

# Customer Satisfaction in the Higher Education Industry

-Master Thesis-

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## **Abstract**

**Introduction:** Understanding customer satisfaction is a central objective of organizations. Besides, satisfaction is an indicator of how customers perceive the quality of an offered product or service. Relating to the literature, the customer satisfaction of international students has become increasingly important for higher educational institutions in recent years due to globalization and the development and distribution of the internet.

**Purpose:** Educational institutions must recognize the importance of satisfied international students and understand how satisfaction arises. Thus, this thesis seeks to explore the needs of international master students and knowledge about the indicators that are used to judge the service quality of educational units.

**Methodology:** A mixed-method approach was used to obtain primary data from international master students at Lund University in Sweden. A pre-quantitative self-completion questionnaire was distributed in order to obtain a sample for the qualitative interview. Qualitative interviews were conducted to explore how the satisfaction of international master students arises.

**Findings:** International master students base their expectations on personal recommendations, the university's marketing communication and image, and previous experiences. In order to judge the service quality of the educational unit, indicators related to the composition of the class, the teaching style and content are explored. Dissatisfied students cope with their dissatisfaction by integrating factors such as the environment, culture, and lifestyle to remain satisfied overall.

**Originality and Value:** This study contributes by investigating the perception of service quality related to the level of culture shock and by exploring the indicators used by international master students to judge educational service quality. The findings are of value to managers of higher educational institutions as well as academic literature, by examining the literature gap of how satisfaction arises in higher education.

**Keywords:** customer satisfaction, service quality, service marketing, international students, higher education, culture shock

## Acknowledgements

This master thesis represents the final accomplishment in order to graduate with a Master of Science in Globalization, Brands and Consumption from Lund University. The topic was chosen based on our own interest and curiosity regarding how international master students perceive educational service offerings against the background of the culture shock to which they might be exposed. Although the topic changed slightly during the process of writing, we enjoyed working on this thesis and exploring how customer satisfaction arises in higher education.

We acknowledge that the research outcome would not have been possible had we not worked together as a team.

First, we would like to thank the interviewees and respondents. This study would not have been possible without their voluntary participation. We especially appreciate that we gained respondents whom we did not know personally prior to this study. Your support, openness, time, and willingness to help us were vital for our work.

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### III. List of Abbreviations

e.g.	exempli gratia (lat.), for example
i.e.	id est (lat.), in other words
et al.	et alii (lat.), an others
etc.	et cetera (lat.), and so on
p.	page
pp.	pages

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

The study of customer satisfaction draw considerable attention from researchers in the early 1980s due to the structural change from a production- to a service-dominated economy in the 1970s in developed countries (Grönroos, 2007, pp. 23-24; Tajeddini, 2011). Several researchers have emphasized the importance of service marketing and satisfied customers, which demonstrates how customer satisfaction arises, how it is influenced, how it relates to service quality and how both concepts can be measured, evaluated and improved. Although this research field seems antiquated in 2015, the relevance of customer satisfaction has increased in the higher education sector in recent years due to the rising number of international students that pursue all or some of their studies in a foreign country (UKÄ Swedish Higher Education, 2014, p. 12). It has been estimated that, around the world, 4.4 million international students are pursuing academic programmes in a foreign country (UKÄ Swedish Higher Education, 2014, p. 12). According to the OECD, the USA, UK, Germany, France and Australia (the 'Big Five') receive almost half of all international students (Huang et al., 2014, 109; UKÄ Swedish Higher Education, 2014, p. 11). While countries such as Sweden, for instance, drew less than 0.5 per cent of the total number of international students globally, the number has risen in Sweden since the millennium, reaching 413,000 applications, the highest ever recorded for the autumn term, in 2013 (UKÄ Swedish Higher Education, 2014, p. 22). Although, the figure seems minor compared to that which the 'Big Five' must receive, the development is significant because being a host country yields economic advantages for each country. Being a host country leads to economic advantages through the receipt of tuition fees from international students and the hope of 'producing' educated and qualified workers who will remain in the country after graduating (Ward et al., 2003, p. 21; Huang et al., 2014, p. 109; UKÄ Swedish Higher Education, 2014, pp. 4-22). Hence, the higher education sector is gradually being acknowledged as a service industry with the aim of meeting students' needs, desires and expectations (Elliott & Shin, 2002). It has become particularly important for countries to keep tabs on the satisfaction of international students in order to attract more students and reap the resulting benefits.

## 1. Introduction

From a student's perspective, the growing interest in studying abroad is founded because students have learned the merits of studying abroad what translate into gaining academic, social, and cultural experiences and, eventually, an attractive job (Kehm, 2005; Goodman et al., 2007; Marcotte et al., 2007; Li & Bray, 2007; Teichler & Janson, 2007). Due to the rise of globalization, as well as the advent and distribution of the internet and technical devices (Harvey & Busher 1996; Bochner, 2003; Mai, 2005; Hemsely-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Ivy, 2008), people around the world are more connected to each other and encouraged to create and share content in the form of personal experiences and opinions to a broad and interested audience. Current international students and graduates act as amplifiers by creating and sharing their expectations and experiences of their time abroad and of the educational institution, thus spreading positive or negative information through word of mouth (Gensler et al., 2013; Labrecque et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Prospective students are able to gather information regarding the educational institution of interest from the institution's website and social media platforms, and by reaching out to current students and alumni's (Coates & Koerner, 1996; Mai, 2005; Oldfield & Baron, 2000). Consequently, educational institutions have become more market-oriented in order to fulfil the information needs of the target group regarding educational services, degrees, courses, leisure activities, rankings and many more (Hemsely-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Molesworth et al., 2009) in order to attract students, build and maintain a certain image, and differentiate themselves from other educational institutions (Hemsely-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Mai, 2005). Hence, prospective students face an increasing variety of degrees, which is leading to excessively demanding students (Ivy, 2008; Molesworth et al., 2009) and thus reinforces the 'competition' between educational institutions (Mai, 2005). Thus, the satisfaction among students regarding to the educational service offerings has become more important for educational institutions in recent years (Molesworth et al., 2009). Therefore, it has become crucial to track, maintain, and improve the educational service quality of the offered educational units (lessons) in order to understand what international students think and how they perceive this quality. To be able to gain these insights, educational institutions must identify which indicators can be used to judge and assess the perceived service quality. In many institutions, the perception of service quality is usually measured through over-

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all customer satisfaction by using evaluation surveys (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Bitner, 1990; Hill 1995; Rust et al., 1999). However, through these surveys, the answer possibilities are limited and mostly cover the indicators that companies think are important (Coates & Koerner, 1996). A number of researchers have emphasized the importance of customer-oriented measurement for judging customer satisfaction rather than a company-driven one. They also suggest focusing more on the indicators that customers use to judge service quality instead of assuming that the indicators that are predefined by the company are the same as the ones customers would use (Grönroos, 1984; Coates & Koerner, 1996; Oldfield & Baron, 2000). According to Rust et al. (1999), some authors have claimed that many customers who expressed satisfaction in customer satisfaction surveys still switched to competitor brands. However, little attention has been paid to the satisfaction of students and the indicators that students use to judge the quality of educational service units. Furthermore, there are no existing theoretical models in the literature that try to explain how customer satisfaction arises in the higher education industry. Moreover, international students are exposed to cultural differences that often lead to a culture shock. A culture shock is a process involving different positive and negative emotional reactions that people who are exposed to a foreign culture experience (Stewart & Leggat, 1998; Oberg, 1960, 2006; Bochner, 2003; Ward et al., 2003, pp. 4-5). Such a shock can have an impact on satisfaction. Thus, the satisfaction of international students and the understanding of how customer satisfaction arises have become increasingly important for organizations in the higher education sector.

### 1.2 Literature Review

Customer satisfaction is a phenomenon that describes the satisfaction of customers with a certain product or service after consumption has taken place. The construct of customer satisfaction is frequently used by organizations to understand how satisfied consumers are with offered services or products. This helps organizations to optimize their service quality and, thus, to focus its resources (time, money, employees, production process, and so on) more effectively as well as to strengthen relationships with its customers (Anderson et al., 1994). How customers judge service quality is mainly explained by the *disconfirmation theory*, which compares expectations and

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experience with regard to the quality of a service or product (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). In order to explain the relationship between customer satisfaction and perceived service quality, many researchers have constructed *theoretical models*, such as the *service quality model* by Grönroos (1984), *the GAP model* by Parasuraman et al. (1985), *the model of perceived service quality and satisfaction* by Spreng and Mackoy (1996) and *the service encounter model* by Bitner (1990). An overview of various models can be found in the study of Seth, Deshmukh and Vrat (2005). The researchers critically appraised various service quality models with the aim of reviewing the growth of literature and developing a comprehensive overview of existing models in their study (Seth et al., 2005). While these models try to explain how customer satisfaction arises, the *measurement of customer satisfaction* has been distinguished into a 'mechanistic' and a 'humanistic' approach (Anderson et al., 1994; Oliver et al., 1997). The mechanistic approach is equivalent to quantitative investigation methods (Rust et al., 1999) and, thus, based on the assessment of figures (profit, sales growth, turnover, etc.), ISO standards (Anderson et al., 1994; Solomon et al., 2006, p. 329), the total quality management, or the SERVEQUAL framework (Parasuraman et al., 1985; 1994; Anderson et al., 1994; Athiyaman, 1997; Mai, 2005). The humanistic approach is akin to qualitative investigation methods, as it places greater focus on customers as humans in order to understand their perceptions, feelings, beliefs and attitudes towards the offered products and services (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Anderson et al., 1994). As can be seen from the already-mentioned quantitative investigation methods, customer satisfaction is mainly measured through quantitative investigation, whereby respondents are asked to judge their perceptions of a given service on rating scales (Parasuraman et al., 1994). This procedure also takes place in assessing satisfaction among students (Carman, 1990). Nevertheless, it becomes questionable if the measurement frameworks take into account the indicators that are significant for evaluating service quality from the point of view of international students. Previous research has failed to address the issue of factors that are important to judge service quality from the viewpoint of international students in higher education institutions.

### 1.3 Research Purpose

Based on an existing literature review, the purpose of this study is to explore how customer satisfaction arises and thus what are the indicators that used by international students at Lund University to evaluate service quality of the offered service units. Thus, the following research questions were conceptualizes: **How does satisfaction arise in higher education for international students?**

### 1.4 Overview about the Thesis

This thesis is organized in five chapters: The **first chapter**, which is the present chapter, gives the reader an overview of the research territory, identifies a research niche and outlines the research aim. The **second chapter** explores how organizations in the higher education sector use *marketing as a business function* by considering each P of the marketing mix. This chapter also considers how service quality arises by explaining the *service evaluation process* based on the disconfirmation theory and the service evaluation model by Grönroos (1984). Next, we draw attention to the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. Last, we consider several factors that influence the perception of service quality, which has an impact on customer satisfaction. The **third chapter** of the thesis examines the research philosophy, the research approach and the research design, thus giving an overview of how the data is collected. According to the mixed-method approach used in the present study to draw a proper sample, the data analysis of the qualitative method is found in this chapter as well. The **fourth chapter** displays the data analysis and discussion of qualitative interviews. The **fifth chapter** reviews the findings and delivers implications regarding how the investigation of customer satisfaction in higher education could be carried out in order to obtain valuable insights about the perceived service quality. Furthermore, the findings deliver an improvement in the service evaluation model of Grönroos (1984) that could be used to provide a theoretical explanation of how customer satisfaction arises in higher education. Finally, the chapter ends with suggestions for further research as well as with the limitations of this study.

## **2. Theory**

The purpose of this chapter is to present a theoretical framework based on significant concepts and theories of customer satisfaction on existing literature. The theoretical framework bases on disciplines such as marketing, consumer research and behavior and sociology. The chapter is divided into three major parts. The first focuses on service marketing and argues for the usage of marketing in the field of higher education. The second part deals with customer satisfaction. The third part links the first and the second part by explaining how customer satisfaction is influenced.

### **2.1 Service Marketing**

Marketing is a business function with the idea of delivering a consistent company orientation through products or services based on the needs of the market to the aimed target group. Where companies offer services to its customers, the term 'service marketing' is used (Oliver et al., 1997; Kotler, 2002, p. 4). A market is roughly defined as a place where suppliers (business) and demanders (business and private customers) encounter and exchange value with each other (Marx, 1974; 1867, cited in Corrigan, 1997, pp. 34-35; Mankiw & Taylor, 2006, pp. 63-64). The importance of marketing has increased through the development from purely demand-driven markets to supply markets and increasingly saturated markets in developed countries (Mankiw & Taylor, 2006, p. 63). Meanwhile, the importance of service marketing has increased since the 1970s in developed countries, according to a structural change from production to a service-dominated economy (Oliver et al., 1997; Grönroos, 2007, pp. 23-24; Tajeddini, 2011). As a consequence of these developments, companies started to place customer orientation as the core of companies' competitiveness in order to gain market success and competitive advantages (Tajeddini, 2011). Thus, the marketing department faces the main challenge of recognizing changes in consumer behaviour and, thereby, in the needs, interests, and desires of market participants, in order to deliver suitable products to the right target group (Kotler, 1979; Tajeddini, 2011; Kotler & Armstrong, 2012, p. 6). In order to reach the overall company goals, companies must develop strategic and operative marketing strategies by using the marketing mix of the 4Ps: product (product or service), price (price), place (distribution), and promo-

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tion (communication; Kotler, 2002, p. 9; Grönroos, 2007, p. 24). By using the traditional marketing mix, companies are able to draw *attention* of customers on the companies' offerings, create an *interest* and a *desire* in the customer, and, finally, turn market participants into customers (Bitner, 1990; Hemsely-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Grönroos, 2007, p. 24; Kotler & Armstrong, 2012, p. 417) by meeting their needs and expectations (Elliott & Shin, 2002).

As mentioned above, the first P of the marketing mix is the *product*. The product policy of organizations embraces the design of the performance programme and, thus, the analysis, planning and implementation of changes regarding existing products and services (Kotabe, 1990). In organizations where the product policy consists of services, the product P is replaced by the term 'service'. The task of these organizations is it to analyse service performances and the consumer behaviour with the aim of making improvements. In contrast to physical products, services are understood as 'a process rather than a thing' (Lovelock, 1991, p. 13, cited in Tajeddini, 2011, p. 440). Even when some studies, for example, Cooper (1982) or Cooper and Kleinschmidt (1987, cited in Tajeddini, 2011), perceive no differences between products and services the common opinion in the literature is that services are distinct from products and characterised as *intangible*, *heterogeneous* and *inseparable* performances that cannot be counted, measured, stored, or tested in advance (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Haywood-Farmer, 1988; Bitner, 1990; Tajeddini, 2011). Furthermore, the service-providing process extends from the service order to the service production and service delivery; therefore, it can be imagined as an activity or a set of activities that aims to create and provide a solution to customers. The special thing about it is that consumers are involved in this process (Grönroos, 2007, p. 52; Tajeddini, 2011) through what resources such as labour, power, time, information, and knowledge are exchanged between the service provider and the customers. Since services are created by humans and through interaction between humans, the outcome and the quality are described as heterogenic (Grönroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1981; 1985; Brown & Schwartz, 1989; Bitner, 1990; Hill, 1995; Mai, 2005; Grönroos, 2007, pp. 53-55). In the higher education industry, service can be understood as the activity of delivering knowledge and information within a certain period (Marx,

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1867; 1974, cited in Corrigan, 1997, pp. 34–35; Grönroos, 2007, pp. 53-55). Thus, universities are seen here as service providers that deliver knowledge and information through educational units to students. Students are seen as customers and consumers, who partake in the service delivery process and gain service through educational courses with the outcome of expanding their knowledge and gaining a degree.

The *price* policy of a company determines the financial conditions pertaining to the products or services offered on the market (Bitner, 1990; Kotler, 2002; p. 9; Hemsely-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009). These conditions are part of the exchange value—i.e. value from the customer to the company (Marx, 1867; 1974, cited in Corrigan, 1997, pp. 34-35; Mankiw & Taylor, 2006, pp. 63-64)—and concern the actual price, discounts, bonuses and cash-back policy. With regard to educational institutions, the price is in the form of the tuition fees demanded from students.

The *promotion* or communication policy embraces activities that enable companies to communicate with internal and external stakeholders through online and offline communication, such as media advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, sponsoring, public relations, fairs, and events (Bitner, 1990; Kotler, 2002, p. 10; Hemsely-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009). In terms of higher education, organizations use online communication platforms (such as social media platforms, and web pages) and offline platforms (such as personal advice, education fairs, open days, and information brochures) to communicate necessary information about the product and price policy to current students, prospective students, alumni, employers, and people of interest (Kotler, 1979; Molesworth et al., 2009).

The *place* or the distribution policy usually bridges and overcomes the geographical distance (place and time) between the product or service provider and the customer through marketing agents, such as retailers or wholesalers (Kotabe, 1990). The services that organizations in the higher education sector offer are distributed where the university is located (Molesworth et al., 2009). For example, universities provide different subsidiaries either in the surroundings or in different cities so as to become more visible to students and offer the opportunity to utilise the services at more than

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one fixed location (Kotler, 1979). Furthermore, the internet has become a tool for universities to provide services online through web-based learning platforms, therefore, it is possible to offer the service irrespective of place and time (Wind, 2008).

At this point, it is important to mention that various researchers have recommend to extend the traditional marketing mix of service providers from four to five or seven Ps (Ivy, 2008; Kotler & Amstrong, 2012, p. 53). A further P in the marketing mix would be 'people' (Ivy, 2008). In the case of higher education, people might relate to the traditional promotion P because Kotler (1979), for example, allocates personal recommendation to communication via offline platforms (see promotion above). However, the importance of people implied in the form of current students and alumni, as in the case of this thesis, can be understood through the following consideration taken from the general marketing literature (Bitner, 1990; Ivy, 2008; Wymer et al., 2014, pp. 3-19). The marketing literature considers satisfied consumers as important factors because these customers possess a high probability of being repeat buyers and could lead to customer loyalty (Athiyaman, 1997), which reinforces recommendations among customers and their friends (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Mai, 2005; Hemsely-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Kotler & Armstrong, 2012, p. 21). In contrast, dissatisfied consumers lead to the spread of negative information, rejections from consumers, and the tendency to protect other consumers from consuming the product or service (Richins, 1983; Kotler & Armstrong, 2012, pp.152–156; see also 2.3.1). This means that satisfied international students will be more likely to return to the university, recommend it to friends and prospective students, and spread a good image of the university by displaying where he or she acquired a degree (e.g. on social media platforms or his/her CV).

In order to deliver a holistic understanding about how customer satisfaction arises, the following section delivers an overview of service quality, the service evaluation process, the role of expectation and experiences, the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, and factors that have a particular influence on international students.

### 2.2 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a term that is used to express the state of comfort by customers with the quality of a product or service (Athiyaman, 1997, p. 531; Brown & Schwartz, 1989). With reference to the structural changes from an industrial to a service economy and the rise in the service-marketing sector, the importance of service quality has increased in recent years (Grönroos, 2007, pp. 23-24; Tajeddini, 2011). **Service quality** is defined as 'The discrepancy between consumers' perceptions of services offered by a particular firm and their expectations about firms offering such services' (Parasuraman et al., 1985, pp. 41–50) and thus the result of how consumers judge the quality of services or products by comparing their **expectations** with their **experiences** (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998; Mai, 2005). However, the discrepancy between the expectations and experiences (also named perception) cannot simply be expressed and described by consumers. The reason for this difficulty is the characteristics of services (intangible, heterogeneous and inseparable; see 2.1) that make it difficult for companies and customers to evaluate the quality of services. Consumers are unable to judge quality according to physical appearance, which is possible with tangible products. Hence, consumers must rely on either previous experiences or other signals, such as marketing communication, price, recommendations, store appearance, rankings and service certifications, the company image, and more. Furthermore, these signals influence the expectations of customers (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Palmatier et al., 2006). The more promising these signals are, the higher the expectation might be (Grönroos, 1984; Bitner, 1990). The final opinion or judgement of a customer on the service quality will be based on the service evaluation process (see below 2.2.1). In the context of marketing, quality is often seen as depending on product attributes; hence, it is of particular importance for companies to identify the 'product attributes' or 'service quality attributes' on which service quality is judged (Rosen, 1974 and Hauser & Shugan, 1983, cited in Anderson et al., 1994).

#### 2.2.1 Service Evaluation Process

As mentioned above customers judge the quality of a certain service according to the *service evaluation process*. In this context, the term 'service evaluation process' is used to describe how consumers evaluate experienced service(s). The evaluation of

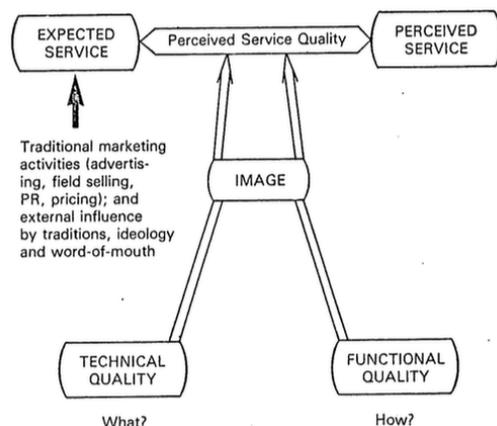
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the service quality takes place in the mind of the consumers (Haywood-Farmer, 1988) and is explained in the service marketing literature through the *disconfirmation theory* (Oliver et al., 1997). Disconfirmation is a psychological construct that describes the subjective discrepancy between an *expectation* and the *perceived performance* (also named *experience*) of a service (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Hill, 1995; Athiyaman, 1997; Mai, 2005; Solomon et al., 2006, p. 329). Expectations are defined as wants or ideal standards that customers have *before* they use a service and that are build up on either previous experiences or external signals (see above 2.2; Grönroos, 1984; Bitner, 1990; Parasuraman, et al., 1994; Hill, 1995; Mai, 2005). Thus, expectations are like reference points in the mind of consumers, through which consumers are able to believe what the service provider should offer and what they can expect from the service(s) (Grönroos, 1984; Parasuraman, 1985; 1994; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996; Kotler, 2002, p. 94). Experiences are the encounter with a service. The disconfirmation theory underlies the assumption that consumers will be satisfied or dissatisfied after comparison between the prior expectations from and the experiences of the perceived service or product (Brown & Schwartz, 1989; Bitner, 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992). If the performance is lower than the expectations have been, negative disconfirmation (dissatisfaction) occurs (Oliver et al., 1997). This takes place when a company, for instance, overpromises offered services that cannot be fulfilled (Grönroos, 2007, pp. 304, 314). Positive disconfirmation occurs if the performance is higher or matches the expectations, so that satisfaction occurs (Bitner, 1990; Hille, 1995; Athiyaman, 1997). Through disconfirmation, consumers are able to build attitudes towards the offered service or product, which helps them to judge the service and, thus, perceive the service quality as positive or negative (Oliver, 1980; Bitner, 1990; Athiyaman, 1997; Mai, 2005). The perceived service quality and the satisfaction of customers can change over time (Anderson et al., 1994; Oldfield & Baron, 2000). Today's needs might be different from tomorrow's requirements; thus, the perceived service quality or satisfaction with a service might only be a snapshot of the moment (Mai, 2005; Tajeddini, 2011). In order to visualize how consumers disconfirm service quality, we propose the theoretical **service quality model** developed by Grönroos (1984). The model was developed and tested in 1981 on a sample consisting of a Swedish service firm's executives. As Figure 1 illustrated, customers perceive service quality based on two

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dimensions: the **'technical or outcome dimension'** and the **'functional or process-related concept'** (Grönroos, 2007, p. 73). While the former, the 'technical dimension', refers to *what* the customers get from the service process, the latter, the functional dimension, refers to *how* the customers receive and experience the service process. Only through the combination of both components are customers able to judge and assess service quality and thus become satisfied or dissatisfied. In addition to these two factors, Rust and Oliver (1994) discussed the need for a third additional dimension—the 'environment of the service encounter', or the *where* dimension (Rust & Oliver, 1994, cited in Grönroos, 2007, p. 75). This idea, however, has been discarded by Grönroos (2007) because the where dimension is already included in the functional quality dimension and influences how customers perceive the service process. However, in the present case of 'how international students perceive the service quality of the educational institution', the importance of the third dimension may be debatable. This could be because if the *where*, the environment, influences the outcome of the functional quality, the level of satisfaction (dis-/satisfaction) with the environment might have a negative or positive impact on the service-delivering process. It might mean that dissatisfaction over the environment, based on a high level of culture shock (emotion and mood), might affect the functional quality perception and, thus, value or devalue the service. A further component that might influence the service quality judgement of consumers is the company's **image**. Consumers will initially judge the service quality as higher when the image is perceived as positive, or lower when the perceived company image is negative.

**Figure 1: Service Quality Model – Grönroos (1984)**



Source: Grönroos (1984, p. 40)

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### 2.2.2 Relationship between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

According to the disconfirmation theory and the 'service quality model', customer satisfaction arises through the discrepancy between the expectation and perception of a service and is, therefore, the result of the service quality evaluation (Fornell et al., 1992; Anderson, 1994; Spreng & Mackoy 1996; Athiyaman, 1997). This relationship can be expressed through the following equation: Satisfaction = (Expectation – Expectation) (Athiyaman, 1997; Oliver et al., 1997). This relationship furthermore developed to the following equations and visualizes the relationship between customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction and the perceived service quality. If the expectations and experiences match at least customer loyalty arises.

$$\text{Satisfaction} = (\text{Experiences} > \text{Expectation})$$

$$\text{Loyalty} = (\text{Experiences} = \text{Expectation})$$

$$\text{Dissatisfaction} = (\text{Experiences} < \text{Expectation})$$

These equations can be connected to the GAP theory, developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985), and by Brown and Schwartz (1989). The GAP theory is used to reveal a positive or negative gap, or disconfirmation between expectations and experience (Grönroos, 1982, 1984; Parasuraman et al. 1985; Brown & Schwartz, 1989). According to this view on the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality might be seen as interchangeable (Anderson et al., 1994; Iacobucci et al., 1995). Whether service quality and customer satisfaction can be understood as one or two constructs has been widely debated in the literature. According to Iacobucci et al. (1995), researchers such as Oliver (1980, 1986), Bitner and Hubbert (1994), Bolton and Drew (1994), and Grönroos (1993), to only mention a few, have argued for a distinction between service quality and customer satisfaction, and recommend considering service quality as a factor that affects customer satisfaction (Taylor & Baker, 1994). This can be explained because a high level of perceived service quality does not necessarily lead to satisfaction and a low level of perceived service quality does not automatically lead to dissatisfied customers. According to Iacobucci et al. (1995), whether service quality and customer satisfaction is seen as a single or distinguished entity depends on the researchers' perspective and opinion (Iacobucci et al., 1995).

### 2.3 Influencing Factors on Customer Satisfaction

Although customer satisfaction is understood as the discrepancy between the customer's expectation and experience (perception), various factors have an influence on expectation and experience along the service-providing process and, thus, on satisfaction. In the following, we will provide a brief overview of influencing factors based on the existing literature. In order to present a structured overview, the influencing factors were grouped into **external, internal and independent factors**, according to the stimulus-response paradigm (Arora, 1982). The stimulus-response paradigm is a model that helps explain the response of humans based on a given stimulus (Arora, 1982; Kotler & Armstrong, 2012, pp. 134-135). Here, external factors such as company communication, image (Grönroos, 2007, p. 77), personal recommendations through word of mouth (Bitner, 1990; Palmatier et al., 2006), price, process, and employee appearance (Anderson et al., 1994), are communicated and might have an impact on the expectation, experience and internal factor of the respondents. Based on these aspects, the respondent reacts through high or low expectations. The internal factor entails aspects that are influenced by external factors but appear within the customer, such as needs, motivation (Solomon et al., 2006, pp. 90-96), emotions, and mood (Liljander & Strandvik, 1997; Mattila & Enz, 2002; Grönroos, 2007, p. 82). The independent factor consists of time because, in the course of time, needs, values, beliefs, demands, and so forth might change (Mai, 2005; Tajeddini, 2011; Kotler & Armstrong, 2014, p. 6). In the following, we will now consider the most important external factors that have impacts on one's expectations, followed by the internal factor of motivation that affect expectations as well as the internal factors of emotion and mood that influence experiences.

#### 2.3.1 External Factors

**Company communication** (online and offline communication; see 2.1) is used by organizations in the higher education industry to inform all stakeholders about course offerings, research subjects, possibilities, opportunities, unique selling propositions, and more with the aim of fulfilling information needs, making promises, and displaying a certain image (Grönroos, 1984; Pimpa, 2003; Hemsely-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Molesworth et al., 2009). **Brand image or reputation** can be defined as the consum-

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ers' perception of a brand (Keller, 1993). It is a key factor in corporate brand management that comprises a variety of positive implications for companies (Fombrun & Gardberg, 2000). In higher education, the reputation of the programme reflects on the reputation of the university. Nowadays, reputation or image is a crucial factor for a university to stand out among the tough competition, especially in the arena of international universities (Aula & Tienari, 2011). Given the increasing number of international education (Hemsely-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Molesworth et al., 2009; UKÄ Swedish Higher Education, 2014, p. 12), reputation can help students simplify their university-selection process. Many studies imply that students are highly influenced by course suitability, the university's academic reputation, future job prospects, teaching quality and campus atmosphere (James, 2002b, Soutar and Turner, 2002, Lawrence, 2000). In addition, positive brand image occurs when the service meets customer expectations. Hence, image and reputation become key factors that affect the perspectives of student decisions on attending a specific university (Sevier, 1994; Berger & Wallingford, 1996;). Moreover, strong brand reputation or image is also considered to be a guarantee of quality (Balmer & Gray, 2003). Clow et al. (1997) supported this by implying that image precedes customer expectation by allowing customers to perceive an organization, which leads to the formation of expectations. Bolten (1989) suggests that expectation will be stronger if students believe that the university has a strong brand image and reputation.

A further external factor that influences student expectations with respect to an organisation is **word of mouth** (personal recommendations; James, 2002b). Bolton and Drew (1991) indicate that the most common sources of word of mouth are family members, friends, teachers and career advisors. This form of communication has a stronger impact on consumer decisions than other forms of communication (Day, 1971; Richins, 1983; Murray, 1991) and is a great influence in the service industry (Bristor, 1990; Murray & Schlachter, 1990) as well as on the student's decision-making process. In higher education, current or graduated students normally communicate brand reputation based on their own experiences, thus reinforcing the expectations of prospective students (Bolton & Drew, 1991; Harrison-Walker, 2001). It becomes a powerful source of information for students and a necessary tool for insti-

## 2. Theory

tutions in the higher education industry (Lang & Lawson, 2013). Hence, word of mouth of others' experience can directly affect customers' decisions and behaviour (Lovelock et al., 2001, pp. 12-23).

### 2.3.2 Internal Factors

**Motivation** is a psychological term that is used to explain consumer behaviour. Being motivated is the conclusion of an occurring or unsatisfied need (a desire of fulfilling biological or cognitive needs) that has to be satisfied through consumption (Kotler; 2002, p. 93; Solomon et al., 2006, pp. 90-96; Raab et al., 2010, p. 202). Thus, motivation is used to explain the willingness of a person to expend energy in order to fulfil unmet needs. In the context of expectations, motivation is considered as a driving factor for gathering and collecting information regarding the university of interest. Furthermore, the existing literature is increasingly focussed on trying to explain why students want to study abroad (Kim & Goldstein, 2005; Salisbury et al., 2009; Hackney et al., 2012). A number of studies argue that students have learned the advantages of what it means to be an international student because it reinforces intercultural competence (Zhang, 2000; Jianjun, 2012), a global understanding (Zhuang et al., 2015), self-development, self-esteem, creates new relationships with people from different backgrounds, and, finally, helps become a more attractive as job applicant (De Ville et al., 1996; Goodman et al., 2007). These aspirations of international students can be linked to the **human motivation** theory of Abraham Maslow (1943) and the achievement of **cultural capital** of Bourdieu (1979, 1984, cited in Corrigan, 1997, pp. 26-28). Maslow's theoretical concept categorizes consumer needs into five categories of needs: physiological, safety, belonging, achievement and esteems, and self-actualization. The theory assumes that people will demand a higher level of needs when the current level has been fulfilled (Maslow, 1943; Solomon et al., 2006, pp. 98-100). In other words, people will aspire to reach a higher category of needs as soon as the prior need is fulfilled. The theory cultural capital of Bourdieu (1984; 1979), assumes, individuals possess two kinds of capital: economic and cultural capital. While economic capital refers to property in terms of money or physical objects of value, cultural capital includes the possession of *time*, *money* and *education*. Through the increase of cultural capital people climb up the social class ladder and thus distinct

## 2. Theory

from others (Corrigan, 1997, pp. 26-28). In order to fulfil or maintain higher-level needs, people need to be motivated. Therefore, the higher the motivation to study abroad, the higher is the involvement (personal relevance; Arora, 1982; Solomon et al., 2006, p. 105) in the subject and, for example, in collecting information about different aspects (study possibilities, courses, countries, activities and more) in advance, which leads to higher expectations from the service (Solomon et al., 2006, p. 105; Tajeddini, 2011). Thus, based on the external factors (see. 2.3.1), international students are encouraged to gather information that is available through various sources, which generates higher motivation and heightened expectations from the educational institution.

Similar to motivation, **emotions** (also called affective, feelings or mental excitement) are psychological constructs, which are described as internal states that are experienced as pleasant or unpleasant by individuals (Plutchik, 1994; Izard, 2007; Oliver 1994). Although all humans experience emotions, the study of emotions is considered to be highly complex, with little census on meaning (Plutchik, 1994; Izard, 2007). How many emotions humans possess or experience is controversial in the literature. Plutchik (1994), for instance, suggests eight basic emotions—interest, joy/happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, and fear—that humans can express through their faces (Plutchik, 1994; Oliver et al., 1997). Izard (1997) proposes and argues for the following ten emotions: interest, pleasure, surprise, grief, rage, disgust, anxiety, contempt, feelings of guilt and shame (Turner, 2007, p. 4). Eckman (1999, pp. 45-60) suggests seven basic emotions that differ in only embarrassment and contempt from those of Plutchik (1994). Based on Grönroos (2007, p. 82), Oliver (1994), and Oliver, Rust and Varki (1997), the perception of services is also determined by *external factors*, such as emotions and mood. According to Grönroos (2007, p. 82), ‘...it is quite obvious that felt emotions, such as anger, depression, guilt or happiness, delight and hopefulness, somehow affect the pure cognitive perception of service processes’. With regard to this statement, taking the affective components—*depression* and *happiness*, for example—might mean that a negative or positive affective state of consumers influences the service quality somehow. This sheds some light on culture shock, which is the progress of different emotional reactions that people who are exposed to a cul-

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ture other than of their home country experience (Stewart & Leggat, 1998; Oberg, 1960; Bochner, 2003; Ward et al., 2003, pp. 4-5). These emotional reactions vary during one's time abroad between four or five stages of positive and negative emotional reactions, and are empirically evidenced (Oberg, 1960; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1962; Gaw, 1995; Mumford, 1998; Stewart & Leggat, 1998) and expressed through the *honeymoon, depression, adaptation and adjustment stages*<sup>1</sup> (Oberg, 1960; Dutton, 2012, pp. 95-118; Adler, 1975). Thus, the stage in what international students are in depends on the length of staying abroad and the ability to adapt the cultural differences. It has been investigated that these different stages of emotional well-being affect the level of satisfaction (Oberg 1960; Lundstede, 1963, cited in Arnold, 1967; Mumford, 1998; Oliver 1994; Gaw, 1995; Stewart & Leggat, 1998). This relationship between the level of satisfaction (vertical axis) and the adjustment of a new culture over time (horizontal axis) can be shown by Figure 2 (Lundstede, 1963, cited in Arnold, 1967, p. 55). The graphic shows that the longer one is exposed to a foreign culture the better he or she can adapt to the culture through what the level of satisfaction increases. In terms of the perception of service quality, this might mean that students perceive services during the depression stage to be less positive than during the honeymoon or adaptation stage. According to Grönroos (2007, p. 82), little attention has been paid to the relation between positive and negative mood emotional constitution and the effect of service quality in contemporary research (Grönroos, 2007, p. 82; Oliver, 1994), even though researchers such as Bechara et al. (2000), Bower, (1991), Clore et al. (1994), Fredrickson, (2000), Lerner & Keltner (2000), and Izard (2007) confirm that emotions influence the human decision-making process. Only a few minor studies, such as the study by Liljander and Strandvik in 1997 or by Mattila and Enz in 2002, have investigated the role of the affective component on service quality perception (Liljander & Strandvik, 1997; Mattila & Enz, 2002; Grönroos, 2007, p. 82). With respect to the study entitled 'Emotions in Service Satisfaction' from the Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration, Helsinki, Finland by Liljander and Strandvik (1997), it has been investigated that positive emotions might have a weaker

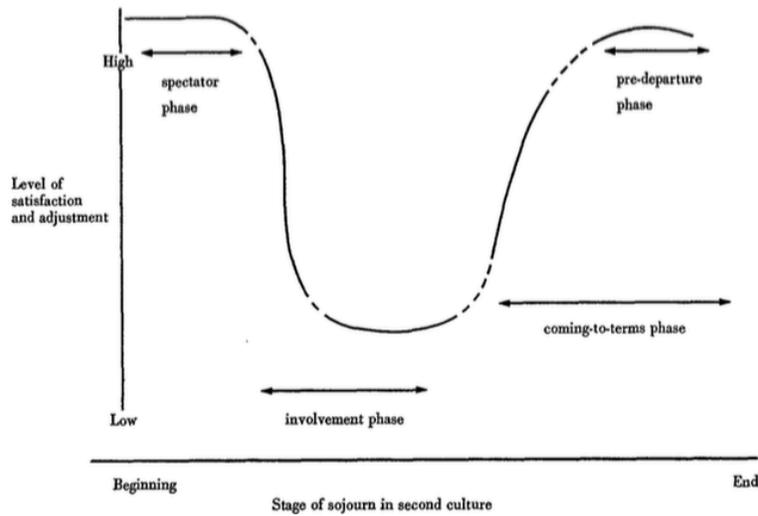
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<sup>1</sup> The 1. honeymoon, 2. depression, 3. adaptation and 4. adjustment stages are named as 1. spectator phase, 2. involvement phase, 3. coming to terms phase and 4. pre- departure phase on Figure 3. Although, the labels are different in names the principle remains as the same.

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effect on service quality satisfaction than negative emotions (Liljander & Strandvik, 1997). However, it is questionable how the level of culture shock in what international students might be exposed to affects perceptions of service quality and satisfaction regarding educational units.

**Figure 2: Culture Shock Curve – Lundstede (1963)**



Source: Arnold (1967, p. 55) after Lundstedt (1963)

### 3. Methodology

In this section, we will argue in favour of the methodology that was used to produce the requisite knowledge to finally approach the research questions. First, we will emphasize the case of this analysis and the object of study. Second, we will highlight the research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, and research design. In order to gain valuable insights into the research question, this study is considered as a case study research carried out at Lund University in Sweden<sup>2</sup>. The study focused on international master degree students at Lund University. Here, international students are understood as students that are admitted by a country other than their own for the purpose of acquiring a degree at a higher education institution (OECD, 2003).

#### 3.1 Research Philosophy

Before the decision of applying a quantitative and/or a qualitative research method can be made, the researchers' views on knowledge and reality must be expressed (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p. 17). We will clarify our ontological and epistemological assumptions below.

##### 3.1.1 Ontological Assumptions

Ontology belongs to assumptions about the nature of reality. The debate is between realism and relativism, and holds views regarding several variations of realism. The traditional assumption highlights that the world is concrete and external, which is why phenomena can only be investigated through observations (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p. 17). The ontological position is referred to as **constructivism** and **objectivism** (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 20). *Constructivism* states that social actors complement social phenomena and the meaning of sharing experiences and language (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 21; Alvesson & Sköldbörg, 2009, p. 23). According to Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 22), individuals use categories to understand and make sense of the world; thus, meanings are created in and through social interaction. *Objectivism* holds the position that a social phenomenon is confronted through external facts,

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<sup>2</sup>Lund University is a University in Sweden that was founded in 1666. It has a long history with almost 350 years of teaching. It engages with students around 47,000 and a position of excellence in international teaching and research. It is consistently ranked as one of the world's top 100 universities (Lund University, 2015).

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which is why individuals use categories such as objects in order to differentiate and distinguish from other social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 21). Discussions about the nature of reality involve further debates on realism and relativism. While realism assumes a single 'truth' that can be revealed through existing facts, relativism assumes that there are many 'truths' which depend on the different viewpoints of the researchers (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p. 19). With regard to the present study, we assume a reality that can be apparent. This is because customer satisfaction and service quality has been investigated sufficiently and evidence has shown that these constructs are existing phenomena. Thereby, we hold an objectivist view by looking at individuals and the holistic phenomenon. The reality of how international students' judge service quality can be understood by investigating what indicators international students use to judge service quality and results in customer satisfaction. In order to gain a holistic picture, we seek to understand expectations and perceptions in terms of the experience of each respondent by adopting a new approach in this field.

#### 3.1.2 Epistemological Assumption

Epistemology has been defined broadly as the study of knowledge (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 15) and focuses on examining the physical and social worlds in different ways (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p.21). The main issue here is whether the social world can or should be investigated according to sample procedures, principles and ethos (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 15). With reference to Easterby-Smith et al. (2013), the debate among social scientists focuses on the two contrasting views of **positivism** and **social constructionism** (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 15; Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, pp. 21-22). The *positivists* assume that the social world exists externally and support the applicability of methods of natural science in order to study the social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 15; Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, pp. 21-22). Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 15) suggest seeing the concept in five key sub-concepts:

1. The phenomena and the knowledge confirmed by the senses
2. The aim of the theory is to generate hypotheses that can be tested in order to allow explanations
3. Through the gathering of facts, knowledge is provided

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4. The analysis must be conducted in a value-free and objective way
5. Normative and scientific statements and beliefs are clearly distinct

*Social constructionism*, in contrast, assumes that reality is not objective and exterior, but a social construct. It is used to focus on how individuals make sense of the world, particularly by using the medium of language to share their experiences with others (Habermas, 1970; Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 15; Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p. 23). An additional philosophical view that has been adopted over the last two decades is **critical realism**. According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2013, p. 29), critical realism delivers a compromise position between the view of constructionism and positivism, thus *bridging the gap between quantitative and qualitative studies*. The realist ontology, for instance, recognizes social conditions as a factor, noting that social life is constructed by the actions of individuals and has an external impact on individuals (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p. 29). Structured ontology is a key feature of critical realism and is differentiated along three levels, which correspond to relativism, internal relativism, and realism—in other words, the empirical domain, the actual and the real. The empirical domain, in this sense, encompasses the experiences and perceptions that individuals have (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 39). The actual is used to embrace events and actions that take place, while the real comprises causal power and mechanisms that have consequences for society but cannot be discovered directly (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p. 29).

In this study, we will respect the assumption of positivism and, more particularly, critical realism—especially on the empirical domain—because customer satisfaction in higher educational institutions deals with satisfaction from the respondent's point of view—thus, experience and perception of the object of interest in a certain way. Since the present study uses a mixed-method approach, critical realism bridges the qualitative and quantitative research approach (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p. 29). Through this focus, we will generate knowledge of experiences and expectations.

#### 3.2 Research Approach and Strategy

A research approach represents the relationship between theory and research through the consideration of an inductive and deductive approach (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 3; Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 11). Whether an inductive or a deductive approach is applied in the research study depends on the chosen research strategy. According to Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 26, p. 614), the two main research strategies are **quantitative** and **qualitative**. A *quantitative research strategy* emphasizes the quantification of data collection and analysis, and embraces a deductive approach. A deductive approach is the most common view of the relationship between theory and research. Based on what is already known (theory), the researcher forms hypotheses and translates them into operational terms that are then subjected to empirical scrutiny (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 11). On the other hand, a *qualitative research strategy* is considered as the collection and analysis of data that emphasizes words rather than figures and predominantly embraces an inductive rather than a deductive approach (Alvesson, 2003; Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 27, 614). An inductive approach is the view of the association between theory and data, whereby theory is generated from the research (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 3; Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 386). Even when these research strategies are different in nature, it becomes possible to combine both approaches by using a **mixed-method research strategy**. The combination of a quantitative and a qualitative study can be advantageous because not everything that needs to be known can be accessed by a single method (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 28, 628).

In the present study, a pre-qualitative, **self-completing online survey** and an **in-depth one-to-one interview** are combined and carried out to approach the research question. The purpose of conducting a quantitative online survey was to draw a sample from the population of interest for the qualitative interview (Alvesson, 2003; Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 628), because we are interested in interviewing international master students whom we do not personally know and who are not enrolled in the same programme, in order to gain comprehensive and reliable insights with which to approach the research question. A further advantage of using this approach relies on the assumption that international master students are affected by a culture shock that

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might affect their satisfaction. The qualitative survey helped us gain a sample that differs in levels of culture shock. By using a qualitative in-depth interview method, we were able to glean key data from the respondents and discover how they judge service quality and how satisfaction arises. The nature of qualitative interviews enabled us to focus on what the respondents want tell. Furthermore, through a loosely structured interview, we were able to adapt during the interview by asking individual questions (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 464-477).

Given the choice of a mixed-method research strategy, it would not be sufficient to see the research approach as contrasting alternatives for the present study but rather as a combination. Through the use of a mixed-method approach, the present study considers an **abductive approach**. According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009), an abductive approach is a combination of a deductive and an inductive approach, whereby a single case is interpreted based on hypothetical statements. The approach starts as a deductive approach from an empirical basis but, instead of rejecting the hypothesis, the approach develops, adjusts, and refines existing theory through the findings of underlying insights and patterns (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, pp. 4-5). The theory for our study is based on the customer satisfaction and culture shock theory. The customer satisfaction theory enabled us to conceptualize a framework that further helped us to focus on the human behaviour of students, their expectations from and their perception of the received services. The culture shock theory helped us understand how people feel and experience their time abroad, thus allowing us to consider the personal well-being of students while conducting the study. This investigation will result in compelling evidence for our assumptions and, thus, contribute to the practices of higher educational organizations and existing literature in the field of customer satisfaction (Whetten, 1989).

#### 3.3 Research Design

A research design is a blueprint or framework of **how the study will be executed** and **how the data analysis** will be conducted (Malhotra, 2009, p. 70; Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p. 38). It is crucial for an efficient and successful execution (Maxwell, 2013, p. 2). The research design of the present study refers to a **case study design**.

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A case study design is used to explore one particular case (Eisenhardt, 1989; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p. 54), such as an organization, a person, a location, or a single event (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 60). In the present study, we will focus on international students (person) at Lund University (organization; Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 60-62). Thus, the case study design gives us the opportunity to focus on a bounded situation. One might argue that almost every object of interest can be a case and that a case does not deliver enough insights to generalize the findings to a larger population of interest (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 60). However, Starke (1995) suggests that a case study must have the foremost aim of learning (Starke, 1995, cited in Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 60). Given this, we argue that the present case study is mainly used to understand and gain insights about a social phenomenon and to identify patterns in order to deliver an approach that will detect the research gap. According to the sequence of the quantitative and qualitative research method, a *sequencing research design* was used. A sequencing research design is used when one method precedes the other and both methods are equally important (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p. 61). Although the qualitative method required significantly more time and resources and the findings are mainly drawn from the qualitative data analysis than the quantitative study, we consider both methods as equally important in the present study. The reason for this is because the quantitative pre-study services as base for the following qualitative study. Furthermore, the research design for the qualitative and quantitative methods is considered a *cross-sectional design* because both methods are carried out more than once at a single point of time. This will be the case here, because the self-completing survey and the interview will help us obtain data from more than one respondent at a single point of time (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 53). According to the sequencing design, in the following, we will first present how the data was collected for the pre-quantitative method (see. 3.3.1) and later for the qualitative method (see. 3.3.2).

#### **3.3.1 Quantitative Pre- Study**

The aim of the quantitative pre- study was it to sample and cluster unknown international students from different majors at Lund University regarding their level of culture shock. In order to conduct a study to find insights about the population of interest (all

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master students) it was necessary to draw a sample and to develop a method that would conceptualize and measure the level of culture shock. It is crucial to **draw a sample of the interested population** because, given the vast amount of international master students and the limited time frame, we could not include each unit of the population in the study. In order to be able to *generalize* the findings to the population, our sample must be representative (Eisenhardt, 1989; Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 176). Given the problem that universities in Sweden are not allowed to ask students about their citizenship, it was not possible to obtain information about the total number of international students and their enrolment distribution at the University of Lund during the time of our study (source: personal interview with the International Desk at Lund University, 25 March 2015). Because of this lack of information, we were unable to draw a representative sample based on all students at the University of Lund (Malhotra, 2009, p. 339). Thus, a **framework was developed** to gain an understanding of how international students feel, behave, and think when exposed to a foreign culture (Ward et al., 2003, p. 21). This consideration is of particular importance because the (A) affective, (B) behavioural, and (C) cognitive components have an impact on people's satisfaction (Ward et al. 2003), which might be displayed in the service quality satisfaction of the educational institution. To measure the level of culture shock the *Socio-cultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS)* was applied. The scale was developed by Searle and Ward in the 1990 and comprises a 41-item scale (see Appendix Table 2) that focuses on measuring the *ABC components* of human behaviour. This scaling technique is a convenient instrument that allows adjusting the scale according to the characteristics of the sojourning sample. Hence, the SCAS was modified based on the research object for the present purpose and embraces 12 items (see Appendix Table 3) to classify the ABC components of the respondents. In order to make it easier for the respondents to respond to the questions, the questions were formulated from a personal perspective, such as 'I am...', 'I feel...', and so on. The scaling technique is considered as a non-comparison scaling technique because each object is scaled independently of the others in the stimuli set on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) strongly agree, (2) disagree, (3) disagree somewhat, (4) undefined, (5) agree somewhat, (6) agree, and (7) strongly agree (Matell & Jacoby, 1972; Cummins & Gullone, 2000; Malhotra; 2009, pp. 157, 274). The **final survey** contained 20 questions, 14 of

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which were used to obtain information regarding the level of culture shock. The remaining six are socio-cultural questions required to gain an understanding about the background as well as about whether the respondents are willing to partake in a further quantitative interview (the final survey can be found in the Appendix, see Figure 6 - 12). Before the quantitative data collection was carried out, the survey was pre-tested by two independent persons. The final survey was distributed between 4 April and 16 April 2015 through the Facebook pages 'International Students Lund' and 'International Desk Lund'. Hence, subscribers of both Facebook pages who were active and noticed the Facebook post during this time had the opportunity to be drawn from the population.

After completing the quantitative data collection, the **final data set** was transferred, **analysed** and saved in Microsoft Excel 2013. Responses were gathered from a total of 88 respondents, 77 of who fulfilled the questionnaire completely. The remaining 11 respondents had a high number of missing values and were excluded from the data set. In order to gain an understanding about the socio-demographical distribution and, more importantly, the number of international master students, a frequency analysis was conducted. According to the data analysis, 57 (74%) were female, 15 (19%) male, and five (7%) did not disclose their gender (see Figure 13). Furthermore, the frequency distribution made it clear that 53 (68.83%) of the respondents study at a master level, 18 (23.38%) at a bachelor level, and six (7.79%) at some other level (see Figure 14). In a further step, it was important to ensure that the master-level students were willing to partake in a further qualitative interview. The data revealed that 13 of the 53 (26%) master students would be willing and interested in participating in a further in-depth interview (see Figure 15). The 13 potential respondents were clustered into groups according to their level of culture shock. The values for the answers of each respondent were summed up ( $\Sigma$ ) to obtain the level of culture shock<sup>3</sup>. The

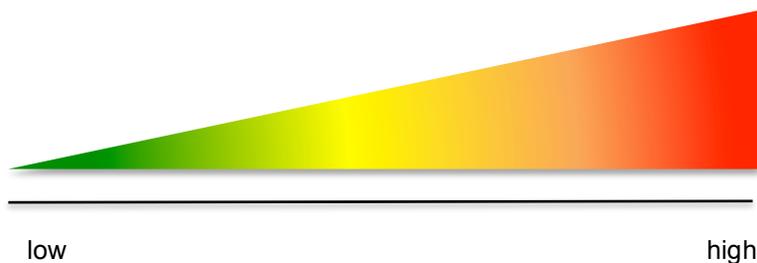
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<sup>3</sup>According to the nature of the seven-point Likert scale and the meaning of the questions, it was not possible to simply sum up the numbers for each question and each respondent because of the different meanings of the questions. It was particularly important to convert the questions so that the meaning of the rating scale would be the same. Thus, the conversation proceeded as follows. For instance, asking students to rate 'I have difficulties in making friends' results in a low value with the number one (strongly disagree) and a high value with the number seven (strongly agree). On the opposite end, the statement 'I think I understand the Swedish culture' implies a high value with one (strongly disagree) and a low value with seven (strongly agree). Table 4 gives an overview of the asked questions and the meaning for each of them.

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seven-point Likert scale and the amount of questions ensure that respondents can have a level of culture shock between 14 (minimum) and 98 (maximum). As is illustrated in Figure 3 the higher the value, the higher the level of culture shock.

**Figure 3: Range of Culture Shock**



Source: Own illustration

Table 6 represents an overview of the acquired respondents, the level of culture shock, whether they have lived abroad before starting a master degree at Lund University in Sweden, their nationality, and their age. As Table 6 shows, the level of culture shock varies between 36 and 80, with the average ( $\emptyset$ ) level of culture shock being about 52.85. Based on this information, four clusters were developed by calculating the modal value of 56 ( $n$  uneven =  $98 + (14/2)$ ) and allocating the respondents based on their personal level of culture shock (see Table 7). As can be seen from Table 7, in six out of 12 cases—i.e. in half of the sample—a higher level of culture shock is displayed (between 56.5 and 77). Hence, we can conclude that the risk of choosing students with the same level of culture shock would have presented a higher risk if students were chosen randomly without applying the quantitative sample method. However, the results of the level of culture shock and the cluster procedure must be treated with caution because this procedure was developed personally based on the literature. For the present case, however, our sampling procedure helped us acquire 14 possible respondents, who can be classified into four different groups. In order to gain insights from the conducted sample, all the respondents were contacted by a friendly email. In total, we acquired eight respondents from the four clusters (see Table 7 and 8).

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Thus, the sample for the qualitative interview is considered a non-probability and judgement sample, where the judgement of who might partake in the study relies on the researcher (Malhotra, 2009, pp. 344-347). The criteria are defined as follow: 1. master students, 2. willingness to partake on a further study and 3. different level of culture shock. Hence, every member of the population does not have the opportunity to participate here.

**Table 1: Mixed Method Research: Sample Overview**

	<b>Quantitative Method</b>	<b>Qualitative Method</b>
1. Target population	Male or female international master degree students Sampling unit: Enrolled at Lund University during the spring 2015 Extent: Sweden, Skåne Län; Date: April 08 to 15, 2015	Male or female international master degree students Sampling unit: Enrolled at Lund University during the spring 2015 Extent: Sweden, Skåne Län; Time: Date: April 18 to 21, 2015
2. Sample frame	* See above issue of counting international students	See Appendix Table 6
3. Sampling technique	Probability sampling, simple random sampling	Non- probability sampling, judgement sampling
4. Sample size	88	eight
5. Execution	Survey distribution through the following Facebook pages: International Desk Lund, International Students Lund University	Semi- structured qualitative interviews

Source: Own illustration

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#### 3.3.2 Qualitative Study

The **data collection** of the qualitative interview took the form of eight interviews between 18 April and 21 April 2015. Depending on how much the respondents were willing to disclose, the duration of the interviews varied between 10 minutes and 35 minutes. This discrepancy in the time interval is because some of the respondents found it disconcerting due to lack of previous interview experiences and because we did not know each other. Hence, the interview situation was unknown for some respondents what affects on the ability of the respondents to express information. Furthermore, all of the respondents hailed from different backgrounds and had different experiences with personal interviews. Although each interview was different in quality and length, it was possible to gain insights for approaching the research questions. In order to achieve an interview situation in which the respondents were able to answer, the *eight characteristics framework*—the ‘general university characteristics’ developed by Athiyaman (1997)—was applied as a rough guideline. According to Athiyaman (1997), by using the eight service characteristics of *academics, emphasis on teaching students well, availability of staff for student consultation, library service, computing facilities, class size, level and difficulty of subject content, and the student workload*, it becomes possible to approach the perceived service quality of students in the higher education industry (see Appendix Table 9). This interview guideline was first used to assist the interviewer during the interview. Instead of strictly following the questions, the interview guideline was used to keep the conversation with the respondents in a bounded situation, to possess background questions if the respondents were silent and shy in the interview situation as well as to ensure a similar interview structure for the other interviews. We asked open-ended questions involving ‘what, who, how, where, when and why’ (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p. 127).

In order to **analyse the data** from the qualitative method and to approach the research question, grounded theory and grounded analysis are used. Glaser and Strauss formulated grounded theory in 1967 (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 53) with the aim of enabling researchers to consider data through different perspectives. Grounded analysis is closely linked to the concept of grounded theory and is used to analyse the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Eisenhardt, 1989;

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Easterby-Smith, 2013, p. 166). In order to apply grounded analysis, the interview situation was recorded and transcribed. To analyse and identify patterns among the data, we first listened to the recorded interviews in order to become familiar with the material. In a next step, the spoken words were transcribed. In order to reach the aim of presenting a reliable and replicable data analysis (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 62) an example of the coding procedure is presented in the appendix (see – Example, Table 10) (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.55-69; Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 585-588).

#### **3.3.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of the Research Design**

Just as each research design has its advantages and disadvantages, so does this one. To ascertain its strengths and weaknesses, it is necessary to make the research design explicit (Maxwell, 2013, p. 4). While using a mixed-method approach has the advantage of combining different data collection methods and, thus, making up for the weaknesses of the other method, the combination also creates disadvantages for the researcher. On the one hand, a mixed-method approach consumes resources in terms of time and money because data collection, analysis and interpretation must be carried out at least twice. As time passes and the researcher acquires more knowledge and, thus, comes up with new ideas in a specific research area, the components of the research design, question, and area need to be modified and elaborated (reflexively). Whereas the data collection in quantitative methods follows a fixed structure, it becomes difficult or impossible to be reflexive and adopt the research design during the process; in contrast, the nature of qualitative research allows easy adaptation. Being reflexive can affect the quantitative approach in such a way that the entire study has to be changed. Although the mixed-method approach enables overcoming the weaknesses of one kind of research method, the combination bears the risk of losing resources (time and money) through being reflexive and as time passes (Maxwell, 2013, p. 4).

Moreover, the disadvantages seem to outweigh the advantages. It appears natural that, during a period of 10 weeks, the researcher will dig deeper into the research area and gain more knowledge, thus leading to an inevitable change in the research

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focus. Hence, we use a mixed-method approach in the present study because the application of a prior quantitative study will enable us to draw a sample of the population of interest for the follow-up qualitative study. Without this, the sample would probably be drawn randomly by asking people from the same programme because of the convenience of selecting international students whom we know personally. This procedure would have the disadvantage of getting a biased sample size within a homogenous group of people with probably similar opinions. Since we were unable to choose a representative sample of the population of interest (all international master students at Lund University), this procedure has the most advantages.

Even though the mixed-method approach has its strengths and weaknesses, the individual method brings further advantages and disadvantages. The quantitative self-completing online survey, as it is carried out in the present study, aims to investigate the level of culture shock as well as to draw a sample and cluster the respondents. This approach is solely an approach to control the effect of negative and positive emotions. We cannot control environmental variations or exactly measure the effect, but it gives us the reliability of knowing the approximate emotional stage of the respondents (Eisenhardt, 1989). Knowing this gives us the advantage of a roughly balanced sample size for the subsequent quantitative analysis, because emotions and mood are known to have an impact on customer satisfaction (Grönroos, 2007, p. 82).

In contrast to qualitative data collection, conducting data through a qualitative semi-structured one-to-one interview has several disadvantages—for example, the level of distance between the researcher and the respondent, the giving of answers adjusted to what the respondent thinks the researcher wants to hear in order to avoid being seen as odd. This issue cannot be fully controlled by the researcher but can be eliminated to some extent through the way in which the questions are asked. A further issue in obtaining qualitative data is that the data cannot be compared with each other because each interview situation is unique. Moreover, the answers given by the respondents regarding their cultural adjustment and satisfaction are only a snapshot of the moment (Mai, 2005). It might be that an event that occurred just before the interview led to either satisfaction or dissatisfaction (for instance, finding out about a good

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or bad grade). This research method is applied because the advantages outweigh the disadvantages in our case. An in-depth interview helps us glimpse into the mental world of the respondents and discover their expectations and experiences; thus, it helps understand what factors are used by international students to judge service quality in the course of a loosely structured interview (McCracken, 1988, pp. 9-12; Alvesson, 2003; Malhotra, 2009, pp. 138, 182) and to subsequently approach the research question in this study.

#### **3.3.4 Ethical Consideration**

According to the guidelines of ESMOAR (European Society for Opinion and Market Research, 1997; 2009), Bryman & Bell (2011, pp. 128-136), and Easterby-Smith et al. (2013, pp. 75-95), we have to deal with the following ethical considerations for the quantitative and qualitative research study:

1. The respondents are informed before the interview about the purpose of the study. The respondents will be informed about the nature of the data being collected, the reasons for processing, as well as what we will do with the data. In order to avoid misconceptions about the data subject, the respondents will have the opportunity to ask us questions.
2. The personal data (names, email addresses, phone numbers) of the respondents are exclusively used for the purpose of this study and anonymity will be maintained. It will not be possible to draw conclusions from the answers since the individuals are not identifiable. Each respondent will be assigned a random number from one to 13. Instead of names, we will use the numbers for the data interpretation. No third party will have access to the respondents' personal information.
3. The respondents will be informed that the interview is to be recorded.
4. We will not lead or force the respondents into any direction or in making statements they do not wish to make.
5. The research is constructed, carried out, and analysed with the goal of being trustworthy.

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The trustworthiness of qualitative research is often questioned by representatives of the positivist school because validity and reliability cannot be addressed as in naturalistic (quantitative) work. Consequently, several researchers have dealt with the issue of validity and reliability, and use different terminologies to differentiate themselves from the positivist viewpoint (Shenton, 2004). Guba (1981) for instance, proposed four distinctive criteria that should be considered in qualitative research to ensure trustworthiness (Guba, 1981, cited in Shenton, 2004; Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 43). According to Guba (1981), four criteria that are similar to the criteria of the positivists must be employed (Shenton, 2004; Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 43):

1. Credibility (in preference to internal validity)
2. Transferability (in preference to external validity and generalizability)
3. Dependability (in preference to reliability)
4. Conformability (in preference to objectivity)

With reference to the above-mentioned criteria, we will now argue in favour of the trustworthiness of the present *qualitative research study*: (1) **Credibility** is the extent to which the findings correspond to or are compatible with reality. Lincoln and Guba (1984, pp. 253-291) have argued that credibility is one of the most important factors in proving trustworthiness. Credibility is confirmed through the adaptation of well-established research methods, familiarity with the culture of participating organizations, random sampling, tactics to help ensure honesty in information when contributing data, iterative questioning, debriefing sessions between the researcher and superiors, qualification and experience of the researcher, and examination of previous research to frame the findings (Shenton, 2004). The present study is credible because the most widely used qualitative method, the applied interview (McCracken, 1988, pp. 9-12), is used in a setting that is familiar to the researchers. The sampling procedure enhanced the credibility of a randomly chosen sample in terms of different backgrounds, expectations and experiences since the sampled respondents belong to different departures and programmes, and was not known to the researchers prior to this. Furthermore, by recording and transcribing the interview situation (see Ap-

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pendix Table 10), we ensure honesty when conducting and analysing the obtained data. Moreover, through the length of this study over 10 weeks, we were able to engage deeply with existing literature. Thus, we gained knowledge in the research area, attended briefing sessions with the supervisor, and framed the investigation based on an established model. Although credibility presupposes a certain qualification and experience of the researcher, the purpose of this study was to gain a master degree at Lund University. Hence, we argue that this accomplishment is a reflection of the qualification but also one that helped us gain experience. (2) **Transferability** is the extent to which findings can be applied in other situations. Since the findings in qualitative research pertain to a small number of participants, transferability or external validity and, thus, conclusions relating to the external world, cannot be ensured as in the case of quantitative research (Shenton, 2004; Malhotra, 2009, pp. 222-223). However, the findings of the present study are applicable for institutions such as universities, schools, and language centres, which operate in the higher education industry and deal with students, particularly international students. Thus, transferability cannot be rejected but must be taken with caution until the findings have been applied to a number of institutions. (3) **Dependability** refers to reliability from the positivist point of view, where similar results are expected were the research repeated in the same context, using the same research method and the same participants (Guba 1981; Shenton, 2004). In this regard, the results of the present study must be considered with caution until more research completed under the same or similar circumstances confirm the findings of the present study. The research design of this study explains in detail how the data was obtained and analysed. We stand by the dependability of the present research while asserting that more research is necessary to confirm our findings. This would increase the transferability and credibility of the present study. (4) **Conformability** refers to objectivity of the present study. Many researchers have emphasized the importance of objectivity. But since the researcher constructs the research design in order to answer the research question, the design underlies inevitable human biases (Guba 1981; Shenton, 2004). But the research design, as described earlier, is like a blueprint or a guideline for the researcher as well as people of interest who want to redo the study, which leads to dependability, resulting in transferability and credibility; the data obtained by carrying out the research method ac-

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ording to the research design depends entirely on the respondents. In order to ensure conformability, we argue that the findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the respondent. As regards the ethical consideration, we have not led the respondents into a pre-conceived direction but allowed them the freedom to express their personal views. Furthermore, ensuring conformability highlights an advantage of using a qualitative interview: By using a semi-structured interview, we only set a boundary, giving the respondents the opportunity to answer freely regarding their own ideas, expectations, and experiences (Guba, 1981). Instead of presenting standardized answer possibilities, we argue for the conformability of the present study. Notably, the *quantitative pre-study* was conducted under the same conditions as the qualitative study, which justifies the trustworthiness of the quantitative pre-study as well.

## 4. Analysis

The following data analysis aims to gain a deeper understanding and knowledge about the needs and wants of international students towards the offered services. Thus the data analysis seeks to explore: (1) the sources through which respondents form their expectations before they about attend a programme at Lund University, (2) the indicators they use to judge the service quality, and (3) how international students cope with dissatisfaction.

### 4.1 Expectation

Through the interviews, we found that each respondent had different expectations about the master programme at Lund University before its commencement. The expectations sprang from the student's personal motivation to collect information about the university, the master programme, individual courses, and scholarships, and were reinforced through the *reputation of the university*, the *university communication*, *word of mouth* and *previous experiences*.

The three insights represent aspects regarding how expectations of service are formed.

#### Brand reputation:

The first finding, **brand reputation**, is that image or reputation can influence student expectations from a university. Brand image or reputation can represent the perception of customers (Keller, 1993). In higher education, the reputation of the programme can lead to the reputation of the university. Hence, a strong brand reputation can be a guarantee of quality for customers (Balmer & Gray, 2003). The following experiences show that the respondents form their expectations on the reputation of the university:

*Respondent 11 (female, 26, from Greek): "After I did my research, I noticed it is a very well-known university so I expected from the standard to be very high."*

*Respondent 10 (female, 23, from Vietnam): "I also was looking for the ranking...the ranking reflects the university as a whole so it seems like has a good culture of research so I thought it will be an ideal place."*

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As illustrated through these statements, it becomes obvious that the ranking or reputation of the university affected the respondents' decision in choosing a university. This can be linked to the perspective of student decisions to attend a university (Berger & Wallingford, 1996; Sevier, 1994). A university's reputation could help students to simplify their university-selection process. Prospective students expect good quality based on the university's ranking. The finding supports Clow et al. (1997), who argued that image precedes customer expectation, as it allows customers to perceive an organization, which leads to the formation of expectations. Ranking and reputation are considered part of the image for higher education institutions like universities. These findings support the argument of Grönroos (2007, p. 77), who emphasizes that image can influence expectations, experience, and the internal factor of customers. This is also linked to Bollen (1989), who argues that expectation will grow stronger if students believe that the university has a strong brand image and reputation.

#### Word of mouth:

The second finding, **word of mouth**, focuses on international students receiving information about the university through friends and family. This can be seen from the following interview expectancies:

*Respondent 11 (female, 26, from Greek): "I heard from other people in my country that comes here. Lund University, I chose it just by chance. I didn't know that Lund is in Sweden in the first place. I heard about it. I was just going through a scholarship application those one from Swedish institute. Then I saw the scholarship. Then I had to choose a University. And then the University I knew was Lund because I heard about it but I didn't know that it was in Sweden."*

*Respondent 4 (female, 23, from Germany): "Actually I got to know about the program from some friends that's taking their degree here... at first I talked to my friends and than later on I went to the website and read some references."*

According to this statement, the respondents based their decision on other's recommendations. This form of communication is known as word of mouth and involves person-to-person informal communication, about a brand, product, organisation or service, which occurs between people (Harrison-Walker, 2001). Bolton and Drew

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(1991) indicate that the most common source of information is word-of-mouth recommendations from family, friends, teachers, career advisors, and peers. This is moderately influential in the student's decision-making process and supports the argument that expectation can be affected by word of mouth (Bristor, 1990; Murray & Schlachter, 1990; Palmatier et al., 2006) and a powerful source of information for students (Lang & Lawson, 2013).

#### Marketing communication:

The third finding, **marketing communication**, also relates to the first insight of brand reputation or image.

*Respondent 10 (female, 23, from Vietnam): "I gathered information through the website... I looked at Facebook and I found people from the program in 2011 and they work now for UNICEF and it seems that they are doing well after the program"*

*Respondent 12 (female, 31, from Malaysia): "The description was perhaps too broad, you needed more specific information to the courses and how would they conducting the course, what is the type of assignment what they expect, maybe that would help for further students to evaluate if it is relevant for me... if I would knew more about what the program entails before I may had other decisions."*

*Respondent 4 (female, 23, from Germany): "Yeah, at first I talked to my friends and than later on I went to the website and read some references."*

As illustrated through these statements the marketing communication are a major influencer that can affect students' expectations from the university. Information is collected through the internet. Thus, it has become understandable that students perceive the brand as per the university's communication and the decision is made based on how the university promotes courses and informs students about these courses. This has an impact on the expectation of students regarding the quality of the university. The marketing communication as such can be considered as external factors that could influence the customer's internal factors, such as needs, motivation (Solomon et al., 2006, pp. 90-96), emotions, and mood (Liljander & Strandvik, 1997; Mattila & Enz, 2002; Grönroos, 2007, p. 304). This is because universities make

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promises regarding their service attributes through market communication like advertisements and publicity material. The quality, reliability, cost, and reputation conveyed through the image are also communicated through marketing communication (Grönroos, 2007, p. 82). Hence, the finding supports Ojasalo (2001), who implied that customers would form their expectations of a service by considering the promises made.

#### Personal Motivation:

The forth finding, **personal motivation** is that each individual has his or her own motivations to pursue higher education as an international student. The following statements show explanations of why the respondents choose Lund University:

*Respondent 13 (female, 22, from Korea): "I choose this program because of the courses. I expected that I can participate in many experiment lab courses. Like in Korea, we have lab courses every week with different topics. But here, I was a little bit disappointed with the system. Here, in one courses, they have lab courses only two to three times. I expected that they have really good system. That everyone can have more circumstances with more practical one."*

*Respondent 5 (female, 23, Czech/Vietnam): "The reason why I chose this program at Lund University was because I wanted to try a new type of education, other than from the Czech one, because the Czech society is quite homogeneous, the people they have a certain way of thinking and when you are in a class it is not too critical. The majority has a mainstream way of thinking, solving problems, and because I come from different cultures I have a Vietnamese background and I always struggle with that because I see things from at least two different perspective. I found the Scandinavian approaches very project based and practical and also this program is international it means that you have more views on a certain context. And I like that I can say whatever I want."*

According to the above statements, respondents' expectations are based on their own motivation. Their personal motivation is it to learn, improve, and gain new perspectives during studies abroad. These individuals expect good education that is different from the academic culture to which they are accustomed. This can be linked to the theory that unsatisfied needs can be satisfied through consumption (Kotler, 2002,

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p. 93; Solomon et al., 2006, pp. 90-96). This finding can be supported by the fact that most students pick up the advantages of studying abroad, such as intercultural competence (Jianjun, 2012; Zhang, 2000), understanding globalization (Hackney et al., 2012; Zhuang et al., 2015), self-development, self-esteem, creating new relationships with people from different backgrounds and becoming a good candidate with an edge in job markets (De Ville et al., 1996; Kehm, 2005; Goodman et al., 2007; Marcotte et al., 2007; Li & Bray, 2007; Teichler & Janson, 2007). Thus, the expectations are formed through the personal motivation and therefore through previous experiences.

#### 4.2 Perception

According to the data analysis, four indicators appeared as the key aspects on which educational service quality is judged. Thus the following data analysis illuminates how the respondents perceive the service quality.

##### Group dynamics:

The first indicator that is related to the perception of service quality is **group dynamics**. Group dynamics encourages individuals to feel integrated and accepted into a group and consists of the social integration through an appropriate class size, cultural diversity and a similar background among the students. The circumstance of being an international student in a foreign country leads students into the unknown situation of being a foreigner (Oberg, 1960; Bochner, 2003). Hence, international students judge group size and the level of internationality as important factors.

*Respondent 1 (Male, 23, from Austria): "The class size was good and I think there are lots of ambitious and driven people in the class..."*

*Respondent 10 (female, 23, from Vietnam): "perhaps the class size is a bit too small, we are 27 and we all have 4 different tracks, so if you are interested in China you take China, Japan and Korea, India and South Asian and South East Asia.... you need to have a bigger group it is difficult to have some discussion's because some people just want to talk about China some just about Korea there is kind of a imbalance"*

As can be seen from the previous statements, international students are keen to be integrated in a group or **class of an 'appropriate size'**. This aspiration can be linked

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to a desire to fulfil the social needs highlighted by Maslow (1943). After the primary, psychological and safety needs are fulfilled, the desire to become part of a group arises. International students hope to find themselves in an appropriate class context in terms of size as well as homogeneous interests and knowledge. This permission is especially important considering that the aim of international students is to gain knowledge and skills that contribute to the human aspiration of self-development and differentiation from others (Maslow, 1943; Baudrillard, 1968; 1990, cited in Corrigan, 1997, pp. 26-28). Hence, they are keen to be surrounded by an adequate number and type of students in order to fulfil this need and be satisfied. Furthermore, international students are highly interested in the amount of **internationality** (also known as cultural diversity).

*Respondent 1 (Male, 23, from Austria): "I was surprised by a number of Germans which are here. But otherwise, I think we have a very mix variety of international students from different countries. I like that. I think that is nice. I think you can talk to other students and work with them. You can gain different perspectives and insights on the same topic from different angle..."*

*Respondent 5 (female, 23, from Czech/Vietnam): "...this program is international it means that you have more views on a certain context. And I like that I can say whatever I want." "My program is quite a small program we have only 20 students from 12 different nationalities..."*

*Respondent 12 (female, 31, from Malaysia): "...interacting with people from all over the world is very positive in a way it has kind of my confidence to interact and share knowledge with other people..."*

As illustrated by the previous excerpts, the attribute of internationality entails that students are interested in being part of an international group in order to bond and create relationships with students from different backgrounds, exchange knowledge, and broaden their horizon by gaining cross-cultural awareness. This finding supports the motivation to become an international student, as described by Hackney et al. (2012) and Zhuang et al. (2015). These researchers focus on the motivation of becoming an international student to gain intercultural competence, bond with people from different

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nationalities, and increase personal development. Through the factor of internationality, students additionally acquire skills that make them more attractive on the labour market (De Ville et al., 1996; Kehm, 2005; Marcotte et al., 2007; Li & Bray, 2007). A further important aspect for international students in judging educational service quality is related to the number of students in a programme as well as with a **similar background** in terms of education. The following statements illustrate this need:

*Respondent 10 (female, 23, from Vietnam): “not everyone comes from Asian studies faculties as a background... basically everyone has to catch up at a certain point so the materials are very basic...there is that kind of unbalance among the students... you don't have really fruitful discussions with your classmates, they do not have much to say, in in that sense you are loosing out something compared to a program where everyone has the same background or similar interests than it would be more beneficial to your understanding, in that sense I think it is lacking in quality in that sense”*

*Respondent 5 (female, 23, from Czech/Vietnam): “All of my classmates are smart...the people are quite ambitious...I think that we are quite alike in terms of knowledge”*

The need of being surrounded by people with the same level of knowledge touches upon the interest of self-actualization, as introduced by Maslow (1943). According to Maslow, people seek to exploit their own potential to the highest possible level. Thus, in order to judge the education as positive and to remain satisfied, international students want to reach a higher level of education in order to increase their personal and professional expertise and competence. This is why it is important for international students to be surrounded by other students who possess a similar background and level of knowledge. The findings show that an unequal background and level of knowledge leads to dissatisfaction because the level of education is too low for students who were exposed to academics on a ‘higher level’ during their bachelor studies. On the other hand, students who come from different backgrounds and have a different level of knowledge become dissatisfied because the educational content is perceived as too difficult. Here, satisfaction springs from a balanced level of knowledge among students in a certain programme. The findings confirm the relationship between expectations and perception, because students who studied on a

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'higher level' earlier expect a more intensive experience; if they see a decrease instead, they experience dissatisfaction. Being integrated in an international class or group of an 'appropriate size' and people with a similar background or level of knowledge would fulfil the need of self-development and actualization among international students (Maslow, 1943).

##### Content:

The need for self-development leads to the second indicator that is related to the perception of service quality: **course content**. This insight embraces factors that lead to the **self-development or improvement** of individuals in terms of gaining knowledge.

As can be seen from the following statement, international students are interested in obtaining education that embraces **unique and relevant topics**.

*Respondent 1 (Male, 23, from Austria): "...a lot of the stuffs we learned is not really relevant. It's not that practical... I feel like everything I would have learned here, I could have also learned in another country which does not promote critical thinking."*

This attribute entails that international students want to feel that they are studying *unique and relevant topics*. The desire of obtain unique knowledge during their stay abroad can be linked to the aspiration of fulfilling the need of esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Obtaining 'unique' knowledge might be an act of international students to differentiate themselves from others in order to gain self-esteem, better achievements, and the respect of others (Maslow, 1943; De Ville et al., 1996; Zhang, 2000; Goodman et al., 2007; Jianjun, 2012). This need can also be explained by the concept of cultural capital introduced by Bourdieu (1979; 1984, cited in Corrigan, 1997, p. 27). Obtaining education leads to an increase in cultural capital while economical capital keeps steady what helps individuals to differentiate and goes up the social ladder (Corrigan, 1997, pp. 27-28). The need fulfilment of obtaining unique and relevant education reinforces the distinction from others even more because than people can display a higher level of cultural capital that has increased through education. Furthermore, this feeling of obtaining a 'unique education' is confirmed by the assumption of the cognitive dissonance theory (Solomon et al., 2006, pp. 95-96). The

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cognitive dissonance theory assumes that people formulate arguments in order to justify a choice. In terms of the present finding, international students look for arguments such as obtaining unique and relevant education to justify the decision for choosing a particular university. If students feel that they are obtaining education that could have been obtained 'everywhere else', dissatisfaction might occur. Although this behaviour can be explained by the cognitive dissonance theory, it becomes clear once again that satisfaction or dissatisfaction occurs through the comparison between prior expectations and experiences.

Gaining relevant knowledge can also be linked to the aspiration in obtaining education in terms of relevant and **practical applications** with respect to their future career:

*Respondent 12 (female, 31, from Malaysia): "Being exposed to the course so far it is quite theoretical, it was a little bit different from my expectation...at this point I feel that I do not really now where to place that knowledge into the practical side..."*

*Respondent 5 (female, 23, from Czech/Vietnam): "... the program is called Applied Cultural Analysis and I miss the applied part of it..."*

This can be related to the motivation of individuals to become international students in order to acquire the practical skills that are required by companies, thus improving their job prospects (De Ville et al., 1996; Teichler & Janson, 2007).

#### Teaching style:

The third indicator that is related to the perception of service quality is "**Teaching style**". This indicator consists of: collaborating with other international students, the freedom in choosing topic of interests, being independent, and getting feedback. As can be seen from the following statements international are interested in **collaborating with other international students**. This leads to fulfil the need of self-actualization and, thereby, personal development, by helping the student gain skills that can only be acquired through working with people from different backgrounds and nationalities:

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*Respondent 12 (female, 31, from Malaysia): “ ... I think group works are very good...it helps to learn to work with people you do not know, communicating with people, you can learn a lot of soft skills like communicating, handling people, making sure that everyone is aligned, I think all those skills you can transfer when you work in practice....and you can gain insights on what other people think, you can share your own experiences, opinions about the topic...kind of brainstorm and get a better understanding of the topics. I think group work is something positive...”*

This behaviour is furthermore linked and explained by the personal aspiration of gaining self-development and improve in order to gain cultural capital. Cultural capital by Bourdieu (1979, 1984 cited in Corrigan, 1997, p. 27) in that case refers to the behaviour of exchanging and gaining knowledge with people from different cultural backgrounds in order to make various experiences, learn soft skills such as handling people, leading a team, get a better understanding of the topic.

Moreover, through the interviews we could obtain that the openness, equal treatment, the freedom of working on own projects and possibility of writing papers reinforces the aim of self-improvement of international students:

*Respondent 10 (female, 23, from Vietnam): “...I would say I like the material that I read, a lot, and also the tasks we were assigned we allowed to do our own projects and you are allowed to do research in whatever you are interested and to present it so that's interesting.*

*Respondent 13 (female, 22, from Korea): “I'm really impressed that everyone can ask questions during the lecture in Korea we think asking something during the lecture is quite rude. So we don't ask anything. But here they ask so many things and discuss during the lecture”*

*Respondent 7 (female, 26, from Brazil): “Actually, I feel that it is important to have a lot of essays to write and reports and the peer reviews...I didn't have that before so, we can improve the way you write, the way you research*

The previous statement revealed that discussions and the **freedom in choosing topics** relating to one's own interest areas is another important factor. This again can be

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explained by the theoretical assumption of Maslow (1943). Being free in making choices strongly relates to the highest level of needs (self-actualization), which leads to being able to solve problems on one's own and, thus, to self-development and personal achievements. The following statements explained this further:

*Respondent 12 (female, 31, from Malaysia): "I think so far studying here has been quite independent, you have a lot of reading on your own... you really have to push yourself to read and understand... you can learn a lot of soft skills like communicating, handling people, making sure that everyone is align..."*

As a result of this kind of teaching style, studying at Lund University is characterised as independent and requiring high self-motivation, which leads to personal improvement in making one's own decisions, being responsible, dealing with people from different backgrounds and cultures, and discussing and sharing knowledge (Hackney et al., 2012; Zhuang et al., 2015).

Another finding of our investigation offers the insight that although students appreciate this **independence**, they seek guidance during the course in order to stay on the right track and improve themselves. This attribute is obtained through the following statement:

*Respondent 5 (female, 23, from Czech/Vietnam): "...some more guidance would be helpful. I would like to get more feedback from the teachers in terms of assessment... I think that sometimes I miss the guidance: What is right and what is wrong? If you are too open to an approach, you do not know...you do not feel the security or the right answer, it is maybe to postmodernist, to shifting in the prospective."*

*Respondent 4 (female, 23, from Germany): "...Yes I definitely miss some guidance both in the structure of the course but also the expectation...it is very different from University to University or country to country what the teachers expect of you and how you need to do you assignment."*

The desire for guidance is closely linked to the need for self-esteem; hence, international students want to be guided during a course in order to feel confident. This feeling of confidence relates to pleasant emotions (Plutchik, 1994; Izard 2007), which

#### 4. Analysis

results in satisfaction (Oliver 1994). On the other hand, the feeling that there is too little guidance during a course results in unpleasant emotions and, thereby, in dissatisfaction, because students might experience uncertainty that might inhibit their self-development (Plutchik, 1994; Eckman, 1999, pp. 45-60). Furthermore, in order to archive the aim of self-development through gaining education and knowledge, international students are interested in **getting feedback**. The following statement highlights this:

*Respondent 5 (female, 23, from Czech/Vietnam): "I would like to get more feedback from the teachers in terms of assessment... for example when you had a presentation they wont say that was really good and this was really bad, they try to be very positive in some ways, they don't say directly what should you improve."*

Getting honest and understandable feedback can have an impact on the self-esteem of students in a positive and a negative way (Major et al., 1998). Nevertheless, it would help students to develop their performance and improve in the future.

#### 4.3 Coping with Dissatisfaction

Based on the assumption of the GAP analysis (Grönroos, 1982; 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1985; Brown & Schwartz, 1989), which is used to investigate the discrepancy between expectations and experiences (Grönroos), the overall satisfaction of the international students was analysed. The analysis is based on a personal evaluation of each respondent in terms of his or her expectations from and experiences of educational service quality. According to the majority of our respondents, their experiences did not meet their expectations. With reference to the GAP analysis and the disconfirmation theory, negative disconfirmation (dissatisfaction) occurred, which could result in the tendency to spread negative information (word of mouth; Bitner, 1990), rejection of the programme (not being loyal anymore), and protecting friends and family members from becoming enrolled in the same or a similar programme in the programme (Athiyaman, 1997). The majority of our respondents, however, showed that even when they rated their expectations as higher than their experiences, they remained positive and mentioned explicitly that they are not dissatisfied with the educational service quality. As illustrated by the generic statements, respondents tend to be satisfied even when they experience dissatisfaction.

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*Respondent 10 (female, 23, from Vietnam): “At the beginning there were a lot of dissatisfaction according to the program but I mean you cannot live for 2 years here feeling completely dissatisfied by everything you know kind to find positive things in the program and try to appreciate them or try to make use of your time wisely, for instance what I cannot get out of class so you will do it out of class... in the end I find it satisfying because it is better as doing basic entry level jobs... and thinking about the end of this... than I have a new title and a new degree and that is good... and no one is really going to care what happened during the time I studied here. A lot of people just care about what you have on paper – I mean that is a sad reality but it works. This is maybe how I can leave all the dissatisfaction behind and just look forward.”*

*Respondent 12 (female, 31, from Malaysia): “...I cannot say that I am dissatisfied even when my expectations are not met, the knowledge gap is there but it is not a matter of dissatisfaction... I would say I am satisfied on a 6 from 1 to 10 but the gap is mainly there because the expectation that I had for the courses.”*

The respondents showed a motivation to remain positive even when they should be dissatisfied, according to the GAP analysis (Grönroos, 1982, 1984; Brown & Schwartz, 1989) and the disconfirmation theory (Bitner, 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Grönroos, 2007, p. 72). This finding confirms the assumption that service quality and satisfaction are distinct constructs that are related but do not necessarily result in each other (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Bitner & Hubbert, 1993, cited in Iacobucci et al., 1995). Additionally, respondents who reported to being dissatisfied with the service quality cited other reasons for the same.

*Respondent 12 (female, 31, from Malaysia): “In overall I wouldn't say so strong that I am dissatisfied...it is more that I do not know where to place the knowledge I have learned so far...”*

*Respondent 5 (female, 23, from Czech/Vietnam): “...I mean it is a difficult situation for me right now because I am trying to get an internship right now and thus it is my task to prove my degree right now...”*

Our findings show that supposedly dissatisfied students use arguments for why they are satisfied overall, even when expressing dissatisfaction with the educational ser-

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vice quality, according to the principle of the service quality model and the GAP theory. This finding supports the assumption of Rust et al. (1999), who claims that customers switch product or service providers despite expressing overall satisfaction in the product or service. Thus, the interview data supports an influence of external factors, such as a different lifestyle as well as finding arguments and reasons for dissatisfaction that do not directly relate to the service performance. While the role of external factors remains unconsidered in the current literature and, thus, in existing models (for instance, the service evaluation model by Grönroos [1984]) and theories (GAP analysis, disconfirmation theory), the latter finding can be explained by the cognitive dissonance theory (Solomon et al., 2006, pp. 95-96). The theory of cognitive dissonance is grounded on the principle that people need consistency and order in their lives as well as that unpleasant tension occurs when behavioural beliefs come into conflict with each another. In the present context, cognitive dissonance occurs through the mismatch of expectations and experiences. In order to remove these dissonances and eliminate the unpleasant tension, people start to convince themselves by finding positive attributes and arguments in order to justify their choice (Solomon et al., pp. 95-96). This finding goes against the behaviour of dissatisfied customers. In accordance with Athiyaman (1997), and Kotler and Armstrong (2014, p. 152), for instance, dissatisfaction results in customers switching brands, spreading negative word of mouth, avoiding future consumption, and protecting friends and family members from consuming these products and services. Customers act in this manner and start to formulate arguments for being dissatisfied for several reasons. One reason might be that international students are enrolled in a programme for at least one to two years, which does not correspond with a 'usual' service delivery process. Furthermore, international students seek to gain an international degree that will help them to develop, gain cross-cultural competences, create relationships with people from different backgrounds, and achieve self-esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Through these achievements, international students gain respect, acceptance, and appreciation from others; thus, they enhance their personal reputation and are able to differentiate themselves from others (Maslow, 1943; Baudrillard, 1968; 1990. cited in Corrigan, 1997, pp. 47-49). In other words, achieving a degree from a known international university subsequently results in international students displaying a pos-

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itive image of the university through the degree. According to Baudrillard this helps students to express social differences (Baudrillard, 1968, cited in Corrigan, 1997, p. 28). Based on this, we can conclude that remaining positive reinforces a social distinction, while spreading negative word of mouth, for instance, about the obtained educational service quality and the university would denigrate the students' self-esteem and image, thus destroying the social differentiation that had been aspired to (Corrigan, 1997, pp. 47-49).

Another finding from the interviews that is closely related to the preceding discussion is how international students cope with dissatisfaction. This action of coping relates to dissatisfaction with the educational service as well as the environment in which the individual resides. The interviews offered unexpected insight in this respect, as expressed by the following quote:

*Respondent 10 (female, 23, from Vietnam): "...A lot of things are not like I thought they are, but I think you learn to kind of adapt to it."*

Interviewer: "So, you said you have learned to adapt – what do you mean by that?"

*Respondent 10 (female, 23, from Vietnam): "...I mean you cannot live for 2 years here feeling completely dissatisfied by everything you know kind to find positive things in the program and try to appreciate them or try to make use of your time wisely...I treat this program also as kind of changing lifestyle, before I thought will be more an addition to my academic life but now it is not so much an academic thing anymore, it is more like I needed time to do something else other than... at home I never had to cook because we can just eat out...but here you have to do it by your own and you probably learn certain things and live a very healthy lifestyle a lot of things you can get organic food without pesticide... and this kind of not spending a lot of money..."*

On the other hand, a respondent explained the following:

*Respondent 7 (female, 26, from Brazil): "But one thing I didn't like very much is the possibilities you have in Lund... and language is another barrier... the city is quite small so you don't have a lot of options to go out and stuffs like that.... but actually I like the university, I feel that it is important to have a lot of essays to write and reports*

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*and the peer reviews. I think there is something positive about here because I didn't have that before. So, we can improve the way you write, the way you research....it is very independent...and of course, study development in another developed country also very interesting because you can live and study a theory and practice at the same time.”*

This behaviour shows that respondents who are dissatisfied with the educational service offerings adapt to the environment and students who are dissatisfied with the surroundings start to embrace the educational service offerings. This finding can be linked to the suggestion of Rust and Oliver (1994) to integrate a third additional dimension, the *where* dimension—i.e. the ‘environment of the service encounter’—into the service quality model developed by Grönroos (Rust & Oliver, 1994; Grönroos, 1984; 2007, p. 75). The present finding could support the claim for a third *where* dimension, as proposed by Rust and Oliver (1994).

## 5. Findings and Conclusion

The aim of this chapter is it now to present and discuss the findings to answer the research question, go beyond present the findings and derive contributions to the existing literature. After presenting the theoretical contributions we will focus on this the research limitations of the present study and finally make suggestions for further researches.

### 5.1 Findings

Based on the data analysis, the results of the qualitative study may be summarised to answer the research question **‘How does satisfaction arise in higher education for international students?’** as follows:

**First**, international master students at Lund University form their **expectations** based on personal recommendations, the university’s marketing communication and brand reputation (image), and previous experiences with their studies. Through these findings, the presence of satisfied students becomes valuable because current students and alumni become part of the marketing communication by spreading positive or negative word-of-mouth recommendations. The opinions of others become a valuable source in the decision-making process of prospective students. Thus, current and former students appear to be an unpredictable and powerful factor in the organization’s marketing communication even though they are only one part of this communication. Another part of the marketing communication is the distribution of information through online and offline media channels. The findings of this study also reveal a connection between the marketing communication of the university and the personal recommendations of current and former students. The university’s online and offline marketing communication influences the expectations of prospective students. Later, during their stay, students experience the educational unit and form their own opinions regarding whether their expectations are met. If there is a discrepancy, satisfaction or dissatisfaction occurs; this might lead to negative or positive personal recommendations. The process reveals that even when the university is not directly empowered to influence personal word-of-mouth communication, it is responsible for the information it publishes, as well as for the resulting expectations. Hence, even when

## 5. Findings and Conclusion

students become an unpredictable factor in the marketing communication organization play a role through their expectation management and thus contribute to the positive or negative shape of word of mouth. This relationship furthermore is applicable for companies in other industries that deal with customers and communicate through online and offline communication. Thus is its crucial not to over premise the product or service companies offer to kind of influence personal recommendation.

**Second**, international master students judge the quality of the educational courses based on the following indicators:

- 1. Group dynamics:** Integration into a homogeneous group of students with an appropriate class size, a similar educational background and level of understanding
- 2. Content:** Relevance, practical orientated and uniqueness of the mediated content
- 3. Teaching style** Collaborations with other students, the possibility of being independent in terms of choosing projects of their personal interest, experiencing a certain degree of guidance as well as to receive constructive feedback

These indicators maybe allocated into the **practical-** (what a customer gets from a service provider) and **functional dimension** (how a service is delivered) according to the 'service evaluation model' by Grönroos (1984). By looking at these dimensions it becomes clear that satisfying international students might become challenging for the program coordinator. The program coordinators have the possibility to take actions in order to improve the service quality of the teaching style. It can be difficult to improve factors related to the content and the group dynamics. The relevance of the topics, for example, leads to dissatisfaction because it is perceived as irrelevant. From a manager's point of view, it then becomes difficult to improve the quality of the service in order to get satisfied students, because students are mostly at the beginning of their career and unable to properly judge what is relevant and what is not. This aspect can only be rated after the students have gained some work experience and used their theoretical knowledge in practice. Moreover, it is difficult for programme directors to

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help students feel integrated in a group. Their responsibility is to facilitate that the accepted students possess similar backgrounds in terms of education and knowledge, but this only provides the foundation for students to integrate themselves in a group of strangers. Becoming integrated and accepted in a group should then be the task of the students. Thus, programme directors face the challenge of dealing with the dissatisfaction of international students because the latter may sometimes attribute the blame for not being integrated as a fault of the university. This issue may be intensified through the level of culture shock that international students experience. Suffering from a culture shock leads and reinforces the behaviour of rejecting from other nationalities and not integrated in the group. Only when people are able to cope by adapting to the new environment will they begin to feel confident. For organizations that deal with different nationalities, this means that social integration becomes difficult when fewer people are able to adapt to the cultural environment.

*Third*, the data analysis has revealed that the satisfaction of international students with the higher education service is not merely due to a discrepancy between the expected and experienced service quality of the educational unit. The respondents of the present study have also shown that they **cope with dissatisfaction** by embracing and appreciating factors that are not necessarily related to the educational unit. More specifically, the respondents embraced the location of the university, the culture, and the lifestyle in Sweden in order to **remain satisfied overall**. Furthermore, the possibility of earning and displaying a degree from a university with a certain reputation leads students to be satisfied overall. The human need for self-development and gaining cultural capital to be differentiated from others reinforces the motivation for getting a degree. Furthermore, a master degree is recognized by people and associated with intelligence and success, which motivates people to reach a respectable level in society. Merely being able to display a degree to others leads to this aspired-for respectable level in society. What happens during the student year(s) is of little importance and will not devalue one's social status afterwards. Besides, quitting the study programme as an international student due to dissatisfaction would lead to high sunk costs. It might also negatively reflect on the person's image and hamper his or her advancement to a higher level in society. Outsiders, family members, and friends

## 5. Findings and Conclusion

could associate rejection of the programme as failure. This phenomenon of coping with dissatisfaction in higher education brings us to the relationship of dependency between customers (demanders) and businesses (suppliers). Based on this, we draw the following relationship: The more that customers depend on the services or products of a business provider and the fewer the possibilities that customers have to switch suppliers, the higher the chance of having to cope with being dissatisfied. Considering the different existing markets of *monopoly*, *oligopoly* and *polypoly*, customers are naturally exposed to a different variety of suppliers that strengthens or weakens the former relationship. In a monopoly market structure, customers are exposed to one supplier; hence, brand or product switching becomes nearly impossible if dissatisfaction occurs. In the market structure of an oligopoly and polypoly, customers are in a position to switch to competitor brands or products when dissatisfaction occurs and can seek satisfaction through another provider or offering that fits his or her needs in a better way. This behaviour is not possible in monopoly markets and when customers are in a strong and certain relationship with a supplier (for instance, through contracts or dependency on knowledge and special skills, as is the case with telephone providers, doctors, or consultancies). Therefore, the more dependent customers are on the offerings of a business, the more they have to cope with dissatisfaction when promises and thus the expectations are not met, in order to justify the use and purchase of services or products by finding positive arguments. Since the educational industry is a special kind of industry where it is not possible to switch to another university easily, students need to develop coping strategies to stay positive and display a positive image of the university. This behaviour of finding and creating positive arguments for continuing to attend the programme has a positive effect on the university's image because, even though the students are dissatisfied, they want to display a positive image if only to justify being a student at that university.

Summing up the findings leads us to a conclusion regarding the research question: Satisfaction towards an educational unit arises through the evaluation of service quality. Service quality is judged through the discrepancy between expectations and experience. International students form expectations based on information, which is collected through word of mouth, marketing communication, and brand reputation and

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previous experiences. Furthermore, the higher the personal motivation to improve, in terms of gaining academic, social and cultural experiences, the higher the level of expectations will be. International students perceive service quality through the indicators of social belonging, teaching style, and the mediated content. If the expectation is higher than the actual perceived service quality, dissatisfaction occurs. Even if students are dissatisfied, however, they start coping with this dissatisfaction by embracing factors unrelated to the educational unit in order to remain satisfied. Satisfaction is the result of a judgement of service quality and the ability to cope with dissatisfaction.

### 5.2 Implications

Our findings have revealed where expectations originate, what factors are used by international students to judge educational service quality, and that satisfaction alone cannot measure and draw conclusions on the service quality. Based on this, our findings have several implications for educational institutions as well as for the literature.

According to our findings, indicators were revealed that could be used by educational institutions to evaluate the perceived service quality of international students. Educational institutions have to be aware that the overall satisfaction (obtained mainly through qualitative evaluation surveys) cannot be used as factor in order to judge the perceived service quality. These institutions must go beyond this factor and obtain information about the perceived service quality through the obtained indicators by the present study (see 5.1 second finding). Furthermore, the findings contribute to the discussion of the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality. According to our findings service quality is an element of customer satisfaction in higher education what strengthens the argument of researchers such as Oliver (1993), who sees service quality as element of customer satisfaction. Thus, the findings support the disconfirmation theory, the equation of the GAP analysis (Satisfaction = [Experiences – Expectation]) by Parasuraman et al. (1985), and the service evaluation process by Grönroos (1984), because satisfaction springs from the evaluation of the experiences and expectations. However, these customer satisfaction methods and models neglected external factors by explaining how customer satisfaction arises. In higher education, a low level of the perceived service quality does not necessarily

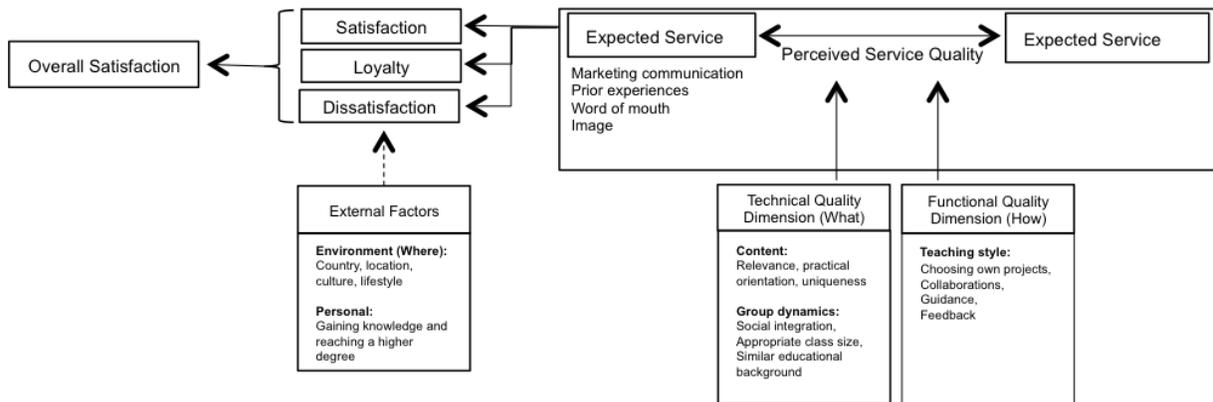
## 5. Findings and Conclusion

lead to dissatisfaction because dissatisfied students develop strategies to cope with dissatisfaction and remain satisfied overall. It has been shown that students cope with dissatisfaction by embracing and appreciating factors from the environment (for instance, location, lifestyle and culture). This finding might be applied to other industries where the customers do not have the opportunity to switch to other suppliers.

Furthermore, according to our findings, the service evaluation model was adapted and extended through the coping phenomenon by embracing the indicators (see Figure 4 and Figure 5). The structure of the new Service Evaluation Process of International Students in Higher Education (1) is linked to the equations of the GAP analysis and can be understood as a flow diagram read from right to left. This model visualizes how satisfaction arises. The right-hand side represents the service evaluation process developed by Grönroos (1984) and, thus, how international students perceive service quality through the discrepancy between the expected and experienced service by integrating the **'technical and functional quality dimension'**. The indicators that were discovered through the present qualitative study are allocated to the technical and functional quality dimension. If the discrepancy between the student's expectations and experiences are positive, then the service quality is judged as positive, and shows why satisfaction (positive disconfirmation) occurs (represented through the leftwards arrow). If the discrepancy between the expectation and experiences is equal, loyalty occurs. Here, loyalty refers to satisfaction, because loyalty does not consist of negativity, which leads to dissatisfaction. In the case of satisfaction and loyalty (confirmation), students do not need to develop a coping strategy by embracing external factors. External factors are environmental and personal factors that are consulted in order to remain satisfied overall. Furthermore, if the discrepancy between expectations and experiences is negative, dissatisfaction (negative disconfirmation) occurs (represented through the dashed leftwards arrow). In this case, international students start to develop a coping strategy by embracing factors from the environment—the **'where dimension'**—in order to remain satisfied overall (represented through the dashed upwards arrow). The 'where dimension' represents the factors that are used by students if dissatisfaction occurs. The implementation of the 'where' dimension supports the suggestion of Oliver and Rust (1994).

## 5. Findings and Conclusion

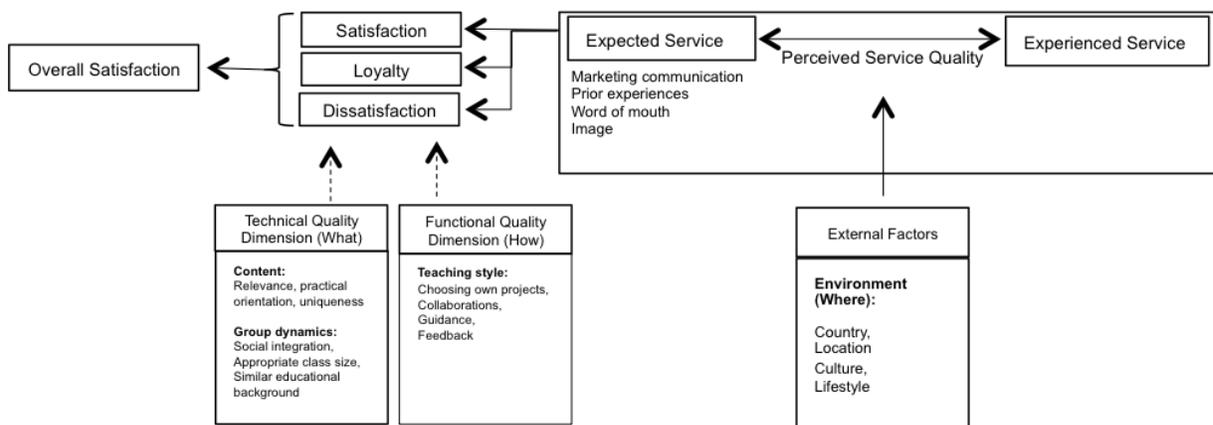
**Figure 4: Service Evaluation Process of International Students in Higher Education 1**



Source: Own illustration, based on own qualitative data analysis, Grönroos (1984), Oliver & Rust (1993) and Parasuraman et al. (1985)

In addition, a second model, the Service Evaluation Process of International Students in Higher Education (2) was derived. This model bases on the same concept as the prior model. The difference here is that international students who expressed to be dissatisfied towards the environmental dimension start to develop a coping strategy by embracing factors from the technical and functional quality dimension in order to remain satisfied overall (represented through the dashed arrow).

**Figure 5: Service Evaluation Process of International Students in Higher Education 2**



Source: Own illustration, based on own qualitative data analysis, Grönroos (1984), Oliver & Rust (1993) and Parasuraman et al. (1985)

## 5. Findings and Conclusion

As derived from the findings (see 5.1 see third finding), these coping strategies might be transferred to other industries as well and thus, the more dependent customers are on organizations, the more they would need to cope, if dissatisfaction occurs.

### 5.3 Research Limitations

Each research design has its advantages and disadvantages. Hence, the researcher must carefully plan the research strategy as well as be flexible during the research process in order to finally produce reliable, replicable and valid data and research results (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 43, 61). Our research design has several limitations: **First**, the sample procedure followed in this research was not empirically tested and was based on our own adaptation of an existing scale. Therefore, the result of the cluster procedure based on the level of culture shock must be interpreted with caution until more research is conducted to validate this procedure. Although the sample procedure in this study was an attempt, the result cannot be generalized to the population of interest. **Second**, the study is based on a relatively small sample size of eight respondents. Therefore, it is doubtful whether a meaningful comparison can be made between international students with a 'low' and a 'high level of culture shock' that would affect their statements regarding the effects of emotions and mood on service quality in higher education. Because of this, it was not possible to reveal more about the effect of culture shock (emotional reaction according to Grönroos, 1984) on satisfaction with higher education services, simply because the sample size in total and for each cluster was too small. **Third**, regarding the three indicators found here, on which international students judge service quality in higher education, it must be noted that this finding cannot be generalized to all students at Lund University and thus to other institutions. Nevertheless, they are applicable for institutions that deal with international students. This limitation arises because, on the one hand, the investigated sample is not a representative sample of the population of interest, and on the other hand, national (master and bachelor level) and exchange students (bachelor or master level) were excluded from the present study. Even when the results are meaningful for institutions that deal with international students and the literature of service quality in higher education, we must be careful not to overgeneralize the significance of the results. **Fourth**, our findings underlined the issue

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that people tend to answer positive in qualitative interviews. Hence, it might be that the respondents answered to be satisfied overall, in order to not be seen as incongruous from the researcher. Thus our research has to be treated with caution until more research is done.

### 5.4 Further Research

The abovementioned limitations lead us to future and additional research in this research area. **First**, further research should attempt to clarify the validation of the attempt to operationalize the measurement of culture shock. Further research can not only contribute to the sample procedure but also become a valuable measurement system for institutions in higher education that deal with international students. Through a valid measurement approach, these institutions might be able to assess the level of culture shock among their students in order to understand the emotional constitution of the students to be capable to adjust to contemporary offerings. **Second**, the effect of emotions and mood on the perceived service quality in the higher education sector would be valuable for investigating a larger sample size with a different level of culture shock. The value of this investigation would be in exploring similarities and dissimilarities among the different groups with respect to satisfaction from the offered educational units. **Third**, additional research is needed to fully understand how satisfaction arises among all students, not only international master students, and members of the institution, such as researchers and deans. Different groups of people might have different opinions on the service quality of the educational units. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the differences among the different groups that are involved in the service-delivering process. Thus, considerably more work is required to explore the factors used to judge service quality. The aim would also be to confirm the factors that were found in this research. Thus, more research would contribute to a measurement method that aids higher educational institutions in investigating and assessing the perceived service quality through a holistic framework that is drawn through the eyes of the customers (students). **Fourth**, since the perception of service quality changes over time, it would be necessary to conduct additional research on the alumni in order to understand how they perceive the service quality after having had the possibility to apply their knowledge in practice. This would help

## 5. Findings and Conclusion

gain knowledge and an understanding about how the 'relevance of the topics' is judged after graduates are able to use their theoretical knowledge in practice. **Fifth**, to generalize the prior introduced models and contribute more to existing theory a qualitative research should be done with the aim to proof the relationships empirically. This would have the advantage of making sure that people do not just answer according to what they think the researcher wants to hear.

## 6. Appendix

**Table 2: Sociocultural Adaptation Scale – Items**

Socio- Cultural Adaptation Scale Items	
1. Making friends	22. Dealing with people staring at you
2. Using the transport system	23. Going to coffee shops/ food stalls/restaurants/fast food outlets
3. Making yourself understood	24. Understanding the local accent/language
4. Getting used to the pace of life	25. Living away from family members overseas/independently from your parents
5. Going shopping	26. Adapting to local etiquette
6. Going to social events/gatherings/functions	27. Getting used to the population density
7. Worshipping in your usual way	28. Relating to older people
8. Talking about yourself with others	29. Dealing with people of higher status
9. Understanding jokes and humour	30. Understanding what is required of you at university
10. Dealing with someone who is unpleasant/cross/aggressive	31. Coping with academic work
11. Getting used to the local food/finding food you enjoy	32. Dealing with foreign staff at the university
12. Following rules and regulations	33. Expressing your ideas in class
13. Dealing with people in authority	34. Living with your host family
14. Dealing with the bureaucracy	35. Accepting /understanding the local political system
15. Making yourself understood	36. Understanding the locals' world view
16. Adapting to local accommodation	37. Taking a local perspective on the culture
17. Communicating with people of a different ethnic group	38. Understanding the local value system
18. Relating to members of the opposite sex	39. Seeing things from the locals' point of view
19. Dealing with unsatisfactory service	40. Understanding cultural differences
20. Finding your way around	41. Being able to see two sides of an inter-cultural issue
21. Dealing with the climate	
22. Dealing with people staring at you	

Source: Furnham & Bochner (1982)

**Table 3: Students life SCAS Adaptation**

<b>Students life SCAS adaptation</b>		<b>Survey Questions</b>
<b>Affective &amp; Behavioural</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Making friends</li> <li>2. Going shopping: local food/ finding food you enjoy</li> <li>3. Communicating with people of a different ethnic group</li> <li>4. Dealing with the climate</li> <li>5. Dealing with people staring at you</li> <li>6. Going to coffee shops/ food stalls/restaurants/fast food outlets</li> <li>7. Understanding the local accent/language</li> <li>8. Adapting to local etiquette</li> <li>9. Living away from family members overseas/independently from your parents</li> <li>10. Getting used to the local food/finding food you enjoy</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I have difficulties in making friends</li> <li>2. I have to deal with the Swedish weather</li> <li>3. I have adapted to the Swedish etiquette</li> <li>4. I miss the food that I am used to</li> <li>5. I miss my family back home</li> <li>6. I miss my friends back home</li> <li>7. I feel accepted by the local students in Lund?</li> <li>8. I feel anxious when meeting local people?</li> <li>9. I feel that people are staring at me</li> <li>10. I am interested in learning the Swedish language</li> <li>11. I am interested in exploring the local coffee shops</li> </ol>
<b>Cognition</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Understanding cultural differences</li> <li>12. Taking a local perspective on the culture</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12. I am able to understand cultural differences</li> <li>13. I think I understand the Swedish culture</li> <li>14. I spend my leisure time with people from different countries</li> </ol>

Source: Own illustrated, based on Furnham & Bochner (1982)

## 6. Appendix

### Figure 6: Final Survey - Introduction

**Cross cultural adaptation**

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey, which we pursue in our master thesis in Globalization, Brands and Consumption at the University of Lund in Sweden.

We wish to examine here how you experience your time studying at Lund University.

The survey will take about **5 minutes**. There are no right or wrong answers, we are interested in your honest opinion. If in doubt, please tick that is most appropriate for you statement. The analysis of the survey is conducted **anonymously**.

Thank you very much for your help.  
Ann-Christin & Punyasoree

If you would like to contact us,  
ggb14afi@student.lu.se, ggb14psu@student.lu.se

Next

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Source: Own illustration

### Figure 7: Final Survey – General Information

**Cross cultural adaptation**

1. What level do you study?

Bachelor level

Master level

other

\* 2. For how long have you been studying in Lund ? (please write the answer in month)

3. Have you ever lived abroad before?

Yes

No

If yes for how long ?

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## 6. Appendix

### Figure 8: Final Survey – Culture Shock: Socio-cultural Adaptation Scale

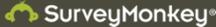
**Cross cultural adaptation**

\* 4. On a scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree), please rate how relevant these statements are for you.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Undecided	Agree somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have adapted to the Swedish etiquette	<input type="radio"/>						
I miss my family back home	<input type="radio"/>						
I miss my friends back home	<input type="radio"/>						
I have difficulties in making friends	<input type="radio"/>						
I miss the food that I am used to	<input type="radio"/>						
I have to deal with the Swedish weather	<input type="radio"/>						

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### Figure 9: Final Survey - Culture Shock: Socio-cultural Adaptation Scale

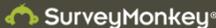
**Cross cultural adaptation**

\* 5. On a scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree), please rate how relevant these statements are for you.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Undecided	Agree somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel anxious when meeting local people	<input type="radio"/>						
I feel that people are staring at me	<input type="radio"/>						
I feel accepted by the local students in Lund	<input type="radio"/>						
I am interested in learning the Swedish language	<input type="radio"/>						
I am interested in exploring the local coffee shops	<input type="radio"/>						
I am able to understand cultural differences	<input type="radio"/>						

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## 6. Appendix

**Figure 10: Final Survey - Culture Shock: Socio-cultural Adaptation Scale**

**Cross cultural adaptation**

\* 6. On a scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree), please rate how relevant these statements are for you.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Disagree somewhat	Undecided	Agree somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think I understand the Swedish culture	<input type="radio"/>						
I spend time my leisure time with people from different countries	<input type="radio"/>						

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**Figure 11: Final Survey: Socio Demographical Information**

**Cross cultural adaptation**

7. How old are you ?

8. What is your gender?  
 Female  
 Male  
 Not specific

9. What nationality are you belonging to ?

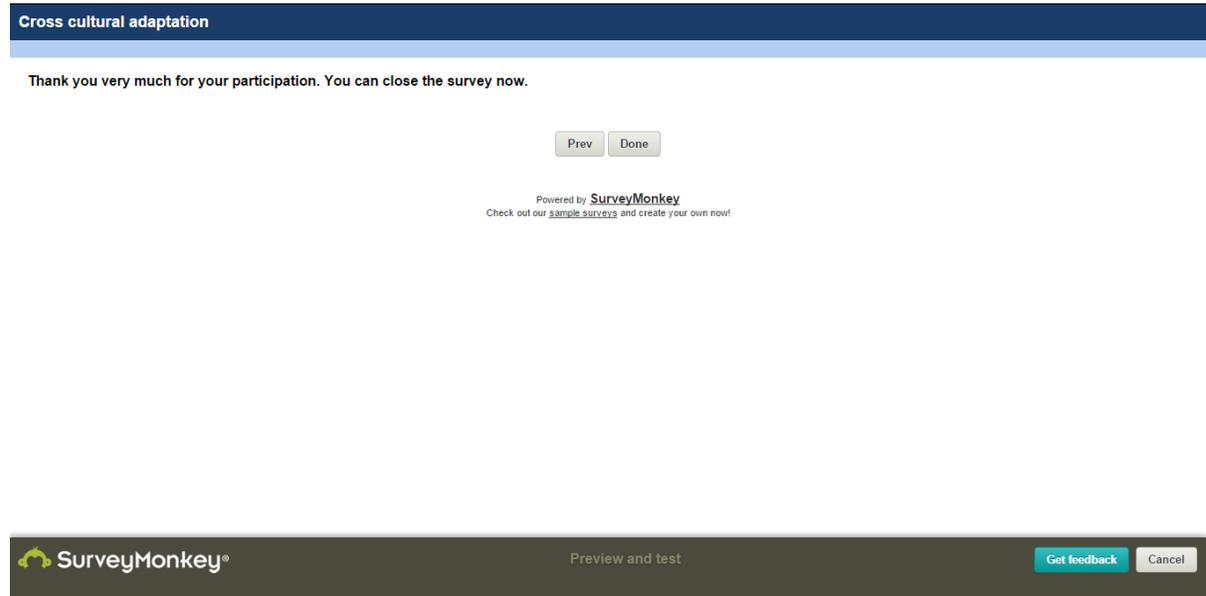
10. Would you like to partake on the further interview ?  
 Yes  
 No

If yes, please specify your email adress.

**SurveyMonkey** Preview and test

Source: Own illustration

**Figure 12: Final Survey: Conclusion**



Source: Own illustration

**Table 4: Likert Scale Conversation**

Meaning before conversion	Meaning after conversion
1 Strongly disagree	7 Strongly agree
2 Disagree	6 Agree
3 Disagree somewhat	5 Agree somewhat
4 Undefined	4 Undefined
5 Agree somewhat	3 Disagree somewhat
6 Agree	2 Disagree
7 Strongly agree	1 Strongly disagree

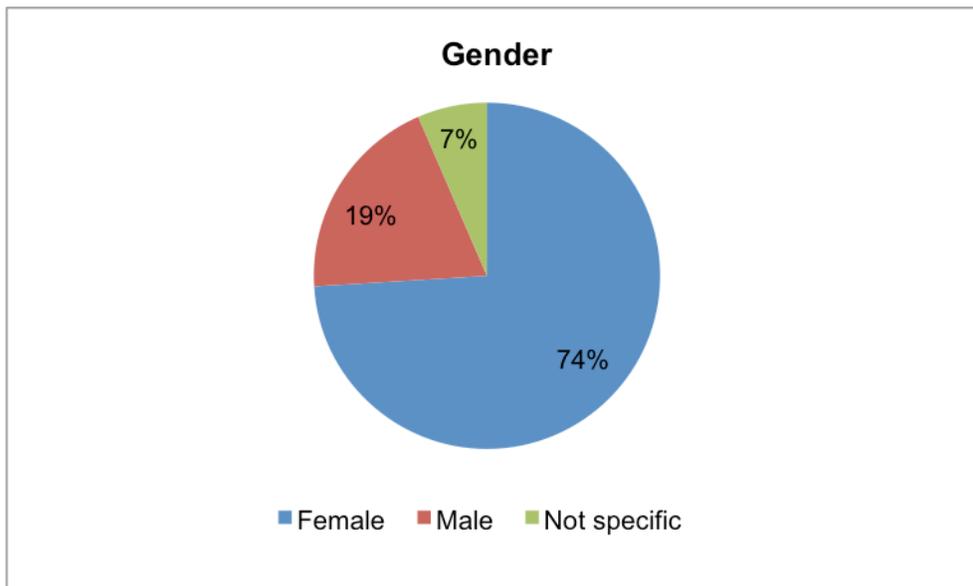
Source: Own illustration

**Table 5: Quantitative Pre- Study Meaning of Questions**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Meaning on a scale from 1-7</b>
I feel that people are staring at me	1 low – 7 high
I feel anxious when meeting local people	1 low – 7 high
I miss my friends back home	1 low – 7 high
I miss my family back home	1 low – 7 high
I miss the food that I am used to	1 low – 7 high
I have to deal with the Swedish weather	1 low – 7 high
I have difficulties in making friends	1 low – 7 high
I spend my leisure time with people from different countries	1 high – 7 low
I think I understand the Swedish culture	1 high – 7 low
I am able to understand cultural difference	1 high – 7 low
I am interested in exploring local coffee shops	1 high – 7 low
I am interested in learning the Swedish language	1 high – 7 low
I feel accepted by the local students in Lund	1 high – 7 low
I have adapted to the Swedish etiquette	1 high – 7 low

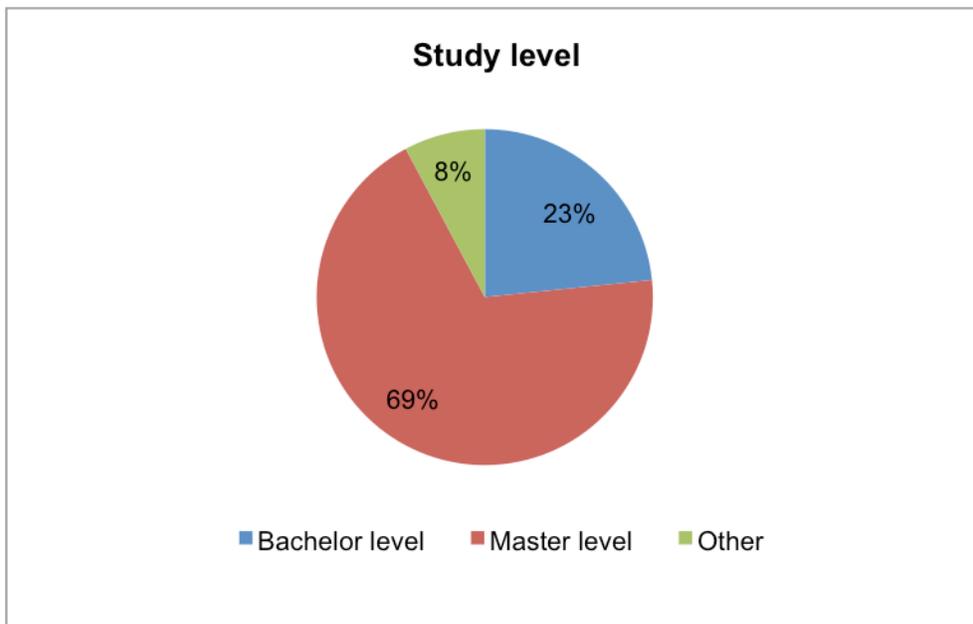
Source: Own illustration

**Figure 13: Frequency Distribution - Gender**



Source: Own illustration, based on pre-study

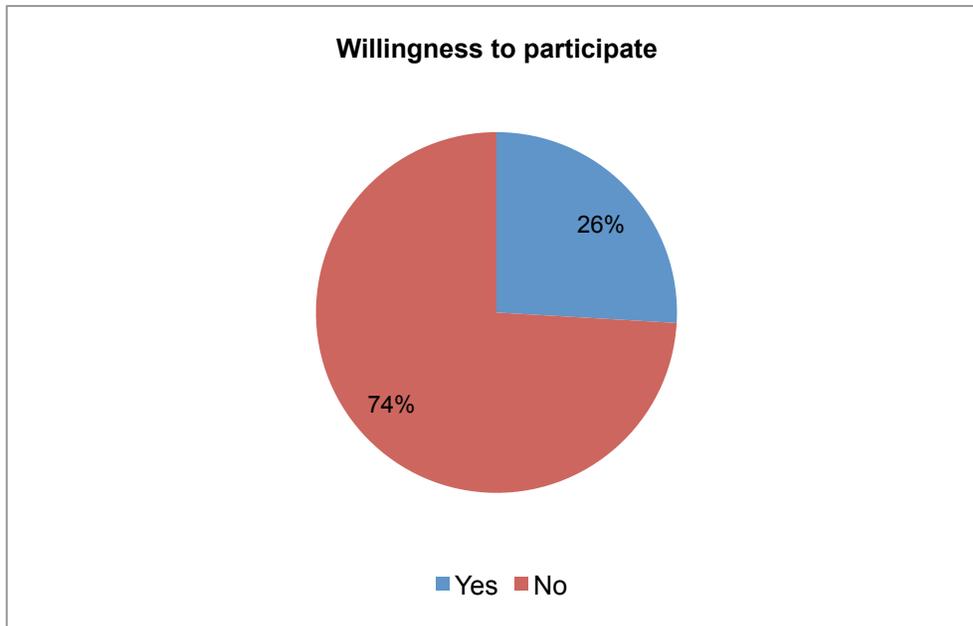
**Figure 14: Frequency Distribution – Study Level**



Source: Own illustration, based on quantitative pre- study

**Figure 15: Frequency Distribution – Willingness to Participate**

## 6. Appendix



Source: Own illustration, based on quantitative pre- study

6. Appendix

**Table 6: Quantitative Pre-Study Respondents Overview**

Respondent NR	Level of Culture Shock	Lived abroad	Nationality	Age
Respondent 1	36	Yes	Austria	23
Respondent 2	52	Yes	Italy	24
Respondent 3	39	Yes	German	24
Respondent 4	34	Yes	German	23
Respondent 5	51	Yes	Czech/ Vietnam	23
Respondent 6	56	Yes	German	25
Respondent 7	80	Yes	Brazilian	26
Respondent 8	58	No	Lithuania	23
Respondent 9	59	Yes	Spain	24
Respondent 10	43	Yes	Vietnam	23
Respondent 11	43	Yes	Greek	26
Respondent 12	57	Yes	Malaysia	31
Respondent 13	79	No	Korea	22
<b>Average <math>\emptyset</math></b>	<b>52.85</b>	-	-	<b>24.5</b>

Source: Own illustration, based on quantitative data analysis

## 6. Appendix

**Table 7: Respondent Allocation**

Much lower than the average 14 - 34	Close to the average 35 - 55	Close to the average 57 – 77	Higher than the average 78 - 98
Respondent 1	Respondent 10	Respondent 2	Respondent 7
Respondent 3	Respondent 11	Respondent 5	Respondent 13
Respondent 4		Respondent 6	
		Respondent 8	
		Respondent 9	
		Respondent 12	

Source: Own illustration, based on quantitative data analysis

**Table 8: Qualitative Interview Sample Overview**

Respondent NR	Level of Culture Shock	Lived abroad	Nationality	Age
Respondent 1	36	Yes	Austria	23
Respondent 4	34	Yes	German	23
Respondent 10	43	Yes	Vietnam	23
Respondent 11	43	Yes	Greek	26
Respondent 5	51	Yes	Czech Vietnamese	23
Respondent 12	57	Yes	Malaysian	31
Respondent 13	79	No	Korea	22
Respondent 7	80	Yes	Brazilian	26

Source: Own illustration, based on quantitative data analysis

Table 9: Interview Guide

Stage	Questions
1. Introduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Give a warm welcome to the respondents</li> <li>2. Introduction of ourselves</li> <li>3. Explanation of the purpose and length of the study</li> <li>4. Elucidate about what is going to happen, the ethics and the need for recording, ask for the permission to record</li> <li>5. Respondent is asked to introduce him or her. (Name, age, gender, nationality, major, have he or she lived abroad before and where?)</li> </ol>
2. Main Part	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Expectations:</b> Why do you choose Lund University and why to study in Sweden?</li> <li>2. <b>Stimuli:</b> Where did you get information's about the University? On what did you base your decision to study in Lund? (Internal factors do it by yourself/ personal motivation: online information, personal recommendation)</li> <li>3. <b>Experiences:</b> What were your <b>expectations</b> based on those information towards the university? Are your experiences met?</li> <li>4. What were your expectations towards: Academics: How do you experience the quality of the education?</li> <li>5. What are your experiences in the classroom? (Class, teaching style, learning style, level of difficulty, workload, library service, group working, work culture)</li> <li>6. <b>Response:</b> Imagine a friend would ask you for opinion towards your time in Lund, what would you say to him or her?</li> <li>7. Would you say that you are satisfied?</li> </ol>
3. End	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Thanks for participation</li> <li>2. Ask the respondents how he or she felt during the interview and what we could do better next time</li> <li>3. Stop recording after the respondent has left</li> </ol>

Source: Own illustration, based on (Athiyaman, 1997)

**Table 10: Code Book - Example**

Interviewer: Where did you get to know about Lund University and the program you study?

Respondent 12: "...I did a research about programs that are offered in Lund **on the internet** through **the webpage** of the university...the main reason why I chose Lund University was because of the location, I wanted to study where my wife works... I wanted to gain more insights into what is the role of a marketer.... this program that I am enrolled in from the description kind of fit in of what I was looking for."

1. Internet

1. Expectation: Online marketing communication

Interviewer: How do you think about the time you have studied at Lund University so far?

Respondent 12: "...Being exposed to the course so far it is **quite theoretical**, it was a little bit different from my expectation...at this point I feel that I do not really now where to **place that knowledge into the practical side**... so in a way there seems to be a bit of gap in what I expected before I joined the courses and what I have experienced so far."

1. Practical application

1. Content

Interviewer: You mentioned there is a gap between what you expected and what you have experienced so far, could you describe this gap a little bit more?

Respondent 12: "...It is a disappointment but I would not say that everything what I have learned so far is a right off there have been aspect of the courses I could potentially use in my working experience but the main topic... **I really find it hard to use it in my future**. Maybe the **description from the website** was a little bit vague... maybe there is insufficient information in the course guidelines... or maybe my interpretation of the information was wrong..."

1. Practical application  
2. Expectation

1. Content  
2. Expectation management

Interviewer: Can you summarise what you experiences as positive or negative?

Respondent 12: "...I like the **interaction with my classmates**... I met some interactive and supporting people...**interacting with people from all over the world** is very positive in a way it has kind of my confidence to interact and share knowledge with other people.... what not so positive is, is the expectation gap what I have had about the course... **and what I got from it**, but...**not all knowledge is not lost** it is something what is with you and maybe in the future I will use it...it would not say it is an completely lost but at this point in time I am just struggling where I can using it **but I remain to be positive**....and maybe I will have a use for it in the future."

1. Social integration  
2. Internationality  
3. Practical relevance

1. Group dynamics  
2. Cultural diversity  
3. Content

## 6. Appendix

Interviewer: If you would rate the expectations you have had from scale from 1 - 10 where 1 is the lowest and 10 is the highest, what would you say how high they were?

Respondent: " I would say between 7 and 8, maybe 7,5."

Interviewer: And if you would rate the experiences you have had so far on the same scale what would you say how high they were?

Respondent: "My experience I would say on a 4."

1. Expectations  
2. Experiences

} Discrepancy between expectations and experiences

Source: The excerpt from an interview with Respondent 12 (female, 31, from Malaysia)

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