form of communication. Whereas Kim (2015, 5) has described stress as "an expression of the instinctive human desire to restore homeostasis, that is, to hold constant a variety of variables in internal structure to achieve an integrated whole". The experience of stress itself thus reflects a natural human instinct and desire to adapt.

Research has shown that the effects of adaptive stress are greatly influenced by the appraisal and coping of individual international students (Smith & Khawaja 2011). That is, the impact of stress seems to depend on our attitude and response towards it. Smith & Khawaja (2011) point to how although the significance of appraisal in stress management research is apparent, it has not been explored further in international student literature. Considering this, this

study examines different attitudes as well as strategies utilised to manage the adaptation challenges experienced.

The relationship between appraisal and one's emotional experience has been further studied within educational research. Pekrun's (2006) control-value theory of achievement emotions suggests a link between appraisal and emotions experienced in learning situations. Achievement emotions are emotions related to achievement activity or outcomes (Pekrun 2006). Pekrun (2006, 315) concludes how "appraisals of control and values are central to the arousal of achievement emotions". Positive or negative appraisals of the learning activity or learning outcomes as well as the appraisal of different levels of control experienced seem to influence how learners feel towards the learning situation (Pekrun 2006). In turn, the emotions experienced are argued to affect one's behaviour. This study considers this and appraisals of adaptation challenges experienced and self-appraisals of adaptive ability are identified and further examined.

Considering the interplay between learner emotions and behaviour, this study considers the significant role of emotions within the process of adaption. Meijers (2002) has described the function of emotions as a sense-making and meaning-giving tool, emotions arise as an intuitive reaction amidst one's experience and also arise as one strives to derive meaning in one's experience. Emotions are considered by this study as an important adaptive tool for the adapting individual. This study attempts to map out a more complete trajectory of emotions or the entire "emotional journey" involved in adaptation (Moate & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2017). It investigates the affective dimension involved in the adaptation process and explores the variety of emotions expressed and the interactions between them.

Besides personal attitudes, social support has been found to help mediate adaptive stress and depression (Smith & Khawaja 2011). Sirin, Ryce, Gupta and Rogers-Sirin (2013)'s longitudinal research on immigrant adolescents found that social support buffers the negative impact of psychological distress over the course of time. Sources of support could include social networks from home, social ties with other international students and locals as well as individual

psychosocial resources (which includes out-group social support, psychological well-being and cultural competence) (Smith & Khawaja 2011). Considering this, this study takes into account different sources of support as described by international students. It examines international student appraisals of student support services and experiences of being supported by university lecturers, thesis supervisors, other university staff as well as student peers.

Besides adaptation tools, this study also considers different adaptive strategies and behaviours of the adapting individual. Khawaja & Dempsey (2007) have found that international students are more prone to using maladaptive strategies to manage stress, as compared to local students. There are a variety of maladaptive strategies which include "denial, substance use, self-blame, venting and behavioural disengagement" (Smith & Khawaja 2011, 705).

In contrast, positive adaptive strategies are scarce within international student literature (Smith & Khawaja 2011). Thus far, adaptive strategies such as positivity, acceptance, self-compassion and humour have been identified (Smith & Khawaja 2011). To address this, this study examines both adaptive and maladaptive strategies described within participant responses. Both are considered significant and provide insight into each other. The concept of adaptive or maladaptive strategies is important for this study as it helps the researcher differentiate between the more adaptive and less adaptive stories and experiences.

3   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Within educational research and intercultural literature, the potential of qualitative approaches and particularly narrative methods for advancing research on complex sociocultural phenomena has been observed. The theoretical framework consists of two sections and the first is on the narrative approach, whereas the second is on intercultural discourse and interculturality.

3.1 Through the narrative lens

3.1.1 Taking the narrative turn

Within qualitative research, the "narrative turn" within education, psychology and sociology since the 1980s has been observed (Hyvärinen 2008, 450). Butler-Kisber (2010, 63) also points to how the narrative approach to "knowing and doing" has influenced and changed the work of qualitative research. In particular, the narrative approach has been used in a variety of different educational contexts. The use of the narrative approach within educational research is perhaps due to its focus on learning experiences and characteristics of education and life (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). Connelly & Clandinin (1990, 2) describe this compatibillity between the narrative approach and educational research as follows:

> One theory in educational research holds that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world… education and educational research is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; learners, teachers and researchers are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories.

In other words, the narrative approach is particularly suited for educational research due to the link between stories on and experiences of learning. Notably, Trahar (2013a) has highlighted the increasing use of narrative methods including collective biography, autoethnography and narrative inquiry within higher education literature. This study aims to further explore the potential of the narrative approach for research on international students and their stories on intercultural adaptation and learning.

According to Bruner (1991, 4), "we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on". That is, human experience is shaped by the narratives used to tell about these experiences (Bruner 1991). Thus, narratives not only represent but also form reality itself. Bruner (1991, 21) describes how "narrative organises the structure of human experience". There is an inextricable link between narratives and human experience due to how we use narratives to represent and construct these experiences.

Connelly & Clandinin (1990) have also described the relationship between life and narrative and how the strength of the narrative approach lies in how it meaningfully addresses both personal and social dimensions in life experiences with relevance. Connelly & Clandinin (1990, 8) highlight how "stories function as arguments in which we learn something essentially human by understanding an actual life or community as lived". That is, stories facilitate the understanding of lived experience and social realities. This study attempts to address the lack of research on the "lived experience" of international students (Smith & Khawaja 2011, 710; Trahar 2011, 46), using the narrative approach and methods to derive international student stories.

Besides lived experiences, stories also comprise of subjective perspectives. The relationship between experiences and perspectives has been observed within narrative theory and research. Stories on one's experience seem to often include one's perspectives in the form of expectations and reflections. Labov and Waletksy (1997) have observed how accounts of one's experience are often juxtaposed with expectations. Bakhtin (1986) goes further to point out the existence of expectation in every articulation. In fact, it seems that stories "essentially recount the story of changing, failing or realised expectations" (Hyvärinen 2008, 456).

As components of stories, experiences and expectations are however somewhat different in that experiences are "personal and subjective", whereas expectations are "social, local and conventional" (Hyvärinen 2008, 456). Besides expectations, Daiute (2011) and Smith (2016) have also pointed out how stories often include explicit or implicit reflections. This study considers the relationship between perspectives and experiences and attempts to identify specifically expectations and reflections within international student stories.

Following Connelly & Clandinin (1990), the narrative is considered as both a method and phenomenon. This study will term the phenomenon "story" and the inquiry "narrative". That is, participants for this study "lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives" whereas the researcher for this study "describe(s) such lives, collect(s) and tell(s) stories of them, and write(s) narratives of experience"

(Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 2). Individual participant narratives are created by the researcher based on the stories told.

As this study examines individual participant stories told within focus group interviews, a more flexible approach to identifying narrative structures is required. This study adopts Clandinin's (2016) three-dimensional approach to narrative structure which comprises temporality, sociality and place. Connelly & Clandinin's (1990, 8) approach to narratives is similar in how it considers that "time and place, plot and scene, work together to create the experiential quality of narrative". Temporality refers to time which spans from past, present to future. Sociality refers to the personal conditions (including morals, aesthetics, desires, hopes and emotions) and social conditions (including linguistic, familial, organisational, social and cultural narratives) (Clandinin 2016). Place refers to "the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and the events take place" (Clandinin 2016, 41).

The international student's journey of intercultural adaptation is thus considered to possess three dimensions of temporality, sociality and place. The journey of intercultural adaptation consists of the past, present and future. It transpires over a course of time. It also consists of personal and social conditions, that is, it comprises of both internal individual and external environmental factors. Lastly, the journey consists of place or space. It takes place against a particular landscape, covers a certain distance and spans across arbitrary boundaries.

3.1.2   Using stories and narratives

The philosophical premise for this study is firstly based on "ontological relativism" which considers how "psycho-social phenomena are multiple, created and dependent on us, as opposed to existing independently of human conceptions and interpretations" (Smith, 2016, 204). Secondly, it is based on "epistemological constructionism" which considers knowledge as a fallible construct (Smith 2016, 204). Following Smith (2016), this narrative study adopts the interpretive paradigm and socio-cultural approach.

The theoretical underpinnings for this study are termed as "narrative constructionism" which considers "human beings as meaning-makers who use narratives to interpret, direct and communicate life and to configure and constitute their experience and their sense of who they are" (Smith 2016, 204). That is, narratives are considered as a tool or resource for individuals to create meaning in our lives, experiences and sense of identity.

In order to understand narrative as a tool or resource, an important distinction is to be made between stories and narratives. Whereas stories are tales or anecdotes, narratives are considered as tools or resources. Smith (2016, 204) describes how "narratives are the resources from which people construct their personal stories and understand the stories they hear". Narratives thus not only facilitate the creation of stories, they also facilitate the understanding of stories. Whereas Trahar (2011, 49) has described how stories are "formed and informed by wider historical, social and cultural contexts".

To further illustrate this, Bruner (1991, 20) has elaborated on how "individual autobiographies" contribute to a process of "joint narrative accrual", which points to the universal human experience:

> One of the principal ways in which we work 'mentally' in common, I would want to argue, is by the process of joint narrative accrual. Even our individual autobiographies, as I have argued elsewhere, depend on being placed within a continuity provided by a constructed and shared social history in which we locate our Selves and our individual continuities.

In other words, individual stories exist within a collective historical, social and cultural continuity. Daiute (2011, 335) also describes how narrating is a "cultural tool". Considering how cultural tools require a significant amount of time to be formed, they are argued to reveal what is meaningful to the narrators (Daiute, 2011).

As narratives have been observed to be used throughout history and across cultures, Peterson (1999, 92) argues that they have common purpose and structure and that "narratives do appear patterned, across diverse cultures". That is, as universal patterns, structures and purposes can be observed in the use of narratives across cultures, narratives could be considered to cross cultural boundaries. Conceptualising Jung's notion of the "collective unconscious" as

"embodied behavioural wisdom", Peterson (1999, 93) posits how the foundation for our common religious narratives and myths rests on "the behaviour, the procedures, that have been generated, transmitted, imitated and modified by everyone who has ever lived, everywhere." Following Peterson (1999), this study also considers narratives as intercultural tools or resources which reflect a shared universal human experience.

This concept of narrative as a tool or resource is crucial for this study because it aims to derive a typology of adaptation narratives through its investigation of international student experiences and perspectives. Considering how the participants for this study are a diverse group of postgraduate international students, this study uses the narrative approach to examine not only the individual experience but also the universal experience of adaptation, based on the stories told and narratives used. Whereas the individual participant stories represent particular individual experiences of adaptation, the typology of narratives represent the common human experience of adaptation. The adaptation narratives derived are argued to serve as adaptive tools and the typology itself could serve as a map for the journey of the adapting individual.

Besides being tools or resources, narratives are also considered as "actors", narratives are an "act" and storytellers "acting beings" (Smith 2016, 205-6). Daiute (2011, 334) also describes how "narrating mediates one's relations in the world" and hence research design and practice must consider "the narrator-audience-context relationship". This study considers how each participant story is not merely an account of what happened. Narrating is an act of the narrator in relation with his or her reality. It thus considers how each story is told and examines the structure of each narrative.

Lastly, the relationship between narrative and culture have also been discussed within narrative research. Notably, a direct link between narrative and culture has been drawn by Bruner (2002, 16) who describes how both narrative and culture are "organised around the dialectic of expectation-supporting norms and possibility-evoking transgressions". That is, both involve and negotiate a

tension between norms and transgressions. Both narrative and culture have the tendency to generalise and particularise.

Hyvärinen (2008, 456) has also described how "narratives and narrativity" alternate between "cultural scripts ('canonicity') and total idiosyncratic babble (breach in every moment)". Dervin (2016, 23) has also described how "interculturality is a narrative". The use of the narrative approach is thus compatible with studies on intercultural adaptation as narrating allows the narrator to traverse between canonicity and authenticity.

Daiute (2011, 335) has highlighted the need for further research on how individuals use stories within especially "culturally heterogeneous educational contexts". Due to the increasingly rapid pace of change within contemporary society, the phenomenon of complex contexts characterised by diverse stories warrants closer examination (Daiute 2011). That is, stories told and narratives used are hypothesized to provide insight into the individual personal experience as well as the universal human experience of a complex, changing and diverse social reality.

This study considers the host university environment as a complex, changing and culturally diverse landscape and how its diverse group of international students contribute diverse stories. Considering how narrative and culture are similar in their dialectic nature, the narrative approach is thus suited for intercultural research due to its adaptability to negotiate between norms and trangressions, the general and the particular, the universal and the individual.

Whereas narratives are finalised and "stable", stories and storytellers are left "unfinalised"(Smith 2016, 206). That is, the story, as well as the storyteller, are considered works in progress, they remain open-ended and undetermined. Squire (2004, 116) has described how "the stories that people tell about themselves are about many selves, each situated in particular contexts, and working strategically to resist those contexts". That is, stories do not portray a finalised and stable self, instead a multitude of selves is depicted – the self is a continuous process. As this study is interested in stories on intercultural

adaptation, the participant stories could provide insight into the adapting individual's sense of self as a part of the process of adaptive change.

3.2   Engaging in interculturality

Within intercultural literature, a myriad of sociocultural factors such as globalisation, internationalisation and technology have been identified as key influencers of contemporary society. Intercultural communication studies have garnered increasing interest due to the fact that we live in an increasingly interconnected, complex and diverse world (Piller 2011). Piller (2011, 3) describes how the current fascination with intercultural communication is due to "the ubiquity of cultural and linguistic contact, mergers and hybrids". Pieterse (2000) describes how "we are all migrants" (as cited in Kim 2015, 3). In our "turbulent epoch" (Trahar 2013, 301), it seems that one's sense of identity and culture is at once challenged and liberated, inspired and confused.

Dervin's (2011) 'liquid' approach to culture borrows from Bauman's notion of "liquid postmodernity". Bauman (2007, 122) describes how for solid modernity "the centre doesn't hold", for liquid postmodernity, "there is no centre". Contemporary postmodern reality is portrayed as "a kaleidoscope of constant change" (Bauman 2007, 122). This study on intercultural adaptation considers Bauman's theory of liquid postmodernity and how the contemporary experience of culture and interculturality is characterised by instability and change.

Perhaps due to how interculturality involves inherent instability and change, Dervin (2011, 39) uses the concept of "unstable discourses" to describe intercultural discourse and interculturality as it necessarily involves "changing, co-creating but also resisting, manipulating, and fighting". This concept is important for this study as it examines international student stories on intercultural adaptation. This concept foregrounds the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the variance within and between participant responses.

Alongside this notion of instability and change, the concept of difference is often raised within intercultural studies. de Miguel (2007) has described how the notion of difference has always been present within social sciences and philosophy, however it has been only recently that it has emerged as public discourse within political, social and academic realms. Dervin (2016) points to the problematic issue of the "differentialist bias" which is a preoccupation with how we are different instead of recognising how we share both differences and similarities. Dervin (2016, 35) describes how the differentialist bias often "denies interculturality beyond difference". Arendt (1958, 155) eloquently illustrates how:

> "If people were not different, they would have nothing to say to each other. And if they were not the same, they would not understand each other."

This study considers the experience of difference as an integral part of intercultural experiences and examines how different adapting individuals perceive and experience differences.

The preoccupation with difference has been hypothesized to be related to the fear of the Other and the submerging of the Other in the self (Dervin, 2016). Closely related to difference, the self/Other analogy is often raised within intercultural literature. Due to the metaphorical nature of this construct, this study considers the 'self' and 'Other' as narratives of interculturality. Similarly, Bauman (1997, 25) has used dichotomies such as "the familiar and the strange", "'us' and the strangers".

More recently, academic debate on difference within classrooms has also been observed. Gay (2010) has described how difference in teaching and learning methods impacts the learning process. Erikson (2010) describes how difference experienced within educational contexts may create problems however they are not insurmountable. Notably, recent local studies on adult migrant education suggest how difference could be regarded as a "resource" (Kärkkäinen 2017, 89). Hence, when it comes to managing difference, it seems that what matters more is one's attitude towards difference instead of the difference itself, regardless of whether it is real or perceived. This study considers this and thus examines

international student experiences of and perspectives on differences encountered.

4 RESEARCH TASK

This study is interested in international student experiences and perspectives. It aims to explore different experiences and perspectives among a group of postgraduate international degree students who temporarily lived and studied in central Finland. It explores international student experiences of different adaptation challenges and the different adaptation tools and strategies utilised. The objective of this study is to understand the nature and role of expectations, reflections and emotions in intercultural adaptation. The narrative approach has been chosen for this research. Instead of research questions, it is a research puzzle which this narrative study seeks to solve (Clandinin, 2016). Using the narrative approach, the researcher has identified key pieces of the research puzzle as: prior expectations, real-life experiences, personal reflections and emotions. Upon a closer examination of these puzzle pieces, this narrative study hopes to delve into the lived experience and internal processes involved in intercultural adaptation.

5 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

5.1 The Participants

This study examines a data set from a recent case study on sixteen postgraduate international Master's degree students from Jyväskylä University (Niemi, 2018b). Eight semi-structured focus group interviews of sixteen students were conducted and the narrative interviewing method was used (Niemi, 2018b). The entire data set comprises a total of 165 pages in Arial font size 12 and forms a considerable sample for the purposes of this study. The detailed transcripts included interviewer questions, responses and observations. All interviews were audio-

and video-recorded and later transcribed. The data set is open-source and available via Jyväskylä University's digital repository.

The questions for the focus group discussion concerned study experiences, differences between previous and current teaching and learning environments, how individual assignments and group work are managed, as well as experiences of support provided by the host university environment (Niemi, 2018b). During these interviews, participants shared their study experiences and the interviewer was herself, an international student.

For the purposes of this study, this data set is considered relevant as the focus group interviews provided participants an opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives on their interactions with the teaching and learning environment at Jyväskylä University (Niemi 2018b). Chioncel, Van Der Veen, Wildemeersch & Jarvis (2003) have described how focus groups produce findings through experiences, perspectives, facts and emotions. Wilkinson (2003) also describes how the interactive exchanges involved in focus groups trigger recollection and argumentation.

5.2   Research methods

Qualitative methods are often preferred for the in-depth study of experiences and perspectives (Calikoglu 2018; Trahar & Hyland 2011). As this study is interested in exploring prior expectations, experiences of adaptation challenges and emotions, as well as personal reflections, it adopts the narrative approach. The "close reading of stories" consists of asking not only "what", but also "how", "who", "when" and "why" (Trahar 2013a, 304). This narrative study attempts to derive its own typology of narratives to add to the existing adaptation narratives used within intercultural literature. Following Smith (2016, 209), the researcher firstly remains distant from the text, secondly uses "extensive and closely edited storied data" to show the participant's perspective and thirdly, gives "a theoretical account of the story".

Narrative research often "begins with an incident from the researcher's life associated with the research puzzle" Trahar (2013b, xv). Trahar (2011, 301) has described how the narrative approach "foreground(s) people's lived experiences, often including those of the researcher". As the researcher for this study is herself an international student, this study adopts the narrative approach keeping in mind the role and subjectivity of the researcher. This study also involved an extensive data immersion and analysis process, which allows "experience and time work their way in inquiry" (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 12).

Dervin (2011, 38) defines interculturality as "the positioning and negotiation of individuals who come from different space-times". Dervin's (2011) 'liquid' approach to intercultural discourse facilitates the analysis and interpretation of descriptions on one's experience of and perspectives on one's culture, other cultures and difference. As a methodological framework, the 'liquid' approach to culture facilitates the study of interculturality. Being an international student who has lived in Finland for a period of time, the researcher could be described as having access to the insider, outsider as well as the intercultural position. The researcher for this study attempts to apply Dervin's (2011, 39) concept of "swapping cultures" or "oscillating between cultures" during the research process.

Dervin (2011, 39) has criticised how intercultural researchers tend to accept what participants say "at face value" and "as evidence and/or truth". Instead of taking participant responses literally, Dervin (2011, 38) describes how it is important "to go beyond the surface increasingly and explore various layers of 'hidden' discourses which can provide more hints of identification and the co-constructive aspects of interaction". This is an important consideration for this study which examines subjective experiences and perspectives.

Intercultural researchers have also been described to neglect their role in the analysis and interpretation process, thus failing to achieve "intersubjectivity" and ending up in "the trap of Othering" Dervin (2011, 39). Reviewing recent studies on international students, Dervin's (2011, 48) describes the tendency for intercultural researchers to alternate between "the Chinese student as an

essentialized identical entity and the Chinese student as an individual". Dervin (2011, 47) highlights the inherent contradictions in using a sociocultural approach to research but presenting research results in a "categorizing, biased and 'culturalised'" manner. This neglect of interculturality results in limitations in the serious consideration of the analysis and interpretation in these studies (Dervin 2011). This study thus considers interculturality during the process of data analysis and the presentation of its findings and interpretation of findings.

Lastly, Piller (2011, 13) proposes for the research focus in intercultural communication studies to be: "who makes culture relevant to whom in which context for which purposes". As this study examines participant stories which consist of references to one's own culture, other cultures and differences, this question helps to position the researcher. However as this research is mainly interested in the experience of intercultural adaptation itself, it does not go further to analyse the "use, content, scope and status" (Piller 2011, 15) of culture. That is, it focuses on experiences of interculturality and not competencies in interculturality.

5.3   Data Analysis

This study uses the dialogical narrative analysis (DNA) method (Smith 2016). Under the story analyst approach among narrative analysis methods, DNA is interested in what is told in the story, how stories are told and what stories do (Smith 2016). It examines not only the content but also the resources used, as well its effects (Smith 2016). Smith (2016, 213) describes how when doing DNA, the researcher asks: "What as actors do stories do and how well are people served by their stories?"

DNA is a flexible and dynamic process. According to Smith(2016, 214), DNA is "cyclical and iterative", the researcher moves back and forth between the stages, circles around them or even leaps between stages. This study uses the DNA method as "a heuristic guide" or "guide to interpretation" (Smith 2016,

213). Hence although the DNA method does not provide a standard course of action, it provides a question-based technique for the analysis process (Smith 2016).

Trahar (2013a, 304) has described how the "close reading of stories" consists of asking not only "what", but also "how", "who", "when" and "why". Contextualisation is important for the design of the analysis process for this study (Trahar 2013b). As this study uses interview data from a recent case study on international student perspectives, it also considers the specific context from which the stories emerged – the academic culture and teaching and learning environment within Jyväskylä university's international Master's degree programmes in education. The DNA process for this study is represented in the form of a diagram in Figure 2:

Stage 1: Indwelling - Get to know the storytellers
- Arrange into individual participant transcripts
- Read through individual participant transcripts and take field notes

Stage 2: Identifying the story - Focus on plot, protagonist and scene
Highlight in different colours:
Expectations, Reflections, Emotion talk and emotional talk, Descriptions of the host university teaching and learning environment

Stage 3: Identifying themes and thematic relationships - Focus on story content
Note:
- Experiences of stress, adaptive change and learning/growth
- Experiences of adaptation challenges
- Other themes and thematic relationships

Stage 4: Identifying structure - Focus on how the story is formed
Note:
- Experiences of learning and growth
- Appraisal of adaptation challenges
- Described personal goals

Stage 5: Engaging in analytical dialogue - Focus on the story as a whole
- Apply suitable question/s on resource, circulation, connection, identity, body or function to the story

Stage 6: Co-constructing individual narratives - Focus on the individual's story
- Co-construct individual narratives based on individual participant transcripts
- Collaborate with participant to tell the research story

Stage 7: Building a typology of narratives - Focus on ideal types
- Examine individual narratives and group similar individual narratives together
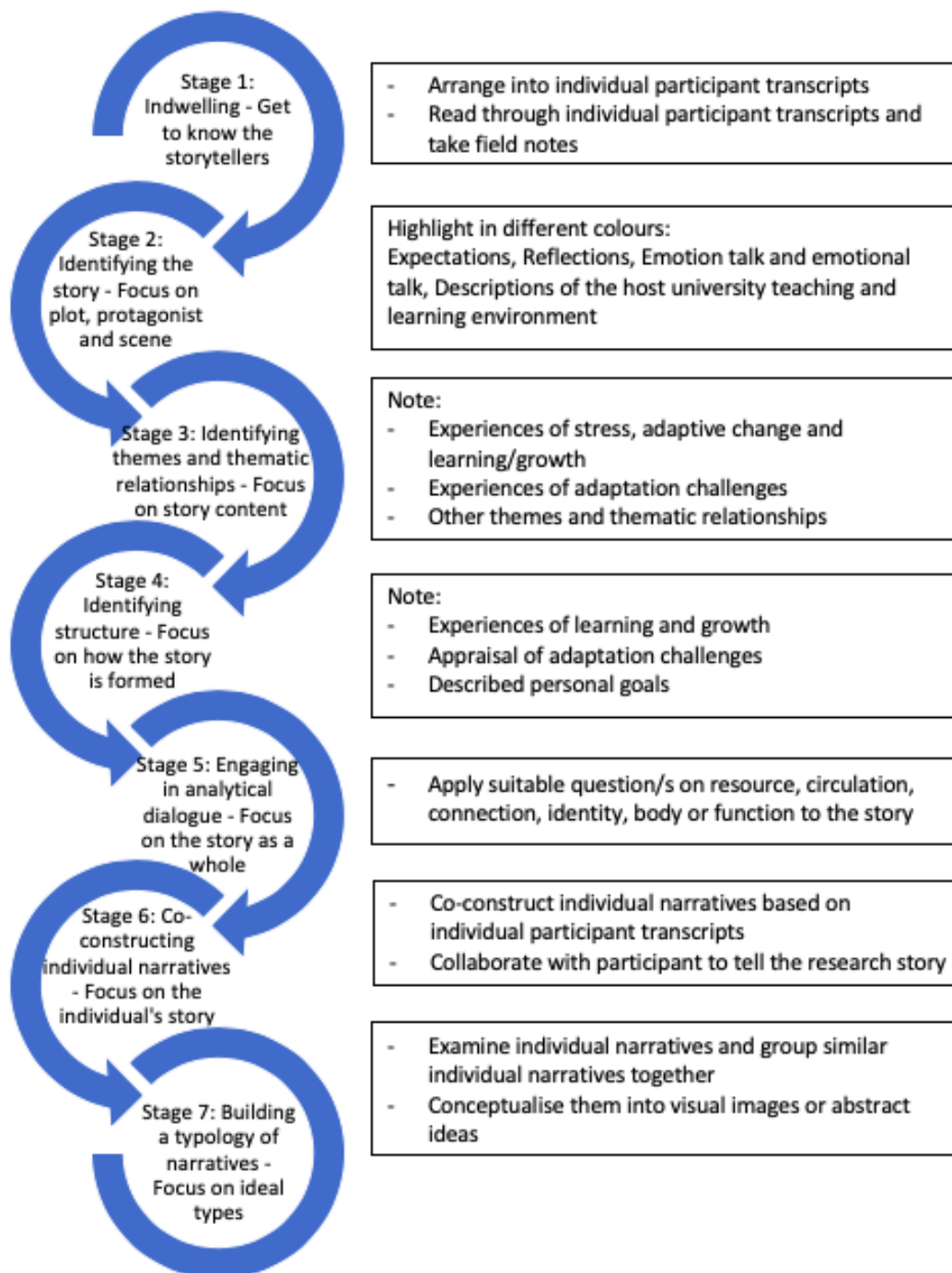- Conceptualise them into visual images or abstract ideas

FIGURE 2. Diagram of the Dialogical-Narrative Analysis (DNA) Method (Smith 2016)

The first stage is indwelling, which focuses on getting to know the storytellers. Individual participant transcripts are read and field notes taken. As the individual participant narratives are derived from pair interviews, the interview transcripts are rearranged into individual participant transcripts including the respective participant's responses. Relevant corresponding

responses of the interviewer and fellow interviewee are included in italics. An example of the Word document template used for individual participant transcripts and field notes are in Appendix 2.

The second stage is identifying stories. Whereas the individual participant's story is considered the 'big' story, 'small' stories are also identified and examined (Smith 2016). For instances in which stories are co-told by participant pairs and/or the interviewer, separate 'small' story transcripts will be made.

For analysis purposes, this study differentiates between narrative elements and story elements. Narrative elements include temporality, sociality and place, whereas story elements correspondingly include plot or time, character/s and scene (Clandinin 2016; Connelly & Clandini 1990) (see Table 1):

TABLE 1 The Process for Identifying Stories

Narrative elements	Story elements	Units of analysis
Temporality	Plot (Time):	Descriptions on:
	- Past	- Prior expectations
	- Present	- Real-life experiences
	- Future	- Personal reflections
Sociality	Character/s	Emotional talk and emotion talk
Place	Scene	Descriptions of the host university teaching and learning environment

Firstly, descriptions of prior expectations, real-life experiences and personal reflections will be identified. Secondly, the emotions experienced will be identified, which are further differentiated into emotion talk or emotional talk. Emotion talk involves the "explicit reference to and naming of an emotion" (Pappa, Moate, Ruohotie-Lyhty, & Eteläpelto, 2017, 86). Whereas emotional talk involves "language indirectly related to and conveying an emotional experience" and includes juxtaposition and metaphors (Pappa et al. 2017, 86). Thirdly, descriptions of the host university's teaching and learning environment will be identified.

The third stage is identifying themes and thematic relationships. This stage focuses on the content of the story. This study borrows from Kim's (2001, 2015) Stress-Adaptation-Growth theory and model of intercultural adaptation and identifies descriptions of experienced adaptive stress, adaptive change and learning or growth. It also identifies descriptions of experienced adaptation challenges. Other emerging themes and thematic relationships are also noted.

The fourth stage is identifying narrative structure. For this stage, the focus is on how each participant narrative is formed. Individual participant transcripts are examined at once and on its own. Smith (2016, 217) describes how different narrative structures can be categorised into "stability, decline, progress, reversal of fortune, rise and fall and circular or repetitive". In order to derive narrative structures, this study investigates the nature of reflections, evaluations and objectives within participant responses (Smith 2016). That is, experiences of learning and growth, appraisal of adaptation challenges and described personal goals if any are further examined.

The fifth stage is engaging in analytical dialogue. The focus is on the story as a whole. Again, each participant transcript is examined at once and as a whole. The type of analytical dialogue depends on the story itself as not all stories will be examined in the same way depending on its content. Smith (2016) suggests for a series of resource, circulation, connection, identity, body and function questions to consider which this study has adopted and contextualised as follows:

1. What narrative resources are used and how do they affect experiences?

2. Who would the participant not tell the story to?

3. To whom does the story connect the participant to?

4. What type of story helps to provide the participant a sense of identity and how? How does the participant tell stories to explore who he or she might become?

5. How does the researcher for this study respond to the story told and what does that say about the story itself?

6. What does this story do for the participant? What does it do for and to the fellow interviewee and/or interviewer?

The sixth stage is co-constructing individual narratives. The focus is on the individual's story and co-constructing individual narratives (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). From the stories collected, the researcher will co-create individual narratives in the form of what Smith describes as a "traditional realist tale" (Smith 2016, 219). These narratives are a collaborative process which require a combination of both participant voice and researcher voice, that is, the "telling of the research story requires another voice of researcher, another 'I'" (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 9-10). The researcher for this study thus considers the ethical, collaborative and exploratory nature of co-constructing narratives with participants.

The final stage is building a typology of narratives. The focus is on creating a systematic classification of narratives. A typology of "ideal types" (Smith 2016, 220) or "story types" (Moate & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2017) will be identified among the individual participant narratives. Smith describes how ideal types are "clearly defined narratives that are different from other(s)… and express something unique about the participant's experiences" (2016, 220). Smith also suggests how each ideal type should describe the three narrative dimensions of content, structure and function (Smith 2016).

In order to derive the ideal types, individual narratives and groups of similar individual narratives are closely examined and conceptualised into visual images or abstract ideas (Smith 2016). This study attempts to derive its own typology of narratives however it does borrow from and build on previously used metaphors and analogies for interculturality, which it considers as narrative resources for intercultural adaptation. These include the Self and Other, the journey, the landscape and fluidity.

5.4   Ethical Considerations

As this study adopts the interpretive paradigm, it gives due attention to the ethical considerations involved in the "art of interpretation" or "moving from the field, to the text, to the reader" (Denzin 2009, para. 2). As its chosen method of

analysis and interpretation, the researcher for this study spent a considerable amount of time to understand the narrative lens and use of narratives before designing and implementing the study itself. Besides its potential to explore the complex and dynamic process of intercultural adaptation, the narrative approach provides not only methodological but also ethical guidelines in doing research on life stories and experiences. Highlighting the ethics involved in exploratory research on stories and experiences, Sugarman has described how "all researchers need to develop their own principled position"(2001, 53). Tennyson and Strom (1986) point to the researcher's moral responsibility which is a combination of rationality, professionalism, values and morality.

The data set used for this study is open source with participant anonymity ensured, hence both the researcher in charge of the data set and the participants have granted permission for further study. As this study relies on solely interview transcripts with participant anonymity, it is argued that this study is able to adopt a more impartial stance towards participant stories and experiences. The researcher for this study maintains some distance from the stories narrated and those co-narrated among the participant/s and interviewer. However, the researcher also strives to respect the participants and their experiences and perspectives or the storytellers and the stories told. One key ethical consideration is thus the "negotiation of entry into the field situation" (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 3). For this study, the researcher strives for the "negotiation of a shared narrative unity" (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 3). Considering this narrative study as a story in itself, the research process is viewed as "a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and re-storying" (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 3). In other words, this study strives for the participant's voice to be balanced with the researcher's voice.

Narrative research and narrative researchers are often described "to think with people" instead of about them (Trahar, 2013b, xiii). Trahar (2013b, xii) has also described how the narrative approach involves "gathering stories respectfully" and on the "reflexivity" of the narrative researcher. Connelly & Clandinin (1990, 10) also highlight how narrative researchers are to derive "ways

of becoming 'I', the critic". The researcher for this study thus strives to understand the participant's point of view at the time the events described took place. Adopting a respectful and critical stance, the individual participant transcripts and co-constructed participant narratives were completed one by one, and later on reviewed and edited. The researcher for this study also notes the tendency towards what Spence (1986) terms as "narrative smoothing" during the research process. According to Connelly & Clandinin (1990), narrative researchers are to recognise that there are stories left untold alongside those told. Hence during the data analysis process which includes the collection of stories and writing of narratives, the researcher aims for a balance between description and interpretation (Kim J. 2016).

Bakhtin (1986, 7) has described how "in the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding". The researcher for this study is herself a postgraduate international student, however as she has lived in Finland previously for a significant period of time, she considers her position as a mediator, having access to both an insider and outsider perspective. What became clear during the research process is how I am neither a complete insider nor complete outsider – instead my position is in between the two. As a more experienced traveller in the host country, I am more acclimatised to the cultural landscape of the host university environment. However, being a stranger to the host university academic culture and teaching and learning environment, I am also sensitive to the intercultural experiences described within participant responses. My researcher's stance thus shifts between insider, outsider and intercultural positions and perspectives.

A combination of the narrative approach together with the 'liquid' or intercultural approach served both methodological and ethical purposes. This study uses Dervin's (2018) "liquid" approach to culture in order to avoid the human tendency towards differentialism, essentialism and culturalism. It poses these critical questions: How does this particular adapting individual experience and perceive interculturality and why? How do these different individual stories culminate in common universal narratives? Considering the fluid nature of

culture and identity, this study follows Trahar (2011, 631) in how "the process of analysing the data did not serve to emphasise the differences but rather the similarities between groups".

6   FINDINGS

The findings are categorised into sections according to a typology of seven ideal types as follows: *The Journey, Chaos and Order, The Hero, Transcendence, Alchemy, Meditation* and *Rebirth*.

6.1   The Journey

The first ideal type identified is *The Journey*. The majority of narratives used the journey as a metaphor when describing their experiences. As an ideal type, *The Journey* suggests the notion of space. All journeys take place within spaces or across a landscape. The international student experience of the host university environment and intercultural interactions within that environment could thus be described as a journey through an unknown landscape.

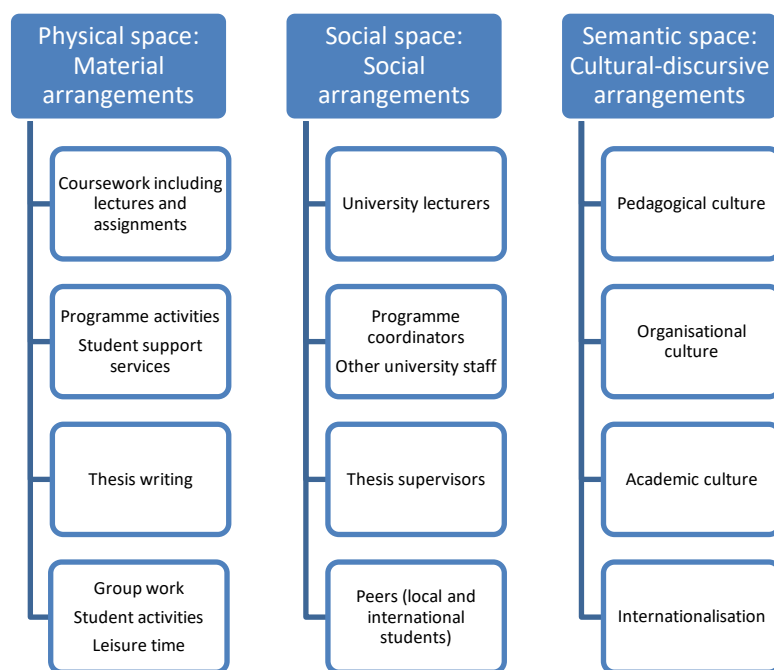The host university environment thus comprises distinct but related components (See Figure 3):

Physical space: Material arrangements	Social space: Social arrangements	Semantic space: Cultural-discursive arrangements
Coursework including lectures and assignments	University lecturers	Pedagogical culture
Programme activities / Student support services	Programme coordinators / Other university staff	Organisational culture
Thesis writing	Thesis supervisors	Academic culture
Group work / Student activities / Leisure time	Peers (local and international students)	Internationalisation

FIGURE 3. Dimensions and components of the host university environment

The intercultural experiences of international students involved teacher-student, staff-student and supervisor-student interactions within the context of the classroom, the university, and email communication. In-group and out-group student interactions were also described to take place within the contexts of group work, student activities or leisure time. The host university teaching and learning environment was described to comprise pedagogical, organisational and academic cultural elements and internationalisation.

All in all, a sense of shared responsibility is described between the host university and international student. In particular, communication via feedback was emphasized for both the host university and international student. Most appraisals of support provided by the host university environment were mixed responses. Among the more positive responses, the host university environment is described as accessible, flexible and trusting as it provides support, autonomy and choice. Among the more negative responses, suggestions included a better peer support system, more consideration of diversity as well as individual student backgrounds, interests and needs.

Considering the semantic space within this unknown landscape, the journey of intercultural adaptation seems to also involve an internal philosophical and emotional journey within the self. In particular, the extent of

difference experienced seemed to reflect the distance and time involved for the journey. Differences between prior expectations and real-life experiences, differences in teaching and learning styles, intercultural differences as well as interpersonal differences were repeatedly described as adaptation challenges. Within participant responses, these experienced differences were sometimes attributed to Finnish culture. This experience of difference between teaching and learning styles was described with ambivalence and through dichotomies. The three dichotomies identified were: freedom and responsibility, trust and accountability, and collaboration and competition. Notably, the more adaptive experiences described an exploration or even play between these philosophical dichotomies.

Besides difference, ambivalence was repeatedly observed among the narratives. One participant (P5) uses the metaphor of "stepping on air" to describe his or her experience in the Educational Leadership programme as someone with no prior academic or work experience in education. Walking on air illustrates a surreal or dream-like experience. It describes an experience both magical and absurd, a journey which is exciting, fun and/or scary, requiring not only curiosity and courage but also faith.

Among the more adaptive narratives, the depiction of searching, seeking and adventure was observed. The international student is akin to an explorer on a quest to venture, navigate and map out unknown territory. These narratives depicted a pursuit which involved navigating one's way, seeking something or going into the unknown:

> "… I was for a long time a bit lost." (P1)

> "… Whatever I got, it's mine…it's my journey…" (P3)

> "… I am always looking for challenges and challenge myself, but it's not always easy to get there. Yeah…" (P6)

> "… you really have to kind of venture out and be brave…" (P8)

Another participant describes the relationship between the international student and the host environment as a ship at bay:

"… you are your own in a big bay…" (P10)

This metaphor points to the impending journey or voyage in which the ship has to leave the bay, set sail and find its bearings in the open sea.

The Journey also suggests the notion of time. Half of the narratives highlighted the relationship between adaptation and time. That is, adaptation is described to take place naturally in time. Although participants described experiencing challenges, they also recognise their innate ability to adapt. Although adaptive change is a natural human phenomenon, the journey of the self into the Other seems to be profoundly challenging. The next ideal type further explores the lived experience of the adaptation process.

6.2   Chaos and Order

As the second ideal type, Chaos/Order illustrates the lived experience of the adaptation process. Although chaos and order are polar opposites, each forms a part of a whole. It is best represented with the Yin and Yang symbol derived from the Chinese philosophy of duality. Among the narratives, the occurrence of positive and negative adaptation cycles was repeatedly observed. The experience of adaptation could be described as fluctuating states of chaos and order or negative and positive spirals.

Notably, most participant narratives were identified as having repetitive circular structures. The temporality within these narratives could be described as a dynamic in the form of an infinite loop. Experiences of adapting to the host environment were portrayed as a continuous and ongoing process:

"… still adapting…" (P2)

"… So, it was a bit of a shock… and it still is in a way…" (P4)

"… Ok, I had this huge knowledge of this (Chicago citation style) and now I gotta start something brand new (APA citation style) and expand that. So, it's still… It was a work in progress (process)." (P13)

As a counter-example, one participant (P15) described experiences of being "stuck" and this inertia perhaps describes his or her lack of "adaptive energy" (Kim, 2001, 57) to carry on with the cycles of adaptation.

One participant (P12) describes being at the end of positive adaptation cycles having adapted to writing more essays and listening to different accents. He or she describes experiencing an "adjustment process", after which one "get(s) used" to it and it is "easier". Whether the participant was a first or second year international student and the stage of studies in which they were in did not seem to have considerable impact on their experiences. A closer examination of individual narratives and the variance between narratives indicated not only different attitudes towards adaptation, different stages of adaptation for different adaptation challenges were also observed.

Alternating states of chaos and order were observed alongside a flux of emotions. A mix and range of emotions were observed within individual narratives and across all narratives. The most expressive narratives used metaphorical language and described strong positive and negative emotions. Whereas the more adaptive narratives expressed strong positive emotions, the less adaptive narratives expressed strong negative emotions. Besides stress and shock which are often mentioned in adaptation literature, other negative emotions identified include anxiety, frustration, disappointment, boredom, confusion and loss. Strong negative emotions such as hate, anger and shame were also described. Positive emotions identified included curiosity, enjoyment, satisfaction, excitement, admiration, gratitude, confidence, faith, pride and compassion. Strong positive emotions such as inspiration, amazement and love were also described.

Notably, among the more adaptive narratives which described experiences of adaptation, a balance of emotions was observed. Emotional regulation thus seems to be a key psychological adaptive strategy. The experience of positive emotions seemed to balance the effects of stress, shock and other negative emotions experienced. Some adaptive narratives depicted a negative to positive emotional trajectory as follows:

"… I really… at the beginning, it didn't make sense, the group work because I am not used to it, but then after a year I understood that 'Oh yeah, it's great' like I reflected in some cases because when the group work is successful…" (P1)

"… the academic freedom or flexibility as we just talked about that, kinda struck me like in the beginning… I don't know what to do with this, just like too much. But then for me… It was a rather positive experience 'cause it gave me inner motivation. So, it didn't really matter what others are doing as long as I am learning, I'm doing, that's good…" (P3)

All in all, experiences of maladaptation were observed to depict a downward spiral towards chaos whereas experiences of adaptation depicted an upward spiral towards order. Experiences of adaptive change typically depicted a positive upward spiral towards order from chaos. Considering how the lived experience of adaptation involves a battle with chaos, the next ideal type identified is *The Hero*.

6.3   The Hero

Tools and strategies for the international student included English language skills, academic skills, previous intercultural or work experience, social networks and a variety of psychological tools and strategies. The third ideal type identified was thus *The Hero*. This ideal type suggests the notion of extraordinary individuals who display extraordinary attitudes and traits. Notably, the notion of agency or responsibility was repeatedly described. Whereas agency refers to the capacity to exercise power and influence on external circumstances, responsibility refers to being answerable or accountable. As the main character, the hero is at the centre of it all as an agent of change. As opposed to the victim, the hero is willing and able to endure hardships, overcome obstacles and emerge victorious.

Among the more adaptive narratives, a sense of agency or responsibility was described. In contrast, the less adaptive narratives emphasized a sense of victimhood. However, a variety of attitudes towards individual agency or responsibility was observed among these narratives:

"… it's ultimately for you to figure out yourself with the challenges that you have... You are your own in a big bay..." (P10)

"… it just all about my proactivity, my initiative, how much I do, how much I learn… It's up to you… just whatever you could go up to, and those who could do more, do more… It's up to you." (P3)

"… So, like instead of… for my point of view, so instead of complaining, you can totally go above, more beyond and do more and ask the professor more…" (P3)

"… They say 'Oh, it's up to you… Here, like all the time. I found it very frustrating." (P13)

All in all, among the more adaptive narratives, ambivalent or positive attitudes towards agency or responsibility were observed. One participant (P15) argues how the focus on individual responsibility in the host environment is "good" as an "opportunity" to do things for yourself. Whereas it was observed that the more adaptive narratives accepted, appreciated or embraced individual agency or responsibility, the challenges involved in practising agency or responsibility were also described. One participant (P3) expresses "love" for the experience of agency or responsibility but at the same time describes the tendency to overload oneself as he or she is "dying" this semester with too much workload.

Besides agency and responsibility, the more adaptive narratives also presented protagonists with other attitudes and traits such as positivity, confidence, resilience, courage and open-mindedness:

"… I am that kind of person that learns from any environment… Because positivity (smiling) always… even though it goes down…" (P7)

"… you really have to kind of venture out and be brave…" (P8)

"… I am not held back myself in any way really all through these two years. So yeah, I think that's a big move… (laughing)" (P10)

In summary, it seems there is a variety of personality traits which could be described as heroic or adaptive traits and these function as adaptive tools for adaptive individuals.

On the other hand, one participant describes how he or she is "dragging a lot of deadlines" and experiencing procrastination. A lack of motivation and a sense of isolation is described. Among the other less adaptive narratives, a lack of agency and confidence, negativity and a sense of failure was observed:

"… I don't know about you, basically I don't manage… If nobody really cares and is pressuring me to perform to a certain standard or to certain level by a certain deadline, why would I pressure myself to do it?" (P4)

"… I have terrible experiences with group work here, horrible. I hated it… It's so stressful and so annoying and so time-consuming and so exhausting… group work experience has consistently been very, very bad here, very bad. So frustrating." (P11)

In addition, a sense of loss was also observed in these narratives which described an experience of victimhood:

"… I didn't give up my life in (home country)… Cause I did give up everything… When I come here, I have four meetings and lot of readings and I am like, that's not what I came here for…" (P4)

"… I expected much, much, much more before I came here…" (P11)

Considering how the adaptation process consists of positive and negative cycles, examples of the anti-hero and unheroic attitudes and traits described were also identified and examined. After all, the emergence of the hero involves not only the eventual triumph, the struggles endured and transcendence are a vital part of the journey. This notion of transcendence as a part of the journey of intercultural adaptation is further explored as the next ideal type.

6.4   Transcendence

The third ideal type identified was *Transcendence*. As an adaptive action, the adapting individual transcends and overcomes. To transcend is to rise above and go beyond. It was observed that the more adaptive narratives described experiences of transcending the adaptation challenges and differences experienced. In contrast, the less adaptive narratives described experiences of being overwhelmed by the same encounters.

The adaptive individual could be described as having a transcendent attitude towards the adaptation challenges encountered. The adaptive individual recognises and values struggle and hardship, sees problems as opportunities and attempts to transcend them:

"… In general, I consider it (difficulty in adapting to lack of assessment in the host teaching and learning environment) positive…" (P1)

"… so that (more group work in host environment) is also a big struggle. At the same time, I learned a lot." (P3)

"… So it (student autonomy within the host environment) gave me a challenge. But at the same time, I started to see… this is also a way how to (learn)…" (P5)

One participant in particular describes a stoic approach in which he or she intentionally seeks challenges and difference:

"… I have always been looking for my own challenges and I have always been looking for different ways of doing things… It's (working with international students from different backgrounds) a nice challenge…" (P6)

In summary, the adaptive individual overcomes obstacles encountered along the journey by rising above them and focusing on the opportunity (instead of the problem).

The more adaptive narratives also described a transcendent experience of the differences experienced. In particular, a certain disregard of differences was observed among these participants who did not describe experiencing difficulty with differences:

"… For me it is very difficult to draw a comparison because the education system… at least ten years ago in (home country). As in fact of today, the comparable factors I have, the they are not comparable…" (P1)

"… I didn't have any difficulties actually. I had the same issues, but it didn't feel difficult. Maybe in the beginning, the English and the assignment process all the time, but it wasn't like difficult, difficult. It's totally different, you cannot compare the systems. From the university, the structures of the university, the classrooms, it's totally different." (P16)

"… At the same time for me personally it (differences in previous and host university environment) does not make that big difference…" (P6)

To summarise, the transcendence of differences was observed in which differences seemed to be perceived as insignificant or irrelevant.

Positive emotions were also observed to be useful adaptive strategies for transcending intercultural or interpersonal differences. One participant describes a passion for collaborative work and how it has served him or her well:

"I drive in groups… I am my best like I work best with people and I love that kind of environment and that was the best part for me in my experience here. And every single group work as very smooth for me cause I work well with people, any kind of people and find a way to work with them… I personally love groups and I get involved in as much group work as possible." (P7)

Similarly, another participant (P16) describes besides the inherent complexity involved in collaboration, he or she also "love(s)" how it involves intercultural interaction and learning. Whereas another participant describes difference as "a big resource" for positive collaborative outcomes:

> "… it's a big resource to have all these different backgrounds because it's really interesting to be able to compare the different backgrounds and to use the experiences that people have…" (P6)

Another participant (P14) (who is a native English speaker) expresses compassion towards his or her group members who struggle with language issues whereas another participant (P5) (who is a non-native English speaker) expresses gratitude towards his or her peers who provided help and support during group work. In summary, these narratives describe a myriad of positive emotions (including love, pride, excitement, compassion and gratitude) which motivated them to overcome differences experienced during group work.

A sense of humour was also observed among the majority of participant narratives. Participants describing their experiences of adaptation challenges, stress and shock often also expressed amusement and/or used humour within the same accounts. One participant describes his or her disappointment with academic standards and assessment within the host environment with humour:

> "… I feel like the standard grade is a five. You know what.. where we have those little stalls with free hugs, I feel like in Finland, Finland is one big stall of free fives…" (P4)

It is plausible that humour could serve as a counter against stress and other negative emotions experienced. Humour could function as an adaptive strategy for the adapting individual.

Hence transcendence itself perhaps begins the process of adaptive change which begins with an adaptive attitude. Another adaptive strategy identified describes specifically what the adaptive individual does to transcend – the creative act of alchemy.

6.5   Alchemy

The fourth ideal type identified was alchemy. The concept of alchemy is an ancient one which involves turning "base metals into gold" (Peterson 1999, 407). Besides adaptive attitudes and traits, adaptive behaviour was observed to involve the act of alchemy. The more adaptive narratives were observed to portray the adapting individual as one who reinvents or transforms elements within the environment. The international student is akin to an alchemist who transforms surrounding environmental conditions and components for his or her own purposes.

In particular, this creative approach of alchemy towards different learning cultures and intercultural or interpersonal differences was observed among the most adaptive narratives. One participant describes an inventive approach to working with different people and the amalgamation of differences for collaborative outcomes:

> "… (I) find a way to work with them (different international students from different backgrounds)… It was all different because people are different, but I didn't have the problem that many people had about others being not committed and… because, I just kinda tend to get people together and push them… Ok, you are good at that, you do this, I am good at that, I do this. We put it together…" (P7)

Similarly, another participant describes how differences facilitate the exchange of knowledge and promote learning, creativity and innovation:

> "… I never feel, see that (working with different international students from different backgrounds) as frustrating, I think I see more like, ok, like exchange of opinions and ideas, which can enhance learning and new ideas and different ideas and aspects of what could be done and what could be done differently or better…" (P12)

To summarise, a creative process of alchemy was observed among these narratives in which differences experienced were described as elements to be integrated into a whole. Differences are akin to precious metals or alloys to undergo the process of alchemy and metallurgy. Differences encountered are regarded as tools for the creative process of the adaptive individual. Creativity is hence another key adaptive strategy. The next ideal type identified, *Meditation*, explores further the intricate internal processes involved in the adaptive individual's creative process.

6.6   Meditation

The sixth ideal type identified is *Meditation*. Meditative contemplation to hone one's perspective was observed to be a key adaptive strategy. It was observed that the more adaptive narratives were characterised by reflections, foresight and/or introspection. The adaptive individual thus not only looks backwards and forward, he or she also looks inward.

One participant shares his or her personal philosophy on learning, time is described as the ultimate teacher:

> "… and then it will be more reflected in a year from now… for all of us, how much these two years meant for us because I don't believe that we grow straight away as individuals. Our skill sets and later on in life that you say 'Oh wow' because you understand that you've gone through this school, you have those skills…" (P1)

Another participant shares his or her vision for self-discovery and personal growth during her studies:

> "… I think I looked at those two years more as breaking certain fears, certain limitations, moving out of certain comfort zones for myself…" (P10)

In summary, these narratives were characterised by honed individual perspectives with deep insights and/or personal vision.

Other adaptive narratives included personal insight and vision on collaboration and managing differences involved in group work. One participant (P10) describes how "group works are an opportunity to learn something about each other" and how team-building is a prerequisite for collaboration. Another participant describes the importance of both self-awareness and empathy and his or her personal goal to further develop leadership skills during group work:

> "… I know myself, I am very aware of my position in a group… I like to be sort of a mediator in a group. So, I like to, I am somewhere from the gray areas. I don't like making decisions. So, usually I don't care if it's left or right, we all get there in the middle somewhere. So, I always like to at least try and help everyone get their voice out in a group, also the more quiet people and especially when the conversation keeps going around and around… Working in a group like that for me it is a really good opportunity to learn to keep myself back and to give other people room to go up there…" (P6)

Another participant describes an acceptance and understanding of differences in commitment levels between different group members:

"… sometimes you are with really motivated people and sometimes with not motivated people and I have been both types of those people myself depending on the time I have to put into assignments…" (P2)

In summary, these narratives described deep contemplation on the nature of relating to others, the position of the self but also that of others.

Besides insight, foresight was also observed to be key. Prior expectations were described in both adaptive and less adaptive narratives. A relationship between prior expectations of the host university environment and the international student's real-life experience of adaptation was observed. Prior expectations were observed to shape the real experience and seemed to be natural and inevitable. However, forming more accurate expectations results in less differences between expectations and real experience and in turn, less stress encountered.

Notably, expectations were emphasized among the less adaptive narratives. Among the less adaptive narratives, unmet expectations were described at length and differences between prior expectations and real experiences were observed to be a main adaptation challenge and source of negative emotions. One participant describes how he or she is used to more instruction and classroom interaction, he or she expresses a sense of loss and frustration:

"I miss having more classes… because it's rather frustrating that you come to another country to study and basically what you are doing is you reading at home, I could read at home, from home…" (P4).

Another participant (P9) expresses disappointment as his or her research interests in higher education were not catered for within the programme, he or she also expresses boredom and demotivation during classes. Another participant (P11) describes feeling "underwhelmed" as he or she expected more academic discourse within the host environment. Whereas another (P13) expresses "hate" towards reflective writing assignments and a lack of communication and teaching skills experienced.

In contrast, the more adaptive narratives did not emphasize prior expectations and described accurate expectations instead:

"… I kinda came here expecting not much…" (P7)

"… No, I don't have any expectation…" (P8)

"… Last time I studied it was in 2007. And… I kinda knew it was not going to be easy…" (P1)

"… And of course I didn't expect courses in physical education teaching here because it's not there (previous teaching and learning environment)…" (P6)

One participant in particular describes his or her preparation for the initial adjustment phase at the beginning of the study programme:

"… First of all, I just got here and then I didn't take that many classes, I am gonna… I need some time to re-adjust and make friends, make a life here and I don't want my academics to come in to interfere with all that. So, my classes were just basics and it actually went really, you know, I got to like find a balance between work and life…" (P3)

In summary, these narratives described having little or no expectations whereas some predicted, accepted and even prepared for specific adaptation challenges.

It was observed that the adaptive narratives managed expectations by reflecting on them and gaining perspective. One participant (P2) describes having expectations and preference for more classroom instruction and interaction due to previous learning experiences. Similarly, another participant (P14) describes inaccurate expectations for the time and effort required in writing and reflecting and attributes them to not only his or her different educational background but also his or her personality. All in all, previous experiences and individual factors were described to influence one's expectations.

In addition, among the adaptive narratives, significant changes in perspective were also observed. These narratives describe dynamic and evolving perspectives on various issues such as the learning process and collaboration:

"… I have never learned in that way… I myself haven't seriously thought about what my interest is. But at the same time, I started to see.. this is also a way how to… it also helps me to develop my own idea." (P5)

Another participant (P12) describes an "eye-opening experience" with collaborative learning through peer review writing exercises. He or she experienced a change in perspective on differences and how they are an opportunity for peer learning. Hence the practice of meditation seems to be an important cognitive adaptive strategy and the adaptive individual seems to engage in a form of reflective practice through introspection. The next ideal type,

Rebirth, further explores the process of change or transformation involved in the adaptive individual's meditative practice.

6.7   Rebirth

The seventh and final ideal type identified is *Rebirth*. It was observed that the most adaptive narratives depicted the Bildungsroman or the "story of personal growth" (Kim 2015, 210). The Bildungsroman is "a story of developing oneself and of one's journey of becoming" (J. Kim 2016, 210). Dunlop (2002) describes it as "a story of a quest to find one's true self" (as cited in J. Kim, 2016, 210).

One participant (P8) describes a sense of wonder and curiosity having learnt more about oneself in "a social way" and it is "quite interesting". Another participant (P5) describes the experience of self-discovery and how discovering one's interests is "a challenge in itself". One participant describes "lifelong learning" as his or her key lesson learnt:

> "… I think that (I) have learned the significance of internal motivation instead of external or intrinsic motivation, I guess… Learning because you want to learn, not because someone is monitoring you, which I still struggle with. But I think that it gives me a better mindset for lifelong learning… in the future, I will learn things because I find them useful or interesting, not for other people." (P2)

Another participant describes how he or she experiences transformation as a learner after adapting to student autonomy and academic freedom within the host university environment:

> "… So when I first got here 'Like, how are we gonna… What's going on, what are we supposed to do.' And that just really like.. shocked me. But for me again like… that flexible freedom gave me… a way to explore my interest… not based on what other people say, but just based on listening to my inner voice, what I want to do. And that was something very new to me and in that way, just like learning outcome, like learning process and outcome process of this became more important for the first time than outcome. So that was a good transformation for me…" (P3)

In summary, these narratives were observed to share on lessons learnt and describe the experience involved in personal growth. In other words, the experience of adaptation seems to result in a form of metamorphosis or rebirth. This portrayal of personal learning journeys or journeys of personal growth seemed to be a source of motivation for these participants.

7   DISCUSSION

This study set out with the aim of examining the nature of international student experiences of and perspectives on intercultural adaptation. The typology of seven ideal types derived in this study capture different facets of the complex experience and intricate processes involved in adaptation. The findings from this narrative study may help us to better understand the lived experience as well as the processes involved in adaptation. This typology adds to existing narrative resources for adaptation and suggest possibilities for the further development of current adaptation theories. The typology derived attempts to map out the experience and processes of intercultural adaptation and is represented in Figure 4:
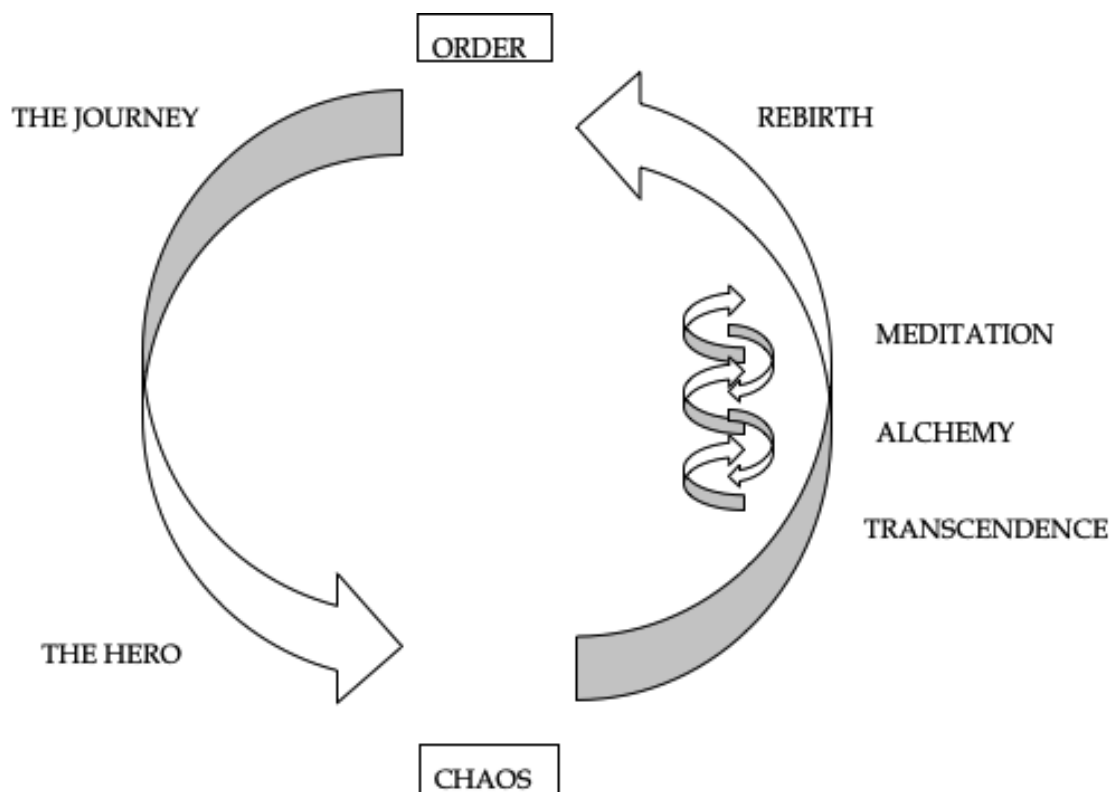
FIGURE 4. The typology of seven ideal types for adaptation

7.1 The Adaptation Epic

The adaptation epic unfolds as the adaptive individual leaves the realm of *Order* to embark on *The Journey* into *Chaos*. This journey takes place across an unknown landscape and involves a multitude of adaptation challenges. Besides an exploration of this unknown landscape or the Other, it also involves a philosophical and emotional journey into the adapting self. Armed with a plethora of adaptive tools and strategies, *The Hero* emerges in the depths of *Chaos*. The Hero repeatedly performs adaptive acts of *Alchemy*, *Transcendence* and *Meditation* which ultimately culminate in *Rebirth*. The transformed adaptive individual then returns to the realm of *Order* and yet another adventure beckons.

The Journey ideal type illustrates the experience of a new, unfamiliar and unknown environment. Whereas the traveller is the Other to the host, the unknown landscape is the Other to the traveller. This supports previous research in which the term "stranger" or the "self-Other orientation" are often used to describe intercultural relationships and interactions (Kim 2001; Kim 2015). Within the critical literature, the self/Other dichotomy is often used (Piller 2011; Dervin 2011). Dervin (2011, 37) also describes how intercultural discourse inevitably involves discourse on the 'Other' and 'Otherness'.

The *Chaos and Order* ideal type illustrates the lived experience and is placed at the centre of the typology as it characterises the inherent nature of change. The philosophical dialectic or dichotomy is particularly significant. The lived experience of interculturality could be described as an experience of diversity, complexity and uncertainty. As a journey between the self and Other, it is an experience of alternating order and chaos.

The findings suggest that the adaptive experience of difference is characterised by the act of exploration. This reflects previous studies by Barth (1969) and Erikson (2010) which have identified perceptions towards differences as "boundaries" or "borders". It seems that the adaptive individual negotiates these barriers or differences through a sense of exploration and play. This is in line with international business and management research which has identified

the "spirit of adventure" as one of the features of intercultural competence (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009, 155).

The three philosophical dichotomies (freedom and responsibility, trust and accountability, competition and collaboration) illustrate the international student's experience of negotiating opposites in the form of philosophical dichotomies. One interesting finding is the disregard for difference and dichotomies. Delving deeper into the notion of change, Bauman (2007, 120) describes how "there is no difference between creation and destruction". As dichotomies or opposites, they are merely lateral or inverted images of each other. Bauman (2007, 122) goes further to describe the process of change as "a convergence into a single act of destructive creation or creative destruction". Kim (2015, 6) has also borrowed from Dabrowski (1964) and argues for the concept of "positive disintegration" in which disintegration is considered a positive and evolutionary process of development.

Another important finding is the experience of a deep sense of ambivalence as with regards to the adaptation. Indeed, exploration involves not only adventure but also danger, it involves the negotiation of both potential and risk. Whereas searching, seeking and adventure implies a sense of exploration, it also implies navigating the unknown, uncertainty and unpredictability. This reflects Bauman's notion of liquid postmodernity which depicts the emotional experience of constant change in contemporary life as a tension "between desire and fear, between anticipation and uncertainty" (Bauman 2007, 124). Similar to differences, it seems that ambivalence is meant to be a process of exploration.

The findings also suggest the role of emotional balance in adaptation. The role of emotional balance is in line with empirical studies in psychology by Pekrun (2006, 327) on the control-value theory of achievement emotions, which have found that "emotional regulation can be used to improve the role that one's emotions are playing." Whereas the findings on positive and negative adaptation cycles suggest that it is plausible that being in either positive or negative cycles affect the participant's self-appraisal and experience. Besides individual adaptive

skills, the stage of adaptation in which the individual is in for a specific adaptation challenge during the interview was significant for one's self-appraisal and experience.

However, if we consider Pekrun's theory (2006, 327) on how positive emotions are "activating" whereas negative emotions are "deactivating", the findings seem to suggest that the adaptive individual could use positive emotions as a tool or resource to counter negative emotions. It is however less clear the role of emotions in adaptation (as with achievement) because "positive emotions are not always adaptive, and negative emotions not always maladaptive" (Pekrun 2006, 327).

Among the less adaptive experiences, one important finding was on negative emotions and negative adaptation cycles. This is in line with previous research which have found negative adaptation emotions including a "sense of loss", "helplessness", "isolation", "confusion" and "anger" (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009, 152). This also seems to support recent longitudinal studies by Demes & Geeraert (2015) which have found emotion-focused coping (instead of problem-focused coping) to be related to higher stress levels. The experience of negative emotions may lead to stress and subsequently more negative emotions and stress, which ends up as a vicious negative cycle. This highlights the role of emotion regulation, especially for adapting individuals experiencing negative emotions, self-awareness and early intervention could prevent a downward spiral.

The Hero ideal type illustrates the attitudes and traits of the adaptive individual. The emphasis on agency and responsibility supports recent longitudinal studies by Demes & Geeraert (2015) which have found adaptive behaviours to involve "problem-focused coping". The range of attitudes (from ambivalence, positive to negative) towards individual agency or responsibility is indicative of the complexity involved in exercising one's agency or taking up responsibility. Alongside a sense of freedom and empowerment was a sense of responsibility and burden. Going back to the ship metaphor, although the bay provides a home and shelter, it is up to the ship to leave the bay, set sail, navigate

the open sea and conquer the waves. However, once on its voyage, the ship is on its own. The variety of heroic attitudes and traits are in line with previous research which highlight positive attitudes, strength and openness as indicators of the adaptive personality (Kim 2001). More recent studies by Wilson, Ward and Fischer (2013) has also found a multitude of adaptive personality traits which include extraversion, agreeableness and openness as well as emotional stability, social initiative and cultural intelligence.

All in all, it seems that the hero or adaptive individual emerges through positive attitudes and positive personality traits. As opposed to how, why the hero or adaptive individual emerges is however less clear. Within the literature, it has been hypothesized that adaptation motivation is derived from the adapting individual's core beliefs and sense of self. Besides culture, the concept of "identity" has been described as "central in intercultural literature" (Dervin 2011, 39). Whereas Kim has proposed the theory of "intercultural personhood" as the final goal of adaptation (Kim 2015).

The *Transcendence* ideal type illustrates distinctive adaptive behaviours of the adaptive individual. To summarise, the adaptive individual transcends or overcomes the adaptation challenges and multitude of differences experienced. The adaptive individual has a positive attitude towards challenges, negotiates differences and regulates one's emotions. It is hence important to note that this act of transcendence, as an upward movement in the adaptation epic, requires what has been termed as "personality strength" (Kim 2001, 175). If we consider it as a muscle, the more one uses the muscle, the stronger it becomes. This supports recent studies which propose that "the interplay of stress and adaptation" boost "personal development" (Kim 2015, 6). That is, the more adaptive change one experiences, the better one becomes at adapting.

The *Alchemy* ideal type illustrates the creative process of the adaptive individual. Differences are elements for a creative process of reinvention or transformation, in which separate parts are used and transformed into a new cohesive whole. This is in alignment with recent studies which propose to see differences as a resource (Kärkkäinen 2017). The emphasis on creativity is also in

line with current research trends. Kim (2015) points to how recent studies in psychology point to the relationship between creativity and intercultural experience.

Meditation as an ideal type illustrates the meditative introspection experienced in the process of adaptation. Looking backwards, forwards and inward seem to have a restorative effect on the adapting individual's encounters with the Other. This supports recent studies which found that the personal motivations of international students are derived from one's personal and psychological situation (Calikoglu 2018, 446). That is, motivation for adaptive change originates from the Self. Accurate expectations, deeper perspectives and personal vision seem to support the adapting individual in overcoming adaptation challenges and the experience of differences. In particular, a practice of self-reflection seems to sharpen one's expectations, perspectives and goals.

The Rebirth as an ideal type illustrates the learning and growth experienced in the process of adaptation. This finding shows support for recent literature which describe "what follows a successful, long-term and cumulative management of the stress-adaptation disequilibrium is a subtle and often imperceptible psychological growth" (Kim 2015, 5). In particular, the specific goal of personal growth seems to serve as a source of motivation. This reflects previous literature which identified "adaptation motivation" as a key affective component of the adaptation process (Kim 2001, 207). More recently, Kim (2015, 4) describes how the intercultural self adopts the "both-and" instead of "either-or" perspective. That is, the intercultural self has both "a solidified sense of self" and "a universalization of one's mental outlook". In the process of exploring and integrating the Other, the Self does not diminish, it actually becomes more complete.

Lastly, the findings highlight the nature and role of cognitive and emotional processes within adaptation. The key findings to emerge concern the intricate nature of different psychological adaptive tools and strategies and the fundamental role of internal adaptation resources. These findings seem to suggest there are a variety of internal adaptation resources available for the

adapting individual. This is consistent with recent research which describe "intrapersonal resources" as crucial for adaptation (Ward & Geeraert 2016, 100). Besides skills, experience and social support, a myriad of psychological adaptive tools including perspectives, emotions, attitudes, personality traits and behaviours were also identified.

All in all, the findings show support for Kim's theory and model of cross-cultural adaptation. In summary, the integrated theory and model of cross-cultural adaptation incorporates both assimilation and plurality, both stress and learning and both macro- and micro- level dimensions and processes (Kim 2001). This comprehensive and versatile theoretical framework suited this study which aimed to explore not only the general nature of international student experiences and perspectives but also specific processes involved in intercultural adaptation.

7.2   Practical implications

One issue which emerges from the findings is the influence of both environmental factors and individual factors. It seems that both external and internal factors influence the 'distance' involved and 'time' required for the adaptation journey. It also seems that there is a sense of shared responsibility between the host university environment and international student for the process of adaptation. These findings show support for the integrated approach to intercultural adaptation as a complex and dynamic process (Kim 2015). Kim (2001, 37) describes how "various parts of the individual's internal system and the environment are engaged simultaneously and interactively, mutually influencing one another". Trahar & Hyland (2011, 631) highlight how in order for a foster a more diverse higher education community, the focus should be on all students and staff. What is apparent then is how it is important for both the host university environment and international student to practise self-reflection and become aware of their own unique idiosyncrasies. This reflects the critical literature which suggests "it is more important to understand our own cultural lenses than the supposed cultural traits of others" (Piller 2011, 176).

Another issue is the emphasis on difference and the challenges which differences pose. It seems that the negotiation of difference is the main challenge during the adaptation journey. Piller (2011, 16) has described how intercultural communication is "a means to overcome cultural differences". The intercultural competence of university staff and international students could thus be further developed. In particular, more channels for communication and opportunities for interaction within orientation activities, coursework and departmental events between the international student and university staff could be looked into. These findings support evidence from previous observations on the "disjuncture" in the understanding of stakeholder responsibilities between the host environment and international student (Niemi 2018a, 63). More support for collaboration could also be considered within the design and implementation of courses involving group work. In addition, more student activities within the university for both local and international students could be organised.

Differences were described via three interesting dichotomies: freedom and responsibility, trust and accountability, collaboration and competition. To summarise, it seems that the emphasis on autonomy, trust and collaboration are the most challenging. These results are significant as they point to the conditions for adaptation within the host university environment (Calikoglu 2018). To a certain extent, these findings show some support for previous research on international student experiences in Finland, in which the emphasis on autonomy, trust and equity were described as key features of the Finnish approach to education (Niemi 2018a; Watanabe 2008; Calikoglu 2018). These findings could be further explored for intercultural training programmes or used for dialogue sessions within existing international student support programmes and activities. It is important to bear in mind however that these findings may be somewhat limited as the sample consists of only postgraduate international students from the field of education. Whereas this result could prove useful for Jyväskylä University and international Master's degree programmes in education in particular, this data should be interpreted with caution to avoid

what Dervin describes as an "(over)emphasis on difference and culture in education" (2011, 42).

Instead of questioning whether or not these perceived differences are real, a more relevant question would be how to manage these perceived differences. Both teachers and students could reflect on their pedagogical cultures and practices and explore new perspectives at the same time. Trahar & Hyland (2011, 627) have criticised the "Europeanised higher education space" and the "striving for self-actualisation and learning autonomy that pervades higher education discourse". Trahar (2013a, 307) proposes for a more "post-structuralist perspective" which encourages higher education practitioners to celebrate differences and consider diverse learning approaches and experiences. International students could also benefit from adopting this perspective and maintain an open-mindedness and sense of exploration to negotiate differences.

Some accounts of discrimination within the host environment were observed. This shows some support for recent local studies which found "social bias and intolerance" as one of the challenges experienced by international students (Calikoglu 2018, 449). In particular, it seems that the use of English as a mode of communication within the university and among the student community could be further reinforced. This is in agreement with recent local studies which found "the lack of using English in organisational communication" (Calikoglu 2018, 448). Apfelbaum, Norton and Sommers (2012) have highlighted the importance of improving diversity practices and policies to improve levels of inclusion and engagement. On the other hand, some participant responses also showed a lack of intercultural competence. Examples of "culturespeak", which is "the use of the concept of culture in a systematic and uncritical way" were identified (Dervin 2011, 43). Examples of "Othering" were also identified (Dervin 2011, 45). In particular, it seems to be tempting to blame culture and cite cultural differences, instead of delving deeper into individual differences and personality issues.

In addition, the mixed responses towards student support services provided by Jyväskylä University show some support for recent local studies

which describe "the lack of organisational support and staff in guiding international students" (Calikoglu 2018, 447). Appraisals of support provided by the host environment were ambivalent and this is somewhat concerning. Tartakovsky (2012) has found that the perception of teacher and peer support is important as it encourages positive attitudes which result in adaptation. This suggests that student support services could be further improved for a more visible social support network which includes university staff, the local and international student cohort. International student organisations could also be further supported and take initiative to co-organise events and activities with other student organisations within Jyväskylä university. It is however possible that these findings are related to differences in the adaptability of individual students and individual university staff. Among participant responses, it seems that more adaptive individuals tend to focus on student responsibility whereas less adaptive individuals tend to focus on host environment responsibility. That is, it seems that some international students require more support than others. This has important implications for developing student support services for international students as it suggests for a more sophisticated mode of delivery which allows for personalisation.

Reported experiences of more stress at the beginning of the programme alongside reported experiences of stress over time is in agreement with the literature which shows "significant episodes of acculturative stress only occur for a minority of individuals and that the patterns of stress over time are highly varied among individuals" (Ward & Geeraert 2016, 100). Hence the adapting individual may do well to prepare himself or herself not only at the start of the adaptation journey but also be prepared to experience detours along the way. Whereas the host university could focus on not only orientation but also implement a sustainable international student support initiative throughout their studies. The findings from this study could be used to further develop the structure of the learning diary which forms a part of the orientation course for international students in the Master's degree programmes in education.

Recent studies by Nolan & Morley (2014) have shown the relationship between person-environment fit and positive adaptation outcomes, that is, individual characteristics are to match the work or organisational characteristics. Hence the host environment could focus on recruiting candidates with certain characteristics which match the nature of the host university environment and study programme. Specifically for Master's degree programmes in education at Jyväskylä University, the potential of candidates could be considered based on their ability to manage autonomy and collaboration. Whereas international students could consider if there is a match between the nature of the host culture or university and the nature of their individual goals and adaptability.

7.3   Limitations

As a data set from a previous study was used, the researcher for this study did not participate in the data collection process, which includes participant interviews and data transcription. Hence, the researcher for this study allocated a considerable amount of time and effort on the data immersion process. In addition, the interview questions did not directly address this study's research interests. That is, specific questions on the experiences of and perspectives on intercultural adaptation were not posed. However, participant experiences and perspectives were thus described within the interview data in an indirect but natural way. This study also depends on the integrity of the data set itself. As the previous study uses "narrative interviewing" methods and includes detailed interview transcripts (Niemi 2018a), it is argued to support the purposes of this narrative study on experiences and perspectives. As this study also relies on solely interview transcripts and one interview of each participant, the researcher for this study considers the limitations of the data set and practises "interpretive humility" (Smith 2016, 213). That is, the researcher balances between description and interpretation during the analysis process.

Smith (2016, 211) has also described how there are limitations in "identifying actual stories for analysis". Whereas this study has strived to

identify and include all big and small stories, it is perhaps impossible to identify and include all stories within individual participant narratives. As the stories are collected from focus group interviews, some stories were co-narrated and the ownership of stories was thus an issue. In addition, using narratives and a typology of narratives involves a certain level of abstraction, which could be seen as both a strength and weakness of this narrative study.

7.4   Considerations for future research

Multidisciplinary approaches, hybrid methods and longitudinal research have been suggested to help continue develop this field of studies (Kim 2001). Ward & Geeraert (2016, 102) have proposed for researchers to move towards "more longitudinal and multi-group studies, both within and across cultures, along with new conceptual approaches". Indeed, the future challenges of research on intercultural adaptation seem to revolve around ironically more communication between different disciplines and the integration of different theoretical frameworks, constructs and methodologies (Piller 2011).

However, the task of integrating research related to adaptation will be a massive undertaking. Intercultural researchers are to traverse different fields of research and explore different research perspectives, tools and strategies. For the further development of adaptation theories and models, intercultural researchers could borrow from pioneering research on creativity, identity and agency within the social sciences as well as studies on beliefs and motivation within psychology suggest possibilities. Whereas the nature of constant change within contemporary society poses an entirely different set of challenges for studies on interculturality. Developmental studies in the future of education and work have delved into different system theories (such as complexity theory and quantum theory) in order to tackle the complexity, diversity and uncertainty which characterises contemporary society and culture.

Within the higher education context, further work in intercultural research is required as Trahar (2013a, 301) points to how "the university is a space within

which the multi-layered complexities of a variety of values, cultures and academic traditions can be illuminated and critiqued". Hence more intercultural research on postgraduate international students could provide insight on the nature of professional intercultural interactions and diverse work environments. Future research within the local context could also delve deeper into the Jyväskylä University environment and the experiences of university staff, so as to explore the interaction between different environmental factors involved in creating an intercultural teaching and learning environment. Future projects could also include both host university and international student perspectives and incorporate elements of intervention. Trahar (2013a, 307) suggests the use of "collective biography" including both teachers and students so as to examine and further develop learning within the university context. More "empirically tested interventions" could be implemented (Smith & Khawaja 2011, 710).

Further in-depth qualitative studies on the personal experiences and motivations of different adapting individuals in different host environments could give us more insight into the often neglected affective dimension of the adaptation process. Recent empirical research on achievement emotions and the motivational process also point to how non-empirical methods could better capture the individual's experience of motivation (Pekrun 2006; Hirvonen, Torppa, Nurmi, Eklund & Ahonen, 2016).

Consistent with the literature, the results of this study were encouraging and seem to support the use of narrative methods for research on interculturality. Narrative research methods have notably been described to "imagine new possibilities" (Daiute 2011, 335). All in all, narrative methodology provided both structure and flexibility for an interdisciplinary study on a convoluted topic and provided important theoretical and ethical guidelines for research on personal stories and experiences.

8 CONCLUSION

> In order to do this, one needs first to understand Self. Then the Change will be Sincere. Then there will be Good Faith. With Sincerity and Good Faith, and once the True is distinguished from the False, all human beings are capable of Change. This is indeed their Supreme Fortune! This is the Tao. (I Ching or Book of Change)

Considering adaptation as a natural human ability, the variety of internal adaptation tools and strategies perhaps reflects our inherent adaptation potential, which although all possess, not all may use, master, or even discover in themselves. Kim eloquently describes this human potential for adaptation as "the remarkable human spirit and capacity for self-renewal" (2015, 10). Every individual thus has the potential to adapt and become intercultural. This is an encouraging notion, considering Tannen's (1986) declaration that "the fate of the earth depends on cross-cultural communication" (as cited in Piller 2011, 172).

On an ending note, commonalities between the journey of intercultural adaptation and the journey of research itself were observed. The adapting individual could adopt the researcher's approach in order to navigate the adaptation journey. The adapting individual could approach the new, unfamiliar and unknown culture and environment as the subject under research. For the adaptive individual or researcher, self-reflexivity is key. Piller (2011, 171) proposes Socrates' motto to "Know Thyself", because "in order to understand others, we need to understand ourselves". After all, what the outward bound journey into the unknown Other both demands and offers is in fact an inward bound journey into the Self:

> "We shall not cease from exploration
>
> And the end of all our exploring
>
> Will be to arrive where we started
>
> And know the place for the first time."
>
> (T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets)

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Questions from focus group discussions in data set used (Niemi, 2018a, 89-90)

Introduction:

Q: How do you manage your studies here at JYU? How would you describe your study experiences so far? What has gone well and what has been difficult? Why?

PQ: (build in knowledge about pre-questionnaire) Academic language (reading & writing), Academic shock, Academic freedom?

Q: How does it contrast from your previous experiences as a higher education student?

PQ: Did it help? Did it prepare? Did it complicate things?

Individual experiences at JYU:

Q: How do you approach such given assignments?

Q: Can you think of an example of an assignment you were pleased with… Why? Can you think of an example of an assignment you were disappointed with… Why?

PQ: Expectations of the lecturer (clear/vague) vs. expectations of the students, Assessment, Feedback?

Group work experiences at JYU:

Q: How do you approach such given assignments?

Q: Can you think of an example of an assignment you were pleased with… Why? Can you think of an example of an assignment you were disappointed with… Why?

PQ: Expectations of the lecturer (clear/vague) vs. expectations of the students, Level of skills - Intersecting? Hindering? Improving? Assessment, feedback?

Support measures and recommendations at JYU:

Q: To what extent have you been supported for your academic work here at JYU?

Q: Are you satisfied with the support you receive? Yes/No - why?

Q: Can you describe challenges, difficulties, beneficial aspects? Particular support?

PQ: This can be related to assignments as well as your work proceeding with your thesis (department, supervisor, other students, externally)?

PQ: Support courses such as for example academic reading and writing, several research-oriented courses, research seminars, supervisors?

Q: In what ways do you think you have developed as students academically here at?

Q: What would you recommend, what would you like to see more (supported)?

Q: What did you feel was the most important thing we talked about today and why?

Q: Would there anything you felt missing and would like to add?

Appendix 2 Template for individual participant transcript and field notes

PARTICIPANT X: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
Stage 1: Indwelling

Stage 2: Identifying the story

Highlight in different colours: Expectations, Reflections, Emotion talk and emotional talk,

Descriptions of the host university teaching and learning environment

Stage 3: Themes and thematic relationships
Note:
- Experiences of stress, adaptive change and learning/growth
- Experiences of adaptation challenges
- Other themes and thematic relationships

Units of analysis	Notes	Category(Who/What/When/Where)	Theme (Why/How/In what way/By what means)	Summary

PARTICIPANT X: NARRATIVE	
Stage 4: Identifying story structure - Focus on how the story is formed	Note: - Experiences of learning and growth - Appraisal of adaptation challenges - Described personal goals
Stage 5: Engaging in analytical dialogue – Focus on the story as a whole	1.　What narrative resources are used and how do they affect experiences? 2.　Who would the participant not tell the story to? 3.　To whom does the story connect the participant to? 4.　What type of story helps to provide the participant a sense of identity and how? How does the participant tell stories to explore who he or she might become? 5.　How does the researcher for this study respond to the story told and what does that say about the story itself? 6.　What does this story do for the participant? What does it do for and to the fellow interviewee and/or interviewer?

Appendix 3 Summaries of individual participant narratives

Participant 1: Summary

P1 is a second-year student from the MPEL programme and is a non-native English speaker. P1 has had almost a ten-year break from studies and has a BA and MA degree. P1 has had exchange experience in an ENL environment and a background in teacher education studies. P1's experience is depicted as a journey and describes getting lost. P1 describes managing expectations, the support of previous experiences and encountering differences. For P1, difficulty is considered as positive overall as it is an opportunity for learning. P1 describes time as the ultimate teacher. P1 also describes both challenges and potential in diversity and collaboration.

Participant 2: Summary

As a second-year student from the MPEL programme, P2 is a native English speaker with a Bachelor's degree. P2 had previous exchange experiences for a semester in an EFL environment. P2 has a background in teacher education. P2 describes an experience of vast differences between expectations and reality within the host environment. Expectations from both the host environment and international student are described. P2 also describes differences in learning preferences. P2 describes managing differences as a challenging and ongoing process. P2 is "still adapting". P2 describes emotions ranging from happiness, boredom, disappointment, shock to amusement. Previous academic and work experience would have supported P2's studies. Individual motivation and learning for oneself was P2's key lesson.

Participant 3: Summary

P3 is a first-year student from the EDUMA programme and a non-native English speaker with a BA Degree from a ENL environment. P3 has work experience as a teacher and majored in social studies. All in all, P3 describes a very positive experience. P3 highlights the role of time in adaptation. P3 expected to need time to adapt and anticipated the importance of a social life. P3 describes

learning as a personal journey. For P3, the experience of adjusting to the host learning environment has been "a good transformation" and greater frustration or stress leads to more learning or growth. Previous studies and experience have supported P3's current studies. P3 also describes the importance of individual responsibility and agency: "It's up to you". P3 expresses a range of emotions including enjoyment, love and excitement alongside shock, frustration and stress.

Participant 4: Summary

P4 is a first-year MPEL student and a non-native English speaker. P4 has a BA degree, a background in teacher education studies and work experience as a teacher. P4 describes the challenges experienced and shares on personal struggles with adapting to the host environment. P4 describes adaptation as a continuous, ongoing process: "So, it was a bit of a shock… and it still is in a way…" For P4, the differences encountered are beautiful but challenging. P4 expresses shock, frustration and disappointment with the differences between P4's prior expectations and actual experience. P4 experienced difficulty with independent learning as well as a lack of instruction, interaction and assessment. Time management, self-discipline and motivation were described as supporting factors.

Participant 5: Summary

P5 is a second-year MPEL student with a BA degree and is a non-native English speaker. P5 does not have a background in education. P5 shares an overall challenging but rewarding experience as someone with no prior experience in education and as a non-native English speaker. P5 expresses mixed emotions towards differences encountered, including appreciation, frustration and confusion. For P5, challenges also present opportunities. P5 experienced difficulty with the host environment's academic freedom and finding one's personal interest. Self-motivation, prior experience in education, language proficiency and academic skills were described as supporting factors. P5

highlights the role of time in the adaptation process. Regarding collaboration, P5 describes its complexity and learning potential. P5 expresses frustration with miscommunication however also gratitude for how collaboration supports one's own learning.

Participant 6: Summary

P6 is a first year EDUMA student and a non-native English speaker with a BA degree in teacher education studies. P6 has had international experience and taught physical education. P6 seeks challenges and "different ways of doing things". P6 describes the complexity of diversity and collaboration and considers it as "a nice challenge". Challenges are described as positive and necessary for learning and growth. Differences are described as interesting, as both a resource and challenge but manageable. P6 describes the diversity within the host environment as positive and an opportunity for exchange and learning. P6 describes how collaboration involves self-awareness, holding space and supporting others. For P6, learning and growth takes place in an environment involving discomfort/risk/challenge, instead of what is comfortable/safe/easy.

Participant 7: Summary

P7 is a first-year student in the MPEL programme and has a BA degree in English. P7 grew up in an English-speaking environment and does not have a background in education studies. P7 describes an overall positive experience and a positive attitude towards differences and challenges. P7 did not have much prior expectations, however P7 reflects on a personal preference for experiential learning. P7 describes initial shock and amusement with the freedom of choice within the host environment, however P7 has adjusted to it and enjoys it. P7 considers him/herself as adaptable: "I am that kind of person that learns from any environment." Language proficiency and academic skills were described as supporting factors. P7 enjoys collaborative work. Differences are considered positive and difficulty is a reward in itself. P7 shares on taking initiative and sharing responsibility as well as the potential of working in a group.

Participant 8: Summary

P8 is a second-year student from the EDUMA programme and a native English speaker. P8 has a BA degree in education studies and has had an internship experience in an EFL environment. P8 shares a personal learning journey of self-discovery, highlighting the role of individual responsibility. P8 expected to experience more difficulty with the study programme and expresses disappointment at the perceived ease experienced. P8 suggests the role of time in the adaptation process. P8 describes experiencing anxiety and panic at the beginning of the studies due to the extent of differences encountered. P8 experienced most difficulty with the staggered pace and lack of routine within the host environment. The differences (openness, collaborative learning and flexibility) observed in the host environment were however described as positive. P8 did not expect and expresses satisfaction with the student support services provided by the university.

Participant 9: Summary

P9 is a second-year student from the MPEL programme with a BA and MA degree. P9 has previous exchange experiences and a background in teacher education studies. P9 highlights the importance of considering individual student needs and shares an experience as someone whose expectations and personal interests were not catered for. P9 expresses disappointment as P9 expected more on higher education. P9 expresses boredom and being "demotivated". Doing a minor and getting involved in student organizations have been supporting factors. Prior intercultural experiences, language skills and peer support were also mentioned. P9's perspective on collaboration has changed in time and with experience, P9 now considers the challenges involved in collaborative work as valuable learning opportunities.

Participant 10: Summary

P10 is a second-year student in the MPEL programme with a MA degree and has had experience in education and educational research. P10 describes a positive approach to challenges and differences. P10 describes being a ship stowed at a big bay. P10 describes personal expectations to overcome fears, limitations and move out of comfort zones. A social support system, taking a semester off for an internship during the course of studies and prior work experience in education were described as supporting factors. P10 also describes the importance of self-reflection in independent learning and navigating one's personal interests. P10 expresses disappointment with the lack of collaborative projects and experiential learning. P10 expected more collaboration and better collaborative outcomes. P10 expected and anticipated more collaboration, conflict and problem-solving. Differences are seen as natural, positive and manageable. P10 also expresses disappointment and sadness at the lack of attention given to feedback within the host environment.

Participant 11: Summary

P11 is a second-year student from the EDUMA programme and a non-native English speaker with a BA degree in education studies. P11 had much expectations before arriving. Being able to study full-time was one supporting factor. Academic skills, academic experience and identifying personal interests were also important. P11 expresses frustration with adjusting to the emphasis on the non-empirical, the lack of feedback and academic discourse. P11 sees differences as both positive and negative. Cultural, national and interpersonal differences are seen as both a resource and challenge. For P11, collaborative work is a source of stress, which P11 describes as negative in general. P11 expects group members to be responsible and expresses anger and amusement at irresponsible behaviour. P11 expresses frustration with those who do not or cannot contribute due to weak language and academic skills. P11 expresses satisfaction and happiness with student support services provided.

Participant 12: Summary

P12 is a second year MPEL student and a non-native English speaker with a BA degree in education studies. P12 shares on the different challenges experienced as a non-native English speaker. P12 describes how diversity among international students offer learning opportunities. Differences are seen as positive – they are interesting, useful and inspiring. P12 experienced challenges with adjusting to the different assessment methods and emphasis on writing. P12 describes this as a "process" which takes time. P12 also had to adjust to academic English and different accents. P12 expresses frustration with other's inefficiency or carelessness, however collaborative learning was an "eye-opening experience". P12 expresses an appreciation for the balance between student autonomy and teacher guidance. P12 describes the overall accessibility of student support in the host environment.

Participant 13: Summary

P13 is a second-year student from the EDUMA programme and a native English speaker with a BA and background in humanities. P13 is an experienced secondary school teacher. P13 shares on the challenges experienced as a native English speaker and describes how all should contribute to group work regardless of differences in language skills. P13 expected better teaching skills among educators and educational researchers. P13 expected better communication with clearer instructions and expresses frustration with vague instructions for reflective writing assignments. P13 describes the process of adjusting citation styles in terms of building new knowledge. P13 describes how diversity creates challenges for the host environment to cater to individual students, however experiences frustration with the differences between BA and MA degree students. Previous academic experiences, taking initiative, doing independent research and self-reflection have been described as main supporting factors. The host environment is described as providing very supportive thesis supervision.

Participant 14: Summary

P14 is a first-year student from the MPEL programme with a BA degree. P14 is a native English speaker with a background in Mathematics and Science. P14 shares on the challenges experienced as someone unfamiliar with academic research and educational sciences. P14 describes how it is P14's first time engaging in studies in the humanities and social sciences. P14 experienced stress with writing as P14 did not expect writing and reflection to take so much time and effort. P14 reflects on how P14's personality and communication style also play a part. P14 expressed amusement with these difficulties. Having native language skills were described as a major supporting factor. P14 expresses empathy towards peers with language proficiency issues. The main differences encountered were described in terms of competitiveness. P14 highlights the role of time in adaptation. P14 expresses mixed feelings about either type of environment, to P14, the key is to strike a balance between competition and equity.

Participant 15: Summary

P15 is a first-year student from the MPEL programme and a non-native English speaker with a MA degree and two BA degrees. P15 is an experienced teacher and shares on prior academic experiences and highlights the importance of individual responsibility. P15 experienced challenges with adjusting to different assessment methods and studying in English. P15 describes him/herself as coping well. P15 describes how taking initiative to get feedback and feedback provided by the host environment are supporting factors. P15 expresses enjoyment when assignments are linked to personal interest, choice and positive group dynamics. P15 also expresses pride and enjoyment with successful collaboration. P15 however expresses mixed emotions towards differences and collaboration. P15 describes initial negative experiences with irresponsible group members although P15 still considers how group work presents learning opportunities. P15 describes the adaptation process as akin to being "stuck".

Participant 16: Summary

P16 is a first-year student from the MPEL programme and a non-native English speaker with a Bachelor's degree. P16 shares on an experience from the perspective of school leadership or management. P16 describes experiencing challenges with self-discipline and having to adjust to different assessment methods. Personal research interests were described as a major supporting factor. P16 experienced more anxiety and stress at the beginning of the studies and expresses frustration with learning "nothing" due to ineffective teaching. P16 describes the importance of teacher guidance. P16 expected more depth and longer duration for MA degree level courses. P16 did not experience difficulty with group work as P16 "loves" interacting with people from other cultures, learning from and bonding with others. P16 describes the importance of open communication, sharing your expectations, teamwork and equal task distribution. P16 describes thesis supervision as accessible, helpful and supportive, however being proactive in seeking support is just as important.