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# **Diversity and Inclusion: Exploring Foreign Student's Perceptions of Social Inclusion in a Multicultural Environment**

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## **Abstract**

In today's increasingly globalized world, the transition from a home country to a foreign one is an important milestone in a student's life, regardless of his age. For many of them, it also marks their first time being away from their country, family, and friends for a longer period. This study explores how international students perceive and consequently experience their inclusion socially in an educational and multicultural environment, with a focus on the factors that could in turn elevate their integration. Using a qualitative research approach, data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 14 international students from 10 different nationalities, enrolled in a Norwegian university recruiting students from various backgrounds. The findings revealed nuanced insights into the students' perception of their social inclusion, their various experiences and interactions with diverse cultures and their engagement within the university premises. Themes such as language barriers, cultures differences and personality or national characteristics appear as significant factors influencing social inclusion journeys; yet, two new factors such as the individual's personal life and the university itself are also relevant and thus, discussed. The study underscores the importance of fostering an inclusive environment, and to help promote this supportive environment. In addition, students' practical recommendations towards their university should aid executives, teachers and co-workers to create or strengthen their policies; fostering social inclusion initiatives and supporting the diverse needs of foreign students in multicultural environments.

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### **Keywords**

Social Inclusion \_ Diversity \_ International Students \_ Norway \_ Communities \_ Social Integration \_ Multicultural Environment \_ Higher Education

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## **Exordium**

This master thesis was written for my Master's Degree in Service Leadership at the University of Stavanger and deals with social inclusion and diversity, particularly international social inclusion in a multicultural educational environment. The increasing globalization of higher education and need to improve the experience of studying abroad in order to attract overseas students makes this subject highly relevant.

Moreover, I wish to express my gratitude to my friends and family for their unwavering support during these challenging months. I was fortunate enough to have such a dedicated support system and their encouragement has been my pillar since the beginning of the research. In addition, I want to extend my sincere thanks to the participants of the research: without them the study would not have been completed. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Tone Therese Linge, for her support, counselling, and motivation throughout this entire research time. Even with the distance of not being in the same country, she has been of great assistance and her advices helped me stay on the right path. And finally, the Norwegian School of Hotel at the University of Stavanger, that has provided the guidelines and instructions. This thesis has been finalized thanks to all their guidance and reassurance.

## Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, the dynamics of cultural diversity and social inclusion have become pivotal aspects of societal cohesion and progress in multicultural environments. As global mobility surges and educational institutions become more culturally diverse, understanding the perceptions and experiences of foreign students regarding social inclusion in multicultural environments is paramount. This study delves into the nuanced realm of diversity and inclusion, specifically examining how foreign students perceive and navigate social inclusion within multicultural settings. By unraveling their perspectives, this research aims to shed light on the complexity of social dynamics in educational contexts, offering valuable insights for fostering more inclusive environments and promoting cross-cultural understanding. The primary objective of this project is to provide a comprehensive answer to the research question “*How do international students perceive and experience social inclusion within their multicultural educational environment, and what factors contribute to their sense of belonging and participation within the student community?.*”

This study focuses on Norway, a country who has welcomed around 23,000 international students in 2023, of which two third are from outside EU/EEA (Colbran, 2023). Yet this number has been expected to decreased significantly in 2024, due to the implementation of tuition fees in Norway at the end of the year 2023 (Colbran, 2023). In addition, since the internationalization of education is gaining significance in Norway, it is important to give more attention to how the Norwegian National Education System is meeting the challenges and opportunities brought with the international students to their new educational environment (Solhjell et al., 2009). However , this European country has little to no research into its experiences of social inclusion of its international student community. Despite its homogenous population, Norway has gradually become diverse in recent decades. Fueled by waves of immigration from across the globe, the Norwegian society, with a total of 5 550 203



citizens in 2023 of which approximately 17% are from immigrants background and 6% from refugee background (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2023, Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2024, Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2024a), is growing richer thanks to their unique perspectives, cultures and experiences. Moreover, every student who wishes to go study abroad knows that choosing a study destination is a complex process: several factors are to be considered, such as the cost of living or the safety of the country (eXpatrio, 2024). Therefore, when Europe is considered, Norway is more popular than other countries such as France or Spain, due to its high-quality and more affordable education (eXpatrio, 2024).

This research project conducted in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 14 participants employing a semi-structured approach to encourage them to share their personal narratives and insights, focusing on the central research question. The voluntary participants were sampled of foreign students at the University of Stavanger (UiS), Rogaland, Norway, all of whom were studying for a full Master's Degree at the time of the interviews. Categorically, six of the participants are from South Asia, one from South-East Asia and two from East Asia, two from Africa while only one is from Europe, the last two remaining participants are from the Mozambique Channel of the West Indian Ocean and the Persian Plateau in the Middle East, in West Asia (Asi/Regions, n.d., Figure 1, n.d.). Purposeful sampling, to include students from different geographical areas in order to increase the diversity of experiences and to discern potential divergences in perceptions and experiences concerning cultural diversity and social inclusion, has been employed.

The structure of this thesis unfolds in the following manner: first, the academic literature relevant to the research question is explored, including but not limited to some definitions and explanations of relevant concepts, theory and main challenges faced by internationals. Next, within the methodology section, a comprehensive explanation of the meticulously chosen research designs, from the data collection method to the ethical considerations, is provided.

Followed by, a set primary data carefully grouped and precisely presented through four overarching categories. The subsequent two sections delve into the discussion, where primary data is meticulously interpreted and scrutinized in the light of the presented theoretical perspectives and in the context of the research question. And then, the practical suggestions proffered by students, with certain examples drawn from literature, to their university, aiming to enhance and foster social inclusion for all members of the community. Lastly in the concluding section, the key findings addressed in the preceding discussion directly respond to the research questions, are being summarized. Additionally, I offer to explore the potential relevance of these key findings for informing and inspiring further studies.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This chapter presents a review of relevant literature for the topic and research question presented in this thesis. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the current state of knowledge surrounding this subject. By examining existing research and grounding this research with theories. This review aims to provide insights into the social inclusion of international students in an environment exposed to multiple cultures. This section provides an overview of the key themes and concepts that will be explored throughout this thesis.

### **Definitions and Theory**

Social inclusion and exclusion have been defined in many different ways. According to Lenoir et al. (2016), various places and countries have different histories, norms and cultures that have shaped their society, and that furthermore contribute to guiding their perceptions and definitions of inclusion and exclusion (Lenoir et al., 2016). However, for the sake of this research, social inclusion and exclusion's definition will be based on different definitions found in literature

### ***Social Exclusion***

This term was used the first time by the former French Secretary of State for Social Action in 1974, René Lenoir (Lenoir et al., 2016), and he explained that there is no global definition of social exclusion, yet always a key common point is found: the lack of participation within the society (Lenoir et al., 2016). Thus, social exclusion can be labeled as “a state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life, as well as the process leading to and sustaining such a state” (Lenoir et al., 2016, p.18).

Still, the lack of access to different resources, such as income, health services or even the disrespect of human rights or dignity may hinder the participation of those individuals within the society (Lenoir et al., 2016). In almost all countries, the degree of deprivation is linked to the feelings of inferiority one perceived based on those recurrent factors: age, sex, religion, race, social status, gender identity, etc., and can take several forms such as abandonment, segregation, assistance, marginalization, and discrimination (Daly & Silver, 2008 & Lenoir et al., 2016). Thus, social exclusion cannot be seen only as a process that has for consequence the isolation of oneself, it is also the outcome of numerous external factors (Lenoir et al., 2016). However, for Silver and Daly (2008), social exclusion is not just a deprivation state, since it emphasizes “on social relationships participation, and customary way of life” (Daly & Silver, 2008, p. 539), contradicting the traditional views on social exclusion: financial well-being, consumption, and income inadequacy, developed by Lenoir in the 70s (Daly & Silver, 2008).

### ***Social Inclusion***

Lenoir et al. (2016) explained that social inclusion and its promotion originated from the concerns over social exclusion and its consequences on society. Therefore, Lenoir et al., define social inclusion as

The process of improving terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic, or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice, and respect rights. (Lenoir et al., 2016, p.20).

Thus, social inclusion can actually be seen as much as a process to create a respectful environment for all, as a goal to achieve, even if people might not know how to live together in agreement (Lenoir et al., 2016). However Juvonen et al. (2019) do not perceive inclusion in the same manner, for them there is no goal to achieve, because social inclusion refers to much more than simply sharing a physical space together and living in it (Juvonen et al., 2019). Instead, they incorporate a more personalized perspective for each individual, explaining that one is included when he/she will have “social acceptance by peers and caring friends” (Juvonen et al., 2019, p. 250).

In addition, in Europe social inclusion in higher education is less focused on the creation of an inclusive environment, but instead “refers to the increasing access to higher education and degree completion for underrepresented groups” (Kottmann et al., 2019, p.7). It has for main goal to improve the human and innovation capital of Europe while nurturing and encouraging the increase of labor market opportunities (Kottmann et al., 2019). In this instance, social inclusion in higher education is seen through a political point of view and at a broader level: country/continent level.

For the purpose of the research, Social Integration will also be defined in order to differentiate the two concepts, that are usually intertwined together. As social inclusion, social integration is used to help society to be more cohesive (Lenoir et al., 2016). However, social integration refers to the action of “bringing someone into an existing group or system” (Preston, 2023); while social inclusion will establish a culture that appreciates and honors the dignity of every person, regardless of their differences (Preston, 2023).

### ***Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior***

When we adopt the position of social changes that come with immigration and/or cultural changes, those adjustments trigger a transformation within social identity and therefore impact distinct aspects of the social identity, specifically the “group members” identity (Amiot et al., 2007, p.365). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the group identity to realize how one individual’s social inclusion operates: for that I based myself on the Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior of Tajfel. Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a social and psychological theory developed by Tajfel in the 70’s, this theory has focused on patterns of discrimination and prejudices, but also on the motivation of those patterns on the individuals’ social interaction with others (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). SIT tries to explain intergroup conflicts with the hypothesis that individuals define their own individuality in relation to their social group (Islam, 2014). However the nature of the group is characterized by the “in-group” and the “out-group” of the individual in question (Islam, 2014). Ramiah et al. (2011), outlined that group members exhibit a strong motivation to safeguard their self-esteem, thereby favoring their own group as the sole means of achieving this objective (Ramiah et al., 2011). Therefore, if one must categorize what SIT is, Tajfel argues, first, that people do not have one “personal self” but a variety of social selves which correspond to group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

**In-Group and Out-Group.** Since we classify ourselves into groups, the differentiation of individuals lead to the formation of “us” as in-group and “them” as out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Moreover, SIT states that our in-group will discriminate and be prejudiced towards the out-group or what is perceived as such, to help enhance the self-image of not only the individual, but also the in-group he or she is a part of (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). In addition, even if a categorization in groups is natural, the dominant and subordinate group are found in certain contexts (Morland, 1969, as cited in Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Moreover, Tajfel and Turner stated that there are three psychological means involved for creating a social identity:

social categorization, social identification, and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Those categorizations explained how an individual choose a group and based on what distinctions the groups are made (Ramiah et al. 2011).

**Psychological Means.** The first psychological means is *Social Categorization*, it implies that people are understood and even defined by belonging to a group based on similar and shared characteristics (Trepte et al., 2017). Trepte et al. (2017) clarified that “people socially interact based on experiences they have had with others” that are from distinct categories (Trepte et al., 2017, p.3). However, during those interactions people are constantly reshaping and redefining their own categories, thus influencing their own behaviors (Trepte et al., 2017). These categorizations of their environment help individuals avoid being overstimulated by information to process and effectively harness their cognitive abilities (Trepte et al., 2017). In summary, we identify with a group to understand each other and ourselves better.

The second mean is *Social Identification*, which demonstrates that once we categorize ourselves to one group, we begin to adopt the behaviors of the group itself, which consists also of all the aspects of self-images that we gained by being part of a group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). What one individual defines as appropriate behavior derives not only from personal, but also group norms: group that one has chosen based on similar characteristics (Tajfel & Turner, 2004, Trepte et al., 2017). Thus, the social identification of one individual helps increase our own self-esteem and create a sense of belonging with others (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

The third and last mean is *Social Comparison*, it happens once we have categorized and identified ourselves into one group. We often find ourselves engaging in the practice of juxtaposing our group (in-group) with the other groups that we did not choose (out-groups), evaluating and contrasting their characteristics and attributes to ours (Trepte et al., 2017). In order to maintain the self-esteem gained during the identification process, the in-group must be

seen as better than the out-groups. This contrast is called *Positive distinctiveness* (Trepte et al., 2017).

**Positive Distinctiveness.** Positive distinctiveness is defined as a “perceptions favoring the in-group over the out-group” (Trepte et al., 2017, p.4). It implies the evaluation of both the in-group favoritism (positive evaluation of the in-group) and the out-group derogation (negative evaluation of the out-groups) (Trepte et al., 2017). This process is seen as important, since individuals are driven by receiving positive evaluations of their in-group to make their social group more valued and increasing their own self-esteem in the process (Trepte et al., 2017, Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

### ***Concept of Acculturation and Acculturative Stress***

In cross-cultural psychology, one of the major sources of the development and display of human behavior is the contact between cultural populations (Sam & Berry, 2010). However, from these contacts, changes and shifts can occur within individuals and groups (alteration at the entire cultural group level) of both cultures, this process is called *Acculturation* (Oxford University, 2017). Initially conceptualized as a uni-dimensional model only focusing on the migrants, it overtime became a bi-dimensional process, thanks to researchers that included the acculturation of the host country with the migrant one (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). In 2005, Berry defined Acculturation as “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Oxford University, 2017, p.15); specifying that this phenomenon occurs not only on the individual level, but also on the group level in both cultures. A distinction is also made between the changes thanks to Berry (2006), he refers to two kinds of changes: those that are cultural and those that are psychological (Berry, 2006). Both can either be perceived as benign and opportunities, or as difficulties and challenges. The latter are, therefore, classified as stressors

that lead to *Acculturative Stress*, due to the possible conflicts between the dominant culture and the dominee (Berry, 2005, as cited in Cambridge University, 2006).

Acculturative Stress is different from the usual stress that one can feel in its daily life; it is seen as the stress linked to the transition and the adaptation happening in an unfamiliar environment (Berry, 1997, as cited in Tiwari et al., 2017). It is a response by people to life events that are rooted in intercultural contact. Frequently, this includes psychological, emotional, and social conflicts due to the loss of everything they once knew and the adaptation to new values, customs, etc. (Berry, 2006). It is also influenced by feelings of helplessness, sadness and/or loneliness and as a consequence leads to the decrease in both, the level of adjustment and the well-being of the immigrants with their host counterparts (Berry, 1997, as cited in Tiwari et al., 2017). Thus, it is reasonable to expect that the international students will encounter a wide spectrum of life changes as an outcome of living and experiencing a new culture (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The most frequently documented stressors within the international student's community are numerous, however Smith and Khawaja (2011) mention four specific stressors; Language Stressors, Educational Stressors, Socio-Cultural Stressors and Discrimination (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

**Language Stressor.** The first one is the language stressor, since the efficiency in one language can lead other stressors, in both social and academic life of the student, to appear (Chen, 1999, as written in Smith & Khawaja, 2011), it is making the inclusion, adjustments and interactions with others harder and possibly leading the student to Acculturative Stress and/or depression.

**Educational Stressor.** The second one is the educational stressors, such as the pressure given by a third party in the student's personal life (Chen, 1999, Mori, 2000, as cited in Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Examples of education stressors will be the style of teaching: from rote learning to interactive teaching and creative thinking, from Asian style to Western style



(Aubrey, 1991, Liberman, 1994, as cited in Smith & Khawaja, 2011); or even, the expectations than one may have, versus the reality of the students life in the host country: performance and results wise (Chen, 1999, Mori, 2000, as cited in Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

However, academic stressors are not only unique to international students, but rather to the entire student's community, it is simply experienced at diverse levels of intensity (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). As Rasmi et al. found in 2009, those who reported having those stressors and experienced it as challenges were more sensitive to psychological distress and Acculturative Stress, making their adjustment into the host community more complex (Rasmi et al., 2009, as cited in Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

**Socio-Cultural Stressor.** The third stressor is sociocultural, due to international students establishing a new social network after leaving friends and family back home, they are more subjects to feelings of loneliness and homesickness. As Triandis (1999) explained, the culture and the style of interaction of the host country may differ. For example, Asian students will have a harder time adapting to a Western culture compared to others: due to differences between individualist and collectivist cultures (Triandis, 1999, as cited in Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Additionally, the nature of friendships in the host country can impede the ability of international students to establish friendships: difficulties perceived when socializing with locals (Townsend & Poh, 2008, as cited in Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

**Discrimination.** Lastly, in 2007, two researchers (Lee & Rice) found that the communities that are the most threatened by discrimination are the minorities (Latin America, Africa, Middle Eastern, etc.), and that its ranges from feelings of inferiority to physical attacks (Lee & Rice, 2007, as cited in Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Such feelings and experiences may negatively impact the adaptation of those students and may discourage them to interact with the locals (Chen, 1999, Mori, 2000, as cited in Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

## **Literature Review**

While the previous section referred to the theoretical framework applied to understand the subject of the thesis, the following section present previous research literature in the field.

Wenhua and Zhe (2013) state that the terms “International student” are an extremely broad terms and are generally used to refer to different groups of students within the educational environment, such as undergraduates and postgraduates and short-term and long-term exchange students, etc. (Wenhua & Zhe, 2013). These students have been researched several times by different scholars, trying to identify the problem(s) faced by them while studying abroad (Wenhua & Zhe, 2013), and they all have categorized their results based on specific problems (Akanwa, 2015). The countries that are the most studied for this phenomenon, are the English speaking countries; such as the US, Australia, the UK and New Zealand; but also several countries that have the most diverse system, such as South Africa, or South Asia, where the majority of international students go to study (Wenhua & Zhe, 2013, Akanwa, 2015, Zhou et al., 2008, Ching et al., 2017, Ecochard et al., 2017, Philips, 2021).

Even if sometimes different (more narrow or broader classifications) the issues are generally categorized the same way: Academic Challenges, Linguistic Challenges and Socio-cultural Challenges (Wenhua & Zhe, 2013, Akanwa, 2015, Zhou et al., 2008, Ching et al., 2017, Ecochard et al., 2017, Australian Education International et al., 2010, Philips, 2021).

### ***Academic Challenges***

Classrooms and how the course is taught vary from one culture to the other, such as interactive teaching in Western countries versus rote learning in Asian culture (Aubrey, 1991, Liberman, 1994, as cited in Smith & Khawaja, 2011). These changes can affect the students and their adaptation on how they are expected to learn and achieve, which in turn influences how they relate and interact with their classmates (Juvonen et al. 2019).

Additionally, the Australian Federation of International Students (2010) emphasized the massive burden of responsibilities that international students carry with them: they are accountable by their relatives to achieve high grades and great academic performances (Australian Education International et al., 2010). Consequently, those same students feel pressured to maintain their relatives' expectations and will usually choose to exclude themselves socially to be able to focus on their academic results (Australian Education International et al., 2010, Ecochard et al., 2017).

In 2013, two researchers Wenhua and Zhe summarized specific issues that are a result of the academic challenges; one of them was the difficulties in using the educational services: like the counseling service (Wenhua & Zhe, 2013). "Offering counseling services could be one of the solutions or supports that can be offered to assist international students to smooth their cultural adjustment" (Swagler and Ellis, 2003 as cited in Ching et al., 2017, p.478). However, some cultures still view counselling negatively and associate it with mental disorders and illnesses (Ching et al., 2017). Therefore, those students will not seek external help except in crisis situations (Ching et al., 2017), potentially leading to scenarios of social exclusion where educational experiences are unsuccessful, disengaging, and not rewarding (Akanwa, 2015).

### ***Linguistic Challenges***

One of the most common issues that international students have to face is the *Language Barriers or Differences* (Wenhua & Zhe, 2013), due to international students not being familiar with the cultural language devices, such as idioms, colloquialisms, dialects, body language, accents and expressions specific to a country or a region of the country (Australian Education International et al., 2010, Ecochard et al., 2017).

However, as language is the medium to several life aspects (Ecochard et al., 2017), a language deficiency leads the students to have a challenging time connecting and communicating with others, as most of the interactions are done in English or other language

of the host country (Akanwa, 2015). Thus, even if one is not fluent in English, mingling with other students, native or international, help creating strong relationships and building a sturdy social support group (Akanwa, 2015). Social support found in interactions and meaningful relationships with both host and co-nationals will usually contribute to students' psychological well-being (Tanak et al., 1997 as cited in Zhou et al., 2008). Consequently, by helping to build the confidence needed to interact more with others, the students learn more about the language, but also create their social group: forming a loop where the students avoid social anxiety and loneliness (Akanwa, 2015, Ching et al., 2017).

In addition to the social aspect of the language, studies indicate that the proficiency with the language, usually English, speaking and writing skills are vital to international students' academic performance (Akanwa, 2015). Without those skills, students may need more time processing what is asked of them during an activity leading to a total lack of participation in class (Ching et al., 2017); and therefore, to some interferences with their overall academic performances and the students doubting their own skills and potential successes (Ching et al., 2017).

### ***Socio-Cultural Challenges***

Students' academic life is fully intertwined with their social one (Juvonen & Wentzel, 1999- as cited in Juvonen et al. 2019), therefore a lack in one part of their life might create a lack in the other. However, "adapting to a new culture is viewed as requiring a dynamic shift in personal identification" (Tran, 2011 as cited in Ching et al., 2017, p.473), and during this alteration two cultural identities cohabit together. Most of the time this process is seen as a positive change by students, however molding yourself to a new country and culture might be overbearing and challenging (Ching et al., 2017).

For instance, when several people from different ethnic backgrounds reside together, the dominant culture gains the upper hand over minorities (Juvonen et al., 2019), and when this

process happen, one may feel entitled to victimize his/her peers (Juvonen et al., 2019). For the sake of mutual understanding peer victimization has been defined by Juvonen et al. in 2019, as such: situations “ranging from covert rumors to overt name-calling and physical aggression” (Juvonen et al., 2019, p.251). All this negativity has a strong impact on the psychological and emotional state of the students. Findings of several researches have predicted that those victimizations have consequences such as loneliness, anxiety and confusion, which may lead to the social exclusion of the students and/or depression (Juvonen et al., 2019, Ecochard et al. 2017, Akanwa, 2015, Wenhua & Zhe, 2013).

As Wenhua and Zhe explained in 2013, several scholars researched this international phenomenon mostly in Western English-speaking countries. However, even if the categorizations are usually the same, there is a lack of agreement among the researchers concerning the magnitude of each challenges on the international students (Wenhua & Zhe, 2013).

## **Methodology**

In this section, I describe how the study was conducted in terms of research design, data collection, sample choice and data processing and analysis. Furthermore, I will explain the limitations and challenges faced while conducting the study, before ending with a reflections regarding the quality of the data findings, by assessing the data’s reliability and validity through distinct categories: transferability, verifiability, credibility, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

### **Qualitative Design**

In order to answer the research question “*How do international students perceive and experience social inclusion within their multicultural environment, and what factors contribute to their sense of belonging and participation within the students community?*”, I have chosen

to employ a qualitative research design as it allows people to speak in their own voice, rather than conforming to categories and terms imposed on them by others (Sofaer, 1999). Hammarberg et al. (2016) emphasized that a qualitative research design is required when factual data are necessary to answer the research question, since the information needed are sought through opinions, attitudes, views or even preferences (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Therefore, for allowing participants to speak about their perceptions and subjective experiences, a qualitative research design is the most appropriate approach. Combined with a narrative approach and storytelling, researchers can access rich layers of information that provide a more in-depth understanding of the particulars of the participants' points of view (Wang & Geale, 2015).

## **Data Collection**

As I wanted to collect personal narratives data on real-life experiences, semi-structured interviews were the preferred data collection method as the goal was to better understand the participants' unique perspective (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Like Kallio et al. (2016) explained, semi-structured interviews are one of the most common data collection methods in qualitative research (Kallio et al., 2016). However, the quality of those interviews will fundamentally influence the results of the study, hence the crucial importance of an interview guide (Kallio et al., 2016 and Barriball & While, 1994). Thus, I developed an interview guide that included a delineation of subjects and inquiries presented in a distinct manner, which allowed me to seek follow-up questions if needed (cf. Appendix 02).

### ***Interview Guide Crafting***

To craft the most comprehensive interview guide, I adhered to the four phases outlined by Kallio et al. in 2016, before presenting the interview guide to my supervisor and SIKT (the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research). This article explained how to begin, design and work on an interview guide and what happens once you are done with it.

The first phase is to identify the conditions for using semi-structured interviews in relation to the research question (Kallio et al., 2016), in this instance, for studying people's perceptions and opinions on social inclusion. Once the requirements have been identified, I have been able to retrieve and use the literature that have already been written on the topic; the aim was to gain an adequate understanding of the entire subject (Kallio et al., 2016) and make a list of topics that could be brought up during the interviews. For the third step, the aim was to craft the initial draft of the interview guide. This involves devising questions that foster natural dialogue and elicit the richest data possible (Turner, 2010, as cited in Kallio et al., 2016). It was crucial to avoid leading questions while ensuring that inquiries remain open-ended, thus allowing interviewees to share their personal narratives and emotions authentically (Kallio et al., 2016). Before presenting the interview guide, I needed to assess it to confirm the coverage and content's relevance of the formulated questions and to identify needs for reformulations (Kallio et al., 2016, Barriball & While, 1994, Chenail, 2011). Moreover, Chenail explained that testing could also contribute to the research integrity and ethical considerations (Chenail, 2011). Therefore, I realized two practice interviews to familiarize myself with the process of conducting the interviews and three pilot interviews to evaluate the relevance and content validity of the questions that were going to be asked. Those tests ensured that as a researcher, I would be focused while still having the autonomy to explore pertinent ideas that may come up in the course of the interview (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

## **Data Processing**

### ***Sample***

“The selection of sampling methods and determination of sample size are extremely important” (Singh & Masuku, 2014, p.2) to be able to draw correct conclusions afterwards. Thus, a balance needed to be found, between a sample size to small that will make the research fail to detect the important aspects; and a bigger sample size that could lead to an inaccurate

study (Singh & Masuku, 2014). For this research, a Purpose Sampling Method has been used, because this technique used in Qualitative Research, enhances the understanding and the development of knowledge from individual cases (Sandelowski, 2000). It also allows the researcher to select its sample units according to the purpose of his/her research (Singh & Masuku, 2014). Since the aim of my research is to study international students, I have chosen to focus on the student that were following, at that time, a full Master Degree (long-term students) at the University of Stavanger (UiS), in Norway and that had a different nationality than the host country. I deliberately chose to not include the domestic students and short-term students, also known as exchange students, on account of the irrelevance for the research question. Moreover, the range of participation within this purpose sample, was first to recruit 10 to 15 internationals to specifically prioritize richness of the data. Yet at the end, 14 students volunteered to be a part of the study and have been interviewed. The participants' identities are not included in the study, respecting their entitlement to maintain their confidentiality.

To reach out to participants, a post was published on the Facebook account of the university and the student Facebook account of the Norsk Hotellhøgskole (NHS \_ Master Degree of the researcher). Alongside the two posts, the snowball method has been used. The characteristic of this method is the use of participants to contact other respondents (Streeton et al., 2004). The primary goal was to have participants from different background, age, nationality, and gender. However, the participants mainly were following a degree in Service Leadership in International Business (approximately 71,42% of the respondents), while 85,70% were from outside EE/EEA and about 57% were female participants.

To be able to keep the identity of my participants anonymous, all the interviewees will be referred as a number ranging from 1 to 14. An overview of the students' profiles is given in the Table 1 below, for confidentiality reasons, certain profile markers have been removed.

*Table 01 - Students Profile*



<b>Student</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Major</b>
01	F	Asia	NHS
02	F	Asia	NHS
03	M	Asia	Data Science
04	M	Asia	Risk Analysis
05	F	Africa	NHS
06	F	Middle East	NHS
07	M	Asia	NHS
08	M	Asia	NHS
09	F	Europe	Environment and Society
10	F	Asia	NHS
11	M	Europe/Africa	Civil Engineering
12	M	Asia	NHS
13	F	Asia	NHS
14	F	Africa	NHS

### ***Interviews Timing***

Once the Interview Guide approved by my supervisor and then, the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT), I contacted the voluntary participants to arrange a face to face meeting to conduct the interviews, provided with a consent form/letter of participation also previously approved by SIKT, for each students participating (cf. Appendix 01). This document was explaining the subject of the research, the participant's rights and what

would be expecting of them during the interview. The students were asked to send it back via email as soon as possible, with any interrogations and concerns they may have felt following the examination of the document. If one participant were to lose his/her document or wanted to see it again the day of the interview, copies were available on the researcher's tablet. Once the letter filled and sent back, the students had the choice of date and hour during week 7 (February 12 to February 19, 2024) for his/her interview. Interviews could not be conducted after this specific week, as I were to move back to France, and therefore would not be able to direct face to face interviews. In addition, the participants were given the freedom to choose their own location: at home, at university, at a café, etc. Most of the students decided on a private room, personally booked by the researcher each time, at university to avoid being bothered by surrounding noises and keep their anonymity. However, during this week, the weather conditions compelled me to conduct three interviews out of the fourteenth, via Teams instead, as the buses were unable to navigate properly due to the heavy snow.

Moreover, since in-depth semi-structured interviews are generally conducted only once and usually cover 30 minutes to 1 hour (Jamshed, 2014), I decided to create a tentative template for my interview to follow for the time of my interviews, thus I have estimated my interviews as 45min long (cf. Appendixes 03). The duration allocated to each category was determined based on its significance to the subject matter (Qu & Dumay, 2003). However, some of my interviews lasted longer: the longest being from 55min to 1hour; and some of them were shorter with a minimal interview time of 15min, even with follow-up questions to elicit more elaborate responses (Qu & Dumay, 2003). In addition, all the interviews have been recorded as per agreement with SIKT, and later on transcribed thanks to the protected website Nettjskjema (cf. Data Analysis part).

## Data Analysis

As a method to analyze the interviews in the best way possible to identify results that would be relevant to the research question: “*How do international students perceive and experience social inclusion within their multicultural educational environment, and what factors contribute to their sense of belonging and participation within the students community?*”, the data was analyzed thematically, following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six steps for thematic analysis. “A thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79).

The first phase consists of familiarization with the data collected from the interviews (Braun & Clark, 2006). Since the data consisted of recorded interviews, the data needed to be transcribed into written form first. The process of transcribing your data is long and time-consuming, however it was a useful way to begin the familiarization process (Riessman, 1993 as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, after recording, the interviews were posted on a secure website, Nettjskjema, which offered the option of a transcription. I carefully read over the transcripts, before listening to the audio while reading again making sure that nothing had been changed. As Braun and Clarke (2006), explained this phase require “a rigorous and thorough transcript” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.88).

The second phase is generating initial codes and began once I was familiarized enough with the data. At this stage, I generated a list of ideas about what was really interesting in the data collected previously (Braun & Clark, 2006). As I was supposed to begin the coding process, I first organized my data into meaningful groups (Braun & Clark, 2006, Tuckett, 2005 as cited in Braun & Clark, 2006). A code reveals a noteworthy aspect of the data, which is interesting for the analyst. For this phase, the computer software NVivo was used to code: to tag and name the selections.

Third, I began searching for themes, this phase “re-focuses the analysis at the broader leaven of themes” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.89), meaning that I had to sort out the different codes that I had into potential themes; it is the beginning of the analysis. As it is advised at this point, I used visual representations to help me classify the codes: mind-maps and the name of each theme with a brief description (Braun & Clark, 2006). The mind-maps have contributed to clarify the relationships between my codes and my themes, and I ended this step “with a collection of candidate themes and sub-themes” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.90). Thus, Appendixes 05 and Appendixes 06 show a tentative mind-map of relationships between social factors, created after phase 3 ended.

The fourth phase is the stage used to review the themes created in phase 3 (Braun & Clark, 2006). During this step, I discovered that some of my previous themes were not themes and should be deleted, and that others collapsed into each other and therefore merged together (Braun & Clark, 2006). Cautiously following the instructions of Braun and Clark, I made sure here that my data, within the theme chosen for it, cohered meaningfully together (Braun & Clark, 2006). “At the end of this phase, you should have a fairly good idea of what your different themes are, how they fit together, and the overall story they tell about the data” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.92).

Phase 5 is about defining and naming the themes identified after Phase 3 and Phase 4 (Braun & Clark, 2006). As explained in the article, this step allows to determine the “essence of what each theme captures” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.92), consequently it was important for me to not just paraphrase the content of my interview, but identify what was really important to answer the research question: consider the big picture to be sure that everything fit. Thus, I made sure that there was not overlapping, by reading again my interviews’ transcripts and defining clearly what is a theme and what is not (cf. Appendix 07 as an example).

Finally, the last phase is about drafting the report (cf. Results). The main objective of authoring a report is to “provide a concise, logical and non-repetitive” story about the data (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.93). Each of the themes must be supported by enough evidence and vivid example, since this phase must go further than simply describing the data: it must analyze the narrative that illustrates the story (Braun & Clark, 2006).

### **Challenges and Limitations**

There were several practical challenges during the months of research for the thesis project. Even though, at the beginning my main focus was to recruit participants who were as different as possible in terms of culture of origin, age and major, I soon discovered that this balance of diversity was not always possible. The international student’s population of the University of Stavanger (UiS) is mainly composed of two groups; the first one is mostly from European countries. However, that community was not relevant for answering my research question since it is predominantly short-term students: ERASMUS students. The second group is mainly from Asian and African countries and those students are staying for the entire cursus of their Master degree. Mostly composed of South and East Asian, the second group was the most receptive to this research.

Moreover, since the participants were having different nationalities, the language selection during the interviews has to be considered. As a French native and an English bilingual researcher, I decided to let the choice of language to my participants. Two of them chose French as they were native speakers too, the rest chose English. However, for those who chose English as the language for their respective interview, a few were not completely fluent in English either, hence some barriers arose. I admit that this language barrier might have affected the participant’s communication and desire to share.

The third challenge was the time, since this thesis was conducted over a period of 4,5 months, from January 2024 to mid-May 2024. During this time, the aim was to investigate the social inclusion and its factors on the international students at the University of Stavanger (UiS). Upon reflection and even with the help of a previously realized calendar (cf. Appendix 04), the time was of the essence and much more complex to follow than predicted. Several delays appeared during the several months: personal and family time, personal choices, and unexpected setbacks. Another time constraint was to go through the full process of SIKT. It took weeks of preparation before even sending the file for them to review: the research should already have been completely thought through, the interview guide completed and organized, the consent form or letter of information clearly written and an explanation what will happen provided. Every part of investigation clearly articulated to convey the aim of the study. Once this work is done, SIKT will take the time to review it and ask for modifications if needed. For this study, SIKT took three weeks to a month to examine and assess the work, before giving the “green light”. In future research, it would be important to carefully consider the allocation of time and resources to ensure a rigorous study. Implementing strategies for an early planning and efficient methods would be essential to the researcher if the time is, as this thesis, limited.

The last challenge and the most difficult one encountered throughout the thesis, was and still is the researcher bias. As I am also an international student, caution was called for to avoid letting one experiences take precedence over those of the others. In order to avoid this phenomenon, my own experiences had to be recognized so as not to influence the participants’ ones. Once this recognition had been made, the focus on empirical evidence rather than individual opinions or preferences was used to reflect on what has been discover from the participants themselves and what the researcher already knew from personal encounters. Moreover, to help avoiding this bias, the researcher followed a transparent methodology by explaining every step taken from research method to decision-making processes.

## **Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research**

“Reliability and validity are ways of demonstrating and communicating the rigour of research processes and the trustworthiness of research findings” (Roberts et al., 2006, p.41). In this part, the researcher describes how the quality of the primary data results are considered.

### ***Trustworthiness***

Seen as the reliability of the research, the trustworthiness is concerned with the degree of reproducibility of study outcomes across variable conditions (Bryman, 2001 as cited in Roberts et al., 2006). However Long and Johnson (2000), propose that validity and reliability in qualitative research have the same core essence regardless of the traditional difference between the two, and as such offer to not separate both concepts (Long & Jonhson, 2000 as cited in Graneheim & Lundman, 2003). Therefore, the concepts of reliability and validity, will be here seen and studied as one concept.

To ensure the trustworthiness of one study strategies and measures have been developed and it is suggested that at least two of those measures or strategies should be used in a qualitative study (Hadi & Closs, 2016, Graneheim & Lundman, 2003). Moreover, even if those measures can be seen separately, they actually should be seen as intertwined, forming together the aspect of trustworthiness (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003).

**Transferability.** Refers to the “extent to which the findings can be transferred to other settings or groups” (Polit & Hungler, 1999 as cited in Graneheim & Lundman, 2003, p.110) and is concerned with the external validity of the study (Zia UI Haq et al., 2023). “The qualitative study result will be considered [transferable] when the one who was not part of the study or the readers can associate it with their own experiences” (Zia UI Haq et al., 2023, p. 156), in other terms, if a large community that is not the primary target of the research, can recognized themselves into the study. Thus, the sample is particularly important to be able to

generalize findings into another area of research (e.g. from educational environment to professional environment) and/or from sample to a large population (Zia UI Haq et al., 2023).

However, this study does not claim all results can be generalized, as such that the participants that collaborated in this study have all their own and unique perspectives and encounters, which cannot be transferable to another environment or to a larger population. Sandelowski (1981) considered the generalization of research impossible, because according to him every researcher, phenomena and situation and interaction is unique; therefore different (Sandelowski, 1986 as cited in Zia UI Haq et al., 2023). Nevertheless, this thesis has been anchored in thorough research and literatures, and is intended to unlock new horizons, thoughts and viewpoints on the social inclusion of the international student community. Thusly, even if certain aspects of this thesis could be easily transferable, others might be used as a ground for innovative ideas and internal improvements.

**Credibility.** Credibility is concerned with the internal validity of the research (Zia UI Haq et al., 2023) and the widely used method to ensure it in qualitative studies is the triangulation (Hadi & Closs, 2016). “Triangulation involves using at least two related data sources, [...] with the aim of reducing inherent bias” (Hadi & Closs, 2016, p.643). In the case of this research, the triangulation happened thanks to the Theory Triangulation which involves using multiple theoretical frameworks to analyze the data, composed of the literature and theoretical framework (Carter et al., 2014) combined with the use of primary data: the interviews conducted. The results of the interviews and the literature compared together throughout the entire research keep the data well justified and secure the credibility needed to have a diverse selection.

Since the question of this study concerned the perceptions and experiences of the international community for their social inclusion and which factors can help, the researcher recruited 14 international students at the University of Stavanger (UiS) for real-life experiences



deepening the credibility of the study. Moreover, inasmuch the choice of the interview's language was made between French and English, and that most of them were performed in the mother tongue of neither the researcher nor the participant, questions were clarified and explained if needed to secure the understanding of the situation from both parties.

In addition, an analytic triangulation or peer debriefing method has been used over the course of the research (Hadi & Closs, 2016). The analytic triangulation is a method uses when the researcher discusses his or her work: such as the research process, the data analysis or even the interpretations (Hadi & Closs, 2016). As a student my supervisor functioned as a debriefer and helped me navigate by meaningfully questioning and provoking critical thinking of my entire research process (Hadi & Closs, 2016).

### ***Ethical considerations***

Before delving into the interview process, I had to go through the Service Data Protection of SIKT, the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT, n.d.) that provide services that guarantee information security and data protection in the knowledge sector (SIKT, n.d.). Following these procedures reassured the respondents of the data handling technicality and assure other researchers of the groundwork provided and aid the validity of the research.

Moreover, SIKT method was requesting the design of a letter of information/consent form, to inform the participants of how their data would be collected, kept confidential, why this study was conducted and what could be asked of them and the design of an interview guide (both of the documents can be found in Appendixes 01 & 02).

## **Results and Findings**

“Qualitative approaches are incredibly diverse, complex and nuances, and thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method” (Holloway & Todres, 2003, as cited in Braun

& Clarke, 2006, p.78). In this part, the thematic analysis allowed to identify four categories of results: Perceptions of Social Inclusion, Experiences of Social Inclusion, Factors Contributing to an Active Participation and Factors Contributing to Students' Sense of Belonging; in addition, sub-categories have been pinpointed, see table 02.

*Table 02: Main Categories and Sub-Categories*

<b>Perceptions of Social Inclusion</b>	<b>Experiences of Social Inclusion</b>	<b>Factors Contributing to the Students' Sense of Belonging</b>	<b>Factors Contributing to their Active Participation</b>
Personal Definition	Integration Within the University	Language to Be Understood	Language to Understand your Environment
First Perceptions and Feelings	Integration Outside the University	Community	Personal Life
/	/	Culture	Personality Characteristics
/	/	University	/
/	/	National Characteristics	/

### **Perceptions of Social Inclusion**

Under this category, I asked the students to tell me about their perceptions of social inclusion. The aim being to see what perceptions they have on the concept of Social Inclusion. Even though there is no universal definition of this concept (Lenoir et al., 2016), it was important to listen to students, living in a multicultural environment, revealing their thoughts on it. They were also expected to describe their feelings when they arrived in Norway. Table 03 includes quotes that illustrate this category.

*Table 03: Sub-Categories and Quotes \_ One*

Sub-categories	Quotes
Perceptions Through Definitions	<p>“I think it is like getting included to the new society, the new environment, and getting comfortable within it and making social connections and so on.” _ Participant 10</p> <p>“Like, maybe like all people from different cultural backgrounds, like in the same group, like combining in the same group. Yeah.” _ Participant 12</p> <p>“You are involved” _ Participant 13</p>
First Perceptions and Feelings	<p>“First semester, I would say that was very tough because everything is new and especially the people around you.” _ Participant 01</p> <p>“Initially it was a little bit tough, challenging because right now all of a sudden you come from a different culture” _ Participant 08</p>

### *Perceptions Through Definitions*

When asked about their perception of social inclusion and how they would define it, the students were having three types of answers, the first response corresponded to the social life aspect, the second was about feelings and saw inclusion as a processus, while the last one was the mixing of culture all together.

**Social Life.** For Participant 01 social inclusion means being part of the social life through friends, colleagues, neighbors, and/or classmates (Participant 01, 2024), for another one, it just means to have fun and “hang out socially” (Participant 04, 2024). Whilst others see it as the fact of doing as much of activities as possible, creating relationships and just be present and participate in everything at school (Participant 07, 2024). Participant 11 explained it as “being a part of a society”: “doing the same activities” and be a “part of the activities that are

done in the city or in the university” (Participant 11, 2024), which means that students can fostered a sense of ownership through it all.

**Feelings and Process.** Only two students enter this category: the first student, sees social inclusion as a personal feeling, for each person to feel at the moment they realize that they are heard, accepted, valued, and recognized as a valuable member of the society in which they find themselves (Participant 04, 2024). The second one, sees it as a process that all students go through when a personal objective is set, in this case for this student: involving everyone. Participant 05 declared, “it could be a decision-making process towards some goals or some objectives. I feel that the major goal for that would be to involve everyone, make them feel included” (Participant 05, 2024).

**Respect of Cultures.** The rest of the students that have been interviewed and asked about social inclusion described it as an environment where each culture and related beliefs are respected, listened to, and appreciated at their true value. Participant 14 defined it as follows “I think it's all about like in a diverse community, all groups are respected, their values are respected” (Participant 14, 2024), whilst Participant 12 stated that maybe it is “like [when] all people from different cultural backgrounds” are combined in the same group (Participant 12, 2024). One of his colleague, clarified that it should be an integration in the daily life of that environment: it should not be only all the culture that are mixing, it should be you and your daily life too. He depicted his perception as “being integrated into an environment, into the social environment in which you evolve. A very day-to-day environment, with other people” (Translated by the researcher, Participant 09, 2024, cf. Translations Glossary 1).

**Potential Synonyms.** After asking for each student's personal perception of the subject, I requested the participants to find a synonym for the verb “to include,” which many had used in their definition. The aim was to see how the students could define it without using a relative term and then to make them think of a word that could have the same meaning as include.

Internationals may have unique ways of perceiving the concept of social inclusion, therefore the synonyms are as crucial as the definition in itself. Below are the answers of the participants when asked to find another term: “hmm, accepted? Yeah” (Participant 01, 2024); “included, hmmm. Included. I would just say considered” (Participant 03, 2024); “adapt. Adapt, yeah” (Participant 10, 2024) and “you are involved” (Participant 13, 2024).

### ***First Perceptions and Feelings***

In this part, the students were asked about their first perceptions and feelings, when they arrived at their university or in Norway and how they evolved throughout their first semester. It is crucial to understand how they perceived their integration and see the evolution between their arrival and the end of the first few months to comprehend how their perceptions influenced their growth.

One of the first questions asked was how their first semester had gone (cf. Appendix 02). The main aim was to find out how they felt and perceived their arrival in a country and culture that was not their own. The first response of all our internationals was how “tough” and “hard”, but still very “exciting” it was (Participant 01, Participant 03 & Participant 06, 2024), because it is the beginning of a new life: several of them had to leave behind an established situation to create a new one from scratch (Participant 08 & Participant 10, 2024). Moreover, some people explained that some experiences, such as filling in all the paperwork or knowing how the buses work and where the nearest shops are located assumed a lot of their time. Therefore they perceived it as stressful situations that were taking too much time to realize, thus restricting other social situations to be integrated with others (Participant 07, Participant 10 & Participant 12, 2024). But like everything else, time has improved their perceptions and feelings linked together, and it has become easier for them (Participant 01, Participant 02 & Participant 10). Participant 12 stated, “it was like tough for some weeks [...], but after that it became easy” (Participant 12, 2024).

However, even if for many students their first semester improves, the consequences for their mental health can be more significant and longer lasting, participant 13 is a good example of the mental state of the international community. She explained “when I first moved to Norway, I was stressed or maybe depressed. [...] now I still feel depressed, but in a different way” (Participant 13, 2024). Before adding,

There was a time that I think I cried almost every day [...] before I sleep. It's like something that I need to do [...] actually until now I still do that, but not very often like before. (Participant 13, 2024).

Due to the consequences of the “big challenge, plus [the] change in [their] life” (Participant 10, 2024), students life can be pretty isolated at UiS (Participant 09, 2024) creating negative perceptions towards their integration within their university.

In this section, students discussed their perspectives on social inclusion, as well as their initial perceptions in an unfamiliar environment. While many have successfully navigated through perceived stressful and challenging situations, the international community still is fragile and emotionally vulnerable.

### **Experiences of Social Inclusion**

Under this category, participants have talked about their integration’s experiences in two locations: within the premises of the university and outside the premises of the university. Table 04 illustrates the category with its sub-groups and main quotes.

*Table 04: Sub-Categories and Quotes \_ Two*

<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Quotes</b>
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Integration within the university	“It was complicated to meet people, even during the activities, because often people were already in groups themselves.” _ Translated by the researcher _ Participant 09 _ cf. Translations Glossary 2
Integration outside the university	“He introduced me to, like, several Sri Lankans who he knew from here before” _ Participant 10

### *Integration*

In this part, the volunteers has been asked about their integration within different situation in order to collect feelings and perceptions about their first experiences of inclusion.

**Within University.** The first experience created by the university to help the integration of all students together, was the Fadder Week, “a week-long party for all” to help them make friends (Participant 03, 2024) and offering “a lot of activities”: such as “musical activities and sound arrangement” (Participant 02, 2024). Guided by a Fadder/a Sponsor, new students were meeting their classmates for the first time while taking the time to chat together (Participant 01, Participant 02 & Participant 08, 2024). The second experience was specific to the Service Leadership Master Degree and it was “the camp at the hotel”, a seminar where people were able to “connect or socialize with classmates” (Participant 08 & Participant 12, 2024).

However, some issues has been identified by the students in accordance of their integration’s experiences. Participant 09 illustrated one with her statement, “it was complicated to meet people, even during the activities, because often people were already in groups themselves” (Translated by the researcher, Participant 09, 2024, cf. Translations Glossary 3). Some students, specially Norwegian, already had their own friends before beginning their master, making it harder for others to create relationships with them (Participant 01, Participant 02, Participant 07 & Participant 09). A second issue was identified by one of the participant’s

colleagues that is doing his master in three years instead of two: “yes, but now, like, all of my friends are doing thesis, so, like, I have a classmate from 2023, so, yeah, there's some gap, like, because I don't know anyone in the class” (Participant 12, 2024).

Then, students talked about their integration within their class that happened thanks to random assigned group works (Participant 09, 2024) and thanks to the kindness of their teachers (Participant 03, 2024). As participant 10 stated, “When we are doing some group work or something, like, when we have some tasks, we are really close” (Participant 10, 2024). However, even if students find themselves close during the group works, some of them have reported that those can be “a bit chaotic” (Participant 14, 2024), and that the closeness felt can “suddenly vanished when [the students] went back to the classroom” (Participant 06, 2024).

**Outside the University.** It is essential to talk about the integration outside the university; groups that they usually have made inside before meeting them outside to “hold special events to sharing the food and stories” (Participant 01, 2024). Participant 02 explained that with her friends from outside university, she usually “celebrated the most important traditional festival together” (Participant 02, 2024), whilst Participant 06, explained that even if she had relationships within the university, she made “90% of [her] socializing [...] out of university” (Participant 06, 2024). In addition, to the social aspect of the integration, according to the students, having an integration with other person outside of the campus helps with the loneliness and the homesickness (Participant 10, 2024).

In this section, students shared their integration experiences with their peers at the university, through the numerous opportunities available to them. However, these experiences can sometimes be negative, especially when they feel uprooted from their familiar surroundings or do not find friends. Nonetheless, many students have also managed to integrate outside of the university thanks to the various experiences they have had on campus.



## Factors Contributing to the Students' Sense of Belonging

For the purposes of this research, I solicited the participants to explain which factors could make their inclusion harder or even stopped it completely. However, sometimes I required some of the students to go deeper on certain points to figure out if those were real threats to the individual's inclusion. Table 05 portrays this category with its sub-categories and the main quotes to clarify it.

*Table 05: Sub-categories and Quotes \_ Three*

<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Quotes</b>
Language	<p>“Now I'm trying to learn the language so that it's really easy for you to communicate” _ Participant 12</p> <p>“No, sorry, we even want someone who speaks Norwegian to be in our team. We don't want anyone who doesn't know the language at all” _ Participant 10</p>
Community	<p>“The friends around my circle, so they're like we hang out and we eat out. So we hold special events to sharing the food and stories” _ Participant 01</p> <p>“Because they are from the same culture. They went through the process of fitting in here as well” _ Participant 03</p>
Culture	<p>“They have to absorb the Norwegian culture and diminish their Pakistani culture more” _ Participant 03</p> <p>“You get the feeling that you don't belong here and you're not one of them. But not the direct racism” _ Participant 04</p>
University	<p>“I should have been spending this time with my family instead.” _ Participant 08</p>

	<p>“Now we are supposed to pay the tuition fees, it will be really hard for us to, you know, find housing from outside and afford everything and just working part time and, like, you know, keeping up with the studies and embracing the cultural shocks and everything” _ Participant 10</p>
National Characteristics	<p>“Norwegian can be very introvert” _ Participant 01</p> <p>“Norwegian people are generally trustworthy” _ Participant 07</p> <p>“Norwegian gatherings are about drinking” _ Participant 04</p> <p>“So it's not within their culture to be open and flexible to different people. So maybe it can be a matter of time” _ Participant 06</p>

### *Language*

Among the 14 interviewees, there was a total of 9 different mother tongues represented \_ with Mayotte official language being French: Vietnamese, Chinese Mandarin, Persian (Iran), French, Urdu (Pakistan), Shona (Zimbabwe), Bangla (Bangladesh), Nepali and Sinhalese (Sri Lanka). With no exceptions, all students have affirmed that they are not using their native language on their daily life on campus ground. They stated; “English is not even my second language. English is a language I learned from school or I tried to practice when I moved to Norway” (Participant 13, 2024), and “English, because we didn't speak Norwegian amongst ourselves. It was the English language” only (Translated by the researcher, Participant 11, 2024, cf. Translations Glossary 5).

**Job Prospects.** Many students feel that the individual feeling of belonging begin because they are a valued member of the society thanks to their job. However, the lack of job opportunities for internationals when applying for a vacancy is important due to their language (Participant 06 & Participant 08, 2024). This subject was raised by several students interviewed, making it a very crucial point to develop. As participant 06 said, when speaking about her social

life and then the use of Norwegian, “job seeking is another story” (Participant 06, 2024). Several students pointed out that despite their motivation to accept any job, many companies closed the door to them due to their lack of knowledge of the Norwegian language. One of the participants, explained that despite taking part in the job fairs organized by the university, she did not get any replies from any of the companies or managers (Participant 06, 2024). She also added that when she did find a job, it did not go as planned: she did get refused based on her language (Participant 06, 2024). One of her colleagues added to the subject: “especially when I got those trial shift in Olivia and they refused me because I cannot speak Norwegian. I said, wow, nice” (Participant 02, 2024). And another classmate insisted on this point with this statement: “when I went to look for jobs, like, part-time, sometimes I was told straight in the face, Oh, sorry, you don't speak Norwegian!” (Participant 10, 2024). While she knows it is possible to find a job, where only English is accepted as she depicted: “I went for this other interview, in Hotel Victoria. [...] They were like, That's okay, [...] Our customers will be mostly speaking in English” (Participant 10, 2024).

However, even when the students had found a position, some of them described their negative experiences confronted to Norwegian customers, accentuating their feeling of being different and of not belonging (Participant 01, 2024). Participant 09 explained two types of situations, where the lack of Norwegian was seen as problematic. The first one was depicted as elderly people complaining that the waiter/waitress serving their table was not speaking Norwegian and wanted another person to serve them (Participant 09, 2024). The second example portrayed as follow:

There have been many experiences where customers were annoyed at having to order in English with my colleagues, [...]. As a result, they were much more bitter and nasty towards them. Whereas if I arrived and spoke in Norwegian, they were immediately

very nice people. (Translated by the researcher, Participant 09, 2024, cf. Translations Glossary 6).

In contrast to those unpleasant encounters, multiple students have relativized these occurrences and put themselves at the place of those customers. As one portrayed by the same person:

I'll try to put myself in their shoes. It's true that I'm not expecting someone who speaks perfect French [serving in a restaurant in France, in this instance]. But it's true that if someone is a waiter, I'd like them to make an effort. (Translated by the researcher, Participant 09, 2024, cf. Translations Glossary 7).

Another one augmented with “who really wants to find a job and like really being included and accepted by this society” really needs to learn the language (Participant 01, 2024).

**Learning to Be Understood.** Several students reported that they have begun to learn the local language and for which reasons. One of the explanation is to be integrated into society: to be able to find a permanent job, to live in the country once you have finished your studies (Person 01, 2024), But also, to be able to be a part of life in society and not dependent on the goodwill of others to speak the same language as you (Participant 01, 2024). One of the student stated as example: “like in the store or the people who's talking Norwegian and they're like if you speak English, some of them actually reply still in Norwegian” (Person 01, 2024). One of her classmates also stressed this point out during her interview: “if as international, you want to increase your integration and interaction in the new country where you live, and close the barrier between you and the natives, learn the local language” (Person 05, 2024).

The second reason is the simplicity of communication: it is easier for local people to speak their first language. One of the students learning Norwegian explains that she is learning the language just to be able to speak with her Norwegian counterparts (Person 13, 2024). While

another one stated on the easiness of communication: “now I'm trying to learn the language so that it's really easy for you to communicate” (Person 12, 2024).

However, from time to time some people would share their positive experiences of the language(s). Such as Participant 06 who was delighted when she arrived here to be able to speak freely in English, without being asked or challenged about her level of Norwegian (Participant 06, 2024). Or participant 01, that shared the experience of one of her friend when she did speak Norwegian to her host classmates. She stated: “my friend [...] talks Norwegian to one of the Norwegian people. And then the Norwegian people say, Oh, impressive” (Participant 01, 2024).

### ***Community***

For this research 10 cultures have been represented, plus a part of the Norwegian's one through the students. However, when all those cultures are mixing together, it becomes obvious that some are more compatible than others leading to the formation of several communities and issues between everyone. Nevertheless, some examples are very personal and might affect the anonymity of the participants, therefore most of the examples in this part, will be explained instead of stated and chosen so as not to cause harm.

**Interactions.** When discussing community, students frequently elaborated on various facets, including their relationships with friends and classmates, their sense of belonging within their own community, as well as their engagement in extracurricular activities and university affairs. Internationals find it easier to make friends with other internationals because they understand what each other are going through. They have the same experiences, a common background to share and feel the same way, which make them grew closer together and form their own community (Participant 01, Participant 03, Participant 05 & Participant 14, 2024). Moreover, according to Participant 14, there is a certain harmony in the classes, there is no conflicts and everyone works well altogether, since even Norwegians are friendly (Participant 14, 2024). Despite this harmony, several students reported a distinct phenomenon following the

Service Leadership Masters (where the Norwegian/international balance is the most harmonious): the communities do not mix on their own. The Norwegians sit on one side, the internationals on the other; and a third group has also formed: the group from Nepal and Bangladesh (Participant 01, Participant 05, Participant 08 & Participant 13, 2024), making those communities very distinct from one another.

**Home Country Community.** The second social group that students are looking for, is one of their own, outside the university: a group from the same country. Finding a community means that students can always have a piece of their country with them and find help at the start of their stay (Participant 10 & Participant 14, 2024). Participant 10 explained that for her, thanks to a relative in Oslo, she has met her community and together they take care of each other the same way they do in her home country, helping her feel at home and less alone (Participant 10, 2024). Participant 03 has strengthened this idea of community support with this statement, since they already have been through this process: “Having a community from my country really helped me understand how I can make a life here” (Participant 03, 2024). However, his compatriot explained that before meeting his community, he was more engaged towards others, specially the internationals (Participant 04, 2024). However now that he has such a good bond with Pakistani students, it is limiting him to go out and make more friends (Participant 04, 2024). Therefore, it is not always a good thing to be a part of one community, since for him it has made his integrations towards other community restraint (Participant 04, 2024), while helping his feeling of belonging.

### ***University***

This might come at a surprise, however for some students the university itself do not help their sense of belonging on two specific points. The first point being the opportunities to be part of student boards or councils or even boards of association. One explained that it was feasible to enter and be elected to be one of the student council, however afterwards everything

was in Norwegian making the opportunities for internationals that do not understand Norwegian diminished considerably. Participant 08 stated, “then there was an opportunity to be part of the student board. And all of the meetings were also in Norwegian. So that means no international student can join that board” (Participant 08, 2024). Another added to this statement that it was hard since “here in Norway, the structure of the student union is different” from what students know from back home (Participant 13, 2024). And that even if she succeeded to be a part of one, it was still hard since everything was happening in Norwegian, making it hard for her to feel included as a representative of a board. She declared, “Because I'm a student representative for the program that we study [...]. But somehow, almost all the students were Norwegian” (Participant 13, 2024). She understood and explained during the interview, that her chance as an international to be a part of it and understand everything would be lesser than her host counterpart. She then added that it was really different from what she was used to in her country: “When I was in Vietnam, I kind of in like student council, student union and I hold like kind of high position there” (Participant 13, 2024).

The second point (even if not controlled by the university itself), would be about the new fees that all international students from outside EU/EEA have to pay. One student clarified why it was seen as a barrier to the social inclusion, she declared:

Now we are supposed to pay the tuition fees, it will be really hard for us to, you know, find housing from outside and afford everything and just working part time and, like, you know, keeping up with the studies and embracing the cultural shocks and everything. (Participant 10, 2024).

She does not know how those students can be socially integrated, while working to save and study to succeed. When the subject of loans was brought up, she explained that as internationals it is harder to check all the list asked of the candidates, ending her explanation with: “That's fine. I will work my ass off, pay it off and go someday” (Participant 10, 2024).

## *Culture*

When we discuss about culture in a multicultural environment, we are inevitably talking about cultural background: students feeling closer to one another and feeling that they belong together when the cultural background is similar to the one they already know. Regrettably, this also implies that negative attitudes may emerge towards those perceived as different, by the main culture of the country.

**Cultural Background.** When the students were asked about their own culture, many pointed out the similarities between Asian cultural background and their African neighbors: “We share like a lot of similarities in terms of culture, in terms of beliefs and stuff” (Participant 14, 2024). The two cultures are seen by several students as “loud”, “colorful”, “social”, “honest”, “outspoken” and “friendly” compared to the “private” and “mellow” European cultures (Participant 03, Participant 04, Participant 06, Participant 07 & Participant 08, 2024), specifically the Norwegian one. Which can explain why the locals have more difficulties with those cultures since “they are taken aback by it” (Participant 04, 2024), and why the international students from those two continents have a tough time feeling that they belong with their European classmates (Participant 07 & Participant 12, 2024).

During their interviews, another notable aspect that resonated deeply with the students pertained to their cultural identity and its integration into Norwegian society or culture arose: shaping cultural aspects. The first time this shaping aspect emerged in the discourse of the students, was with one of the Pakistani volunteer; he was talking about his community and explained that his people have “to absorb the Norwegian culture and diminish their Pakistani culture more” (Participant 03, 2024). For him, here in Norway you cannot be completely Pakistani, you have to mold yourself to cancel a bit of your own culture to be more adapted to the Norwegian one (Participant 03, 2024). Another one explained that she sees it more “like remodeling”: it is only “excluding some of the thing” and “use whatever is good” in the context



where she finds herself (Participant 10, 2024). And a third student added: “I kind of mix my culture and Norwegian one together because now I live with a Norwegian” (Participant 13, 2024), creating two identities cohabiting together and therefore, making her integration different from one student that would already have a cultural background close to the Norwegians.

**Negative Cultural Attitudes.** During our discussions, the students agreed to talk about subjects that were more complicated to raise: discrimination, racism, and prejudices. Some preferred not to elaborate on them at all (Participant 07, 2024) feeling it was too personal, while others gladly shared their feelings and experiences on racism and discrimination. One point came up while listening and it was about how Norwegians express discrimination and racism, “because it's true that Norwegians are not people who will openly criticize” (Translated by the researcher, Participant 09, 2024, cf. Translations Glossary 9). It began with a student illustrating that Norwegians “do not show it directly to the world, but [are rather] very silently racist.” (Participant 07, 2024), and then others supported the idea with their own personal stories of racism or discrimination. Certain stories really made an impact and they were the story of a child of immigrant parents who was racialized by classmates, but as the participant said, “it's strange to think that a 7 year old kid can be racist” (Participant 03, 2024). Or how one colleague of a participant shook the hand of four of the group members that were white and ignored the only group member (in this instance the participant) that have a brown skin color (Participant 07, 2024).

However, when asked about racism or discrimination against others, some students had an interesting response that allowed them to not feel targeted by it. Several students explained at the time that “if you do not perceive it as it, it's fine, you can cope with it” (Participant 08, 2024). To strengthen this idea, Participant 11 stated:

But I don't think I've seen it, you see. Because I've had other people say to me "Oh, I've experienced this and that", but personally I've never... So I asked myself, is it just that I haven't experienced it or is it just that we didn't want to see it? (Translated by the researcher, Participant 11, 2024, cf. Translations Glossary 10).

### *National Characteristics*

In this part students have discussed or made comments about the characteristics shared by the local community. For the interviewees, those characteristics restrain their integration and do not help them to feel that they belong within the society or community.

**Norwegians Characteristics.** During the interviews, Norwegians has been depicted by students, upon the first encounters, as peers that stayed away from others: “they're introverted, they're isolated” (Participant 02, 2024) or seen generally as people that “don't really like to talk too much” (Participant 07, 2024). In addition, one of the students elaborated on the observation that Norwegians are “creatures of habit” (Participant 03, 2024) and that they needed to “make sure it is in their comfort zone or it is familiar for them” (Participant 06, 2024) before doing any social activity. Furthermore, this same student contributed by noting that, in comparison to other nationalities she encountered, Norwegians exhibited a lack of curiosity (Participant 06, 2024), making any integration within this community more complex. However, the students described Norwegians very differently once they got to know them better and spent more time in their company. They were portrayed as “kind-hearted people” (Participant 03, 2024), very open and respectful of others (Participant 06, 2024), “easygoing” (Participant 07, 2024), but also respectful and friendly (Participant 10 & Participant13, 2024).

**Drinking Culture.** Nevertheless, what has been found difficult by foreigners when talking about characteristics on locals is the Norwegian culture of drinking. Many of the internationals are from Muslim faith, therefore cannot drink or “can only drink beer but in very moderation.” (Participant 04, Participant 07 & Participant 08, 2024). However Norwegian

gatherings are all about drinking and those students refuse to go drink just to be a part of it (Participant 04, 2024), hence the “you’re weird” (Participant 04 & Participant 08, 2024) looks received some times to times. Another student stated that Norwegians do not really communicate with others, until everyone go to a pub and drink (Participant 01, 2024).

**National History.** The last characteristic explained by internationals was the closed-mindedness of their society in general, with Norwegians “not accepting” certain ethnicities that they consider too different from their own (Participant 10, 2024); e.g., “they prefer people that are European” (Participant 03, 2024). However one student explained that it was due to the history of the country: the openness was still young (Participant 09, 2024). Participants 06 and 09 have clarified that historically speaking Norway does not have a long history of immigration and that the society did not had time to grow and adapt itself; therefore “it's not within their culture to be open and flexible to different people” (Participant 06, 2024). The “immaturity of the Norwegian society” (Participant 06) on this matter, makes it hard for some internationals to feel that they belong, since (for example) “the first time that they have seen a black person, they were 6 or 7” (Translated by the researcher, Participant 04, 2024, cf. Translations Glossary 8).

In this section, students delve into the factors, they believe, alter their sense of belonging in their environment. Whether it is to be understood and become part of society through language or to create a community for support, students also discuss their university and potential opportunities. They concluded by addressing cultural differences and the potential attitudes that arose from those differences, along with the national characteristics that define Norwegians.

### **Factors Contributing to the Students’ Active Participation**

In an effort to identify potential factors that would influence the internationals’ active participation within their environment, they were queried about their attachment to or

involvement in various associations. Regrettably, the findings indicate that only 36% of respondents are affiliated with a university association, with a similar percentage engaging in extracurricular pursuits, such as a participation in the “student choir” (Participant 06, 2024), in the new association of the student priest (Participant 08, 2024), in different “sport clubs” present in UiS (Participant 13, 2024) or “play football” (Participant 07, 2024) with other students at university. However, even if so little were active within those associations, factors have still been identified by numerous interviewees. Table 06 illustrate this category with its sub-categories and its main quotes.

*Table 06: Sub-categories and Quotes \_ Four*

<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Quotes</b>
Language to Understand your Environment	<p>“I feel like they prefer their own language a lot, they do not want to switch from it” _ Participant 03</p> <p>“But I know their English is a little bit better than mine” _ Participant 08</p>
Personal Life	<p>“I should have been spending this time with my family instead.” _ Participant 08</p> <p>“It's just sadly that have some attachment at home that wouldn't really allow me to be in the school” _ Participant 01</p>
Personality Characteristics	<p>“Now I'm more of an introvert than like an outgoing person I was before, like eight months ago, you know?” _ Participant 14</p> <p>“But for some people, you will be more introvert. You just don't want to talk to other people” _ Participant 13</p>

### *Language to Understand your Environment*

While talking about participation, I asked them about what factors could be related to their participation, and several students shared their experiences linked to the use of one language, explaining the difficulties to participate in a world you do not completely understand (Participant 01, 2024). For example refusing to change language at the store as “they clearly understand what you said, but they still like don't want to talk to any other language than Norwegian” (Participant 01, 2024).

**No Switch of Language.** Students explained their frustration when trying to communicate and participate with Norwegians, “because they love to talk in Norwegian” (Participant 08, 2024) while everyone knows “there is no English language barrier” (Participant 06, 2024), participant 06, added: “Norwegians speak very good English”. Still, Norwegian students will automatically switch to their own language no matter what, restraining any participation to the goodwill of their host counterparts. Participant 01 described that people that she still do not know as of today, came towards her and talked to her in Norwegian, destabilizing her; she then defined it with: “I feel in such an international university, like everyone should have an expectation that not everyone can speak Norwegian” (Participant 01, 2024) and therefore assume instead that everyone speak English (participant 01, 2024). Moreover, one student explained, she has seen her chances of participation in class removed when her teacher switched from one language to the other losing more than half of the students present, she stated: “he ended up doing it in Norwegian and it's only the locals that were able to understand what he meant” (Participant 05, 2024).

**Even English.** Nonetheless, students' participation can also be limited because of another language, as several students have noted that the struggles began also with their second or third language, which is English. One of the student clearly stated when this topic arose:

“When I first moved to Norway, in general, I struggled to speak even in English” (Participant 13, 2024). One of her colleagues, explained that English was also not his first language (Participant 08, 2024) and was sometime taking his time to “think to make some [correct] sentences” before being able to speak with someone else (Participant 08, 2024). Hence, the limitations which English can bring to the participation of students within an unknown environment.

**Comparison to Other Environments.** Though, when talking about language most of the students have talked only about the Norwegian language, others discussed both languages, with for example a comparison from what is happening in their own country. One student coming from Asia, clarified that in her country, people “don't use [their] mother tongue” if a foreigner is present, they will at that time “use a common language” for everyone to understand (Participant 10, 2024). While in Norway, students will be “discussing in Norwegian and they will tell [the other] one line at the end” from the entire conversation (Participant 08, 2024), not allowing the foreigners to participate more actively since they do not understand what is happening around them.

### ***Personal Life***

This factor does not seem crucial, yet for certain internationals it is: when ask about the factors they thought would slow down their participation, some of them talked about their personal life: which can go from a family to pets at home that you cannot let alone too long. One of the older student interviewed, explained that when he came to Norway, his entire family followed. Consequently, he did not have time or could not go out as much as he would have wanted since he also had responsibilities towards his family. He stated:

Then I was also moving in at the same time because I got the housing from SIS and my house was not furnished and I had to move the beds, the sofas because I had the

family with me and initially I had to do the groceries so that we can just get our circle going. (Participant 08, 2024).

However, when he was going out for social activities with his peers, he would sometimes feel guilty of not being with his family, and instead enjoying with others, because the activity was not as fulfilling as thought previously. To what he added: “I should have been spending this time with my family instead” (Participant 08, 2024). Another student, explained why she could not take part in the social life, she voiced out during her interview that “it's just sadly that I have some attachment at home that wouldn't really allow me to be in the school” (Participant 01, 2024). She could not participate to social gatherings due to her being the owner of dogs that could not stay home alone too long (Participants 01, 2024) without bothering the entire neighborhood. This fact made it difficult for her to go out, or spend any extra time on campus outside lessons. She recognized herself that her inclusion was lesser than the one her friends could have because of that, she explained: “can also be that I don't stay in the university that long only for the classes and afterwards going back home” (Participant 01, 2024).

### ***Personality Characteristics***

Upon the first meeting internationals are immediately described as curious, open-minded, and comfortable to talk to (Participant 01, Participant 06 & Participant 07, 2024), thus seen as extrovert people. However, many students have come to realize that personality can change many things in their integration, such as limited it or in the contrary help them to participate more. Therefore, the duality between introverts and extroverts has been highlighted by many students. One who felt was closer to the Norwegians at the time of her interview explained: “My personality is closer to the Norwegian stereotype, very calm and withdrawn” (Translated by the researcher, Participant 09, 2024, cf. Translations Glossary 4), very reserved and introverted, hence her restricted participation and interactions with others of the other personality (Participant 09, 2024). Moreover, another one that had issues connecting with the

host students and his social active participation, clarified that he was more of an introvert person and therefore would need more time to open and trust others (Participant 07, 2024); he stated: “If I feel comfortable with you, like I will talk a lot, I will do a lot of things with you” (Participant 07, 2024). However, participant 14 shed light on this intriguing duality that several students remarked upon during their interviews; she elucidated: “I’m outgoing, but then because of this environment, I’m becoming more antisocial” (Participant 14, 2024). This student clarified this dichotomy by explaining that even if someone were to have an extrovert personality and therefore participate in social events; the lack of person to talk to and greet modify the personality from extrovert to introvert (Participant 14, 2024). Hence, the lack of participation of some students in the social gatherings within the university premises.

In this section, students explained the numerous factors that influenced their active participation within the university premises. The host language is seen as a limitation to understand an environment and therefore to an individual's participation. Personal obligations may also outweigh a student's participation in the university's social life. However, what plays the most significant role is primarily the individual's personality: an introvert will participate less than an extrovert, but an extrovert can change to an introvert due to his/her poor environment.

## **Discussion**

In this part I will conduct a detailed interpretation of the main findings identified in the previous section and discuss how these key observations relate to the literature used and answer the research question: “*How do international students perceive and experience social inclusion within their multicultural educational environment, and what factors contribute to their sense of belonging and participation within the students community?*”. The discussion will group relevant findings and will be divided into four main categories: (1) Perceptions of Social



Inclusion, (2) Participation and its Influence over Social Inclusion, (3) Social Aspects and (4) Cultural Aspects. For the purpose of this research the academic challenges will not be discussed since educational inclusion and social inclusion although related, have been differentiated. UNESCO defines educational inclusion as being each individual's needs considering, and that all learners, with a focus on those at risk of marginalization, participate and achieve together (UNESCO, 2023).

### **Perceptions of Social Inclusion**

When speaking about social inclusion, individuals go through a self-observation process combined with judgments on and by others (Back et al., 2011 as cited in Bleckmann et al., 2022), therefore I distinguished two perceptions, combined with two viewpoints, and use the literature to link them to this research.

#### ***Self-Perception VS Other-Perception***

**Self-Perception.** The first perception begin with your own: *Self-Perception*. Self-perception is characterized as “a mechanism for controlling an individual's perceptions and behavior, based on his/her interpretations of events and experience” (Bem, 1967, 1972, as cited in Riding & Rayner, 2001, p.32). Bem contended that our beliefs are not merely influenced by our behavior; rather, they are derived from it, which mean that as an individual “you automatically [would reflect] your expectations of inclusion” (Participant 05, 2024). This assertion challenges common assumptions regarding the relationship between behavior and belief, suggesting that our actions play a fundamental role in shaping our beliefs, contrary to prevailing notions (Riding & Raynor, 2001). Which means that the international students perceive their inclusion through a formed image of themselves, based on observations they are making over time (Bleckmann et al., 2022). This statement would explain why the first moments at university are experienced as tough as participants 02 and 06 explained in their interview. Thus one could argue that it is “the stage of full curiosity” (Participant 01, 2024) at

the beginning that will shape the future self-perception. By helping with the “sharing and hanging” phases (Participant 01, 2024): since internationals perceive their inclusion through their own behavior that is constantly changing. Being out will bring more self-observation in contact of different social situations.

**Other-Perception.** Our second perceptions comes from the others: *Other-Perception*. Researches have highlighted that perceptions of and by others meaningfully shape interaction behavior and social experiences (Back et al., 2011, Rau et al., 2019 as cited in Bleckmann et al., 2022). While this perspective supports that everyone’s self-perception will influence and might modify the interpretation of interactions, it also shapes the behaviors of individuals in a social experience (Bleckmann et al., 2022). Participant 05 perfectly illustrates this concept with her statement: “I don’t have any expectations for validation from my fellow colleagues because I am at part and that’s the way I see myself” (Participant 05, 2024). However, the students did not express their own perceptions of how others judge them; instead, they projected their judgments onto others, thereby forming a perception of others that would subsequently influence their own beliefs about how they were perceived and judged. For example, Participant 01 explained how she perceived the complexity of her integration with locals, due to the fact that locals were not open to others and preferred to stay between them (Participant 01, 2024). No one contradicted this statement, conversely several students supported or added their own idea to this point. Since the locals are seen to be quite reserved and already having their own group of friends (Participant 10, 2024), this made the international students perceive them as unattainable. Participant 02 even declared that it would be easier to be in a love relationship rather than just be friends (Participant 02, 2024) as in needed more time to break their shell (Participant 07 & Participant 13, 2024). One could argue, therefore, that the other-perception of those students could have limited their perceptions during social situations, making them less

inclined to interact and maybe delayed their inclusion, since after sometimes local were perceived as “more friendly” and as “very nice people” (Participant 07 & Participant 08, 2024).

### ***Negative Perceptions, Acculturative Stress***

Since perceptions are developed through intercultural encounters, it may happen that those events are perceived, by students, negatively and therefore seen as challenging and leading to a high level of stress. In other words, the perception of our international students depends on their capacity to cope and deal with stressors and bad situations without letting their vision being clouded with negativity. The students who initially struggled with the adjustment to Norway, experiencing hardship and difficulty, but later found their footing and now feel at ease, can be seen as having effectively coped with his/her Acculturative Stress that developed through time and negative perceptions. However, it is also strongly associated with mental health issues, preventing further interactions with others as participant 09 explained that for her, mental health was one of the biggest issues and this, had strained her relationships (Participant 09, 2024). Participant 13 stated: “Because I am in a kind of mental health issue now. So for me now, I don't want to make any new friends or I don't want to join any activities” (Participant 13, 2024). This student is a good example of how Acculturative Stress works, she could not answer properly to a stress factor: has reacted very strongly to the situation and is now psychologically vulnerable, making her perceived everything negatively and cutting her out from her social life (Barlow et al., 2014).

### ***Positive Perceptions, Extrovert Personality***

In contrast to the negative perceptions, the students that possess an extrovert personality experience social inclusion and social interaction in a more positive manner (Bleckmann et al. 2022). The students that get this trait are usually engaged in more social interactions than their peers and have a greater social support system (Bleckmann et al., 2022, Mooradian & Swan, 2006), since the extrovert people exert a considerable impact on self-perceptions as well as how

they are perceived by others (Other-Perception). Thereby serving as a pivotal factor in fostering the social inclusion of students within their new academic and social milieu. While discussing their different perceptions on social inclusion, students demonstrated an awareness on how an extrovert personality could aid their perceptions and therefore their integration, as exemplified by Participant 04's explanation of his perception on the matter: "Obviously if you're a very extrovert kind of person, [...], but still if you confidently go and talk to them, then they get to know you more" (Participant 04, 2024). Therefore, students that are said to be extrovert: "energetic, cheerful, and sociable" (Mooradian & Swan, 2006, p.779), perceive their daily interactions with fellow students and their inclusion very positively and are more open towards others, they are also perceived as such by comrades.

### **Participation and its Influence over Social Inclusion**

In the literature, Social Inclusion is seen as the process that help improve the participation in the social life, such as marginalized students (UNRISD, 2015 as cited in Nwachi, 2021). Therefore, participation in the social environment of the university can be seen as a deliverable, but also a tool for both communities: internationals and locals, to be more included towards one another (Nwachi, 2021). In addition, the intricate relationship between both participation and social inclusion delineates a multifaceted process, that will enable the international community to gain improved access to a broader array of opportunities and resources, thus contributing to their overall social mobility and well-being (Nwachi, 2021). Participants, such as Participant 08 who explained that even if the openness is here, the opportunities are lacking due to language barrier created by the university (Participant 08, 2024), or Participant 01 which described that she could not attend a workshop that was seen as very important for her future due to another barrier out of her control (Participant 01, 2024), understood the process of participation as a tool and expressed frustration to not possess as many opportunities as their local peers.

During my discussions with the interviewed international students, I made the decision to inquire about their level of engagement in their social milieu, aiming to explore the connection between participation and social inclusion. My intention was to ascertain whether the students were cognizant of this connection, and if they perceived and comprehended the interplay between the two phenomena. As a few students talked about their participation, they appeared to have perceived the strong correlation between both occurrences, Participant 12 explained: “If you participate in that, I think it will help you to, like, but I think it also has to come from you. If you don't participate, then there's no point” (Participant 12, 2024).

If internationals are seeing the participation as a way of being included, they also deplore the lack of participation of their local counterparts: since participation strengthens social inclusion (Nwachi, 2021 & Participant 06, 2024) and would help them feel as they belong. Participant 06 highlighted that due to the comparatively lower participation of locals, or sometimes their absence altogether, in social activities compared to internationals, a crucial aspect of internationals' inclusion was absent (Participant 06, 2024). This underscores the notion that active participation in the social life of one's environment is integral to achieving a sense of inclusion, seeing the participation as a product of social integration and social inclusion.

## **Social Aspects**

### ***Peer Acceptance***

Peer acceptance can be defined as the extent to which an individual is liked and noticed by his/her peers, and is an important predictor of short AND long-term adjustment in one environment (Greco & Morris, 2005), yet students call it friendship (Participant 02 & Participant 03, 2024). In literature friendship “refers to a dyadic relationship requiring mutual and voluntary participation” (Berndt, 1996 as cited in Greco & Morris, 2005, p.198), and seen beneficial to grow the individuals' well-being (Greco & Morris, 2005). However for the

international students it is more seen as a procedure to connect with others that begins with curiosity and understanding of one's feelings (Participant 01, 2024), as a trigger that is created by a favorable environment (Participant 12, 2024), or as an outcome because you can understand the other completely: share common grounds (Participant 07, 2024). Drawing from these diverse definitions, one might argue that there is no singular, definitive definition of friendship. Instead, friendship could be viewed as a deeply personal ideal, shaped by individual experiences and perceptions.

During the interviews, participants also explained that friendships enables them to find the support they need to avoid social anxiety and exclude themselves on their own (Participant 10, 2024, Greco & Morris, 2005). This support seemed to enable students to cope not only with their studies, but also with all their day-to-day worries (Participant 10, 2024). This support as all the internationals have explained can be found most of the time within their own community or within the international community: they understand one another (Participant 01, Participant 04, and Participant 05, 2024). Therefore, one could argue that the literature is right; friendships help with the overall well-being of the international community. Nevertheless, after learning more about the experiences of friendships from internationals at university, it appears that there is a dissent between what could appear as true in the literature and what is some students' reality. At times, friendships cannot happened even if you take the time to "make the effort to get involved" (Participant 02, 2024) and participate. Participant 04 illustrates this point clearly with his own experience, he explained that he took the time to go to the social events and socialize with others, but at the end he stated "I would not say that I have friends. I know people, like on first name basis" (Participant 04, 2024), it is for him more acquaintances than friends.

### ***Class Acceptance***

As shown in the findings, several international students such as Participant 06 and Participant 11, explained that they have experienced social inclusion in class rather differently,

than inclusion within social situations. In class many local students behave as if they do not know their international colleagues or as if it is the first time they are meeting: they go back to their “default mode” (Participant 06, 2024) quiet, reserved and introvert (Participant 07 & Participant 08, 2024). Hence why the internationals tend to stay with their fellow international students (Participant 08; 2024). Having that said Participant 11 delve deeper by stating that there is no acceptance in class, since there was never any integration: it is very individualistic and no one is mingling (Participant 11, 2024). However, Participants 14 and 09 contradicted their classmates’ accusations by just explaining, that there is not enough classes to just create acceptance and that even if they might see it as such there is a harmony within the classes (Participant 09 & Participant 14, 2024). Therefore one could argue that acceptance can only result if there is no imbalance in the relationships: interactions flow naturally in and outside class (Block, 1998).

However, even if there is hardly acceptance by the locals classmates, some of the students found acceptance through all the groupworks. As described by Participant 08: groupworks allow the internationals to know more their comrades, even if they have chosen their groups, and if you know them more you will be more accepted (Participant 08, 2024). Despite this, not everyone thinks the same; Participant 05 contradicts those interactions by mentioning, that since you do not have the choices of your group for your class activities or assignments, there can be a misalignments of objectives and one can suffer from it (Participant 05, 2024). She argue that groupworks can helps being accepted, but that can also play a downfall in the acceptance process, since people only go to the ones they already know and are comfortable with (Participant 05, 2024). For this last reason, another one advocate the use of their teachers in creating the groups to produce more diversified interactions (Participant 10, 2024), based on this last point one can argue that class acceptance need an external push to be effective.

## **Cultural Aspects**

### *Language*

In the literature language is defined as a way of communication that is structured and used by entire nations or just different societies (Appiah & Adeyeye, 2020), however for the internationals of the university it is mainly a barrier preventing them from understanding their internationals and locals peers. They distinguished the language in two categories: language as an opportunity, but mostly as a barrier. Language is seen as an opportunity when student are motivated to learn it (Participant 05, 2025). When arriving to another country, students researches everything before going (Participant 13, 2024), yet upon arrival the language can become mandatory to live your daily life. However, several students see the learning of the language as a must that will help them find friends, a career, and aid their inclusion into the society of the host culture (Participant 01 and Participant 02, 2024). Therefore, foreigners may advocate for the learning as an opportunity for a new life.

Nevertheless, “beyond these realities, we should also consider the discrimination experienced by many minorities seeking inclusion” (Barradas, 2024, para. 3), because based on the international experiences, language can be a factor helping the exclusion of the minority that do not speak it. For example, several students have experienced rejection from possible vacancies, as they were not fluent or even speaking the language (Participant 02 & Participant 10, 2024), even if those positions were open to all students, they were discriminated on the knowledge of the local language. It is one of the reason that foreigners wish to learn the local language (Participant 05, 2024). In addition to the job prospects, language is also seen as the barrier when the university does not take the time to share all the information in both official languages of the university: English and Norwegian (Participant 01 & Participant 10, 2024). They explained their difficulties to find the good information, to follow a workshop or even read their email without the aid of technologies to understand what is happening (Participant



01, Participant 05, Participant 10 & Participant 14, 2024). One student even argued that as a multicultural university, authorities must respond to the cultural and social needs of both linguistic groups on equal grounds (Nyqvist et al., 2019, Participant 10, 2024).

### *Neo-Racism*

Based on the literature and on the internationals' experiences on discrimination, racism and other biases shown in the findings, it is relevant to talk about neo-racism or modern racism, since many of the students referred to the experiences of silent racism towards foreigners in Norway: they do not display it outwardly as such (Participant 07, 2024). Thus, neo-racism or cultural racism, is described as a phenomenon that emerged over the last two decades and is "the result of the ingroup/outgroup dynamic" (Ramazzotti, 2021, p.147) believing that one culture is actually superior to the others: usually the Western culture toward the others (Hadzic, 2022). It involves a process of inclusion and exclusion based on the incompatibility of cultural differences (Hervik, 2013). While racism is based on the social construction of race and is seen as "a justification of privilege" and "of aggression towards the victim" (Hervik, 2013, p.45). For that, racism is built "upon existing or ascribed phenotypical characteristics as indicators of intellectual and moral superiority and inferiority" (Memmi, 1992 as cited in Hervik, 2013, p.45): blood or skin color being two of the phenotypical characteristics.

Participant 07 mentioned even a somewhat innocent game can take the form of a racism situation really quickly, due to the subtle and nuances approaches. This participant stated:

The question was like, who do you think would leave without paying the rent in SIS?  
So, one Italian girl, she said that: Only Asian people here would do that, because I don't think there are people here, other people here wouldn't do that. (Participant 07, 2024).

Moreover, it has been found that it is common for foreigners and locals to find themselves segregated during university trips or within university organizations, conscious choice or not. Upon reviewing the interviews, I encountered two instances that exemplify this discrimination between Norwegians as the in-group and internationals as the out-group. Participant 13, described how the organization of one of the board's week-end has been done. She found herself and all her foreign fellow board members in the same rooms since the locals girls refused to take any internationals in theirs (Participant 13, 2024): the two communities were segregated, but one was not by choice. On this point her colleague did not contradicted her, but rather explained how the same happen to him while on a trip far away. But instead of the local chose to put all the internationals in the same bedroom: women and men had to share. They decided that they will be more comfortable with one another, without thinking of the discomfort one gender could feel having to share a room with the other. (Participant 03, 2024).

Having that said, participant 04 disputed that it will actually be better for internationals if there was a wall between the two communities and no one could know what they look like: locals would be more open to the differences; if they could not see what others looks like and where they come from and therefore not separated and not judged for who they are (Participant 04, 2024). If that was possible the in-groups and out-groups would disappear and the silent racism over the foreign community too; as explained in the literature, the majority of the students (here Norwegians) may discriminate their internationals counterparts "to maintain their sense of in-group superiority" (Lam et al., 2020, p.678). Based on this, one may debate that this would be also true if the situations were reverses, with for only change the majority's culture.

## Practical Suggestions

This part introduce suggestions for UiS or for any university in Norway that would like to better support the international students' experiences. These feedbacks will take place in two stages: the first will be guidelines drawn from the students themselves who would have liked to see these changes within their environment, the second phase are specific examples of what could be done, taken from the literature.

### Suggestions from International Students

If having the opportunity, the students could help the university improve and enhance the experiences of every international individual, by just listening and be open to feedbacks. The aim is to make the university an environment where both communities (local and international) are given equal opportunities. As one student stated: "I want them to see this from the angle that they are not doing it for the international students, but they are doing it for both the local students and the international students" (Participant 05, 2024). Once the subject had been discussed, a number of suggestions were put forward and new ideas developed with a view to implementing them for future students at the university. Below Table 06 sums up the main suggestions, sub-categories, and some quotes relative to the key suggestions.

*Table 07: Summary of the Main Suggestions, Sub-Categories and Quotes*

Main suggestions	Sub-categories	Quotes
<b>LANGUAGE</b>	/	<p>"If they are, like, welcoming international students, why not held it in an international language?" _ Participant 10</p> <p>"If it's related to every single student, then they should have the language that's prepared for every single student to be understand." _ Participant 01</p>

<b><i>CREATING A SOCIAL PLACE</i></b>	Class Efforts	“Even in class, a lecturer can create activities and give examples that encourage this type of interaction.” _ Participant 05
	Specific Programs	“But, like, I think they should just not only arrange programs, they should actually, like, review all these programs and distribute and try to get some feedback from the attendees” _ Participant 07
	Associations and Events for Both	“That's when they are also supposed to encourage the students to exchange culture, exchange experience. And make them be aware of the benefits that they get after this.” _ Participant 05
<b><i>HELP AND FOLLOW-UP</i></b>	Counselling	“I found for example student priest as well a very open person.” _ Participant 06
	Follows-up	“Yeah, so I think we can have someone that know about the area, about the school, about everything, or at least for social life around here, they can help.” _ Participant 13

### ***Language***

The main question here is the following: “It's an international university, but then why everything is, like, everything is in Norwegian language?” (Participant 07, 2024). As an international university, the entire organization must support two languages (if the language of the country is not English). Moreover, information concerning the daily life of the university and its students should at least be in English; it can be emails, signs, papers or even pamphlets. English must be present in all, due to issues with translation, even with all the technologies

available, because “sometimes the Google translator is not that smart to translate everything correctly. So I feel that they can do better” (Participant 07, 2024) and “if they are, like, welcoming international students, why not held it in an international language?” (Participant 10, 2024).

In addition, the university hold many workshops or events for all students to join, unfortunately they are mostly hold in Norwegian, and therefore not letting the international students be a part of them due to their lack of knowledge of the host language. And as one of the student explained, you cannot “use Google Translate when you are trying to listen at the same time” (Participant 14, 2024). Writing all the information in the international language helps the international community not only to understand what is happening around them, but also avoid discrimination on information and provide the same opportunities to learn for all, as one student declared: “Then like I realize it's just that they send to every single student and they included the international students, but they don't bother to send the English version at the bottom” (Participant 01, 2024). Using English as an automatic language everywhere around the campus, when so many cultures live together will help the students (locals or not) to feel more included within their environment, but also with their peers.

### *Creating a Social Place*

Unfortunately, some pupils do not see the university as a social place, but rather as an academic and career one (Participant 01, 2024). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the university to make it more of a social place for its students; and that should begin in class.

**Class Efforts.** Numerous international students do not know their Norwegian counterparts and vice-versa.: one of the student explained that it is not normal for him to not “even know who is in [his] class” (Participant 04, 2024). Others think it is because the balance in term of number between the two communities: local and international, is off, and offer to make it 50/50 between the two to have a better harmony and not have too many students of one

of the two community. Examples with those two students, that had the issues of having too many internationals: “it will maybe be discriminatory, but maybe 50-50, [...] 50% of Norwegians, and 50% of internationals” (Translated by the researcher, Participant 11, 2024, cf. Translations Glossary 11). While one of his colleague precised:

It didn't work out, [...] 50 places for Norwegians and 20 places for internationals in the master's program, and in the end there were a lot of them. [...] So I would have liked it to be more 50-50. (Translated by the researcher, Participant 09, 2024, cf. Translations Glossary 12).

Others think it is because, in class nothing happen to help them socialize and interact with their host peers, or because not everyone goes to class and therefore diminish the number of possible interactions (Participant 04, 2024). Consequently, they suggest that “they can improve things, like making classes mandatory or some kind of group activities in classes” (Participants 04, 2024) or “even in class, a lecturer can create activities and give examples that encourage this type of interaction” (Participant 05, 2024), so that students can mix and mingle.

**Specific Programs.** The second option, to help the creation of a social environment for all, will be to create specific programs that have for only main focus: Social Interactions, since it has not been heard of before (Participant 05, 2024). To work toward that goal, students have the idea to “create a platform for people to interact” (Participant 06, 2024). This platform should be used by both communities to connect upon arrival, to help relationships to begin and flourish before arriving and during they journey at the university, and with it, mentors should be attributed to the students to helps them during their first few months, and information regarding both communities should be posted: not choosing to be focused on either one.

And like I feel maybe the school can hold something that could really. Not either focused, but like to really considering the both groups and then like in a way that can make them be more socialized between each other. (Participant 01, 2024).

The second idea that arose, was to create a place within the university that would be totally dedicated to the international cultures that live and grow at UiS. Facts made by each culture at the university, thickened each year by new arrivals, displayed around the room, small things for others to learn and know more about their peers and culture, since “the university definitely have the data about every single one” (Participant 01, 2024), helping each students to understand or feel understood. With that, all students should be invited to visit it once to know what it is and learn from others, plus “maybe this place can be a very cozy, comfortable place. Have a sofa, have some table to play some cards or the table games like a cozy corner” (Participant 01, 2024). This “cozy corner” for sharing every cultures or just spend time with your friends and make new relationships shall be different from the event “Coffee around the World” judged by students too international focused and limited by the time, since not everyone is available at that specific time (Participant 01, Participant 03 & Participant 11, 2024). It shall be open 24/7 and available for anyone that would like to just spend time with others, because according to participant 02, local and international students “are interested to socialize with people from different kind of culture” (Participant 02, 2024). “Coffee around the World” is an event with the university where the international volunteers come one by one to present their country and culture, but it is considered to be too focused on the internationals and no Norwegians come to listen or learn (Participant 01, 2024).

**Associations and Events for Both.** After discussions, many students have reported finding associations too focused in one community or the other and not trying enough to be both (Participant 11, 2024). Therefore, students would like to see more events that are inclusive towards everyone, as one student explained: “So what we want is that this, like the union of a

university needs to have something to help the international student here to be a part or to have a connection between international and Norwegian” (Participant 13, 2024). Another offered to include both community in the creation of the events, working together to attract more students since they will know how to influence their own community.

So maybe what we need in those associations, maybe having two leaders at the same time, two sub-leaders, which will at the same time allure all internationals to come, and the leader that will make sure that all Norwegians come. Those activities, obviously will need to be in English. (Translated by the researcher, Participant 11, 2024, cf. Translations Glossary 13).

A third one, just wanted to remind their university that “being a student is really the happiest thing in the world” (Participant 01, 2024) and therefore, should hold activities to help improve the interactions between locals and internationals, “especially if it is connected to Norwegian culture” (Participant 06, 2024). One stated: “That's when they are also supposed to encourage the students to exchange culture, exchange experience. And make them be aware of the benefits that they get after this” (Participant 01, 2024). Hoping that their university would know how to tempt their local students to take a part in several events for the sake of both communities.

### ***Helps and Follows-up***

The last recommendations from the international students towards their school would be the amount of help they are receiving and that they dimmed insufficient or not enough available or talked about.

**Counselling.** With a counselor available for every students that feel the need to talk, and a priest always open to help others, students are delighted to see that such a service exists in case of need and that there is a follow-up once a meeting has been arranged. Participant 06 explained the support she has received: “I was talking to him during autumn and he even told



me for example if you felt lonely during Christmas holiday or something do reach out. So he was careful to take care of the students” (Participant 06, 2024). However, they would like the counselling team to make the first steps and contact the students to make sure everyone is having the support they deserve, as a student described: “yeah, I think if they can contact each of us to say, oh, do you need any help?” (Participant 02, 2024). Plus, they would like to see the university putting more resources towards the advertisement of this service, because “everyone should be knowing of it” (Person 10, 2024), whilst having more counselors to avoid not having a meeting due to overdemand: “so I would say maybe more therapists or counselors are available. Because I myself needed one and I checked and if the app was working correctly on my phone it was booked for three months” (Participant 06, 2024).

**Follows-up.** Since it is a big step for international students to move abroad and change their entire life, many students lose themselves trying to do everything correctly without knowing how that works and without having any help from the university just directing them or cluing them, “because somehow you just get lost. Oh, what's the next step? Why does the bank account or the personal number take so long? Did something went wrong? Right” (Participant 02, 2024). While another one stated “because they specifically mentioned it's not our job to sort your student permit, you have to work with UDI, so I had to take it all by myself” (Participant 10, 2024). Students do not ask the university to do everything for them, they just would like to receive assistance in their research. What can be created for those students in need, is a desk or a team that would be dedicated to it; internationals students that have previously go through the integration’s process can help in this team to reassure the new arrivals and show them that they are listened to.

There are people who would like to help, but when it comes to the system, the regulations and everything, it would be nice if they would have like some, like, you

know, these restrictions and regulations for international students because sometimes we feel like we really don't belong there. (Participant 12, 2024).

If you need, for example, you want to know where you take a bus, for example, with the bus route, where you want to have a housing place, have good housing, do you have everything, like social activities or student life, something. So they have like an international team, an international office that have some people that willing to help. (Participant 13, 2024).

The second idea from the students to help them, will be a follow-up after graduation: most of the long term international students, will stay after graduation in the country to begin their professional career, but receive no or little help from the university to find something:

But in other countries, the university, they play a part in trying to get the graduates into employment. I'm not sure about here, but I don't think they have no such program. Never heard of one. Yeah, because international students, they end up struggling a lot. (Participant 14, 2024).

Several of those students already have taken a part in the workshops and events that concerned jobs and positions into their own industry. However most of them are in Norwegian which deepens the imbalance between the two communities and closes opportunities for internationals.

It's very hard for us to find a job after our graduation if we want to stay here. Yes. So if they try to, like, bring some organization, like, some company to conduct some interview, it might be really helpful for us. (Participant 12, 2024).

In the end, those suggestions would facilitate the social inclusion of the international students within their educational environment and their professional environment. They will be happy to help and discussed all their opinions, UiS just need to take some time to listen to their

feedbacks and their ideas to support future internationals in their social inclusion and experiences.

## **Examples Taken from the Literature**

### ***The EXCELL Program***

The EXCELL program, Excellence in Experiential Learning and Leadership program, is defined as follow: “a practice-focused group program designed to enhance foreigners’ confidence and skills in workplace, academic and other interpersonal contexts” (Mak & Barker, 2004, p.1), and is a behavioral program based on cultural learning (Mak et al., 1999 as cited in Smith & Khawaja, 2011), crafted to assist newcomers in acclimating to the new society (Mak & Barker, 2004). Currently implemented in most English countries and in The Netherlands, this program demands to divide individuals in mixed-groups of 10 to 20 internationals and locals, they will follow six courses of 3hours to learn and play with cultural learning aiming to maximize the sociocultural adaptation and the confidence of internationals in the host culture, while keeping their own cultural identity (Mak et al., 1999 as cited in Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The results that have been collected from different researches are interesting, for example by enhancing social skills in new comers, the program strengthen the coping resources and strategies, while helping facilitate the adaptation into the host culture (Mak & Barker, 2004).

### ***Potential Promotive Programs***

“For Western developed universities to remain competitive and attract more international students, it is important that university administrators and professors put more effort into understanding how cultural factors influence international students” (Akanwa, 2015, p.275). If the universities wish to stay attractive for foreign students, they need to address the barriers that keep the internationals excluded, a study by the Australian Federation of International Students (AFIS) in 2010 has identified what the universities are trying to create, but are not sufficient (Australian Education International et al., 2010). This study is still

accurate in 2024, as the issues encountered by the students are still the same (cf. “Literature Review” and “Results and Findings” parts).

According to AFIS, in order to promote the active engagement of their international students, universities can develop two possible initiatives (Australian Education International et al., 2010). The first would be to assign each student a mentor. Preferably non-international, this mentor would help the newcomer with social integration: adapting to the new environment (norms and culture of the host country), but also interactions with other students, teachers, etc. (Australian Education International et al., 2010). The second initiative would be to create each event with both an international and a local focus: those experiences tend to offer group discussion/work, report more positive experiences of the university’s diversity and learn more about cultural diversity making the entire group more inclined to promote and accept their comrades (Glass, 2012 as cited in Liang & Schartner, 2020, Australian Education International et al., 2010). Most of the time the universities do not realize that “home students tend to exhibit ethnocentric views and that this may prevent them from forming groups with their international peers”, excluding rather easily all students that do not resemble them (Volet & Ang, 2012 as cited in Liang & Schartner, 2020, p.47).

## **Conclusion**

Before ending this thesis, I answer the research question which is “*How do international students perceive and experience social inclusion within their multicultural educational environment, and what factors contribute to their sense of belonging and participation within the student community?*.” Additionally, I will provide a concise overview of the primary findings and the implications derived from this study. Subsequently, I will conclude by discussing the limitations inherent in my research and offering recommendations for future scholars.

## **Research Aim**

Initially, this study sought to address the research question outlined previously: investigate the perceptions and experiences of international students on social inclusion, with the objective to identify the key factors on their active participation and those which contribute to their sense of belonging within the students community to improve their experiences within their multicultural school environment. To achieve this objective, I utilized primary data obtained through interviews conducted with 14 international students at the University of Stavanger (UiS), combined together with an overview of relevant literature and a theoretical framework, before following a thematic analysis to help me determine those main key factors.

## **Summary**

### ***Main Findings***

The thematic analysis discussion yielded four distinct categories, each grounded in the findings from the 14 narratives and supported by relevant literature pertaining to the subjects addressed within each category. In the initial category, an in-depth examination was conducted to explore the multifaceted viewpoints of the international student community at the University of Stavanger. This discussion unpacks four pivotal concepts extracted from existing literature, shedding light on the nuanced differences in perspectives regarding social inclusion across various individuals. Given that an individual's perceptions significantly shape their experiences within a given situation, it is imperative to comprehend the mechanisms underlying perception to gain insight into their social inclusion. The first subcategory: *Self VS Other-Perception*, highlight the two different perceptions everyone has when observing a social situation. The remaining two subcategories, *Negative Perceptions*, *Acculturative Stress* and *Positive Perceptions*, *Extrovert Personality*, exemplify contrasting pathways in perception: while one thrives in their inclusion through extroverted behavior, the other may be more prone to mental

health challenges such as anxiety and depression, thus experiencing greater feelings of exclusion.

The second category *Participation*, highlights how the participants were seeing their participation within the university. This part identifies participation as a tool to foster social integration or as a by-product of it. The primary focus of this category revolves around how social inclusion hinges on students' engagement in social settings. Despite international students actively participating in student life, they may encounter limitations in opportunities for involvement. Furthermore, their participation does not always culminate in integration; instead, it can lead to exclusion due to insufficient engagement from others.

For the third part, the discussion focuses on the *Social Aspects*, with two subcategories: *Peers acceptance* and *Class acceptance*. Regarding the importance of integration by their colleagues and friends, it is crucial to talk about the acceptance internationals receive from others. This can come from locals or from members of the international community. Key points in this category are defined as the importance of friendships, which will help the students to find their support system, improve their well-being and help them cope with difficulties. However, several students expressed their struggles to be accepted by others and find friends, for some the university is not a place where they have friends but acquaintances. For the second subcategory the importance is focused on acceptance while being in class. In this subcategory, students elucidate how acceptance in such scenarios is constrained by the behavior of locals, the limitation of hour of classes and by the individualistic way of thinking. Nonetheless, group collaborations can facilitate this process, provided they are assigned rather than self-selected by students.

The last category is *Cultural Aspects* of social inclusion and covered the language barrier. This barrier is actually from the Norwegian language point of view, but also the English one, since none of the participants have English as their native language and sometimes not

even as a second one. *Language* is divided in two steps, since generally language is seen as a barrier to their understanding and a discrimination in the eyes of a potential employer, it is relevant to discuss it. Nonetheless, foreign students continue to see the language as an opportunity to be, one day, a part of the host society and be completely integrated. The second subcategory focuses on *Neo-Racism*, a form of racism more discreet and more malign than the “normal form” of racism, it is also mostly based on the culture of the victim. Based on the findings, there is a great influence of silent racism and silent discrimination against the internationals, and this second subcategory focuses mainly on the segregation and discrimination experienced by the foreign students within their multicultural environment.

Based on the main findings, I can conclude that international students perceive and experience social inclusion rather differently from one another; certain will perceive it positively and have no challenges during their experiences. However, the second perspective is more complex and holds more challenges and stress for the students. This difference of perspective depends mainly on the student’s strategies to cope with their stress and the negative situations that could arise. Yet even if strategies influence the integration, specific aspects impact the foreign students’ integration and active participation within their environment. Social and Cultural Aspects presents the main aspects. However, based on the participants other barriers could also contribute to their inclusion, such as one’s personal life that can limit one participation and therefore the integration later on. Also the university plays a pivotal role that can bring more negative effects with their lack of opportunities to be a part of the team or the fees that need to be paid every year.

### ***Implications of the Study***

Education is generally one of the first diverse environments that students experiences and in this instance UiS is considered as one, due to its multicultural environment through all the different ethnicities present. As a result, other international students have crossed the border

to grow through distinct learning experiences (Marginson, 2014), and it is imperative to acknowledge that in those environments it can be hard to feel at home again. The primary practical implication of this thesis, is its contribution to the initial exploration of perceptions of the international students within Norway. Unlike countries like the UK, the USA, and South Africa, which have been extensively researched in terms of immigration and international student experiences, Norway's context is relatively under-explored. Therefore, initiating fieldwork to gather perceptions and experiences of international students in Norway is paramount for advancing our understanding in this area.

The second implication arises from existing literature, which posits that the social inclusion of students is a gradual process. However, this research offers a novel perspective by suggesting that inclusion is not solely a one-sided endeavor; rather, it entails a dual dynamic between incoming students and those already residing in the country. It underscores that successful inclusion cannot be achieved by the student alone; rather, it necessitates the active participation and support of others within the host community.

## **Limitations**

### ***Representativeness***

This thesis focused only on a specific demographic and geographical area: long-term international students of the University of Stavanger. Therefore the researcher acknowledges that some of the findings of this study may not be generalizable to broader populations. Moreover, in the continuity of population representation, I admit that the diversity of the sample was rather limited: 85% are from outside EU/EAA including 65% of them from Asian countries, 71,5% are in the same age range under 28 and the same percentage came to Norway alone without their spouse or family (71,5%) and are studying the same major (71,5%): Service Leadership In International Business.



To show more representativeness for future researches, it will be crucial to have (as much as possible) a sample that varies and offers more balance between the ethnicities, the participants' age or even their familial situation. However, the equilibrium between the male and female is to be kept to the upmost degree. If the academics can find a proper balance between all the aspects of his/her sample, he/she will foster a diversity of perspectives, experiences, and ideas of cultural dimensions.

### ***Time Constraints***

Due to a limited period, there were various constraints that might have influenced the extent and scale of the research results. The time available for data collection was restricted, conceivably limiting the number of participants, and potentially resulting in a shortfall in the comprehensiveness of the collected data. Moreover, the time limitations presented challenges to conduct an exhaustive literature review and an in-depth analysis of the data. Consequently, some relevant literature may not have been fully explored, and certain nuances in the data may not have been thoroughly examined. While efforts were made to alleviate these limitations, it is important to acknowledge that the thesis's conclusions are based on available resources during this time limit.

### **Recommendations for Potentials Future Research**

This research is focused only on the University of Stavanger and on the international students that are following a full Master Program. However, in the following recommendations, the researcher outlines several key areas for future research that hold the potential to deepen our knowledge on diversity and inclusion. These recommendations are outlined by opportunities and gaps identified within the existing literature, but remains in the same field as this thesis: the social inclusion of international students in Norway. By addressing these researches priorities, the researchers will aim to contribute to the development of more inclusive

practices and policies for those communities and honor the diverse identities and experiences of all internationals.

### ***Longitudinal Research***

For this type of research, the scholar is to wait a few years and then recreate the same aspects as this research in order to explore the dynamics of diversity over time (Cosco et al., 2016). By tracking those changes in attitudes, behaviors, perceptions and organizational practices, researchers will be able to get a better understanding of the long-term impacts of diversity strategies on an environment (Cosco et al., 2016). In addition, the researcher(s) will be able to see whether the university has taken on the suggestions made by these students. If modifications have indeed been implemented, being able to identify the influence of these changes on the international students' experiences and perceptions of their social inclusion, will further help to promote multicultural and inclusion initiatives in other educational environments.

### ***Comparative Research***

Comparative studies are conducted across different contexts, which can be cultural, institutional, and even geographical (Gittleman & Luh, 1992). The objective is to identify cross-cultural variations in diversity and inclusion practices (Gittleman & Luh, 1992). By comparing different settings, researchers will be able to uncover specific factors that will shape the future perceptions and strategies (Gittleman & Luh, 1992).

In this context, two research are suggested to discover more about inclusion in Norway. the first will be based on two majors: instead of spreading out over the entire international population, the researcher will be able to compare two different Master's Degree. One master from the scientific major such as engineering compared to one from the human sciences major, such as psychology or sociology, etc. In both, international students will be studied on their social inclusion and the results compared together to see if there is any difference and if yes,

which one is it and why. The second one, will be on a broader scale than just UiS, it will count all international universities in Norway. The purpose will be to identify which university is better than the others for its inclusion and why. Recognizing the factors that make it the best, will make it easier for others to recreate at home and improve their own strategies.

### ***Expand the Scope of Demographic Representation***

In this part future research should strive to include a more diverse range of participants, including individuals from underrepresented communities. Those individuals can be brought into the research based on factors such as their ethnicity, gender identity and socioeconomic and family status. In those studies, researchers will still delve into the same field of investigation: diversity and social inclusion, However, this time the population analyzed would be different. Raising questions about the empowerment and participation of the LGBTQIA+ community could bring another dimension on the inclusion strategies. Studying a broader ethnicity mix, with for instance more Europeans, Americans and Africans' experiences, inquiries can gain deeper insights. Exploring the host students and the international together, by having each community talked about their perceptions and experiences of social inclusion with the others, will convey the level of acceptance and embracement those two communities have for one another. It would also help to get insights into the locals' perspective and feelings; since a lot of changes asked for by internationals may require them to adapt beyond their natural inclinations.

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## Translations Glossary

- 1) Être intégrée dans un environnement, dans l'environnement social dans lequel on évolue. Un environnement de tous les jours, avec d'autres personnes. (Original, non-translated, Participant 09, 2024).
- 2) Ça a été compliqué de rencontrer des gens, même pendant les activités, puisque souvent les gens étaient déjà en groupe, eux-mêmes. (Original, non-translated, Participant 09, 2024).
- 3) Ça a été compliqué de rencontrer des gens, même pendant les activités, puisque souvent les gens étaient déjà en groupe, eux-mêmes. (Original, non-translated, Participant 09, 2024).
- 4) J'ai une personnalité qui se rapproche plus du stéréotype norvégien, genre très calme, renfermée. (Original, non-translated, Participant 09, 2024).
- 5) La langue anglaise, parce qu'on ne parlait pas le norvégien entre nous. C'était la langue anglaise. (Original, non-translated, Participant 11, 2024).
- 6) Il y a eu énormément d'expériences où des clients étaient agacés de devoir commander en anglais avec mes collègues, [...]. Et du coup, étaient beaucoup plus aigris et méchants, on va dire, envers eux. Alors que si j'arrivais et que je parlais en norvégien, tout de suite, c'était des personnes très sympas. (Original, non-translated, Participant 09, 2024).
- 7) Je vais essayer de me mettre à leur place. C'est vrai que je n'attends pas quelqu'un qui parle parfaitement le français. Mais c'est vrai que si quelqu'un est serveur, j'aimerais avoir un effort de la part. (Original, non-translated, Participant 09, 2024).
- 8) La première fois qu'ils avaient une personne noire, ils devaient avoir 6-7 ans (Original, non-translated, Participant 09, 2024)
- 9) Parce que c'est vrai que les Norvégiens ne sont pas des gens qui vont critiquer ouvertement. (Original, non-translated, Participant 09, 2024)
- 10) Mais je pense que je ne l'ai pas vu, tu vois. Parce que j'ai d'autres personnes qui me disent « Ah, j'ai expérimenté ça et ça », moi, personnellement, jamais... Donc je me dis est-ce

que c'est juste que je ne l'ai pas expérimenté ou c'est juste qu'on n'est pas voulu voir ? (Original, non-translated, Participant 11, 2024)

11) Ça va peut-être être discriminatoire, mais peut-être 50-50, [...] 50% de norvégien, 50% d'international. (Original, non-translated, Participant 11, 2024)

12) Ça n'a pas été respecté, [...] 50 places pour les norvégiens et 20 places pour les internationaux dans le master, et au final, il y en a été beaucoup. [...] Donc j'aurais aimé que ce soit plus de 50-50. (Original, non-translated, Participant 09, 2024)

13) Donc peut-être qu'il faut, dans ces associations-là, peut-être qu'il faut avoir deux leaders en même temps, deux sous-leaders, qui feront en sorte que tous les internationaux viennent, et le leader qui fera en sorte que tous les norvégiens viennent. Et ces activités-là, il faut qu'ils soient en anglais, bien sûr. (Original, non-translated, Participant 11, 2024).

## Appendixes

### *Appendix 01 - Consent Form/Letter of information to participants*

#### **Are you interested in taking part in the research project**

*“Diversity and Inclusion: exploring foreign students’ perceptions of social inclusion in a multicultural environment”?*

#### **Purpose of the project**

You are invited to participate in a research project for a master thesis, where the main purpose is to understand the perceptions and experiences of international students concerning their social inclusion at their university.

#### **Which institution is responsible for the research project?**

The University of Stavanger is responsible for the project.

#### **Why are you being asked to participate?**

You are asked to participate as an international student that is following a full Master degree at the University of Stavanger.

#### **What does participation involve of you?**

If you chose to take part in this project, this will involve that you take part in an interview. It will take approx. 45min. The survey includes questions about your experiences, feelings, and reflections on events you lived here at the university. You will also be asked during the interview questions about your ethnicity; specifically your mother tongue and your country of origin. These 2 questions will help the researcher to see if there is any difference between students that are from EU/EEA or outside EU/EAA. Your answer will be recorded electronically.

#### **Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

### **Your personal privacy - how we will store and use your personal data**

We will only use personal data for the purpose(s) specified here and we will process your personal data in accordance with data protection legislation (the GDPR). The only two persons that will have access to the data will be myself as the researcher and my supervisor, and your data will be saved on protected hard drive. I will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data.

### **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The planned end date of the project is June 30, 2024, at that time the recordings will be deleted, and the collected data will be anonymized.

### **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- Access the personal data that is being processed about you.
- Request that your personal data is deleted.
- Request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified.
- Receive a copy of your personal data (data portability) and
- Send a complaint to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data.

### **What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based in an agreement with the University of Stavanger, the Data protection Services of SIKT – Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project meets requirements in data protection legislation.

### **Where can I find out more?**

If you have any questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- The Researcher, Marie DORVILLE via e-mail: [m.dorville@stud.uis.no](mailto:m.dorville@stud.uis.no)
- The Supervisor, Tone Linge via e-mail: [tone.linge@uis.no](mailto:tone.linge@uis.no)
- Our Data Protection Officer, Rolf Jegervatn via e-mail: [personvernombud@uis.no](mailto:personvernombud@uis.no)

If you have question about how data protection has been assessed in this project by SIKT, contact: email: ([personverntjenester@sikt.no](mailto:personverntjenester@sikt.no)) or by telephone: +47 73 98 40 40.

Yours sincerely,

Marie DORVILLE  
Researcher/Student

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## **Consent form**

I have received and understood information about the project “*Diversity and Inclusion: exploring foreign students’ perceptions of social inclusion in a multicultural environment*” and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

I give consent to participate in an interview:

YES

NO

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end of the project.

-----  
(Signed by participant, date of signature)

## *Appendix 02 - Interview guide*

### ***1st part > Introduction***

- Welcome and thanks the participant
- Explain the purpose of the interview and the rights of the participants during

### ***2nd part > Background questions***

- State your name, age, your mother tongue and your country of origin
- State if you move to Norway alone or with friends/family
- State the major you are studying and the year you are in
- State your social status : full time student, full time student + part-time worker, etc.
- Are you a member of any association here at UiS
- Have you ever travel for a long time outside your country before or is it your first time

### ***3rd part > perceptions, experiences, and challenges***

- Do you know what is social inclusion, and how would you define it?
- How often do you speak with your family/friends back home?
- Could you tell me about your first few months here in Norway studying? (Challenges, supports system, integration, inclusions, friends, community)?
- Can you tell me one or two situations where you felt that you did not belong? How did this experience shaped your perspective and future interactions? How did that make you feel? Do you still feel the same a few months after the facts?
- Have you ever experienced racism or prejudices from anyone at the university? By whom? Can you tell me about it? Have you ever witnessed it towards someone else? How did you feel while experiencing/witnessing?

- Have you ever felt the need of talking to the counselor of UiS? Have you talk to a counselor?
- Do you think that the social inclusion can play a part in your academic results? If so, can you describe how?
- Do you feel included, if yes what makes you feel that way // if not, what do you think can help you feel included?

#### ***4th part > UiS policies***

- Do you think UiS is prepared enough to help international students with their inclusion?  
If yes, could you elaborate your answer? Have you ever received any helps from UiS
- Have you ever been informed of the policies of UiS towards international students?
- As an international students yourself, what do you think UiS can be improved about policies and practices?

#### ***5th part > Closing interview***

- Is there anything else you would like to add or emphasize about this story?
- Express gratitude
- Summarize key points

*Appendix 03: Tentative time spent and phases of the interviews*

Interviews are supposed to last for 45 minutes > sum of minimum **Time Spent**

<b>Phases</b>	<b>Explanations</b>	<b>Time spent</b>
<p><b>Phase 1:</b> Confidence Building</p>	<p>Not recorded</p> <p>Socializing and asking news from peers</p> <p>First encounter, being present to know the participant</p>	05 to 10 min
<p><b>Phase 2:</b> Information on the thesis 1<sup>st</sup> part _ Interview Guide</p>	<p>Reminder of the topic of the research</p> <p>Reminder of their rights and how the data are handled</p> <p>Reassurance about their anonymity</p>	05 min if questions
<p><b>Phase 3:</b> Personal data 2<sup>nd</sup> part _ Interview Guide</p>	<p>Recorded _ Beginning of the interview</p> <p>Trying to know the participant's background for the research</p> <p>Knowing if they know a little about the subject</p>	05 to 10 min
<p><b>Phase 4:</b> Focus of the research 3<sup>rd</sup> part _ Interview Guide</p>	<p>Recorded</p> <p>Letting the participant talking about his/her stories</p> <p>Bouncing back on certain points to go deeper into it</p>	15 to 40 min
<p><b>Phase 5:</b> UiS 4<sup>th</sup> part _ Interview guide</p>	<p>Recorded</p> <p>Having feedbacks on policies and the student's perceptions of their university</p>	10 to 20 min
<p><b>Phase 6:</b> Last chance 5<sup>th</sup> part _ Interview guide</p>	<p>Recorded</p> <p>Summarizing and final opportunity for them to add something</p> <p>Showing gratitude for their participation</p>	05 to 10 min
<p><b>Phase 7:</b> Relaxation time</p>	<p>Not recorded</p> <p>Socialization for those who want before departure</p>	Unlimited

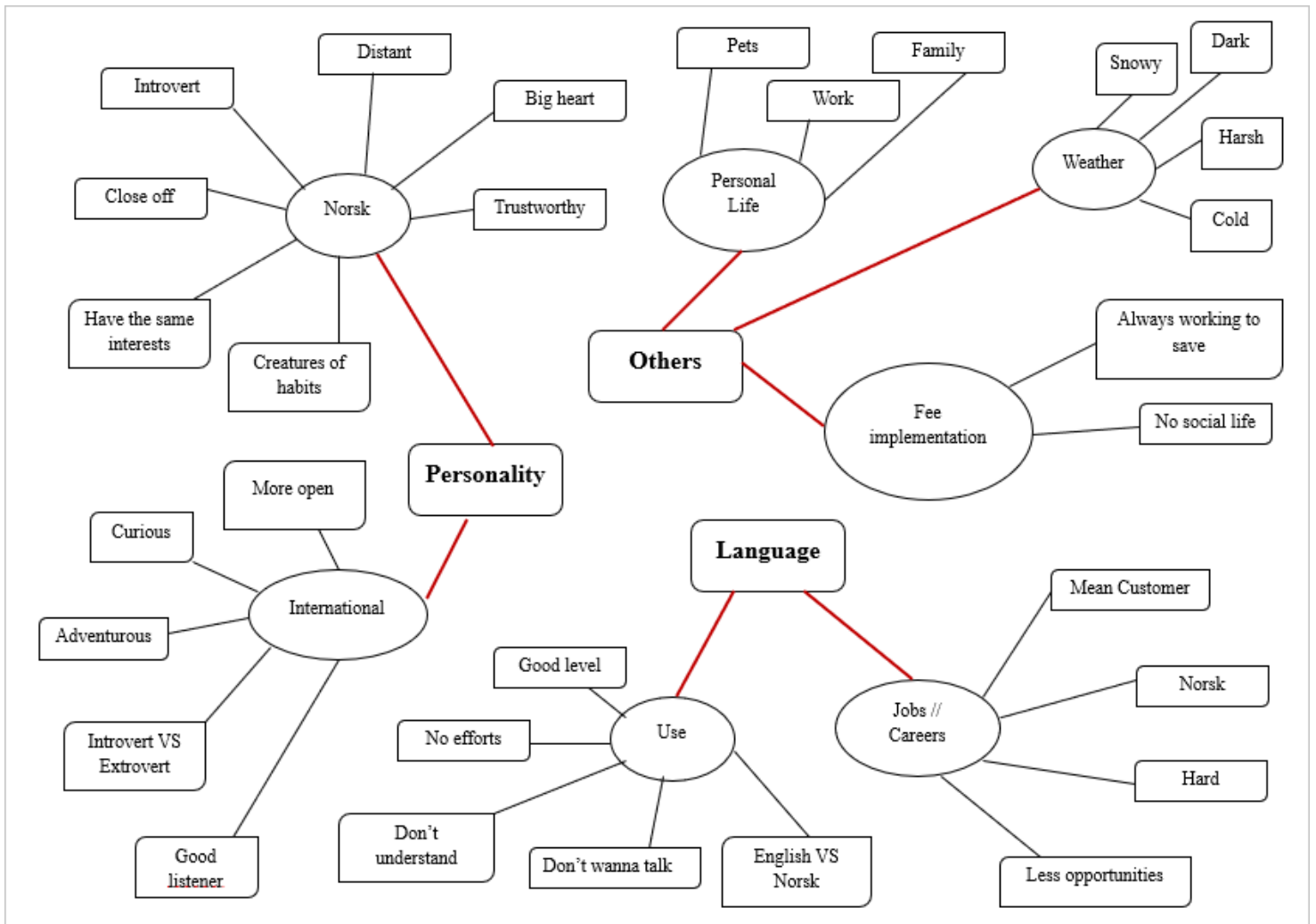


*Appendix 04: Tentative calendar before beginning the research*

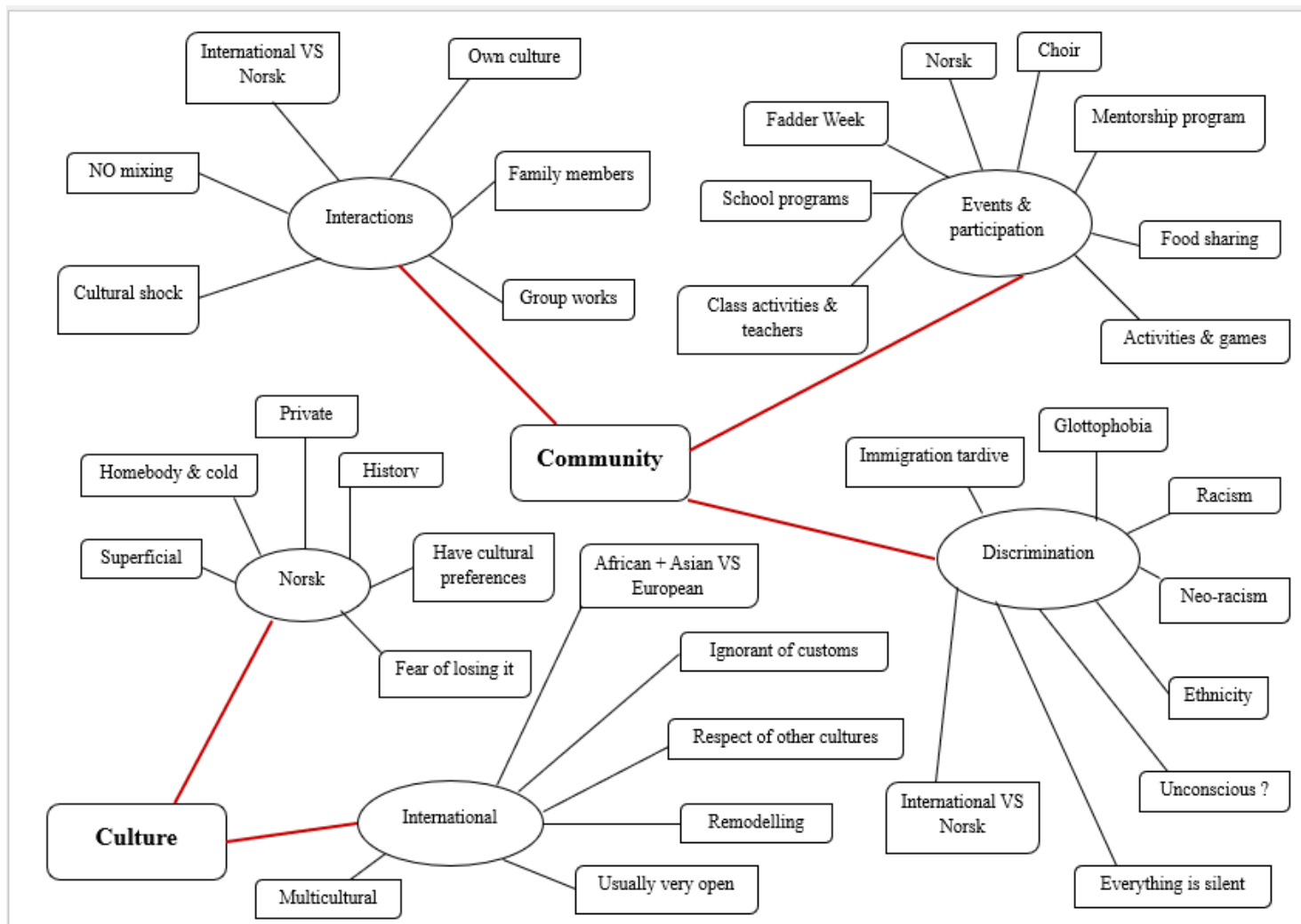
<b>Weeks</b>	<b>What is supposed to be done</b>	<b>Completed?</b>
Weeks 51 & 52	Literature SIKT	None of it has been conducted due to Christmas holidays and family time
Weeks 1 & 2	Literature	SIKT was sent January 12, 2024
Weeks 3 & 4	Literature	Continued
Weeks 5 to 6	Literature achieved Interviews	Literature not finalized Interviews executed on week 7
Weeks 7 to 10	Interviews on NVivo and coded, for the beginning of the 'Findings' part	Move from Norway to France on week 9 Family holidays on week 10 NVivo and codes has been made on weeks 14 & 15
Weeks 11 to 17	Writing	Writing began on week 06 and ended on week 17
Weeks 18 & 19	Proofreading Changes accordingly to feedbacks	Bit by bit from week 15 to week 17 Changes done on weeks 18 & 19

The '**Completed**' column has been done at the end of the research on Week 20, once everything has been written and the thesis finalized.

*Appendix 05: Tentative Mental Map \_ 1<sup>st</sup> Party “Factors of Social Inclusion”*



*Appendix 06: Tentative Mental Map \_ 2<sup>nd</sup> Party “Factors of Social Inclusion”*



*Appendix 07: Examples for the coding process \_ One Factor of Active Participation*

Raw Data → Sub-Sub-Category → Sub-Category → Main Category (Blumenthal & Gjerald, 2022)

