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**International student perceptions
on studying abroad and developing
employability during a UK Masters**

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Abstract

Student mobility is the most visible aspect of the internationalisation of higher education. Congruent with global trends, Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data shows that for over a decade, international students have been the largest group of students studying for a full-time Masters degree in the UK (70% in 2015/16). Large-scale surveys suggest that developing employability is one of the main motivations for studying abroad. However, internationalisation and employability are largely regarded as unrelated in higher education policies and discourses. As a result, the literature on internationalisation is mainly framed around the recruitment of international students and associated economic benefits to host countries and institutions, whereas employability related discourses are predominantly oriented towards national policies focused on the development of human capital through domestic students. Consequently, there is a dearth of research exploring international student employability.

This thesis aims to contribute to understanding the connections between internationalisation and employability. The research examined Masters-level students' rationales for studying abroad and how these relate to their perceptions of developing their employability. The research was qualitative and involved conducting 36 semi-structured interviews at two points in time (at the end of the first and second semesters) with a targeted sample of 19 international Master students from 11 non-EU countries who were studying on four different programmes (located in four Schools) at a Scottish university: Social and Political Science; Literatures, Languages and Cultures; Education; and Business.

The findings of the research are discussed using the international student lifecycle (ISL) model which adopts a holistic approach towards understanding students' rationales for studying abroad. The focus lies in the relatedness of their lived experience and expected outcomes including their employability.

The thematic analysis of the interview data resulted in a proposed conceptual framework which identified different rationales or motivations international students have for studying abroad: educational rationale (studying abroad for a quality education); experiential rationale (seeking to experience living and studying in a different and multicultural environment); aspirational rationale (aspiring to contribute to society during their study and in their home country); and the economic rationale

(aiming to develop skills and competencies in preparation for work in a globally interconnected world).

In line with the focus of the study, the economic rationale was explored in greater depth to understand students' perceptions of employability-related support available at the programme level and within the wider university (Careers Service). The findings showed variations in the support provided across the four schools. There was a degree of unanimity regarding the student perceptions of the support made available by the Careers Service. Both levels of support influenced students' perceptions of developing their employability during their Masters studies.

Further analysis of the findings led to the development of four employability-related constructs including the knowledge, skills, attitudes and relationships the students perceived they developed during their study abroad. The employability-related constructs framework that emanated from the research aligns with and extends frameworks which have originated from recent large-scale studies that have linked studying abroad to developing employability.

The findings have important implications for policy development and educational practices. The policy implications relate to the relevance of the framework proposed for institutions to take account of students' rationales in the development of internationalisation strategies. In terms of educational practices, the proposed employability-related constructs framework can be integrated into the institutional curriculum and extra-curricular activities to enhance the student experience.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, that the work is my own, and that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed: _____

Date: February 2019

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February 2019

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List of Acronyms

- BUS** - Business
- CoS** - Certificate of Sponsorship
- DfEE** - Department for Education and Employment
- DfID** - Department for International Development
- DLHE** - Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education
- EDOs** - Employability Development Opportunities
- EDU** - Education
- EIS** - European Impact Studies
- HE** - Higher Education
- HEA** - Higher Education Academy
- HEC** - Higher Education Commission
- HEFCE** - Higher Education Funding Council for England (closed on 1 April 2018)
- HEIs** - Higher Education Institutions
- HEPI** - Higher Education Policy Institute
- HESA** - Higher Education Statistics Agency
- IaH** - Internationalisation at Home
- IoC** - Internationalisation of the Curriculum
- LLC** - Literatures, Languages and Cultures
- MMM** - Making the Most of Masters
- MOOCs** - Massive Open Online Courses
- MSc** - Masters
- MScR** - Research Masters
- OECD** – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- PD** - Programme Director
- PG** - Postgraduate
- PGT** - Postgraduate Taught
- QAA** - Quality Assurance Agency
- SPS** - Social and Political Science
- TNE** - Transnational education
- UIS** - UNESCO Institute for Statistics
- WBD** - Work-based dissertation
- WBL** - Work-based learning
- WPB** - Work-based placement

Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis explores international students' rationales or motivations for studying abroad and their perceptions on developing their employability while studying on a one-year Masters programme.

In this chapter, I discuss my motivation for conducting the research, provide some background information to explain the context in which the research took place and offer an outline of the chapters (Chapter 1). The literature review chapters cover key aspects of the research including internationalisation (Chapter 2), the international student lifecycle (Chapter 3) and employability (Chapter 4). The methodology and the methods are discussed in Chapter 5. The findings are presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. This is followed by a discussion of the findings in light of published literature (Chapter 9). Finally, the implications and recommendations for future research are outlined in Chapter 10.

1.1 Motivation for my research

After 19 years of experience including teaching high school students in Northern Nigeria and working in different multinational organisations in various business sectors (auditing, banking, service, and marketing), I was motivated to pursue further study to fulfil a lifelong ambition. I also wanted to obtain an international education that will give me the knowledge and skills to improve my small business. Interestingly, after a full year of unsuccessful attempts to get admission into three UK universities, I obtained a scholarship to study on a one-year Top-Up Business degree (the Top-Up degree allows students to join a final year of an undergraduate degree after the previous study such as an Higher National Diploma) in a university in the North West of England. This experience stimulated my interest in international student decision-making related to study abroad. I explored this interest initially in my BA (Hons) dissertation. The dissertation gave me the opportunity to interview international (EU and non-EU) and UK students to understand and compare students' motivations for studying on a one-year top-up degree programme. The experience of conducting my undergraduate research and presenting the findings at the first education conference I attended (British Conference of Undergraduate

Research, 2012) inspired me to further pursue my interest in the international students' experience.

I learned about the concept of employability during my undergraduate degree programme. The university provided an opportunity for students to obtain an additional qualification to demonstrate our employability to potential employers. This meant that aside from completing all requirements for my degree, I needed to complete two additional credit-bearing courses (one 20-credit and one 10-credit course). After successful completion of the taught courses, I passed the assessed interview (by a panel selected from across the university) to attain the Employability Gold Award (the highest award possible).

Ironically, despite obtaining a First Class degree and the Employability Gold Award, after the completion of my degree, I was unsure about the next steps in terms of career prospects in the UK or my home country. My inquiries from the University Careers Service did very little to allay my fears and uncertainty about my future career. At the time, I could not reconcile the excellent support I had received at the start of my study abroad and study experience with my perceived lack of support at the end of my study period abroad. Importantly, it was difficult to understand why the university had encouraged me to invest the extra effort to develop my employability if I could not get the much-needed support at the end of my study. Hence, my experience at the end of my first degree deeply motivated me to research the extent to which the concept of employability mattered in the experience of non-EU students.

I started a Masters in Educational Research at the University of Edinburgh. Mainly due to my educational background, I applied to study for a Masters at the Edinburgh Business School. However, my application was transferred to the School of Education which was deemed as a better fit for my proposed research. At the initial stage, it was a struggle to reconcile the traditions of my learning in the School of Business with the philosophical traditions in the School of Education. However, I have come to regard my education in the two disciplines as beneficial in terms of access to broad and diverse perspectives in relation to employability and the international student experience of higher education. This frames my approach in my research and underpinning ontological positioning discussed in Chapter 5.

My interest in understanding the international student experience grew during my Masters study, and this influenced the focus in my Masters dissertation which

explored Chinese students' perceptions on developing their critical thinking during their one-year Masters in the UK. In contrast to the dominant perspective in the literature, the study found that the students developed critical thinking skills while studying in the UK and this is evidenced by success in their academic study (Fakunle, Alison and Fordyce, 2016). However, there seems to be a mismatch between student expectations and the actual academic experience regarding whether or not they possess the critical thinking skills required for their study (Fakunle et al., 2016). The findings highlight the need for the university to support international students to understand the importance of critical thinking at the start of the academic year.

In my Masters dissertation, I focused on critical thinking skill development which is an important factor for academic success during the study period. At the same time, it seems reasonable to suggest that developing skills during the study period should not be an end in itself. In other words, skills developed during studying abroad should be of value during and after study. However, at the time I did not explore the extent to which international students make connections between the skills they perceive they were developing during their Masters and their future goals after graduation. This is an aspect that is explored in my PhD research. Furthermore, my Masters dissertation highlighted the importance of understanding a key aspect of the experiences of a cohort of international students. I am aware that it is also important to understand the experiences of the range of international students studying in the UK which is the second top destination of international students globally and this is the focus in my PhD thesis.

During my PhD study at the University of Edinburgh, I have had the opportunity to work in different departments (Student Recruitment and Admissions, School of Education, and Careers Service). This has enriched my understanding of the University's systems and support in place for students (home and international students). My roles across the different departments involved designing and conducting projects related to different aspects of the student experience (as applicants and their lived experience) at undergraduate and postgraduate levels of studying (for home and international students). I have also been involved in teaching, marking assignments and providing feedback to Masters-level students. My experience, study, research and work have further stimulated my interest in researching international student employability. My interest is also driven by the

relative lack of attention to international student employability in the literature on internationalisation (Caruana and Spurling, 2007; Huang, Turner and Chen, 2014; Jones, 2012, 2013) despite employability being cited as a main reason for studying abroad (Gribble and Blackmore, 2012; Hobsons, 2014; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002).

The dearth of student voices in relation to their perspectives on developing their employability has generated some research to address this gap. However, research in this area especially in the context of higher education in the UK focuses on undergraduate home students (Tomlinson, 2008; Tymon, 2013; Yorke, 2004a). Citing the absence of research exploring the intersectionality between international education and employability, a three-year longitudinal study in Australia highlighted the need to conduct further research to inform policy and practice to support international students' employability (Gribble, Blackmore and Rahimi, 2015), and this point was reiterated in a report by researchers at the University of Exeter titled '*Employability in Higher Education: A review of practice and strategies around the world*' (Blackmore et al, 2016). Interestingly, the Australian study also focused on final year undergraduate students.

To date, there remains a significant gap in understanding international students' rationales for pursuing Masters-level study and their perspectives with regards to developing their employability. There are also additional issues such as the dominant marketization agenda in higher education which prioritises the economic value of recruiting international students while paying less attention to other aspects of the students' experience (Healey, 2017; Stein and de Andreotti, 2016; Ploner, 2017), including their employability.

These issues have further stimulated my interest in exploring the international student experience. I began to question why there was a lack of research exploring the linkages between international students' motivations to study abroad, experience and their future goals after graduation. In particular, I was interested in the experiences of Masters-level international students as they have been researched less compared to undergraduate students (Bamber, 2015; Macleod, Barnes and Huttly, 2018; Mellors-Bourne, Hooley and Marriott, 2014). In their study exploring the transition to postgraduate study in terms of learning, identity and participation in practices, O'Donnell et al. (2009) suggested reasons for the lack of attention to Masters student experience. They said:

Perhaps there has been an assumption that, once students graduate with their first degree, postgraduate-level study simply represents ‘more of the same’, or ‘taking things to the next level’, and thus that there is little (if anything) in the way of a transition to be undertaken. Until this is established, though, there remains a considerable gap in the literature (27).

Similarly, a Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) report revealed that ‘clear models about their [Masters students] decision-making were yet to emerge’ and ‘there was evidence that that little hard information about career-related outcomes from PGT study was available’ (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014, 1). The authors of the report then recommended that there is clearly room for further research in PG study.

The need for research into PG study is further underpinned by global trends which show that increasing numbers of international students participate in postgraduate education (OECD, 2017). In the UK, the independent inquiry on postgraduate education by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) states that ‘postgraduate enrolments increased by more than 200% since 1999, compared to an increase of 18% for home and EU students’ (HEC, 2012, 11). To buttress this point, data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2017) shows that non-EU international students represent the largest percentage of students studying a full-time Masters (Table 1:1).

Table 1:1 Full-time PGT students in UK HE by domicile, EU, UK and Non-EU (2015/16 and 2014/15)

| | 2014/15 | % | 2015/16 | % | % change from 2014/15 to 2015/16 |
|---------------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|---|
| UK | 53,065 | 28.8 | 54,995 | 30.2 | 1.4 |
| EU | 22,130 | 12.1 | 21,385 | 11.7 | -0.4 |
| Non-EU | 108,875 | 59.1 | 105,970 | 58.1 | - 1 |
| Total | 184,065 | 100 | 182,350 | 100 | |

Source: HESA 2017

As Bamber (2015) notes, the relative lack of research exploring Masters students experience is problematic in terms of developing support to meet their needs. The

decline in the numbers of international Masters students in the last five years (HESA, 2018) suggests that research to understand their rationales for studying abroad will prove useful. In relation to the aims of this research, there is a need to understand non-EU international students' perceptions on developing their employability while studying at Masters level in the UK to assess the extent to which their perceptions match (or not) their lived experience and the employability-related outcome from their study.

1.2 Context of the study

This section presents the contextual background to the research reported in this thesis. As evident in the previous section, this thesis is positioned within three key areas of literature: internationalisation; international student experience; and employability. Each of these areas of literature is briefly reviewed in the sub-sections below (representing Chapters 2-4) to contextualise the thesis.

1.2.1 Internationalisation and international students

The term, internationalisation is commonly used to refer to universities' responses to the global dimension of higher education in the 21st century. There are however different interpretations of internationalisation and this is discussed in detail in Chapter 2. In general, internationalisation encompasses the cross-border movement of students and staff, research and knowledge exchange, embedding international perspectives in the curriculum and developing intercultural awareness. Despite its multifaceted definition, de Wit (2002) and Knight (2004) identify four main rationales for internationalisation: political rationales (mainly related to national foreign policy and security issues), economic rationales (chiefly competitiveness for development and growth within a globalised knowledge economy), social and cultural rationales (institutional support for students and staff to develop intercultural competence in an international environment) and academic rationales (embedding an international perspective in research, teaching and service). Though de Wit (2010) acknowledges that the four rationales are interrelated, the economic rationale is recognised as a dominant aspect of the internationalisation of higher education (de Wit, 2010; Healey, 2017; Kreber, 2009a). This directly relates to recruitment of international students in a highly marketised global higher education environment.

Accordingly, with 4.6 million international students studying outside their home countries (OECD, 2017) student mobility is the most visible aspect of internationalisation. Furthermore, student mobility accords with the economic rationale for internationalisation in terms of the benefit it entails to the host nation and institution. For example, student tuition and living costs contributed AUS\$31.6 billion to the total of AUS\$32.2 billion generated by international education in 2017 as Australia's third-largest export sector and the country's leading service export sector overall (ICEF Monitor, 2018). Similarly, a recent report commissioned by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and Kaplan estimated the total net economic contribution to the UK of international students starting courses in 2015/16 was £20.3 billion (London Economics, 2018). In contrast, these reports do not outline the economic value of mobility for the students. This is perhaps unsurprising in view of a HEFCE report (based on a literature review on international student mobility) which revealed that 'the published literature on the evidence on the true added value of study abroad remains extremely scarce' (King, Findlay and Ahrens (2010, 34). In other words, there is lack of empirical evidence that shows a direct correlation between mobility and employability.

Considering the economic benefits from recruiting international students (Gribble et al., 2015; OECD, 2017), it is perhaps unsurprising that many studies related to studying abroad are framed in line with the marketization agenda in higher education. To support this point, it is important to use the example of the Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) paper which has been described as the most widely used theoretical framework for analysing student motivations for study abroad (Wilkins, et al., 2012). The research paper, titled '*Push-Pull* factors influencing international student destination choice' report findings from a large-scale study which concludes that 'institutions need to ensure that their marketing and promotion is undertaken in a sophisticated manner' (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002, 90). Similarly, the report by Hobsons (2015) titled, '*International student survey 2015: Value and the modern international student*', provides 'a detailed set of recommendations, setting out the value that prospective international students place on an international education and...what the UK can do to stand out in an increasingly competitive marketplace' (2). This shows that previous and recent research on prospective international student motivation for studying abroad is largely framed to support the marketing strategies put in place by the host country and institutions. This is not surprising for three key reasons. First, the economic value of international students in terms of

their tuition fees forms a substantial part of income in the higher education sector. Second, there is a competitive drive to recruit talented students who can contribute their skills to host countries. Third, although a less emphasised reason underpinning a highly marketized recruitment drive for international students, internationalisation leads to increased cultural diversity.

However, based on research conducted in one university in the UK, Healey (2017) points out that:

Despite the growing numbers of international students on campus, there was little fundamental change in the culture of the university which remained firmly positioned as an institution catering primarily for full-time, domestic school leavers...which left many international students unintentionally marginalised (11).

The observation above seems to validate conclusions reached by King, Findlay, and Ahrens (2010) who describe international students as:

...undoubtedly an under-researched phenomenon. Indeed, they are almost a blind-spot on the research map of social sciences. Yet, quite apart from their sheer numbers, they are important for several reasons (46)

Yet, to date, internationalisation discourses are mostly framed as an organisational process in line with institutional and national standpoints. To this end, the dominant framework for understanding rationales for internationalisation have focused on institutional and governmental perspectives (Knight, 2004). As a result, the roles of individuals in the internationalisation process have been ignored (Hunter, Jones and de Wit, 2018). This further highlights the need to understand individual rationales for internationalisation, in particular from the perspectives of international students who are the beneficiaries of international education.

1.2.2 International student experience/lifecycle

The existing literature on international student experience is largely framed from a deficit perspective (Marginson, 2014; Zhou, et al., 2008) including, the impact of culture shock (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001) and struggles with psychological and sociological adjustment (Schartner and Young, 2016; Wu and Hammond, 2011). In other words, the international student experience is largely conceived in terms of whether or not they adjust to the academic and cultural norms in the host society.

However, the deficit model of understanding the international student experience has been challenged (Stein and Andreotti, 2016; Marginson, 2012). For example, Stein and Andreotti (2016) critique what they describe as the 'global imaginaries' which frame the international student experience as: '*sources of income and intellectual capital that support the continued prosperity of the Western university and nation-state; as unworthy or inferior participants in the contest for social mobility through educational and employment opportunities or; as objects of development and recipients of the West's universal knowledge*' (226). The issues around equity and equality raised by Stein and Andreotti (2016) resonate with other researchers (Brown and Jones, 2013; Cantwell and Lee, 2010; Marginson, 2012; Lee and Rice, 2007) and Arshad, De Lima and Konstantoni (2012) who reiterate the need to support the different needs of diverse groups in an internationalised HE setting to provide a positive experience for all.

Despite extensive research into international students' experience, there is a lack of studies which adopts a holistic approach towards exploring the student experience. This means that connections between international students' decision-making and motivation, their lived experience and their expectations after graduation are under-researched. As earlier mentioned the lack of a holistic approach in examining international student experience can be attributed in part to the research aims and intended outcomes. This means that research on student decision-making is mainly framed to support institutional recruitment activities (Hobsons, 2014, 2015). The research on the international student lived experience predominantly focuses on their role as learners and socio-cultural adjustment to the host environment (Montgomery, 2010). International student outcomes in terms of their employability is the least explored aspect of the international student experience (Caruana and Spurling, 2007; Huang et al., 2014).

To put in context how the research into the different aspects of the student experience/lifecycle are presented in the literature I will refer to the book titled '*The student experience*' published by the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE). The book comprises of seventeen chapters divided into three sections which according to the editor 'mirrors the stages of students' experiences of higher education – getting in, being there and moving on' (Haselgrove, 1994, 3). However, although the book focuses on higher education in the UK, it focuses on home students. Notwithstanding, the book provides an early idea of 'transitions in, through

and out of higher education' which describes the student lifecycle (Sutcliffe, Tangney and Matheson, 2018) which also relates to international students.

Notions of the student lifecycle in the literature fall into two categories. The first category focuses on issues pertaining to home students, particularly with regards to the massification of higher education and widening participation (Haselgrove, 1994; HEFCE, 2001; Sutcliffe, Tangney and Matheson, 2018). Accordingly, initiatives to encourage access to higher education, for example, for under-represented students is rightly regarded as the first stage of student lifecycle (HEFCE, 2001).

However, the vulnerable position of international students has been highlighted in terms of their human rights (Marginson, 2012) and multiple and multi-dimensional transitions to studying abroad (Jindal-Snape and Rienties, 2016). For example, 'the immigration policy of a country can have a huge impact on international students' mobility' (Jindal-Snape and Rienties, 2016, 9), and non-native speakers of English need to meet language proficiency benchmarks to gain admission to study. Accordingly, a holistic approach towards understanding the international student experience should take into account their particular needs at different stages in the student lifecycle. This is currently lacking in the literature.

Thus, although the second category of discourses around the student lifecycle relates to international students' transitions from arrival and the lived experience to departure from the host country (Harris, 1997; Humfrey, 1999), there is no evidence that the suggestion that the international student lifecycle should be the focus of future research (Harris, 1997) has been taken forward in a single empirical study. Rather, the recent mention of the international student lifecycle by the HEA (2014) refers to activities that are undertaken at different stages of the students' educational journey, without highlighting how these stages are connected.

As such, although, I was influenced by notions of the student lifecycle described above, I conducted an independent review of the literature pertinent to the different stages of the international student experience. From a grouping process outlined in detail in Chapter 3, I presented a conceptual framework which encompasses four key stages of the international student lifecycle. Importantly, the conceptual framework presents an integrated model which highlights the interconnectedness of the four different stages of the student experience from motivations to post arrival, lived experience and outcomes/employability.

Furthermore, I revisited and revised the conceptual model based on the findings in my study (in Chapter 9). The revised international student lifecycle model provides an integrated framework that recognises linkages between students' rationales for studying abroad and their lived experience and their perceptions on developing their employability. Employability which had largely been excluded as part of the international student experience is discussed below.

1.2.3 Employability and international students

The lack of attention to international student employability is surprising for two reasons. First, employability has been cited by applicants (potential international students) as a key motivation for studying abroad (Archer, 2016; Hobsons, 2014; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). It should therefore be of interest to HEIs whether international students have access to employability-related opportunities. Research in this area can provide evidence to inform initiatives and strategies to enhance the international student experience. Second, relatedly, based on the findings of a three-year longitudinal study into the employability of international students in Australia, Gribble et al. (2015) caution, that a 'reality gap' currently exists between the promise of employability development opportunities advertised and lived experience for international students ... with the potential to damage Australian higher education's reputation and image internationally' (414). The implication is that in the short or long term, there is a possibility for damage to the image of an institution and a nation if student rationales for studying abroad, such as employability-related reasons, are not taken into account in the design and delivery of a study abroad experience.

While on the one hand, there is an omission of discourses around international student employability, on the other hand, employability is a contested concept. The lack of agreement about the definition of employability has been attributed to methodological and conceptual differences (Suleman, 2018). Methodologically, from a quantitative approach, employability can be regarded as the number of graduates in employment after graduation. Since the mid-2000s, HESA has collected The Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) six months after graduation from UK institutions (this changed to the Graduate Outcomes survey collected from Leavers 15 months after graduation from 2017/18). However, the DLHE excludes data for international students. It remains to be seen if the new Graduate Outcomes Survey will include international students.

The definition of employability below proposed by Hillage and Pollard (1998) embodies the two main conceptualisations in the literature.

Employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work (2)

The first is the outcomes approach which is related to the ability of a student to obtain and retain a job after graduation. This aligns with the quantitative measure of employability (such as the DLHE). This approach is criticised as a crude measure of employability that assumes a simplistic linear relationship between education and employment (Harvey, 2001). The approach does not take into account other factors not related to the university that may impact employability such as the state of the economy. The second is the process approach which is concerned with the development of skills, knowledge and attitudes that will help to prepare and position a graduate for employment. The process approach understands developing graduate employability as a shared responsibility for the student and the institution where learning takes place (Harvey, 2001). My research aligns with the process approach. This means that the approach adopted in this thesis sees both the student and the institution as participants in the process of developing student employability. This outlook frames the research design in Chapter 5.

1.3 Structural outline of the thesis

This thesis comprises 10 chapters. The summary of chapters 2-4 provided above relates to literature pertinent to the context of the study. This allows clear identification of gaps in the literature to guide the focus and the design of the thesis. The main gap my study addresses is the lack of connection between mobility, the student experience and employability. Since research into internationalisation and employability are considered in the literature as two separate agendas (Jones, 2012), this warrants a review of the literature in separate chapters. At the same

time, a holistic approach to the international student experience provides a way to explore the student lifecycle from motivations and rationales to study abroad to lived experience and employability-related outcomes. Hence, the three literature review chapters are:

Chapter 2: Internationalisation of higher education

Chapter 3: International student experience/lifecycle

Chapter 4: Employability

By adopting a selective approach to draw from pertinent literature (Wolcott, 2002) related to core concepts explored in this thesis, the research purpose guides the development of the research questions outlined below:

- What are the rationales or motivations for international students to study on a one-year Masters programme at a UK university?
- To what extent do international students' expectations of developing their employability match their experience?
- To what extent do international students' perceptions of the benefits of studying on the Masters programme change over the course of the one-year of study?
- To what extent do students' perceptions relate to present discourses around employability?

Chapter 5 explains the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning this thesis. This was necessary as the thesis is exploring the connection between two key concepts in higher education that have mostly been explored separately in the literature. Hence, it was important to draw on the ontological assumptions of critical realism which fits with my aim to understand the intentional dimension of human agency, while not ignoring the 'institutionalised nature of social life' (Scott, 2010). In relation to my study, a critical realist methodology allows me to research the complex world of diverse participants in 21st century higher education with thoughts and perceptions (transitive epistemology) about views within the higher education system about how their employability is developed (intransitive ontology), through their reconstructions and conceptualisations in different ways. I draw on Maxwell's (2013) view of critical realism which brings together divergent conceptual

models to 'expand and deepen rather than simply confirm one's own understanding' (43). This was evident in the selection of a qualitative methodology. This chapter also provides a detailed explanation of the sampling, data collection and analysis which contributes to the trustworthiness and validity of the thesis.

Chapters 6-8 present the findings of the thesis to answer the research questions mentioned above. All three chapters follow a similar structure where the results are presented followed by a short synopsis for each main category.

Chapter 9 provides an in-depth discussion of the findings reported in the previous three chapters. The chapter synthesises the findings with existing literature and the student lifecycle model proposed in chapter 3. This seems to validate the model. Further, the model was updated in view of the empirical findings. This means that the revised model is based on theoretical assumptions and empirical evidence.

Chapter 10 concludes the thesis. The chapter includes implications of the study and recommendations for policy and practice based on the findings and makes suggestions for future research.

1.4 Chapter summary

In summary, the motivation for conducting this research was my interest in the experiences of non-EU international students and internationalisation discourses. The research presented in this thesis explores the experiences of international Masters students and aims to contribute to the critical gap in understanding the intersectionality in their experiences and their perceptions on developing their employability while studying abroad. Adopting a holistic approach to understanding the international student experience is important to inform internationalisation strategies and initiatives in the context of delivering higher education in the 21st century to prepare graduates to live and work in a globally connected world.

Chapter 2. Internationalisation of higher education

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a structured review of internationalisation-related literature. It identifies key literature in the field and main developments in the last three decades while identifying relevant gaps. This overview guides the development of the research questions in Chapter 5 and provides the theoretical background which frames the conceptualisation of the international student lifecycle discussed in Chapter 3.

It is important to point out early on in this chapter that the terms; *foreign students*, *overseas students* and *international students* are used interchangeably, reflecting diverse literature references.

The review has four main sections which encompass internationalisation at different levels:

- Internationalisation: Conceptualisations and key developments
- Internationalisation in a national context (the UK)
- Internationalisation at the institutional level (study context)
- International student mobility

2.2 Internationalisation: Conceptualisations and key developments

2.2.1 Definition of internationalisation

The reality is that despite three decades of debates and discussions, internationalisation is still a complex and multi-faceted concept with different and increasingly contested interpretations, definitions and conceptualisations (Altbach, 2016; de Wit, 2016; Knight, 2013; Kreber, 2009a; Teichler, 2004). This provides a rich context for intellectual debate.

However, some contend that debates on internationalisation and international students have remained more or less stagnant, and repetitions of the same problems usually attributed to supporting a diverse student population (Karram,

2013; Singh, 2009) with little evidence of new ideas to move the debate on internationalisation forward (Kehm and Teichler, 2007; Trahar and Hyland, 2011). This has resulted in different sets of literature (Stein and Andreotti, 2016) and tensions around the aims and perceptions of internationalisation (Altbach and de Wit, 2015) which suggests there is an urgent need to make sense of the expansive body of work in the field and perhaps carry out research to develop new ideas.

While there is no universally accepted definition of internationalisation, many scholars describe internationalisation as the aspect of higher education involving the cross-border mobility of students and staff, exchange of knowledge across international borders and embedding international and intercultural content into the curriculum (Altbach and Knight 2007; de Wit 2010; Kreber 2009a; Tamrat and Teferra, 2018; Teichler, 2004). This is the overarching background for my study, with a focus on student mobility.

The framing of internationalisation as an organisational process is well documented in the literature (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2016; Bartell, 2003; Knight, 1997). For example, Bartell (2003) depicts a purist conceptualisation of internationalisation as an organisational process using Sporn's (1996) cultural typology as a means of assessing the extent to which universities adapt to the pressures to internationalise.

However, the organisational approach to internationalisation has been criticised because it excludes the perspectives of individual stakeholders within institutions; academic staff and students (Sanderson, 2011; Trevaskes, Eisenclas and Liddicoat, 2003; Willis and Taylor, 2013). Recently, the need to include the perspectives of staff and students in internationalisation process was reiterated by Hunter, Jones and de Wit (2018). It is therefore important to point out that the definition of internationalisation by de Wit et al. (2015) makes specific reference to individuals:

Internationalisation is the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to the society (29)

Despite the inclusion of students and staff in the definition above, it emphasises internationalisation as a strategic organisational process. This means that there is still a gap in understanding the contributions and perspectives of individuals. Some

authors are contributing to addressing this gap in relation to staff experiences of internationalisation (Kreber and Hounsell, 2014; Maadad and Tight, 2014; Sanderson, 2008, 2011). For example, Kreber and Hounsell, (2014) query the dearth of research on the experience of non-UK academics working in the UK. Their empirical study on the lived experience of academics raise questions regarding whether their employers make the best use of their knowledge and skills. They concluded that institutions need to develop ways of allowing the cultural and work-related background of international academics to support internationalisation-related activities such as exchange of knowledge and values.

Despite the widening scope of empirical work on academic mobility, there is a lack of attention with regards to the perceptions of non-academic staff working in an international university. This is surprising as the changing work demands in an internationalised university environment pertains to all students and staff (Caruana and Ploner, 2010). This suggests a need to understand the perspectives of non-academic staff who provide support services at universities, for example, the Careers Service. Aspects of the work of the Careers Service related to international students' experience is presented in the findings in Chapter 7.

As earlier stated, students' perspectives are largely unaccounted for in conceptualisations of internationalisation process. This thesis seeks to contribute towards addressing the gap in the literature.

2.2.2 Rationales for internationalisation

As de Wit (2010) points out, it is important to distinguish between definitions of internationalisation and rationales for internationalisation. Nonetheless, both concepts are framed from an organisational perspective. The four rationales are political, economic, academic and cultural/social (Knight and de Wit, 1997, 2018). The political rationale relates to the function of the state in terms of foreign policy and national security. The economic rationale is apparent across both national and institutional functions including financial incentive (from student recruitment and the contribution to the host knowledge economy) and competitiveness. The academic rationale consists of the international dimension in research, teaching and services. The cultural rationale pertains to preserving and promoting national cultures, intercultural understanding, citizenship development and social and community development.

Rationales for internationalisation underpins the framework of strategic operationalisation of internationalisation at national and institutional levels (Tamrat and Teferra, 2018). It is unclear why the framework excludes input from staff and students who are key participants in international education.

Furthermore, there are concerns that the economic rationale underpinned by globalisation, commercial interests and competitiveness have become the dominant aspect of internationalisation (de Wit, 2010; Kreber, 2009a). In view of these concerns, Garson (2016) argues that there is a need to 'critically examine the rationales for, and outcomes of internationalisation' (31).

2.2.3 Current issues in internationalisation

Three interrelated issues are of immediate concern in the context of this study. First, internationalisation is a global construct without a globally accepted definition. This is problematic as key actors in internationalisation processes have different understandings which frame their actions and expectations. The issue is further exacerbated by underlying unequal power relations in the global north and the global south (Altbach, 2016). In other words, key destination countries (USA, UK, Australia and Canada) in the global north have a dominant position in internationalisation discourses (OECD, 2017), whereas there are persisting equity and equality issues with regards to the international students mostly from the global south (Marginson, 2012). This supports the assertion that inequalities are embedded within dominant conceptualisations of internationalisation (Altbach, 2016; Scott, 2015). Internationalisation can become more inclusive by involving individual stakeholders such as staff and students in developing strategic frameworks.

Related to the first point, the second point relates to the selectivity of internationalisation within a global context. The case of Europe is worth mentioning as international cooperation is conceived as the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) involving 48 countries. The EHEA is the culmination of the 'political will' of the countries involved to:

...implement reforms on higher education on the basis of common key values – such as freedom of expression, autonomy for institutions, independent students unions, academic freedom, free movement of students and staff. Through this process, countries, institutions and stakeholders of the European area continuously adapt their higher education systems making them more compatible and

strengthening their quality assurance mechanisms. For all these countries, the main goal is to increase staff and students' mobility and to facilitate employability (EHEA website, 2017).

While the benefits of EHEA are apparent for EU members, there are systemic barriers for non-EU students studying within the EHEA. For example, non-EU visa nationals studying in a university within the EU do not necessarily benefit from the EHEA's goal to increase students' mobility and to facilitate employability.

Additionally, as Caruana and Spurling (2007) suggest, the strong tradition of academic research cooperation and mobility in Europe (Europeanisation) is not congruent with how 'the UK is in many ways simply traversing the same path as other Western governments in pursuing the economic motive with rigour' (34). Therefore, despite the political will, the reality is that there are differences in educational systems in Europe, particularly with regard to the delivery of international education (OECD, 2017). Furthermore, it is unclear how long the 'strong tradition' in the EU will continue, considering for example, France's international education strategy published in 2018 which seems to be pursuing the marketised agenda.

Europe is not unique in pursuing a regional internationalisation agenda and the benefits to the region are not in question. The Australian Government's New Colombo Plan is another example of such an initiative. Congruent with Caruana and Ploner (2010) in their study on 'internationalisation and equality and diversity in higher education', the main point here is that there are practical challenges in merging local, regional and global internationalisation in an inclusive manner. This further underscores the need to understand international students' rationales for studying in the UK (and elsewhere) to support policy initiatives to enhance their experience during their study.

The third issue concerns internationalisation at the institutional level. This relates to the suggestion that higher education practitioners have the responsibility to determine the extent and scope of their internationalisation activities (Leask and de Wit, 2016; Teichler, 2004). Higher education leaders need to outline how and to what extent internationalisation is integrated with strategies and initiatives aimed at internationalisation of the curriculum for the benefit of all students. At the same time, universities operate within a national context (King, 2011) and this is the focus in the next section.

2.3 Internationalisation in a national context (the UK)

An international outlook in higher education dates to the 6th century AD as students and staff from all over the Buddhist world travelled to learn and study at the Nalanda University in India (Altbach and de Wit, 2015). The first universities in Europe in Bologna and Paris which were founded in the 13th century also thrived as international learning spheres attracted scholars from many countries (Altbach and de Wit, 2015; Collini, 2012). However, Scott (1998) cautions that the notion about the 'myth' of an international medieval university transcending boundaries should not be conflated with current realities of mass systems within a 'complex, diverse and pluralistic' world. In other words, it is important to make clear the distinction between the historical beginning of universities as citadels for learning and knowledge for an elite few and the rapidly expanding rate of the scope and spread of mass higher education in the 21st century in a globalised world.

2.3.1 First wave of internationalisation of UK HE

Similar to other European countries mentioned earlier, higher education (HE) in the UK has been international in drawing students from outside the region since medieval times. This could be described as the first wave of internationalisation of HE. At the time, academic autonomy and mobility were not impeded by national boundaries. In the UK as well as in other countries, nation-states and borders are well-delineated features of the 21st century. The impact of this key aspect of international education is discussed below and later in the chapter.

2.3.2 Second wave of internationalisation of UK HE

From 1945 the UK HE sector grew as an academic and administrative structure (Sastry, 2004; Scott, 1995) and increasingly became dependent on the support from central government subvention through the University Grants Committee (UGC). Since its establishment in 1919 UGC contributions to HE income grew from around 33% to 60% in 1946 and until 1989 (Humfrey, 2011; Scott, 1995).

Dwindling financial support from the state in the 1990s (Humfrey, 1999) and campaign and legislation from the government 'inadvertently began a second and far more structured move towards internationalisation' (Humfrey, 2011, 652). This marked the first stage of departure from 'classical' internationalism, based on mutual

understanding towards marketing educational services to foreign students at competitive rates' (Humphrey 1999, 15). This departure is the origin of internationalisation in the UK as it is now predominantly perceived in economic terms and student mobility.

Thus, the second and current wave of internationalisation in the UK can be traced to the introduction by the government of a fee regime for overseas students in 1979. Despite initial resistance, UK HEIs adapted to the wave of economic internationalisation which was already established in competitor countries like the USA (Field and Fegan 2005; Humphrey, 1999, 2011).

In view of economic drivers for recruiting international students in the UK, Findlay (2011) argues for a critical analysis of state-produced knowledge of student mobility (166). Perhaps a critical appraisal of the UK policy on higher education is a useful starting point. Four important key policies on Higher Education in the UK spanning over five decades will be examined briefly: the Robbins Report, 1963, the Dearing Report, 1997, the Prime Ministers' Initiative 1 (PMI 1), Prime Minister initiative 2 (PMI 2) and the Teaching and Excellence Framework (TEF) 2016).

It is crucial to briefly point out that since 1999, education is devolved to the three nations (Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales) which together with England make up the UK. This means that the constituent nations other than England can pursue their own policies in education. However, the relationship between each devolved nation and England is complex (Gunn, 2016). While higher education is a devolved function to each nation, research policy and the funding distributed by research councils is not (see BIS, 2013 for 'statement on devolution'). In addition, immigration is not devolved. As such, issues related to international students in terms of a visa-entry system are vested in a UK central administration. As such, Trench (2018) asserts that the two main factors that ensures the overlap of devolved and non-devolved policy in higher education in the UK are, the market-oriented drive to attract international students to universities in Britain which are offering degrees which conform to the internationally recognised 'gold standard,' and the labour market for academic staff (Trench 2008, 18).

In summary, despite the devolved education system in the UK, the value of a strong UK HE degree across the four countries is a consistent policy approach to recruit non-EU international students.

Higher Education Policy in the UK from 1963 to 2016

International higher education operates within a nation-state led by political stakeholders with more than a cursory interest in the sector. The political underpinning of higher education in the UK and linkages with internationalisation is explored in this section. This aligns with the political and economic rationales for internationalisation as an organisational process.

The Robbins Report (1963) and the Dearing Report (1997) on higher education

The Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education 1963) and the Dearing Report (National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, 1997) have made an impact on higher education in the UK. While recognising the 'diplomatic and economic advantages' of international students who mostly pay for their studies in the UK, the Robbins Report was the first UK policy document that estimated the economic cost of subsidising higher education for overseas students to be around £9M (67). This is the first conceptualisation of the economic benefit accruing from recruiting overseas students. Building on the Robbins Report, the Dearing report (1997) recognised international student recruitment delivers competitive advantages to higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK:

HEIs have a valuable business in attracting students from other parts of the world and developing business in providing educational services in other countries... There are distinct benefits from this. It enriches the learning experience for UK students through interaction with students from other countries. At the financial level, overseas students are a welcome source of income to institutions, as well as to the national balance of payments (Dearing Report 1997, 156)

As the first two key national policy documents on higher education in the UK, both the Robbins Report and the Dearing Report did not place emphasis on other aspects of internationalisation in UK higher education except in the area of economic benefit to the country. An expanded vision of internationalisation was brought to the forefront of government policy in 1999 by the Prime Minister at the time, Tony Blair.

Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI) - PMI 1 (1999) and PMI 2 (2006)

In 1999, Prime Minister's Initiative 1 (PMI1), a branding campaign seeking to attract international students to the UK, described as the first of its kind was initiated by

Tony Blair (Lomer, Papatsiba, and Naidoo, 2016). The target of PMI 1 to attract 75,000 students by 2005 was exceeded by 57%. Unsurprisingly, on 18th April 2006, Tony Blair launched the second phase of his Prime Minister Initiative (PMI 2) lauding the economic and cultural gains to the UK since the initiative started (Blair, 2006). This is directly related to the economic rationale for internationalisation at the national level underpinning strategic marketing and recruitment.

PMI 2 had four key objectives namely: to recruit additional 100,000 international students to the UK higher and further education; to double the number of countries sending more than 10,000 students to the UK in a year; to demonstrate evidence of improvements to student satisfaction and increase the number of partnerships between the UK and other countries (HEA, 2014). However, the government's support for PMI 2 led initiatives ended in 2010 (Hallett, 2010). Nevertheless, the branding of the UK as an idealized international student destination continue to be evident in policy and practice in the UK (Lomer et al., 2016).

However, despite the Prime Minister Initiatives and associated funding projects, Archer (2011) states that 'international student expectations have never been higher and in times of economic uncertainty, delivering on the promise has never been harder' (27). Archer seems to imply that there is a need to address perhaps unmet expectations of international students. This suggests that while the PM Initiatives could be described as successful for recruiting higher numbers of international students, the issue of meeting students' expectations does not seem to be adequately addressed.

Reference to internationalisation in the most recent higher education policy in the UK, Teaching and Education Framework (TEF) will now be examined briefly.

Teaching and Education Framework TEF (2015/2016)

Similar to earlier higher education policies (Robbins 1963 and Dearing, 1997), the TEF recognises internationalisation in the form of economic benefits derived from the international students studying in UK higher education. Drawing on the figures from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) report which states that in 2011 higher education export generated £10.7 billion for the UK economy contributing 2.8% of the country's GDP, the TEF policy document reiterates the importance of having UK institutions as an attractive educational destination for international students for global competitive advantage and for economic reasons.

Additionally, the TEF includes three guiding metrics to inform further development: student satisfaction, retention, and employment/graduate destination. These metrics are drawn from student surveys, the International Student Barometer benchmarks and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) which provides data on home and international students. This suggests that the TEF takes cognisance of the international student experience. Further, Section 2.12 of the framework states that 'the teaching of overseas students studying in the UK is within the scope of the TEF. They are included in the NSS-based metrics. However, this is followed by the caveat, '...but not the non-continuation or employment or further study metrics for technical reasons. Providers should take this into account within their provider submission, where relevant' (Department of Education, 2017, 14). It is surprising that such caution is included in a national HE policy document in the UK. This seems to contradict a promotional campaign in a government publication (BIS 2014) which states that:

The British Council launched the GREAT campaign to continue to promote the UK HE as a positive campaign' such as international graduates of British universities significantly enhance their career prospects and earning potential. Study in the UK and enjoy the rewards. And for world-class education and training, with 30 of the world's top 200 universities, choose the UK (BIS 2014, 125)

In summary, key policy development in the UK over the past five decades points towards economic motivations to attract international students. However, as Archer (2011) points out, it is in the interest of the nation and institutions to implement and initiate product offerings that will improve the experience of international students as consumers of higher education. Interestingly, despite growing numbers of international students and clearly enunciated significance of the economic and cultural benefits underpinning the need to sustain growth in the sector, there is no strategic policy on international higher education in the UK. This is unlike recent activities by competitor countries, for example, Australia and Canada (Blackmore et al, 2014; Minocha, 2017).

According to Marginson (2011, 394), universities are 'glonacal', organisations. This means they are operating in global (glo), national (na) and local (cal) dimensions, all at the same time. King (2011) however argues that despite the processes of policy convergence inherent in globalisation, higher education systems are mainly

national-oriented (289). As the national context has been discussed in depth, it is pertinent to examine internationalisation at the level of a university.

2.4 Internationalisation at the institutional level (study context)

According to Trahar (2013), all universities in the UK see themselves as international. It is, therefore, the norm for the HEIs in the UK to have internationalisation policies. The internationalisation strategic plan of the university where the study is located will now be examined briefly.

The university traces its international activities to over four centuries since its inception. However, the first four-year internationalisation strategy for the institution was published in 2009. This suggests that an internationalisation strategic plan is a fairly new development at the institution. The internationalisation strategy for 2012-16 is briefly examined to provide contextual understanding of the strategic plan at the university when the study was conducted. The internationalisation strategic goals at the time were:

- Excellence in education
- Excellence in research
- Excellence in innovation with an overall vision 'to recruit and develop the world's most promising students and most outstanding staff
- Be a truly global university benefiting society as a whole
(University Internationalisation Strategy, 2012-16, 2).

Expanding on the goals articulated in the university internationalisation strategy, the Vice Principal International of the University reiterated the value of internationalisation to core teaching and research activities at the university within three important areas (University Newsletter, 2015, 9). Figure 2:1 outlines the key areas of activity with regard to internationalisation at the university.

Figure 2:1 Key areas of internationalisation at a UK University

| Area of activity | Scope of activities |
|---|---|
| Creating partnerships | Partnerships with universities around the world |
| | Partnerships with the private sector |
| | Partnerships in emerging areas (e.g South East Asia & Africa) |
| Internationalising the campus community | Students and staff experiences (promote diverse cultural interest on campus) |
| Student mobility | Encourage students to become more international through studying abroad as part of degree or working overseas |

The university internationalisation strategy seems to place emphasis on creating international partnerships. This is unsurprising as the university is a leading and prestigious research university.

The university also has a strategic aim to encourage intercultural encounters on campus. However, the presence of diverse students and staff cohorts does not necessarily mean that intercultural encounters will occur. Specific initiatives to facilitate such encounters could be explicated within the internationalisation document.

Perhaps, more importantly, the internationalisation strategy does not point to the input from students (and staff) informing the development of initiatives. This could be regarded as important to any university.

The university highlights the importance of student mobility during study as part of an internationalisation strategy. To this end the university supports short term mobility embedded into the degree programme or for work experience. At the same time, congruent with global and national interest in student mobility, the university attributes great success to its efforts to recruit international students.

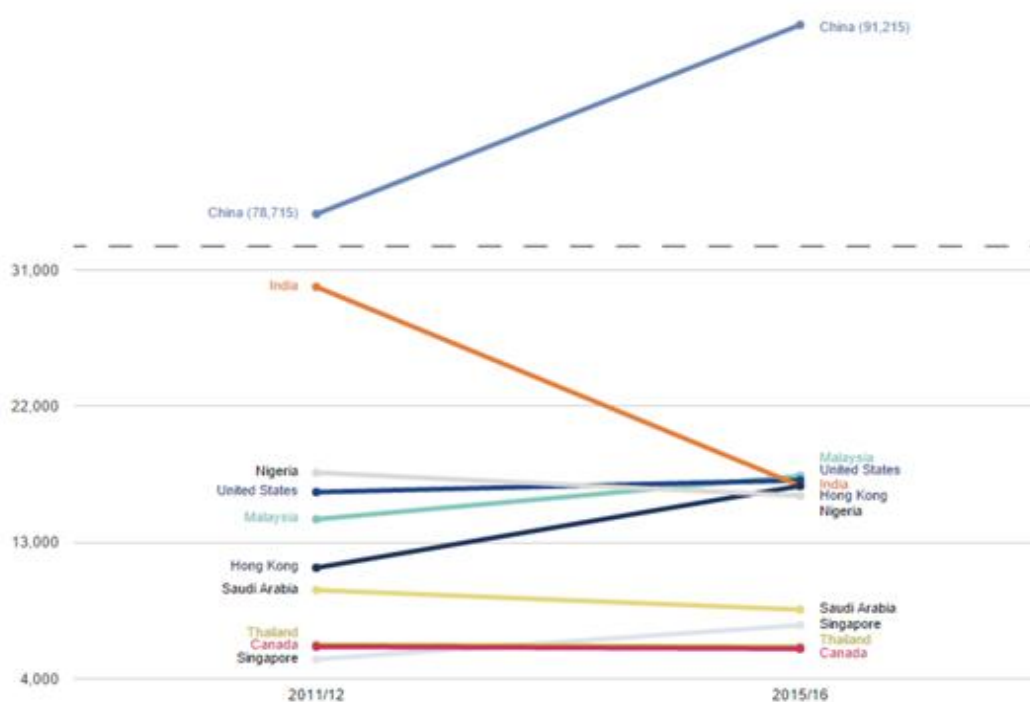
2.5 International student mobility

Globally, students who studied abroad increased by around 100% each decade since 1991. From around 1 million mobile students in 1991 (Altbach, 1991), data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS, 2012) shows that mobile students grew to 2 million in 2000. In 2015/16, mobile student numbers reached 4.6 million (OECD, 2017).

However, the future flow of international students is uncertain (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Barber et al, 2013) as the traditional flow of students from South to North (Altbach, 1991) is changing. For instance, there is expanding provision of higher education in traditional sending countries like Singapore, India and China, as such countries are developing and investing more funds in their HE sector (Altbach, 2016). Regional hubs are developing in the Arab States and sub-Saharan Africa with mobile students growing: in the Arab States from 12% to 26% between 1999 and 2012; and in sub-Saharan Africa from 18% to 28%. This is in contrast to the decline in the proportion of international student enrolment in the top five [Western] study destinations for tertiary level students (United States, United Kingdom, France, Australia, and Germany) dropping from 55% in 2000 to 47% in 2012 (UIS, 2012), although, in absolute terms, countries in the West have growing numbers of mobile students.

Within the UK context, international student numbers attract interest at institutional and national levels. This is evident, for example, in the contributions to a UK House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee's inquiry into Higher Education in STEM subjects held in 2012. The committee invited stakeholders including the government immigration agency (the Home Office), the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), leadership officers from several UK universities and other organisations (for example, the British Council) to give oral and written evidence concerning the falling numbers of students from India who traditionally studied more STEM subjects. Further, Williams (2014), cited national interest in STEM subjects for the 'overall health of strategically important and vulnerable subjects in UK universities' (121). It is therefore not surprising that a wide range of stakeholders were concerned about the drastic drop in the numbers of international students from India (see Figure 2.2). Figure 2.2 also shows a significant increase in student enrolment from China. Currently, students from China account for 1 in every 3 non-EU students studying in the UK, and their numbers exceed the total numbers of students from all EU countries (HESA, 2017). This underscores the importance of international student mobility in the UK.

Figure 2:2 Top ten non-EU sending countries student enrolment for HE student enrolments 2011/12 and 2015/16



Source HESA (2017)

In view of increasing student mobility there are claims that ‘the student experience is now in the forefront of what we believe internationalisation to be’ (Humfrey, 2011, 657). It is unsurprising to find many studies and theories on the international student experience (Arshad, et al., 2012; Fakunle, et al., 2016; Gill, 2007; Kandiko, 2013; Jindal-Snape and Rienties, 2016; Marginson, 2014; Montgomery, 2010; Schartner and Young, 2016; Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009; Sun and Richardson, 2012; Trahar, 2013; Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001; Wu and Hammond, 2011).

However, considering the expansive research in relation to international student experience it is surprising that there is little research around the uncertainty around immigration policies in the UK. This an important issue for modern-day internationalisation discourses (Altbach, 2016) in view concerns about the uncertainty around the human rights of international students (Marginson, 2012) and well-documented national discussions on the topic of immigration. As Humfrey (2011) noted ‘many interventions made by the government to university internationalisation [since 1999] either reactively or proactively, centred on visas, UK Border Agency (UKBA) regulations, work permits, other immigration issues’... and

[is] complicated (654). It remains to be seen whether future research, for example, into the impact of immigration policies could shed some light around the uncertainties around this aspect of international student mobility.

The global dominance of the English language is also a key driver for internationalisation with English currently seen as the lingua franca of the internationalisation of higher education (Crystal, 2007; de Wit, 2012; Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007). The 'major players' in the world as leading study destinations, the USA, the UK and Australia are English speaking countries (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007) and they attract the highest number of mobile international students from the top two sending countries (China and India).

2.5.1 Trends in international student mobility

Traditionally, 'many manifestations' of internationalisation (Altbach, 2016, 10) are framed around mobility (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Humfrey, 2011). This includes: data on mobile students collected by national agencies (for example, HESA) and supranational organisations (such as the OECD or UNESCO); studies on international student decision-making and motivation for studying abroad (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002); research on the experiences of mobile students including their adjustment and transitions to the host country (Jindal-Snape and Rienties, 2016; Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, and Todman, 2008), academic outcomes (Iannelli and Huang, 2014), and employability (Li, 2013).

In general, the two types of student mobility within the internationalisation framework are cross-border studying abroad for an entire academic programme (degree-programme) and short-term study abroad as part of a programme (credit-bearing). My research focuses on the most visible aspect of internationalisation, that is, cross-border student mobility for full-time study in a host country.

Internationalisation at home (IaH)

It is worth mentioning briefly that broadening views on internationalisation beyond cross-border mobility have emerged within the last two decades. To this end, the notion of Internationalisation at Home (IaH) was put forward in Europe in 1999 to draw attention to the importance of seeing internationalisation not solely as the mobility of students and staff (Nilsson, 2003). This is understandable, since not all

students will be mobile during their study. As a result, IaH has become a key aspect of the internationalisation agenda (de Wit, 2010).

Internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC)

Similar to IaH, Internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC) is conceptually positioned as different from student mobility. IoC refers to embedding intercultural and international perspectives across the curriculum (Jones and Killick, 2013; Leask, 2012; Leask and Carroll, 2011; McLaughlin, et al, 2016). This aims to develop local, international and global awareness in all students (Leask and de Wit, 2016).

However, Whitsed, Green and Cassol (2018) describe the main impediments to IoC as a lack of a systematic, whole-of-university approach, adequate funding and provision of resources to support its implementation. Similarly, Kreber (2009b) raises questions on 'cosmetic' efforts at internationalisation of the curriculum (13). This suggests that while the ideals behind IoC are important in internationalisation discourses, there are also concerns in relation to how it is operationalised.

Regardless, student (and staff) mobility, IaH and IoC are dimensions of internationalisation relating to how individuals are impacted by their experience of internationalisation, whether at home or abroad. Other aspects of internationalisation include knowledge transfer, cooperation and international education, research collaboration, internationalisation of the curriculum (De Wit, 2017; Jones and Killick, 2013), Transnational education (TNE) where higher education is provided by an institution in a country outside its main location, and technology-enabled delivery of education online, for example Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) (Barber et al., 2013).

As this review shows, student mobility remains the most visible aspect of internationalisation. Unsurprisingly, student mobility continues to attract much research, data analysis, and strategic planning for institutions and governments around the world.

2.5.2 Approaches to understanding student mobility

There are two different approaches to understanding student mobility. Some scholars use quantitative research to collect data on mobility. To deepen our understanding, others use qualitative research.

Quantitative approaches to understanding mobility

Student mobility is captured in figures collected by several statistical agencies such as HESA (UK), UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and OECD. Rumbley (2012) refers to this as the quantitative dimension of mobility, evidenced by large datasets tracking academic mobility. Also, these agencies analyse key information in different ways, for example, the year of student enrolment can be collected to represent a calendar year (UIS) or an academic year starting from September (HESA). Rumbley (2012) provides a comprehensive report which outlines the difficulty with the dissimilar data gathering techniques. She argued that the current system makes it difficult to accurately make sense of mobility trends and patterns for effective organisational decision-making for institutional, national and comparative cross-national purposes. Interestingly, half a century ago, Elliot (1967), made similar observations:

The actual numbers of students...have, of course, an important bearing on the intensity of the interest they arouse. But the approach to figures must be cautious. Foreign student statistics constitute a specialized branch of study and research in which figures must be accompanied by many explanatory notes...The trouble is, though, that for various reasons very few countries are in a position to provide accurate and useful figures...These observations ...show how inaccurate the information derived from statistics may be if not accompanied by full explanations (Elliot, 1967, 192-193).

In agreement with Minocha (2017) and Elliot (1967), Findlater (2014) decries the abundance of data but relative lack of insight in research on student mobility.

Qualitative approaches to understanding mobility

The sizeable literature which covers empirical explorations of the lived experience of international students at the host destination mostly uses qualitative research methodologies. Drawing on Rumbley (2012) this could be described as the *qualitative dimension of mobility*. The importance of the qualitative dimension of mobility is reiterated by Minocha, (2017):

For far too long internationalisation has principally been about statistics, quantifying, and measuring. But sharing knowledge, values, thoughts and perspectives across the boundaries of geography has far greater implications than simple – or even complex ones – figures can convey (Minocha, 2017)

However, as many authors have noted, the main body of work on mobile student experience is based on a deficit model when compared to norms in host countries (Fakunle, et al., 2016; Marginson, 2014; Zhou, et al., 2008). Examples include culture shock (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001), psychological and sociological adjustment (Schartner and Young, 2016; Wu and Hammond, 2011), the development of intercultural competences (Deardorff, 2006) or by contrast, the limits of interculturality (Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009).

Aside from the deficit model, there are emerging discourses describing the positive aspects of the international student experience. For example, research on the contribution of international students to intercultural learning at host universities (Sawir, 2013; Trahar, 2013). Importantly, a qualitative approach to understanding student mobility provides an in-depth understanding of the student experience which is mostly hidden within raw quantitative data.

2.6 Chapter summary

While an attempt was made to review the key areas in the literature pertinent to this study, the scope and resources available means that the discussion on internationalisation here is not exhaustive. For instance, one could discuss whether non-mobile students studying at branch campuses are international students (as their programme is delivered either fully by an international university or in part in collaboration with a local institution) or 'local' students (since they are studying at home). This pertains also to online degrees. Understanding different aspects of Transnational education (TNE) is important in view of growing participation in campuses around the world. For example, HESA (2018) data shows that more international students are studying for a UK degree outside the UK (n= 707,915 in 2016/17) than the number of international students studying in the UK (n= 442,375 in 2016/17).

At the same time, I have made an attempt to provide a coherent and structured discussion of key conceptualisations, research and policies on internationalisation at the international, national, institutional and individual levels. This review shows that student mobility is at the forefront of internationalisation discourses. Paradoxically, the discourses rarely extend to international students' *experience* of internationalisation. This is the focus in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. International student experience/lifecycle

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the student lifecycle as inclusive of all aspects of the student experience which includes ‘transitions in, through and out of higher education’ (Sutcliffe, Tangney and Matheson, 2018). I make a distinction between the two descriptions of the student lifecycle in the literature, with regards to home and international students.

On the one hand, the HEFCE student lifecycle model (2001) offers a clear and distinct presentation of six stages of the student lifecycle in terms of pre-entry activities, lived experience and assessment of students’ readiness for employment. The HEFCE model was developed for widening participation students in the UK. As such, although the model has elements that could also be adopted for international students it does not adequately embody what Humfrey (1999) describes as the ‘particular needs and vulnerabilities’ (113) embedded in the international student experience.

On the other hand, the international student lifecycle is poorly conceptualised in existing literature. In the 1990’s, the international students lifecycle is described as the ‘natural history’ of overseas students (Harris, 1997, 35) as an applicant, student and alumnus (Humfrey, 1999). More recently, the international student lifecycle described on the Higher Education Academy (HEA, 2014) website presents a list of activities that are relevant in the context of the international student experience. However, it does not appear to be framed as a theoretical model.

Based on the critical analysis and synthesis of relevant literature I will later propose a model for the international student lifecycle. In doing so, I aim to provide a holistic understanding of the international student experience from the decision-making process, through their experience and outcomes/employability.

3.2 Student lifecycle

The importance of the student lifecycle is reiterated as:

...an integrated approach...is to look at the student life-cycle. By breaking down activities into stages, an institution can demonstrate how it engages at that stage or how it plans to do so. This should be possible irrespective of the target group and the level of study.' (HEFCE, 2001, 15)

In view of its importance as highlighted in the quote above, it is worthwhile to briefly examine the HEFCE student lifecycle model.

The HEFCE student lifecycle

The HEFCE student lifecycle model has six stages:

Aspiration raising: the earliest stage whereby institutions raise awareness and encourage adults and young people to participate in HE and also use data to understand the target group.

Pre-entry activities: at this stage, HEIs approach the target groups of students to aid their successful transition to universities.

Admission: as 'gatekeepers', the HEIs ensure the admission process is smooth and stress-free.

First-term/semester: recognising that the few days of induction or arrival or welcome might not be sufficient to support many students arriving at a university or college as this can be a lonely experience which the students are not accustomed to. This stage involves the initial period of settling in.

Moving through the course: although requiring less attention, this stage includes the evaluation of students' progress and providing guidance where needed

Employment: at this final stage in the student lifecycle, HEIs should assess if the skills developed within the curriculum including work experience and placements fit with the challenges, constraints and opportunities that will be faced by the student in his/her working life.

The first three stages in the HEFCE student lifecycle are concerned with pre-entry activities to support student transition to higher education. This is in line with the focus of the model as a framework to get equitable access into education for home

students who are the target recipients of Widening Participation (WP) initiatives based on their ethnicity, gender, age, disability and low socio-economic status (Greenback, 2006).

To some extent the importance attached to the HEFCE student lifecycle model aligns with assertions made by Humfrey (1999) that:

From the moment that he or she writes to the institution for information, the international applicant, student and alumnus should be aware that he or she is regarded as important – primarily as a human being, but also as a customer. Nothing written here [in Humfrey, 1999] suggests that this should not be the case for the home student. (Humfrey 1999, 113)

However, the HEFCE model is not based on what can be considered as the 'proactive' behaviour of international students who are expected to 'seek information' related to admission to study in the UK. On the contrary, the HEFCE model emphasises the need for HEIs to provide support and encouragement for home students to access higher education during the first three stages involving pre-admission activities, and follow-on activities at the final stage of seeking employment. However, as discussed in 2.2.2, international student recruitment is driven by the economic rationale of internationalisation. This point is made by many authors including Humfrey (1999) who states that 'it is hypocritical to deny their [international students] value as customers (113).

The last three stages of the HEFCE student lifecycle model, overlaps with what could be expected to form part of the international student experience, in terms of continuing support during their studies and development of employability related skills. However, as previously mentioned, the discourses around employability have barely extended to international students. This suggests that integral conceptualisations within the HEFCE student lifecycle model do not mirror key stages of the international student lifecycle.

Nevertheless, Arambewela and Maringe (2012) used the HEFCE student lifecycle model to develop interview questions for their study exploring international students' experience of support services at a university in the UK. They presented the international student lifecycle as involving five stages: considering study, application and admission, learning and assessment phases, graduation and post-qualification. Arambewela and Maringe (2012) note that non-academic experiences such as

participation in cultural activities were important for international students. Ironically, cultural extra-curricular activities were not included in their adapted international student lifecycle. It is not clear if this omission is linked to the focus of the HEFCE model they adopted which relates to home students in their 'cultural' environment. As such, while, it is important to note that linkages have made between the widening participation agenda and internationalisation, as both relate to issues of access and equity for 'non-traditional' entrants into higher education in the UK (Taylor and Scurry, 2011), I argue that a direct adoption of a student lifecycle model developed for widening participation students in the UK does not fully capture the range of activities engaged in by international students.

Interestingly, the adapted version of the international student lifecycle based on the HEFCE model (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012) is similar to the international student lifecycle described on the Higher Education Academy (HEA, 2014) website. However, the international student lifecycle is not presented by the HEA (2014) as an integrated conceptual framework that links the different stages of the student experience.

Arguably, the earlier description of the international student lifecycle as a three-stage process including; the point of selection, moment of arrival and stay abroad, and reintegration to the home country (Harris, 1997) provides a more cogent articulation of the experiences of international students. Harris (1997) states that future research should look broadly at the 'natural history' to develop the concept of the international student 'lifecycle' (35). Ironically, there is a lack of evidence to suggest that more recent conceptualisations of the international student lifecycle are backed by research which takes into consideration all aspects of the international student experience.

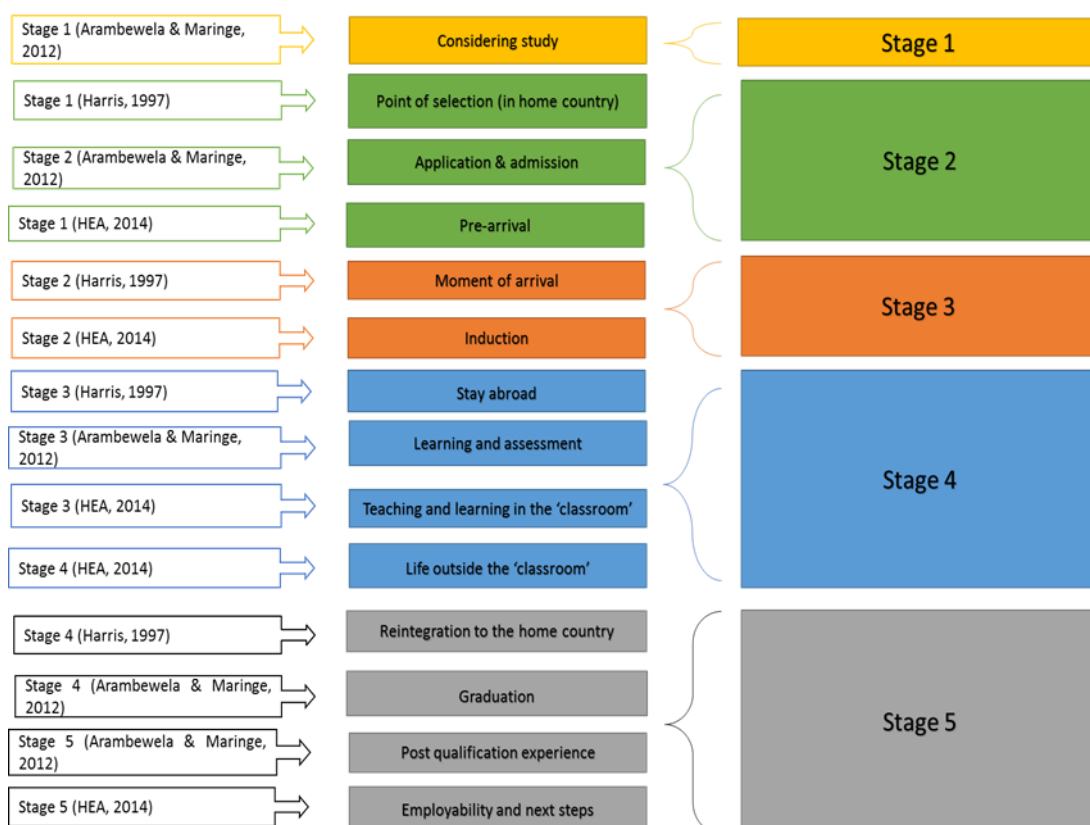
Nonetheless, previous conceptualisations of the international student lifecycle (outlined in Figure 3:1) provide a starting point to identify similarities and differences in existing knowledge, and gaps which I aim to address in this chapter.

Figure 3:1: Previous conceptualisations of the international student lifecycle

| Stages | Harris (1997) | Arambewela & Maringe (2012) | HEA (2014) |
|--------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 1 | The point of selection | Considering study | Pre-arrival |
| 2 | Moment of arrival and stay abroad | Application and admission stages | Induction |
| 3 | Reintegration to the home country | Learning and assessment phases | Teaching and learning in the classroom |
| 4 | | Graduation | Life outside the classroom |
| 5 | | Post-qualification experiences | Employability and next steps |

Despite different phrasings, there are similarities across existing conceptualisations of the international student lifecycle (Figure 3:1). For example, the applicant would need to have been ‘considering study’ (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012) prior to the ‘point of selection’ of a study destination (Harris, 1997) which would involve ‘application and admission’ processes (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012) as key ‘pre-arrival’ activities (HEA, 2014). It is therefore useful to group comparable stages of the international student lifecycle as shown in Figure 3:2.

Figure 3:2 Stages of the international student lifecycle



The grouping of existing conceptualisations of the international student lifecycle shows five stages. However, this grouping also reveals gaps in each of the three previous conceptualisations of the international student lifecycle. In other words, none of the previous conceptualisations of the international student lifecycle (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012; Harris, 1997; HEA, 2014) fully captures aspects of the international student experience reflected in the five stages. For example, Harris (1997) and the HEA (2014) seem not to recognise that the first stage of the international students' experience starts at the point of 'considering study'. This was noted by Arambewela and Maringe (2012). Additionally, Arambewela and Maringe (2012) did not acknowledge the 'moment of arrival' and induction as part of the international student lifecycle. By contrast, Harris and the HEA included this stage as part of the international student lifecycle.

In summary, the previous conceptualisations of the international student lifecycle (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012; Harris, 1997; HEA, 2014) are problematic for three reasons. First, as shown in Figure 3:2, none of these conceptualisations fully captures the range of the international student experience. Second, in contrast to suggestions by Harris (1997), the conceptualisations did not emerge from holistic research which captures the 'natural history' of international student experiences. Further, issues with building on a student lifecycle model developed for home students have been pointed out in 3.2. Third, the conceptualisations do not reflect prevalent descriptions of the international student experience in internationalisation-related discourses, for example, their motivations and decision-making processes (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). As a result, I will now examine the discourses around the different stages of the international student experience in internationalisation-related literature.

3.3 Stages in the international student experience

Internationalisation-related research largely focused on separate aspects of the international student experience, treating them as unconnected. For example, the discussion in Chapter 2 focused mainly on international student mobility which is a major part of internationalisation discourses. This also aligns with the dominant marketised agenda in higher education. As a result, despite the availability of considerable data on student mobility, there is still little insight with regards to connections between their motivation to study abroad and their lived experience.

Furthermore, research on international students' employability is largely missing in the literature.

The review in this section will adopt a holistic approach to examine different aspects of the international student experience. This will include the literature that has more of a practitioner focus (for example Marketing departments) and is mainly related to international student recruitment, and other literature that has a more 'academic', research focus (such as research on student learning in the host country). I shall pinpoint the main findings and gaps in the literature.

3.3.1 Motivation/Decision-making

The international students' motivation and decision-making process is framed as the first stage in their experience (Hobsons, 2014; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014). The push/pull model is the most widely used theoretical framework for analysing student motivations for study abroad (Wilkins, Balakrishnan, and Huisman, 2012). The origin of the push/pull model can be traced to a 19th Century treatise by Ravenstein, who stated that 'migration means life and progress; a sedentary population stagnation', (Lee, 1966, 54). Lee (1966) then theorised that migration, including education migration, comprises, '*a set of factors at origin and destination, a set of intervening obstacles and a series of personal factors*' (52). The 'factors at origin' initiate the 'Push' from the home country. The set of intervening obstacles (issues that motivate the move abroad) at the home also contribute to the 'Push'. Likewise, intervening factors in the host country contribute to the 'Pull' to another region/country (for those who overcome the obstacles). Personal factors can influence the decision to migrate and the choice of destination.

McMahon (1992) first conceptualised the push/pull model in international higher education. Based on statistical analysis of data compiled from the World Bank, McMahon (1992) studied the flow of international students from 18 developing countries to the United states from the 1960s to the 1970s. She identified economic and educational factors as the 'Push' factors that may 'Pull' students to study in specific countries. Over two decades later, Wei (2013) arrived at a similar conclusion based on a comparative analysis of large databases from the UN (United Nations), OECD, UIS (UNESCO institute for Statistics), IIE (Institute of International Education), and ILO (International Labour Organisation). However, in contrast to the study by McMahon (1992), which looked at the flow from the South to the North, Wei

(2013) examined flows between developed countries and developing countries and flows emanating from either developed countries or developing countries also to either developed countries or developing countries (109). Despite the difference in time, scope and cohort studied, Wei (2013) and McMahon (1992) both observed that to varying levels, depending on the economic circumstances at both host and destination countries, economic and educational factors influenced international students' decision-making processes.

The Australian survey by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) is the most cited study on the international student 'Push-Pull' model. From 1996 to 2000, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) collected data from 2,485 students in four countries (Indonesia, Taiwan, China and India) to investigate factors that contribute to how international students choose study destinations. They found four key factors influencing the intention to migrate: perceptions of a higher quality of education in the host destination compared to their home country; difficulty or a lack of access to their course of study at home; desire to have a better understanding of Western culture; and intention to migrate after graduation.

Maringe and Carter (2007) conducted a small-scale exploratory study, involving focus group interviews with 28 students studying at two universities in England to understand the motivation and decision-making of African international students studying in the UK. They ascertained that Push factors include, political instability, economic reasons and the HE capacity available at home. Pull factors comprise, the provision of an international higher education experience with a global appeal, teaching and research quality and perceived value of the subject in the labour market which the authors said were 'uppermost in the minds of the student' (472).

Hence, research on international students' motivation and decision-making suggests that educational and career needs are the top 'Push' factors. Ironically, in a highly marketised and competitive global higher education landscape (De vita and Case, 2003), most of the research on international student decision-making processes are conducted from a business and marketing perspective (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Hobsons, 2014) to support efforts by HEIs to bolster recruitment

Interestingly, both Harris (1997) and the HEA (2014) did not mention motivation and decision making in the international student lifecycle. This is surprising considering the topic is prominent in internationalisation-related literature.

Based on the findings in the literature, the first stage of the international student lifecycle is the motivation/decision-making stage. Key features of this stage are the Push and Pull factors (Lee, 1966; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; McMahon, 1992). However, these studies focus on student recruitment. This means that they offer insight regarding a particular stage of the international student lifecycle but are not designed to capture and connect whether students' motivations to study abroad match other aspects of their experience.

3.3.2 Pre-arrival: Application/Admission

A leading UK University stated on their website, that 'pre-arrival visa advice has risen 14% over four years in student satisfaction rankings to 92% in 2014' (Oxford University, u.d.). Considering the impact on students when there are changes in immigration regulations (Humfrey, 2011), it is unsurprising that 'visa advice' is a measure of student satisfaction. This suggests that it is important to include this pre-arrival activity as a part of the international student lifecycle. However, there is little research on this aspect of the international student experience. This is unsurprising as pre-arrival activities including student admission are handled by university administration departments and they may not necessarily have a research agenda.

Notwithstanding, the discourse around international student pre-arrival activities has attracted the interest of scholars in the field of internationalisation (Altbach, 2013; Marginson, 2012). For example, while referring to the role of universities to determine admission criteria for students, Altbach (2013) reminds us of the Humboldtian idea of academic freedom echoed in a speech by professors at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, quoted in a 1957 United States Supreme Court decision:

It is the business of a university to provide that atmosphere which is most conducive to speculation, experiment and creation. It is an atmosphere in which there prevail 'the four essential freedoms' of a university – to determine for itself on academic grounds who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study (137)

It is interesting to link internationalisation to academic freedom, as university professors rightly affirm their prerogative to select students based on academic merit. Yet, at the present, and seemingly for the foreseeable future, academic merit notwithstanding, international students require visa permission at entry borders, and

during their study abroad. As the political role of government in any nation is incontrovertible, a solution to this tension is not yet apparent.

However, as Vallée (2017) suggests, empirical and ethical facts are required to substantiate anecdotal evidence of the impact, for example, of the current immigration system in relation to academic and student experiences. It is surprising that there seems to be a lack of research on the impact of political actions on internationalisation activities of universities. Citing a lack of attention in policy and research with regards to non-EU students, Artess et al. (2014) note that:

Attention has to be paid to the actions and consequences of home policy making (e.g. the UK Border Agency) on the attractiveness of the UK for PGT students from overseas and the development of overseas higher education which may impact on the decisions of global business (10).

Also related to economic reasons, the implications of a harsh visa system by the UK government and its effect on the recruitment of non-EU international students has been the topic of discussion by government committees, for example, the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee Written Evidence on International STEM Students (2014), and Universities UK Parliamentary briefing on International Students and Immigration published on 15 November 2016. Even though Artess et al., (2014) and other parliamentary committees highlight the impact of government policy on student recruitment for economic reasons, there is a need as Vallée (2017) suggests to also assess the ethical implications of government policies on international students.

In contrast to the framing of pre-arrival activities in internationalisation literature, the HEA (2014), suggests the pre-arrival stage is the starting point of the international student lifecycle (also includes induction). This could be in the form of advertisements on their website and promotions at University Fairs or other marketing strategies. Also, as part of the pre-arrival experience, applicants can have a virtual experience of touring campuses and they can use online spaces to talk to staff members at the universities. These are all important aspects of pre-arrival activities for all students detailed in the HEFCE (2001) student lifecycle. However, consistent with Marginson (2012) the literature show that international students have what Humfrey (1999) describes as 'particular needs and vulnerabilities' (113) and these should be taken into consideration in the international student lifecycle.

3.3.3 Post-arrival/Induction

Providing support at the crucial period when a student arrives at a university is considered very important for home-based students (HEFCE, 2001, 16). Arguably, this support is more crucial to international students who have arrived in a new learning and cultural environment away from the familiarity of their home and family. The phenomenon which describes the disquiet and stress international students undergo in their new host environment is known as culture shock. The term, 'culture shock', which was used by the anthropologist, Oberg for the first time in 1960 has attracted considerable research interest (Furnham, 1997). This is not surprising in view of the growing numbers of mobile students. The moment of arrival comes with some initial difficulties before the students adjust to the new host environment (Brown and Holloway, 2008; Gill, 2007). The assumed linearity of transition from culture shock to adjustment/acclimatisation has been further developed, debated and theorised extensively in more recent research (Jindal-Snape and Rienties, 2016).

To prepare students for their lived experience in a different learning and cultural environment, institutions put in place induction activities (Carroll and Ryan, 2005; Coates and Dickinson, 2012). In spite of this, there is little reference found concerning the specific aim and the impact of induction events on international students. The action study by Coates and Dickinson (2012) is a noted exception. At the time of conducting their study at a university in England, the institution was one of the top twelve UK universities in terms of recruiting international students. Coates and Dickinson (2012) analysed data collected from international postgraduate inductions over a period of three years (2007-2009). Their research led to the development of a 'PG Learning Model' which has been embedded into academic activities at the university to help the students engage with learning and teaching throughout their programme. This underpins the importance of research to develop initiatives to support international student experience.

Looking at the international student lifecycle (Figure 3:2), unlike the HEA (2014), the distinction between the initial stage of arrival and the latter part of lived experience is not apparent in Harris (1997) and (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012). However, the literature suggest that the post arrival period is a key and distinct stage in the international student lifecycle. This is positioned as the third stage, while the 'stay

abroad' stage is discussed in stage 4 as this involves the lived experience of international students.

3.3.4 Lived experience

The considerable literature on the international student experience during their stay abroad include all aspects of their academic and extracurricular activities within the host environment. Examples of research on the international student experience include culture shock and adaptation (Gill, 2007; Wu and Hammond, 2011; Zhou et al., 2008), intercultural competences (Deardorff, 2006; Gu, Schweisfurth and Day, 2010), learning and teaching (Fakunle et al., 2016; Sun and Richardson, 2012), student support services (Arshad et al., 2012; Arambewela and Maringe, 2012), friendship social networks (Bochner, Huntlik and Furnham, 1985; Montgomery, 2010; Rienties and Jindal-Snape, 2016) and multidimensional transitions to the host environment (Jindal-Snape and Rienties, 2016).

As mentioned earlier, approaches to international student experience have largely been from a deficit model based on students' adaptation and acculturation, or lack thereof, to a new learning and living environment (Wu and Hammond, 2011; Zhou et al., 2008). This mainly highlights differences and difficulties in cultural and academic encounters. While these studies describe a valid picture of the difficulties faced in adapting to a different cultural environment, Lilyman and Bennett (2014) argue that much literature highlights the experiences of international students in the UK from a 'deficit perspective... and cases of problematizing the experience for the student and university' fail to capture their experiences which can be rewarding (63). As Jindal-Snape and Rienties, (2016) noted, the multi-faceted and multidimensional transitions of international students include:

Multiple contextual transitions– moving to a new country, moving to a new educational system, and moving to programmes for a higher educational degree– as well as associated changes in interpersonal relationships such as leaving family and friends behind, making new friends, and forming new relationships with staff and the local community. Within these transitions, international students might experience differences in the (sometimes unspoken) social and organisational cultures of the country and institutions, the language, academic as well as interpersonal expectations and realities, along with dealing with daily life issues (Jindal-Snape and Rienties, 2016, 2)

In the context of international student experience, they [Jindal-Snape and Rienties] suggest that transitions have both positive aspects and challenges, for example, in personal and academic life and employment.

Further, Jindal-Snape and Rienties (2016) provide a comprehensive list of current research and theories on different aspects of the international student transition to their host environment. They conceptualise transition as an 'ongoing process that involves moving from one context and set of interpersonal relationships to another' (2).

Crucially, the lived experience of international students involves both academic and non-academic activities within a social and cultural environment. This covers all aspects of 'stay abroad' (Harris, 1997), teaching and learning in the classroom, life outside the classroom and assessment (Arambewela and Maringe 2012; HEA, 2014) as listed in Figure 3:2.

Much of the research on the international student experience focuses on student engagement with academic, non-academic staff, students and the community. For example, research into international students' perceptions of support services at university (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012; Roberts and Dunworth, 2012) highlights the need for a differentiated service for diverse students (Healey, 2017).

Furthermore, it has been suggested that the student support services traditionally meant for undergraduate students do not adequately serve the needs of postgraduate students from diverse backgrounds, especially in relation to their employment and career needs (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012).

The lived experience is a crucial aspect of the international student lifecycle. At this stage international students could assess whether their motivations for study match their experience. Also, at this stage the students could engage in learning and extra-curricular activities that are in line with their rationales for studying abroad and their aspirations after their study. However, there is little evidence that connections are made between different aspects of the student experience. Employability is the most neglected aspect of the international student experience and is explored next.

3.3.5 Employability

Pertinent to this study, Jones (2012) criticises 'countless' studies on the benefits of studying abroad which do not highlight the skills developed as a result of

international study as these skills are also valued by employers. For example, communication skills, interpersonal skills, and intercultural competences are valued attributes for employment that can be developed by studying abroad (Deardorff, 2006; Jones, 2012). However empirical evidence to substantiate notions that internationalisation is linked to employability is hard to find (Caruana and Spurling, 2007; King, et al., 2010).

As a crucial though often neglected aspect of the international student lifecycle, employability will be discussed in-depth in the next chapter. Prior to that, it is important to examine briefly how employability is discussed in the international student lifecycle outlined in Figure 3:2.

Normally, graduation and post qualification experiences are natural conclusions after a period of study and Arambewela and Maringe (2012) consider this to be the end of the international study lifecycle. However, there is a need to understand how the experiences leading up to graduation impact post qualification experiences. The international student lifecycle model suggested by Arambewela and Maringe (2012) falls short in that they did not explicitly address employability as part of the international student lifecycle. The quote below aligns with perceptions of the importance of employability for international students:

When an international student is considering studying in the UK, America or Australia, they are making a judgment about how they are going to receive high quality education and opportunities for employment on their CV...that message consistently comes through the British Council and university fairs, regardless of the continent that they are trying to recruit students from; employability is absolutely key (West, 2014, 455)

According to Harris (1997), reintegration into the home country is the last stage of the international student lifecycle. This is unsurprising considering that in the 1990s, it was a 'well-grounded assumption' that international students will leave when they complete their studies in the UK unlike in the United States where the 'stay rates', for example of science and engineering doctoral graduates is as high as 68% and rising (Findlay, 2011, 172). Comparing the 'historical' trend in the United States to the relatively newer trend for international students seeking leave to remain in the UK after their study, Findlay (2011) suggests that this could be due to the policy needs of an advanced economy to attract global talent or perhaps linked to the

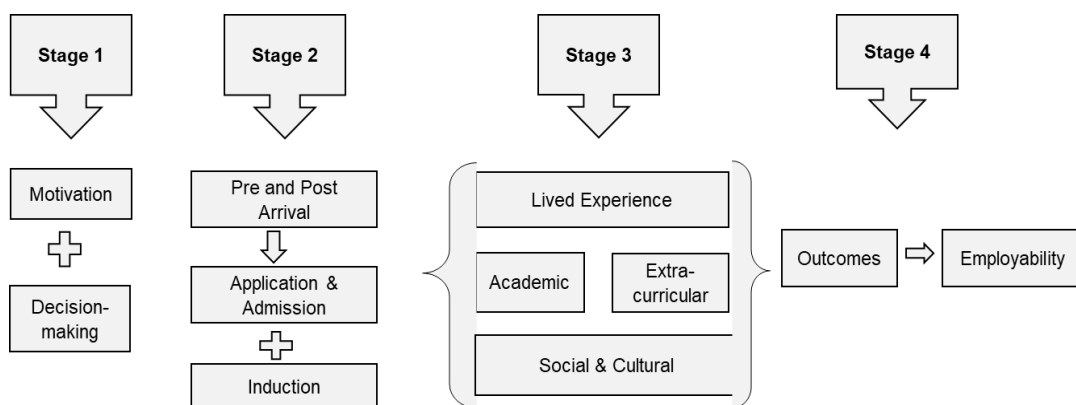
proportion of the increasing numbers of students staying on to work. This can also be linked to the notion of international students as ‘global citizens’ (Clifford, 2014) who engage in higher education with the aim to work in a globalised world, whether in the host country, in their home country or in another country (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2003; Gribble, 2015). As such, reintegration of graduates back to their home country as the final stage in the student lifecycle (Harris, 1997) does not take into consideration newer trends for students to consider multiple destinations after study abroad (Gribble, 2015).

The HEA website states that employability and next steps (HEA, 2014) are the final stages of the international student lifecycle. However, the document does not provide any details of what employability entails for international students and whether or not, and how this is embedded in their learning experience.

3.4 Proposed model of the international student lifecycle

Based on the review of literature presented in relation to the different stages of the international student experience, an integrated model of the international student lifecycle is now proposed below in Figure 3:3.

Figure 3:3 Proposed model of the international student lifecycle



I suggested that understanding connections between different stages of the international student experience through a lifecycle model will prove useful for institutions and policymakers seeking to develop strategies and initiatives to enhance the international student experience.

3.5 Chapter summary

Previous research highlighted the need to adopt a holistic understanding of international students' experience using a lifecycle model (Harris, 1997; Blackmore et al., 2014). However, an extensive search of the literature on the international student experience carried out as part of this thesis revealed the complexity of international students' decision-making and different aspects of their lived experience are known but clear models about the international student lifecycle have yet to emerge.

The literature on international students' experience view the different stages of the international student lifecycle as different areas of research. The motivation and decision-making of international students is mainly explored through the Push/Pull theory (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). The pre-arrival stage is the least researched and theorised aspect of the international student experience (Artess et al., 2014). International students' initial arrival in the host country attracts interest in their adjustment to learning and living in the host destination (Robson, 2011; Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001; Zhou et al, 2008). The academic and non-academic aspects of the international student experience has attracted extensive research as discussed in some detail in this section (Deardorff, 2006; Fakunle et al., 2016). In contrast, employability, is rarely discussed in empirical studies, neither in relation to the international student experience (Caruana and Spurling, 2007) nor as part of the international student lifecycle (Harris, 1997) despite being cited as a motivation for studying abroad (Hobsons, 2014; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; QS, 2018). In line with the focus of this study, the next chapter will examine employability which is the last stage of the international student lifecycle.

Chapter 4. International student employability

4.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the literature review for this thesis, pointing to the main findings which arise from the literature. The review aims to identify relevant gaps and how the literature on employability guided the development of the research questions.

The review builds on the two previous chapters, presenting the main findings in the internationalisation literature (Chapter 2) and the international student experience/lifecycle (Chapter 3), which provided the model which highlighted the importance of employability as the last stage of the international student lifecycle. Accordingly, the chapter provides an overview relating to discourses around employability found in the literature and at the institution where the study was conducted.

4.2 Defining employability

Employability is a complex and multi-faceted concept. Many researchers agree that employability should be differentiated from employment, and employment rates (Brown, et al., 2003; Gribble, 2015; Harvey, 2001; Yorke, 2004b), as a causal chain between employability and employment is highly contentious (Woodley and Brennan, 2000). Additionally, using employment outcomes as a measure of graduate employability is seen as a crude measurement of the ability of an individual to get employment (Holmes, 2013). Others criticise the implied meaning that individual employability is seen as an achievement by the institution instead of the individual (Brown et al. 2003; Harvey, 2001).

In their review of the literature on employability commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) to help develop future policy initiatives, Hillage and Pollard (1998) acknowledged that there are varied meanings of the term in the literature, and they proposed the following definition:

Employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the

individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work (2)

The above definition of employability by Hillage and Pollard continues to be referenced in recent literature (Cole and Tibby, 2013; Williams, et al., 2016), although different aspects of employability also continue to attract debate.

The growing interest in employability is evident in that within the last three years, different authors have reviewed different theoretical and empirical conceptualisations of employability in different global contexts including the UK, Australia and the USA (Guilbert et al, 2016; Potts, 2018; Suleman, 2018; Tomlinson and Holmes, 2017). Yet, despite the continuing review of employability in higher education discourses, there is little consensus on a commonly accepted conceptualisation of employability. Suleman (2018) attributes the increase rather than decrease in uncertainty stemming from research on employability skills partly to conceptual issues, methodological options, and the role of employers within the broad discussions on skills development. However, this lack of unanimity is not necessarily problematic, as this can be considered as evidence of robust and critical debate in the field. In any case, employability is viewed through mostly interrelated lenses which will be elaborated to some extent in this chapter.

4.3 Stakeholders' perspectives on employability

Williams, et al., (2016) who claimed that they conducted the 'first systematic search of English Language employability search' (897) identified 88 components from 16 conceptualisations of employability. This underpins their claim that a single dominant definition of employability does not exist. Rather, they suggested that it is useful to first determine the perspective of the stakeholder from which the term is being applied - as 'a plurality' of stakeholders (878) including employers, potential employees, policy makers, and wider society have different approaches and perspectives on employability (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005).

Further, the QAA (2014) employability framework indicates that students, employers and higher education institutions are considered as key stakeholders and the economy, local community and employees are secondary stakeholders (Appendix

B). Accordingly, the key stakeholders perspectives are examined below to understand employability through various lenses.

4.3.1 Perspectives on employability: Employers

Many studies have suggested that employers are dissatisfied with the employability-related skills and work-readiness of graduates (Archer and Davidson, 2008; Clarke and Lunt, 2014). However, while acknowledging the evidence with regards to employers' expectations from graduates, Tomlinson (2012) argued that 'the extent to which their rhetoric is matched with genuine commitment to both facilitating and further developing graduates' existing skills is more questionable. Further, he argued that 'the problem of graduate employability and 'skills' may not so much centre on deficits on the part of graduates, but a graduate over-supply that employers find challenging to manage' (Tomlinson, 2012, 425).

However, Tomlinson's research relates to graduates' work-readiness within a national context. Reflecting much of the discourses on employability, this excludes international students. Perhaps the lack of attention to international student employability can be linked to the uncertainty around immigration policies which have implications with regards to their work rights. This point was reiterated by Tindal, McCollum, and Bell (2014) as they found that immigration policies in the UK have an impact on the attitude of employers in relation to recruiting non-UK workers. This suggests that, in the first place, immigration and accessibility to the labour market in the host country are factors to be considered before addressing employer perspectives on international student employability. Considering observations by Burgess (1997) that researchers seem to 'follow the interest of policy makers and practitioners' (3), it is then perhaps unsurprising that employer perspectives with regards to the employability of international students in the UK, as part of a migrant population, remains under-researched.

Ironically, employability is a key motivation for studying abroad. Hence, in contrast to what is currently obtainable in the UK, in Australia, there is growing interest and research into international student experiences and their employability from different stakeholder perspectives, including employers (Blackmore et al, 2014; Gribble, 2015). Despite emerging interest, there is still limited understanding of employers' perceptions of international student employability.

4.3.2 Perspectives on employability: Policy makers

Interestingly, policy makers are excluded in the employability framework developed by the QAA, (2014) (Appendix B). In contrast, the importance of policy makers in employability discourses is reflected in what many authors cite as the growing pressure from, for example, UK national government on higher education institutions (HEIs) to 'produce' employable graduates for meeting the needs of the economy (Cranmer, 2006; Harvey, 2000; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Yorke, 2004b). Furthermore, the HEFCE study conducted by Clarke and Lunt (2014) which compared postgraduate education in eight countries (Australia, England, Germany, India, Norway, Scotland, Spain and the United States) made linkages between higher education and employability. They found that in all the countries government interventions has 'money attached' to initiatives that are often linked to the national economy, investment in postgraduate education, and sometimes in response to industry requirements (51).

Similar to observations by Clarke and Lunt (2014), Jameson et al., (2012) describe the situation as a political environment where 'funding, fees and student employability' are integrated. For example, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is responsible for learning, teaching provision and research activities for all 19 universities and 25 colleges in Scotland. The Council states that it will 'set out each year the outcomes that it expects colleges and universities to deliver in return for the significant public investment in further and higher education' (1). This is linked to the SFC strategic aim to develop and enhance graduate employability in Scotland. Unsurprisingly, as Tymon (2013) notes, in the UK, 'graduate employability has become a key objective for government and a performance indicator for higher education institutions' (843).

Employability is also given 'supra-national prominence' in European policy from the onset of the Bologna Process in June 1999 (Sin and Neave, 2016) and well embedded within the Yerevan Communiqué, 2015. From the meeting of Ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 1999, the Bologna process aims to facilitate credit transferability and education mobility within Europe (ERASMUS). On 14-15 May 2015, the Ministers pronounced the Yerevan Communiqué which draws attention to the importance of the end of *the student study cycle*, to prepare graduates for initial employment and continuing employability in the 21st century

global workplace. However, the EHEA policy has yet to focus attention on the employability of non-EU international students studying in Europe.

The extant literature shows that within the last five years the employability of international students has attracted the attention of the policy makers in destination countries, such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These countries have developed a national strategic policy on international education. However, the interest of UK policy makers in this area is not yet apparent.

4.3.3 Perspectives on employability: Higher education institutions

Employability is a topical and keenly discussed topic in higher education. It is not surprising that many UK HEIs have employability frameworks on their websites. A sample of the employability document at the university where the research was conducted is reviewed briefly. The document was downloaded from the university website on 18 June 2015. The Employability document states that it aligns with the University's Strategic Plan 2012-2016 which has been discussed earlier (2.4). Five key areas where the two documents align include: (1) embed employability in the curricula to support students' ability to compete in the global market; (2) produce graduates with socially and economically valuable graduate attributes and expertise; (3) increase student satisfaction by providing opportunities and support towards developing their graduate attributes and employability; (4) equip graduates with the abilities to achieve their full potential within the global community; and (5) broker strategic partnerships between academics, industry, specialist and other institutions to enhance the development of graduate attributes in all students.

The employability document identifies students, academic staff, Schools and the University as key stakeholders with responsibility for employability. Students are reminded that the degree is no longer enough in a competitive job market where employers require 'work-ready' graduates with demonstrable skills. The document recognises that students study at a university to enhance their career prospects and want a return on their investment. It is perceived that students' interest in their studies is sustained if they connect their studies to the future careers and life after graduation. In summary, the employability document presents academic, co-curricular, extra-curricular and work experiences as key parts of a 'well rounded education'.

In the section for academic staff, the document highlights the importance of employability towards implementing the Colleges' Learning and Teaching Strategies as a part of good learning practice. It was suggested that students who are engaged with developing their employability are likely to be independent, reflective and responsible learners. It was also suggested that employers could be involved in the educational experience in areas such as placements, case studies, and delivery of guest lectures which can help students make links between their course and the workplace.

The document reiterates the aim of the University to 'produce graduates fully equipped to achieve the highest personal and professional standards in line with its strategic goals to attract and retain quality students and maintain its competitive advantage in the global market' (2). Interestingly, the document states that the University's focus on employability is compatible with the strategic importance of employability to the UK economy and the Scottish Government's skills agenda, and other agendas such as widening participation and employability. This implies that the policy makers in the UK and the Scottish Government are also invested in international student employability. However, the evidence in the extant literature suggests otherwise (see 4.3.1 and 4.3.2).

As Tomlinson (2012) notes, 'the dominant discourses on graduates' employability have tended to centre on the economic role of graduates and the capacity of HE to equip them for the labour market' (408). Unsurprisingly, the University's employability document reflects current discourses on employability as a key issue for policy makers, institutions and students in higher education. However, as Jackson puts it 'the voices...of graduates are deafening in their silence' in discourses related to graduate employment (2003, 419). Tymon (2013) questions the exclusion of students from employability discourses noting that:

...they [students] are the intended recipients of employability skills development, their views are important...we know little about the extent to which employability matters to current students, and what employability is from their perspective. Do they have similar views to other stakeholders on what transferable skills, or attributes, might be necessary? Do they think employability can, and should, be learned?' (849).

The questions raised above provide a useful starting point to examine student perspectives on employability.

4.3.4 Perspectives on Employability: Students

A review of the employability literature by Williams et al. (2016) support assertions that students' perspectives are largely absent in employability related discourses. The sixteen key conceptual papers on employability identified by Williams et al. (2016) include five empirical papers, seven position papers, two reviews of literature and two reports. One report used interviews with DfEE officials and external experts and the second report used 16 HEIs case studies (for full analysis see Williams et al., 2016, 881-884). The five empirical papers are of interest as they include different voices.

One of the empirical papers is pertinent to this review as it examined students' perspectives on developing employability during their study in a UK university. However, the paper follows a similar trend to the sparse number of empirical studies on graduate employability which focuses on undergraduate students in the UK (Tymon, 2014; Purcell and Elias, 2004; Yorke, 2004a) and internationally (Andrews and Higson, 2008).

Other researchers also critique the paucity of research into Masters students in general (Bamber, 2015; Macleod, et al., 2018) and in particular their employability (Baker et al., 2014; Li, 2013). Tobbell and Donnell (2013) suggest that postgraduate student experience is under-researched, as such students are expected to have some level of 'expertise', having successfully progressed from prior undergraduate study. However, it can be argued that a successful transition from undergraduate study to Masters study is not necessarily indicative of 'expertise' and evidence of having developed graduate employability. Rather, a taught Masters degree is seen as a pathway to enhance employment prospects (Burgess, 1997; Clarke and Lunt, 2014).

Furthermore, Woodley and Brennan (2000) contend that restricting studies on employability to 'young, first degree full-time students who are domiciled in the UK' is not representative of the whole body of students, and it means... ignoring aspects of internationalisation (248), as it does not reflect the changing demographics and diversity of students in UK HE (HESA, 2017). This underpins the focus of my study on non-EU international full-time Masters student employability.

4.4 Employability and internationalisation

UK Universities publish their 'high' employability indices to attract students from within the UK and overseas. The employability data is derived from the Destination of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) survey which is used by HEIs to collect information from students regarding their employment or further study six months after graduation and published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Crucially, data on non-EU international students are not included in the DLHE survey published by HESA. This suggests that the DLHE data used to infer employability in the UK offers no insight with regard to international student employability.

Ironically, employability is a key motivating factor to study abroad as international students aim to enhance their career prospects by seeking work experience while studying abroad, and explore employment opportunities after graduation (Blackmore et al., 2014; Maringe and Carter, 2007; West, 2014). For example, a recent survey of prospective, current and past [international] student databases at 16 universities from across the UK and Australia with 18,393 responses across 195 countries, and 198 nationalities indicates that the 'two main factors for decision to study abroad are the quality of education and the employment rates of graduates' (Hobsons 2014, 3). These findings resonate with other studies (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012; Blackmore et al., 2014; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). As such, internationalisation is linked with employability-related discourses. However, there is scant research evidence to support whether employability is enhanced or not during study abroad (King et al., 2010).

As was the case in the employability document discussed, institutions link internationalisation strategies and employability initiatives. However, these two concepts are presented in the literature as two separate agendas, with few exceptions from a growing number of authors, notably from Australia and the USA. These authors put forward the argument that the employability of international students in host countries needs to be addressed (Blackmore et al., 2014; Choudaha and de Wit, 2019; Gribble, 2015; Potts, 2018).

Currently, research and ongoing discussions support recommendations that higher education and policy makers need to explore innovative ways towards understanding international student mobility, and its implications for their

employability (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2008; Choudaha and de Wit, 2019; Gribble, 2015). A decade and half ago, Teichler (1999) pointed out that in view of growing student mobility, the conceptual framework of research from national to global employability training for graduates will become one of the challenges that future research would need to address to 'reinforce the innovative capacity of higher education' (185). In their report on the future of higher education, the Institute of Public Research (IPR) suggested that there are three fundamental challenges facing educational systems all over the world. One of the challenges is the issue of the current basis for university global rankings, which is not the focus of this study. According to the authors of the report, the other two pressing issues for higher education relate to linking education to employability (Barber et al., 2013). As such, conducting an empirical study on possible convergence between employability and internationalisation will contribute to addressing the gap in understanding international student employability.

International education is partly driven by a robust internationalisation strategy and competition by countries to attract 'the brightest and the best' international students, and for economic reasons (Humfrey, 2011). Aside from intellectual ability, and bringing cultural diversity to campuses, international students contribute financially to host nations. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) estimates that total UK education export for 2011 were worth £17.5bn to the UK economy, with over 75% of the expenditure (£13.6bn) attributable to international students who were physically studying in the UK (BIS, 2013) and this estimate increased to £20.3 billion in 2015/16 (London Economics, 2018). As mobile students who are mostly self-funded are 'the largest source of funds for international education' (Altbach and Knight, 2007, 294) it is not surprising that they expect to develop their employability as a return on the high cost of studying abroad (Choudaha and de Wit, 2019; West, 2014).

Researching the contested theme of graduate employability is challenging, and even more so when one considers the diverse range of students at UK HEIs (Woodley and Brennan, 2000). Arguably, the dialogue on international student employability in the UK is in its early stages (Huang et al, 2014). As predicted by Teichler (1999), this presents an interesting opportunity for higher education to address new realities in the 21st century. This makes it interesting to look at possibilities for developing employability at the institution in the context of the study.

4.5 Employability in context: Work-based learning experience

Research shows the value of work experience towards enhancing graduate employability (Crammer 2006; Wilson, 2016). However, restrictions on the right to work may pose additional difficulty on international students who would like to gain work experience in their host country (Gribble et al., 2015). Nevertheless, institutions may adopt multiple employability initiatives including embedding it in coursework, and/or providing work-based learning opportunities (Cranmer, 2006; Jackson, 2015) to help all students develop their employability.

Reflecting different country contexts, practical work experience integrated into an educational programme called Work-Based Learning (WBL) in the UK is referred to as Work Integrated Learning in Australia (WIL), and 'Cooperative Education' in the United States and Canada. The two main types of work experience offered at the university where I conducted my research are; Work-based projects (WBPs) and Work-based dissertation (WBD). A WBP is a small project work that is undertaken by students as part of one of the courses in the Masters programme. The academic requirements for a WBD and a traditional thesis are the same, for example, in terms of the word length and academic supervision. However, students undergoing a WBD have the opportunity to work on a project in partnership with an external organisation.

The WBD in the university where the study was carried out emanated from a project called Making the Most of Masters (MMM) available at ten universities in Scotland (as at 2018). The MMM is a strategic collaboration between employers, universities, enterprise agencies (MMM website). Although the MMM is not work experience at an organisation, it allows a student to work in collaboration with an organisation either onsite or offsite. MMM supported 1500 student work-based projects between 2010 and 2016 (MMM website).

Importantly, the opportunity to embark on a MMM project is available to both home and international PGT students studying in a partner Scottish institution. Data collected over a four-year period (from 2013/14 to 2016/17) from the Business School in the university where the research was conducted shows that non-EU take up the largest number of projects. For example, in the 2014/15 academic year, MMM projects were undertaken by forty-three non-EU students (largest group from China n= 25) compared to thirteen students from the European Union (excluding the

UK) and five students from the UK. In reality, not all programmes in the Business School offer the WBD (offered in 3 out of 6 programmes as at the time the study was conducted). As such, students may not necessarily have the opportunity to embark on a WBD, should they wish to do so. MMM is also not undertaken across all Masters programmes in the university. This makes it difficult to understand trends in Masters students' participation in MMM projects across the university.

However, it is important to note that non-EU Masters students were able to embark on MMM projects as part of their degree programme. This shows that despite the lack of attention paid to non-EU students' employability in policy and practice in the UK context of higher education, the MMM seems like an innovative way to provide employability-related opportunities for international students. Furthermore, the MMM supports conceptualisations of employability development as a partnership between students, the academic institution and employers (Barton, Hartwig and Le, 2018; Holmes, 2017).

Many UK universities also engage in Erasmus plus programs which allows higher education students access to travel and work in EU member states. However, with the uncertainty around Brexit, as at the time of writing, it is not possible to determine how Erasmus plus will function for students in UK universities.

4.6 Previous studies on employability and international students

The majority of studies on employability usually exclude international students (Shah Pell and Brooke, 2004; Yorke, 2006). This means that, 'as a group of mobile people, international students have been under-studied' Findlay (2011, 162). Also, studies on graduate employability are usually conducted within a UK context of seeking employment (e.g. Brown et al., 2003). With the cancellation of the post-study work visa in 2012, seeking employment in the UK is not an option that is easily available to non-EU students seeking to gain work experience in the UK after their studies. Other options to gain practical experience during their study (for example, MMM) is available to a limited number of students. Furthermore, despite anecdotal evidence, there is no research yet on the impact of the MMM on graduate employability.

The few empirical studies exploring non-EU international student employability focus on one group of international students from China (Huang, 2013; Huang et al, 2014;

Li, 2013). Since Chinese students are the largest group of international students in UK HEIs, (HESA, 2018) these studies make a vital contribution to the literature. However, despite similarities in their cultural and political background, many authors caution that Chinese students are not a homogeneous group (Clark and Gieve, 2006; Durkin, 2008) and they are not representative of the diverse international student population in the UK. Nevertheless, the findings are briefly examined as a part of the background to my study.

Li (2013) conducted a qualitative study that examined Chinese postgraduate student perceptions of their employability after study in the UK. The author argues that the findings suggest that students see their study experience as encompassing personal development as much as securing employment in their home country. The author calls for holistic research and a theoretical framework to examine the complex relation between students' development as individuals and their aspiration to enter the labour market. My study builds on Li's work in that it examines the relationship between studying abroad and developing employability. My research goes further to put forward theoretical frameworks which are reported in Chapters 6 and 8.

Huang (2013) interviewed nine undergraduate Business Chinese students to explore their motivations for studying in the UK and their perceptions on developing their employability. She identified three main reasons for studying abroad; to obtain a quality education, enhance job prospects and to understand western culture. She suggested that the students make connections between studying abroad and developing their employability. However, the extent to which the students' perceptions were informed by their experience during their study was not scrutinised. She suggested that future research should consider a broader range of international students and disciplines. To some extent this is addressed in my study.

Building on the earlier qualitative study (Huang, 2013), the quantitative study by Huang et al., (2014) involving 449 Chinese students studying in the UK, sought to understand: (i) students' understanding of employability; (ii) influential factors in employability; and (iii) student likelihood to participate in different activities to develop their employability. As one of the very few studies on non-EU international student employability in the UK, it makes an important contribution to the field. However, it is useful also to consider the perceptions of a broader range of non-EU students in the UK. This is a gap my research seeks to address.

From a global perspective, Nilsson and Ripmeester (2016) draw on the data from a global survey with over 150,000 respondents to conclude that employability mattered more for non-EU students than EU students. Their study provides much evidence to support other large-scale studies like Hobsons (2014 and 2015) which found employability to be a key motivator for study abroad. However, they did not provide insight with regard to how students develop their skills or what skills they develop during study abroad.

Additionally, in contrast to most surveys which look at the perceptions of prospective students, Nilsson and Ripmeester (2016) focused on the experiences of current students after a period of studying abroad. From data collected over five years (2010-2014), they found that employability was the most important element when it comes to student satisfaction with their learning over time. This specifically concerns students' perceptions of the extent to which employability development opportunities were embedded in their courses. They found that there was a drop in student satisfaction in three areas: (i) employability (learning that would help me get a good job); (ii) opportunities for work experiences/work placements as part of their studies; or (iii) careers advice from academic staff. They argue that the lack of student satisfaction in these areas suggests that HEIs have not paid sufficient attention to the needs of current students' expectations that the institution should support them in developing their employability post-graduation.

Two recent studies in the UK and in the USA are of particular interest as they focus on the relationship between study abroad and employability (Farrugia and Sanger, 2017; Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017). The studies reflect current research in an area where there persists a dearth of studies exploring in-depth international student perceptions from a theoretical perspective rather than based on predominant marketization discourses (discussed in Chapters 2 and 3). This fits my study within topical themes of interest in higher education in a global context.

Specifically, Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017) investigated university student perceptions on the benefit of their 'global education' with regard to developing intercultural skills. The authors rightly argued that current ways of measuring internationalisation mainly focus on structural issues such as the numbers of international students versus the numbers of home students. They further acknowledge that existing measures of internationalisation focus on organisational strategies rather than people's experiences of internationalisation. This predominant

focus of internationalisation discourses has been explored in this thesis in Chapter 2.

To address the current limitation of the 'existing tools' of measuring internationalisation, Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017) designed a new tool, 'the Global Education Profiler' (GE-P). The GE-P provides a list of five skills that higher education institutions should probe to assess people's experiences of internationalisation. They are: Social Integration (SI) which 'probes the amount of interaction and social cohesion' with diverse groups encountered outside the academic life; Academic Integration (AI) which probes student life within the department in their institution; Communication Skills (CS) which makes a distinction between language skills and the skills required to effectively manage communication with different people in diverse settings; Foreign Language Skills (LS) are considered to be a 'key employability skill' and as such, the tool probes how students take advantage of learning foreign language skills; and Global Skills and Support (GS), which focuses on student perceptions on developing employability skills with a focus on their intercultural competences developed for the world of work (10). The GE-P can be used by all students including international students.

As part of the Institute of International Education's national 'Generation Study Abroad' project, the study by Farrugia and Sanger (2017) investigated the connection between study abroad programs and the development of employability skills. The authors stated that their mixed method study was 'in departure of much of the research on the topic' in that after the survey involving 4,500 study abroad participants between 1999/00 and 2016/17 they interviewed 30 respondents to gain a more nuanced understanding of linkages between study abroad and employability (5).

Drawing on the list of 21st century skills clusters developed by Pellegrino and Hilton (2012) the research by Farrugia and Sanger (2017) identified 15 key skills the participants reported to have developed during their study abroad: intercultural skills, curiosity, flexibility and adaptability, confidence, self-awareness, interpersonal skills, communication, problem solving, language, tolerance for ambiguity and course or major related knowledge, teamwork, leadership and work ethic.

There are key distinctions between my research and the studies by Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017) and Farrugia and Sanger (2017). Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017) piloted the GE-P tool in a study conducted with over 1214 current students

from 74 countries who were studying in six universities in five countries (UK, Ireland, Belgium, Germany and Uruguay) without making a distinction between the experiences of home and international students. The importance of making such a distinction has been emphasised throughout this review, since different policies guide the extent to which employability-related opportunities can be accessed by international students. Furthermore, they use pre-determined constructs to assess employability. This is different from the aims of my study to explore in-depth insight into international student perceptions in terms of rationales for studying abroad and the extent to which their experience relates to developing their employability.

The study by Farrugia and Sanger (2017) differs from the study by Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017) and my research in that it was conducted with alumni from USA institutions – not current students. Also, the study was not carried out in a European context, though the authors did report that 64% of the participants studied in Europe. Additionally, the participants were mostly undergraduates with only 4% of the respondents having studied abroad at graduate level. As a result, the interviews ‘focused solely on undergraduate study abroad experiences’ (Farrugia and Sanger, 2017, 11) unlike the focus on Masters-level students in my study. Importantly, Farrugia and Sanger (2017) said their study focused on students who had studied in US institutions and had a study abroad experience as well. It is not clear whether they focused on US students or their sample included international students who had studied in US institutions between 1999/00 and 2016/17.

4.7 Chapter summary

This chapter outlined literature on employability with particular reference to international students. The review identified limited studies of international students’ employability, and the importance of two recent studies which make connections between the internationalisation of higher education and employability (Farrugia and Sanger, 2017; Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017) which are of direct relevance to my study. Hence, the chapter provides the context for examining commonalities and differences between the findings in my study and institutional discourses and the wider literature (presented in Chapter 8). At this stage, this chapter culminates the literature review which provides the background for developing my research questions discussed next in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5. Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the aims of the study and the research questions it seeks to answer. It provides an overview of how the theoretical approach taken in the study underpins the methodology and the methods used, and how the participants in the study were purposefully selected with an aim to enhance the validity of the study. Ethical issues in the context of conducting the study are also addressed. The steps taken to analyse the data into themes and categories using NVivo are outlined as the basis of the findings presented in Chapters 6 to 8.

5.2 Aims of the study and research questions

The overall aim of the study was to explore both international Masters students' rationales for studying abroad and their perceptions on developing their employability while studying on a one-year Masters programme in a UK university.

The following research questions were framed to achieve the objectives of the study:

- What are the rationales or motivations for international students to study on a one-year Masters programme at a UK university?
- To what extent do international students' expectations of developing their employability match their experience?
- To what extent do international students' perceptions of the benefits of studying on the Masters programme change over the course of the one-year of study?
- To what extent do students' perceptions relate to present discourses around employability?

5.3 Theoretical approach taken in the study

Ontology (the idea of reality) and epistemology (how we seek knowledge) guides the methodology (ways of knowing) and methods used in a study. In practice, based on

Kuhn (1962), approaches to methodology are underpinned by 'paradigms' defined as a way of researching phenomenon based on the worldview of communities of scholars. Paradigms are thus the foundation for divergent philosophical positionings on ontology and epistemology in social science research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Pring, 2000; Scott, 2005). The main division is seen to exist between positivism and interpretivism.

Positivism was first used by the 19th century Philosopher, Auguste Comte, to describe how social phenomena can be researched empirically, using observation and experiments (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). The main assumptions of positivism are; reality exists independently of human views, knowledge derived from experience is observable, causality (cause and effect) is a natural occurrence amongst phenomena, and research is value-free and generalizable. This view is contested in social science and many alternatives are proffered broadly in line with an interpretivist philosophy.

Interpretivism was conceived by the philosopher, German William Dilthey (1833-1911) who put forward that 'understanding' and 'explanation' are two different forms of knowledge. He averred that social science research should aim to 'understand'. He affirms that the natural sciences seek explanation for phenomenon and make generalisations. Dilthey later expanded the scope of his earlier work on psychological understanding to include the construction of meaning from a cultural perspective (Delanty and Strydom 2003). In general, interpretive approaches accept multiple constructs of reality from participants in social research and maintain that social research is non-generalizable. The interpretivist paradigm, also known as constructivism, has diverse approaches. Denzin (2014) mentions a few: indigenous scholars; critical pedagogy; performance (auto) ethnographies; standpoint epistemologies; critical, public, poetic, queer, materialist, feminist, reflexive ethnographies... (not the full list) (1122). When planning the research, I evaluated the merit of the different approaches to answer my research questions. Within the interpretivist paradigm, I will briefly discuss two approaches I considered for the research.

Paradigms considered for the research

Critical theory

I considered Critical Theory. This approach draws from a Marxist worldview with aims of causing change through action. This approach was appealing as it looks at structure and agency in the social world. Critical theory critiques social structures which are seen as enabling domination and oppression. Hence, the basic tenets of critical theory explore dialogues in terms of power relations between: the oppressor and the oppressed; minority over majority; teachers and students. Before the start of my exploratory research, I did not want to assume that there was a linear power relationship framing the students' perceptions and actions. Importantly, as Sayer (1997) argues, 'the emancipatory potential [of Critical Social Science] need to be moderated by recognising the limits of its methods' (484). Sayer was referring specifically to the difficulty and the contestability of normative judgement in a diverse and multi-cultural world. As my study involves multiple nationalities I therefore did not consider this approach to be appropriate to answer my research questions.

Grounded theory

I also considered grounded theory. This theory was proposed in the 1967 text of Glaser and Strauss within the post-positivist tradition (Charmaz, 2006). Later works by Glaser support post-positivism. In contrast, Strauss and Corbin (1990) diverged from post-positivism. They subsequently aligned more with an interpretive paradigm similar to Charmaz who advocates for a constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Adopting the constructivist grounded theory would involve 'theory co-construction' between the researcher and the researched (Charmaz, 2006). However, my aim was not to construct theory as such but to understand the interpretations the participants make of their experience. Importantly, as Layder (1998) notes, 'the grounded theory approach rejects the importance of prior theory (especially general theory) and insists that theory should emerge directly and exclusively from data collection and analysis' (26). In contrast, from a critical realist perspective, the adaptive theory 'constantly reformulates itself both in relation to the dictates of theoretical reasoning and the 'factual' character of the empirical world' (Layder, 1998), and this was more suitable to address my research aims. I will now discuss critical realism which provides the theoretical framework for my research.

Adopting critical realism as a theoretical approach for the research

Perhaps related to notions of a false dualism between the main paradigms (Pring, 2000), a growing number of social researchers adopt a middle position in order to understand phenomena in a complex social world (Maxwell, 2013). Critical realism is growing in influence amongst social researchers and embraces such a middle position (Maxwell, 2013; Porter, 2015). In other words, critical realism adopts various methodological approaches from different philosophical positions with 'a critical stance towards the necessity and validity of current social arrangements' without following 'the extant paradigms' assumptions at face value' (Mingers 2001, 248).

Critical realism combines two philosophical perspectives that had long been considered incompatible: ontological realism and epistemological constructivism (Maxwell, 2013). Ontological realism is the belief that there is a real world out there which is independent of our idea of reality and belief system. Epistemological constructivism views the understanding of reality to be an individual construction and such subjective perception cannot claim to be absolute truth. My aim here is not to engage with the philosophical discourses around critical realism (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar 1975; Pawson, 2016; Porter, 2015). This mainly points to the focus of my research which is not from a philosophical standpoint. This aligns with views in the literature that the main proponent of critical realism, that is, Roy Bhaskar 'was a philosopher, writing for philosophers about philosophy' (Pawson, 2016, 49) as his approach to critical realism was largely philosophical rather than empirical.

It is therefore useful to consider how Williams (2012) made connections between the mainly philosophical discourses around critical realism and higher education contexts, specifically in relation to students as agents. Building on Archer's (1995) work in social critical realism, Williams (2012) theorised the phenomenon of students as 'agents' interacting with the 'structure' of higher education. The theory is based on the third stage of Archer's 3 stage model of the relationship between agency and structure where 'courses of action are produced through the reflexive deliberations of subjects who subjectively determine their practical projects in relation to their objective circumstances' (Williams, 2012, 318). In other words, higher education is a structural reality (structure), and students participate in higher education as agents with their own subjective construction (agency). Interestingly, although advocates of critical realism hold that structure predates agency for actions

and transformations to take place in the social world, Williams argues that the third stage where 'action' is undertaken by students is largely ignored in sociological discourses. This echoes earlier submissions about the missing voices of students as stakeholders in internationalisation process.

It could be argued that the lack of acknowledgement of students' action in theoretical discourses (Williams, 2012) could be related to what Layder (1998) describes as the problem associated with adopting a theory in empirical research, with little consideration of emerging theory from research findings. To this end, Layder (1998) proposes an 'adaptive theory' in an attempt to address the ontological/epistemological issue, with a focus on agents and structure. This approach is useful to generate new theories based on evidence from current research findings. Thus, Layder's adaptive theory provides a middle ground to situate my research within the critical realist theoretical standpoint. As such, my research is framed as an agency/structure relationship between students and higher education. In addition, my approach agrees with recent suppositions that research into graduate employability aligns with the theoretical assumptions of agency and structure (Holmes, 2017; Tholen, 2015).

5.4 Methodological approach: Critical realism (CR)

The case for using critical realist methodology is made in several diverse disciplines, including, childhood studies (Alderson, 2016), information technology (Zachariadis, Scott, and Barrett, 2013), and complex supply chain management (Adamides, Papachristos, and Pomonis, 2012). This is not surprising as a critical realist approach provides a philosophical epistemology suited to conducting research in a complex social world (Maxwell, 2013; Sayer, 1997). For example, drawing on over 30 years of research in Childhood Studies, Alderson, (2016) reviewed how critical realism can help researchers in the field 'to conduct more philosophically informed, critical and realistic research, with greater theory–practice consistency, which is practical and relevant to policymakers and professionals and to all generations of the general public' (209).

Zachariadis, Scott, and Barrett (2013) support the use of a critical realist mixed methodology. They suggest that a mixed method design combining both qualitative and quantitative methods is well suited in CR research to produce complementary and 'robust meta-inferences that would be difficult to produce using single methods'

(862). They however caution that the quantitative element within CR research should be descriptive as numbers and inferences from relationships between variables alone cannot predict future occurrences. They provide a detailed account of how qualitative methods, such as, interviews, ethnography, and case studies, are used more within CR to describe agents' notion of structures within the complex mechanisms of social phenomenon.

Similar to the position adopted by Zachariadis, Scott, and Barrett (2013), qualitative research on internationalisation benefits from a quantitative foundation (de Witt, 2000). This means that numerical data obtained from quantitative research depicts trends in a population, and can be analysed in depth or at the start of a qualitative study (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014). In the case of my study, the growth in international student enrolment around the world provides a starting point for positioning the research within the current discourses on internationalisation of higher education and graduate employability.

To frame my methodology, I accept Maxwell's (2013) view that critical realism can be combined with other philosophical positions like pragmatism and post-modernism to benefit from a 'dialectic approach' which brings together divergent conceptual models to 'expand and deepen rather than simply confirm one's own understanding' (43). In other words, I adopt a critical realist methodological approach where established theories are not regarded as impediments and biases, but rather as a resource (Souza, 2016) used in a 'meaningful' place within a social context 'where, when and with whom the research will take place' (Holliday, 2007, 33), and dualisms turns into interactive dialectics (Alderson 2016, 203).

I deem it necessary to use methods consistent with a critical realist approach to a qualitative study. This could be a mix of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Zachariadis et al., 2013), or multiple qualitative methods (Souza, 2016). I explain below, how I took the decision to use two qualitative methods; interviews and document analysis. I later discuss how validity in realist research derives from the understandings embedded in a qualitative inquiry (Maxwell, 1992, 281) and how this is addressed in my study.

5.5 Methods

5.5.1 Consideration of research methods: Survey questionnaires and observation

Survey questionnaires

At the early stages of planning the study, I wanted to use both quantitative and qualitative methods. The aim was to first collect primary data through survey questionnaires to reach a wide range and large numbers of participants. At that stage it was deemed important to identify employment history as a variable for two categories of participants: those who made a direct transition from undergraduate to postgraduate study, and those who have had work experience before postgraduate study. This could have provided information as to whether their work experience or prior success in the labour market impacted their perceptions of employability. This survey would have provided demographic information to guide the selection of participants for the second stage of the data collection using face-to-face individual interviews.

However, I discussed my research plan and timeline with two gatekeepers through whom access to the participants was being sought. These contacts have the role of Employability Leads at the Business School at the university. They reasoned that response rates to surveys in the School are low, and the survey might not give usable information. I had encountered a similar challenge when I used an online survey to recruit PGT students for a study at another school at the university. The concerns raised by the gatekeepers and their unwillingness to commit time to what from their experience was not a reliable way of reaching students impacted my original research design.

Webber, Lynch and Oluku (2013) suggest that the low response rate of students to surveys is a key limitation in ensuring the reliability and the usefulness of the data collected from these surveys. Reliability is a quantitative construct which aims for repeatable outcomes in so-called value-free research (Thomas, 2009) in contrast to an authentic understanding of peoples' experience in qualitative research (Silverman, 1993) which better fits with my research goals. I updated my research design as it was not possible to determine in advance whether survey respondents

would represent the variety of international students at the university, either in terms of their diversity or in terms of their employment history.

Observation

Observation shows interaction in the natural research setting. I considered observing students at university employability related events, such as, career fairs organised for students. This was impractical for my study which focuses on Masters students, as it would have been difficult to differentiate between attendees studying at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

I considered attending university Careers Service sessions on employability. These smaller sessions on employability, such as CV workshops, are organised for students pursuing their Masters studies. However, students are not compelled to attend any of these career sessions. This suggests that the attendees could be regarded as students who are taking proactive steps towards developing their employability. This could potentially skew the data collected. To obtain a range of perspectives, I was interested in selecting a method that would grant access to a diverse range of students in their natural setting. I determined that using observation as a method was not a good fit for my research.

5.5.2 Methods used: Interviews and document analysis

After considering the method options available to me vis-a-vis my research aims and questions, I choose two research methods in the study: interviews and document analysis. The in-depth, one-to-one, semi-structured interview is the primary method used for my study. Documentary data was used as: (i) a complementary method; (ii) to provide the context within the institution in which the participants operate and; (iii) to guide the development of interview questions (Bowen, 2009).

Interview

In order not to 'bias the inquiry' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011), the invitation for interview, the consent form, discussions during interview and other communication with Masters student participants (for example, see the email invitation to participate in the study in Appendix C) did not include the word, 'employability'. Instead, the participants were asked about their motivations, perceived benefits and experiences of studying on a one-year Masters in the UK. This proved useful to elicit information about their perceptions about developing their employability. This did not contravene

the ethical principle of obtaining informed consent which also involves the decision as to how much information should be given about the research and when (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

The interview guide used for the pilot and main interviews were developed following a review of the literature on internationalisation and employability. The first set of interview questions were designed to tap into the interviewees' 'episodic memory' (Flick, 2007) as they are asked to share reflections about their motivation for study abroad and the process they went through in deciding their choice of programme of study at the host institution. Interviewees were also asked about their expectations about the benefits they hoped to get from studying abroad in the areas of personal, academic, and cultural experiences.

Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit authentic responses to the research questions (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Silverman, 1993), providing a valid account of experiential narratives from the participants (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). This meant that I used open-ended questions to obtain in-depth information from the interviewees, as I accepted their reflections as their valid description of their experiences. I used questions like 'why did you choose to...?' or 'what do you hope to achieve...?' and the interviewees were allowed room for further reflection by asking 'are there other reasons you can think of?' Hence, the semi-structured interviews allowed me to probe further interesting cues emanating from the discussion.

Pilot study

In December 2015, I did a pilot study including interviews with three MSc students (2 Chinese and 1 Brazilian students) from two different Schools (MSc Education and MSc Business). Demographic information, including age, gender, nationality, employment history and educational background, were collected.

The pilot provided a further guide for the main phase of my study. After conducting the pilot interviews, I slightly modified the interview guide. I rephrased some questions. For example, I clarified that work includes internship and volunteering, not only paid employment. I also included a main interview question (on university rankings). I removed questions that did not elicit useful information. As a result, the pilot interview made it possible to develop an appropriate interview guide to probe

the interviewees' perspectives and to collect rich data that answered the research questions.

Main interview

The first interviews with the students were held in January 2016 to coincide with the end of the first semester. The timing suited the students who at the time were not under the pressure of assignment submissions. The timing also allowed the students to reflect on their rationales for studying in the university. This initial data fully addressed the first research question and provided responses to the second and fourth research questions. The second set of interviews were conducted in July 2016 after the second semester, when the students had concluded the taught element of their study. At the time of the second interview, the students had been immersed in the study environment for over ten months and could provide a detailed description of their experiences. The second interview addressed the second, third, and fourth research questions (the interview guides used for the first and the second interviews are available in Appendices D and E).

Each interview was expected to last for around 60 minutes. In the end, the length of the interviews varied among participants, depending on the depth of their engagement during discussion or if the interview was not generating new insights. The shortest interview lasted for 38 minutes and the longest took up to one hour 20 minutes. I was checking the interview data for similarity and dissimilarity until I reached saturation, which is when more interviews would not add any new insights or perspectives (Flick, 2007).

Thirty-five face-to-face and one Skype interviews were conducted with 19 students (see Appendix F for a sample interview). A total of 17 students participated in the second interviews, with 16 conducted face-to-face and one conducted via Skype with a student who had travelled back home to the USA. The likelihood of having the second interview online had been discussed during the first face-to-face interview with the student. Two students did not participate in the second interview. The sampling strategy and the sample is discussed below.

5.5.3 Sampling

The sampling strategy was designed to maximise the possibility to access the target sample. To select the research setting, I did some background quantitative work.

This involved multilevel detailed examination of data on the non-EU Masters students population at macro (national), and micro (institutional) levels using bespoke HESA data and the university data respectively. I examined the HESA data over a four-year period (from 2011/12 to 2014/15) which showed the spread of the target sample (non-EU Masters students) across universities in the UK. This informed the decision to situate the research at a university which is a top destination for non-EU international students in Scotland.

Nationally, and at the selected university, the majority of the students in the target population were studying a Business-related Masters programme. The Business School is also a professional School with a strong employability focus. Hence, I initially planned to conduct interviews with non-EU Masters students at the Business School. After further consideration of my research aims, I sharpened my focus and updated my research design to include Masters students from four different Schools with the largest population and diversity of non-EU students. The selected schools provided breadth and depth to my study as it included a varied group from both professional and non-professional fields – Business (professional), Education (philosophical/professional), Literatures, Languages and Cultures (artistic), Social and Political Science (sociological/non-professional).

A further selection was done at programme level as each School has several Masters programmes. For example, the School of Education has 19 Masters compared to 31 Masters programme in Literatures, Languages and Cultures. The selected programmes are not identified to protect the anonymity of the participants. Recognising that the aim for variability in the study does not mean the research should have no boundaries, one programme from each School was selected. The main criteria was to select a Masters programme that had a broad scope and did not have a specific or specialised undergraduate subject requirements for enrolment which suggests that it was accessible to the widest possible pool of qualified candidates.

Purposive selection of interview participants

Many qualitative researchers view sampling as a problematic term, as it is seen as representative of the population of interest; a normal aim of quantitative research (Maxwell, 2013; Thomas, 2009). I adopt the term 'purposive selection' (Maxwell, 2013, 97) to describe my strategy for recruiting participants for this study. I

specifically sought to select participants who can provide information that is relevant to answer my research questions.

Due to the university data protection regulations, it was not possible to obtain data that would identify student nationalities. I used links with the university staff to get to my target participants. I had personal links to one Programme Director (Education). A senior member of staff (Dean) who shared my interest in employability facilitated my contact with the other schools. In the case of one School, I was linked directly to a Programme Director (in SPS). At two Schools (Business and LLC), connection was facilitated through the Director of PG studies who in turn linked me with Programme Directors (PDs) at their School. Three PDs confirmed that they had enough students to meet my requirement (minimum number of 5 non-EU students on the programme). However, in the case of LLC, they had a low intake of students enrolled on programmes I had suggested via email in November 2015 to the Director of PG studies:

For my study, I am interested in your cross-disciplinary taught Masters degree programmes. To this end, I would be very grateful to non-EU international students on any one of these programmes; MSc X or MSc Y. It is especially interesting that these two programmes have Alumni Profile on their information pages. I hope to interview 4 or 5 current non-EU international students on the selected programme. I understand that I will need your guide to choose the programme with my target sample. I am happy to follow your guide on how best to work with you to move forward my study. (excerpt from authors' email, 1/11/15)

The Director of PG studies responded back in detail as follows:

Thanks for your email – it sounds as if you have the makings of a very interesting project!
Some of our programmes in LLC have a small intake, and MSc X is effectively running only as an MScR this year, as there is just one student. MSc Y is larger (9 students), but I doubt that there will be enough overseas students on the programme for your purposes. The fact that these programmes have alumni profiles isn't actually to do specifically with the programmes – we are putting up alumni profiles for all of our MSc programmes at the moment.

In any case, there are other programmes in LLC that would be a better fit with your project...I'd recommend approaching the Programme Directors of the MSc A first; this is a programme with 23 students on it this year (including many overseas students)...the Programme Directors are... and you are very welcome to say that I recommended that you should contact them. You're welcome to copy me in if you would like to.

The other programmes...are ... and ..., however the numbers of overseas students on these programmes are too low for your purposes. So, I'd suggest that you approach ... instead – this is one of our larger programmes, and it should certainly have enough overseas students... The Programme Director next semester is ...and you would be welcome to get in touch with her. (excerpt of email response from Dir PG LLC, 1/12/15)

After receiving the positive response from the Director PG LLC, I contacted the PDs for MSc A. As they both have similar roles, one of the PDs accepted to work with me to recruit Masters students on the programme.

My systematic and clear aim to have a purposive selection of participants enabled me to reach my target participants while preserving the ethical standards in place at the university to protect the students and ensuring that voluntary participation was channelled through trusted gatekeepers. Furthermore, the gatekeepers (PDs) who provided links to the participants were not included in further communication after the general introduction email which students were free to respond to or otherwise. It was important to protect their identity as an ethical issue and also a reassurance to the students of the confidentiality of any discussion related to their ongoing Masters study.

The study sample: Masters students

Current Masters students on four different programmes in four different Schools were contacted through their PDs to request their participation in the study. The PDs had slightly different ideas on how best to contact the students. My approach in turn was to work with each PD on an individual basis.

Education (EDU)

The PD MSc Education requested that I prepare a letter introducing myself and the aims of my research which was forwarded through email to all non-EU students enrolled on the MSc programme. My email address was included in the letter for interested students to reply directly back to me. The emails were sent out in December 2015. Non-EU students represented 80% of the MSc Education cohort (n=49). Two MSc Education students responded to this email to indicate their interest in participating in the study. Another two students I had met at a School organised event and with whom I had discussed my research agreed to participate in the research. In total, four MSc Education students from three countries (China, India and Colombia) participated in the study.

Literatures, Languages and Cultures (LLC)

Similar to MSc Education, the PD requested that I prepare a written text which was sent by the school administrator through email to non-EU Masters students on the selected programme in December 2015. This means 9 students received the email (total number of students = 22). Three students from three countries (USA, Mexico and Colombia) replied, and accepted to be interviewed. One participant volunteered to ask some of her classmates to consider being interviewed by me. The snowballing 'sampling' added one more LLC student (from Taiwan).

Social and Political Science (SPS)

Eight non-EU students were enrolled on the selected programme in SPS (total number of students = 23). The PD introduced me directly to four students (from Canada, USA, Turkey and China), as I was copied into the email sent to the students in December 2015. I followed up by sending individual emails to the students. All four students agreed to take part in my study and were interviewed for the first interview in January 2016.

One of the interviewed LLC Masters student introduced me to a non-EU student in the School of Social and Political Science (SPS). The student was from South Africa (SA). The SA student also introduced me to another student on her programme (from Nigeria). I interviewed these students as this was congruent with my aims for a diverse group of participants. The data collected from the students provided richer data for my study.

Two SPS students dropped out from the study at the second stage of interviewing. Despite repeated attempts to contact them by email, there was no response from them. The contribution of the students in the first interview provided themes that were useful for my study, so I included them in my analysis. Although a fuller version of their experience would have been welcomed, non-participation of the two students in the second interview did not have a significant impact on my study. In total, four out of six students from SPS who participated in the first interview took part in the second interview.

Business (BUS)

The PD Business stated that the students were very busy with their assignments in December and suggested that I could have access to students in January. Prior to

contacting the students, we had an informal meeting to discuss the purpose of my study. The PD expressed a preference for me to deliver a face-to-face presentation about my research and make a direct request for participants at the programme town hall meeting (informal general information and discussion forum held between the PD and the students each semester).

I gave a 10-minute presentation of my research aims to the BUS Masters students. It was not compulsory for students to attend the event. Hence, although 39 out of a total of 58 students enrolled on the MSc Business programme were from non-EU countries, I could not determine how many non-EU students were at the Town Hall meeting. After my presentation, four students from three countries (China (n=2), Taiwan and Singapore) accepted to take part in my study. A fifth student (from India) who attended the event approached me a few days later to indicate interest in my study. All five students were interviewed in January 2016 and July 2016.

Profile of the interviewees

Table 5:1 shows the profile of all the interviewees (n= 19) from 11 countries. I conducted 36 interviews over the one-year study period (excluding 2 students who did not participate in the second interviews). Four males and fifteen females participated in the study (Table 5:1). At least one male student participant was represented in three programmes except LLC, as no male non-EU student was enrolled in the MSc programme in the academic year when the study was conducted. The average age was 25.16 years. Seven participants described English as their first language. The remaining twelve students spoke English as a second language, and with sufficient fluency during the interview.

The majority of the students were funded through personal arrangements. Around 50% of the participants were fully sponsored by their parents (n=9). Five students describe their funding as a combination of their contributions and support from parents. One student said that her fees were paid by combining resources from parents, self and scholarship (from the university). One student was funded by family friends. Two students were self-funded with one using her savings and the other having obtained a loan. One participant had scholarships from their employer in their home country. The interviewees had varying types of work experience, except for one student who had none. The length of time of work experience ranged from ten years (full-time employment) to one month (internship).

Table 5:1 shows demographic information collected from the participants from all four schools. Pseudonyms are used so that individual students are not identified.

Table 5:1 Profile of participants across four Masters-level programmes

| Name (Pseudonyms) | Country | Gender | Age | Masters Programme |
|----------------------|--------------|--------|-----|----------------------|
| Qian | China | Female | 22 | SPS |
| Adele | Canada | Female | 26 | SPS |
| Jackie | USA | Female | 22 | SPS |
| Bola | Nigeria | Female | 36 | SPS |
| Mandy | South Africa | Female | 24 | SPS |
| Alim | Turkey | Male | 24 | SPS |
| Fang | China | Female | 21 | EDU |
| Chao | China | Male | 23 | EDU |
| Indira | India | Female | 38 | EDU |
| Sofia | Colombia | Female | 26 | EDU |
| Jun | China | Female | 22 | BUS |
| Lan | China | Female | 23 | BUS |
| Harshad | India | Male | 22 | BUS |
| Bond | Singapore | Male | 24 | BUS |
| Yin | Taiwan | Female | 27 | BUS |
| Abby | USA | Female | 22 | LLC |
| Mariana | Colombia | Female | 26 | LLC |
| Patricia | Mexico | Female | 26 | LLC |
| Shi | Taiwan | Female | 24 | LLC |

SPS (Social & Political Science), EDU (Education), BUS (Business), LLC (Literatures, Languages & Cultures)

5.5.4 Documentary data used in the research

Documents are 'recipient designed' products of the organisational structure (Atkinson and Coffey, 2011, 89). Hence, the words in documents connect to the actions of those who produced the document and the people who are meant to use the documents (Prior, 2008). Table 5:2 shows why the documents were chosen and how the selected documents fit with my study.

Table 5:2 Employability-related documents at the institution

| Document | Source | Why am I using this documentary resource? | How does the document fit with my study? |
|---|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Employability: Information for staff website | University website | It provides the official/institutional version of what employability is and gives a rationale for its importance to students, staff, schools and the University | Text version of the core theme of my research as disseminated at the institutional level |
| Employability: Information for students | University website | Guide for students on developing their employability | |
| University Strategic Plan 2012-16 | University website | One of the central themes in the document is 'embedding graduate attributes and employability in all our curricula, and equipping our students to compete in and 'increasing student satisfaction with the opportunities and support for developing their graduate attributes and employability' | It links the strategy on internationalisation and employability at the institution |
| PGT: marketing yourself effectively (WAVE; Work And Volunteering Experiences) | University Careers Service website | Documents the implementation of employability development initiatives | This puts employability into practice at the institution |
| | Programme websites | Employability related document at programme level | |

As shown in Table 5:2, documentary data provides insight into the definition, scope, and practice of employability at the university. I conducted an evaluation of documents which are accessible from the school/programme website (programme information) and the university website (employability initiative document; internationalisation strategy) to familiarise myself with the institutional position and contextual understanding of employability discourses in the study setting. I analysed

documents in the research setting related to employability and internationalisation (Table 5:2).

Atkinson and Coffey (2011) argue that documentary materials provide a distinctive version of social reality and should be interpreted in their own right as such, instead of being used as a supplement to other methods like interviews and observation (80). At the same time, documents are expected to be used by an audience as documents '(re)produce' the organisational realities (Prior, 2008). My intention was not to conduct a linguistic discourse analysis or data mining (quantitative like collation of the data) of the documents. Rather, I used the documentary text to understand how the discourses on employability and internationalisation are presented in the research setting to further supplement the interview data, and enhance the validity of the study.

5.6 Validity

To most qualitative researchers, validity means an accurate representation of the study (Silverman, 1993). Citing Hammersley (1990 and 1992), who suggests that researchers require a 'subtle form of realism to address the issue of validity, Silverman (1993) describes validity as 'confidence in our knowledge but not certainty'; hence reality is presented in the researchers account which is viewed through 'particular perspectives' but it is not reproduced (155). Notably, this concept of validity mainly relates to accounts, not data or methods (Maxwell, 1992). In other words, validity could be seen as an authentic and trustworthy account of understanding of other perspectives (like respondents' accounts during an interview) which may not necessarily reflect the researcher's knowledge or 'reality' (Maxwell, 2013).

The validity claims in my study are framed by Maxwell's (1992, 2013) critical realist approach to validity in qualitative research. Maxwell (2013) recognises that validity in research is a complex issue and acknowledges the criticism of the concept of validity as a mostly quantitative assumption by well-known qualitative researchers like Guba and Lincoln (1989) who put forward concepts like trustworthiness, authenticity and quality as more appropriate for qualitative research. However, Maxwell (1992) argues that validity does not have to mean an 'objective truth', which quantitative research aims to achieve, and suggests that validity should be seen as the '*correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation,*

or other sort of account' in qualitative research (122). I explore below briefly the key aspects of validity described by Maxwell (1992).

Correctness or credibility of a description – also called, descriptive validity (Maxwell, 1992). In my research, descriptive validity was assured by audio recording and verbatim transcription of all interviews. I then provided an accurate account of what I heard from the interviewees.

Interpretation: interpretive validity – this builds on giving an actual description of information but also acknowledging that ‘the meanings and constructions of the actors’ may differ, depending on time and situation (Maxwell, 2013, 290). This suggests that repeated observations, longitudinal interviews, and continued presence of a researcher in the study setting can enhance interpretive validity. Interpretive validity in my study is addressed in part by interviewing participants more than once and posing a main research question to them at two different time periods (January and July) to (re)assess my interpretation of their earlier response. In addition, I conducted lengthy in-depth interviews allowing the respondents to provide detailed accounts of their perceptions, thus getting rich data which provided an illuminating portrayal of interviewees’ thoughts and their experience.

Explanation: Beyond descriptions and interpretations, the explanation of the theoretical underpinnings of research represents theoretical validity. This means that theoretical validity relates to connecting the data collected to theoretical constructs. This is evident in my research which explores the agentic capabilities of the student in relation to the structural components of higher education including university documents and human resources like tutors.

Other sort of account: Maxwell’s (1992) description of ‘other sort of account’ is similar to triangulation in that it involves using different sources and methods to collect information to enhance the dependability of a method. As such, I developed a rigorous methodological approach in this study. I used multiple methods; interviews and documents. This enhanced the dependability of the interpretation of the data collected. The student sources were also a varied group to enhance the richness and depth of data. Documents were sourced from the websites of different departments within the university, from the top echelons of the university (Strategy and Governance), key central working units (Careers Service and International Office), and at the micro implementation level (Schools).

Conclusion: I address what Maxwell refers to as two important validity threats to the conclusions of a qualitative study; research bias and reactivity.

5.6.1 Addressing specific threats to validity

Researcher bias – refers to selecting data that fits with the preconceived assumptions and theories of the researcher. This issue cannot be dealt with by eliminating the researcher's beliefs, theories and perceptions (Maxwell, 2013, 125). Early on, I therefore acknowledged how my values and understandings have contributed to my motivation to conduct this research (1.1). I also took conscious steps to guard against the effect of possible bias in my study. For example, I had several discussions with different groups including educationist and non-teaching personnel in different departments (academics and administrators) in the research setting to develop the initial focus for the study. I also set out a clear outline of the steps I took towards the purposeful selection of participants. To deal with researcher bias in my study, I took the following steps: independent quantitative secondary data informed the selection of the appropriate sample to answer my research questions; access to my target group was determined by gatekeepers; and finally, I included a participant whom my informant mentioned had a negative experience as this allowed me to include credible voices with variant experience in my research (Flick, 2007).

Reactivity: pertains to the effect a researcher has on the setting or the study participants (Maxwell, 2013) as the researcher and the researched are social beings operating in a social world. Reactivity is strongly evident in interviews (Maxwell, 2013). This can be addressed through reflexivity (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) as researchers accept the complexities that are part of qualitative research and recognise this as they develop the methodological framework of their research (Holliday, 2007). I adopted a reflexive attitude at each stage of the study from conceptualisation, data collection, analysis (discussed in the next section), organisation and presentation of the data. I clearly linked the interview questions to the analysis of the data collected and the findings presented in the next three chapters (see Figure 5:1 for overview).

5.7 Analysis

All the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The verbatim transcription ensured a trustworthy audit trail, closeness to the data for familiarity and reliability in interpreting meanings (Silverman, 2005). As Braun and Clarke, (2012) put it, I became 'intimately familiar' with my dataset content to notice what relates to my research questions (6).

I used NVivo11 (a qualitative data analysis software) which enables improved management of multiple data sources and easy retrieval of coded text and original text (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013) for abstraction and synthesis (Richards, 1998) beyond a descriptive account to interpretation. Thematic analysis of the data allowed me to assume 'a knowable world and giving voice to experiences and meanings of that world as reported in the data' (Braun and Clarke, 2012, 3).

I adopted a systematic approach to develop codes for the interview data. This was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step approach in conducting thematic analysis (familiarisation with the data; getting initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report), and Richard's (2009) guide in coding (to identify what is interesting; ask why it is interesting in the context of my research; I then apply a code to what is relevant to my research). I took the steps, discussed in 5.7.1 below, in data analysis using NVivo.

5.7.1 Four stages of detailed coding

Deriving in vivo codes directly from the interview data capture actual expressions and constructs emanating from the data. At the first level of data analysis, I embarked on a close reading of the interview data, re-read the transcripts and took note of interesting cues (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Richard, 2009). For the first stage, I coded the first interview with Indira which generated 176 nodes from 228 references in the transcript (8,870 words). The difference in the number of nodes and references indicates cases where a single code represents multiple references (discussed later). This first level of coding provided a broad outlook of emerging categories in line with the overall aim of my study and the research questions (RQs).

However, while the rich data provided interesting insight, not all the data directly answered my research questions which aimed to understand students' rationales

and their lived experience. For example, Appendix G shows that 16 sources provided 28 references related to a code named 'key influencers'. At the initial stage, this code was used to describe the interviewees' accounts of input from their families and friends at the stage when they were considering which institution to choose. This accords with suggestions in the literature that family and friends could influence international students' decision-making (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). However, while they seemed to value input from others, the interviewees emphasised they selected the Masters programme based on their rationales for studying abroad (see Chapter 6). As such, I used codes (such as 'programme accessibility') which were directly related to the students' rationales for studying at the institution abroad rather than 'suggestions' from 'key influencers'. In any case, according to some interviewees, such suggestions did not impact their final choice of a study destination (for example, see Mariana's comments in 6.2.2).

Accordingly, I sharpened the focus of my analysis as coding progressed to maximise the potential for a variety of concepts in the initial coding (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). For the second stage of coding, in addition to Indira, I selected the first interview with Abby as the second interview to code. I chose the first two interviews to work through in detail, because they provided the most contrast as detailed in Table 5:3 below:

Table 5:3 Initial coding: Selected participants' profile

| Participants' profile | Indira | Abby |
|--|---|--|
| Schools | Education | Literatures, Languages & Cultures |
| Nationality | India | USA |
| Age | 38 (oldest participant) | 22 (one of the youngest participants) |
| Previous work experience | Full-time & part-time work | part-time work & internship |
| Changing discipline at Masters level | previous degrees; Zoology (BSc) & Marketing (MBA) | continuing in field related to UG degree (previous degree; English Literature) |
| Highest level of qualification prior to starting the Masters | postgraduate qualification (MBA) | undergraduate (BA) |
| Engagement in extracurricular activities during the Masters | little engagement in extracurricular activities | engagement with various extracurricular activities within and outside the university |
| Expectations about their future career trajectory | said she is "definitely going back home" | open to working in the UK after the Masters and considers herself to be "internationally mobile" |

At the third stage of coding, I added two more interviewees (Alim and Lan) which increased the variability of the data in relation to gender, country of origin, and

programme level (meaning selected interviewees at this stage represent the four programmes where they were recruited from).

For stage four, I coded the remaining fifteen interviews collected at the end of the first semester. The codes were further expanded, changed or discarded through repeated interactions with the data. This was done for each unit of analysis (i.e. each interview). As a result, the initial codes in the first interview with Indira reduced to 61 nodes (100 references) from 176 nodes (228 references) (Appendix H). However, the codes did not follow a linear pattern (i.e. the codes did not increase or decrease based on when the interviews were conducted or the number of references in each unit of analysis) (see Appendices H and I). I used memos (notes) to provide a trail for reference (audit trail) regarding the rationales for choosing a code. After coding the first four interviews, fewer new nodes emerged from the data. There was no need to code when I noticed no new ideas in the data (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013).

As the participants were interviewed at two different time spots, to organise the data, each data source (interview) related to one case (interviewee) was assigned a unique identifier, for example, Indira 1, Indira 2 (representing the first and second interviews with Indira respectively). The unique identifier was also important to track change over time within a case (related to RQ3).

Close analysis of the data ensured that all seventeen interviews conducted at the end of the second semester included more focused questions about their experiences during the Masters and their perceptions about the employability development opportunities available at the programme level and across the university. This provided insight into changes in their perceptions over the course of the one-year Masters.

5.7.2 Arranging nodes into categories

Using NVivo allows a broad first level of interpretation of the coded data into categories. This involves a direct process of bringing together all text related to the category to create a strong awareness of components embedded within each category (Richards, 2009). For example, Appendix J shows themes and categories related to RQ3 including the parent node (category), child nodes (themes), and the first level branch of child nodes (component of the child node) and the second level

of child nodes (component of the child node). In other words, *the skills construct* forms a category (parent node) with 20 components (child nodes). The child node, for example *intercultural skills* has two branches – one branch includes ten memorable references in the data related to developing intercultural skills (out of a possible 31 references) while the second branch includes six possible references which seem to present contrasting views of intercultural skills development.

5.7.3 From description to analysis

As Bazeley and Jackson (2013) note 'more general or abstract concepts are essential for moving from description to analysis' (83). This means that it is important for coding to evolve from initial thoughts about the data to making decisions about the data and thereafter making conclusions based on the data. Furthermore, coding using NVivo allows the same texts to have multiple codes. This second level of interpretation, 'opens up analytical possibilities through the recombination of coded passages' (75) and flexibility to make interpretations from the data not limited to a single code. The codes provided a clearer picture of the structure of the coding including the relationships and contrasts within a source (that is one interviewee) and emerging dimensions within concepts presented in the data.

The second level of interpretation goes beyond deciding the segments of data that cohere together - rather, it also involves discerning nuances within similarly grouped concepts, for example; *international experience, going abroad, and foreign degree*. This helps to maintain a focus on the key aspects of the data that are crucial to answer my research questions. Following the detailed analytical approach adopted in my research, a clear structure of the data emerged, and I placed codes into categories and themes which align with each of my research questions.

I checked the reliability of my coding in two ways. I sent a complete interview to two experienced academics to check the codes. This process was repeated with four complete coded interviews. The checks provided a sense of the trustworthiness of the coding process and the validity of the codes used. However, we did not always agree on codes in terms of some areas where interesting data is evident within the text. This was not surprising as different perspectives could lead to different ways of 'seeing' the data. We agreed that the reliability of the codes should be based on how it answered the RQs. Additionally, a third academic examined the codes and concluded that they are a valid representation of the data.

5.8 The limitations of the study

The limitations of the study outlined below relates to the context of the study, in terms of the type of the institution and the single site where the study was conducted. Other limitations relate to issues around representativeness and attrition with regard to the participants in the study.

Context of the study - describing a 'relatively' prestigious university, Woodley and Brennan, (2000) make reference to the study by Purcell and Pitcher (1999) which suggested that graduates from older universities enjoy employers' bias during recruitment. Against this backdrop, they caution against generalising that student experience and their graduate employment outcomes would be general for different higher education graduates in the UK. Similar observations have been made by other authors, for example, Moreau and Leathwood, (2006) and Brown et al., (2003). This suggests that the concerns raised by Woodley and Brenna (2000) apply to my study which was undertaken in a university that is usually described as old and prestigious. However, I should add that research on graduate employability usually relates to the UK national context. There is little clarity around the extent to which the benefits of studying at a prestigious extend to non-EU international students.

Single site of the study - the participants in my study are located within a single site. I recognise that with technology and the worldwide web, I could have widened the scope of my research to include participants who are studying digitally at the university. My focus on mobile students who are resident in the country where they are studying narrows down the scope of my research to a defined group. This will be a consideration in how my findings should be interpreted.

Representativeness - the issue of representativeness is still prevalent in qualitative research (Flick, 2007). This draws on quantitative research tenets which value claims of generalised research findings. The research cannot claim to be representative. However, the aim of my qualitative study to obtain a trustworthy and valid account of phenomena was enhanced by the rigour and reflexivity I adopted in carrying out the study. I used purposeful selection of participants to include variation in my study to collect rich data that will answer my research questions.

Attrition - is a well-recognised problem with longitudinal research, as participants might not be available, or they might withdraw their consent to continue with the

study. I have reported and explained how I dealt with the issue of two participants who did not take part in the second round of interviews.

5.9 Ethical considerations

The onus of conducting an ethical study rests on the researcher. I followed the ethical guidelines at the institution and the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research 2011, to adopt five common ethical principles in educational research; *Harm, Autonomy, Privacy, Reciprocity, and Equity* (Hammersley and Traianou, 2007).

Harm: the study was conducted at a safe and mutually agreed location on campus. I did not pursue sensitive issues or topics which could cause distress to the participants. The key aim was to ensure that the participants did not suffer from physical and mental stress. Also, as access was granted to conduct the research within the university, my findings and report did not cause harm to the reputation of the institution, and staff members at the institution.

Autonomy: The aims of the research was clearly stated in the invitation to participate in the study and the consent form was sent in advance of interview to the participants. Further, it was reiterated at the start of the interview that participants can withdraw their consent to participate in the study at any time. Participants could therefore make a voluntary informed decision whether to take part in the study without any form of coercion.

Privacy: I respected the right of the Schools not to provide access to information about partner business institutions. I also respected the privacy of individuals who contributed to the study. I used pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of the participants. While I provide a nuanced description of their individual experiences, personal descriptions were omitted so that individual participants could not be identified. In practical terms, this means that due to the small numbers of non-EU students on some programmes, I do not use quotes that could make students easily identifiable.

Reciprocity: Although the participants in the study gave their time for the interviews, monetary remuneration was not offered as an incentive or reward for participation. At the request of three students, I provided some informal support with

their dissertation work. A copy of the findings will be made available to interested student participants.

Equity: This research is not an experimental or quasi-experimental study. As such, I adopted the same approach in conducting in-depth interviews with all participants and no individual was privileged or disadvantaged.

5.10 Chapter summary

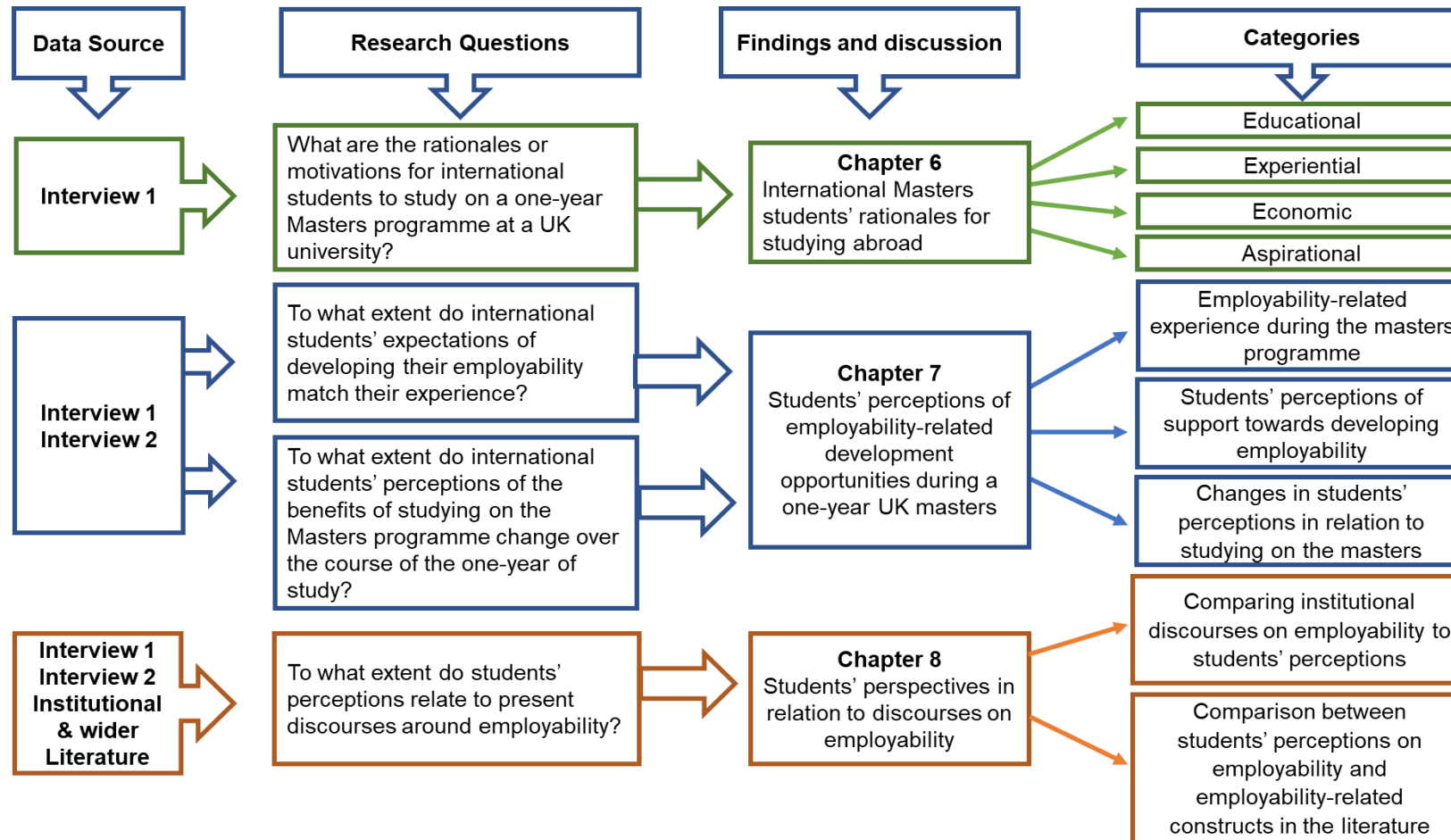
The research draws on a critical realist ontology to explore how international students' actions (agency) are moderated, or not, by their participation in international higher education (structures). I used one to one semi-structured interviews with a purposefully selected sample of international students to answer my research questions. Documents at the university were used as a supplementary method. I transcribed verbatim all interview data. I used NVivo11 to conduct a thematic analysis of the interview data. I addressed issues related to validity and possible limitations of the study. I provide an outline of the ethical considerations taken into account in the course of conducting the research. The categories and themes emerging from the data inform the presentation of the findings in Chapters 6 - 8 in line with the research questions (RQs) outlined in Figure 5:1.

Introduction to the findings chapters

The graphical presentation (Figure 5:1) provides a summary of how the primary data (interviews) and secondary data (university documents and wider literature) answered the four research questions. I then link the research questions to the findings presented under different categories in Chapters 6 - 8. The themes under each category are explored in the relevant chapters.

The findings from the study will be discussed in the next three chapters as outlined in Figure 5:1. Interviewees will be cited using pseudonyms, abbreviations of their Schools (SPS - Social and Political Science; LLC - Literatures, Languages and Cultures; EDU - Education; BUS – Business) and country. A complete list of interviewees is provided in Table 5:1.

Figure 5:1 Overview of findings chapters



Chapter 6. International Masters student rationales for studying abroad

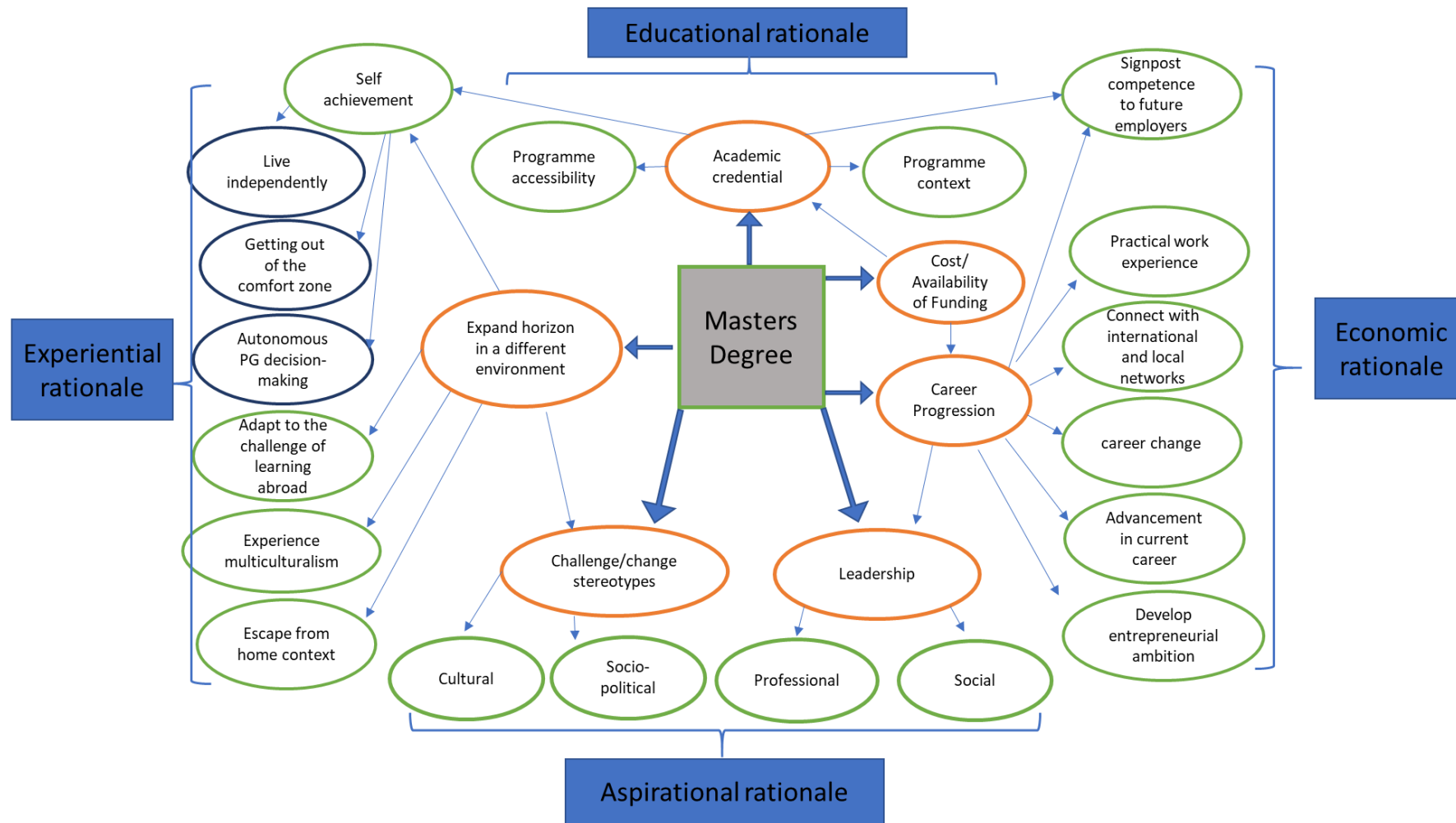
6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings on students' rationales for study abroad. This directly addresses the gap in the literature regarding previous conceptualisations of rationales for internationalisation as an organisational process (2.2.2). Furthermore, the findings relate to the decision-making stage of the international student experience/lifecycle discussed in 3.3.1. This chapter addresses the first research question:

What are the rationales or motivations for international students to study on a one-year Masters programme at a UK university?

The chapter presents a holistic look at why students study abroad at Masters-level distinguishing the following rationales: educational, experiential, aspirational and economic rationales (Figure 6:1).

Figure 6:1 International students' rationales for embarking on a Masters study abroad



6.2 Category 1: Educational rationale

Under the educational rationale, the two main themes that emerged from the data are: 'programme component' and 'programme accessibility' (Table 6:1). The programme component refers to key elements embedded in the curriculum including: practical work experience, course modules, diversity of the student cohort and the one-year length of the programme. Programme accessibility refers to the requirements needed to enrol on the course, including, proficiency in English as the 'language of instruction', and pre-enrolment prerequisites.

The geographical location of the host country emerged as another sub-theme (under theme 2). This comprises the 'convenience of continuing Masters after UG abroad' and the 'proximity of study location to home country'. The former is considered important in view of its lack of mention in previous studies. The latter is worth mentioning as it chimes with findings of the key work on international student motivation by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), but I present an additional consideration not mentioned in their study.

Table 6:1 Educational rationale: Themes and sub-themes

| Themes | Sub-themes |
|-------------------------|---|
| Programme component | Practical work experience |
| | Course modules |
| | Diversity of the student cohort |
| | One-year length of study |
| Programme accessibility | Language of instruction |
| | Pre-enrolment prerequisites |
| | Geographical location of the host country |

6.2.1 Theme 1: Programme component

The programme structure available on the university website or on the School website provided direct and often relied upon information about the programme. The students said, as part of their decision-making process to study abroad, they conducted an in-depth analytical search of programmes that fits with their interest in

a field related to their undergraduate study or in another field. This 'sifting' stage occurs twice. The first sifting stage occurred at the point of searching for a programme outside the student's country, as the quote below shows:

*I went to the School webpage. It had more information about education. For example, (names top university in England) and (names another top university in Scotland) didn't provide some details so I perceive that they don't have many good scholars in specific areas. **Chao (EDU, China)***

The second sifting stage was when the students were considering the choice of a university out of many options in the host country.

*Actually, I applied [and got accepted] to five universities. My first choice is this university because this programme I'm taking has a course option and practical exercise. That is why I come here. **Shi (LLC, Taiwan)***

As the above quote from Shi indicates, the interviewees place emphasis on two main aspects of the programme structure: practical work experience and the course content. This was also a consideration, for example, in the case of Qian (SPS, China) who was offered admission to study at an Australian University.

6.2.1.1 Practical work experience

All interviewees studying on the LLC programme (Abby, Shi, Mariana and Patricia) emphasise the importance of undertaking a practical work-based placement (WBP) during their Masters. This involves the students working with industry partners on projects at film festivals.

*Ultimately what drew me to this programme was the emphasis on applied practice in addition to of course reading widely and writing, we get to do a number of related projects. So that was really appealing to me. I feel like I would benefit a lot from those projects. Industry is increasingly global, so, I thought to myself I could try to do this in NY or LA or Canada, but I was thinking it would be better to do this in Europe or in the UK. **Abby (LLC, USA)***

Similarly, a work-based dissertation (WBD) instead of a traditional dissertation, which was advertised as an optional part of the Masters in SPS, attracted Bola to her programme:

*I got offers from three universities. Since I have not been in this field which I know will matter when I want to look for a job and they ask for experience. So, work based dissertation attracted me here. It means that I am going to learn the roles of what they do on the field. **Bola (SPS, Nigeria)***

However, at the time the interview was held at the end of the first semester, Bola said she had a clearer picture of what embarking on a WBD entails in terms of available projects, and the credits required on first semester courses which were the prerequisites to do a WBD. She also said the projects available were not directly related to her interests. She pragmatically asserted that the programme modules were of value even if she did not get a placement during her study period.

While I think I might not get the practical things [through a WBD] I believe if I have the deep knowledge [from the course], with on-the-job training I should develop. Bola (SPS, Nigeria)

Though WBD seems to be valued when offered as a part of the Masters programme, the extent however to which WBD could therefore be 'ultimately what drew me to this programme' (Abby), is not clear with regards to the other programmes where WBP is not available. For example, both WBP and WBD are not advertised as part of the Masters on the School of Education website. It was therefore surprising to hear from some of the EDU interviewees (Fang and Indira) talk at length that they hoped to have practical experience during their Masters.

If I'm going to be practicing in India, it's going to give me knowledge about the Indian educational system. But why not get a perspective of the English educational system. So, what I really wanted to see was could I get an experience here which is more of a practical experience? Indira (EDU, India)

Although WBD was available on selected programmes in the School of Business, the BUS interviewees were not undertaking one of the programmes where WBD was offered. Interestingly, none of the BUS interviewees mention practical project work as part of their reasons for choosing their programme. Perhaps the students were aware that the BUS programme had industry-related collaborative group work integrated into some of their 20 credit course modules.

6.2.1.2 Course modules

As noted, WBD was not offered on the programme the Business students were recruited from. It was therefore not surprising that rather than focusing on WBD, most of the BUS interviewees (for example, Bond, Harshad) stressed the value of other aspects of the programme, for example, the modules. Prior to enrolling on the Masters, some of the students had conducted an evaluation of courses within a school.

*I did look through most of their programmes to see what courses they have. I went through some financial courses to see what they offer. After looking through I saw that (names the current Masters programme) provides the most variety of courses that you are able to learn from. **Bond (BUS, Singapore)***

The uniqueness of the Masters programme as an emerging niche field was important for students in LLC who were studying on a new Masters programme. Sofia (EDU, Colombia) and Fang (EDU, China) said they were attracted to the EDU Masters because they were able to choose different course modules that matched their interest, for example, Education Policy and Education Technology respectively.

In contrast to an interest in WBD shown by most of the SPS students, Alim asserted that the course modules attracted him to the programme:

*I checked the modules on the website. From the list of courses, I can get a hold of the mentality of the faculty. How they take things like which courses or what are the kind of courses being discussed. So that was the main thing. It pushed me the most to come to this university. **Alim (SPS, Turkey)***

Alim's lack of interest in WBP can be linked to his aim to continue to PhD study. He later talked about his interest in having an opportunity to work as a project research assistant during his Masters. This is also practical experience related to his future career trajectory. Thus, the findings suggest that what seems to be important to the students is that the experience is directly related to their Masters and future aspirations.

6.2.1.3 Diversity of the student cohort

Harshad (BUS, India) asked, rhetorically, "how could I have met people from so many countries if I had studied for this Masters at home?" Similarly, the perceived importance of having a diverse student cohort was echoed by all the students. Aside from the students' general expectation that the programme will be diverse, there were some nuances in their comments, for example, **Bond (BUS, Singapore)** talked about being in an environment where diversity is valued:

My friends told me about the tolerance for diversity here. That attracted me to come over. I did not want a harsh environment where you get judged for being who you are because people do not agree with your thoughts...I want to be exposed to different nationalities apart from Asian people alone.

Interestingly, Mandy (SPS, South Africa) talked about having met international students during her undergraduate study at home. However, she was interested in experiencing a different context of learning while still having the opportunity to meet

other international and home students. Hence, the findings suggest that the students' rationale to study abroad was underpinned by their expectation that they would be studying alongside a diverse student cohort.

6.2.1.4 One-year length of study

The one-year length of the Masters study in the UK was noted by some students to be an important factor.

I came because there weren't enough options in Canada, you waste less time doing your Masters [in the UK] because two years are compressed into one. Adele (SPS, Canada)

For some, however, there seems to be an interest in a short-term Masters programme and an interest in having a longer period to 'learn more' and experience the country more.

Once I come here I realise that one year study is too short. You can't really experience everything. I feel I want to stay here for a while, so I can see. Fang (EDU, China)

The one-year length of study seems important as a rationale for the students before the actual experience of studying which seems to be the stage when the idea of a longer period seems to appeal. The main reason the students gave was that a longer period of time could help them to make the most of their time abroad.

6.2.2 Theme 2: Programme accessibility

The students found the Masters programme accessible for various reasons discussed below.

6.2.2.1 Language of instruction

Except for Bond (BUS, Singapore) all the interviewees explicitly mentioned the importance of language as a motivation to study in the UK. The context of meaning ascribed to the use of the word 'language' is discussed under two main motivations for choosing to study in the UK.

The first reason pertains to non-native English students who are required to undertake language tests. This relates to the number of language-based tests required to study in the UK. As Qian explains, she needed to do only one English language test (IELTS) as part of the conditions to study in the UK (and Australia). She considers this to be better than the US system where international students are

required to pass two English language tests, the TOEFL, and GMAT entry exams, which are also conducted in English.

The second reason relates all the students. This pertains to their ability to communicate in English. In this case, monolingualism was an important factor in the students' choice of study destination. For example, despite persuasion from her parent, Mariana explains why she choose to study for her Masters in the UK:

I know there are a lot of this kind of Masters in France, but I don't speak French. My mom is always saying you should study French because France is an amazing country for Masters studies and they have very good universities and Masters, but language is a barrier. Maybe one day I'll study French. **Mariana (LLC, Colombia)**

This section however explores further nuances in the student perception of the importance of English as a medium of instruction in their host destination.

Language difficulties [in English-speaking countries] faced by international students is widely reported in the literature. Not surprisingly, some participants (Shi, Jun and Yin) express their intention to develop their English language skills during their study in the UK. Institutions across the UK have responded to the needs of such students by providing pre-sessional English language courses for international students.

However, efforts to address the language difficulties faced by some international students focus on students who are non-native English speakers, and who consider English as their second language. There is hardly any attention given to non-native English-speaking students from countries with historical ties to the UK, who have adopted the English language as their first language. Students from two such countries, India and Nigeria provide interesting insights as they regard English as their first language:

English is my first language. Yoruba is my mother tongue. **Bola (SPS, Nigeria)**

I will consider English to be my first language largely because I think in English having studied in the medium that I sort of would consider it the first language. My mother tongue is Bengali, but I hardly use it because I've not stayed there because my family travelled a lot. So, I will consider my second language to be Hindi which is the national language for India. **Indira (EDU, India)**

It is unclear whether Bola and Indira and students in a similar position need support in a native-English learning environment. However, what is clear is if they do need support, I did not find this flagged up in the literature.

Lan also provides an additional aspect of language that is worth mentioning:

*I think that learning a language is a tool for new knowledge and it was a great way to speak to other people, but I think that language is not the knowledge itself, so if I can use language to learn more specific knowledge it may be beneficial in my future work. **Lan (BUS, China)***

It is important for students to develop their English language skills to support their academic progression. It is perhaps also useful to note that there may be missed opportunities in assessing student learning if there is no distinction between language skills and understanding in terms of student knowledge. This is an area that perhaps warrants further thought in future studies.

6.2.2.2 Pre-enrolment prerequisites

Aside from English language, there are other pre-enrolment prerequisites to study in UK educational institutions. However, the participants stress the importance of four pre-enrolment prerequisites: 'flexibility of entry requirement', 'application deadline for UK universities', 'no age barrier' and 'visa requirements'. Related to discussions in 3.3.2, it is worth mentioning that some students (Indira, Patricia and Bola) alluded to the importance of visa requirements as instrumental to the choice of institution.

Flexibility of entry requirements

Many students were enrolled on programmes unrelated to their undergraduate programme. For example, Bond, an aeronautical engineer, was studying on a BUS Masters, and Shi, a Law graduate, was studying on the LLC Masters.

Jun provides a reason for leaving her home country which resonates with other students (Sofia, Lan)

*The reason why I did not continue my education in China is because it is very difficult to change to a different programme that is different from what I did at undergraduate level at post graduate level in China, and that was one of the reasons I came to study in the UK. **Jun (BUS, China)***

Additionally, Harshad considered he would not have been able to fulfil his ambition to study abroad if non-academic entry requirements at the university were not

flexible, for example, in terms of the number of references required to support his application – as he said that this was not possible from other institutions.

Application deadline

The application deadline [later in the year] was also an important pre-enrolment requirement for students who may have otherwise chosen to study in another country like the USA (Bond). Related to the English entrance exams discussed as part of the language requirement, for Lan, the time saved for not doing two exams to study in the US was a motivation for choosing the UK. This gave her ample time to prepare her application. Sofia (EDU, Colombia) provides an example of the level of the seriousness attached to preparing the application – she left her job as a teacher and spent six months preparing for her English test and application to study in the UK.

'No age barrier' to enrol on the Masters

Indira (EDU, India) was unsure whether her age (38 years) would be an impediment to her ambition towards enrolling on the Masters. For Abby (LLC, USA) who found out she was the youngest on her programme, it was important to her that age was not a barrier to embark on the Masters, and she said the Masters would allow her to get the knowledge and experience that would have taken her longer to obtain in her field. 'No age barrier' to enrol on the Masters was therefore an important aspect in terms of accessibility to further education for students, such as Indira for whom this was an issue in her home country. Perhaps universities could clearly outline the accessibility of their courses to international students who are not necessarily familiar with, in this case, age entry requirements in the UK.

Visa requirements

The majority of the interviewees (Harshad, BUS, India, being the only exception), had multiple offers of admission to study at universities in the UK. **Bola (SPS, Nigeria)** described having to select one university before being able to apply for her study visa:

I had a lot of offers and I started deliberating, 'which one should I go to?' because when preparing for visa you have to take just one university, so I had to decide. So it was through trying to apply for a visa that I decided to come to this university as it was the highest ranked.

As the quote above suggests, processing a study visa is a crucial pre-enrolment activity. However, the gap in the literature with regard to students' pre-arrival activities has been discussed in 3.3.2. It is therefore pertinent to mention that thirteen out of the nineteen students interviewed talked about their visa. However, in all the instances, the students were not asked to do so. For example, see dialogue with **Adele (SPS, Canada)**:

Interviewer: *What advice would you give to someone coming here to study?*

Adele: *Well, if you're international, you've definitely got to figure out the right place to do your banking. That's so irritating here especially with our dollar being so low. Do your exchange rate things before you get here. Figure out a place to live before you come because it's harder when you get here. Also make friends with people in your programme, try to figure out a way to talk to people because it's really helpful to have that core group because you are really likely to see them a lot. I think that's it.*

Interviewer: *That's a lot of good advice for someone who is coming for the first time.*

Adele: *Yeah, especially if you're international. Make sure you sort out the visa in advance, so you don't have to pay any extra fees. You have to pay like so much more money to not only get the visa, but to get it rushed because I had to get mine last minute.*

Interviewer: *Oh ok, that's if you want like a fast track one.*

Adele: *Yeah. That's why I say get that done first because you won't have to worry about it. And don't ever go through (names a UK airport). Just go straight to Edinburgh, just do direct!*

It is generally known that prospective students ask their friends about their study experience (for example, Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). Similarly, some interviewees mentioned that they have been contacted by their friends to share their study experience. Hence, the students were asked about the advice they would give to prospective students to further elicit responses about their experience. To this end, Adele raises key points about students' pre-arrival activities, including the high cost and potential issues with visas. This underpins the importance of research into this aspect of the students' experience. Currently, this is not the case. This, however, suggests that the conceptual model of the international student lifecycle (proposed in Chapter 3) is useful to highlight gaps in under-researched aspects of the international student experience.

6.2.2.3 Geographical location of the host country

The location of the institution was a factor in terms of accessibility as outlined below:

Convenience of continuing Masters after UG

Mariana moved to study for her Masters in the UK after finishing her undergraduate in Spain.

If I don't do it [Masters] now I probably would not do it because if I go back to Colombia it is going to be hard for me then to come back to Europe. Mariana (LLC, Colombia)

It seems interesting to note that being present on a continent is seen by Mariana to offer an easier transition for her as an international student to progress on to Masters study rather going back home. Jackie presents a case of student transition to Masters study within the host country.

I began university thinking that I would not do any more but when I first got to the UK I figured I would go straight into working from university but I really enjoy study and I decided I was not ready to know what I wanted to put my energy into so I thought that I would keep studying. That just continued on to the Masters.

As a dual American/British citizen, Jackie (SPS, USA) is classed as an international student under UK rules mainly for the purposes of paying international fees.

However, she asserts that '*I am totally American... having lived in America my whole life*'. This probably explains why she responded (through the gatekeeper at her school) to the explicit invite for non-EU students to participate in the study.

Proximity of study location to home country

When asked the question: '*So why did you make your decision to study in the UK?*'

Alim replied: Because the institutions are good. As I said the programmes are as I wanted it to be. And it was one year. It was [also] not that far. I didn't consider going to America because of that.

It is interesting that Alim (SPS, Turkey) stressed the proximity to his country as one of the reasons for choosing to study in the UK instead of the USA. However, none of the other students mention proximity as a factor influencing their decision to study in the UK. This is interesting as geographical proximity is considered as a motivating factor for international students. For example, the study on student motivation to study abroad by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) looked at the importance of proximity to the host destination, Australia. The students in the study from Indonesia (62%) see geographical proximity as an important motivator to study abroad. This was less of a concern to the students from other countries (China, India and Taiwan).

Though not mentioned by the authors, their study shows that students from countries farther away from the host country (Australia) did not consider proximity to be important. Also, in my study, proximity seems less of a motivation for international students who have travelled a long way from their home country to study in the UK or elsewhere.

Synopsis

The findings show that the students valued opportunities to have practical work experience either as a work-based dissertation (WBD) or industry-related projects offered as part of the Masters programme. However, such opportunities were not necessarily embedded on their programme. The students' discourses reflected the importance of the practical work embedded on their programme in relation to developing their employability (all the LLC students). In many cases, the opportunity to engage in work-related projects was a 'draw' to the Masters programme. Unsurprisingly, some students (in SPS and EDU) expressed their disappointment due to the lack of opportunity to engage in practical work. The students gave two reasons for their discontent - the lack of clarity on the School's website with regard to the requirements to do the WBD, and the lack of available projects which fit their interest and area of study. Hence, although data collected from the co-ordinator of WBD projects across the university shows that the highest number of WBD were done at SPS, none of the six participants from SPS participated in a WBD.

Students across all four programmes seem to have taken diligent care to look at the modules available on the school website before selecting their programme. This highlights the importance of clarity of information presented on university websites. Other important aspects of the programme component include the 'diversity of student cohort', and the one-year length of study'.

Related to programme accessibility, in terms of language, the students gave two motivating factors to study in the UK; monolingualism or the opportunity to develop their proficiency in the English language. I pointed out that identifying English as a first language for an international student may not necessarily equate to having native speaker level proficiency. It is however unclear to what extent this may be an issue in terms of provision of academic support for some students. As one of the students pointed out, language is not knowledge. Whilst an insightful

observation, it is difficult to show your knowledge without a certain level of proficiency in the language of instruction. The students also mentioned key pre-arrival activities, such as processing their study visa as this was a major requirement which determine access to study abroad.

6.3 Category 2: Experiential rationale

The single theme; 'experience a different environment abroad', examined under category 2 encapsulates many facets of a different experience which the students said motivated them to decide to study abroad. As shown below in Table 6:2, this theme resonated in discussions with all the students across all four programmes.

Table 6:2 Experiential rationale: Sub-themes with quotes

| Sub-themes | Quotes | Interviewees |
|----------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Learning & teaching | <i>I expected to learn a lot. To take interesting courses that I had never done before. To be challenged academically by students and staff</i> | Mandy, SPS, South Africa |
| | <i>...learning policy or the situation about people in different countries</i> | Chao, EDU, China |
| Physical environment | <i>Edinburgh ticked the boxed because of the festivals, the beauty of the city...there is so much richness and heritage that is not necessarily just city-related. I came to visit for a weekend and just fell in love and decided to stay</i> | Patricia, LLC, Mexico |
| Multicultural environment | <i>I wanted to experience many different cultures that is only unique in the UK. So, I decided to come here</i> | Lan, BUS, China |
| | <i>Getting to know different people from different countries</i> | Mariana, LLC, Colombia |
| | <i>Experience how different nationalities are when they are abroad as well</i> | Bond, BUS, Singapore |
| | <i>Understand how decision is made in different cultures</i> | Harshad, BUS, India |
| | <i>I looked at the website and its completely different to China and I think that's a good place</i> | Fang, EDU, China |
| | <i>I have to know if I'm good enough [intellectually] in an international environment</i> | Indira, EDU, India |

6.3.1 Theme: Experience of a different environment abroad

In the dialogue box below, Alim uses the word 'different' to emphasize the importance of making sense of his and others' experiences, both as a learning experience and an opportunity to share his own experience.

Alim: As I told you I wanted to experience how Scotland is as well. It is a **different context**. A **different environment**. I wanted to see how it is.

Interviewer: Different context from what?

Alim: From Turkey. It is a **different livelihood**. Like a different world.

Interviewer: Why do you think it would be different?

Alim: I am just sure it is different. It coincides with my reason to go abroad as well. I want to learn about **different cultures**. Like **different experience**. Different people. I want to get to know **different people**. That is why. As I told you, getting to know **different people** from **different countries** in the world helps me to improve my understanding regarding **different contexts**. I have learned about **different experience** of **different things** or **different experiences of the same thing**. Also, it enables me to tell them my own experiences as well. That kind of connection.

Interviewer: I'm going to divide that into two. Why is it important for you to learn about other people's experiences and why is it important for them to learn about your experiences?

Alim: It is reciprocal in one sense. Like when I learn about **other people's experiences** it enhances my knowledge about myself as well and that applies to them as well. Secondly, I want to learn about people's cultures.

Interviewer: Why?

Alim: Because as I said before the **difference of cultures** enable you to perceive your own **culture in a different way**. Understanding what you consider as normal or natural in another sense. (emphasis added)

6.3.1.1 Different learning and teaching experience

There was a strong sense from all the interviewees that they wanted experiences which were different from the norm in their country. They emphasise different areas where they expect to experience 'something different'. For example, Alim and Chao stressed that their academic experience was very important:

It is important for me to come to here to have another experience of a country and to have another experience of a university. And I am happy about it because you experience a different kind of teaching mentality. You

experience a different kind of handling different literatures which might not be provided to you when you study in your native context. Alim (SPS, Turkey)

I want to get more knowledge about the teaching method and broaden my horizon about learning policy or the situation about people in different countries and especially the children. Chao (EDU, China)

As the first interviews were conducted at the end of the first semester it is useful to use the quote by Mandy which reflects how some students (Indira, Sofia, Bola, Jackie) link their academic expectation to their actual experience.

I expected to learn a lot. To take interesting courses that I had never done before. To be challenged academically by students and staff. To gain new skills. It's been ok. I've been a bit disappointed with a few things. I had thought I would have more opportunities to research and I guess that I found it quite rushed. I would have learned more through more assessments. But it has been good to learn to take my learning into my own hands and not be coddled. And to make the most of things. It's good. It's just very different. Mandy (SPS, South Africa)

6.3.1.2 Different physical environment

The quotes from Lan, Patricia and Jackie provide important examples of why they choose their study location:

At first I really wanted to go to London but I decided to come here because it was very attractive and the architecture is really beautiful when I look at pictures on the internet... university life is a part of the city and if you don't enjoy the city, you won't enjoy the campus life. Lan (BUS, China)

Yes. I got accepted into all of them [four universities] I guess the city is what made me make the final call. I was reading about it. And everyone said it was amazing and it was great for students. Patricia (LLC, Mexico)

I wanted to move somewhere else and I just like the feeling of Edinburgh as a compromise between having the city aspect and people. If I had gotten into the other course but not Edinburgh I don't know if I would have done a Masters. Jackie (SPS, USA)

It was interesting to note that students' interest extended beyond the academic context of their study abroad experience. Chao (EDU, China) also talks at length about his interest in experiencing the beautiful environment he had seen in books before embarking on his Masters study abroad.

6.3.1.3 Multicultural environment

The essence of the city as the students described is linked to the cultural

environment as noted below by Mariana who had previously studied on a one-year language course in the UK five years before returning for her Masters:

I really want to go back to the UK cos I really enjoyed it. I mean the culture and the people. The cultural environment is different. Mariana (LLC, Colombia)

Descriptions of a different cultural environment are interwoven with living in a multicultural society in the UK. Mariana further clarified what she meant by her reference to the people living in the UK:

I think the UK is very good in that you have different cultures and people from all over the world that you meet in one city. That doesn't happen in Colombia, for instance, everyone is Colombian. But here you find Chinese, Indians, Mexicans, from all over. It is very multicultural, and I find that really nice and interesting. Mariana (LLC, Colombia)

Reflecting on their experience in their country, some students showed their awareness of 'multiculturalism at home':

In Singapore, even though we have different kinds of cultures there is a certain mindset or frame of mind that is in Singapore. Bond (BUS, Singapore)

However, the students (for example, Lan, Bond, Mariana) were interested in multiculturalism in an international context and Lan explained why she believed it was important to have a multicultural experience:

If I am always in China I could not understand why so many people think one way. I also see many different things and I think the biggest experience for me to study abroad is that it has changed the way that I think about the world. Now I am more open to different opinions from different people. Even if we have different opinions, I think that it is good that we can communicate and change our minds. Lan (BUS, China)

Bond provides some interesting insight as to why it is important not only to interact with other cultures abroad but to also see how people from other cultures adapt to living in a different environment:

It's good to experience how different nationalities are when they are abroad as well how do they adapt to the differences they are facing at that point in time. It is something I think we should learn from one another like how they adapt. For me adaptability is very important. Bond (BUS, Singapore)

Interestingly, Abby (LLC, USA) who asserted that the culture in the USA is similar to Scotland had this to say:

I know Scotland is not hugely culturally different from where I'm from but it's still enough of a jump that to be able to do it at this age I think it's just helpful for down the road.

6.3.2 Perceptions of the value of a different experience for the present and future

Abby later clarified that her expectation was to have opportunities to develop professional networks which would be helpful in building her career 'down the road'.

This view was unequivocally reiterated by Harshad:

Today is a globalised world. If you want to work at a global level you need to understand different cultures, different perspectives. You need to understand how decision is made in different cultures. The organisations are working in global level and if you want work for an organisation at the global level you need to understand how the process works. Harshad (BUS, India)

However, the student conceptualisation of a different experience was not always linked to their future career. For Qian, her intrinsic interest in foreign cultures has a major influence on her motivation for studying abroad:

*I could do the Masters degree in China because there are very good universities, but I just didn't want to, I wanted to go abroad to experience a different life, some fresh ideas and a totally different view to see the world and I love this. I think that the one-year life here will influence my future expectation for my life because in the UK I see that I can search for things that I really want. It's kind of abstract, sorry. But, sometimes an experience in a country you are not familiar with will influence your whole life because **only when you live away from what you are familiar with, you can see what you really want** [emphasis added]. Qian (SPS, China)*

Ironically, Indira faced pressure from home for 'wanting a different experience'.

It was not an easy decision because I was being bombarded by questions, why are you doing this? Why do you need to go there and study? Why are you not studying in India? I tried to tell them that I have to get a different perspective. I have to know if I'm good enough. Indira (EDU, India)

For Bola, studying in a different and multicultural environment enabled her to become keenly aware of the disparity between her experiences and that of her peers.

I am having different view of what is happening at home. In my class, I think we are from different worlds. They are from the UK, the US, and central Europe where they don't have the problems I have. They have an established system back at home. We don't. Bola (SPS, Nigeria)

According to Bola, some of her courses look at the developmental challenges in Africa. Bola talked about seeing her classmates as being representatives of the donor countries.

Part of what we are discussing in class is that low income countries look for Aid everywhere. We are like beggars because we are looking up to them [donor countries]. I don't want us to be beggars again. So, I don't think we [classmates] have a common ground really. Sometimes when they talk about it in class I feel embarrassed. Bola (SPS, Nigeria)

It was unclear if Bola approached anyone on her programme to discuss how she was relating to the course content or if she considered it necessary to talk to anyone.

Synopsis

Though the students did not know to what extent there will be a difference in the learning environment in the UK and their home context, they believed it will expand their learning capability. It is therefore worth mentioning that in their review of the literature on international student experience in the UK, Lillyman and Bennett (2014) criticise the pervasiveness of the deficit perspective of the international student experience which is mainly linked to the stress of adjusting to the academic and cultural environment in the UK. Ironically, the participants were looking forward to the different experience with the expectation that it will disrupt their understanding developed in their home environment. As the first interviews were held at the end of the first semester, it is important to note that the students still clearly stated that before starting their studies they expected to experience 'something different'. For the most part, the different experience was linked to their personal growth and development. The attributes the students said they were developing as a result of studying abroad in a different learning and cultural environment are presented in Chapter 8. This does not mean that the students did not find the learning process to be challenging and disquieting as in the case of Bola who seemed to feel disconnected from her peers who were from a 'different' world and what she described as a superior context of reference with regard to the content of her course which is not explored in the study.

While all the students emphasised the importance of having a different experience it was difficult to capture entirely what they meant by 'different'. The range as well as the elusiveness of what 'a different experience' entailed is reflected in myriad forms including the educational, cultural and physical environment in the host country (Table 6:2). As Qian (SPS, China) puts it, having a different experience as a motivation to study abroad is valued for many reasons, and is 'kind of abstract'.

6.4 Category 3: Aspirational rationale

When asked about their motivation for studying abroad, it was interesting to hear some of the participants point to how they expect their learning on the programme to broaden their horizons and help them to develop in their aspiration to change society within and beyond their home country. The aspirational rationale is explored under the theme and sub-themes outlined in Table 6:3.

Table 6:3 Aspirational rationale: Theme and sub-themes

| Theme | Sub-themes |
|--|---|
| | Giving back |
| Making a difference within national and international contexts | Challenging/changing cultural stereotypes Leadership position Engaging with global issues |

6.4.1 Theme: Making a difference within national and international contexts

Aside from wanting to have a different experience, some students (Alim, Sofia, Patricia, Jackie, Mariana, Mandy and Bola) affirm their aspirations to actively seek to contribute to society in both national (home) and international (including host country) contexts. Their aspirations explored below are deemed important as they linked their motivation to study abroad to their future aspirations.

6.4.1.1 *Giving back*

Some of the students see the Masters as a stepping stone towards their vision for their future which is not limited to a job or career:

I chose to come here as part of my growth process because I wanted to be in a new place and learn new things. The reverse side of that is being able to give back to other people. The two is linked because my goal to be able to do what I can do for the world is not necessarily separate from my self-growth. I want to be able to bring all of those things together. Jackie (SPS USA)

It was interesting that Jackie considers herself someone who could reach out to those who had not engaged, for example, in educational mobility like her. She further explains:

We are inhabiting the same space and we should work together in a more like inclusive, engaged way. It just has to be started because like no one in the government is telling you to think this way and be part of this, so it has to be us. Jackie (SPS USA)

Jackie did not expand on who she was referring to as 'us' starting the 'movement' for a different way of approaching things. However, it was clear that she did not see herself only as an international student studying abroad. She believes she has a vision and the study abroad experience gives her a chance to find like-minded individuals to work with. It was not clear at the time of the interview whether Jackie had achieved her aims. However, it was interesting that she had a clear motivation to study abroad which went beyond academic reasons.

6.4.1.2 Challenging/changing cultural stereotypes

Like Jackie, some other students (for example, Alim, Mariana, Bola) expressed their hopes that the Masters programme will help them to achieve more than getting an educational qualification. For some, studying abroad was tied to their hopes to contribute to a better understanding of their country from a global perspective. For example, Mariana provides three underlying reasons for wanting to promote Colombian culture. The first has to do with what she describes as the 'dark' depiction of Colombian culture in films:

A lot of people have the image of a very dark side of Colombian society that's been seen in Colombian cinema, but that's changing. Other types of films are showing more theme stories and I think the world needs to see that. They need to see what is been made in Colombia.

Primarily, Mariana was interested in how she could change stereotypes about Colombia while studying abroad. Relatedly, the second reason looks at the need for an awareness of the diversity of cultural voices in the world.

There are other cinemas being made, Asian cinema, African cinema, Latin America cinema. Let's show all the visions of the world and it is important that people see that because it's not only the two sides of the world that is Europe and the United States. There are other countries and other people that are also expressing themselves. I think it is very exciting to work on that.
Mariana (LLC, Colombia)

A third reason is that Mariana believes her time abroad can be used to understand perceptions of her country/culture and to relate her observations back home, ostensibly to encourage a change back home.

I think it's good to get a distance from what you are and then reflect on that and then go back. And say look this is what I saw. This is what people think of us that is wrong. We need to change it. We need to do this. **Mariana (LLC, Colombia)**

As per the ethical conventions for the project, I did not share details of any interviewees. As far as I am aware, neither Shi nor Mariana knew who I interviewed in their class. Interestingly, Shi, who is Mariana's classmate mentioned how her impression of South America, specifically, Mexico and Colombia, had changed based on her interaction with her classmates from the two countries.

Before I met the Mexican girl and (mentions Mariana's real name) from Colombia, I had an impression of South America only from films and textbooks and now I actually met them. She says Mexico is not all like in Hollywood films where it's only drugs. I think when you know them you can have a feel of how the country looks like. How the country really is like and not just the impression given you by Hollywood. **Shi (LLC, Taiwan)**

It was interesting also that while Mariana had talked extensively about her intention to share the positive aspect of Colombian culture, this did not come up in the conversation with Patricia when she talked about her country, Mexico. However, Shi refers specifically to Patricia's views on how Mexico is portrayed in films. This suggests that discourses between international students go beyond academic matters. For example, Alim states that, his experience is '*reciprocal in one sense. Like when I learn about other people's experiences it enhances my knowledge about myself and that applies to them as well*'. This is congruent with the intention of other students like Jun who said:

I wanted to come and study abroad, because coming abroad gives me the opportunity to experience the local culture here also to learn other cultures. **Jun (BUS, China)**

Similarly, in relation to cultural stereotypes, Yin describes an event in her student housing:

My flat mates from Singapore, Greece and Romania could not distinguish between Japanese and Chinese, thinking they are all Asia. So, she thinks that sushi is my cultural food and I said no I eat Chinese food and I eat Taiwanese food and sushi is Japanese food. So, I taught her how to make sushi. It is still a good thing, I mean not really, but it is hard to tell a group of people apart. **Yin (BUS, China)**

The findings showed that the students had opportunities to discuss cultural stereotypes both in the class context and in shared accommodation. These

opportunities fulfilled the aspirational rationale for studying abroad for some of the students.

6.4.1.3 Leadership position

Sofia and Bola articulated how they feel the Masters abroad will equip them for positions of influence in their home country in the future.

*I need the Masters degree whether here or somewhere else. I need it if I want to actually start building a path to get to where I want. And the only place I found a programme I was interested in that matched my interest was this programme. In the long term, I will have my own primary school or be influential enough to change education curriculum through the government policies. But that is a really long-term goal. I am trying to build myself a career strong enough to present myself as an expert in the future in terms of education. **Sofia (EDU, Colombia)***

Similarly, Mariana said her Masters could contribute to her future ambition to develop awareness of Colombia culture abroad.

*I'll like to work for my country you know. I mean if I could give something to Colombia to make it grow that will be like my dream, to show what's being made in Colombia. So, I'll probably go back. Or my dream job will be working with Colombian cinema abroad showing it here in Europe. That will be even better; kind of promoting Colombian cinema abroad. **Mariana (LLC, Colombia)***

It is important, however, to point out again that the first interview was conducted three months into the Masters programme. Interestingly, within that period Bola seemed to have undergone a transformation in terms of her aspirations for the future:

*I never knew that I will be exposed to policy. I didn't know what policy entails. I wanted to study Masters just for me to get a change of career. Better money. Live in a comfortable place. Be fulfilled in life. But the fact is that my course is now opening me up to what you can do when you are in a position of decision-making. So, I am now thinking of being in government. I pray that I get in a position of authority. That is when I can use this [Masters] certificate more to help your people. We should have a change of mentality. It's not just about the good life. Your focus should be to change something in the society. To want to make a change. **Bola (SPS, Nigeria)***

Bola ascertains that she envisions a future position of authority to enable her to contribute to development in her country. This seems to go beyond her initial expectations and motivations for embarking on the Masters. She seemed happy with what she describes as a new wave of possibilities directly linked to her Masters abroad.

Some students (for example, Abby, Mandy, Patricia and Yin) also talked about having a leadership position during the Masters, for example as a class representative. The students reiterated the importance of having leadership opportunities in an international context, as preparation for working in an international organisation.

6.4.1.4 Engaging with global issues

Alim was clear about his intention to progress on to PhD after his Masters. At the same time, he explained his interest in global perspectives in education:

*I would like to say that we are now living in a more global environment and you have to have knowledge about different cultures and regions and also connections with those people. So, what I hope is that I will find those through my studies here. Even if not all but some at least. **Alim (SPS, Turkey)***

Sofia seems to be thinking in a similar way when she talks about the influence of global rankings on local perspectives (this will be discussed in detail in the next section). She also mentions others in her class talking about the same 'problem':

*Who says what quality is in education? I did think a little bit about that before I came, which is why I find it so interesting to see in my class it is not only me thinking about it. It's not a problem only in my home country but it is something around the world. **Sofia (EDU, Colombia)***

Related to Alim's observation, Jackie also mentions how she wants to probe in her dissertation the impact of global transfer of cultural values:

*At the moment I'm thinking of doing my dissertation on how communications work in foreign aid programmes. What the kind of social cultural information is and how these things affect the implementation of the foreign aid programme so you're not just passing on development to this country, you're also passing on social, cultural values that you might not really understand are being communicated and I think it's not really looked at, so I'm really interested in looking at that. **Jackie (SPS, USA)***

When probed further, Alim (SPS, Turkey) reiterated that studying abroad provided a huge benefit as an opportunity to engage in and to interrogate dominant discourses:

Alim: *The huge benefit I really expect to have is what I have told you before. Here and the US have leading scholars all around the world. The research produced here is much more compared to all around the world like the funding and all that stuff. But what they have more importantly is the power to value it. The power to assert a certain value. And being in that kind of environment allows you to understand both how research is worldwide and*

also being in the local environment. The power is here. You have to take the knowledge by being here and to understand how ideas flow all over the world

Interviewer: *And what will you do with that knowledge?*

Alim: *I think for it to be meaningful we have to struggle against it.*

Interviewer: *Is that something you want to do in your future?*

Alim: *Yes, I do*

Interviewer: *In what sense?*

Alim: *In every sense*

Due to the focus of my project, it did not seem necessary to probe further how Alim aspires to engage with dominant educational discourses. It is however interesting to know that other students like Jackie and Sofia including her [Sofia's] unnamed class members were also interrogating political issues from a global perspective.

Synopsis

Three months into the Masters, the students were able to articulate their aspirations and long-term plans in terms of giving back to the society, challenging cultural stereotypes, leadership positions at home and during their study abroad. Some students shared their interest in and intent to contribute to global discourses around equality and inclusiveness and power relations.

Prior to starting the Masters the participants were nurturing different aspirations including positioning themselves as a connector for people and building a global movement (Jackie), leadership positioning (Yin) and interrogating global educational discourses (Alim, Sofia). They seemed very expectant to achieve at least some of their aspirations during the time of their study. For example, Mariana (LLC, Colombia) talked extensively about her aspirations to provide alternative narratives to cultural stereotypes about her country. Interestingly, Mariana's classmate (Shi, Taiwan) mentioned how her perceptions about Colombia (and Mexico) have changed since meeting students from these countries during her Masters. Shi considered this to be one of the benefits of studying abroad. In a similar vein, students from across all programmes talked about changing perceptions and broadening horizons. This suggests that the Masters provides a platform for some to achieve their aspirations.

Interestingly, Bola who had self-oriented aspirations prior to starting the Masters had changed her outlook based on the knowledge she was getting from her

course.

Considering Jackie and Mariana's aim to use their dissertation to explore key global and national issues, Masters student dissertations could provide a veritable source of knowledge and information worth sharing widely. It was not apparent from the findings how Masters dissertations are disseminated within and beyond institution.

Though the findings suggest that students were realising some of their aspirations during the Masters, it was unclear whether support was available at the institution for students to share and perhaps develop their aspirations during their study abroad.

6.5 Category 4: Economic rationale

The economic rationale divides into two broad themes: the financial costs of the Masters; and the expected value ascribed to obtaining the Masters in relation to economic and personal benefits. The themes and sub-themes related to the economic rationale are outlined below in Table 6:4.

Table 6:4 Economic rationales: Themes and sub-themes

| Themes | Sub-themes |
|---|--|
| Financial and personal cost of the Masters degree | Organisational and/or personal financial support Ranking as a signal of credibility to employers and funders |
| Value ascribed to obtaining a Masters degree | The Masters degree as a measure of competence and self-achievement The Masters degree as a signpost for future employers The Masters degree as an important criterion for career progression or future PhD study |

6.5.1 Theme 1: Financial and personal cost of the Masters degree

All the students explicitly mentioned the financial and personal costs of the Masters. The majority provided specific details regarding how the financial cost of the Masters underpinned their rationale to select their current university (for example, lower living

costs than London). Mandy (SPS, South Africa) proved to be an exception in that she had received a scholarship to study a similar Masters programme at another UK university, but declined the offer. She offered two reasons for her decision – the ranking of the university (discussed later) and interest in the programme content. The narrative below reflects her views when she was interviewed three months into her Masters programme:

Mandy: *I didn't go to the other university. Now, I regret that to be honest, because that would have been fully paid for, everything. And I didn't realise how much I will be stressed up by money and debt. I kind of thought, do the course you love. And now, I mean, I made that decision when I was working full-time. When I think about that, I want to hit myself in the head because every day, like its better now but for the first few weeks of the semester I got like issues with anxiety. And it's just been thinking about how much money this is costing and how I have to experience everything and make the best of everything. It is so true and it's a kind of pressure. I was financially independent for two years and now I have to rely on my parents again.*

Mandy further said:

By studying here, and after getting the degree I can apply for things [job-related] I would not normally apply for. Also, hopefully at the end of the year I will get research experience...Because it is so much money and sometimes I don't know if it's worth it. I mean the rest of Europe has good universities and they don't charge as much.

Interviewer: *Did you know how expensive it was before you came?*

Mandy: *I knew. I was an idiot.*

Mandy further talked about her frustration because her “currency was spiralling out of control” which she had not anticipated before embarking on the Masters. She had moved out of her student accommodation into a family friend’s house as at the time of the interview. As I had pointed out in Chapter 5, one of the LLC interviewees had introduced Mandy to me. It was interesting to hear Mandy talk extensively about the challenges and benefits of studying abroad, which are mentioned where relevant as part of the findings. This further enriched my research findings.

Financial cost of studying in the UK was a deterrent for **Mariana (LLC, Colombia)**, who had wanted to study at undergraduate level in the UK:

I know that the education here is really good and I know that the environment is amazing. Actually I wanted to do my undergrad in the UK but it was too expensive for three years. It was like no. I went to Spain because it was a bit cheaper so I thought I'll do my undergraduate in Spain and probably a Masters in the UK.

Furthermore, as the quotes below show, students across the programmes stressed the huge financial and personal cost of the Masters, which also underpins their perception that 'the Masters should be worth it'.

Well, it's a lot of money to go into and I wanted this for so long that I didn't want to get it wrong. Patricia (LLC, Mexico)

To be realistic, because I pay my tuition fees for this programme, I must study hard to learn knowledge well. To not make my money wasted. I am not comfortable because my parents pay for my tuition fees because they work very hard to bring me up. Lan (BUS, China)

It is very important because you are spending so much money and putting in one year of my life. It should be worthwhile, rather than doing it just because everybody is doing it. It's hard-earned money. £16,000! So, when I am willing to put in that amount of money, forget about money, it's about the time I'm staying away from my family. I'm staying in a foreign country in which I had not experienced the winter before because I came during summers. The climate is taking me off balance. So, when I am making so much of an effort to be somewhere the place should be worth it. Indira (EDU, India)

Aside from the financial cost, Indira provides a vivid picture of the personal cost of the Masters:

Interviewer: *What do you define by worth it?*

Indira: *Worth it for me at the end of the day means that all the tears that I have cried, all the pains that I have felt and reading the materials. At the end of the day when I hold that degree in my hands even, hold the diploma in my hand for that matter, I will hold it with the pride that I have actually put myself into the process, and not just make a superficial work of it. Indira (EDU, India)*

6.5.1.1 Organisational and/or personal financial support

Almost all the interviewees were self-funded either through personal funds, loans or parental support. A brief snapshot of the cost of the Masters to the interviewees bears mentioning.

Indira (EDU, India) – self-funded

A 38-year-old mature self-funded student said she had committed most of her life savings to do the Masters. She was living with her sister to offset the cost of living. Having studied Zoology (BSc) due to parental pressure, she embarked on the Masters to fulfil a lifelong dream. As the only student who paid for the Masters completely by herself Indira mentioned funding as one of the challenges of returning to education as an adult learner.

It's very difficult and hard because it's completely self-sponsored and not a scholarship thing, I've put most of my savings into this course. Indira (EDU, India)

Bola (SPS, Nigeria) – self-funded and parental support

Bola had worked as a medical doctor for almost 10 years before embarking on the Masters. Her life savings were not enough, so as a single parent she had to get financial support from her parents. Her three children were left in her parents' care at home as she could not afford to support herself and her dependents during the study.

Abby, LLC, USA - Partial funding & Bond (BUS, Singapore) - full funding

Abby and Bond are the only interviewees who received funding for the Masters programme. They stressed that they could not have embarked on the Masters without the funding. Abby had received partial funding from the university. She said this was the only reason she could approach her parents to cover the balance of the funds needed. Bond received full funding for the Masters from his employers. For this reason, he is beholden to the terms of a bond to work for five years for the employer. For Bond, studying abroad was not an option without the government scholarship:

My family is not very wealthy and based on my experience I don't believe I have sufficient means to come abroad. It was more because of the scholarship that was awarded because without the scholarship I would not have the capability or the ability to pay the tuition fees. Bond (BUS, Singapore)

Adele (SPS, Canada), Patricia (LLC, Mexico), Mariana (SPS, Colombia): Loan from home country

When asked about funding, Adele who got a loan to pursue her Masters from her country had this to say:

Ultimately it is if you can afford to come. I mean even if I had all these things and I really wanted to go, I need to make sure that I can afford it. So that was the one thing that mattered the most. Adele (SPS, Canada)

All other students interviewed have financial support, mainly from their parents.

Chao (EDU, China), Harshad (BUS, India) and Jackie (SPS, USA) – parental support

Some interviewees who were fully funded by their parents said they were not expecting their parents to fund future educational pursuits.

Seven students mentioned names of institutions which in some cases were their preferred choice, but they did not go to the institution because they were more expensive either in terms of the fees or (in most cases) the location (London) due to living costs. The Masters was valued by the students who had made financial and time commitments to study on the Masters programme. Unsurprisingly, the students reiterate the financial cost of the Masters as a motivation to make the most of it.

Because I am probably not going to study again. So, I will like to make the most of it. I will probably pay for it forever **Mandy (SPS, South Africa)**

To this end, for reasons related also to the economic rationale, the students talked about ranking as part of the motivation for choosing to study at a particular institution. For example, the students talked about the value employers in their countries attach to a Masters degree obtained from a highly ranked university.

6.5.1.2 Ranking as a signal of credibility to employers and funders

As earlier mentioned, **Mandy (SPS, South Africa)** who was offered a full scholarship at another university declined the offer in favour of studying at a higher ranked university. Interestingly, the Masters programme at the two universities were similar. Yet, she chose the non-funded option. At the time of the interview she said:

I think ranking was important because that was one of the main reasons why I didn't go to the other university. The other university had a good reputation but not really for the course. It had a good reputation for the sciences and stuff. This university was like my dream one. So, I guess the ranking did pull the sway between the two.

Considering the financial cost of the Masters which Mandy said was a constant source of worry, it was ironic that she had passed on the opportunity to do her Masters in another UK university, due to ranking. This highlights the 'sway' ranking has on students' decision regarding a choice of study destination.

Unsurprisingly, all students interviewed mentioned ranking as an important factor in their choice of Masters programme at their chosen university. They mainly asserted that this was because ranking was important to employers back in their country.

*The ranking of this university in China is very high. That also influenced my decision. I don't know why. It's very weird, but when you apply for a job, the HR really think highly of a well-known university and a good ranking. They don't really care about distinction and they pretty much think that A and B are the same. Maybe distinction matters but B and C and considered pretty much the same. I think that it is very common knowledge in China. Everyone knows it! When I got all these university offers, I was very confused as to which one I should choose but ranking was one of my reasons to come here because of what companies think. **Jun (BUS, China)***

Jun's comment about the value employers in China placed on ranking was reiterated by all other students from China on all four programmes (Fang, Chao, Lan, Qian) and Shi (LLC) and Yin (BUS) from Taiwan. Yin however described the challenge of choosing between two universities in the UK if one is popular with employers in Asia due to its overall ranking and if the other university has a higher ranking in a particular programme.

*That other university ranking is not higher than here. But the business school in the university is higher in the ranking list. I was wondering if you compare this kind of situation, should I choose this university or (x). I have to choose this university because if I go back to Asia or go back to Taiwan, I will go for an interview for a job for work and people will know that I have studied in the UK and which university. I know that it's crucial. It's the truth. So, I expected myself to have as higher ranking as possible. **Yin (BUS, Taiwan)***

In some cases, as the quotes below show, students did not have a choice but to seek admission to a highly ranked university to obtain either partial or full funding to do the Masters.

*I was asked for the ranking of the university for applying for my loan from Colombia. So, I guess for them it is important in order to give you the money for paying the fees to say you are actually studying in a good university with a good reputation. **Mariana (LLC, Colombia)***

*Well this university is in the top 100 universities in the world. And I had to apply to one of those in order to get the loan that I got. **Patricia (LLC, Mexico)***

*Ranking was important to the scholarship people. Ranking doesn't really matter to me, but it matters to my sponsors. **Bond (BUS, Singapore)***

Ironically, eleven students (including Bond) criticised the idea that ranking was a sign of quality, but they believed the system is what Sofia calls the 'world order'.

I have always thought that quality is such a big issue not only in terms of what quality is but who says this is better than the other. So, I did think a little bit about that before I came, which is why I find it so interesting to see in my

class it is not only me thinking about it, it's not a problem only in my home country but it is something around the world. Sofia (EDU, Colombia)

The students' position in relation to ranking fits with Chao's pragmatic affirmation:

Chinese employers consider ranking. So, we also need to consider it a little bit. Chao (EDU, China)

Crucially, the financial and personal costs of the Masters underpin students' perceptions that the Masters should yield economic rewards. It was therefore not surprising that all the interviewees were concerned about making the most of the Masters in terms of exploring the academic and sociocultural opportunities in the host environment, and gaining a return on their investment. This directly links to the second part of the economic rationale as a benefit for their future career.

6.5.2 Theme 2: Value ascribed to obtaining a Masters degree

The students reiterate their commitment to putting in their best efforts towards achieving the Masters as a measure of their competence, as a signpost to demonstrate such competence to future employers, and career progression.

6.5.2.1 The Masters degree as a measure of competence and self-achievement

Some students considered doing the Masters to demonstrate to themselves their academic capability. This was related to what, for example, Qian perceived as her failure as an undergraduate student.

I think I have the ability to get a better education and that is why I chose a good university in the UK. I wanted a Masters degree in a much more advanced university because my [UG] university was not what I wanted. I just did very badly in the Chinese entrance exam. Qian (SPS, China)

On the other hand, Indira and Mariana did not link their previous study to their Masters. They viewed the Masters programme as a challenge they needed to overcome to demonstrate their capability and build their confidence.

I think doing the Masters is kind of like a challenge that you take and then once you have made it you have that confidence saying yeah, I've been doing a Masters so I can do any job as well. That is giving you confidence and strength in your own professional thing. So, I think the Masters is giving me that confidence that I can undertake whatever job that I have, or they ask me to do. Mariana (LLC, Colombia)

When asked if Indira would recommend someone to do the Masters, she said:

Absolutely! Because it's a huge risk sometimes to put yourself through this. It challenges your entire belief system in terms of your self-perception. There are times when you are pushing yourself. Forget about anybody else pushing you. So, once in a lifetime you need to do that because you need to know what you are capable of. Right now, I know that I am capable of this.
Indira (EDU, India)

When probed further, Indira reiterated:

I have to keep growing as a human being. I have to test my limits of what I can achieve and what I cannot achieve. So, now I can talk about self-actualisation, but I am far from self-actualisation. But at least I know what I am looking for. And sometimes it takes people an entire lifetime to know what they are looking for. So, it's a huge difference.
Indira (EDU, India)

In many instances, the students link their hopes for self-development to their career prospects. It was clear that they did not see these two aims to be in conflict or mutually exclusive.

I am a bit introverted. I don't speak much but I hope that once I leave the space and the environment I know, I hope that I can change when talking in public, or not really change my personality but be braver to do new things I don't normally do before. Yeah, that is what I hope this year living abroad can give me. Also, for the job, the career, I hope that this Masters degree can help to make it easier to find a job.
Shi (LLC, Taiwan)

Ultimately, all the students link how the Masters will help them develop personally and in a professional capacity. The participants were strongly motivated to do their Masters abroad primarily because they believed their undergraduate degree was not enough to make them competitive in the labour market in their home country. The students were also interested in specialising in their field, and exploring courses related to their area of interest. This underpins the students' perception that the Masters will be a measure of their ability and accomplishment for future employers.

6.5.2.2 The Masters degree as a signpost for future employers

Across all four programmes, the students discussed why the Masters was important to demonstrate competence to future employers, as shown below:

Well, mostly because you can't do anything with an undergraduate anymore, you're not going to be able to get a job, you need to have more education.
Adele (SPS, Canada)

Even though I have studied four years I feel like I cannot offer anything. I mean there are 200 other people who got the same degree with me. So, what do I have to offer different from the other people? This is why I wanted

to do the Masters, to step out of the crowd. I think that it will open a lot of doors for me in Colombia. **Mariana (LLC, Colombia)**

The main reason is to provide a good start to my career. If you have Masters you have postgraduate which means you are one level above ordinary graduate. Because I've done my Masters from a very good university and from the UK so, obviously it's like I can understand the work better than the people who have studied in India. **Harshad (BUS, India)**

I started looking abroad to other universities that could actually fulfil what I was needing. Something that will be recognised by future employers. **Sofia, (EDU, Colombia)**

6.5.2.3 The Masters degree as an important criterion for career progression or future PhD study

The value of the Masters was not limited to securing a job after graduation. For example, Bond who was returning to his job saw the Masters as positioning him for career advancement. Many of the students had multiple future plans (Indira, Jackie, and Yin). Some students were interested in pursuing a career in a specific field in education (Sofia and Fang), changing their field (Bola and Shi) or pursuing a PhD (Alim and Chao). The quotes below capture the range of students' career-related plans:

Multiple career plans

I will love to work for an organisation with film and kids. If I go back home I will get a job with film archives or I will get a job with the university which is the easiest job to get. What else? Well I know what I don't want. I can tell you that. I don't want to get a job that I am going have for the rest of my life. **Patricia (LLC, Mexico)**

Right now, the career prospects after doing this Masters are very bright and very huge. I can pursue a career in Marketing. I can pursue a career in Consultancy. I can pursue a career in Finance. There are a wide range of options available after I finish my degree. **Harshad (BUS, India)**

Change in career

I like doing something that I will be satisfied with. So, I think I need a change of job. And this change of job requires another experience, another knowledge. I think a degree in this university can give me the kind of things I have been missing out. **Bola (SPS, Nigeria)**

I finished my Law degree after four years and I decided that I don't like that. But if I really want to get into this industry [Film] I need some more relevant background, so I decided to do the Masters study. **Shi (LLC, Taiwan)**

PhD study

Because I didn't have the mandatory dissertation at undergrad level, I want to see how I would feel about writing research paper as a dissertation. And then I need to produce a good evidence of research in order to apply for a PhD study. That is why. Alim (SPS, Turkey)

I want to have a higher mark. Apply for a PhD, hopefully, after my Masters. I will go back to China for half a year or something then come back here to pursue further studies. I don't think I will consider apply to study in another country. Chao (EDU, China)

The student experience is an integral part of all the students' future career goals outlined above. The extent to which students feel supported to attain their future career goals is the focus in Chapter 7.

Synopsis

The economic rationale shows that students consider the financial costs of the Masters as well as the economic value of the Masters. In terms of the cost of the Masters, funding was a major factor. Only one student (Bond, Singapore) received full funding for the Masters. Abby (USA) received partial funding from the university. All other students were either self-funded (Indira, India), partially funded by parents (Bola, Nigeria), obtained a loan (Mariana, Colombia, Patricia, Mexico) or fully supported by their parents to do the Masters. It was therefore ironic that Mandy (South Africa) declined an offer of a full scholarship to study at another UK university. She attributed her decision to the ranking of the university. However, at the end of the first semester when the interviews were held, she talked about regretting her decision due to financial difficulties, which she had not foreseen.

Mandy did not reply to repeated email requests for the second interview. It was therefore not possible to ascertain how she got on with her programme. Her input into the data during the first interview however provided key insights into the importance students attach to rankings.

At the same time, it was important to note that the students displayed some scepticism regarding university ranking. They however said, employers and funders use university rankings as part of their decision-making process for

employment and funding, and as Chao (EDU, China) puts it, the students 'have to consider it too'.

Students' talked at length about the value of the Masters in term of its attestation of their ability and competence. Thus, obtaining the Masters is clearly perceived by students as an important signal of their competence to employers in order to obtain an initial job and for career progression.

6.6 Chapter summary

This chapter presents students' rationales for studying abroad. Though there is some evidence from large-scale surveys that employability is a key motivation for studying abroad (Hobsons, 2014; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002), I did not approach my research with the preconceived notion that employability is the dominant rationale for studying abroad. Accordingly, employability was not mentioned when I communicated the aims of my research to the students involved in the study, nor in subsequent interviews. As such, the in-depth data analysis revealed four rationales for study abroad: educational, experiential, aspirational and economic.

Furthermore, my research focused on a holistic understanding of the international student lifecycle from their rationales to their experience and preparation for their future goals. To this end, aside from students' rationales for study abroad outlined in this chapter, Chapter 7 reports findings in relation to their experience during study abroad. In line with the focus of the study, Chapter 7 explores in depth students' perceptions of employability-related development opportunities during their study abroad.

Chapter 7. Students' perceptions of employability-related development opportunities during a one-year UK Masters

7.1 Introduction

This chapter reports findings related to students' lived experience while doing their Masters in the UK. The first interview was conducted at the end of the first semester, that is, three to four months into the Masters programme. At this stage, all the students described different aspects of their study experience which they linked to developing their employability. As such, data collected from the first interviews will be used to answer the second research question:

To what extent do international students' expectations of developing their employability match their experience?

The second interview was conducted after the end of the second semester. The interview questions were used to further probe students' perceptions on developing their employability during their study abroad. Another important aim during the second interview, was to find out if there were changes in student perceptions regarding developing their employability towards the end of the one-year Masters. This addresses the third research question:

To what extent do international students' perceptions of the benefits of studying on the Masters programme change over the course of the one-year of study?

Table 7:1 shows the findings presented in this chapter under three categories and related themes. The first category examines students' perceptions regarding different options for taking part in practical experience during their study. This covers opportunities to engage in full-time work, part-time work, internships and volunteering. The second category scrutinises the students' perceptions of employability-related support available at the programme level and at the university level. This includes students' perceptions of support from their Programme Directors and the Careers Service. The third category explores changes in students' perceptions over the one-year period of the Masters study. Findings under the third

category thus provide insight into whether, or the extent to which student perceptions about developing their employability change over the one-year study period.

Table 7:1 International students' perceptions of employability-related development opportunities and support: Categories and themes

| Categories | Themes |
|--|---|
| Employability-related experience during the Masters programme | Types of student work experience during the Masters programme |
| Students' perceptions of support toward developing employability | Employability development opportunities embedded on Masters programme |
| | Support at the university level: Careers Service |
| Change in students' perceptions in relation to studying on the Masters | Changes in students' perceptions regarding employability-related development across four programmes |

7.2 Category 1: Employability-related experience during the Masters programme

The findings in this chapter draw on the university employability initiative which is available on the university website. The employability initiative document states that students should get 'involved in activities beyond their degree' including work experience, travel abroad, and clubs and societies (University document, u.d, p.1). The document further stated that academic staff play an important role in providing employability development opportunities for students, including, placements, case studies, and guest lectures to help students apply their knowledge in the workplace. As such, during the second interview, the students were asked specifically if and why (or not) they had embarked on employability-related activities mentioned in the document (though they were not informed that the activities are mentioned in the university document). In addition, further probing questions were used to explore whether students had engaged in other activities not mentioned in the employability initiative document. The students talked about different types of work experience and the support provided at the programme and university level. This is the main focus in this chapter.

7.2.1 Theme 1: Types of student work experience during the Masters programme

During the first interviews the students talked at length about the importance of practical work experience during the Masters to improve their employability in terms of either enhancing their chances for career progression or securing a new job. This aspect of the student interest was followed up during the second interview. The students were asked if they had engaged in any of four types of work: full time work, part-time work, internships, and volunteering. Table 7:2 shows the types of work the students across all four programmes had engaged in during their Masters.

Table 7:2 Work activities engaged in by students during their one-year Masters

| School | Name | Part-time work | Internship | Volunteering |
|--------|----------|----------------|------------|--------------|
| LLC | Mariana | ✓ | x | ✓ |
| | Patricia | x | x | ✓ |
| | Abby | x | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Shi | x | x | ✓ |
| SPS | Alim | X | x | x |
| | Jackie | ✓ | x | x |
| | Qian | x | x | x |
| | Bola | ✓ | x | ✓ |
| | Mandy | x | x | x |
| | Adele | x | x | x |
| EDU | Fang | x | x | ✓ |
| | Chao | x | x | ✓ |
| | Sofia | ✓ | x | x |
| | Indira | ✓ | x | ✓ |
| BUS | Bond | x | x | x |
| | Yin | x | x | ✓ |
| | Jun | x | x | x |
| | Lan | x | x | ✓ |
| | Harshad | x | x | ✓ |

Note: ✓ denotes yes X denotes no

Part-time work

The majority (14 out of 19) of the students interviewed did not engage in part-time work. Five students engaged in part-time work; two EDU students, two students from SPS and one LLC student (Table 7:2). The different types of part-time work the students engaged in and a selection of quotes related to their rationales for the work are shown below in Table 7:3.

Table 7:3 Student part-time work: Types and rationales

| Programme | Student | Type of work | Rationale for working (Quotes) |
|------------------|-----------------------|---|--|
| LLC | Mariana (Colombia) | Waitressing | I am working because it is expensive to live here. I also think having a job helps you to kind of organise yourself. You manage your time wisely as you know that I have to work these days, so I have to have these days to study so it gives you discipline. It also allows you to meet people outside the university. At work you are like a normal person talking about the weather and I really like the people from my job. It is like another social sphere. To escape from Uni, I go to work |
| SPS | Bola (Nigeria) | Social worker | With my knowledge of taking care of people, I tried to get part-time work as a social worker |
| | Jackie (USA) | Waitressing | This is mostly just for money |
| EDU | Indira (India) | Student helper during University Open Day | I'm doing it out of curiosity more than anything else. The Open Day in Edinburgh University would be a good experience to take back home whenever I join any kind of a job. |
| | Sofia (Colombia) | Baby-sitting | My budget is quite tight. So, I thought it would be nice to have some additional income |

It should be reiterated that students across all four programmes valued practical work experience undertaken as part of the Masters. A reason for this could be that the work was included in their programme schedule. Relatedly, work-based

dissertation (WBD) was undertaken after the end of the taught aspect of the Masters. This coincided with the period some students said they were seeking work experience. Students who were working in jobs not related to their Masters programme (Table 7:3) provided a common reason for working; to make some money to augment their living costs. Conversely, a lack of financial pressure was the common reason given by the students who did not engage in part-time work.

Bola (SPS, Nigeria) and Indira (EDU, India), engaged in part time work related to their job interest. Both students worked for only one day. Bola explains why:

The part-time job felt like a full-time job. I didn't do it more than one day. It was too demanding after school work. I am not really in need of extra money - so no stimulus to get a job **Bola (SPS, Nigeria)**

As suggested in the quote from Bola, other students affirmed that studying for a Masters is demanding. Many students said a lack of time during their study period is the main reason for not engaging in part-time work. Some said that they looked for part-time work at the beginning of the first semester but stopped searching due to the pressure of the Masters programme.

A few students, for example Jun (BUS, China) and Shi (LLC, Taiwan) said they did not do part-time work because the Masters is more demanding for them as an international student. **Shi (LLC, Taiwan)** explains:

At first, I was thinking of maybe I can get a part-time job because with tier 4 visa you can work for 20 hours [per week], but I didn't do that. We have 5 to 6 articles to read each week and because my first language is not English it takes me twice as much time than other people. So, I have to spend more time on studying so I have to give up the thoughts of a part-time job.

Nonetheless, students across the different programmes talked about being interested in part-time work after finishing the taught aspect of their Masters (in April). For example, Jackie (LLC, USA) explained that she started her part-time work at a café after her classes ended. Aside for the financial reasons, this also allowed her to build some structure to her day. Alim (SPS, Turkey) also said he expected to start a part-time job with a research team in the university in September.

However, the quote from Mariana (LLC, Colombia) (Table 7:3), suggests that students can gain more than money from engaging in part-time work. Mariana perceived her part-time job helped to plan her time and to develop her

organisational skills. She also saw it as a way to balance her social life with her academic life.

Internship

Students across all programmes indicated an interest in internships. The students were applying for internships within the UK, and different other countries including the USA, New Zealand, Taiwan, Netherlands, Austria. For example, **Bola (SPS, Nigeria)**:

I am really looking out for internship. If I can just have 3 months of internship before or after my graduation, yes, I am done and can then go back to Nigeria. I have applied for internship with some organisations, one in London and one in the Netherlands. I hope to get good feedback.

Despite their interest, the students talked about the difficulty to do an internship for two main reasons. Firstly, most organisations want students doing internships to work for more than 20 hours in a week. This conflicts with the student visa conditions. **Mariana (LLC, Colombia)** explains:

I applied for an internship at the film festival [in Scotland] but they said no because of my visa. Because they needed someone who could work more than 20 hours a week. My other friend also applied for one. And just because of that they didn't even check our application. They said, "you have a student visa, no".

Secondly, similar to the views shared in relation to part-time work, the students cited the demands of their programme as a major reason for not engaging in an internship.

Considering the demands of the Masters, it did not seem surprising that some students were thinking of doing an internship after the taught component of their Masters. For example, Yin (BUS, Taiwan) said that she was open to doing an internship in the summer. However, she cited visa-related issues as the main reason for not pursuing her ambition. She said:

In semester one, I applied for a summer internship in Stockholm. I received an email saying that you are allowed to do that if you are European student. I am non-European student. Yin (BUS, Taiwan)

Perhaps due to her experience, Yin seems to conclude that:

Most of the opportunities were in Britain or in European countries. But it's hard for me to work in Britain. Obviously, they don't like foreigners. That is why they vote to leave [Brexit]. No, I mean before they vote to leave they do

not actually welcome people like foreigners. But because they are part of European countries they cannot reject people who are from like France or Germany. I asked my German friends and there is no visa problem for them to work in the UK. But for me it's really really hard. I just have to look for jobs in Taiwan.

Serendipitously, Yin received a job offer in Taiwan. She narrated how she was doing a quantitative dissertation and one of the survey respondents in Taiwan contacted her to inform her about a job offer. She was due to start the job after her Masters.

Abby (LLC, USA) was the only interviewee who secured an internship. She got the summer internship in her home country, the USA. She also talked about being motivated to look for internship positions at home due to the “UK stringent immigration rules”. She however considered the practical work she had undertaken during her Masters as an important factor contributing to her getting the internship position:

The strength of the Masters programme is its applied practice component, which gives students the ability to work in real-world situations and learn from industry partners. After working with multiple festivals and film exhibition bodies in Scotland, I felt prepared enough to apply for a traineeship [internship] in film distribution in New York City. That I successfully got the job is a testament, in my opinion, to what I've been able to do this past year. So, I feel like my current study experience is not only relevant to my aspirations, but vital to them.

Bearing in mind the value the students placed on internships, it is perhaps not surprising that **Indira (EDU, India)** said:

If given an opportunity I will like to tell them [the school] that please, have some kind of internship in place for the students. Because Masters programme is something that the internship could add value. The benefit of that is that you get to work in an environment and you can relate it to what you are studying. It gives you a more rounded effect.

In contrast to the quote above and general favourable perception of doing an internship, **Bond (BUS, Singapore)** provided a detailed rationale for his interest in a “short stint” work experience rather than in internship:

I would say I have close to zero business experience prior to my studies over here. I heard rumours from friends that you wouldn't learn much from internships if you are only there for 2 to 3 months they will probably not be doing much. So that is the reason why I am happy with a short overseas trip or short stint in a company.

It should therefore be reiterated that the students seemed to be keen to have practical work experience that they can relate to their career goals.

Volunteering

In contrast to the difficulty with getting internship opportunities, most students engaged in volunteering. A total of eleven students across all four programmes engaged in volunteering (see Table 7:2).

All the students interviewed in LLC engaged in two weeks volunteering work mainly due to their programme having established links to the industry within their field. Some LLC students also engaged in volunteering through contacts within the networks they had developed during the Masters (Abby and Patricia). All the LLC students said they were adding their volunteering experience to their CV to show employers they had experience in an area related to their field.

In a similar vein, in Education, Fang, Indira and Chao volunteered for events which relate to the careers they want to pursue after the Masters. For example, **Fang (EDU, China)** said:

My volunteering is mainly related to technology because I want to work in this area.

In addition, some EDU students had the opportunity to volunteer for events organised in their School, sometimes, based on the recommendation of a tutor.

Some SPS students (Adele, Alim and Mandy), talked about having engaged in a lot of volunteering during their undergraduate study. As such, they said they were not really interested in volunteering. In addition, **Mandy (South Africa)** said the limited time to do the Masters was also an issue:

I did too many extracurricular in my last degree. I was completely overwhelmed so I thought I will cut it down. I am only here for one year. It's not so much.

Bola was the only SPS student who engaged in volunteering. This involved assisting a lecturer during a one-day School organised event (seminar).

Ironically, despite the one-day volunteering, Bola articulated what students across all four programmes referred to as their preference to have practical opportunities relevant to their course and future career. **Bola, (SPS, Nigeria)** said:

Whatever I have to volunteer for has to add knowledge and experience in my field of study. I am not a young scholar. I am an adult learner. Any moment for me now is valuable. I can't just waste it. I want focused experience and not scattered experience. I want something that will earn me an advantage, like people will say, 'whoa you got this experience in the UK!' Not gaining

experience cleaning the environment in the UK, because if I want to work in high profile establishment it does not add up.

Three BUS students engaged in volunteering. Harshad worked as a volunteer (student ambassador) during a School-related event which ran over two days. Lan and Yin did not volunteer for any event related to their field. Rather, they volunteered for events to support their friends involved in activities related to promoting Chinese and Taiwanese culture respectively. **Jun (BUS, China)** attributes her lack of engagement in volunteering to a lack of opportunity:

I will like to volunteer but I could not find any. I did not even see the posters about volunteering or the website. Even if I knew it I did not have anyone to introduce me there. My flatmate got a volunteering job in social work, but she was introduced by one of her classmates. I ask my friend about the volunteering work, but she said it was not for everyone.

Echoing Jun's assertions, students across all four programmes said the provision of support at the School and the university was an important factor related to whether students engaged, or not, in extracurricular activities. They gave examples of seeking information about volunteering opportunities from the websites of the Careers Service and the Student Association, and in some cases, from their fellow students.

Fulltime work

As expected, none of the students had engaged in full-time work due to their visa restrictions. Many students mentioned that the conditions of their study visa meant that they could work for 20 hours in a week. Jackie (SPS, USA) who has dual citizenship (American and British) was the only interviewee who did not need a study visa. She, however, said she did not have time for full-time work as studying took up much of her time.

Exploring other employment opportunities: Business and academic careers

This section briefly outlines other career-related opportunities that the students talked about in the area of business interests and pursuing an academic career in the form of a PhD.

The students showed awareness that the labour market is competitive, and they used expressions like seeking the Masters to 'stand out from the crowd' and to 'do the Masters to be more employable'. This means that it is important to note that some students (in EDU, LLC and BUS) mentioned plans to start their own business

after the Masters as part of their long-term plan. **Bond (BUS, Singapore)** explained how the idea of expanding the scope of his business started during the Masters:

It's just when I got here that I realise I can develop my business model further. For example, I am thinking of providing different specifications of my business product for different markets because the cultures might be different.

Specifically, the students mentioned becoming more aware of different cultures and how this was helping to further develop their business ideas. Students on other programmes identified business interests directly related to their Masters. For example, Sofia (EDU) talked about setting up a primary school in Colombia and Indira (EDU) was considering starting a training consultancy in India. **Mariana (LLC, Colombia)** had started discussions about starting a business with a classmate she met during their Masters. She said:

The idea we got with my Colombian friend is that we might do our own business. Just the two of us. Because we discovered kind of like a gap in the industry in Colombia that we can fill. It is an idea that we have. We will do our own company. So that is another option. It's going to be really hard. It's going to be like beginning something from scratch.

As it was also a common theme mentioned by many students, it is crucial to briefly mention that the students considered their Masters dissertation to be important in relation to what they wanted to do in the future in terms of employment or progression to PhD study. In the case of Mariana, she was doing a project-based dissertation with two other students. She talked about building contacts with people working in her field in the UK and in Colombia. She and her colleague were already thinking of leveraging the knowledge from the dissertation to start a business to fill a gap they had identified in the Colombian film market. As the quote below shows, the students mentioned how they were choosing topics related to the area they will like to work in the future.

I feel like my dissertation is actually the foundation of what I'm going to do after I've finished. So, it's given me a feeling of security to know that I have that to build up. So, I'm not just like 'what do I do when I'm done?' **Jackie (SPS, USA)**

A dissertation was also important for students with immediate or future plans to apply for a PhD, for example, Chao (EDU, China), Alim (SPS, Turkey), Abby (LLC, USA) and Jackie (SPS, USA). **Alim (SPS, Turkey)** explains why:

I am writing a dissertation right now which I didn't have the opportunity to write in my UG. I need to produce a good evidence of research in order to apply for a PhD study.

Finishing their dissertation and doing it well was a running theme amongst all the students. For example, **Jackie (SPS, USA)**:

I need to finish my dissertation. And I obviously want to do that well. The main thing on mind now is to do my research well. Do it in a way that respects the work that I have done and the work that I am trying to do.

Many students talked about their plan to undertake part-time work, internship or volunteering after finishing their dissertation. It was not certain that the students would get the opportunity to engage in work opportunities after finishing their dissertation.

Synopsis

The findings discussed in 7.2 show that students across all the programmes consider part-time work, internship, and volunteering to be related to developing their employability. However, as Table 7:2 shows, most students engaged in two activities, usually part-time work and volunteering. The LLC students engaged with all possible types of work experience, although Abby (LLC, USA) was the only student who engaged in an internship which she was doing in her home country for visa reasons already discussed.

Despite the engagement of LLC students in different work opportunities, programme embedded work experience cannot be correlated to engagement in other work experience. For example, despite none of SPS and EDU students engaging in work experience embedded on their programme, they engaged in other work experience like part-time work and volunteering. Some students said they were only interested in activities that they perceived are related to their field of study, and ultimately their future career. This agrees with earlier discussion about students' lack of interest in non-career related WBD. Relatedly, the BUS students had opportunities for work experience embedded in their programme. This may account for the lack of pressure for the BUS students to seek other work-related experience. Perhaps having work experience embedded on the programme may provide employability related experience without the distraction

from study. This however might not prove satisfactory for students, for example, Mariana and Sofia, who have economic reasons for work.

However, aside from the economic reasons, Mariana (LLC, Colombia) also engaged in part-time work to experience what she calls “life with normal people” outside the academic circle. This suggests that students have various reasons for their work experience such as engaging in volunteering to make contact or support cultural activities related to their home country. This might be important to note, especially as two BUS interviewees (Lan and Yin) only engaged in such volunteering.

Of note, ‘experience related to career field’ is the common rationale for all types of work experience. Mostly, students did not engage in internships and part-time work, though not due to a lack of interest. Some of the reasons they gave for not engaging included time constraints and the demand of the Masters, including the additional constraint for some students studying in English as a second language. Visa issues was a common problem for many students who wanted to engage in part-time work and internships within and outside the UK.

All the students seemed to understand the need to focus on their Masters during term-time. Some students expressed their intention to seek work experience when the academic pressure lessens at the end of the second semester. This suggests that employability development opportunities could be embedded around what works for the students and at the same time support student learning. The extent to which this is factored into employability development initiatives at the university was not apparent from discussions with the students.

Entrepreneurship was not a recurring theme with all the students. It was however considered important to mention this as some students emphasised their business goals as a future career. Additionally, the university website shows that there are opportunities to support student entrepreneurs, including, free events, competitions, workshops and one-to-one meetings with expert advisers to students. Yet, none of the students mentioned awareness of any of several entrepreneurship projects in the university. This was especially surprising in the case of BUS students as the entrepreneurship projects are widely publicised in the Business School. It is unclear if, or the extent to which, students are aware of the support available within the university to support student enterprise, as the

students said they had not discussed their business plans with anyone at the university.

It is worth mentioning that the students considered their dissertation to be a very important aspect of their Masters, and not just a piece of academic work.

Specifically, the students seemed to view their dissertation as a tool to promote their work and abilities to future employers.

The main issues with doing a WBD have been discussed. It therefore seems instructive for the university to pay attention to Masters student dissertations, which they seem to link to their future careers goals. This suggests that the dissertation could be seen beyond students' work solely to satisfy academic requirements.

However, while some students expressed their appreciation with regard to the academic support from their supervisors to produce their dissertation, it is not known whether guiding or supporting students to conduct an independent academic dissertation in an area related to their future career is included or under consideration as part of the university curriculum.

7.3 Category 2: Students' perceptions of support towards developing employability

The overview of student engagement in work-related experience (Table 7:2) does not necessarily provide insight into the extent to which these opportunities were supported as part of the student experience within the university. To this end, I will now focus on students' perceptions of support towards developing their employability during their Masters. The first theme relates to employability development opportunities (EDOs) at the programme level (7.3.1). The second theme relates to EDOs across the wider university with a focus on the university Careers Service (7.3.2). I focused on the Careers Service since the university employability document states that students' engagement with the Careers Service should be considered as a key step towards developing their employability. Additionally, students talked about enhancing their employability mainly in terms of their engagement (or lack thereof) with the Careers Service.

7.3.1 Theme1: Employability development opportunities embedded on Masters programmes

The types of work-related experience available for Masters students across the four programmes and the numbers of students who participated are shown in Table 7:4.

Table 7:4 Practical work experience available for Masters students interviewed across four programmes and interviewees' engagement

| Programme | Type of practical work-related experience | Numbers of students who engaged in the work experience |
|------------------|--|---|
| LLC | Project work with industry-related links | 4 out of 4 students (Abby, Shi, Patricia and Mariana) |
| | An individual or joint industry report/applied research project (dissertation) | 2 (Mariana and Patricia) out of 4 students |
| SPS | Work-based placement on a topic related to global health. The placements generally consist of eight weeks of on-location research with a host organisation in the UK or overseas | None out of 6 students |
| BUS | Short-term industry group work experience | 2 (Yin and Bond) out of 5 students |
| | Company based dissertation | None of the students |
| | Guest lectures | All students |
| EDU | None | None out of 4 students |

Source: Programme websites and student interviews

As Table 7:4 shows, work opportunities embedded on the Masters vary across different programmes. Student perceptions with regard to work experience on their programme and other EDOs are discussed below.

LLC

On the LLC programme, practical work experience in the industry was embedded in the Masters as a compulsory element of the course work in the form of a short-curated film project, and an option for an industry-related dissertation. All LLC students (Abby, Shi, Patricia and Mariana) talked extensively about their practical

work experience at two film festivals and how they perceive such experiences contribute to developing their employability. **Shi (LLC, Taiwan)**, for example said:

I think the international work experience is going to help me with job hunting because I have the Glasgow film festival experience and the Edinburgh film festival experience. The programme gives us the chance to get involved with these international film festivals. It will make my CV look great.

Additionally, the students stressed how the established links between the LLC programme and industry partners provided opportunities for professional networking. They said this coheres with their expectations for their study and their future aspirations. **Abby (LLC, USA)** talked about her determination to take advantage of the opportunities offered on her programme to develop such networks. She said:

It's been kind of my personal mission to find out more about people who work film festival directors, programmes, people who do this professionally. I've also sent emails to a lot of people and I've been in touch with them about work opportunities and research opportunities. Things like that are the kind of networking that I'm trying to do.

Similarly, **Patricia (LLC, Mexico)** said:

My current study experience is linked to my future aspirations in every way. Like professional experience that we're doing. They are introducing us to people who are in the industry in which we are involved. It's a very practical programme. It's incredible! So, it's linked in every way.

Ironically, though **Mariana (LLC, Colombia)** talked enthusiastically about the benefit of the work experience at the film festivals in two cities in Scotland to put on her CV, she also spoke about wanting 'real work' experience after her Masters dissertation.

After the dissertation, I will like to get a job even if it is like a part-time job in something related to what I am doing. I'll really love to have some real work experience. Not like the other one I had at the Edinburgh Film Festival that you will just be standing and scanning passes. No. I want to be inside the organisation working somewhere I can have deep experience.

The students were asked about the overall support provided at the school. In response, all the LLC students talked about the support provided by their two Programme Directors (PDs). They said their PDs operate an open doors policy and all students were encouraged to discuss their career plans from the onset of the programme. **Abby (LLC, USA)** explains:

The Programme Directors (PDs) have made it clear that we are always welcome to talk to them about our future plans and I've actually spoken to

(names PD) already specifically about final projects and how they can lead to job opportunities so definitely I feel like I'm getting advice.

Specifically, the LLC PDs facilitated opportunities for the students to present their group project work at two international film festivals in Scotland, for example:

*The whole class were part of the Glasgow international film festival. As part of a Masters project we made an entire day of home movies. We also curated short films for the Edinburgh film festival. It is called applied learning and it is graded. Everyone did that. **Patricia (LLC, Mexico)***

It was apparent the students valued the applied learning aspect in their programme. They talked about including their experience in their CV to let employers know that they have practical experience as well as knowledge of theoretical aspects in their field of study. The students also talked about how the practical experience has given them the confidence and skills including problem solving, communication and team work. This skills aspect of the student experience is the focus in Chapter 8.

SPS

The School website showed a clear outline of the work-based dissertation (WBD) available for SPS Masters students. Most of the SPS students (Bola, Mandy, Jackie and Adele) talked about their interest in applied practical experience in the form of the WBD advertised on the programme. **Mandy (SPS, South Africa)** explains what the WBD entails:

We have this thing called Work Based Placement which we can do instead of a dissertation. It's two months and instead of writing a dissertation you write a report for an organisation.

Adele (SPS, Canada) elaborated the importance of the WBD to facilitate networking opportunities with organisations during the Masters:

The work- based dissertation was something that drew me to this programme because then you have a chance to network with different organisations when you're writing your dissertation and hopefully make contacts instead of just getting a sociology degree and being like, I have this now, somebody just hire me.

Ironically, the students, for example, **Mandy (SPS, South Africa)** said in spite of her interest, she could not embark on a WBD:

Doing a WBD was my plan. I really want to do that instead of a dissertation. But it's really hard to get in. You can only find out if you get in at the end of February/March...If I can do that [WBD] it will help me decide where I want to work because I'll experience working for an organisation.

The School had a list of potential organisations with whom they had agreed projects. Some of the students said they were not able to do a WBD mainly due to lack of availability of the type of project they were interested in. Additionally, the students had to undergo a competitive selection process to get allocated to a project as this was determined by their grades in the first semester and follow-on interview with the organisation. Unsurprisingly, although the School record shows that many students in SPS engage in WBDs, none of the six students interviewed secured a WBD.

When asked about the overall support provided at the school, students in SPS provided a mixed account of the support provided. For example, in relation to the PD, **Jackie (SPS, USA)** said:

My PD is so wonderful. I think she's been really helpful with helping me know where I want this journey to go with, how I'm going to do my dissertation, all that stuff, also putting me in connection with other people who can help me. She's such a useful resource.

In answer to the same question about support, Mandy (SPS, South Africa) said she was not getting as much support as expected. **Adele (SPS, Canada)** also made similar comments:

Specifically, in an arts type of field, it's harder to find jobs. I feel like that should be the priority for people. They should be helping us. In the job market nowadays, everyone that is unemployed has an Arts degree. If you have a Masters, great, but it's still harder to look for those. And you don't know where to look sometimes. So, it's helpful if our university can tell us what we can do and where to go.

In contrast to the other SPS students, Alim and Qian did not mention whether they expected to embark on a WBD. It was not apparent if doing a WBD was important to them.

BUS

Yin (Taiwan) and Bond (Singapore) secured one each out of 15 places available on a school-sponsored project in Italy. The work-related experience was not compulsory, and students had to apply for a place to get selected. They both spoke enthusiastically about their experience in terms of the opportunity to apply what they have learned on the programme to a real-world scenario. **Yin (BUS, Taiwan)** said:

The school provided 15 opportunities to students here on our programme. I am interested because I expected that I will have more practical work with real companies. Real work. We did the analytical work for this company. I

really applied what we have learnt from the course here. I will cherish this opportunity here.

In addition, the two students said they valued the feedback received based on their presentation to the company staff.

The BUS Masters programmes provide an opportunity for students to work in groups on consultancy projects for clients in the UK. It was not clear if consultancy project work was a compulsory part of the Masters as none of the students talked about embarking on such projects.

In contrast, all the BUS students talked about employability-related support provided to all students by the Student Development Team (SDT). The SDT deliver weekly lectures and individual appointments for students on topics related to their career development. The School of Business thus had a system embedding employability development support on the programme which the students, for example, **Jun (BUS, China)** said they valued:

They [SDT] give us lectures once a week but you can make personal appointments after the lectures. They are on our timetables, like a normal lecture. I choose to go to the ones I consider more important for me. When I had a private appointment, we talked about career options and work experience and my future plans. They are very helpful.

Though the lectures and one-on-one appointment were not compulsory, all the students said they had attended some of the lectures. Two out of the five students interviewed said they had not made a personal appointment with the SDT. Both students (Bond and Yin) said they had jobs at home after the Masters. Perhaps, this could be a reason they did not feel the need to meet the SDT.

Other practical learning opportunities embedded in the BUS Masters programme include invited talks given by business consultants and skills development workshops. In this regard, the students talked positively about attending a two-day workshop in negotiating skills delivered by an external consultant.

Additionally, the BUS students can choose to do a WBD as discussed earlier. However, the option to do a WBD was not available on the Masters from which the BUS students were recruited. Unsurprisingly, none of the students interviewed did a WBD. At the same time, the students expressed satisfaction with the applied learning opportunities embedded on their course.

EDU

In contrast to the other three programmes, the Education Masters programme did not offer practical experience. The students said they had looked at the school's website before applying for their programme. As such, it seemed that they would likely be aware that practical work was not offered as part of the Masters programme. It was therefore surprising that the students talked about their interest in engaging in practical work. For example, **Fang (EDU, China)** said:

I thought it will be more practical. Because it's education-related I thought it is more about teaching or how to deal with learners. Now it's all about theories. A lot of theories. I still want some more practical things related to local schools. To have a visual idea of what the school looks like. Obviously, the Chinese education system is different from here. But how is it different? I will like a first-hand experience of how it is different. It is like theoretical knowledge not taken to reality. If you read something in the literature like learner characteristics you are like is that really true in the UK context? You want to compare the article perspective with the practical context. It is important. At the end you still need to deal with students in education. You can't just talk about something abstract and all about theories. At the end you still need to practice. You need to do something.

Fang was keen to get some practical experience in the UK in Education technology. She talked about approaching her tutor for advice in this regard.

The EDU students did not provide much information about employability-related support provided on their programme. All the EDU students said they had not approached anyone in their school to discuss their future plans. Most of the students interviewed also said they did not have 'concrete' future plans, and as such they did not think they were ready to initiate discussions about their plans with their tutors.

Sofia (EDU, Colombia) reflectively said:

They assigned us with personal tutors and I think they are supposed to talk about these things with us. But I haven't talked about this with my personal tutor. Maybe I should.

Though the quote above suggests that some students were not sure who to have discussions with about their future plans within the school, the students were asked explicitly whether they had discussed their future plans within their school or at the university. The question was expected to assess the extent to which the students perceive support towards developing their employability was available at the university. The Careers Service is the central department at the university

responsible for supporting student employability. Accordingly, student perspectives of the support from the Careers Service is explored in 7.3.2 below.

7.3.2 Theme 2: Support at the university level: Careers Service

The range of Careers Service available for students and the number of students who said they have accessed the service are shown in Table 7:5.

Table 7:5 Careers Service provision and students' usage of service

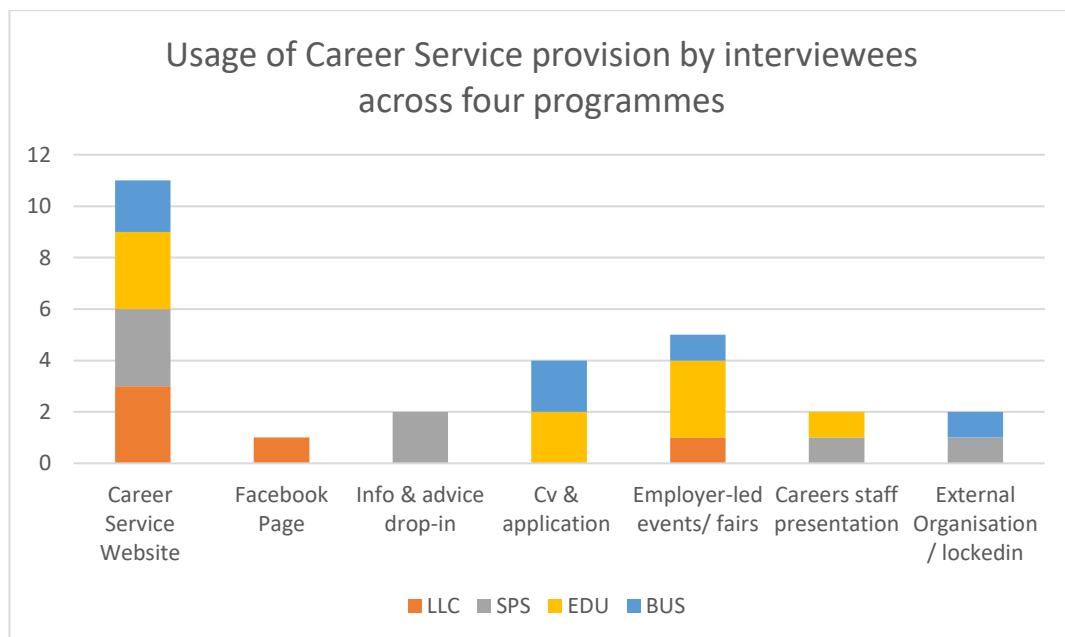
| Careers Service | Details | | Number of students who have engaged the service |
|--|---|---|--|
| Online: job advertisement including full-time, part-time, internships and volunteering | Careers Service website | | LLC - Mariana, Abby and Patricia SPS - Alim, Mandy and Qian EDU - Sofia, Fang, and Chao BUS - Harshad and Yin |
| | Facebook page | | LLC - Mariana |
| Face-to-face consultation | Information and advice drop-in | | SPS - Jackie and Mandy |
| | CV and application advice - get feedback from careers advisors | | EDU – Chao, and Fang BUS - Harshad |
| | LinkedIn profiles - to get feedback | | - |
| | Careers guidance – book an appointment to discuss any topic | | - |
| | Practice interviews - to practise and get feedback | | - |
| | Referred appointments – to meet with advisors | | - |
| Careers events | Employer-led events | Careers fairs (multiple employer presentations) | LLC - Mariana EDU – Sofia, Chao, and Fang BUS - Harshad |
| | | Individual employer presentation | - |
| | Careers staff presentation on preparing CV and Interview advice | | SPS - Qian EDU - Fang |
| | External organisation (LinkedIn) presentation on job opportunities outside the UK | | SPS - Qian BUS – Jun |

Source: Careers website and student interviews

As shown in Table 7:5, the central Careers Service at the university provides a wide range of online and face-to-face consultations to all students at the university to support their career aspirations. The Careers Service also organises career events for students to meet employers. Of all nineteen students interviewed, twelve said they had engaged with the Careers Service in one or more ways (Table 7:5). However, though listed in Table 7:5, Jun (BUS, China) said she had not engaged with the central Careers Service. She got information about LinkedIn from the Student Development Team in the Business School. At the same time, the Careers Service are involved in bringing external stakeholders, such as LinkedIn to the university to make presentations to the students. Perhaps it could be reasoned that Jun had indirectly engaged with the Careers Service.

Figure 7:1 shows a comparison of student usage of services provided from the Careers Service (excluding services not used as shown in Table 7:5). It shows that students across all four programmes consulted the Careers Service website. This suggests that the website is important for the Careers Service support to the students.

Figure 7:1 Interviewee's usage of Careers Service



Students in three out of the four programmes (SPS, EDU and BUS) visited the Careers Service for a face-to-face discussion. However, none of the LLC students mentioned visiting the Careers Service. Rather, as earlier discussed, LLC students

had opportunities for one-on-one discussions about their careers with the PDs. This perhaps makes the students not consider it essential to visit the Careers Service.

The SPS students asked for general advice from the Careers Service. Students in BUS and EDU went specifically to get advice with regard to their CV. The EDU students (Chao and Fang) who had availed themselves of a range of services offered by the Careers Service (see Table 7:5) spoke positively about support from the Careers Service.

Careers Service: Online

Students across all the programmes talked about accessing the Careers Service website for information about jobs. **Sofia (EDU, Colombia)** explains:

I think that their [Careers Service] web page is really good. It allows you to search for full-time jobs, part-time jobs, to start now or to start later. They give you a very wide range of choices focused on your field of expertise or any job that comes. They tell you like these are openings for jobs and you read through them and see if you are interested and then you contact the advertiser directly.

Eleven students checked the careers website in the first semester when they were contemplating job options. Related to their motivation for doing the Masters, **Fang (EDU, China)**, provided some insight into why getting work experience during study abroad is important:

Even if I have a better degree in China, it will be hard to work overseas. Now, I have come here, maybe I can find a job here. I will become more competitive. So, I will try to find a job during this opportunity.

However, Mariana (LLC, Colombia) is the only student who got a part-time sales job from searching the Careers Service website.

Resonating with the perception from many interviewed students, **Yin (BUS, Taiwan)** provided her perception of the Careers Service website:

I've checked the careers website before, but they didn't offer many opportunities in Taiwan. Most of the opportunities were in Britain or in European countries. But it's hard for me to work in Britain.

The concerns raised by Yin were echoed by many students from different countries. This suggests that the Careers Service needs to continually seek ways to support international students from different countries. At the same time, considering that international students at the university come from over 150 countries, the support

they require will likely have sizeable implications in terms of human and economic resources.

Aside from looking at the website it is important to consider what steps the students were taking in relation to their career ambition. In the first interview **Harshad (BUS, India)** said:

I have checked the website of the companies I want to apply to in the UK. I am in the first stage of the application process right now. I am applying for jobs. The biggest challenge is since I am an international student I require a visa to work over here and it is not very easy to get that. There are very few organisations who are willing to sponsor candidates and we need to express ourselves very well to try and get that [work] visa. You have put in a lot of money and you want to have a good job. It's a hard situation. But since they are hiring the best I think it's alright. Not a big challenge. The chances are very bright. Very bright.

However, during the second interview Harshad's positive outlook seemed to have been diminished by the reality of the job market search in the UK. He said he stopped applying for jobs after seven failed attempts. He attributed his difficulty to make any progress with his applications to the UK's visa rules:

At first, my intention was to work in the UK for a couple of years then to go back to India. I heard that it's difficult. But getting a job is not easy in any part of the world so I said let's give it a try but when I came here, and I started applying it's almost impossible. The visa regulation makes it very difficult for us to get work in the UK. The organisations are not willing to sponsor non-EU people. A lot of organisations don't even consider the application. That makes me feel disappointed. It was always rejection at the very first stage in the online application. I get email in a couple of hours or the next day that my application cannot be processed to the next stage. It is not that it is only me. My friends here are also having the same issues. They are like they are rejected also from a lot of companies. They are all non-EU. EU people don't need visas, so they are progressing to the next stage. They have interviews. They are progressing nicely. I am talking about non-EU. The job market here is not in our favour right now.

Despite his disappointment, when asked about what support Harshad expected from the university he said:

I don't see the role of the university because the visa rules are formed by the government. And organisations have to stick to it. The university is obviously helping us to apply. They are willing to review our CVs. These things are more in the hands of government or organisations.

In a way, Harshad outlines ways that the Careers Service supports students to develop their employability by helping students develop a CV that presents their

skills and competencies to potential employers. However, Adele (SPS, Canada) expected more tailored support from the Careers Service to help international students with developing their chances of getting a job. She said:

It's like the careers centre sends you emails that organisations would be coming to speak about jobs in specific areas. That would be helpful if it was related to my field. If I was told something, maybe I could have been interested. It could be an international organisation where I would be able to, you know, cultivate my skills in a sense but they don't offer that, so you can't. It's not really an option right now. And it's pretty expensive here so I would much rather go back home where I can work. It's easier. If there was a way to go into it here then yeah sure, I would think of it that way, but it doesn't seem like that's an option.

As all the students said they know where the Careers Service was located in the university it is surprising that very few had gone to the office including Adele who voiced her concerns about the job market and how she needs help and also because she does not find the generic emails from the Careers Service helpful. Yet, when asked, Adele said that she had not visited the Careers Service to find out about support.

Careers Service: Face-to-face consultation

Five students said they visited the Careers Service for face-to-face advice (see Table 7:5). **Fang (EDU, China)** talked about the need for students to take the initiative to visit the Careers Service:

Because I use the Careers Service they send me emails but some of my classmates have no idea about that because they did not use the Careers Service before. They don't even know they have careers fair. Here, you need to take initiative to get information whereas when we were doing the BA the teachers give you information. Here is like if you are interested in these things you need to find the information for yourselves.

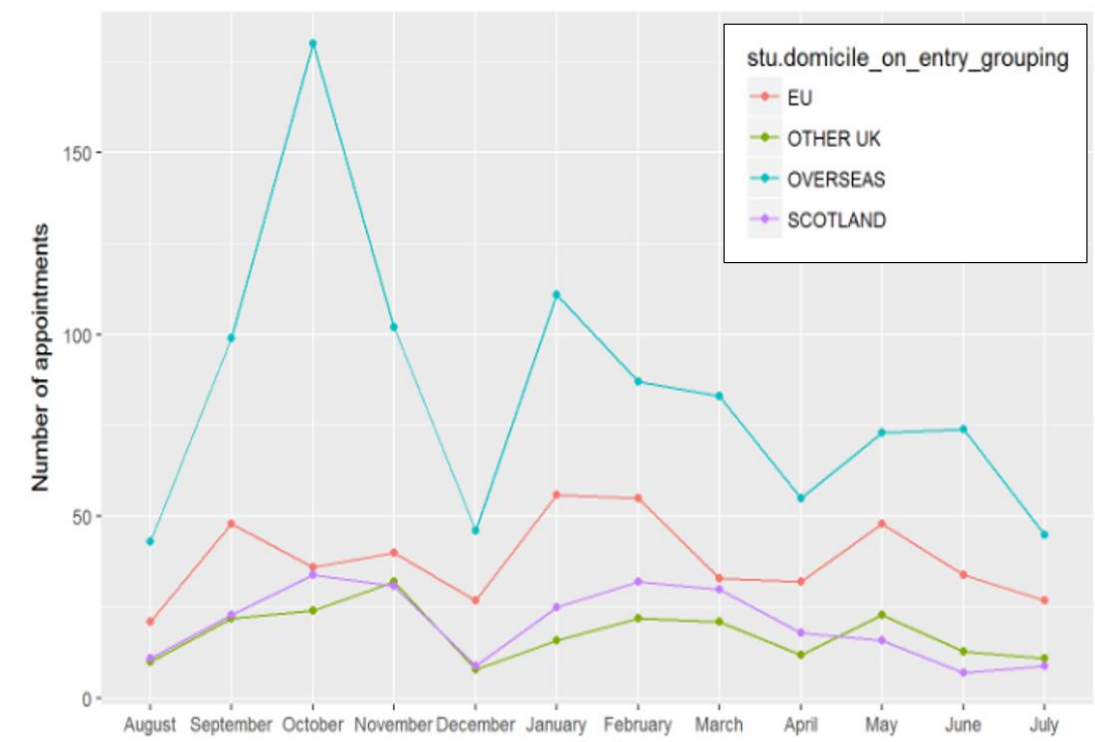
In the quote above, Fang seems to suggest that making initial contact with the Careers Service ensures that she receives follow-up invitation to events. She asserts that this was not the case with some of her classmates (in EDU), as a result of which they did not engage with the Careers Service. In contrast, Adele (SPS, Canada) asserts that she receives too many emails from the Careers Service. Ironically, despite this, she also did not engage with the Careers Service. As earlier mentioned, she did not think the emails relate to her career interest.

Crucially, Fang's quote also implies that there seems to be a mismatch between

student expectations and the level of proactiveness expected with regard to engaging with the Careers Service. This should not be surprising considering the university recruit students from different educational and cultural backgrounds. The findings suggest that there is a need to assess the effectiveness of career-related communication materials sent to students.

At the same time, the Careers Service keeps data on student engagement with the support provided on site, for example, when students visit the careers office and the helpdesk. The data provided by the Careers Service shows that non-EU international students were the largest number who booked appointments in 2015/16 (n=2,948) (Figure 7:2). This suggests that non-EU students are interested in career-related support.

Figure 7:2 Data on student engagement with Careers Service (2015/16)



Source: Careers Service

The significant spike in non-EU students' engagement with the Careers Service in October (attendance at appointments, fairs, helpdesk. and workshops) (Figure 7:2) coincides with student's account of their more active engagement with the Careers Service at the onset of their studies.

However, at the time of conducting the second interview (June/July) with around two months to the end of their Masters programme, only five out of the nineteen students interviewed had visited the Careers Service. Most students talked about plans to visit the Careers Service later. **Patricia (SPS Mexico)** mentioned the lack of time in the first semester and the awareness that international students are not allowed to work in the UK as the main reasons for having not yet gone to seek career advice:

I checked the careers website for jobs in the first semester. But since I didn't have time for a job I didn't anymore. I should look into it now. But I am pretty sure I can't stay [to work in the UK] I only have to go for PT jobs. I'll look into it, but I haven't really.

Across the four programmes, the students said they believe visiting the Careers Service was relevant to those who want a job in the UK. For example, when **Indira (EDU, India)** was asked if she had opportunities to discuss her future plans with anyone in her school or the university, she replied:

I didn't really. I didn't even look out. I didn't look out because I knew that I'm going to go back to India.

In response to a further probe as to what were her thoughts about the provision of support services in relation to her future plans in her home country, she said:

I've never really asked myself that because I was so sure that usually people look for such opportunities here because they are looking for job opportunities here or they want to stay back here. That was never my intention. I thought why take away something from someone who might want it? Somebody might be really wanting it and deserve it better.

Despite students' positive view of the willingness of the staff to help with, for example, reviewing their CV, the main issue is that some students do not link the support of the Careers Service to their career plans outside the UK job market. The question then remains, is the same type and format, and language on the CV applicable to different countries? Qian (SPS, China) who did not visit the Careers Service disagreed. In response to whether she sought for support to review her CV within the university, **Qian (SPS, China)** said:

I am not using the university because it's English [language]. I will apply for a Chinese job so not really helpful actually. I think it [university Careers Service] will be helpful if I want to get a job here. I will seek for professional help online. They can polish my CV.

Jun (BUS, China) also did not visit the central Careers Service, but she had her CV reviewed by the SDT. She said:

I went to one appointment to revise my CV. But they didn't change a lot on my CV. It is more like chatting not so formal meeting. In March I applied to companies in China. Some companies do not need the English version, so I just send my Chinese version.

During the second interview Jun said two international companies in China have invited her for face-to-face interview stage when she returns to China in September. As she mentioned in the quote above, it is not apparent the extent to which the help in reviewing her CV helped. It could be said that students could always translate their CV to the language used by potential employers. It is not apparent that the university will be providing CV services in Chinese, or in other languages.

Careers events

Five students attended Careers Fairs in the first semester (Table 7:5). They said their purpose was to explore job opportunities. Harshad mentioned that a second careers fair was held in May, but he did not attend as he took a short break after lectures ended in the second semester.

Chao (EDU, China) who attended one of the Careers Fairs to look for a job encountered what seemed like a recurrent refrain from the students. He said:

Before I went to the Careers Fair I had the desire to find a job within the UK but I don't think it's really helpful because the companies they invite some have no authority to issue sponsorship for international students. I don't think I can apply for a job there. I was a little bit disappointed because some companies are not suitable for international students because of the visa issue. I wanted to try, so I attend the careers fair.

For clarification. Chao's reference to 'companies not suitable for international students' refers to the requirement that a UKVI licensed sponsor (for example, a business or an educational organisation) is able to issue a Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) to support an employment offer to non-EU nationals including international students.

Nonetheless, the Careers Service invites organisations to make presentations to international students. Qian and Jun attended one such event. Jun (BUS, China) and Qian (SPS, China) were the only students who attended the careers event delivered by a Chinese company, LockedIn. Both students said they did not get information about the event from the Careers Service. Jun said she received

information about the event from her School. Qian got the information through WeChat, a Chinese social media channel. Both students said they got a lot of information about the Chinese job market from the presentation. Ironically, **Yin (BUS, Taiwan)** talked about the focus on support students from China and not Taiwan:

I believe that the [Careers] services are for mainly the European countries. It is close to their market. For Asian market, China is the giant, so it's hard to find a job in Taiwan from their career fairs. It's fine. I don't feel disappointed to a great extent. I don't feel that, oh why don't you provide careers service in Taiwan. Taiwan is a very small country. If I want to work in China, I would try to contact the Careers Service here but since I'm not, I can't.

Yin's perception on the focus of careers fairs, which is a part of careers event is comparable to other student perceptions.

On a related note, it is not clear if the information about the event was widely available to all students who may find it relevant for their future career aspiration.

Interestingly, **Fang (EDU, China)** talked about her experience of the careers fairs as an opportunity which opened her eyes to the organisational culture in the UK which is different from her previous experience in China:

I talked to some employers at the careers fair. I asked about their company culture and what is a typical day working in your company. The idea I have is that they care more about their employees because it's like a two-way decision. It's not just like I hire you. In China everyone is competing so it's a different environment to work. So, I want to stay here for a while to experience it. My idea is that you can't say you don't like something, or something does not suit you until you try it. If I try a different thing and compare it, I will know which kind of lifestyle I prefer. If you have never tried like this food, how can you say you don't like it?

At the time of conducting the second interview with Fang, she was preparing to submit a job application in the UK. It could not be ascertained at the time whether she achieved her plans or not.

Synopsis

As shown in 7.2, at the programme level, practical work was either available (LLC, SPS and BUS) or not available (EDU) across the selected programmes. Where available, the practical work was either compulsory (LLC) or not (BUS and SPS).

LLC, however, offered both compulsory and non-compulsory practical work embedded on the Masters programme.

It is not surprising that compulsory practical work was undertaken by all students in LLC. Also, 50% of the LLC student interviewees engaged in non-compulsory practical work in terms of a work-based dissertation (WBD). Although WBD was available for students in SPS and BUS, none of the interviewed students engaged in this option. This suggests that the availability of practical work experience does not necessarily mean students will engage in it. However, lack of student engagement in WBD does not mean that students were not interested in doing a WBD. When the first interview was conducted, most of the SPS students stated emphatically that the opportunity to do a WBD attracted them to the programme. However, they expressed concern about the lack of available options to do a WBD in their area of interest. This suggests that students who might be interested in doing a WBD also consider the relevance of the WBD to their career interest. Furthermore, Bola ascertained that the WBD was not “automatic”, that is, there is a selective application process based on grades in the first semester and passing an interview. This means that students who find and apply for a WBD they were interested in were not necessarily successful.

Interestingly, although practical work opportunity was not available as part of the EDU Masters, the EDU interviewees expressed interest in having an opportunity to engage in work-related experience.

At the university level, the Careers Service are responsible for providing employability-related support for all students. From the interviews it was apparent that the level of support the students expect from the Careers Service falls into three categories; some students seek support for working in their home country. For example, Yin, Indira, Qian, Jun and Bond fall into the first category as they were not considering working in the UK after their studies for reasons such as having a job already in their home country (Bond, Yin and Jun), or due to family commitments (Indira and Bola).

A common perception amongst the students in the first category was that the employability-related support provided by the Careers Service was good in general, but not particularly relevant to their home context. For example, Qian (SPS) talked about the lack of available help to prepare her CV for Chinese

employers. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, students who had this perception did not engage with the Careers Service (Table 7:5). It was not apparent that the Careers Service had a strategic plan in place to support students in this category.

Most of the students fall into the second category, that is, they wanted the opportunity to work in the UK, for example, Fang, Chao, Harshad, Patricia, Mariana, and Abby. All the students in this category engaged in at least one way with the Careers Service. However, the students talked at length about the impediments to their desire to work for some time in the UK after graduation, including, limited length of time on their visa (four months) after their studies, and lack of interest from employers.

The third category includes students like Adele (SPS, Canada), Jackie (SPS, USA), Mariana (SPS, Colombia), and Patricia (SPS, Mexico) who wanted the Masters to prepare them to work anywhere in the world. The students in the third category were especially concerned that their degree may not make them very employable and they needed support in this regard. Citing various reasons (section 7.3.2) some, but not all these students, engaged with the Careers Service.

The findings suggest that the student perceptions of the support from the Careers Service influenced the extent to which they engaged, or not, with it. Crucially, student perceptions to a large extent were formed mainly at the early stage of starting the Masters. For example, the students gave instances of recruiters citing their student visa status as the reason for written and verbal rejection of their applications. Some students, for example, Harshad, said they underestimated the difficulty associated with access to the labour market in the UK for international students. Consequently, they did not have much expectation that the Careers Service could be helpful in their quest to secure work in the UK. There might be a case to be made that students' expectations in terms of working in the UK either during or after their studies needs to be managed prior to starting their studies.

Changes in students' perceptions over the course of the year is explored in 7.4.

7.4 Category 3: Change in students' perceptions in relation to studying on the Masters

As mentioned earlier, the first interview was conducted three to four months into the Masters programme. At the time, many students said their expectations for embarking on the programme had been met in terms of getting introduced to and learning alongside a multicultural student cohort, learning to live independently and exposure to a different teaching, learning and cultural environment. Although most students considered learning in a different environment to be challenging, they talked about how they were adjusting to the new learning and cultural environment. For example, **Indira (EDU, India)** said:

I've done reading for 10 hours at a stretch to adjust to the system here. It really stressed me initially. I was terrified in the first few weeks. Slowly the fear has gone away.

Also, during the first interview, Indira's colleague, **Chao (EDU, China)** talked unabashedly about the mental and physical change he had undergone in the first three months of the Masters:

In China I can just read during the class but now I can't do that anymore because they don't want to know what I read but my understanding. So, it's more heavy work for us. It has cost me a lot of hair – its falling off, especially after (mentions tutor) class. Before this semester when I buy the alcohol in the supermarket each shopkeeper will ask me my age. After the essay I write this week no one ask me again because there is no need again. I don't know why. Maybe it is a coincidence. You can do a research on that.

According to **Sofia (EDU, Colombia)**, her surprising experience early-on in the Masters has helped her in terms of her personal development:

I think I have been focusing mainly only on the academics. Being here actually helped me on how to relate and how to build a relationship from people from different cultures and cultures that were completely unknown to me. This has been enriching in terms of how I have grown as a person. These are things I didn't think it will happen. Now that it has happened. I see them as really positive.

Similarly, **Harshad (BUS, India)** describes his personal growth since starting the Masters:

In India I was completely different. But over the period of the few months I have arrived I have noticed changes in my personality. And my ability to think differently has improved significantly.

As the term 'employability' was not mentioned during the interviews, this allowed an in-depth exploration of student motivation for study abroad, and the extent to which this was employability-related. The emergent framework encapsulating student rationales for study abroad in terms of, educational, experiential, economic and aspirational rationales have been discussed in Chapter 6. Hence, the findings indicate that student perceptions with regard to developing their employability was woven into different aspects of their academic and extracurricular experiences on the Masters. As a key focus of the study was to find out the extent to which student perceptions relate to developing employability, one of the main questions asked during the first interview was:

How does your current experience relate to your future aspiration?

The same question above was asked during the second interview. The aim was to examine changes, or not, in student perceptions regarding developing their employability.

7.4.1 Theme 1: Changes in students' perceptions regarding employability- related development across four programmes

I use excerpts of interviews at the end of the first semester and at the end of the second semester with four students across the four programmes to show changes in students' perspectives over the one-year Masters study period. The selected students represent the range of views across the interviewed students.

Mariana, (LLC, Colombia)

During the first interview, Mariana talked about how the Masters had changed her perceptions, personally and professionally, and in terms of how she sees the film industry:

I have gained a lot of experience and different ways of thinking that I didn't have before, in just four months! I have changed a lot in the way I see the film industry. I see myself as a professional and my role in the whole industry. Before I was completely lost. I didn't know what I was doing, so many things, so many options, but now I know what I am doing, though not completely, but I know what I have to do and who do I have to be in order to fit in the whole thing.

Mariana was asked again during the second interview about how her Masters was linked to her future aspirations, she said:

With all the practical work we have done in the Masters, I have met a lot of people and I have been gathering a big and nice database of contacts that I could probably use in the future. I think that is the most useful thing so far. Of course, all the knowledge and the theories are useful also but if you have a project in the future you know people and maybe they could help out. I think that is the most useful I have got from this Masters so far.

Mariana talked more about the general benefits of the course during the first interview. For her, this was already a major change which had occurred during the first semester. During the second interview, her conversation seemed more focused on the practical work experience aspect of her Masters, rather than 'the knowledge and the theories'. She talked about putting her experiences to use in the future.

Chao (EDU, China)

When Chao was first interviewed, he talked about engaging with the wider community. He described the value of such opportunities:

The opportunity to go to the city Chamber to be involved in community discussion cannot be gained even by a million-dollar tour. I joined the Choir, so I have the opportunity to communicate with the locals. This is an extra benefit for studying in the UK. I quite enjoy my experience here because I have more engagement with the society.

During the second interview, Chao elaborated further on how his extracurricular activities has been an important part of his study experience:

In the short period of the one-year Masters it is very difficult for me to meet the local people. I joined the Choir to immerse myself in this environment. This helps me to communicate with local people and will prepare me for my future job. This is the most important difference between being here and online study and just reading journal papers.

Similar to Mariana, Chao talked about changes which had already occurred during the first semester. He talked further about the importance of his experience with the "locals" right through the first semester to the time of the second interview at the latter stages of the Masters. He talked about how communicating with local people and understanding a different culture relates to his future aspiration to become a teacher. Similar to other students, he talked about how had developed his skillset by immersing himself in the host society. This further highlights the importance of the experiential rationale for studying abroad.

Bola, (SPS, Nigeria)

The point has been made already that students across the four programmes talked about the impact of the Masters early on during their study. For example, Bola described how what she was learning on the Masters had made her change her future plans. When she was interviewed four months into the programme, she talked about the transformative experience:

Before starting this Masters I never knew that I will be exposed to policy. I didn't know what policy entails. I wanted to study Masters just for me to get a change of career. Better money. Live in a comfortable place. Be fulfilled in life. But the fact that my course is now opening me up to what you can do when you are in a position of decision-making.

Interestingly, Bola is one of few students who did not engage in extracurricular activities. She said:

I don't have extra-curricular activities because I am taking this course when I think that I am much more mature. Though a lot of things go on in the class. The only way they enjoy life here is drinking. And the weather is not good enough for you to say that you want to go outside. If I am not in class, I am always online reading. When I am not reading journals, I am listening to the News. I also watch films. That is the social part of my life.

Bola's assertions with regards to engaging in extracurricular activities seems to contradict the comments from other students about the importance and the benefits of engaging in activities outside study. Bola was also one of the SPS students who expressed disappointment that she was unable to embark on the WBD which 'drew her to the programme' in the first instance. Unsurprisingly, Bola said she did not have opportunities to network both within and beyond the university. It is, perhaps, important to point out that, students across the four programmes, including, Adele (SPS, Canada), Jun (BUS, China), and Abby (LLC, USA), did not engage in the activities within the university outside their academic study. Abby, however, stood out amongst all the students in terms of networking, as she talked about developing networks with her classmates and the individuals she met while working with external organisations.

In any case, regardless of her lack of engagement in extracurricular activities, when interviewed at the end of the second semester, Bola reiterated the benefit of the Masters in relation to her future career:

This Masters has given me knowledge about what we can do...it is not something new anyway... but it is new to society in Nigeria. I want to work in an establishment that is going to create health for all.

While it is not possible to surmise that lack of engagement in extracurricular activities is necessarily detrimental to their employability, there seems to be an opportunity for the university to provide support to students like Bola and others who do not tap into the available resources at the university to enable what the students describe as a 'rounded experience'.

Harshad (BUS, India)

Harshad described how his thinking has changed within a few months of starting the Masters:

In India I was completely different. But over the period of the few months I have arrived I have noticed changes in my personality. And my ability to think differently has improved significantly.

Also, during the first interview Harshad talked about opportunities to develop his skillset:

During the start of this course we have the Award session and I listed the three skills in the areas I want to improve significantly. I'm working on them throughout the period of this one year so that when I complete my Masters I would get better at those skills.

Additionally, Harshad talked about developing networks and relationships with other students (international and home) during the Masters:

Apart from the academic, we have the networks and the relationship that we form with different nationalities. We are getting to know each other very well. And this benefit is very different from what I can get back home.

Similar to some other students (Table 7:5), Harshad also talked about attending career fairs and applying for jobs in the first semester.

I have been to almost every Fair. This helped me identify the company that I could apply to. The career prospects are really bright.

When he was interviewed at the end of the second semester, Harshad talked about the benefit of the Masters towards achieving his future ambition:

The main benefits are developing technical skills regarding my work and soft skills. When I take these back to my country I can work in a better position than the people in my country because I have a degree from a global organisation. I think when I go back I will have an edge over others in the job market. It is a competitive world. You need to be a bit superior to others to get that job or progress.

Interestingly, when he was interviewed at the end of the first semester Harshad mentioned his expectation to secure a job in the UK as part of his future aspirations.

Ironically, when interviewed again at the end of the second semester he had changed his mind as all his attempts to get a job had proved futile:

I applied to seven organisations and it was rejection at the very first stage. For non-EU students the job market is not in our favour right now.

Some students also talked about going to careers fairs and checking the careers website in the first semester with the intention to explore work opportunities in the UK. Similarly, at the time of conducting the second interview, the students expressed disappointment regarding opportunities to obtain work experience related to their Masters.

Synopsis

It was apparent from the first interviews that three to four months into the Masters the students perceive they were undergoing a change in terms of their personal and professional development. Across all four programmes the students talked with enthusiasm about different aspects of their experience that has been transformative. For example, the students talked about the challenge of studying abroad in terms of the different pedagogy, and independent living abroad. The students also said that they had anticipated the challenges and they showed resilience in their approach to dealing with the pressures of studying abroad which they described as a developmental process.

Also, during the first semester, the students talked about broadening the scope of the experience and possibilities for their future careers, especially in relation to work experience during their Masters.

Interestingly, when the students were interviewed at the end of the second semester, there did not seem to be much evidence of changes in their perceptions as to the benefit of the Masters discussed during the first interview. Rather, the students reiterated how early on during the Masters they could relate their experience to their future aspirations, both in terms of their professional and personal development. This also meant that the students repeated their discontent with lack of opportunities for practical work experience during the second interview.

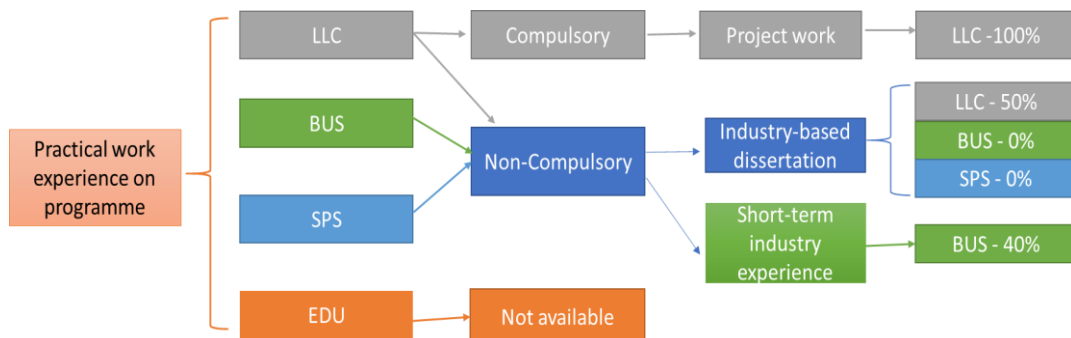
Relatedly, an area where there were clear changes in students' perceptions is with regard to opportunities for jobs in the UK during and at the end of their

studies. For example, during the first interview, Harshad (BUS, India) expressed optimism about his chances to obtain work experience in the UK. However, during the second interview, he expressed deep disappointment regarding the lack of opportunities for work experience or a job. This shows that there was an apparent change in the students' perceptions from 'very bright' chance for work in the UK to 'disappointment' in the job market. Interestingly, Harshad said 'he was told' about the difficulty for international students to get a job in the UK before starting his studies, but he did not think it would be near 'impossible'. It is unclear what advice Harshad will in turn give his peers who are thinking about working in the UK during and after their study

7.5 Chapter summary

Comparing the student experience across the four programmes shows students' interest in a range of work-opportunities embedded on their programme. The type of work-based opportunity, that is, whether compulsory or not, also determined the level of participation (see Figure 7:3).

Figure 7:3 Options for practical work experience across all programmes and participants engagement (%)



Two clear factors affect student participation in work opportunities - the availability of work opportunities on the programme, and the relevance of the available option of work experience to student career interest. Importantly, the students valued the opportunities to engage in work experience, for three main reasons: first, to have the experience of work as part of their preparation prior to getting a job; second, as a signal to prospective employers by including their experience on their CV; and third, to develop networks they could draw on during and after their Masters.

However, as the findings show, student initiative also plays a key role in terms of the level of engagement in extracurricular activities. It was not clear whether support was in place at the programme level or the university level to target students that do not seem to engage in activities beyond their academic study. It is not known if it is feasible to monitor student engagement in extracurricular activities with the aim to provide support.

Changes in students' perceptions over the length of the Masters relate mainly to a lack of access to work opportunities, which did not match students' expectations. Importantly, Harshad also said that to the best of his knowledge all his classmates from non-EU countries faced the same problem. As Harshad rightly recognised, the issue of lack of work opportunities for non-EU students is related to visa policies put in place by the government. This goes beyond the power of the university or employers. At the same time, there seems to be a mismatch between his expectations and experience. This suggests that there might be a need to support international students who feel disappointed by their experience. It was not clear if this was happening at the time of conducting the research.

Nonetheless, the students talked at length about the employability-related skills they perceived they developed during the Masters programme. In the following chapter the students' perceptions are examined in comparison with discourses around the notion of developing employability skills in the university document (alluded to in this chapter) and more broadly within the wider literature.

Chapter 8. Student perspectives in relation to discourses on employability

8.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the fourth research question:

To what extent do student perceptions relate to present discourses around employability?

To provide a context for the discussion, section 8.2 provides an overview of discourses around employability (see Chapter 4 for an in-depth discussion). The findings are discussed under two categories shown below in Table 8:1.

Table 8:1 Comparing students' perspectives of employability and wider discourses

| Categories | Themes |
|--|--|
| Comparing institutional discourse on employability to students' perceptions | - Engaging in extracurricular activities - Developing skills and attributes |
| Comparison between student perceptions on employability and employability-related constructs in the literature | - Knowledge construct - Skills construct - Attitudes construct - Relationship construct |

The first category examines the extent to which conceptualisations of employability at the university (in the employability-related document) relate to students' perceptions. Hence, the findings will be discussed in relation to student engagement in employability-related extracurricular activities (clubs and societies, and travelling), aside from work-experience already discussed in Chapter 7. In addition, I examine students' perspectives regarding the employability-related skills and attributes mentioned in the document.

The second category will explore the extent to which findings in my study relating to students' perceptions on developing employability agree, or not, with the wider literature, with a focus on research linking study abroad to employability. Based on my findings and drawing on the wider literature, under category two, the themes are

framed as a conceptual framework of employability constructs: knowledge, skills, attitudes and relationships.

8.2 Overview of discourses on employability

As discussed in Chapter 4, and of direct relevance to my research, it is pertinent to (re)state that human capital is the fundamental underlying principle framing employability discourses in the UK and further afield. Human capital theory which emphasises the importance of an educated skilled workforce (Becker, 1975) is aptly described in the *Oxford Dictionary of Economics* as ‘the stock of knowledge, skills, and abilities that determine the labour productivity of an individual’ (Black, Hashimzade, and Myles 2017, 157). Unsurprisingly, as discussed in Chapter 4, discourses on employability cover the views of key stakeholders including policy makers, employers, higher education institutions and students. These discourses are outlined in institutional documents, data and statistics and the wider literature. Further, Black et al. (2017) assert that the ‘investment in human capital through education and training can increase the stock, and such investment is one of the sources of economic growth’ (157). This captures dominant views in the literature regarding the benefit of human capital ‘stock’ for competitive advantage within a nation state.

However, by definition, international students are not nationals of the host nation. As such, aside from their much discussed monetary contribution to the host country economy in terms of tuition fees and living costs, very little is known about the extent to which international students develop what Black et al., (2017) describe as ‘the stock of knowledge, skills and abilities’ necessary for individual labour productivity and as ‘sources of economic growth’ (157) perhaps for the host economy, or their own country, or any other country.

In view of the growing number of mobile tertiary-level students, there seems to be a need to reflect on current dominant and arguably narrow conceptualisations of the benefit of growing human capital for national labour market. This is not to say that individuals do not already make contributions to the economic development of a state other than their own. In contrast, as discussed in Chapter 4, studies in migration highlight the longstanding movement of people for their economic development and by extension contribution to the economy of their host nation (Lee,

1966). However, discourses linking the internationalisation of higher education to graduate employability remain poorly conceptualised and under-researched in the literature (see Chapter 4).

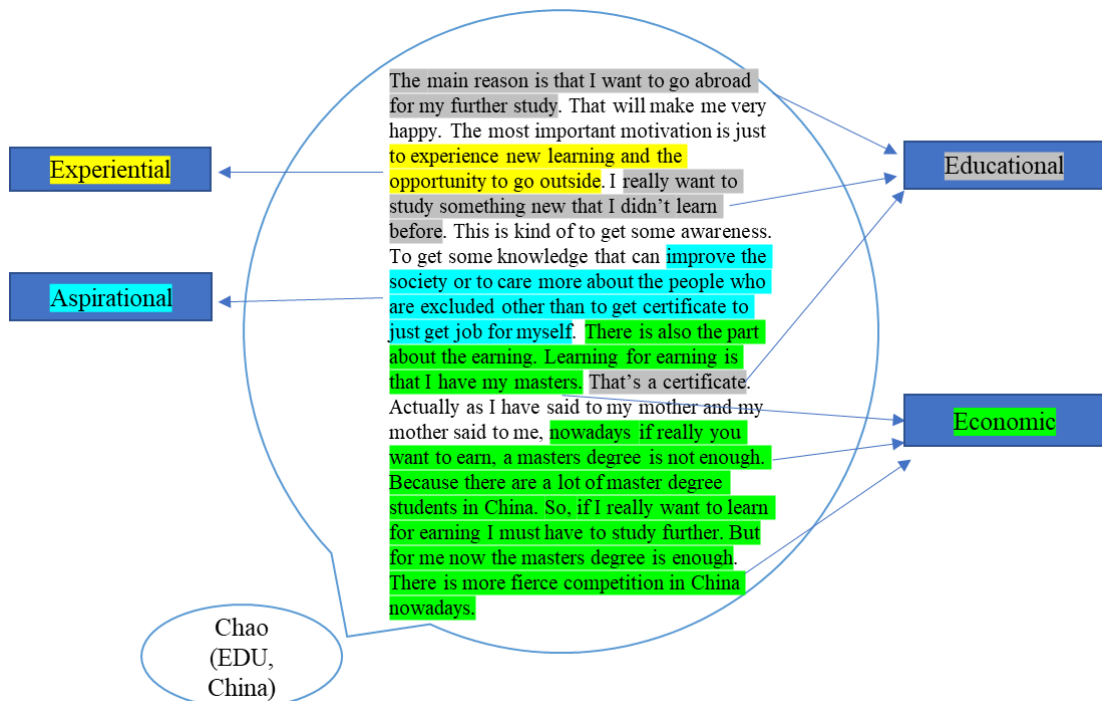
As such, the employability discourses that I draw on in this chapter pertain to institutional documents (specifically, the document in the institution where the study was carried out) which does not distinguish between international and home students. Similarly, the main conceptualisations of employability in the wider literature are not framed in the context of international student employability. It is therefore pertinent to look at emerging developments in the field in terms of recent studies making linkages between employability and study abroad, after a brief overview of employability as a concept.

As has been recognised by other authors (for example, Harvey, 2001; Holmes, 2013), the two main conceptualisations of employability align with the widely cited definition by Hillage and Pollard (1998), which relates, firstly, to the ability of a student to obtain and retain a job after graduation, and secondly, on 'enhancing the students' attributes (skills, knowledge and attitudes), with the ultimate aim of developing the student as a critical lifelong learner' (3). The two main conceptualisations of employability can be regarded also as the outcomes approach or the process approach (Harvey, 2001). Employability outcomes approach refers to obtaining employment and related discourses around graduate employment rates. Congruent with the human capital theory, the employability outcomes outlook largely forms the basis of the imperative on HE to produce graduates with suitable skills for the labour market and the economy.

However, the 'crude measure' of employability (Harvey, 2001, 97) in terms of a simplistic linear relationship between education and employment is contested for two main reasons. In the first instance many researchers agree that having the skills and the ability to obtain a job (employability) does not necessarily translate into employment (Brown et al, 2003; Gribble, 2015). Second, external factors outside the influence of educational institutions, including labour market conditions (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005), and wider social and economic background, underpin arguments regarding inequalities of access to employment (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). It is important to state that criticism of the outcomes approach does not seem to seek to invalidate the veracity of students' expectation to secure suitable employment after graduation. However, by making a direct link between education

and later employment, the outcomes approach frames employability as an end and this implies that a successful outcome can be seen only in terms of job acquisition. In contrast, the findings in Chapter 6 suggest that students' rationales for study abroad include and extend beyond economic measures and employment outcomes. The quote below provides an example of students' multiple rationales for study abroad (Figure 8:1).

Figure 8:1 Textual data outlining four rationales for study abroad: Chao, EDU, China)



Similar to other students, Chao talks about seeking to obtain the Masters 'for earning' which suggests that employability-related outcomes can be linked to students' economic rationale for study abroad. The other rationales such as, the educational rationale includes the quest for knowledge and learning for both instrumental outcomes (employment) and intrinsic reasons. The experiential rationale shows that students have the desire to expand their horizons beyond their previous experiences. The aspirational rationale reveals students' ambitions to contribute to society using the knowledge and skills developed through their education and other activities. To this end, in contrast to the outcomes approach, my study conceptualises employability within a process of developing competencies with the potential to lead to differing though not conflicting possible graduate options.

The approach to employability in my study aligns with what Harvey (2001) describes as employability processes which relates to activities that equip, or, enhance the possession of employability attributes. The employability process approach involves the institution, students, and other related stakeholders. This means that the HEI provides employability development opportunities for students. In turn, students' engagement with academic and extracurricular activities will provide opportunities to develop or enhance employability-related skills and attributes (Harvey, 2001) which frames the graduate identity they present to prospective employers [key stakeholders] when the opportunity arises (Holmes, 2013), for example, during a job interview. It is therefore important to link the employability-related activities at institutions and the skills and competences students perceive they develop from engaging in these activities. To this end, the findings reported in Chapter 7 provide important insights into students' perceptions of employability-related activities in the university, at the programme level, and centrally, through the Careers Service.

However, employability-related initiatives at the university are not expected to exist in a vacuum. It is therefore unsurprising to find that at the university, the discourse on employability is framed in the form of an online document. The document outlines the aim of the University to 'produce graduates fully equipped to achieve the highest personal and professional standards in line with its strategic goals to attract and retain quality students and maintain its competitive advantage in the global market' (University employability document, 2).

The university employability document further states that it coheres with the university's internationalisation strategy, thus directly linking the employability initiative to international students. Yet, similar to what is available on other university websites, the institutional documents remain undifferentiated in terms its applicability to the diverse student cohort at the university. The extent to which the university document might be relevant, in particular, to international students warrants attention considering the keen interest for higher education institutions to promote employability to attract students from a global pool.

Furthermore, the framing of employability discourses in existing policy and practice normally makes clear linkages between higher education and the work readiness of graduates to develop the economy in a national context, to support the national economic and market imperatives. This is to be expected considering the human capital perspective underpinning employability discourses mentioned earlier.

However, in an internationalised higher education setting in a globalised world, universities educate and train an international student cohort. As Nilsson and Ripmeester (2016) noted, the student experience of studying abroad ‘needs to be supported to act as bridge from campus to employment’ (617) as institutions face the challenge to prepare their students for the global job market. This directly links to a major aspect of my study regarding the relative lack of studies making connections between employability and internationalisation. Relatedly, there remains a gap in understanding the extent to which international student perspectives relate to university stakeholder discourses. This is the focus in the next section (8.3).

8.3 Category 1: Comparing institutional discourse on employability to students’ perceptions

The discussion under category 1 draws on the university employability document. The institutional document describes a 3-step plan to support students in developing their employability during their study.

For the first step, students are encouraged to recognise that their degree and academic and non-academic activities gives them the ‘EDGE’ to demonstrate what they can offer to an employer.

For the second step, students are expected to develop their employability by getting involved in other activities, namely, work experience, clubs and societies, and travel abroad. Students are also encouraged to develop skills and attributes, such as, foreign languages, enterprise, or leadership skills.

The third step is linked to engaging with the Careers Service to find the information and advice they need to prepare for future work or further study.

It can be inferred from the institutional employability document that the students are expected to take responsibility for developing their employability by following the steps described above. Related to the first step, students are expected to use the ‘My EdGE Workbook’ to document their strengths and articulate their academic and non-academic experiences. This is expected to allow the students to identify gaps in their skillset and to work towards developing employability-related attributes. However, none of the students interviewed mentioned that they had used the ‘My EdGE Workbook’ which was put forward by the university as a key resource for

developing student employability. At the same time, though the students did not show an awareness of the existence of the workbook, this, however, does not necessarily mean that the students did not see or use the workbook.

In contrast to the lack of attention to the My EDGE Workbook, students talked extensively about their engagement in extracurricular activities, including, work experience, clubs and societies, and travelling, all of which are mentioned in the university document as the second step towards developing their employability. The third step listed in the document, that is, engaging with the Careers Service, has been discussed in Chapter 7. This chapter will therefore focus on student engagement in extracurricular activities.

8.3.1 Theme 1: Engaging in extracurricular activities

Students' responses to questions related to paid and unpaid work experiences including part time jobs, internships and volunteering activities have been discussed in Chapter 7. The discussion in this section focuses on findings related to why students engage in other extracurricular activities, including travelling, and clubs and societies, and other activities not mentioned in the employability document.

I examined student engagement in extracurricular activities, including work experience, clubs and societies, and travelling. Table 8:2 details the students' responses to whether they had engaged in extracurricular activities suggested in the university employability document.

Table 8:2 Student engagement in extracurricular activities

| School | Name | Travelling | Clubs and Societies | Volunteering | Other extracurricular |
|------------|----------|------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| LLC | Mariana | ✓ | x | ✓ | x |
| | Patricia | ✓ | x | ✓ | x |
| | Abby | x | x | ✓ | x |
| | Shi | ✓ | x | ✓ | x |
| SPS | Alim | ✓ | x | x | x |
| | Jackie | ✓ | ✓ | x | x |
| | Qian | ✓ | x | x | x |
| | Bola | x | x | ✓ | x |
| | Mandy | x | ✓ | x | ✓ - Language French |
| | Adele | x | x | x | x |
| EDU | Fang | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| | Chao | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| | Sofia | ✓ | ✓ | x | ✓ - Language - Mandarin |
| | Indira | ✓ | x | ✓ | x |
| BUS | Bond | ✓ | ✓ | x | ✓ - Language Italian |
| | Yin | ✓ | x | ✓ | x |
| | Jun | ✓ | x | x | ✓ International fellowship |
| | Lan | ✓ | x | ✓ | x |
| | Harshad | ✓ | x | ✓ | x |

Travelling

Fifteen out of the nineteen students interviewed had engaged in travelling during their Masters. Their travelling ranged from trips to locations within Scotland, the rest of the UK, Europe, and in the case of one student (Bond, BUS, Singapore), also a trip to Africa (Morocco).

Students who did not travel during the Masters said they did not have extra funds for travelling. **Bola (SPS, Nigeria)**, for example, said:

I don't have extra money. I just have money for my upkeep. I have to be smart with my finances because I am not getting any job, so I have to get to the end of the programme. When I am sure nothing is at stake anymore, then if I have some money left, I can travel within Scotland, or maybe London.

Some students (Harshad, Sofia, Indira, Mariana and Alim) travelled within Scotland and the rest of the UK. These were, in most cases, day trips with friends to visit tourist destinations. For **Sofia (EDU, Colombia)**, all her travelling was in relation to her activities with the ballroom dancing society. She said:

I didn't have the budget to travel around. I made small trips with the ballroom society. I was able to manage because they were a one-day trip. It was not a tourist trip, so I wasn't paying for attractions. I just went to the competition danced and came back. The society organised everything from where to stay to how to travel and we had big discounts as a student society. I don't know if that actually counts as travelling.

Sofia said she was not sure whether her trips with the society "counted as travelling." It is possible she had this opinion since they were not leisure trips.

Similar to Sofia, Chao (EDU, China) also travelled with his music society to perform in Wales and Bath. In addition to this, **Chao (EDU, China)** travelled to Berlin for reasons related to his interest in music:

I like music and Germany is classical music place, so I travelled there. I also like beautiful scenery. Sometimes I like to look at buildings that are in my history textbook. I really saw them. Very exciting!

Most of the students travelled around the UK and Europe. It was not surprising that most students travelled in December and April during breaks from classes as they talked about travelling to take a break from their study. In addition, in many cases, it was apparent that they had planned to travel during their Masters, for various reasons, such as visiting friends:

Travelling was just for fun. Learning about the world. Seeing my friends who live in other places. I had friends in most place I went to. Sometimes I went with my friends from the States who actually came up. One of my friends from my hometown lives in Berlin now. We all met up in London and then travelled up. Jackie (SPS, USA)

There was a common theme amongst students from Asia as they talked about travelling around Europe during their study as an opportunity they may not have again. **Qian (SPS, China)** said:

It's really convenient to travel to the whole Europe because they are close. Since I'm here, I should travel more to experience more culture. When I go back to China it is hard for me to travel to Europe again because the cost is so high and when I start work I think I don't have that kind of time to enjoy such holiday.

Due to the perception from students across the four programmes that travelling was a personal and not a professional activity, it was perhaps not surprising that **Harshad (BUS, India)** said:

Travelling was just for personal experience rather than a professional experience. I'm not going to put travelling in my CV, No. No. It is too general. There are hundreds and thousands of people in the world who are travelling. What have I done differently by travelling?

Similarly, the comment below from **Yin (BUS, Taiwan)** was echoed by most of the students:

Travelling is for my own interest. Before I came to study here I have been to many countries around the world, so this is just one of my own interest. It is not really related to my future plans.

Nonetheless, some students make linkages between travelling and employability, for example, Qian (SPS, China) and Bond (BUS, Singapore). Bond (BUS, Singapore) talked about visiting different countries during his Masters to experience different approaches to cooking in different cultures. He links this to plans to start-up a food business in the future. Crucially, Bonds' motivation for travelling was not related to his immediate career plans as he needed to fulfil the condition of his scholarship from his country (Singapore) to return to his job.

Except for the two BUS students (Bond and Yin) who needed to travel to Italy as part of their school-sponsored work experience, none of the other students across all programmes talked about any aspect of their study experience at the university related to their travelling. Rather, the students talked about making plans to ensure

that their travel fit around their academic study.

Interestingly, the employability document does not provide details on whether there is support provided for students to engage in extracurricular activities, including, travelling. It is not clear how the employability discourse at the university provides information for students to connect their travelling as an activity with ways that could also potentially develop their employability.

Clubs and Societies

The students were asked during the second interview whether they were members of clubs and societies in the university. This was around ten months after the students started their Masters, and it was expected at this stage that students would have had the opportunity to get involved in societies. To put this in context, the university Students Union website states that there are over 260 societies students could join. In addition, students could start a society as their own initiative. Yet, only around one third, that is, six out of the nineteen interviewed students had joined a society. Interestingly, some students (for example, Alim, Qian and Abby) talked about the importance of their friendship networks. They compared the get-togethers with their friends as meeting the same social needs as clubs and societies:

I'll more likely join a society or club just to meet people but because I'm pretty comfortable with my friend group and all that I just haven't. **Abby (LLC, USA)**

The findings suggest that most of the students were more interested in clubs and societies at the start of their study, as they talked about attending the societies fair held at the beginning of the first semester. **Sofia (Colombia, Education)** gave a detailed explanation about her reason for attending the fair:

When I just arrived in Edinburgh if I go to whatever Masters welcome session they will tell you join a society, life is not only about studying get something to be distracted with. So, I went to the societies fair to see what they had to offer. I really liked the ballroom dance society and I joined the Latin America society because it was really nice to find someone with same cultural background that would understand your Latin jokes or whatever and someone to speak Spanish with was nice as well. I also like the fact that they didn't have like a proper schedule. So, if I could go to the events it was fine but if I couldn't it wasn't like I was missing out on something.

In contrast to Sofia's interest in a society with people from her country, resonating with views from the students discussed extensively in Chapters 6 and 7, **Yin (BUS,**

Taiwan) talked about valuing a multinational experience more during her study abroad:

We do have a Taiwanese society here. I don't really know many Taiwanese people here in Edinburgh. To be honest, my friends are all foreigners from other countries or British people. It is fine for me because multinational experience is what I really cherish here. I have fewer than five Chinese friends here and interestingly, five of us are not part of the Taiwanese society. I really do not have a specific idea how they operate as a society. I don't know how they are organised. But for very important events like the Chinese New Year which is the most important festival for us. I went to have dinner with them.

Further, the dialogue with **Chao (EDU, China)** suggests that joining a society could help students deal with the pressure of their academic work.

I didn't expect the workload is so much. Before I come here many students who study in the university in the UK when they come back they say UK is pleasure and very easy to pass but I found that I must study very hard to get acceptable mark of around 60. If I am too ambitious it will give me a lot of pressure. I need to balance my mental health with my academic ambitions. That is why I joined the club. On the one hand I want to get good marks. But I want to get some fun to enjoy myself. It is very important for me, I think. You know international student tuition fees is so high I don't just want to just waste those tuition fee to read all the journals. I want to use this opportunity to communicate all round with tutors and the community.

None of the students mentioned that they were aware of the existence of the employability document. At the same time, their motives for engaging in clubs and societies seems in line with the employability document. The rich dialogue above with Chao, however, suggests that engaging in extracurricular activities seems beneficial for reasons other than developing employability. For example, Chao's activities provide information regarding how his engagement with the Choir helps him in dealing with academic work pressure, balancing academics and having a social life. He further states that extracurricular activities provide an additional benefit as a result of his sojourn in the host country as an international student, which as he affirms, cannot be obtained through online study. Congruent with assertions from other students, he also considers his engagement with the academic environment and society outside the university as a way to obtain optimal value of the Masters, considering its high cost.

Further dialogue with **Chao (EDU, China)** seems useful to understand what students seem to want from societies:

I joined the society because I like music and my interest cannot be satisfied

by just listening to music. I really want to engage by performing. I play the flute and the saxophone. But I did not bring my instruments here, so I decided to join the choir.

At the same time, Chao, seems to relate his interest in music to a possible future career in the area. Specifically, he talked about pursuing a career in Education by enrolling on a PhD. **Chao (EDU, China)** was also open to seeking a career path in the Arts:

I think music is related to my future because I may apply for a job or a PhD. For the job part, I can say I am in the choir when I apply for a job in a cultural agency. I have already contacted the Royal Scottish Orchestra to ask if [job] opportunity exists. Maybe there will be in September. I sent my application last week (June, that is, end of second semester). That is the only request [job application] I have sent.

While it was not unusual for the students to talk about considering multiple career paths, Chao was interesting as he apparently seemed very keen to continue pursuing his interest in music during his Masters. This suggests that to some extent there is a link between students' interest and activities prior to starting the Masters and how they take forward their interest, perhaps by joining clubs and societies. However, this does not suggest that students might not want to start a new activity.

Despite students' interest in extracurricular activities, the one-year period of the Masters means that there are associated constraints on the students' time:

*I've noticed events and stuff but when you don't have that much time you are fitting everything into a year you do pick very selectively the things to engage with. You do your best and leave the rest. Unfortunately. **Jackie (SPS, USA)***

Also related to time constraints, it seems important to mention that students said that they felt there was no point joining societies if they missed the first few weeks, as **Lan (BUS, China)** pointed out:

I did not join clubs and societies because I missed the [clubs and societies] conference. I didn't know that they did some promotion about their societies. I just missed it when they did it in September or October. I just didn't know the date. I don't know the detailed content about them, so I missed it.

Lan's comments were echoed by a few other students.

Some students (Bola, Indira, Mariana and Jun) mentioned specifically that they were not interested in joining a club or society. **Indira (EDU, India)** gave a couple of reasons why:

I have done that a lot when I was in university in my younger years. The first thing in the first semester was for me to cope with the reading and cope with the writing the assignments because I didn't know what to expect. But at the second semester I think the clubs and societies had all been formed. I think I'm not really a society or a club kind of person.

In addition, **Mariana (LLC, Colombia)** said she was not interested in attending the society events as she wanted “something else” apart from drinking alcohol:

I mean they only do shows and they just want to get drunk. It's ok but not every time. Like do something else. Not only alcohol.

The findings show that students' engagement in clubs and societies depends to a large extent on student interest. Time constraints and personal preferences are also factors that affect students' decision to join (or not) a club or a society.

It was apparent that the university provides a forum at the start of the academic year for students to get acquainted with the societies on campus. Ironically, not all students were aware of the event. All the students who did not participate in the clubs and societies event organised at the beginning of the first semester did not make further attempts to join a society as they believed the societies were already 'formed'.

Off-campus local group-initiated extracurricular activities

Aside from the activities mentioned in the employability document, the students were asked to talk about other extracurricular activities they might have participated in. The activity described here is based on discussion with Jun (BUS, China). This merits mentioning as it describes efforts made by a local group to make connections specifically with international students. In addition, this means looking at international student engagement in activities beyond the university, which, crucially, is missing from the university employability document. In this instance, this involved a faith-based international fellowship.

From discussions with Jun, she did not seem to have made connections with classmates on her course and she did not belong to any society within the university. Yet, she talked with enthusiasm about her engagement in extracurricular activities with the group outside the university. This seems to suggest that students will connect with people within the local community when it aligns with their own interest. This resonates with comments from some other students, for example, Chao (EDU, China) and Mariana (Colombia, LLC) who talked about the importance

of interacting with the 'locals'. Though **Jun (BUS, China)** said she was less interested in the faith aspect of the fellowship, she, however, talks about enjoying the different activities organised by the members of the fellowship. Her main reason for attending the activities was related to her interest to immerse herself into the society and practice her English language:

The international fellowship allows me to get closer to the native speakers. It includes other people apart from native speakers. We speak English. Everyone is nice and very friendly. I got information through another Chinese student. It is just an opportunity to practice my English and to enrich my experience.

In terms of "enriching her experience" Jun talked at length about several aspects of attending the international fellowship, mainly as a social network. She joined members of the fellowship to engage in different informal activities, for example, a fun day out including a trip to St Andrews. The fellowship also provides the opportunity to practice her English language skills which has been discussed in Chapter 6 as a key motivation to study abroad. Jun further links her experience with the local group to her future aspiration to work in international business.

External informal organised extracurricular activities, like the example given by Jun and some other students seem to enrich their student experience abroad. Yet, in the literature on student experiences, there is little known about how and the extent to which external social connections with groups outside the university relate to the student experience. However, if, as the findings suggest, such connections are valuable to international students, it might be worthwhile to communicate to students the range of activities that they could consider engaging with during their study. In addition, it might be interesting to understand possible reasons why local groups seek to engage with international students, perhaps for their own intercultural learning and understanding.

8.3.2 Theme 2: Developing skills and attributes

The employability initiative document encourages students to develop skills and attributes, so they can demonstrate to potential employers that they have the 'Edge'. The document mentions foreign language, enterprise or leadership skills. To some extent, student views with regards to developing enterprise and leadership skills have been discussed in the previous chapters. To this end, findings related to students' foreign language skill development will be discussed in this section.

Foreign language

During the second interview, **Sofia (EDU, Colombia)** wanted clarification as to whether language learning could be classified as part of extracurricular activities. Her query was:

I don't know if this [language] classifies as others. I didn't mark it but if you think it classifies I'm taking Chinese classes.

Sofia was taking the language classes at the LLC School. When asked why she was taking language classes, she said:

Well I thought I have so many Chinese classmates that it made me start thinking why not expand the vision of the world and my possibilities of the world to the Far East.

She further explained:

Back in Colombia we don't have a very high Asian population and it's mainly Japanese and Korean. But being here I kinda realise how big China is and how they are connected to the world because back in Colombia the only news we hear or the only comments we hear about China is how closed they are in terms of their politics and things. Then how open they are in terms of their economic training and things with everything back home made in China or Taiwan. Being here and interacting with Chinese people made me a lot more curious about China. I have so many Chinese friends now. Why not consider China at some point in my distant future? Even if I never go to China, if I know Chinese it will be an advantage if China is moving towards the rest of the world.

Sofia's explanation ties in with earlier discussion regarding the students' perceptions that studying abroad broadens their views of the world.

Two other students, Mandy (SPS, South Africa) and Bond (BUS, Singapore), out of the nineteen students interviewed (see participants' profiles in Table 5:1) said they were learning an additional language.

Mandy (SPS, South Africa) shared her experience of learning French through the TANDEM language programme run by the Student Union:

I'm learning French. I just signed up for the TANDEM which is a language exchange programme.

Bond (BUS, Singapore) talked about learning Italian. Unlike Sofia and Mandy who were taking classes at the university, Bond was learning a language online and at his own pace. He explains the reason for his interest:

I'm learning Italian on an individual level, online or wherever I can find. I've always been interested in the Italian culture. I love Italian food, so I'm planning to go to Italy for a few weeks. It would be better if I can converse in Italian. The School of Business trip was quite an exposure. We went to the University of Bologna.

It can be surmised that students across the four programmes considered learning a new language as an important extracurricular activity. There were opportunities across the university for the students to learn a language. The students seem to consider learning an additional language to be a beneficial skill to enhance their understanding of other cultures, especially if they decide to visit (Bond) or live in another country (in the case of Alim discussed below).

Three students (Alim, Jackie and Shi) also mentioned they were interested in learning an additional language. However, they had not taken steps to learn the language. **Alim (SPS, Turkey)** said he would like to learn another language or improve his competence in German:

I have thought about some options. Either I learn another language or improve the level of my German language, then I could stay in a country different from mine.

Interestingly, although LLC provides language classes for interested students across the university, as at the time of conducting the second interview, none of the students in LLC had embarked on any language course. It was also not known if Shi (LLC, Taiwan) will learn Japanese as planned before the end of her studies.

The employability document and the wider literature points to the importance of developing language skills. Accordingly, the university provides opportunities for students to develop their language skills. This means that students have access to resources to develop foreign language skills available at the departmental level and the Student Union. However, not all the students took advantage of the opportunity. Whether they make use of the resources or not seems to depend on student personal choice and interest. The findings thus present a mixed picture of student perspectives of the benefit on learning a foreign language.

The employability document also provides a glossary of other skills that students could develop during their study in the university. However, aside from providing a link to a glossary of skills and attitudes, it does not elaborate on how students develop such skills during their study. In a similar vein, employability skill development is widely discussed in the literature. Yet, there is little focus on how or

the extent to which students develop employability skills during their study. The next section will therefore focus on findings related to students' articulation of the employability skills and attitudes they are developing during their study.

Further, as earlier stated, I will explore the extent to whether students' perspectives are congruent or not with the employability discourses beyond the institutional document. Crucially, the university document does not make distinctions between employability development in relation to study abroad. This will be addressed in the next section as the students' perspectives are compared with selected literature which contributes to our understanding of the connections between study abroad and employability.

Synopsis

The chapter introduces an overview of employability discourses (8.2). This was useful to distinguish between the two main strands of discourses in the literature: the outcomes approach which is focused on employment rates; and the process approach which looks at the role of key stakeholders such as, policy makers, universities, students and employers, in developing student employability.

Situating my research within the process approach to employability informs the structure of the chapter under two categories. The first category focused on the university employability initiative document which describes a '3-step employability plan' including how students can enhance their employability in terms of, documenting the knowledge and skills they are developing during their study and preparing to convey this to potential employers, seeking opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities, and engaging with the Careers Service.

However, none of the students demonstrated awareness of the document. It is unclear if students' awareness and perusal of the employability document could have improved their impetus towards developing their employability.

Notwithstanding, the findings discussed in depth in Chapter 7 and in 8.3 suggest that the students engaged in many employability-related activities out of the array of options of extracurricular activities available in the university. At the same time, not all students engaged in all the activities suggested in the document. Some students did not engage in any of the activities due to reasons discussed in

section 8.3.2. A few students engaged in activities (outside the university) omitted from the university employability document.

The findings suggest that students' rationales for engaging in extracurricular activities mentioned in the document, for example, travelling, is not always employability-related.

Importantly, the employability document provides little clarification as to the ways students are supported to engage in the activities listed in the document.

Additionally, the findings suggest that the dominant narrative in the university employability document (and other related discourses) are mostly linked to employment outcomes discussed in section 8.2. This, however, limits our understanding with regards to whether, and the extent to which, engaging in some so-called employability-related activities, like clubs and societies, could enhance students' experience during their study in other ways. Chao (EDU, China), who talked about how engaging in society helped his mental wellbeing and coping on the course, is a good example.

Thus, the findings suggest that students' actions and their perceptions of institutional practices, for example, the support provided by the Careers Service (discussed in Chapter 7) do not necessarily match the employability agenda put forward by the institution. As a result, this chapter goes further to provide some insight into understanding students' perceptions of the skills and abilities they were developing during their study in preparation for the global job market.

To this end, the discussion in section 8.4, builds on the findings in Chapters 6 and 7 to further outline students' perceptions regarding the skills they are developing as a result of engaging in academic and extracurricular activities during their study abroad. To position the findings within the wider employability discourses, the students' perceptions of the employability related component of their postgraduate study are compared to employability-related discourses in the university and in the wider literature.

8.4 Category 2: Comparison between student perceptions on employability and employability-related constructs in the literature

Aside from the university document discussed in 8.2, employability discourses in the form of data and statistics are available online and in reports (for example, HESA). However, HESA data on employability excludes international students (see Chapter 4). The students did not talk about their awareness of the lack of data with regards to international student employability. This was not further pursued with the interviewees.

In line with the focus in this section, relevant employability-related studies in the wider literature mentioned in Chapter 4 are further discussed (Farrugia and Sanger, 2017; Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017) so as to compare the findings to my own. These studies are relevant to the context of my study considering that present theoretical and empirical examination of employability mostly exclude study abroad experiences.

Importantly, as pointed out already in Chapter 4, theoretical discourses around employability are framed without a distinction between national and international context of participation in higher education towards developing and enhancing graduate employability. For example, the ESECT (Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team) USEM (Understanding, Skilful practices in context, Efficacy beliefs, and Metacognition) framework of employability in the UK (Yorke and Knight, 2007) is noted to have 'gained the most traction' in the field and the basis of many definitions of employability in HEIs (Cashian, 2017, 110). Yet, aside from criticism of the USEM model as 'a passive' statement of skills that a student should possess to be employable (Cashian, 2017, 111), it does not seem to consider the extent to which the model might be applicable in an internationalised higher education environment (for example, see Yorke, 2004a). Furthermore, another well cited model of employability, the Career EDGE framework (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007) is largely based on the importance of 'emotional intelligence' (EI) (Dacre Pool, 2017) without a clear articulation as to how the conceptualisation of EI might apply to international students and towards developing their employability.

In relation to empirical research, despite the robust and many-sided studies around employability, student perspectives largely remain missing, in general (Tymon,

2013), and barely any attention is given to international students' perspectives on employability (Huang et al., 2014). This means that, notwithstanding the increasing attention to employability in the wider literature (Bridgstock, 2009; Holmes, 2011; Knight and Yorke, 2004; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2016), few authors make the connection between employability and study abroad (Caruana and Spurling, 2007; Jones, 2012). This makes interesting Potts's (2018) review of ten studies published around the globe since 2014, which contribute to understanding the link between study abroad and employability. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, the majority of the studies were conducted in the USA (n =4) which is the top destination of international students. Possibly, reflecting well-documented efforts to increase the recruitment of international students, a number of studies have been conducted in the area in Australia (see for example, Blackmore et al., 2014), and Potts refers to two Australian studies in her review. Potts' review also included one study each conducted in Japan and Italy, and also the European Impact Study conducted by researchers in Europe. Considering that the UK is the second top destination for international students, after the USA, it seems interesting that the review includes only one study in the UK which made linkages between study abroad and employability. This is also perhaps not unexpected considering the UK government policy which is widely seen as unfavourable towards international students. It is unclear if there are linkages in government policy and the dearth of research on international student experience in the UK.

One recurrent theme amongst all ten studies in the review by Potts was the link between study abroad and employment outcomes. For example, the UK study, '*Gone International 2016: The value of global mobility*' published by Universities UK, compared the class of the degree, employment rate, and average annual salary between mobile students and those who were not mobile. Importantly, as pointed out in section 8.2, employment is not necessarily the same as employability (see also Chapter 4). At the same time, considering the value placed on graduate outcomes nationally, perhaps, graduate employment rates for international students will be included in data collected by HESA from HEIs UK in the future, or the topic of future research.

Potts (2018) mentions the European ERASMUS Impact Study (EIS) as a key text regarding employability in Europe. However, though the EIS study offers important insight as to the importance of study abroad for enhancing employability, crucially,

the focus on Europeanisation means that it excludes aspects of internationalisation that are of direct relevance to the experiences of non-EU students, which is the focus of my research.

Interestingly, another empirical study conducted in the European context by Andrews and Higson (2008), which examined graduate and employer perspectives of graduate employability in four European countries (the UK, Austria, Slovenia and Romania), produced findings that mostly align with findings from my research. From a review of existing literature and the findings of their qualitative study, they identified three major constructs and related components of employability; firstly, business specific issues (hard business-related knowledge and skills) which includes the qualification attained and knowledge graduates are able to transfer to a work context. In addition to the course specific knowledge, secondly, interpersonal competencies (soft business-related skills) valued by both students and employers include, communication skills, presentation skills, team-working skills (through group work), interpersonal skills, and social (intercultural) skills. Thirdly, work experience and work-based learning, are considered important in enhancing graduate employability. Hence, the key skills, competences and work experience valued by graduates and employers reported in the study by Andrews and Higson (2008) agree with findings in my study in relation international students who come to study in the UK.

However, reflecting the focus of the study by Andrews and Higson (2008) on undergraduate students, the option for 'most of the UK graduates to undertake a twelve-month-long period of formal paid work placements, whilst a few of the Austrian, Slovenian and Romanian graduates had undertaken a period of formal 'internship' (416) was not available for Masters students. In the first instance, the duration of a master's programme makes it impossible to undertake a work placement for a year. This suggests that embedding proportional time for work experience into the master's programme could be beneficial, as discussed in Chapter 7. Additionally, non-EU international students have limits imposed on the type of work and the time they can take out of their study for work. This means that what Andrews and Higson (2008) said was 'evident from the study that the UK graduates benefited greatly from participating in a twelve-month period of formal work placement...which afforded multiple benefits, providing a valuable learning opportunity during which theoretical skills could be applied to 'real-life' employment'

(416) was not a possibility for Masters students, and certainly not for international Masters students.

Ironically, as discussed in Chapter 7, participants in my study talked at length about their keen interest in work experience during their study, but this was largely missing from the experience of most of the students. Interestingly, Andrews and Higson (2008) seem to consider work experience in the form of paid work placement and internships as a third construct of employability skill. However, my findings seem to suggest the students find work experience more as a context to develop their employability skills.

Considering the context of my study, it is worth looking at a more recent example of research conducted in Europe which looked at linkages between internationalisation and employability. In this case, Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017) developed the GE-P (Global Education Profile) tool based on internationalisation-related literature. This is a welcome addition to the field as the GE-P tool is expected to provide data on student experience to institutions who are interested in internationalisation. Methodologically, Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017) used their quantitative-oriented study to investigate the extent to which students had developed five pre-determined skills (listed in Table 8:3) during their study abroad experience. In contrast, my qualitative study seeks a nuanced and in-depth understanding of student perceptions of the skills they were developing while studying abroad. As a result, and perhaps unsurprisingly, my qualitative study captured a broader range of skills the students perceived they were developing during their study abroad, including all the five constructs of the GE-P (Table 8:3). The GE-P (Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017) thus provides a useful comparison with my research. As noted earlier, different conceptualisations and methodological approaches in research on employability (Suleman, 2018) do not necessarily provide conflicting findings, and could extend current understandings in the field.

Looking beyond Europe, the study by Farrugia and Sanger (2017) was conducted with alumni from USA institutions. However, as pointed out in 4.6, aside from the focus of the study on undergraduates, it was difficult to ascertain whether the skills construct they outline in their research relates to all students irrespective of their student status (home and international), and perhaps, the extent to which such a distinction might have had any impact regarding their perceptions of developing their employability. At the same time, interestingly, all fifteen '21st Century Workforce

Skills' identified by Farrugia and Sanger (2017) were mentioned by the students in my study (Table 8:3). This seems to validate the applicability of the '21st Century' Workforce Skills in different global contexts.

Table 8:3 Student perceptions of employability skills: Comparison between my research and related studies

| Employability-related constructs | Fakunle (2019) | Farrugia and Sanger (2017) | Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017) |
|---|---|---|--|
| Knowledge | Course or major related knowledge Intercultural learning | Course or major related knowledge | Academic integration |
| Skills | Communication Presentation | Communication | Communication skills |
| | Intercultural skills | Intercultural skills | Global skills and support |
| | Interpersonal skills | Interpersonal skills | Foreign language |
| | Analytical skills | Problem solving | |
| | Foreign Language | Language | |
| | Technical or software skills | Technical or software skills | |
| | Leadership | Leadership | |
| | Adaptability | Flexibility and adaptability Tolerance for ambiguity | |
| | | | |
| | Organisational skills | | |
| | Teamworking | | |
| | Critical thinking | | |
| | Thinking skills | | |
| Independent living | | | |
| Attitudes | Confidence | Confidence | |
| | Curiosity | Curiosity | |
| | Self-awareness | Self-awareness | |
| | Work ethic | Work ethic | |
| | Compassion/Empathy | | |
| | Showing initiative | | |
| Resilience | | | |
| Relationships | Social integration | | Social integration |
| | Networking | | |
| | Friendships | | |

It is possible that adopting a mixed methods approach in their study could have been a factor for Farrugia and Sanger (2017) to provide a wide-ranging list of skills beyond the concepts put forward by the QE-P tool developed by Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017). Importantly, both studies by Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017) and Farrugia and Sanger (2017) are of interest as they make connections between internationalisation of higher education, the study abroad experience, skills development and employability.

Despite the distinctions between my research and the two studies mentioned above, it is important to compare my findings with these two major studies which align with the main conceptualisations of employability skills constructs in the wider literature. The two studies also cover large datasets beyond the scope of my study due to limitations of time and resources. Hence, as shown in Table 8:3, I compare the findings from my research which probes international students' perceptions on developing their employability in a global context and the fifteen 21st century skills developed from study abroad described in the research by Farrugia and Sanger (2017) as well as the five Global Education Profiler (GE-P) constructs developed by Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017).

As shown in Table 8:3, although employability-related constructs usually refer to skills and attitudes, my findings, and analysis of the literature, suggests that 'knowledge, skills, attitudes and relationships' capture better the spectrum of the employability-related constructs. I will examine aspects of the four constructs the students considered important during their study which are also reflected in either both or one of the studies by Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017) and Farrugia and Sanger (2017). Further, I will discuss the components of the employability-related constructs the students said they developed during study abroad not mentioned by the other two studies.

8.5 Examining the four employability-related constructs

8.5.1 Theme 1: Knowledge construct

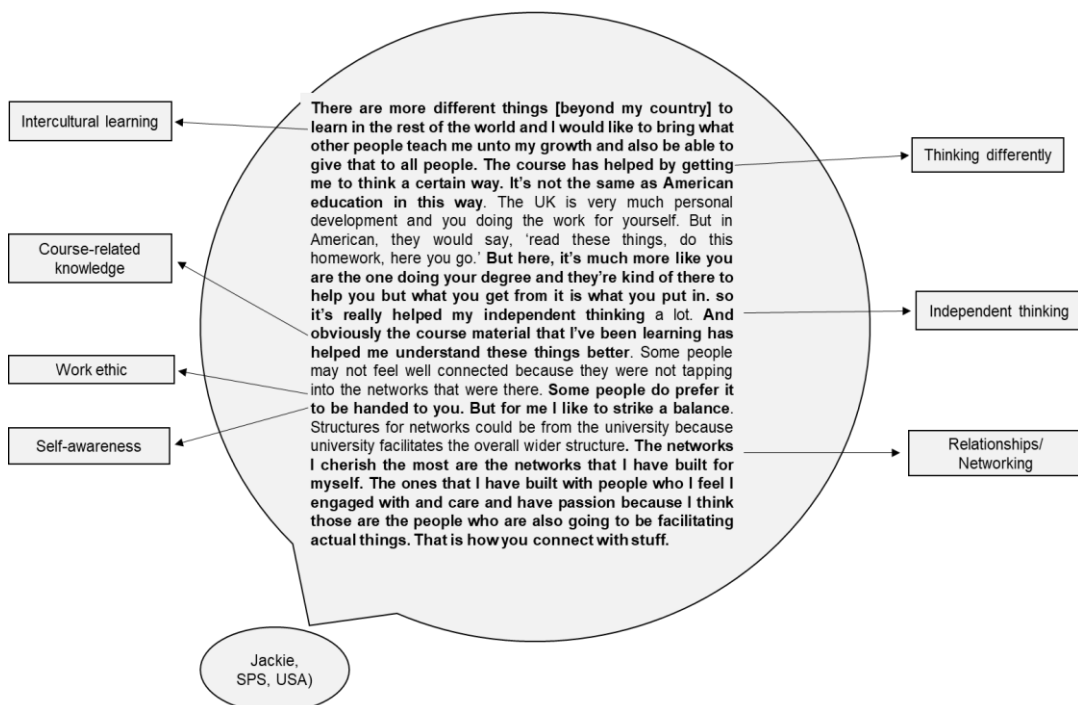
The Knowledge construct can be described as a foundational part of the employability constructs. This means that disciplinary knowledge is normally a requirement before seeking employment in a particular field. The knowledge construct comprises two employability-related components; course or major related knowledge and intercultural learning as shown below in Table 8:4.

Table 8:4 The knowledge construct and components

| Construct | Components |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| Knowledge | Course or major related knowledge |
| | Intercultural learning |

The quote from Jackie (Figure 8:2) provides an example of findings related to the knowledge construct and some components of other employability-related constructs discussed later.

Figure 8:2 Textual analysis of interview data: Jackie (SPS, USA)



It is unsurprising that both aforementioned studies (Farrugia and Sanger, 2017; Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017) as well as mine show that course or major related knowledge is an important aspect of study abroad. Developing proficiency in course-related knowledge is both a rationale for study (educational rationale discussed in Chapter 6) and an expected outcome for undertaking a programme of study. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 6, some of the rationales for studying at Masters level relate to career change. To this end, studying abroad provided opportunities for the students which may not be available in their home country. For example, Shi (LLC, Taiwan) talked about how she needed to study at Masters-level abroad to change her discipline from Law to the Arts. This was also the case for many students, including Bond, Bola, Jun, and Yin.

Intercultural learning is included in the knowledge construct in terms of students being in an environment where they have the opportunity to learn about other cultures, due to the presence of other international students and the inclusion of international examples in the curriculum. The students across all four programmes talked at length about becoming aware of cultures in different countries; for example, Shi (LLC, Taiwan) talked about learning about South American countries as a result of her interactions with students on her programme who are from Mexico and Colombia. Sofia (EDU, Colombia) also mentioned her interest in learning Chinese language after interacting with many Chinese students on her programme. Harshad (BUS, India) emphasised how his international study experience has made it possible for him to have a greater understanding of the world.

The students' lived experiences which pave ways for intercultural learning is not limited to the classrooms. **Yin (BUS, Taiwan)**, for example, shared intercultural understanding/learning opportunities arising from her interactions with other international students:

Some of the Asian students had a dinner with the Germans. We find they could not use a chop stick, so we teach them how to use chop sticks. It is an opportunity for us to teach other people and it was interesting. And in my flat, I stay with another Singaporean and a Greek girl and one from Romania and when we first met up my other flat mates could not distinguish between Japanese and Chinese thinking they are all Asia. So, she thinks that sushi is my cultural food and I said no, I eat Chinese food, and I eat Taiwanese food, and sushi is Japanese food. So, I taught her how to make sushi.

Similar to other students, Jackie (SPS, USA) asserted that intercultural learning is a two-way process (see Figure 8:2). **Lan (BUS, China)** further provides some insight into the importance of the two-way intercultural learning process:

I learn calligraphy as a young kid. I think I can share my skill and show the foreigners or other people what Chinese culture is. I really want to do little contribution about sharing traditional Chinese contribution to other people because I see that many foreigners are interested in Chinese culture, but they don't know what it is exactly. I think if I do something to explain to them it might be helpful.

However, Lan did not elaborate regarding the extent to which she achieved her aims to contribute to intercultural learning. It is unclear if there are avenues within the university for students to share their unique cultural skills.

Interestingly, while comments made by most of the students across all programmes underpin a positive attitude to intercultural learning, Bola (SPS, Nigeria) talks about how learning more on the course about other health policy practices in developed countries which most of her classmates belonged to made her feel like a “beggar” and that she “has nothing in common” with them. This suggests that learning about other cultures could evoke positive and negative reactions from students. As such, although Qian (SPS, China) and Mariana (LLC, Colombia) said the awareness of other cultures is helpful for them to reflect on their own culture and identity, for ethical reasons, I did not probe deeper to explore the reason why Bola seemed upset from her reflections on the cultural differences between her and her classmates. In any case, further questions with regard to perceptions on learning about other cultures was not the aim of my study.

In terms of the benefits of intercultural learning beyond the study period, **Bond (BUS, Singapore)** talked about taking the knowledge from studying abroad back to his “world” as a transferable skill:

This experience has taught me to understand why things happen [in certain cultures]. Why certain things are being implemented. Understand the rationale behind certain rules or policies or practices. It is actually for a purpose. Hopefully, these transferable skills can be brought back to my world back in Singapore. It [certain rules] might not be logical, but it was there for a reason. It was just for me to understand why it is there. If I can accept the rules.

The quote above shows the interrelatedness between some employability related constructs. This is not problematic as this perhaps demonstrates the importance of making distinctions between the constructs to make clear how one construct relates

to another. For example, Bond clearly talks about ‘understanding why things happen, that is, acquiring intercultural knowledge. He asserts that this knowledge can develop into transferable intercultural skills. This suggests that intercultural learning precedes the development of intercultural skills discussed under the ‘skills construct’.

8.5.2 Theme 2: Skills construct

The skills construct, usually labelled as soft skills (Andrews and Higson, 2008; Archer and Davison, 2008) is the most discussed aspect of employability in the literature. Soft skills are abilities displayed by a graduate, other than ‘hard’ skills, that is, practical knowledge in the field/area of study. Table 8:5 below lists the components of the skills construct which emanated from my research.

Table 8:5 The skills construct and components

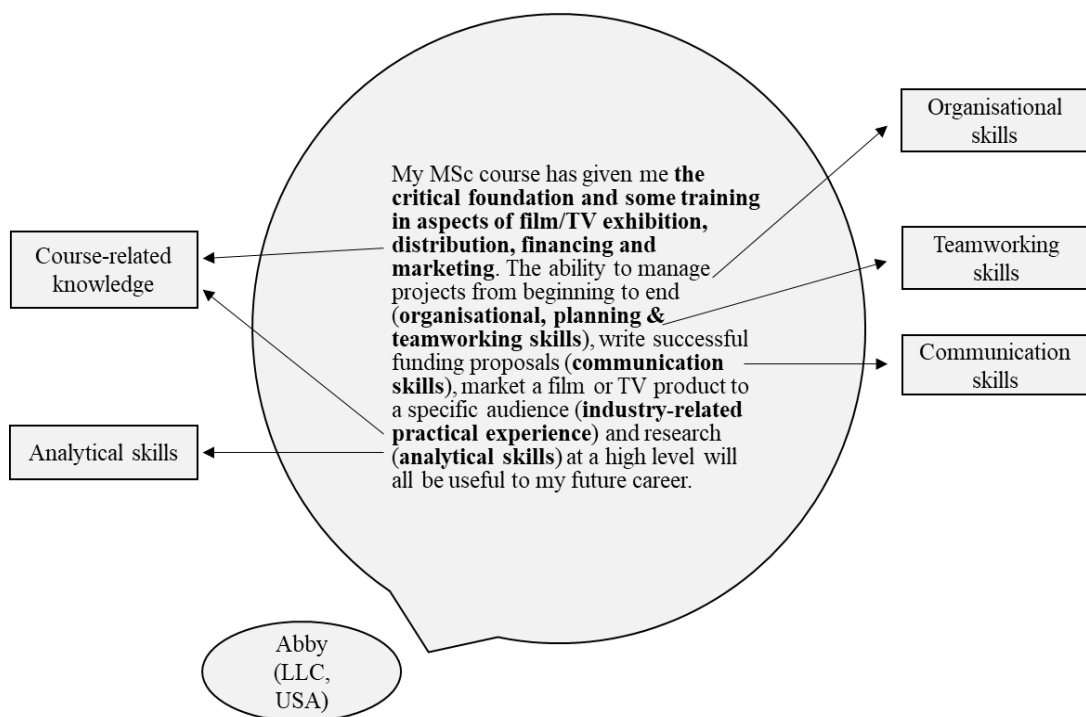
| Construct | Components |
|------------------|--|
| Skills | Communication Presentation Intercultural skills Interpersonal skills Analytical skills Foreign Language Technical or software skills Leadership Adaptability Organisational skills Teamworking Critical thinking Thinking skills Independent living |

In total, my study and the other two studies identify thirteen employability-related components that are related to the skills construct; communication/presentation, intercultural skills, interpersonal skills, analytical skills/problem solving, foreign language, technical or software skills, leadership, adaptability/flexibility/ tolerance for

ambiguity, critical thinking, thinking skills, organisational skills, teamworking and independent living (Table 8:3).

Students across all four programmes talked about how studying on the Masters has helped them to develop employability-related skills. For example, in the quote in Figure 8:3, **Abby (LLC, USA)** provides succinct connections between enrolment in her programme and developing skills, such as, organising, communication, analytical and teamworking skills.

Figure 8:3 Textual analysis of interview data: Abby (LLC, USA)



Abby was the only student doing an internship at the time of conducting the second interview. As the internship was in her country, the USA, it was not possible to have a face-to-face interview as was the case with all the other students. However, the Skype interview proved challenging due to the public location where Abby was able to get Wi-Fi. To resolve the problem, we agreed that it was best to send to her the interview questions which she completed and returned on the same day. Based on her answers, I asked further questions which she also promptly answered and returned through email. The detailed quote in Figure 8:3 above is a direct excerpt from her written response to one of the interview questions. Her clearly enunciated answers suggests that she links the skills developed during the Masters to her work,

though, it is not clear the extent to which she is using the all the skills mentioned during her internship.

Skills components common across my study and recent studies

The three employability-related components common to all three studies (Table 8:3), are communication, intercultural skills, and foreign language.

Communication skills is regarded as the top skills desired by both graduates and employers (Andrews and Higson, 2008; Archer and Davidson, 2008). Similarly, students across all four programmes talked about developing their communication skills during their study. Many students, for example, **Shi (LLC, Taiwan)** further linked developing her communication skills to her career aspirations:

...because film festival is somewhere where different cultures mix together, with the international experience, like I said, I think I'm getting better communicating. All this helps me to build the image I see of myself in the future.

The quote above from Shi resonates with other students' perception and their keen awareness of the need to develop skills that would be relevant to work in an international context. This resonates with Farrugia and Sanger's (2017) description of communication skills as 'the ability to convey ideas to others through verbal and written means, using clear and effective language that accounts for the audience' (7). As discussed in Chapter 6, the students demonstrated their awareness of the need to be able to communicate with audiences in their national and global contexts.

Intercultural skills are also widely considered as an expected outcome for study abroad (Deardorff, 2006; Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017). As to be expected, the students portray their experience as an opportunity to develop intercultural skills. Interestingly, as earlier discussed the students talked first about having intercultural knowledge. **Sofia (EDU, Colombia)** describes the multicultural study environment as a place where intercultural skills development was possible:

I think being here actually helped me on how to relate and how to build a relationship from people from different cultures and cultures that were completely unknown to me.

Similarly, the students talked about developing intercultural skills as part of the academic experience, for example, **Adele (SPS, Canada)** talks about access to different cultures during the Masters giving her the opportunity to obtain useful data:

I think generally no matter which programme you're in it is good to have a comparative perspective. Because different people have different perspectives and I think we generalize things too much in the society...and label people who come from the same country, and when you talk to people, you learn that these things aren't true. If you stick in one spot I feel like you are limited, especially if you are doing a dissertation. If you don't have an outside opinion or different approaches you are not going to have anything useful to say.

The quotes (from Sofia and Adele) underpin the importance of the host environment to develop skills which the students may not have access to in their home country. The quotes also fit with the description of intercultural skills in the wider literature as the openness and the ability to understand and respect different cultures and ways of thinking.

The value of learning an additional language have been mentioned in many other studies including the Europe Impact Studies (2014) earlier mentioned. Considering that learning a foreign language is described as a 21st century employability skill (Farrugia and Sanger, 2017), it is unsurprising that some students in my study were taking steps to learn an additional language during their study abroad. As discussed in Chapter 7 and earlier in this chapter (8.3.2), the importance attached to learning a foreign language was reiterated by students who were already learning a new language and students who mentioned their interest in developing their foreign language skills.

Skills components common across my study and Farrugia and Sanger (2017)

As Table 8:3 shows, five skills are common to my study and the study by Farrugia and Sanger (2017). These includes; interpersonal skills, analytical skills/problem solving, technical or software skills, leadership, and adaptability/flexibility/ tolerance for ambiguity. These skills are, however, excluded in the employability-related constructs included in the Graduate Education Profiler (GE-P) (Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017). It could be reasoned that some of the skills are implied in the GE-P. For example, the GE-P includes an employability construct called 'Global skills and support' which could include other skills, such as, interpersonal skills. This means that the current description of global skills and support as part of the GE-P could be expanded, though this does not seem to be the case yet.

Similar to intercultural skills, developing interpersonal skills requires interactions with people from different cultures. The students had ample opportunities to develop their interpersonal skills through interactions with their peers and the host society. For

example, **Fang (EDU, China)** said her volunteering experience was helpful for her to develop interpersonal skills.

Everything you do may not be directly related to what you want to do in the future. If you find it interesting, you can learn from your experience. From volunteering you have more chance to talk with locals and you develop your interpersonal skills.

As the quote above from Fang, implies, academic and non-academic aspects of their study abroad experience provided opportunities which contributed to developing students' interpersonal skills.

Many students, including, Bond, Abby, Indira, Yin, Mariana and Fang, talked about developing analytical skills during their Masters (see Abby's quote in Figure 8:3). The students mostly relate analytical skills development to the requirements in the academic learning environment. For example, **Fang (EDU, China)** said:

What I can draw on from the programme is my study ability has improved. Like how you can get information, how you can analyse information.

In addition, there was mention, for example, by Yin (BUS, Taiwan), about linking the development of their analytical skills to practical work experience on the course.

We did the analytical work for this company. I really applied what we have learnt from the course here.

Some students talked about the importance of technology-related skills development as an important aspect of their study abroad experience. For example, during the first interview when **Fang (EDU, China)** was asked about her future plans, she said:

This semester we have a course about technology. Before coming here, I wasn't sure if I wanted to be a teacher. Now, I have a better understanding about my career to write or develop Apps for kids' development. In this modern society something has to relate to technology. Recently, I've started to think about getting a job in this area. Maybe I will ask my lecturer for help, so I can know more about this area.

During the second interview, Fang reiterated her interest in seeking a career in a technology-related field and how this relates to her study abroad experience:

Initially, I just want to come here for one year to study to experience a different culture and a different education system and go back to working in education area. During the semester I feel interested in working here because I have interest in technology. At the moment, UK technology is not like China.

As the students in my study were in the Arts and the Social Sciences, the use of technology might not be a key part of their study. However, comments from **Mandy (SPS, South Africa)** about her flatmate provided a glimpse into the difficulty some international students might face in terms of their software skills:

Some of my flatmates really aren't doing okay really. One has to do a lot of computer programming which she hasn't done before. I don't know how to help her. That's a shame.

Technology or software skill development is a common theme in my study and in the research by Farrugia and Sanger (2017). However, in contrast to the importance placed on technology skills by some students in my study, they suggest that students develop their technology skills at home, and it was not a major aspect of their study abroad experience. This perhaps highlights an important distinction between their sample of alumni from a single country (USA) who had studied abroad in their study, and my exploration of the perceptions of a sample of students from different countries studying within a host country.

Students across all programmes talked about different types of leadership positions they expect to hold or were already holding.

When **Yin (BUS, Taiwan)** was asked during the first interview what she expects to gain from her study abroad experience she talked about her aspirations to be a leader in an international context:

One of my expectations, though maybe intangible, it is the leadership. I like to be the leader of the group, but groups in my previous experience when I was a leader they are all Taiwanese so it's easy- very very easy for us to communicate but if you are leader and you have to discuss and communicate with other people from different countries and English is not my first language it will be a little challenging. I have to learn the way a good leader should lead an international group.

Yin did not explicitly mention if she had leadership opportunities in an international context as desired. Other students; Indira (EDU, India), Sofia (EDU, Colombia), and Mandy (SPS, South Africa), Jackie (SPS, USA), talked about valuing the opportunity to hold leadership positions as class representatives in their different schools. Abby (LLC, USA) also talked extensively about developing leadership skills during her project work experience.

Some students relate their experience of study abroad to developing skills, such as, adaptability and flexibility. For example, **Mariana (LLC, Colombia)** said:

I think it is good for you to adapt in different environment. I think that is how it is going to be in the future or maybe that is how it is now – that you have a job in one place and you have to move to another city in another couple of years. I think we are a generation that we are mobile. So, I think it is key to learn to adapt to that. To be comfortable to be in a new city that you have never been to and adapt to all those changes and be able to work and to function normally. It is a skill that I think everyone should learn.

As the quote above suggests, adaptability and flexibility skills are deemed important for students' self-identification as a mobile generation preparing to work in a globally interconnected world. This suggests that the study abroad experience creates the ability to develop what Farrugia and Sanger (2017) describe as a tolerance for ambiguity. They describe this skill as being comfortable with 'uncertainty, unpredictability, conflicting directions, and multiple demands' (7). In other words, a person's ability to 'operate effectively in an uncertain world' (7).

Skills components in my study not common across recent studies

Most of the components of the skills construct were common across my study and one or both of the studies (Table 8:3). However, five out of the thirteen skills mentioned by students in my study were missing from the other two studies. These are; organisational skills, teamworking, critical thinking, thinking skills, and independent living. Interestingly, two out of the five skills; organisational skills and teamworking skills are listed among the top ten skills employers value most highly among graduates in the International Employer Barometer (IEB). The IEB findings were drawn from responses from 233 employers representing over 750,000 employees (Archer and Davidson, 2008). Though my research did not seek to examine the views of employers, it was interesting to find similarities in the perspectives of both the students and employers with regards to key employability skills such as organisational skills.

To develop their organisational skills, the findings show that the students had opportunities to take up new responsibilities including 'juggling' part-time work with their study (Mariana, LLC, Colombia), and planning projects (Abby, LLC, USA).

Mandy (SPS, South Africa), for example, compared her experience to her prior learning experience at home and said that studying in the UK made her realise it is important to be organised:

I realise you just have to organise yourself. Now being at a UK university, I realise how we were coddled at my previous university. It's like you were looked after from the minute you arrived until you left.

Regarding teamworking skills, students across all four programmes talked about opportunities to work in groups as a valued aspect of the Masters. For example, **Yin (BUS, Taiwan)** said:

Most of the courses I took require group work and group assignment. I think that is very good because people from different cultural background have different habits. I know this is a stereotype. But I think it is true that German people always have higher standard and high criteria for assignments. But for our assignment some people might think that our group work is fine, and the Germans will say, "no, we should revise this part and this part". Some people will think that it is very stressful working with Germans but for me I think its fine.

In addition to developing teamworking skills, Yin's account above suggests that the multinational learning environment could help to dispel what she acknowledges to be possible stereotypes. This is similar to comments made by Shi (LLC, Taiwan) and Bond (BUS, Singapore) about developing a better understanding based on their interactions with students from certain countries. The findings thus suggest that group work, social interactions in accommodation spaces and recreational spaces provided students with opportunities to learn about different cultures, and to develop skills to work effectively in multicultural teams.

Underscoring the emphasis on teamwork across the programmes which might not be available as much in other institutions, **Jun (BUS, China)** talks about the contrast in her experience with the experience of her peers studying in other universities and at home:

I compare it with my classmates in other universities and I think that this one is very good. I also compare it with university life in China and I think here, there is a lot more team work but in China there isn't.

Importantly, as a running theme amongst the students, **Mariana (LLC, Colombia)** points out the importance of developing skills in preparation for work:

I like it because for me it's like how it would be based in the real life to work in a team. You need to do it with a team, so this is more like as real as it can get even though it is within the university environment you have to deal with team work. You have to deal with the issues collectively it teaches you a lot. I think the best way is to do these kinds of projects.

Interestingly, in contrast to the positive comments about groupwork from the majority of the students, **Adele (SPS, Canada)** had this to say:

It seems to be more group work in my Masters than Undergrad which bothers me because I don't like group work. They want to make sure everybody is talking but I feel like at this level, shouldn't you already know how to do this? It seems like they're still kind of monitoring us in that sense, but I don't like that aspect. I thought that it would be a bit more different than my undergraduate in that sense.

The comments above seem to suggest that background experiences during undergraduate study could affect the value placed on certain aspects of teaching and learning in the Masters. Perceptions of group work were highly positive for almost all the students, except Adele. Unfortunately, Adele was unavailable for the second interview. It was assumed that she had returned home as she had mentioned this as a possibility during the first interview. It is therefore unknown if her views of groupwork on the Masters changed over the course of the study period.

Surprisingly, critical thinking was not listed as a skill developed during study abroad by both Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017), and Farrugia and Sanger (2017). This could perhaps be linked to the focus and the context of their study in Europe, and the USA, respectively. In contrast, studies of international students, for example, Chinese students, usually highlight their critical thinking skills or the lack thereof (Fakunle, et al, 2016). It was apparent that developing critical thinking was important for some students across all programmes. Such students asserted that studying abroad made them develop their critical thinking. For example, see quotes from Harshad (Figure 8:4).

Further, **Indira (EDU, India)** links her developing critical thinking skills to her future work. She said:

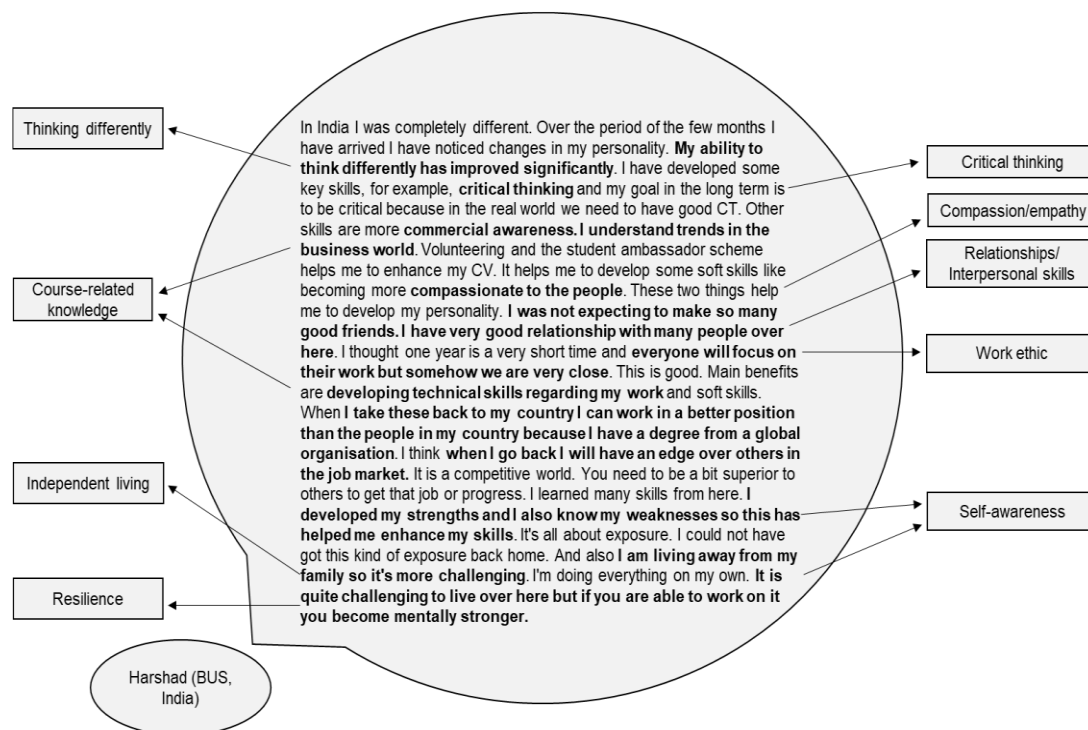
I am still understanding critical thinking because I come from a background where we are not really allowed to question a lot. We take what is given to us because we believe that people who are qualified enough have all depth, so we just take it in. But over here they make you think like what is it that you think? And why do you think? It's related to my future because it's something that I also want for my future students to do because it really helps one to question and not take things for granted.

According to Moon (2008), thinking skills complement critical thinking skills as the rational process of collecting and analysing information precedes making a judgement and reaching conclusions. This was reflected in the findings as some students said they were developing their thinking skills in addition to critical thinking

(see for example, Jackie and Harshad, in Figures 8:2 and 8:4 respectively).

However, thinking as a component of the skills construct was not mentioned in the other two studies examined.

Figure 8:4 Textual analysis of interview data: Harshad (BUS, India)



As implied by Jackie (SPS, USA) (Figure 8:2), it seems possible that student perceptions of developing thinking skills relate more to *learning to think* in a different way. For example, Sofia (EDU, Colombia), Mandy (SPS, South Africa) and Bola (SPS, Nigeria) talked at length about adjusting to thinking differently about their approach to learning and course assessment criteria. **Bola (SPS, Nigeria)** for example, said:

It was quite challenging when I note the change in the system. I am more used to a system where I am given what to read and the exam will be on that. Here, they want you to think broadly. We have to read so many journals. I'm happy that I'm getting it, although it's not easy.

Some students (Indira, Sofia and Bola) talked about their aspiration to promote a thinking culture in education when they return back to their home country, for example, **Bola (SPS, Nigeria)** said:

Though I am not in education, I am thinking about what I can do to influence a kind of transformation back at home. Lecturing should not just be about giving handouts and the exam should just be on that. No, I don't think so.

In terms of independent living, again, the quote in Figure 8:4 provides an example, of how students perceive that living independently in a different country means that they learn to take responsibility for themselves. **Lan (BUS, China)** provides a strong rationale for this:

When you are living abroad no one knows you and sometimes you must be very independent because of all the work and study. You can get some assistance but most of the time you must do all the work alone. It is a big challenge for me to be independent. But it's really important. I don't think a woman should be dependent on others. My goal is to be an independent woman that I can decide my own interest and my future direction. I think that is the most important thing to me. To be independent and overcome the difficulties by myself.

The students also talk about the importance of living abroad as a potential signal to future employers which will demonstrate their ability to take decisions independently and work with minimal supervision. **Abby (LLC, USA)** sums it up as follows:

I think having this experience on your CV let's say demonstrates to someone reading that this person can be independent that they are open minded enough to live in a new place.

8.5.3 Theme 3 Attitudes construct

The attitudes construct comprises personal characteristics either explicitly mentioned or implied in the students' account of different aspects of their study abroad experience. They talked at length about how taking the initiative to study abroad is helpful in enhancing and developing these attitudes as listed in Table 8:6 (also see sample quote in Figure 8:5).

The dialogue below also reflects the attitude of students across the four programmes:

Interviewer: what advice would you give to anyone coming here to study?

Indira: *Definitely keep up an open mind. Be open to the different kind of learning that you would experience here. You cannot work with a closed mind or closed attitude. Attitude is very important. Don't let the stress take over. Learn how to fight it...So be ready that it would be a very different experience from what you have had before. What I realised is that most of class students do not come from a background which is used to this kind of teaching. So I can imagine the amount of stress.*

Table 8:6 The attitudes construct and components

| Construct | Components |
|-----------|---|
| Attitudes | Confidence Curiosity Self-awareness Work ethic Compassion/empathy Initiative Resilience |

Importantly, the students, for example Abby (LLC, USA), Indira, (EDU, India), and Mariana, (LLC, Colombia) reiterated that having taken the step to 'get out of their comfort zone' to live and study abroad demonstrates their capabilities, such as, confidence and ability to take initiative, to future employers.

The attitudes construct has seven components: confidence; curiosity; self-awareness; work ethic; compassion/empathy; initiative; and resilience (Table 8:6). Four components are common to the 21st century skills (Farrugia and Sanger, 2017) (Table 8:3).

None of the seven components are included in the GE-P tool (Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017). I will explore the components common across my study and the study by Farrugia and Sanger (2017). I will also discuss the employability-related components drawn from my findings, but not common to the other two studies.

Attitudes components common across my study and Farrugia and Sanger (2017)

The four employability-related components common across my study and the study by Farrugia and Sanger, 2017 discussed below are: confidence, curiosity, self-awareness, and work ethic.

The findings from my research show that students' perceptions of developing confidence run through every stage of embarking on, experiencing, and preparing for life beyond the Masters. The students, for example, **Indira (EDU, India)** talked extensively about the importance of having the 'will' and the confidence to make the big decision to study abroad:

It makes you confident that you just have to have the will to achieve it. Sometimes attempting it, having the confidence to attempt it is very difficult. So, when I took this decision it was a big decision.

In terms of experience, Indira links her study abroad to a validation that she can have the confidence to 'hold her own' within an international context:

It makes me confident that I could speak on a platform where different views were coming in. It's a very different experience speaking among your own people. If I'm among Indians, the way you speak is going to be different from an international crowd.

Mariana (LLC, Colombia) talked about the challenge of doing the Masters as preparation for professional life:

Doing the Masters is like a challenge that you take, and once you have made it, you have that confidence and strength in your own professional thing, that I can do it. So, I think the Masters is giving me that confidence that I can undertake whatever job that I have, or they ask me to do.

During the second interview, **Jackie (SPS, USA)** talked about how her study has given her the confidence to make decisions for her future, though she admits she is uncertain of the next steps:

I don't feel I really expected to be where I am now, to feel happy and confident and my decisions about where I'm going in my life. Even though I have no idea what the next step is, I still feel I am on the right track.

As earlier pointed out, **Sofia (EDU, Colombia)** said studying abroad stimulated her curiosity:

Being here and interacting with Chinese people and things made me a lot more curious about China and how and what things happen there, and I thought at one point I have so many Chinese friends now why not consider China at some point in my distant future.

The quote above reflects comments from some other students. Indira (EDU, India), for example took proactive steps to satisfy her curiosity about educational events in the UK. She mentioned volunteering during the University Open Day as she was curious to know how such events are organised in another context. This gives credence to the description of curiosity by Farrugia and Sanger (2017) as the 'openness to new experiences and the desire to learn' (7) which is exhibited by taking the step to study abroad, and interest in exploring other contexts after study.

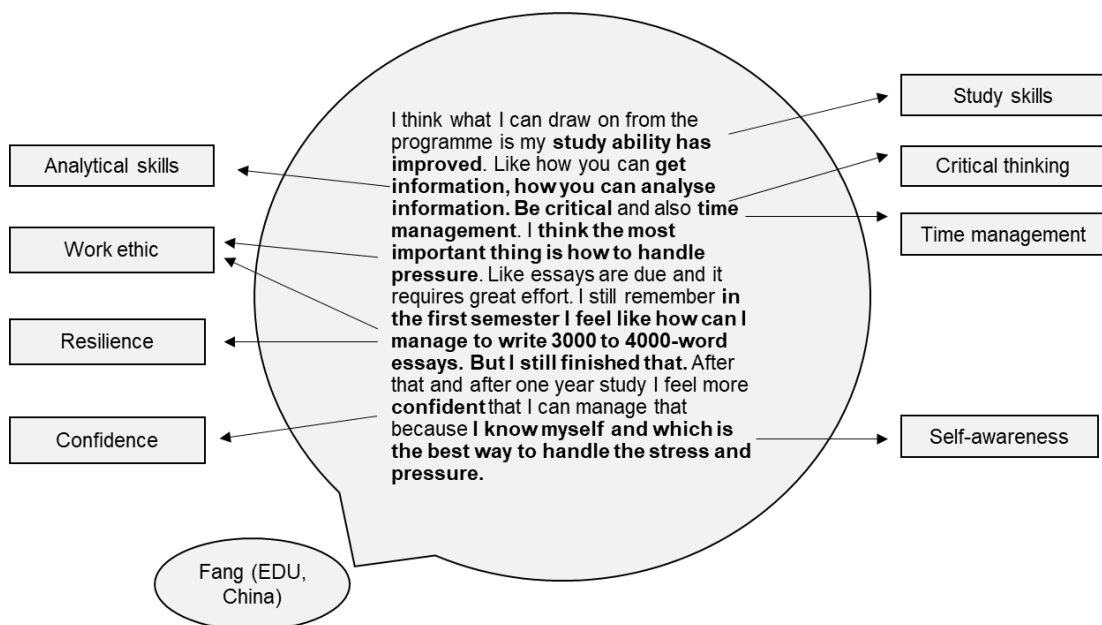
However, despite their curiosity, not all students were able to experience different aspects of culture and education in the UK during their study. For example, **Fang**

(EDU, China) expressed her disappointment for not having opportunities to engage in practical aspect of education in the UK:

If you read something in the literature like learner characteristics, you are like is that really true in the UK context? You want to compare the article perspective with the practical context. It is important. You can't just talk about something abstract and all about theories. At the end you still need the practical experience.

The students gave several examples of becoming more self-aware during their study abroad. This suggests that studying abroad seems to create opportunities for students to reflect on their past experiences and present circumstances, for example, as shown below in Figure 8:5.

Figure 8:5 Textual analysis of interview data: Fang (EDU, China)



Some students, for example, Bola (SPS, Nigeria) described how during their study, they have learned to reassess their plans for their future. **Lan (BUS, China)** described changes in her perceptions of the opportunities available after their study.

During my BA I don't have a clear goal for my future work. Studying here has broadened my selection of future work. I think the space for development and the potential for IT industry is huge in the Chinese market. And if I can step into this market by using the business knowledge that I gained from the Masters degree and my language advantage to understand the Asian market, I think it will be a good advantage for me to work.

Reflecting comments from other students, **Bond (BUS, Singapore)** talked about his keen interest to travel during the Masters, but reiterated his commitment to completing his dissertation on time:

As of right now, I just want to concentrate on my dissertation. Try to finish it off. I considered visiting South Africa, but I did not go because it would have squeezed into my time. I would have done more travelling but right now my priority is my dissertation.

Additionally, **Abby (LLC, USA)** who was doing her dissertation and an internship at the same time in the USA. She talked about how she manages her workload:

It's slightly more difficult to be apart from my tutors, class mates and university resources, but I am lucky that I get to use NYU's library. NYU and the University both participate in the SHARES programmes which gives students access to other libraries if they are away. I Skype once a month with my dissertation adviser, and she reads my work and gives me feedback. So far, I am about 48 pages in.

The students' attitude to work aligns with Farrugia and Sanger's (2017) assertion regarding work ethic in terms of personal accountability and effective work habits. Given that Farrugia and Sanger's (2017) research focused on undergraduate students, it is interesting to note that **Patricia (LLC, Mexico)** stressed the work ethic of Masters students:

The difference in doing your masters is that when you are doing your masters it's because you want to. When you are doing your undergrad it's because you have to. Like my classmates, we are all very invested. There is a lot of group work. Unlike during my UG...here everyone carries their own weight because we are all very invested in it.

Attitudes components in my study not common across recent studies

The three components in the attitudes construct not mentioned in the other studies (Farrugia and Sanger, 2017; Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017) are: compassion/empathy, initiative and resilience.

Although the two studies examined did not talk about compassion/empathy as employability-related attitudes, this theme was apparent from the findings in my research. **Harshad (BUS, India)** specifically mentioned the change in his personality since he started his study abroad.

Volunteering and the student ambassador scheme helps me to enhance my CV. It helps me to develop some soft skills like becoming more

compassionate to the people. These two things help me to develop my personality.

Like the other students, Harshad talked about enhancing his CV based on his extracurricular activities. He also describes the soft skills he is developing as a result of engaging in such activities. Harshad might be able to have opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities in his country. He, however, explains why his non-academic activities abroad help his development in a different way:

Being compassionate implies you need to understand what others are trying to say. It is very important in the corporate world. Especially if I want to work in a global organisation and I meet someone from a different culture. I need to be compassionate towards that culture so that I understand what that person is trying to communicate to me.

Mandy (SPS, South Africa) had friends and family who lived in the UK and she had visited the country several times before starting her studies. The discussion with her suggests that she had developed compassion for fellow international students during her study:

It's just very different here and it's made me appreciate how hard things are for international students. You could tell when you see them with huge backpacks and know that they were lost. I was like what! I know the system and the city. It's so much easier for me. Things like getting a bank account are things you don't realise how difficult that can be. It's just made me sympathetic to that.

It is possible that students were compassionate before embarking on study abroad. It was however, interesting to hear the students talk about how developing compassion is woven into their study abroad experience.

The findings suggest that the students showed initiative. This might seem apparent by making the decision to study abroad for personal and professional development. Additionally, it was interesting during her interview, without prompting, **Shi (LLC, Taiwan)** mentioned that she had her CV with her. When asked why, she said:

That's because last week I went on an interview with a director who want to arrange a Taiwanese film screening, so I think it might be handy if I have my CV and show him.

The quote above resonates with discussions in Chapter 6 with regards to the proactiveness of the students in looking for opportunities for work. For example, **Sofia (EDU, Colombia)** said:

I have just started looking for job opportunities here and at home. I am thinking what is going to be of me when I graduate. The Masters can be the greatest Masters ever. I can have the greatest education experience. But the only thing that would ensure that I have a job afterwards is my own work. It is ensuring that I search for a job, applying and getting my CV done. The university is not giving me a job once I graduate.

As discussed in Chapter 7, although the students demonstrate initiative, the support from the university was important to attain their objectives. The extent to whether they feel supported (or not) has been discussed in Chapter 7.

The students across all four programmes demonstrated resilience in terms of their attitude in a different cultural and educational environment, and sometimes when dealing with difficult situations.

In adjusting to the learning, **Indira (EDU, India)** said:

I've done reading for 10 hours at a stretch to adjust to the system here.

Sofia (EDU Colombia) talked about different aspects of learning that were challenging:

Starting from lectures, they were different. I don't know if it is because of the difference between a Masters programme and a UG programme or if it's because of the cultural differences but the classes are taught differently. Assessment is completely different. I struggled a lot in the beginning with how things work here in terms of the timetable. I could not understand how come my only assessment was one essay. I am still struggling a little bit with that. But I have come to terms with it as I have to write my essay.

Qian (SPS, China) talked about persisting until she overcame her language difficulties:

I thought my English was capable enough to go through lectures, but I came across constraints in the lectures because it was the first time I took a class that had teachers from different countries and to focus on what they are talking about was challenging for me. In the first week I could not catch up with what the teacher said but now, I am fine because I can catch up with them now.

Aside from academics, some students found it challenging to get used to studying abroad. **Mandy (SPS, South Africa)** explains:

I'm missing home. When I saw another South African student here for the first time, I was so excited. I was like are you from Botswana? Yeah!!! I know it's a huge stereotype, but people are different here. In SA people are always just interacting and hugging each other. Asking about things in general. Also,

it's so expensive. I try to get things as cheap as possible. My currency is just spiralling downwards. The exchange rate to the pound. I didn't think about that. I was really stressed out about it last semester and I wasn't really coping. But I thought I'll try this semester. The last thing I want to do is fail out.

In Mandy's case, aside from missing familiar hues from home, there was the added pressure of financial issues. As **Qian (SPS, China)**, puts it, the students have to adjust to everything:

Studying in China and abroad are totally different. Here you have to adjust everything new, like the food, oh my God! I don't want to talk about that. Also, the people, the way they talk, the way they act with each other.

Yet, despite the challenges, all the students reiterated their determination to succeed during their Masters, as like Mandy, they did not want to "fail out".

This finding aligns with other research studies (Ploner, 2017; Yokota 2016), though not mentioned by Farrugia and Sanger (2017) and Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017). This seems to support Ploner's (2017) criticism of studies on international students which do not seem to capture the resilient attitude demonstrated by the students during their sojourn abroad. The findings suggest that studying abroad allowed the students to develop their resilience, for example as shown in the quote by Fang (EDU, China) in Figure 8:5.

8.5.4 Theme 4: Relationship construct

The relationship construct consists of aspects of the student experience which involved social interactions. The findings suggest that the students perceived these relationships could be beneficial in their future work. These relationships were formed with classmates in the programme and with the wider community. The three components in the relationship constructs derived from my study are: social integration, networking and friendships (Table 8:7).

Table 8:7 The relationship construct and components

| Construct | Components |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Relationship | Social integration |
| | Networking |
| | Friendships |

Interestingly, although the 21st century global skills in Farrugia and Sanger's (2017) study hitherto had components found in other employability constructs in my study (Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes), none of the components of the relationship construct were mentioned in their study. It is unclear if this is as a result of the authors' focus on the skills and abilities aspect of employability.

In contrast, the GE-P (Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017) includes one of the three components of the relationship construct, social integration. As mentioned earlier, none of the components in the attitudes construct were included in the GE-P. This suggests that the GE-P focuses on the academic, skills and social aspects of employability. The findings discussed below show students' perspectives of the components of the relationship construct.

I will first discuss 'social integration'. Volunteering, which has been discussed in detail in Chapter 6 allows the students to work with local people. Joining clubs and societies also allowed some students (Chao and Sofia) to integrate with people within the host community.

Further, **Mariana (LLC, Colombia)** talks about the part-time work experience as an opportunity to engage with people within a 'social sphere':

At work you are like a normal person talking about the weather and I really like the people from my job. They are like really real people and I really like them. So, it like another social sphere.

The students, therefore, have different opportunities to engage in non-academic activities. This suggests that the students are developing relationships beyond the scope and the requirement of their degree. To some extent, this agrees with Spencer-Oatey and Dauber's (2017) description of social integration as the non-academic aspect of the student experience involving interaction and social cohesion with people of different cultures. However, the findings suggest that students do not always get opportunities to integrate within the society, even when there is a willingness to do so. For example, Mariana talks about her fellow students who could not get a part-time job despite submitting several applications. In any case, engaging in paid work as a non-academic activity does not necessarily mean that a student wants to integrate with a different culture. As discussed in Chapter 7, a few students said they were interested in part-time work for financial reasons. At the same time, Mariana, Chao, Sofia, Jun, and Abby were the only students who talked about their extracurricular experiences outside the campus. Social integration does

appear to happen for some, but not all students.

Networking is presented as the second component of the relationship construct. The students' awareness of the importance of networking was a common theme across all programmes. This has been discussed in Chapter 7. The main point here is that the students, for example, **Jackie (SPS, USA)** see networking as building relationships, and as a resource, she said:

There are different ways of connecting people together and that's just the biggest thing. Something I didn't really like about my bachelor's because I felt like that was not something that existed. Well, there was a student meeting or whatever, but I didn't feel like there was a network across students and activities and things that were like a resource. I didn't feel like that existed until I came here.

Harshad (BUS, India) further elaborates on how they can draw on the international networks in the future, he said:

When I go to organisations, I have links in different countries. I can take advantage of my network. So, it is good to have exposure in the UK, to make [international] networks.

Abby (LLC, USA), and Mariana (LLC, Colombia) also talked extensively about the Masters providing them with opportunities for international networking with people in their field. **Adele (SPS, Canada)**, reiterates the importance of networking for employability:

The work-based dissertation was something that drew me to the programme because then you have a chance to network with different organisations when you're writing your dissertation and hopefully make contacts instead of just getting a sociology degree and being like, I have this now, somebody just hire me.

For the most part the students seem to view networking as an instrumental tool which could potentially be helpful towards enhancing their employability.

In contrast, to the views expressed by most of the other students, **Patricia (LLC, Mexico)** said she was averse to networking:

I hate that word. I hate networking. I am so bad with people. I am horrible with people. Everyone says I can. But no, I can't do it. I'm just terrible at networking. It sounds to me more like obsequious behaviour to gain favour. I hate being a hypocrite and I'm very transparent and I get anxious. So, it's kind of difficult for me to fake it. You know when you meet someone, and you're supposed to just defer, and you dislike them. It would be in my face like I don't want to talk to you. I just can't fake it. So, it's difficult for me to

start networking. It's not what I do. Even with my peers if I don't like someone I just can't do it.

Interestingly, she, however, seemed to value the opportunity the programme affords to 'network' with the industry, as she later said:

...Maybe get some networking. So, I guess getting links to the industry is a useful bit.

Friendships are presented as the third component of the relationship construct. Considering Patricia's comments above, it seems pertinent to distinguish between networking and friendships. Interestingly, Patricia talked about the friends she has made since she started her Masters and went on to describe how a particular friend (also her flatmate) has been supportive during the difficult times she has had during the Masters.

While networking in the context used by the students seem to be aligned towards making connections for their career advancement, some students, for example, Qian (SPS, China), Alim (SPS, Turkey), Bond (BUS, Singapore), and Harshad (BUS, India) talked about developing close friendships during the one-year Masters as a support framework and for social interactions. Harshad's quote in Figure 8:4 shows how developing such friendships could be a pleasant surprise. **Harshad (BUS, India)** further said:

The UK is a very international place with students from many nationalities. Today I have friends from Germany, from Brazil, and from China. Imagine if I had stayed in my country, I would not have had the chance to get these friends.

In some cases, students with family ties in the host country, for example, Indira (EDU, India) talked more about the friendship circle of their family, but not with other students. This, however, was not always the case, as Mandy (SPS, South Africa) talked about wanting independence from family during her study.

Echoing the views of some other students, Qian (SPS, China) reiterated the importance of developing friendships during the Masters study abroad in terms of future international ties:

I met a lot of people. I invited them all to China because I think if we can meet after graduation it will be a very precious friendship and I look forward to meeting them after graduation and when I go to their countries I think I will be welcome. I think studying in the UK is a really unforgettable memory in my whole life because I meet a lot of different people and cultures and I

know more about the world and my own country. I don't know the lasting implication for my future or my career, but I think it includes every decision. Maybe I will look for job connecting with UK because I have a very good memory here and I will like to make it long-lasting. I am very glad to work with some people with international background. I will prefer to make friends with people who study abroad because I think we have same experience.

As the quote above shows, the students seemed to be thinking of maintaining friendships beyond the Masters. For example, Harshad, Qian and Abby seemed to consider the friendships formed during the Masters would transform into useful connections and access into an international community of associates. They asserted that these connections can become valuable assets to the organisations they join.

Another key point is that although the students met during their study in the UK, they seemed to hope that their future friendships will include people from different cultural backgrounds. At the stage of conducting the interview, the students were happy with the friendships they had formed. The friendship networks developed by some students was also helpful in recruiting two participants for the study (see Chapter 5).

Synopsis

Four employability-related constructs are proposed as a framework towards a holistic understanding of different aspects of employability: knowledge, skills, attitudes and relationships (Table 8:3). Twenty-six components of the employability constructs emanated from findings from my study (Table 8:3).

The fifteen 21st century global skills in the study by Farrugia and Sanger (2017) and the five Global Education Profiler (GE-P) in the study by Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2017) are compared with the employability-related constructs in my study. The findings show that there are commonalities across all the four constructs in my study and the other two studies (Table 8:3). These are:

- Knowledge (course or major related knowledge)
- Skills (communication, intercultural skills, interpersonal skills, problem solving, language, technical or software skills, and leadership;
- Attitudes (adaptability/ flexibility/tolerance for ambiguity, confidence, curiosity, self-awareness, and work ethic)
- Relationships (social integration, networking, and friendships).

The commonalities between my findings and these recent studies linking study abroad and employability underpins the relevance of my study in relation to current related discourses.

Aspects of the employability constructs in my findings that are not included in the other aforementioned research are:

- Knowledge (intercultural learning);
- Skills (organisational skills, teamworking critical thinking, thinking skills, and independent living);
- Attitudes (compassion/empathy, showing initiative, and resilience)
- Relationships (networking, and friendships).

It is likely that the scope and focus of the two studies examined made it possible for some but not all aspects of my study findings to be included in both studies.

This shows that the findings in my study includes and extends findings reported in each of two large-scale studies linking study abroad to employability.

8.6 Chapter summary

On the one hand, the increasing interest in international student employability at institutional, national, and the global level is widely discussed in literature. On the other hand, the discourse is mainly focused on the global competition to attract and retain talented international students. With the high cost of international education, it is perhaps not surprising that the institutional employability agenda and government initiatives such as the Australian National Strategy for International Education 2025 published in 2016 reiterate the economic value of study abroad (Whitsed, Green and Cassol, 2018). However, research suggests that international students expect study abroad to enhance their employability (Nilsson and Ripmeester, 2016), though, there is little understanding as to how, or if this happens.

The findings in this chapter are framed from the viewpoint that employability development-related process is an important stage of the international student experience. Hence, the chapter presents findings related to students' perceptions on developing their employability while studying. The findings agree with conceptualisations of employability in the university employability document and the wider literature. Importantly, the four employability-related constructs presented in

this chapter reconceptualises employability not solely in terms of course-related knowledge and skills and attitudes, but also relationships and networks. The findings in this chapter align with students' rationales for studying abroad (presented in Chapter 6) with regards to their perceptions on developing their employability.

In the next chapter, I highlight the interconnectedness of the findings reported in the three preceding chapters. In doing so, I will discuss how the findings reveal how student rationales for studying abroad, and their experience of studying at the university, are linked to their perceptions of developing employability (Chapter 9). Then, in the final chapter I will identify the key contributions that my study makes and will also discuss its implications for policy development and educational practices.

Chapter 9. Discussion

9.1 Introduction

This study set out to address four research questions:

1. What are the rationales or motivations for international students to study on a one-year Masters programme at a UK university?
2. To what extent do international students' expectations of developing their employability match their experience?
3. To what extent do international students' perceptions of the benefits of studying on the Masters programme change over the course of the one-year of study?
4. To what extent do students' perceptions relate to present discourses around employability?

In this chapter, I will first provide a short summary of the main findings (9.2). I will then use the conceptual framework of the international student lifecycle proposed in Chapter 3 (Figure 3:3) to highlight the interconnectedness of the findings reported in the three preceding chapters (9.3). In the final section, I will present a revised model of the international student lifecycle showing how students' rationales for studying abroad, and their experience of studying at the university, are linked to their perceptions of developing employability (9.4).

9.2 Summary of main findings

Looking at the first research question, the students described their rationales for studying in terms of the following factors:

- Educational
- Experiential
- Aspirational
- Economic

The second research question targets the focus of my study on student perceptions on developing their employability during study abroad. Pursuing this focus, I examined students' perceptions of employability development opportunities at the

programme level and within the University Careers Service. Research question three allowed further probing of changes in student perceptions on developing their employability over the course of the year. The findings identify the following factors:

- Congruent with the university employability strategy document, students engaged in extracurricular activities: part-time work and volunteering.
- Time constraints and visa restrictions were the main barriers to student participation in other work experiences, notably, internships.
- Students across all programmes emphasized the importance of practical work experience. However, practical work experience was not available across all programmes.
- Programme Directors could secure industry-related work opportunities for students (where available as part of the delivery of a Masters-level programme).
- The extent to which students engaged with the Careers Service at the university varies, ranging from active engagement to partial engagement to no engagement.
- Students' perceptions of the relevance of the support from Careers Service to their specific employability needs was a key determinant of the extent of their engagement with the Careers Service. For example, students cited the lack of support for writing CVs suitable for employers in their home country as a major reason for lack of engagement with the Careers Service.
- Non-EU students highlighted the mismatch between their aims to obtain work experience in the UK and attending university careers fairs where employers were targeting UK and EU students.
- There were few changes in student perceptions formed at three months and towards the end of their programme. For example, students reaffirmed that their expectations were met in terms of having a different academic and social experience.

Addressing the fourth research question, '*to what extent do student perceptions relate to present discourses around employability?*' required me to draw on a relevant university document, 'the employability initiative' at the university where the

study was conducted, and the wider literature, with a focus on studies linking employability to study abroad. The interviewees were involved in academic and extracurricular activities that they perceived were enhancing their employability. This is consonant with the expectations outlined in the university employability document. The interviewees spoke about the types of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and relationships which they were developing during their study abroad. These resonated with the wider literature (see Table 8:1). These findings in relation to the fourth research question thus suggest that students' perceptions relate to discourses around employability at the institution and within the wider literature.

However, the findings did not indicate that the students were aware of the existence or engaged with the university's employability initiative. This might not be a concern since the document implied that employability was embedded either explicitly or implicitly at the university. However, there were mixed findings in terms of students' perceptions of the level of embeddedness of employability development opportunities at the programme level and within the wider university. This suggests that there is a need to examine the extent to which the employability initiative align with the level of embeddedness of employability at the institution.

In general, the findings were comparable to the employability related discourses in the wider literature. However, unlike conceptualisations of employability mainly in the form of knowledge, skills and attitudes, the findings show students' perspectives of the importance of developing relationships (social integration, friendships and networks) during their studying abroad as contributing factors towards enhancing their employability during their study and after graduation.

As Taha and Cox (2016) point out, researchers have focused on two aspects of international students' networks. Some researchers look at the factors influencing friendship networks (that is patterns of friendship between home and international students) while other researchers are interested in factors influencing students' participation in intercultural groups (groupwork) (for example, Bochner, Hutnik and Furnham, 1985). The findings from my research suggest that students also have employability-related rationales for developing networks. Therefore, the findings contribute further to previous research which had focused on networking among international students in relation to their adjustment to the teaching and learning environment.

9.3 Framing the findings through the international student lifecycle

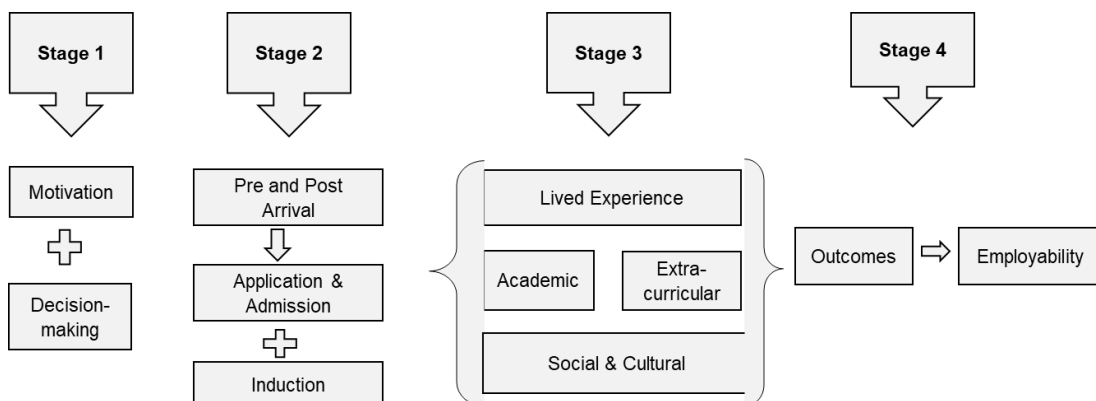
My aim in this chapter is to show how my findings provide a meaningful and coherent contribution to advance the initial international student lifecycle model proposed in Chapter 3 (Figure 3:3). In Chapter 3, I reviewed and synthesised the existing work related to international student experience at different stages of their student lifecycle: from motivations to study abroad; through their experience and their expectations at the end of their study (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012; Harris, 1997; HEA, 2014; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002) to explore current understanding and identify gaps in the literature. The main gap identified was that previous studies did not provide a holistic account of the international student experience. To this end, I have proposed a holistic four stage theoretical framework which looks at the trajectory of the international student lifecycle.

The proposed model incorporates elements from existing work in internationalisation discourses including motivation and decision making, post-arrival experience, lived experience and outcomes/employability. It can be argued that the conceptual framework I have proposed (Figure 3:3) provides a theoretical contribution to the existing literature.

9.3.1 Revisiting the proposed international student lifecycle model

To provide a background for discussion in this chapter, it is necessary to revisit and discuss briefly the proposed international student lifecycle model shown below:

Proposed model of the international student lifecycle



As discussed in Chapter 3, conceptualisations of international student motivation and decision-making mainly as a push/pull model (for example, Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002) provide some insight into students' rationales for studying abroad, for example, for a good quality education and to enhance their career prospects. However, as Wilkins et al., (2012) noted, the push/pull model is limited as it does not account for 'individual preferences and personal characteristics of students' (418). Further, the literature on student motivation is not usually integrated into other aspects of the students' experience.

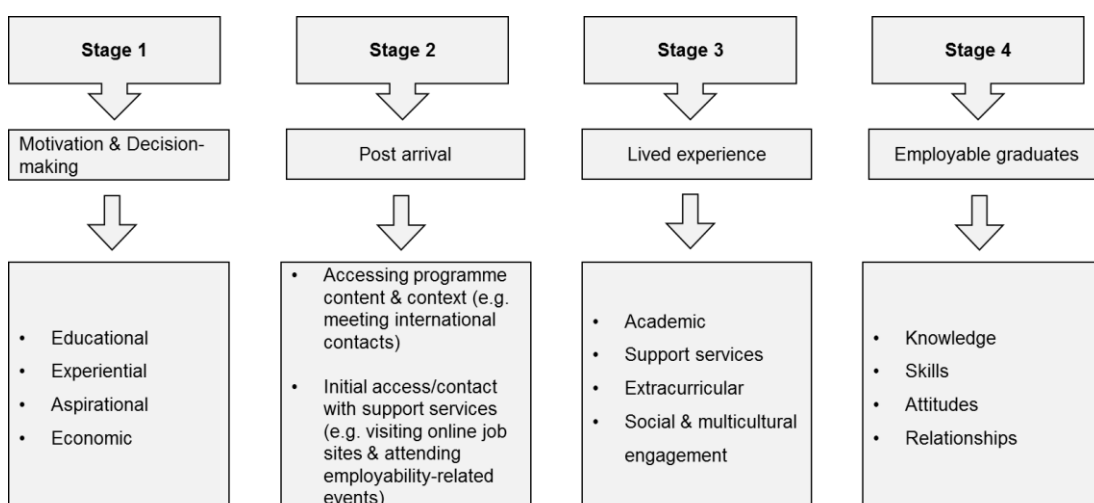
Additionally, the extensive literature on international students' lived experience mostly examines their adjustment to the learning and cultural environment in the host country (Fakunle et al., 2016; Gu, Schweisfurth and Day, 2010) understandably to enhance their experience during their study. However, research into international students' lived experiences are not normally linked to their rationales for studying abroad. Furthermore, rationales for internationalisation are largely framed as an organisational process from the perspectives of institutions and host countries (Knight and de Wit, 1997, 2018). The findings presented in Chapter 6 address this gap in the literature.

International students' outcomes in terms of their employability is the least researched aspect of the internationalisation of higher education (Caruana and Spurling, 2007). This means that very few studies make the connection between internationalisation and employability in the UK and globally (Gribble et al., 2015; Huang 2013; Huang and Turner, 2018; Jones, 2012). Ironically, studies examining prospective students' decision-making reveal that employability is a main motivator for studying abroad (Hobsons, 2014). Relatedly, Choudaha (2017) states that 'increasing competition among destinations and institutions will amplify the importance of meeting career and employability expectations of international students in either host or home countries' (11). This underpins the need to understand how international students' rationales and lived experience are linked to their desired outcomes in terms of developing their employability. Accordingly, the proposed lifecycle model (Figure 3:3) offers a theoretical framework through which the findings from this research provide an integrated approach examining the international student experience.

9.4 The revised conceptual framework of the international student lifecycle model

Empirically, the findings from my study exploring international student motivations and their perceptions on developing their employability during their one-year Masters study highlight the interconnectedness between different stages of the international students' lifecycle (Figure 9:1). This means that students' rationales for studying abroad, and their experience of studying at the university are linked to their perceptions of developing their employability. Therefore, building on the framework I proposed in Chapter 3 (Figure 3:3), the findings are incorporated into the revised international student lifecycle model shown below (Figure 9:1).

Figure 9:1 The revised international student lifecycle model



The revised international student lifecycle model (Figure 9:1) shows how the empirical findings fit the four stages of the conceptual framework. Student motivations to study abroad (stage 1) accorded with the four rationales for study abroad (based on findings in Chapter 6). Also, at the post arrival stage (stage 2), the students talked about familiarising themselves with the programme content and context, including meeting other students (home and international) and initial searching of the careers website for job opportunities in the first semester (see Chapter 7). Additionally, the interviewees talked extensively about their lived experience (stage three) relating to their academic, extracurricular, social, cultural and networking activities and further engagement (or not) with support services at the university (see Chapters 7 and 8). In line with the interviewees' rationales for

studying abroad, their lived experience informed their perceptions of developing their knowledge, skills, attitudes and relationships (see Chapter 8), which directly relate to enhancing their employability (stage 4).

Given that the findings highlight multiple rationales for studying abroad (Figure 9:1) it is important to mention the three main reasons for focusing on employability. First, the study aims to understand students' perceptions on developing their employability, thereby addressing what has been identified as a gap in the literature, in general, (Tomlinson, 2008; Tymon, 2013), particularly in relation to Masters-level students (Artess, et al., 2014; Mellors-Bourne, et al., 2014), and international students (Caruana and Spurling, 2007; Gribble, et al., 2015; Huang, 2013). Second, all the interviewees cite career-related rationales for studying abroad (Chapter 6). This agrees with other authors citing employability as a key motivation for international students studying abroad (Barton, Hartwig and Le, 2018; Blackmore et al, 2014; Nilsson and Ripmeester, 2016). Third, existing studies on international student employability rarely scrutinise students' perceptions regarding the extent to which institutional support assists them in developing their employability. Thus, my study contributes to this key knowledge gap by examining international students' perceptions on developing their employability within the one-year study period and the extent to which this relates to support at the university. To this end, I use the four stages of the revised international student lifecycle model (Figure 9:1) to discuss my findings in relation to existing literature.

9.4.1 Motivations and decision making/rationales for study abroad (stage 1 of the international student lifecycle)

The study has identified four rationales for studying abroad at the first stage of the international student lifecycle. In contrast, the HEA website (2014) which lists the first stage of the international student lifecycle as 'pre-arrival' did not provide details on what this entails.

Existing large-scale studies on student motivation and decision-making use empirical data to support the claim that prospective students have different reasons for considering studying abroad. The prominent push/pull model of student motivation and decision-making focuses on factors which influence students' choice of a study destination (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; McMahon, 1992) predominantly from a South to North context (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Kondakci, Bedenlier, and

Zawacki-Richter, 2018). The push factors include a lack of access to study opportunities at home and plans to emigrate after graduation. The main pull factors are the perceptions of the quality of education in the host destination and interest in understanding Western culture. The push/pull model makes a valuable contribution to the literature. However, the model focuses only on the first stage of the student lifecycle involving their motivations to study abroad. This provides a limited view of the international student lifecycle. In addition, my research was designed to capture a range of views not limited to students from a particular region or from the global south. The findings reveal rationales for studying abroad beyond a largely South/North flow of student mobility.

Other large-scale surveys, for example, Hobsons (2014, 2015) and the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Applicant Survey (2018), emphasize that employability is the main rationale for study abroad. The findings are based on the accounts of potential applicants who may not necessarily convert to international students. In contrast, my research presents the views of current students who have transitioned to studying abroad. My findings thus provide a reflective account of participants who have pursued their ambition to study abroad based on their main rationales, which have been presented earlier in the thesis.

In addition, as discussed in Chapter 3, surveys on student decision-making, for example, Hobsons (2014), stress the importance of their report to 'provide institutions with a full strategic framework that can be used to start the process of marketing optimisation' (39) such as their recommendation that 'charging fees of £14,000 or above markedly decreases the attractiveness of that course to prospective students...charging £14,000 or above, your marketing materials should make the additional value proposition very clear' (37). This is not surprising considering the dominant focus on the economic rationale for internationalisation. For example, a recent report on international postgraduate taught (PGT) students commissioned by the UK Higher Education International Unit had the remit to systematically examine the 'UK's market position' with respect to international student recruitment and the international student experience (Archer, 2016, 8). The report recommended that Universities, sector bodies and Government should consider a more substantive process for collecting and collating evidence of the decision-making, influences and routes to PGT study in the UK (Archer, 2016). Interestingly, the author acknowledged that international PGT students 'are likely to

be focused on their employability, post-study outcomes and return on investment' (10) and concluded that:

'universities should increasingly hard-wire the connections between recruitment, student experience and graduate outcomes' (Archer, 2016, 51).

This further underpins the importance to understand students' rationales for internationalisation as this can provide institutions with empirical evidence to develop strategies aimed at enhancing the students' experience and graduate outcomes.

It is important at this stage to briefly highlight the dominant organisational rationales for the internationalisation of higher education: political, economic, academic and cultural/social (Knight and de Wit, 1997, 2018). The political rationale focuses on foreign policy and national security; the economic rationale underpins the dominant financial narrative attached to recruiting international students for growth and competitiveness; the educational rationale aligns with traditional values including adding the international dimension to research and teaching and the extension of academic horizons; and the cultural rationale consists of intercultural understanding, citizenship development and social and community development (Knight 2004, 23).

Crucially, the organisational rationale for internationalisation has been criticised for excluding individuals' rationales, specifically, the perspectives of international academic staff and international students (Jones, 2012; Sanderson, 2008; Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017). Different authors across the globe make key contributions to understanding academic staff mobility (Kreber and Hounsell, 2014; Maadad and Tight, 2014). For example, Sanderson (2008, 2011) describes the importance of the 'internationalisation of teaching' (679) towards becoming an 'internationalised teacher' who engages in more than just 'the act of teaching' to familiarise themselves with theory, be self-aware of their own culture in relation to the increasing cultural, linguistic and educational diversity in their workplace and other international academic perspectives and the labour market (Sanderson 2011, 667).

In line with the aims of my study which seeks to address the gap in understanding rationales for internationalisation in relation to students, I will further discuss below the four rationales for study abroad: educational, experiential, aspirational and economic rationales.

Educational rationale

In agreement with other studies, the interviewees were unanimous in their perception of the value of an international education. This underpinned their motivation to travel outside their home country to study abroad. The main aspects of this educational rationale for study abroad were: 'programme component' and 'programme accessibility' (Chapter 7).

The findings show that the programme component, in terms of the work-based projects (WBP) and work-based dissertation (WBD) (instead of the traditional dissertation) 'drew' interviewees to the LLC and the SPS Masters programme. These work-based projects were not advertised as part of the Masters in the two other schools (EDU and BUS). Unsurprisingly, participants from the schools (EDU and BUS) did not specifically state that WBPs and WBDs attracted them to the programme. However, they talked about the importance of having 'practical work experience' during their Masters for a 'rounded study experience'.

Though it is recognised that all the Masters programmes in the institution where interviewees were recruited from cannot provide identical WBD offerings, the findings show that the lack of opportunity to participate in a WBD was a source of disappointment for interviewees who said it was a main motivator to enrol on the programme. This finding echoes earlier work by Hesketh and Knight (1999). From a close analysis and comparison of postgraduate programme information (13 MBA programmes and 21 Masters Programmes), Hesketh and Knight (1999) observed that it was 'hard to believe' that all programme options and course modules could be offered in one year. They then acknowledged that students could be quite disappointed if they expect 'all listed options' in their chosen programme will be available (153). On the one hand, this reflects the pressure of the one-year masters. On the other hand, this also suggests that institutions need to be clear about what students would be able to do during their study.

The findings related to programme accessibility point to the importance of English Language as the medium of teaching and learning in the host country. This is unsurprising as English Language is the lingua franca of international education (Altbach, 2016; Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007). This means that the students' ability to communicate in the English language was a major factor for the native English speakers who were all monolingual. It was also a key factor for all the interviewees

who were bilingual non-native English speakers with expectations that studying in the UK will help them to develop their English language skills.

An interesting nuance in the findings relates to students with historical ties to the UK (India and Nigeria) who asserted that English is their first language. These two countries are among more than 60 sovereign states where English language is the official language (Kiczowski, 2014). It is unclear if the students in this category need or seek to benefit from courses at the university for international students to improve their academic writing, as these courses are designed for students who do not speak English as a first language. This is an area that the university may need to address. The binary delineation of English as a first language or a second language may not sufficiently capture the range of linguistic experiences of international students.

The students' perception of age as a possible barrier to access the Masters programme was another interesting finding related to pre-enrolment requirements. For example, the two oldest interviewees (Indira and Bola) talked about their age and gender as barriers to returning to studying in their countries (India and Nigeria respectively). This underpinned their motivation to study abroad. However, Indira expressed her concern at not knowing if such barriers existed in the UK. Bola did not express similar concerns, perhaps because she had studied previously in the UK on a short-term programme.

Indira's concern could fit under 'widening participation' which is an important national policy agenda in the UK. However, the discussion of widening participation is not normally related to discourses around internationalisation (Taylor and Scurry, 2011). As Taylor and Scurry (2011) observed, 'while the (re)construction of 'non-traditional' 'home' students within changing educational policy, has been explored, the intersections between marginalised 'home' students and 'international' students have received little attention in spite of apparent commonalities, crossovers, and distinctions within and between such groups' (584). This means that the discourses on widening participation agenda in the UK focuses on home students (HEFCE, 2001; Greenbank, 2006). However, similar to Taylor and Scurry (2011) findings from my study suggests that these issues pertain also to international students. My findings highlight the need for institutions to provide clear information regarding programme accessibility for international students.

Interestingly, the findings show the importance of visa with regard to programme accessibility. For example, Bola (SPS, Nigeria) talked about how her choice 'was shaped' at the stage of applying for a visa, as she needed to choose one out of several institutions she had received offers from. Scholars' emerging interest in this aspect of the student experience has been highlighted in 3.3.2. The importance of this stage in the international student experience is manifest within the student lifecycle model. The majority of the students (n= 13) explicitly referred to their visa, without any prompting. Yet, this aspect of the student experience is under-researched.

As all students need to go through the visa processes, it is unclear why some did not mention this aspect of their experience. Perhaps, Abby's (LLC, USA) description of the visa application process as 'scary', provides a clue as to why some students did not deem it necessary to bring up the subject, since they had already passed that stage. However, this was not the case, for Adele (SPS, Canada) who talked about having gone through a tough experience before obtaining her visa (see 6.2.2). In any case, the subject was not pursued with the interviewees, as this was not a specific focus in my research.

Experiential rationale

The existing literature recognises that international students have a different experience when studying abroad. However, the international student experience is mainly viewed from a deficit perspective (Lillyman and Bennett, 2014) in terms of challenges related to their psychological and sociological adjustment and development of intercultural competencies, and culture shock (Deardorff, 2006; Schartner and Young, 2016; Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001; Wenli and Hammond, 2011). As Ploner (2017) argues, the international student experience is rarely framed in terms of developing their resilience as they face challenging situations while studying abroad. It is therefore important to highlight a key finding from my research related to resilience.

At the time of conducting the first interview (at the end of the first semester) all the students had experienced what they described as different teaching and assessment styles within the educational environment in the UK. Importantly, they described their experience as a part of their personal and professional development which they said was a key rationale for studying abroad.

The interviewees demonstrated their resilience as part of a challenging self-development process. Ironically, much of the literature on resilience looks at how individuals or groups respond to adverse or challenging situations in primary and secondary education with little interest in higher education (Ploner, 2017). Examples of what some students describe as the challenges of studying and living abroad have been presented in Chapter 6. However, the students, for example, Mandy (SPS, South Africa) reiterated their determination not to “fail out”.

Interestingly, without prompting, some students talked about how Brexit could impact the international student experience. Their concerns were twofold: possible restrictions on international students in the UK to travel around Europe, and whether fewer students from different countries will come to the UK after Brexit. At the time of writing it is unclear how Brexit will impact students’ perceptions of the UK as a multicultural environment, and as a ‘base’ for connecting to neighbouring EU countries. Brexit appears to be of interest to international students, and perhaps could impact on their experiential rationale to study in the UK.

Aspirational rationale

The findings show that some interviewees embarked on the Masters to fulfil aspirations which are not directly related to the academic aspect of the programme. For some interviewees, the Masters provided a way to ‘start a movement’ with people within local and international communities. Some other interviewees, Mariana and Patricia, stressed the point that the Masters allowed them to be ambassadors for their countries as they were aiming to dispel negative stereotypes about their respective countries (Colombia and Mexico). They seem to have had some success as another interviewee (from Taiwan), who was unaware that I had interviewed the other two students in their programme (LLC), described how her impression had changed after meeting ‘real people’ from the two countries.

The interviewees’ aspirations to leadership are in line with an earlier finding by Maringe and Carter (2007) that international students from Africa seek to develop leadership skills during their study abroad. My research further shows that students from a range of countries also have an interest in developing leadership skills during their study abroad.

Additionally, the aspirational rationale provides insights into intrinsic underlying motivation for studying abroad. One could argue that this points to the importance of

embedding initiatives to support students to achieve their aspirations in the course of studying abroad. This could potentially address concerns raised about the dominant focus on the economic aspect of internationalisation with less regard for other aspects of the student experience and motivations (Ploner, 2017; Stein and de Andreotti, 2016).

Economic rationale

Similar to the other rationales for studying abroad, the economic rationale also resonated with students across all four programmes. The economic rationale includes the costs and benefits of embarking on the Masters. The cost relates to the financial resources needed to embark on the Masters. Funding was a major issue for the students as nearly all (except Bond and Abby) did not receive any scholarship funding (funds were sourced through personal loans, savings, parents, and family friends). The economic benefit of the Masters is tied to the expected return on the investment in terms of enhanced job opportunities.

Economic costs

Related to the economic costs, the interviewees described their perceptions of the Masters in terms of value for money. This relates mainly to the lower cost of living when compared to studying in another city (like London). In some cases, the economic cost of the Masters was exacerbated by what Mandy (SPS, South Africa) described as her currency spiralling downwards and out of control. It is important to note that some interviewees said the cost of the Masters was causing them to 'stress out', as this could affect their studies. Alim (SPS, Turkey) talked nostalgically about the time in the past when education was free in the UK and he blamed the neo-liberal policies underpinning the marketization of higher education for what he described as the high cost of studying in the UK when compared to other study destinations in Europe.

Economic benefits

The interviewees were keen to point out that the Masters will help them to 'stand out from the crowd' in a competitive labour market. The interviewees also described the Masters undertaken abroad to be of a higher value for employment in their home country.

In addition, some interviewees, (for example, Qian and Chao), said the university they attended in their country did not reflect their ability. As such, it was important for them to enrol at a top university as a form of self-achievement and to demonstrate their competence to future employers. Other reasons for selecting a highly ranked university have been discussed in Chapter 6 including conditions for securing funding from current employers (Bond).

Limitations of the organisational economic rationale

In view of the discussion of students' economic rationale for internationalisation, it is pertinent to point out that the organisational economic rationale is problematic for three main reasons. First, it does not provide a framework to encourage organisational/institutional strategies and policies that could support talented students who are unable to afford the high cost of studying abroad. Recognising the inclusion and inequality issues in internationalisation, Garson (2016) pointed out that several scholars have stressed the dangers of framing internationalisation within a one-dimensional market-driven ideology instead of educators and institutions promoting social justice ideals (for example, see also Stromquist, 2007).

Additionally, the need to re-examine internationalisation policies was alluded to in a recent Higher Education Commission's (HEC, 2018) report based on a ten-month inquiry co-chaired by Lord Norton and Professor Simon Marginson. The report (published in September 2018) was based on the evidence and insights gathered from stakeholders in the 'industry' to understand what factors are responsible for the decline in the global share of students studying in the UK, while competitor countries such as Australia and Canada are recording double digit growth. Related to one of its main recommendations that the UK needs to reduce its dependency on a few source countries for students, the report stated that 'the Government should establish English language scholarships and pathway programmes to reach emerging markets; funded by DfID allocating a proportion of foreign aid spending to universities willing to match funds' (11). This coheres with the recommendations in another recent report published by the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations in Canada (CASA) (also in September 2018) titled, '*Value beyond the dollars and cents: International students' contributions to Canada and their need for supports*'. The CASA report reiterates the benefits from having international students in Canadian HEIs, including how they 'contribute in diverse and meaningful ways to the quality of education on their campuses, to the strength of the Canadian economy

and to all aspects of Canadian culture and society. As such, it is imperative that, like other students, they too receive the supports they need to thrive during their studies' (CASA, 2018, 2). It remains to be seen whether new directions will be forged in policy development in the near future, in the light of the recommendations in these reports.

Second, the lack of inclusion of the student perspective in the organisational economic rationale likely means that supporting international students who face financial difficulties during their study may not form part of strategic internationalisation policies at the institutional level. As pointed out by some interviewees, unexpected financial difficulties put pressure on them and this affected their study. International students face financial challenges in different global contexts. For example, Redden (2014) reports that a national study conducted by NAFSA in the United States found that financial difficulty is the number one reason for international students to drop out. Similarly, a study undertaken at two universities in New Zealand found that 'support services do not fully cater for the needs of international students nor accord them the full range of potential rights' (Sawir et al., 2009, 461) which accords with the conclusions reached by other authors in regard to international students in the UK and in Australia (Healey, 2017; Marginson, 2012).

Third, the organisational economic rationale ignores the students' lived experience and outcomes after graduation. This is somewhat perplexing considering many authors acknowledge that enhancing their career prospects is one of the main motivators for studying abroad (Archer, 2016; Clarke and Lunt, 2014; Hobsons, 2014; Mellors-Bourne, et al., 2014). It is surprising that there persists a lack of attention to international students' employability as part of their economic rationale for studying abroad. This further buttresses the point that the organisational economic rationale does not address the concerns of the range of stakeholders involved in the internationalisation process. Perhaps the lack of attention to the students' perspectives can be linked to the focus on the decision-making process stage as an end in itself (culminating in enrolment in the university) (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014) which satisfies the economic objective from an organisational perspective. Arguably, widening the scope of the economic rationale to include international students' perspectives could have impacted policy development and government interest, for example in terms of funding opportunities.

This, however, has not been the case. A summary of the main points covering the first stage of the international student lifecycle is provided below.

Synopsis

Stage one of the international student lifecycle clearly highlights four different rationales for studying abroad: education, experiential, aspirational and economic. The educational rationale has two related components: programme content and programme accessibility. The first component relates to the acquisition of top-notch disciplinary knowledge. This also includes the practical aspect of the programme involving work-integrated learning.

Regardless of student interest in the programme content, access was important. Programme accessibility was described mainly in terms of the students' proficiency in the language of instruction and age requirements. The students across the four programmes talked extensively about the ease of getting information about the programme content (mainly through the Schools' website). The Language requirements were also clear to the students. However, the students also talked about a general lack of information about non-academic requirements, such as, whether older students could apply for the programmes. This was an issue for students who were not familiar with the academic system in the UK, and for example, Indira, whom access to education in her country was problematic due to her gender and her age. It was not apparent if the widening participation agenda for home students in the UK extends to international students. Taylor and Scurry (2011) argues that this should be the case.

Additionally, regardless of both student interest and offer of admission to a programme of study, accessibility was dependent on securing a study visa. Obviously, all the interviewees had obtained a study visa. At the same time, the majority of the students talked about their visa, without being prompted to do so. The findings suggest that the visa was important to the students at the application stage, and this was also a factor with regards to the work-experience related opportunities they could explore during their study. Yet, although some scholars have drawn attention to this aspect of the student experience (Altbach, 2016; Humfrey, 2011), it remains under-researched.

The experiential rationale consists of one broad theme related to the students' interest to experience a different environment abroad. The findings include 'different experience' under several sub-themes listed in section 6.3. (Table 6:2 Table 6:2). For example, concurring with Montgomery and McDowell, (2009), across all four programmes, the interviewees described the benefit of working together with classmates from different countries which was helpful towards developing a global perspective.

The findings suggest that the interviewees perceived their Masters programme as an important step towards achieving their future aspirations. The findings show that part of the aspirational rationale of the interviewees include their visions for contributing to the development of their home country and globally. The interviewees talked about being surprised to find their classmates shared common concerns about dominant global themes, such as 'quality in education'. This suggests that the international programme context provided the interviewees with an opportunity to share their thoughts with, and learn from, diverse classmates.

Current and dominant conceptualisations of the economic rationale for internationalisation from an organisational perspective focusses on the financial benefit of recruiting international students (Qiang, 2003). This is evident in national and institutional drives to recruit fee-paying international students (OECD, 2017) which is attributed to dwindling government funding in higher education (Altbach, 2016; Healey, 2017). In contrast, the students expressed concern about the high cost of studying their programme. All of them reiterated the need to secure funding from personal (self, family and friends) and organisational (employer, and the university) sources to progress their aspiration for international education. They also talked about their motivation to make the most of the Masters considering the cost. The dissonance in the organisational and the students' economic rationales is clear. This underpins the need to include students' perspectives in internationalisation processes.

Importantly, the four rationales for studying abroad are linked to the students' expectation of their lived experience. It is therefore necessary to now discuss the second stage of the student lifecycle, that is, their post-arrival experience.

9.4.2 Post Arrival (stage 2 of the international student lifecycle)

The post-arrival period covers the first few weeks the students spend in the host institution (Brown and Holloway, 2008). Notably, previous work related to the early stage of arrival focused on culture shock which encompasses the negative emotions and difficulties associated with international student adjustment to a new environment with unfamiliar cues and norms (Furnham and Bochner, 1986). Murphy-Lejeune (2002, 111) describes this stage as a period which stimulates feelings of disorientation and a heightened vision 'of the very first moments on foreign land often remain etched out in memory as symbols of the passage into a new space and filter perceptions to come'.

Bearing in mind the existing literature, I was open to exploring nuances within the interviewees' descriptions of their initial post-arrival stage, not only in terms of what they were *feeling* but also, what they were *doing*. To this end, when the first interview was conducted at the end of the first semester, I asked the interviewees questions relating to all aspects of their experience since arriving at the university (see Appendices D and E for interview 1 and 2 guides). Within the first month of arrival the interviewees' main activities include familiarising themselves with the programme context (for example, meeting other international and home students), engaging with the academic content of the programme, and accessing support services (Careers Service website and Counselling Service).

Post arrival activities: Adjusting to the academic and cultural environment

In agreement with previous findings from research on international experience, the interviewees mostly expressed satisfaction with the high quality of education in the UK (Archer, 2016; Arambewela and Maringe, 2012). At the same time, the interviewees described the initial challenge of adjusting to the academic environment. As reported in previous research (Brown and Holloway, 2008), this was linked primarily to the different pedagogical approach in the UK, for example, independent learning and less contact time with tutors, and the methods of assessment which were vastly different from the students' experience in their home country.

Based on their research into the adjustment of international students to the Australian higher education environment, Russell, Rosenthal, and Thomson (2010) rightly pointed out that although the international student experience is not free of

stress and challenge, most of the students in their study exhibited a constructive and positive sense of self within their host environment. This was echoed by Montgomery (2012) in her study of the international student experience in the UK. This agrees with findings from my study whereby the interviewees talked about trying their best to cope with the challenges within a relatively short time. Importantly, the interviewees saw the challenges as a necessary step towards their personal and professional development, such as, independent learning and learning about different cultures and people (linked to the experiential rationale).

Some of the interviewees' strategies for coping included being selective in terms of the activities they engaged in. This meant not engaging in volunteering and part-time work unrelated to their Masters. Their coping strategies in this regard, however, seem at odds with what most of the interviewees emphasized as the importance of extracurricular activities, which they believed would deliver a 'rounded experience'. As Chao (EDU China) stated, he did not want to do the course online because of the value of having the actual experience of immersing himself in the culture within the host society (experiential rationale). It seems that the one-year Masters, which some interviewees described as very short, posed some challenges for the students to engage fully with a range of activities.

Across the four programmes, the interviewees expressed satisfaction with the multicultural programme context. However, in contrast, perhaps, for reasons related to the focus of the course (on Aid and Development), Bola (SPS, Nigeria), talked about feeling ashamed during class discussions and feeling that she had nothing in common with her classmates who were from 'developed nations with well advanced public health systems, and not in need of aid like her country'. She further said that she had not made any friends with her classmates and her only 'extracurricular' activity was watching YouTube videos in her living accommodation. It was unclear whether Bola discussed her feelings with anyone in her department. Bola's account differs from findings from research conducted with a student cohort in a similar Masters programme in a UK university (Bird, 2017). While Bola's account cannot be seen as representative, at the same time this authentic account of her experience cannot be dismissed. This further underpins the need for institutions to ensure that the diverse range of international students are supported in all aspects of their experience (Arshad, et al., 2012).

Post arrival activities: Accessing support services

The findings underpin the importance of support services for international students. Some interviewees said they had attended advertised careers fairs in the first few months of their arrival. The careers fairs provided a platform for the interviewees to meet 'prospective employers' as a form of career-related support at the institution. However, based on their interactions with the employers at the event, they perceived that these fairs were not suited to their needs. Their experience agrees with findings from Tran's research into Australian teachers' perspectives of hindrances for work experience arrangements for international students. Tran found that employers are hesitant to employ international students for two reasons:

- a lack of recognition of these students' potential contributions to their organizations,
- the complexities around the international student visa regulations (Tran, 2013)

At the same time, congruent with Huang and Turner's (2018) assertion, it was evident that some interviewees (for example, Abby, Indira, Bola, and Adele, Alim) did not engage at all with the Careers Services. These interviewees gave two main reasons for their lack of engagement including their perception that the Careers Service (and events) were only for international students seeking work experience in the UK and the generic email invitations sent to all students to attend career events did not relate to the interviewees' areas of interest.

However, two EDU students from China (Chao and Fang) engaged with all different aspects of the Careers Service provisions including attending career fairs, checking the website and visiting the Careers Service to get their CV checked (on multiple occasions in the case of Chao). These interviewees' actions seem to contradict previous findings from studies which have suggested that Chinese international students perhaps do not seek out opportunities to develop their employability (Huang and Turner, 2018).

As the interview questions were open-ended, it was expected that the interviewees would mention other support services they had used at the university. However, only Patricia (LLC, Mexico) said that she used the counselling service. She, however, expressed disappointment with the service and stopped attending after two sessions. Patricia's experience would appear to reflect Healey's (2017) observations

that facilities in universities are designed for a mostly undergraduate home student cohort and do not meet the needs of international students. It was unclear whether Patricia's issues with the counselling service were related to her being a postgraduate student or an international student or both. Her experience cannot be considered representative based on the limited data. However, given that our understanding of international students' mental wellbeing is limited, and it is only now emerging as an area of research interest (Forbes-Mewett and Sawyer, 2016) it seems important to mention Patricia's experience. It was unclear if other interviewees were aware of the existence of the counselling service or whether they used the service or not.

Recently, the need to provide financial support for international students has emerged as an area of interest in internationalisation in the UK (HEC, 2018) and other host destinations (CASA, 2018; Redden, 2014). This suggests that there is a growing awareness of the need to address this gap in the literature. The findings did not show evidence that the interviewees were aware of the availability of financial support during their study.

To round up this section, it seems crucial to point out that previous conceptualising of the second stage of the student lifecycle focuses mainly on the induction which happens within the first few weeks of arrival. Induction includes a valuable series of activities to welcome students and create awareness of what they should expect at the university. The findings provide a reconceptualization of the international student lifecycle which suggests that at the second stage, the students in this study were not just passively engaging in the induction - the interviewees were actively pursuing interests related to their rationales for studying abroad, such as seeking work opportunities.

Synopsis

Brown and Holloway (2008) state that their research corroborates other studies which 'indicates, sojourners suffer most stress at the beginning of their stay it follows that this is when most support should be made available' (45). To this end, the initial stage of the students' arrival at the host environment was conceptualised as a distinct and second stage of the international student lifecycle model.

The findings reflect the challenges students face at the onset of their studies. However, this research also highlights what the students were doing soon after their arrival in the host country. The students' actions were therefore linked to their rationales for study abroad.

The students mainly talked about careers-related support services. Importantly, the findings suggest that the interviewees' initial impression at the Careers Fair seemed to underpin their reticence to further engage with the Careers Service. This resonates with Connor and Brown (2009) and Archer (2016) who have identified careers support as the main area international students are dissatisfied with during their study in the UK. This seems to indicate that there is an urgent need for Careers Services to recognise the different needs of their student cohort and adapt their services accordingly. This point is echoed by Gribble (2014b) who points out that international students' lack of familiarity with local job seeking procedures, makes it necessary to provide them with 'tailored WIL programmes and support services to ensure a 'level playing field' with local students' (2). However, whether this support can be provided to international students who seek work opportunities in the UK remains to be seen.

The experience of a single student who expressed disappointment with the Counselling Service cannot be deemed to be representative. It however bears mentioning due to the paucity of research on international students' use and perceptions of the Counselling Service.

Some students made references to their financial challenges before and during their study abroad. The 'financial support' for international students is discussed briefly in view of the findings and recent calls pointing to the need to address the financial support for international students in internationalisation-related discourses (CASA, 2018; HEC, 2018).

Further, throughout their study period, the interviewees engaged in different activities at their school and centrally within the university. These are discussed as part of the third stage of the student lifecycle, the lived experience.

9.4.3 Lived Experience (stage 3 of the international student lifecycle)

The lived experience of international students is described in the literature mainly in terms of their transition to academic norms in the host country and their learning and living experiences (Archer, 2016; Gu, Schweisfurth and Day, 2010; Wu and Hammond, 2011). Unsurprisingly, many authors have focused on academic-related experience in previous conceptualisations of the lived stage of the international student lifecycle (see 3.3.4). Related studies have emphasised the need for providing support mainly for students' academic needs (Brown and Holloway, 2008). A few authors have looked broadly into the need for supporting international students in the host environment (Arshad, et al., 2012; Marginson, 2012), especially in the area of employability (Bird, 2017; Huang and Turner, 2018; Tran and Soejatminah, 2017).

In line with the aims of my study, I have explored below in-depth the students' lived experience including their academic and non-academic experience. This stage of the international student lifecycle comprises:

- Academic experience,
- Extracurricular activities,
- Social, cultural engagement and networking activities

In addition, this section includes discussions around students' perceptions of the support provided by the Careers Service which seemed like an integral aspect of the students' lived experience. This is related directly to their perceptions of the employability-related support available within the wider university.

Academic experience

The findings show that the interviewees' expectation of having a top-notch education largely matched their lived experience in terms of the teaching resources (academic staff and study materials) and facilities (for example, the library) they encountered. This aligns with the general agreement that the provision of high-quality education is a 'pull factor' for international students (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002), and goes further to demonstrate that student satisfaction is evident when their expectation is met.

As part of the academic experience, short-term projects were embedded as a work placement opportunity on many BUS programmes. Two BUS students (Yin and Bond) successfully applied to take part in a one-week project with a company in Italy (out of a total of 15 places available for over 50 students on the programme). However, the findings did not suggest that the criteria for selecting students for WBP (ad-hoc projects) included whether the students already had work experience. In the case of the BUS, the two students (Bond and Yin) who participated in a school-sponsored project work to Italy had previous full-time work experience (and both students had jobs at the end of the Masters). None of the other three BUS interviewees who also did not have previous work experience received a similar opportunity. This might question the extent to which the employability development opportunities (EDOs) at the school level take into account students who probably need the most support to enhance their employability. This should, however also not prevent such experiences for students who may have work experience but embarked on the Masters to change their field (as was the case for some of the interviewees).

Other studies in the UK and European contexts, though not focused on international students, have recognised the importance of work experience in relation to employability (Andrews and Higson, 2008; Shury et al., 2017). Congruent with Harvey's (2000) assertions that EDOs empower students to develop critical, reflective and transformative abilities, the interviewees said the EDOs, in terms of WBP, made them feel prepared to 'go out' to seek employment opportunities. Importantly, having industry work experience during their study seemed to enable the interviewees to affirm their sense of belonging within their field and confidence to approach employers with the evidence of what they have achieved aside from their academic qualification. This aligns with the 'graduate identity approach' whereby students formulate the identity they present to potential employers as a graduate 'worthy' of employment (Holmes, 2013, 550). The interviewees reiterated the importance of practical experience rather than *just* learning about the theories. Attention now turns to the extracurricular activities that students engaged in.

Extracurricular activities

It should be clarified that the interviewees make a distinction between WBL embedded in the Masters and seeking work opportunities outside the scope of the Masters programme, for example, in the form of part-time jobs. The extracurricular

activities sought by the interviewees within and outside the university included: part-time jobs; volunteering; travelling; and clubs and societies. The extent of student engagement in extracurricular activities has been covered in Chapter 7. In this section, I highlight extracurricular activities as a key aspect of the third stage of the international student lifecycle as part of the student lived experience which has largely been ignored in previous research (Tomlinson, 2008).

Serendipitously, the interviewees were engaging in employability-related activities mentioned in the university's employability document which includes part-time work, volunteering, travelling, or clubs and societies. Their participation in these extracurricular activities can be linked to their rationales for studying abroad. For example, the interviewees were interested in obtaining work experience (part-time work, volunteering and internship) to develop industry-related experience as they perceived this would enhance their employability.

The findings highlight the importance of the role of the Programme Director (PD) in gaining work experience. For example, the LLC PDs had established links with industry partners. This connection was used to facilitate volunteering opportunities for their students. Two students (Fang and Bola) also talked about volunteering on tutors' projects.

The Student Development Team (SDT) at the Business School (BUS) offered weekly careers advice, such as checking student CVs and conducting practice interviews. Though there was a SDT in SPS, the students did not mention if they had engaged with the team in any way. The other two schools (EDU and LLC) did not have an SDT. However, the Careers Service website shows that career consultants were allocated to each school across the university. It was not apparent that the students were aware of, or have engaged with, the careers consultant within their school.

The findings show that students engaged in travelling mainly to have a break from their work and to experience other cultures. Some students said that travelling gave them the opportunity to further develop their intercultural skills. Considering that the university employability document suggests that travelling contributes to student employability, it seems curious that travelling is not embedded in the Masters provision. In contrast, a key recommendation in the ERASMUS Impact Study (EIS) (2014) is that a 'mobility window' should be incorporated into the delivery of higher education programmes to enhance student employability (169). Building on existing

frameworks, for example, the Erasmus Plus programme which allows universities to support all students (whether EU or non-EU) to engage in a travel abroad experience, the university might be able to provide advice and support to students who may want to travel during their study.

Interestingly, the findings suggest that students with strong friendships with their peers did not feel motivated to join a society. This means that formal (clubs and societies) and informal (friendship networks) associations within and outside the university can play an important role in the student experience. Further, probing in-depth into students' engagement with extracurricular activities indicates that local groups outside the university actively seek to engage with international students. However, the distinction between the internal (university-supported) and external (local) groups is not apparent in the employability document on the university website.

Social, cultural and networking activities

The findings show that social and cultural engagement within and outside the university was an integral aspect of the students' lived experience. Scholars researching international students' intercultural networks state that social and cultural relations are developed in class, housing, engagement in extracurricular activities and engagement with tutor programmes (Bochner, Huntnik, and Furnham, 1985; Jindal-Snape and Rienties, 2016; Kim, 2001). As the discussion so far shows, this was found to also be the case in my research (see Chapters 7 and 8). Much of the research on international student intercultural encounters focuses on international student friendships with co-nationals (other students from their country), host nationals, and multi-nationals, friendship strength, and the length of time it takes to form friendships over the period of their study abroad (Hendrickson, 2018). As noted in Chapter 7, in contrast to focusing on the 'quantity' of social contact (Oatey-Spencer and Dauber, 2017), I was interested in the interactions the interviewees described as valuable in their different social and cultural contexts.

Tutor programmes involve matching students with their peers who provide academic support and an introduction to cultural norms in the host society. This is regarded as one of the ways institutions provide support for international students outside the classroom (Hendrickson, 2018) and is part of what Kim (2001) calls host receptivity. To this end, many universities in the UK, if not all, have developed tutor programmes in the form of a 'buddy system' whereby, a current student befriends a

new student. Interestingly, though the buddy system was available in the university, none of the interviewees described any interactions with a university buddy. Hence, the findings do not suggest that the interviewees had university buddies as part of developing their social and cultural relations.

While, research in peer learning and support focuses mostly on first-year undergraduate students (Quintrell and Westwood, 1994), the interviewees provided examples of what could be described as their own peer tutor programme. For example, one interviewee talked about having weekly language conversation 'classes' with her classmate to improve their English (both international students). This seems to demonstrate students' initiative and interest in their learning. There also seems to be the friendship element in the personal arrangement which takes place in a social environment (in a coffee shop). Although the importance of institutionally-based English language classes for international students is undisputed, perhaps innovative experiential peer to peer informal learning opportunities could be fostered to enhance the international student experience (related to their experiential rationale for studying abroad). The extent to which such an approach might be effective could be the focus of future research.

As discussed in Chapter 6 (6.2.1) opportunities to network were valued by most of the interviewees. However, some interviewees were critical of the value of networking as a meaningful connection. They reiterated the value of what they described as 'genuine' connections based on mutual respect rather than superficial interactions. The interviewees described valued relationships with organisations they connected with as part of their Masters and connections with local groups. Curiously, the relationships/networks developed by international students during their study abroad are scarcely included in discourses linking internationalisation and employability.

As earlier mentioned, on the one hand, this section discusses students' lived experience in relation to their engagement in academic and extracurricular activities. On the other hand, drawing on employability from a process approach (see 8. 2), I will now discuss student perceptions of employability-related support encountered as part of their lived experience.

Students' perceptions of support services as part of the lived experience

There were variations in students' level of engagement across the different schools (Figure 7:1). Due to the size of the study, the pattern of engagement cannot be seen to be representative. However, the interviewees' narratives provided insight into their perceptions with regards to the support from the Careers Service. This had direct impact on their engagement with the Careers Service (Chapter 7).

Interestingly, none of the LLC students sought advice from the Careers Service. This was perhaps unsurprising since the students talked about the open-door policy operated by their Programme Directors which meant they had access to ask for careers advice when needed.

By contrast, almost all EDU students engaged with all the Careers Service provisions (online, face-to-face advice, and careers events). This is also not surprising since the EDU students said they were unaware of the career support at the school. This suggests that students benefit from careers support provided at the programme level and centrally. Indira is the only EDU student who did not engage with the Careers Service. Echoing some other students, Indira said that this was because she 'knew' that the UK does not want international students to work during and after their study in the UK. As noted by other authors, it seems important for HEIs to communicate the possible ways the Careers Service provide support for international students (Archer, 2016; Gribble et al., 2015). The findings suggest that there seems to be a need to communicate beyond what some interviewees describe as generic emails regarding employability-related events – events such as careers fairs that might not relate to international careers.

At the same time, the findings suggest that the Careers Service supports employer events tailored to meet the needs of students looking for job opportunities outside the UK. The event mentioned by the interviewees related to job opportunities in China. This was welcomed by the Chinese interviewees (Qian and Jun) who attended the event. Ironically, Yin (BUS, Taiwan) was critical of the event which she said did not include employers from Taiwan. This suggests that in addition to the point that international students should be provided with support to access 'local labour markets' (Gribble, 2014b) there appears to be an appetite from international students with regard to careers events tailored to meet their country-specific needs.

However, it is unclear if the Chinese employer event was part of a strategic plan at the university or a one-off event initiated by the organisation. This buttresses the point made by other researchers that universities lack a differentiated employability related strategy to meet the needs of their diverse students (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012; Healey, 2017). With Home Office (2017) records showing that 97.4% of international students return to their country after studying in the UK, it seems imperative for universities to consider how they provide employability related support for international students, most of whom return home after studying abroad.

The findings show that the interviewees engaged mostly online with the Careers Service. Perhaps the use of technology to collect data related to students' use of the Careers Service website can help to inform the delivery of career-related support.

The data obtained from the Careers Service (Figure 7:2) showed a significant spike in non-EU student engagement (attendance at appointments, fairs, helpdesk. and workshops) in October (beginning of the first semester) in contrast to July (end of second semester) which was the month of the least non-EU student engagement. This corroborated the interviewees' account of engagement with the Careers Service. Aside from the five interviewees who attended the first Careers Fair in October 2015, none of them or the other interviewees attended Graduate Recruitment Fair held at the end of the second semester (in May 2016). The interviewees' accounts of the decline in their engagement with the Careers Service events towards the end of their study was therefore reflected in the quantitative data provided in relation to their face-to-face engagement.

Nevertheless, the data (Figure 7:2) also showed that non-EU students accounted for the highest level of engagement with the Careers Service. This shows that non-EU students do visit the Careers Service. The data, however, does not indicate if repeat student visits are accounted for. For example, Chao (EDU, China) said he visited the Careers Service to check his CV on three different occasions. When asked why he said he wanted the opinion of different consultants as he 'suspects' they have different levels of expertise. Interestingly, the attitude of Chao and some of his colleagues seem in direct contrast to notions that Chinese students are reticent to take advantage of the employability-related support available at the host university due to cultural reasons (Huang and Turner, 2018).

However, the decline in student engagement in Careers Service over time should be an issue that warrants some attention. The findings reported in Chapter 7 highlight

reasons for a lack of, or non-continuing engagement, mainly related to students' perceptions that the Careers Service provisions do not match their career aspirations, as non-EU students.

I did not assume that the student experience would be static over the period of study. As such, I posed interview questions to explore whether the interviewees' perception changed over the course of the year. The changes in perceptions that these questions revealed are considered below.

Changes in perspectives over the course of the lived experience

During the first interview, the students talked at length about their learning and intercultural experience from class and other social interactions. These perceptions were reiterated during the second interviews.

Regarding the quality of their teaching and learning, it seems that the students' perceptions did not change much over the period of their study. During the second interview, the students reaffirmed earlier comments made at the end of the first semester that their study was helping them to gain knowledge in line with their future career plans. Despite challenges with living independently and adjusting to a new learning culture, the experience of learning in a different and multicultural environment was valued by the students. Of note, during the first interview, some SPS students (Adele, Bola, Jackie) said they were dissatisfied with being unable to embark on a WBD, and this was mentioned again during the second interview. Their dissatisfaction stemmed mainly from their belief that the WBD as a part of the Masters advertised on the website was a promise not delivered on by their school.

With regards to extracurricular activities, the interviewees who did not participate in clubs and societies at the end of the first semester when those interviews were conducted tended not to engage later. The reasons for not engaging in extracurricular activities were a lack of interest, lack of time and perceptions that the clubs were formed early on and there was no point in joining after the first few weeks had passed. It was unclear, however, why some students seemed to get information about the events while others did not. Perhaps, as Fang (EDU, China) pointed out, this could be related to proactiveness of students who seek out such information. The findings therefore point to the need for a clearly defined information system that could perhaps increase the likelihood for all students to have similar information about extracurricular activities at the start of their programme.

Similarly, in terms of EDOs, the point has been made that the interviewees' engagement with the Careers Service dwindled over time. It is unclear whether the Careers Service has sought to investigate why this is the case.

In general, the students' perceptions of the support at the central level was positive in terms of the description of the friendliness and approachability of the careers consultants. Harshad (BUS, India), for example, suggested that the Careers Service are helpful, but there is little help they can give to international students due to the UK government's visa policies. However, Adele (SPS, Canada) expressed her disappointment with the undifferentiated careers support for students. She argued that she receives emails to attend careers events which are not related to her field. There is perhaps a need for the Careers Service to assess the information channels to students. As Qian (SPS, China) rationalises, there was no need for her to go to the Careers Service since she is going back to China. This suggests that there is a much bigger discussion to be had in relation to the strategic plan for Careers Service to provide career-related support to the diverse student cohort recruited into the university. This aligns with the recommendation that universities need to 'hard-wire the connections between recruitment, student experience and graduate outcomes' (Archer, 2016, 51).

Synopsis

This section presents the different aspects of the students' lived experience in terms of their academic and extracurricular activities. The findings highlight the value placed on integrating work-based learning into the academic programme. The different forms of work-based learning have already been discussed in Chapter 7. However, echoing Hesketh and Knight (1999), the work-based opportunities advertised as part of strategies by the university to attract international students (Tran, 2013) did not necessarily become reality as none of the interviewees did a WBD, despite their interest.

There was relatively low student participation in clubs and societies (for reasons discussed in Chapter 7). At the same time, the interviewees who engaged in societies gave positive feedback, and they spoke extensively about how joining a society enriched their student experience in terms of balancing academic and social life, having an immersive intercultural experience (related to the experiential

rationale), and, also for developing their communication and interpersonal skills (congruent with the economic rationale).

The findings show that the social and cultural context abroad provided the interviewees with opportunities to develop networks with students (and staff) from a range of countries (international and the UK). The interviewees described how social interactions with their classmates were contributing to broadening their horizons in terms of their knowledge about other cultural contexts both within and outside their immediate study context. Additionally, the social interactions provided the interviewees with what Alim (SPS, Turkey) described as a 'reciprocal' flow of information whereby he could learn about other cultures and share his own understandings with his classmates and other friends. This flow of information was also evident in the housing context, for example, with the students sharing knowledge about their culture, and learning about other cultures.

Similar to other research (Archer, 2016; Healey, 2017; Gribble et al., 2015) the findings show that the students did not think that the Careers Service provided enough support for their needs as international students. Ironically, non-EU international students were also the highest percentage of students who engaged face-to-face with the Careers Service.

However, it is important to also consider the pattern of engagement with the Careers Service which peaks in October (Figure 7:2). This coincides with the students' account with regards to stage 2 of the student lifecycle (that is when they first arrived at the institution). For example, Chao, Fang and Harshad said that they engaged with the Careers Service early on their arrival at the institution. However, their interest dwindled over the one-year period of their Masters. This is reflected in the data collected by the Careers Service (Figure 7:2).

The main reasons for students' lack of continuing engagement include their disappointment due to unsuccessful efforts to secure a work opportunity during their study (part-time work and internships). Interestingly, some students, for example, Jackie (SPS, USA) and Alim (SPS, Turkey) said they were thinking of going to the Careers Service in September, after submitting their dissertation. This seems to present an interesting scenario where it is possible that the non-EU students visiting the Careers Services around September/October represent two

different cohorts (incoming students and outgoing students). It is not apparent from the data if such a possibility is taken into consideration. Hence it is not clear if the Careers Service make distinctions, for example, with regard to the usage of their service at different stages of the student lifecycle. This points also to the importance of having a framework such as the international student lifecycle to guide the collection and analysis of data related to different student cohorts. Such data could provide evidence to inform the development and assessment of strategic initiatives and career-related services.

The findings suggest that for the most part there were no changes in students' perceptions formed earlier on during the Masters. This highlights the need for institutions to ensure that initiatives to ensure a positive student experience are fostered early on, and throughout the student lifecycle.

Aspects of student dissatisfaction mostly relate to the lack of practical work experience embedded on the programme. Nonetheless, the interviewees clearly articulated the employability-related skills they perceived they were developing. These are presented as four constructs (knowledge, skills, attitudes and relationships) and related components shown in Chapter 8 (Table 8:3). This is examined as the last stage of the international student lifecycle.

9.4.4 Employable Graduate/outcomes (stage 4 of the international student lifecycle)

The findings suggest that in line with their rationales for studying abroad and their lived experience the interviewees expected to become employable graduates at the end of their study abroad. Further to the discussion in 8.2, it is important to restate that the employability-development process involves both the individual and institution. Individuals need to access the support available for enhancing their employability. The support is provided by universities in the form of employability-development opportunities (EDOs) embedded in the lived experience of the students (stages 2 and 3 of the student lifecycle model). In other words, the employability process predates employability outcomes, mainly described in the form of obtaining employment. The scope and resources for my research did not extend to examining actual employment outcomes. For my current research, I focused on another little-examined aspect of the employability process –

employability-related support at the institution at the programme level and centrally (Chapter 7).

Drawing on my findings and a review of the wider literature, I proposed four employability-related constructs: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and relationships. The constructs have twenty-six components (Table 8:3). Overall, my findings resonate with current studies in the field of internationalisation and employability. My research, however, further expands current understandings. With regards to employability, my findings identify key employability-related constructs omitted, for example, from the current conceptualisations of 21st century global skills which emanated from a large-scale longitudinal study (Farrugia and Sanger, 2017) and another recently developed Global Education Profiler (Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017). Additionally, unlike Ploner (2017) and Yokota (2016), these studies for instance, do not include resilience as a skill developed during study abroad.

Crucially, my research has allowed me to construct an employability-related framework which encapsulates existing studies, and additional components emanating from the in-depth analysis of data collected from international students from a range of countries. The students' aims with regard to developing the different components of the employability-related constructs are congruent with the four rationales for study abroad discussed in Chapter 6. The knowledge construct fits with the educational rationale. The skills construct fits with the economic rationale. The attitudes construct fits with the aspirational rationale, with the interviewees demonstrating confidence in their ability to achieve their ambition. The relationship construct also fits with the experiential rationale. At the same time, the constructs are interrelated and are, therefore, not isolated items. This means that individual components could fit more than one construct, for example, although curiosity is included within the attitudes construct, it is also integrated into learning for knowledge.

However, the interviewees did not all have similar opportunities to develop all aspects of the employability-related constructs. For example, although the opportunity was provided within the university, the majority of the students did not engage in activities to develop their language skills which is recognised as an important employability-related skill (Farrugia and Sanger, 2017). This does not mean that all students will engage with every opportunity available at the university. At the same time, the findings provide a framework to support institutional initiatives

to adopt an integrated approach towards assessing and embedding employability-related constructs into their programmes. This is discussed in the implications and recommendations outlined in the conclusions in Chapter 10.

9.5 Chapter summary

The students' lived experience consists of the academic and other extracurricular and networking activities. The students expressed satisfaction with the academic aspect of their experience. There was evidence of dissatisfaction from students who did not have the opportunity to engage in WIL as part of the programme. The findings show that the main driver for interviewees engaging in WBP is when this was a compulsory aspect of the Masters programme (as was the case in LLC). This suggests that support at the programme-level is critical to providing students with such EDOs. This is an area where the university perhaps needs to assess the availability and equity of the distribution of EDOs for students at the programme level, and across Schools.

Not many students took advantage of the opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities within the institution. This seems related to communication gaps and issues with timing. For example, students who did not get information about clubs and societies at the initial stage of arriving at the institution were unlikely to engage as the semester progresses.

At the same time, the students developed personal and professional networks and friendships during the Masters. Most personal networks were mainly for social interactions. Professional networks were also developed during the Masters. The students in the LLC programme had opportunities to make industry-related connections as a part of their programme. This was a crucial source for developing professional networking. Some students talked about extending the professional networks beyond the Masters. For example, Mariana (LLC, Colombia) and Abby (LLC, USA) said they had accomplished one of their aims for embarking on the Masters - to have a list of professional contacts in their field. They talked about their plans to continue the professional relationship after the Masters, for their career advancement. Students in BUS (Harshad) and SPS (Qian) talked about developing friendships with their classmates which they hope would evolve into professional network after the Masters. However, none of the EDU students talked about

developing professional networks. This suggests that opportunities for student networking did not seem apparent across the four programmes.

Aside from academic and social activities, the students discussed their lived experience within the wider university. This was mainly in terms of their interaction with the Careers Service. This builds on earlier discussion in relation to the interviewees' perceptions of support services, which in turn affects the extent to which they engaged, or not, with the Careers Service, or in some cases, the level of engagement decreased as the study-year progressed (7.3.2).

Overall, the findings provide a mixed picture in terms of the interviewees' perceptions with regard to developing their employability for future career progression within and outside the UK. The majority of students clearly perceived that they received support towards developing their employability during their Masters, mainly in relation to support provided at the programme level. It was apparent that for some students (for example Harshad), the 'reality' of the difficulty to obtain work experience during their study was unexpected and disappointing. This suggests the need for universities to manage students' expectations about work opportunities, perhaps at the pre-arrival stage of the student lifecycle.

In agreement with Archer (2016) and Choudaha (2017), there is urgent need for universities to find ways to support international students' career development and employability. This is expected to signify innovative practices as a part of the delivery of higher education in a globalised world (Teichler, 1999).

This chapter has recapped the main findings from Chapters 6 – 8. Further, the findings have been integrated into the four stages identified in the international student lifecycle conceptual framework proposed in Chapter 3. Accordingly, students' rationales for study abroad (educational, experiential, aspirational and economic) were linked to their lived experience (academic and extracurricular activities), and their perceptions of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and relationships they were developing during their study. These are directly linked to their perceptions on developing their employability during their Masters.

The following final chapter will pull together insights from the integration of the findings into the international student conceptual framework and suggest implications and recommendations for educational policy and practice and other contributions to knowledge.

Chapter 10. Implications and recommendations

10.1 Introduction

The findings from my research make several significant contributions to existing bodies of knowledge in the fields of internationalisation and employability. Based on in-depth scrutiny of the literature in the field of internationalisation (Chapters 2 and 3) and my empirical findings (Chapter 6), my research proposes, to the best of my knowledge, the first conceptual framework relating to the international student rationales for studying abroad: educational, economic, experiential and aspirational.

I examined different theoretical and empirical conceptualisations of employability in diverse global contexts (Chapter 4) which I have synthesised with the empirical findings in my research to propose a detailed and coherent conceptual framework of employability which identifies four broad employability-related constructs and their related components (see Table 8:3): knowledge, skills, attitudes and relationships.

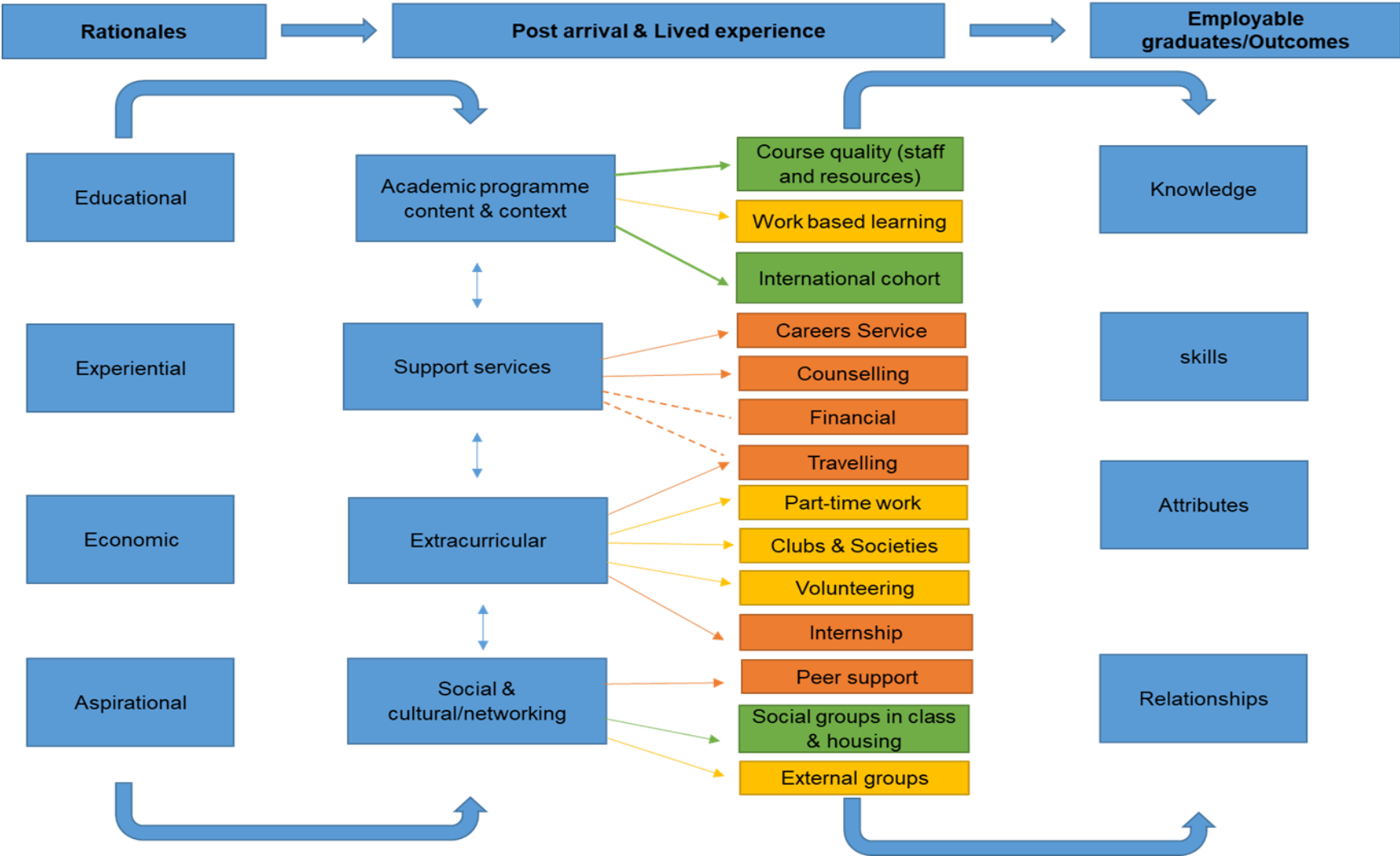
Following a review and synthesis of existing literature, I proposed a conceptual model of the international student lifecycle (Figure 3:3). This integrated approach towards understanding the international student experience addresses what I argued is a key limitation of existing related studies. Based on my research findings, I revisited and revised the international student lifecycle model proposed in chapter 3, to capture the four stages of the international student experience (Figure 9:1).

In this final chapter I will use the revised model of the international student lifecycle to first highlight the implications of my findings and recommendations for policy and practice at the institutional level before reviewing other contributions to knowledge. I will then provide reflections on the research process, and areas for future research.

10.2 Implications and recommendations: Institutional level

I have used the international student lifecycle to examine how the rationales of the interviewees align or not with their lived experience and future aspirations (Figure 10:1).

Figure 10:1 Using the international student lifecycle model as a framework to examine how rationales for study abroad and lived experience relate to employability-related constructs



Using the international student lifecycle model, Figure 10:1 provides an integrated view of the findings reported in Chapters 6 to 8. Hence, it was possible to identify aspects of concurrence (rationales matching a positive experience), mixed perceptions (that is experienced by some, but not all interviewees), and areas where there seems to be a mismatch between rationales and lived experience. The lived experience of the interviewees in relation to their rationales for studying abroad showing: concurrence (highlighted in green), mixed perceptions (highlighted in yellow) and mismatch (highlighted in orange) in Figure 10:1 are discussed below.

10.2.1 Concurrence: Student rationales concur with experience

As discussed in Chapter 9, all the interviewees expressed satisfaction with course quality (that is teaching and learning) and the programme context (studying with other international and home students). This agrees with the generally high levels of Masters student satisfaction in these areas reported in the literature (Archer, 2016; Crossman and Clarke, 2010). This suggests that the educational and experiential rationales matched the students' lived experience. This is directly connected to the employability-related knowledge construct (Chapter 8). To this end, it is recommended that institutions maintain the high quality of education (staff expertise and resources, such as the library).

The social context in class and housing provided the interviewees with ample opportunities for multicultural experiences and networking. The extensive findings reported in Chapter 8, show that the students' multicultural experiences concur with all four rationales for studying abroad. Hence, institutions that seek to recruit international students need to provide an international programme context and environment.

10.2.2 Mixed perceptions: Student rationales to some extent aligned with experience

There were mixed perceptions in some aspects of the lived experience in relation to interviewee rationales. Predominantly, this was in regard to the educational rationale, for example the lack of opportunities to embark on a work-based learning (WBL) embedded in the programme. This was a major dissatisfaction for many interviewees. In contrast, all interviewees who had such an opportunity extolled its benefit for their future career. This connects the educational rationale to the

economic rationale and it aligns with studies in other global contexts, such as Australia (Blackmore et al. 2014; Gribble et al., 2015) attesting to international student interest in WBL. The two main implications are: universities need to provide unambiguous information with regards to the work opportunities embedded in the programmes to manage expectations at an early stage; and there seems to be a need to provide WBL opportunities which align with student career trajectories (LLC provides a good example of this).

Importantly, as several authors have acknowledged, and as has emerged in my research, WBL is a major motivator to study at Masters-level. It is therefore recommended that institutions who want to recruit international Masters-level students need to consider embedding WBL opportunities in their programmes.

The findings show that engaging in extracurricular activities such as part-time work, volunteering and clubs and societies, provided opportunities to develop and enhance different components within the four employability-related constructs (knowledge, skills, attributes and relationships). However, not all interviewees had the opportunity to engage in some or any of these activities. The implication is that students could potentially miss out on an array of activities that could enhance their lived experience and employability.

The recommendation in this case is that the university needs to adopt a strategic approach to ensure that new students are provided with information about the extracurricular activities and ways they could participate during their study. This could be included as part of the student handbook. Currently, the student handbooks typically has information related only to academic study. Considering that international students are new to the host environment norms and culture, the institution also needs to provide 'connectors' to help the international students to make the connection with local organisations. My research shows that some staff already work as connectors, for example the LLC Programme Director and tutors on some courses display good practice in this area.

10.2.3 Mismatch: Student rationales do not match experience

According to the findings, some aspects of the interviewees' lived experience did not appear to match their rationales for study abroad. Mainly, this relates to the support available at the university. This finding resonates with observations from several authors (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012; Choudaha, 2017; Healey, 2017) that

universities need to reshape current support services to align with the changing student profile and needs. The following paragraphs note these aspects of support services that the students found unsatisfactory to at least some degree.

As discussed in Chapters 8 and 9, career support was an area where many interviewees expressed disappointment with their experience. The main issues were the UK work visa policy and the perceptions of the students that the careers support available does not relate to a large extent to their expectations and career goals. These points have been raised in a report on PGT students commissioned by the UK Higher Education International Unit (Archer, 2016). However, the government visa policy is an area which cannot be altered by an individual institution or career service. Regarding the issue on study [work] visas, perhaps, the UK government may learn from developments within the last five years where countries including Canada (in 2014) Australia (in 2016), New Zealand and France (in 2018) have developed National Strategies in International Education which have less stringent visa rules to attract international students.

Echoing other authors (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012, Choudaha, 2017, Gribble, 2014b), the main recommendation is that there is a need for institutions to provide differentiated careers support for a diverse student population, which they seek to attract. This suggests that the onus lies on universities to develop strategies to address the issues international students might have concerning employability development opportunities.

The mental health of international students is becoming an area of emerging interest, though there is sparse research in the area (Forbes-Mewett and Sawyer, 2016). One student talked at length about her experience using the university Counselling Service. However, she expressed her disappointment with the support provided. The interviewee did not elaborate on the reasons. As this could be a sensitive issue, I also did not probe further. It was not clear from the findings if the other interviewees did or did not use the service. In any case, my study did not directly address this matter.

In agreement with Forbes-Mewett and Sawyer (2016), it is recommended that there is a need for longitudinal studies to understand international student mental health. In addition, the current provision of counselling should be designed to meet the needs of a growing population of international students.

Several reports have highlighted the need to provide financial support for international students at the national level (Archer, 2016; CASA, 2018; HEC, 2018). This recent policy recommendation aligns with my findings, as most of the interviewees described the impossibility of embarking on studying abroad without financial assistance from friends and family and through scholarships. In addition, the findings show that financial problems can arise during an individual's postgraduate year and this could have implications for students' progression with their study. Yet, the findings did not suggest that the interviewees were aware of the availability of financial support at the university.

The main recommendation is that the university should make clear the financial support available for international students, if any. Perhaps this could be embedded in the university's internationalisation strategy. The data on the numbers of students given financial sponsorship by the university could be used as a measure of successful internationalisation efforts. Currently, the opposite is the case as the focus is on the cash that international students bring.

Lastly, similar to other universities in the UK, the institution has a robust buddy system which allows current home students to support international students at the early stages of their arrival (Hendrickson, 2018). However, it was not clear whether buddy relations were fostered with home students. Rather, some interviewees talked about using their initiative to engage in what could be described as 'peer tutoring', for example to have English Language conversation meetings and intercultural learning with other international students at the university.

The importance of mutual intercultural learning opportunities for international and home students (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Volet and Ang, 1998) was highlighted by the interviewees as a "reciprocal thing". As Sawir (2013) found from an Australian study using interviews with 80 academic staff, 'if well engaged, international students could broaden everyone's cultural horizons and could contribute to domestic students' overall learning and experience' (366). Congruent with the experiential rationale for study abroad, I would recommend a tutoring programme be made available as a mutually interactive peer tutoring activity for all students.

To round up the recommendations for institutions based on the findings of my research, it is crucial to restate that not all interviewees have access to the same opportunities, despite the availability within the university. The student lifecycle model could give a more fine-grained model of international students' experience

that would allow policy and practice to be more responsive to the situation and needs of a wide range of international students. My research thus makes an important contribution by providing a practical model for students, institutions and policymakers.

10.3 Theoretical and practical contributions: Internationalisation

It can be argued that my findings make important theoretical and practical contributions to the field of internationalisation. I will discuss these contributions in relation to the need to include international students' voices in internationalisation discourses in general and the importance of the empirical findings for practical purposes, such as, in the development of evidence-based initiatives to support the international student experience at the institutional level.

Despite three decades of discussing internationalisation processes, the perspectives of staff and students are largely excluded and underrepresented (Hunter, Jones and de Wit, 2018; Jones, 2013). Hunter et al. (2018) reiterate the need for a strategic approach to internationalisation that recognises the value of academic and administrative staff who should be recognised for their contributions and supported as equal-partners in internationalisation processes. Emerging theoretical and empirical literature examining the perspectives of staff in internationalisation (Kreber and Hounsell, 2014; Sanderson, 2008, 2011) have made important contributions to the field.

However, more attention needs to be paid to the student voice and my research has contributed to this. As discussed in Chapter 9 the conceptual models that emerged from my research include the student voice which has been under-studied and absent from the dominant organisational framework in internationalisation literature.

In terms of practical considerations, previous internationalisation-related research largely focused on separate aspects of the international student experience treated as unconnected. My findings show that this is not the case, as there were apparent linkages in all stages of the student experience (see Figure 10:1).

As Archer (2016) pointed out, 'historically, departments of admissions, student services and alumni have operated independently' (51). Unsurprisingly, within the

literature there are studies that have more of a practitioner focus, and others that have a more 'academic', research focus. The former group (practitioners) usually focus on international student motivation and decision-making processes (Humphrey, 1999; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014). The latter group (academic researchers) mainly focuses on the international student academic and socio-cultural adjustment to host societies (Gu, Schweisfurth and Day, 2010).

However, while it is expected that different individuals and departments within the university will have different roles to play in the internationalisation processes, a lack of an integrated approach towards understanding the international student experience has unintended consequences. For example, in the competitive higher education landscape, the marketing department will likely seek to ensure that a university enrolls growing numbers of international students. However, the findings show that the class composition differed considerably along national lines across different schools. Crucially, comments from a few interviewees suggest that they were not satisfied if there was a lack of diversity in their programme. It was not apparent if this concern was fed to staff at the institution. Arguably, to whom such questions should be posed to might present a conundrum for both the students and staff. For example, it is unclear if academic staff could provide an explanation for student diversity, or a lack of such, on a programme. The likelihood for students to discuss the issue of diversity with university recruitment or marketing staff seems highly doubtful. This further underpins the importance of adopting a holistic approach towards understanding the international student experience and providing integrated support as part of an institutional ethos and strategic framework.

Finally, echoing the views of scholars of internationalisation (Brandenburg and de Wit, 2011; de Wit et al., 2015; Leask, 2012), Garson, (2016) calls for reframing internationalisation amidst growing concern that 'the focus on outputs, in terms of numbers or activities rather than outcomes for learning, may be detrimental' (21). Recent suggestions have included, Internationalisation at Home (IaH) and Internationalising of the Curriculum (IoC) (discussed in Chapter 2). Though IaH seeks to expand the scope of international education within local contexts, there are other areas of concern, such as, the limited integration of mobile and home students which has been reported in other research (for example, Sawir, 2013). My findings provide empirical evidence which aligns with recent research findings attesting to

the importance of having a diverse student cohort to develop intercultural knowledge and competencies for all (Tran, and Vu, 2018).

Tran and Vu (2018) suggest that the success of internationalisation processes depends on strategic policies at the institutional and the national levels. However, at the national level in the UK policy makers are yet to develop a strategic policy on international education. Unsurprisingly, the need for the government to reassess the policy on international education has been stressed by different authors (Archer, 2016; HEC, 2018).

My thesis is focused on institutional internationalisation policies related to international students. Many universities have internationalisation strategies. However, there is a lack of evidence that the student voice is embedded into the internationalisation policies. This could be linked to current conceptualisations of internationalisation as an organisational process that has ignored the voices of individuals including students and staff (Hunter, et al., 2018). The findings reported in this thesis provide a framework that can be integrated into a strategic internationalisation policy. For example, in the institution where the study was conducted, work integrated learning was available on some programmes. This was important to international students who sought opportunities for practical experience to enhance their employability. This aligns with the students' rationales for studying abroad. The extent to which practical experience is expanded and integrated into all programmes could be included as part of an internationalisation strategy.

In summary, the international student lifecycle model presents a holistic understanding of the international student experience. It provides institutions with a coherent empirically-based model to assess and enhance the support provided to international students from the initial stage of arrival through their experience to graduation. As such, the international student lifecycle model can help to develop strategic policies to support internationalisation processes at universities.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the international student lifecycle model recognises the 'particular vulnerabilities' of international students (Humfrey, 1999) largely ignored in internationalisation processes. However, there is no reason why the international student lifecycle model could not be adopted as part of an institutional-wide framework that includes all students (home and international). For apparent reasons, home students do not need a visa to study in their own country. However, they also could need a visa, if one takes into account the

internationalisation strategy document (at the institution where the research was conducted) that highlights the importance of mobility for [all] students to study or work outside during their study. This is also implicit in the employability document that mentions travelling as a key extracurricular activity. This is not surprising in the 21st century delivery of higher education, as many institutions envision an international experience for all their students. The conceptual framework of the international student lifecycle model highlights challenges (or vulnerabilities) that would require support from the university. This is helpful to evaluate the extent to which institutions enhance the student experience, whether on a degree programme or a credit-bearing part of the degree.

10.4 Theoretical and practical contributions: Employability

My findings also contribute to discourses on employability. I mention briefly below how my findings extend current conceptualisation of employability. As discussed in Chapter 4, discourses around internationalisation usually exclude employability. However, my findings show how employability-related constructs and components are integrated into the international student lifecycle model, thus linking the two concepts (Figure 10:1).

As discussed extensively in Chapter 8, my findings are compatible with the main conceptualisation of employability which emphasises skills, knowledge and attitudes (Farrugia and Sanger, 2017; Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2017). However, the study extends the theoretical conceptualisation of employability beyond skills, knowledge and attitudes to include the relationship construct. This recognises the social integration, friendships and networks formed during study abroad. Similar to other studies (Archer, 2016; Taha and Cox, 2016) the findings highlight the importance of developing international networks during Masters study. The findings, however go further to shed insight on networking as one of the components of the relationship construct which contributes to developing employability during study abroad and potentially after graduation.

The majority of employability studies focus on the outcomes approach. This has been criticised by many authors for reasons including its focus on employment indices, which is described as a crude measure of employability. These studies also mostly focus on employability within a national context. In contrast, my research focuses on the largely ignored aspect of international student employability. In

particular, the findings highlight how employability development opportunities are embedded or not at the programme level and centrally within the institution. This has practical implications for the institution.

Overall, the findings show how internationalisation and employability discourses fit into the international student lifecycle by making linkages between students' rationales for studying abroad and how their lived experience relates to their perceptions on developing their employability.

In conclusion, although my research focused on international students, the employability constructs can benefit all students for two main reasons. The development of human capital which underpins employability-related discourses pertains to all students. In addition, home students studying alongside international students also have the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills, attributes and relationships to live and work in a global world.

10.5 Future research

The study reported in this thesis was based on my keen interest to better understand international student experiences and their employability. Due to the limitations of time, resources and the complexity of the issues explored, it is important to indicate the need for future research into the little explored aspect of internationalisation from the perspectives of individuals. I outline below key areas where future research could be carried out with regards to the type of the institution, context of the study and the scope of the study.

This research was conducted in a research intensive higher education institution. Future research could be carried out in a vocational oriented institution. It will be interesting to find out, for example, students' perspectives in regards to the extent to which the different components in the employability-related construct are embedded on Masters programmes at such an institution.

It will also be interesting to carry out a similar study in a different context. The study was carried out in Scotland, in a city which the participants described as part of the 'draw' to experience something 'different'. This finding points to perhaps the uniqueness of the study location. This also highlights the limitation of conducting the study at a single site. Future research could explore whether students in a different

context might have a similar or different rationale for choosing to study in a different place or country. This could possibly extend the findings in this study.

Additionally, the study context provided opportunities for work integrated learning, for example, for all LLC participants. This was possible due to the presence of organisations (in a related field) within the vicinity of the university and industry links which had been established by the Programme Directors. A future study carried out in a socially-deprived area where there might be fewer opportunities for work experience for students might bring out interesting insights about student perceptions of their lived experience in such an environment.

Several authors have pointed out that there are differences in the experiences of undergraduate and postgraduate students (Healey, 2017; Humphrey and McCarthy 1999; Macleod et al., 2018). This study focused on Masters students. Regardless of the level of study, it is expected that the international student lifecycle consists of the four key stages outlined in this thesis (rationales, pre-arrival, lived experience and outcomes/employability). However, future research could look into the interrelatedness of the different stages of the international student lifecycle from the perspectives of both undergraduate and postgraduate research students.

Internationalisation has become a major strategic initiative for institutions. It will be beneficial to expand the scope of this study within an institution. This means that a study could be conducted on a larger scale across different Colleges (including Engineering and Medicine) within an institution to understand the extent to which current initiatives do, or do not, align with students' rationales and their experience of studying abroad. This will be of interest to institutions seeking to develop strategic internationalisation policies which seeks to enhance the international student experience.

The scope of a future study could also look at the perspectives of staff who engage with students at different stages of the international student lifecycle. While some studies, for example Hyland et al, (2008) and Arambewela and Maringe (2012) have explored staff perspectives of internationalisation, such studies have focused on a specific aspect of the student lifecycle. For example, the Higher education academy study conducted by Hyland et al (2008) looked at staff (and students) perspectives of an internationalised curriculum across different disciplines. This is a part of teaching and learning aspect of the lived experience within the student lifecycle. The future study suggested here would seek input from the staff in both academic and non-

academic disciplines/departments within this institution. This aims to develop an integrated approach in understanding and providing support to enhance the international student experience.

10.6 Final thoughts

In contrast to the dominant organisational model of internationalisation that does not reflect individual perspectives, the international student lifecycle model presented in this thesis relates to individual experiences of internationalisation that can be integrated into institutional initiatives to assess and enhance the delivery of a rounded student experience.

During the course of writing up my thesis, there is ongoing engagement with internationalisation and employability in institutional, national and international contexts. A recent edited book (Bista, 2018) titled *Global perspectives on international student experiences in higher education: tensions and issues* explores a range of issues faced by international students including academic social and cultural concerns. Recent exploration of employability includes reviews of theories and practice and debates in different global contexts (Potts, 2018; Suleman, 2018; Tomlinson and Holmes, 2017). However, international students are still underrepresented in these discourses. Recent reports published by the Higher Education Commission (2018) in the UK and the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations in Canada (2018) also point to the importance of reconsidering current internationalisation related policies and strategies which do not provide differentiated and integrated support for international students. Drawing on the views of a range of scholars, Holmes (2017) concluded that '*graduate employability research can and should have implications for action, and that such action is possible...whilst insisting that such action should be informed by sound research*' (360).

In view of emerging developments in the field, my thesis contributes to current themes that are of interest to diverse stakeholders: policy makers, HE practitioners, academic and administrative staff and students. Accordingly, the theoretical frameworks that this thesis present, and further research, have 'implications for action', such as the development of institutional internationalisation policies and strategies, taking into account the linkages between the international student experience and employability.

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Appendix A - Knowledge dissemination

List of knowledge exchange opportunities – dissemination of knowledge obtained during this research to wider audiences (papers, conferences, and seminars)

Fakunle O. (2019) Students: Missing voices in internationalisation. University World News, No: 539. 17 February 2019.

<https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20190212144121925>

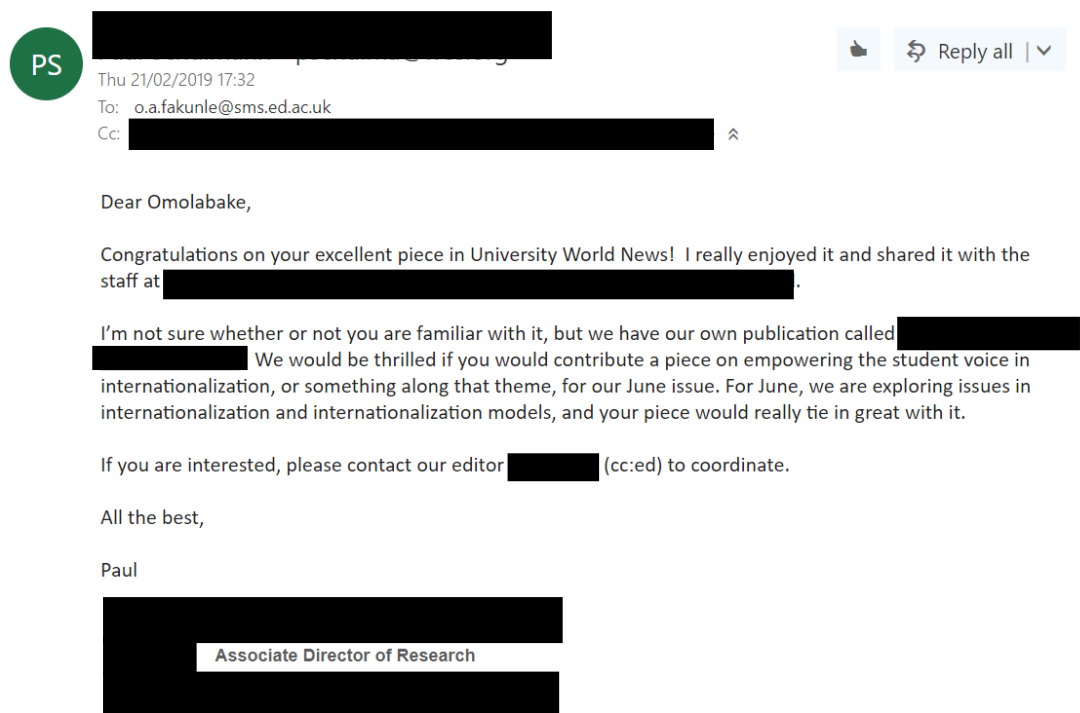


Figure A:1 Feedback after publication of article in University World News No: 539, 17 February 2019.

Fakunle, O. (2018) Internationalisation of higher education: A conceptual framework of international student rationales for study abroad. **Winning paper submission – 2018 Estelle Brisard Award** Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA). 22 November 2018.

Fakunle, O. (2018) International student perceptions of developing their employability during their one-year masters-level study in the UK. Invited contributor, Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) Seminar *International Graduate Employability: Trajectories and Performance. Workshop 2: Drivers for Change*. 16 November 2018.

Fakunle, O. (2018) New inequalities? The exclusion of international student employability in higher education discourses. Work, Employment and Society Conference, Belfast. 13 September 2018.

Fakunle, O. (2018) "Cooperation: A sustainable approach to inequality in Latin America" – through the lens of internationalisation: Perspectives of International Latin American students. Latin American Forum, University of Edinburgh (**Winner – Best poster**) 13 February 2018.

Fakunle, O. (2017) Exploring Graduate Employability through the International Student Lifecycle. SRHE Annual Conference 2017, Wales. Paper presentation. 6 December 2017.

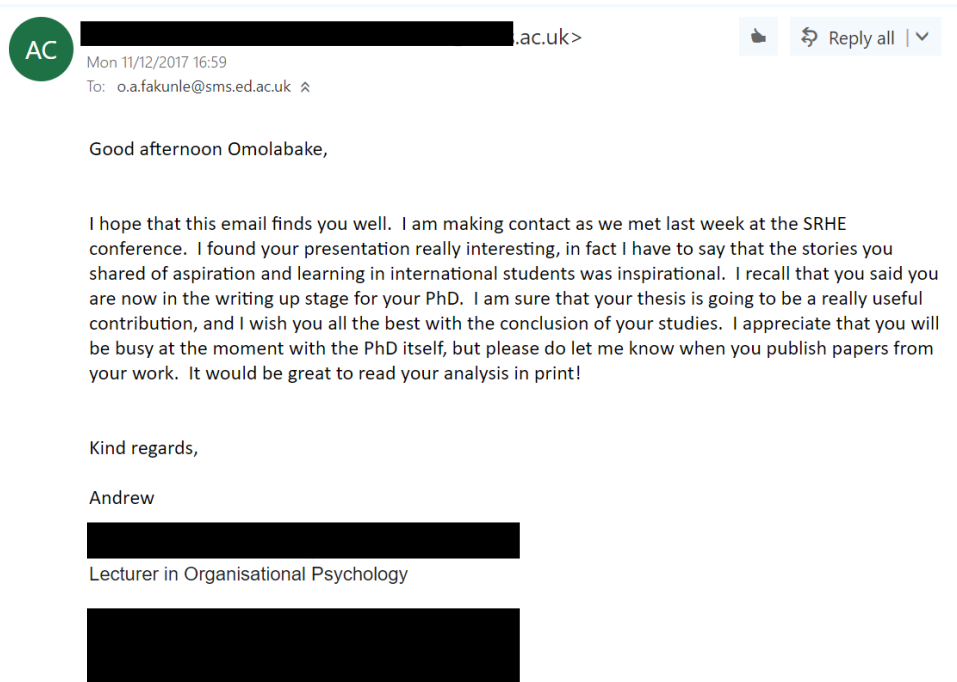


Figure A:2 Feedback after presentation at SRHE Annual Conference December 2017.

Fakunle, O (2017) The international student perspective on developing employability. **Winner – 3 Minute Thesis Competition**. Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA Conference), Ayr. 22 November 2017.

Fakunle, O. (2017) Contextualising social justice in an increasingly internationalised higher education sector: A case for international students in Scottish higher

education. Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA) Conference, Ayr Paper presentation. 22 November 2017.

Fakunle, O. (2017) Developing international student graduate employability in a globally competitive higher education landscape. Canadian Society for Higher Education Conference, Toronto. 30 May 2017.

Fakunle, O. (2017) Mobile, yet constrained: International graduate employability. Educational Futures and Fractures Conference, University of Strathclyde. 24th of February 2017.

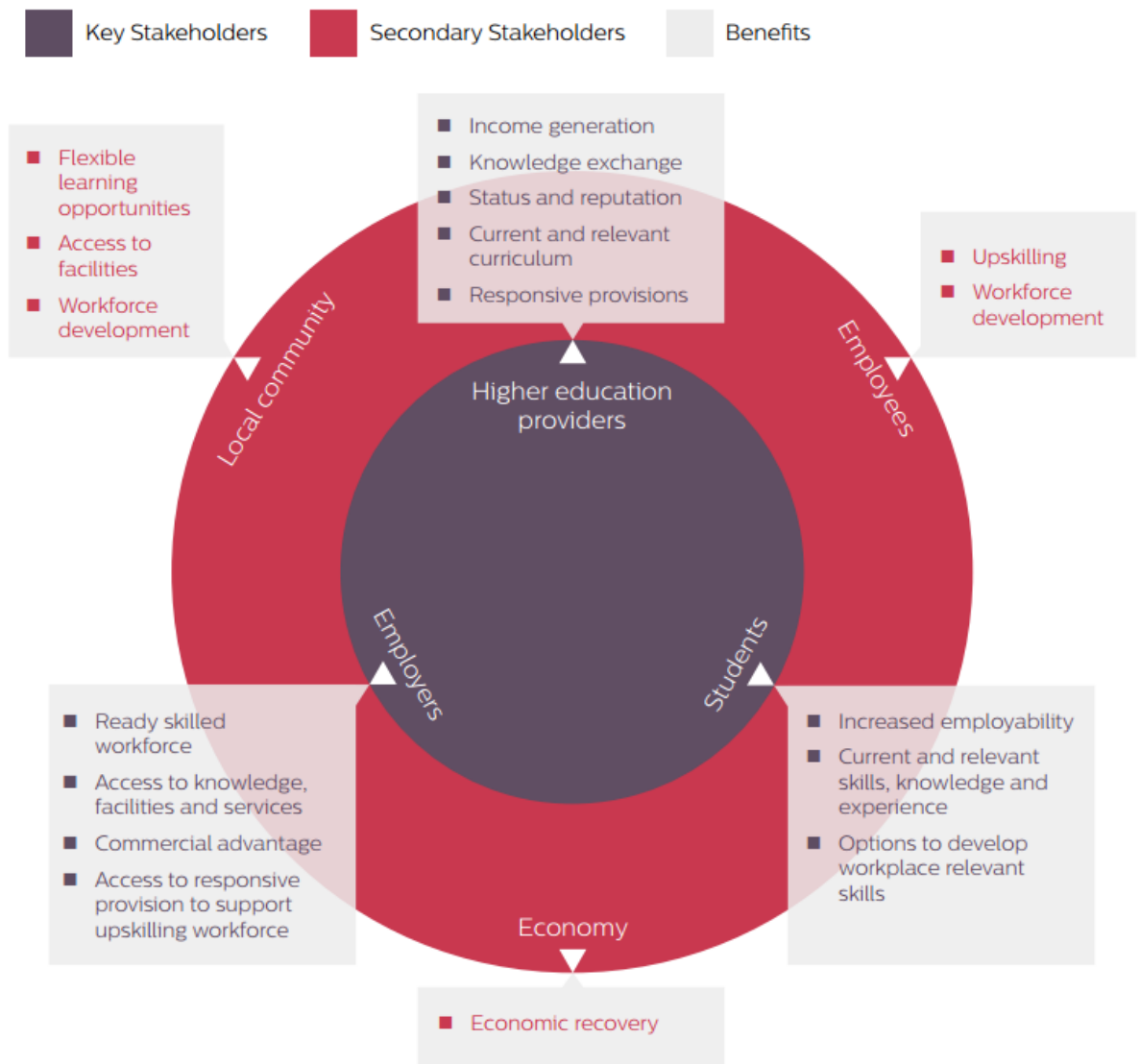
Fakunle, O. (2016) The employability of international students matters SRHE Annual Conference 2017, Wales. 8 December 2016. Poster presentation.

Fakunle, O. (2016) Quo Vadis - national context, internationalisation and graduate employability. British Council Going Global Conference, Cape Town. Poster presentation. 04 May 2016.

Fakunle, O. (2015) Global graduates: Evidence for ongoing study on postgraduate taught international student employability. Invited contributor, Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) Seminar. 13 November 2015.

Fakunle O. (2015) Examining international students' perceptions of their employability during their one-year UK Business Masters. Interweaving Conference Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh. 02 September 2015.

Appendix B - Stakeholders in employability



Source: QAA, 2014

Appendix C - Letter of introduction to Masters student

I am a PhD student at the Moray House School of Education at the University of Edinburgh. My thesis is examining international student motivations, perceived benefits and experiences of studying on a one-year MSc at a UK University. To this end, I am looking to conduct interviews with current MSc international students at the University of Edinburgh. I would be very grateful if you could participate in my study. I aim for my study to reflect student voices and it is very important to learn your opinions.

Ethical approval for the study has been obtained, and the study will comply with all ethical requirements throughout the investigation and afterwards. I undertake that I will not reveal the identities of interviewees that participate in this exercise. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and written informed consent will be obtained before the interview. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this investigation. However, if participants feel uncomfortable answering any questions, they can withdraw from the interview at any point.

If you wish, I will be happy to share my findings with you. My research report will also be available at the University Repository.

My email contact is s1258179@sms.ed.ac.uk. Please let me know your availability for the interview (December or January). The interview will last for around 45 - 60 minutes.

Kind regards,

Omolabake Fakunle

Appendix D - Interview 1 guide

Section 1: Personal details

Name:

Sex:

Age:

Nationality:

Current MSc Programme:

Previous higher education:

| Programme/Subject | University | Country | Degree obtained | Length of study (years) |
|-------------------|------------|---------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| | | | | |

Previous work experience:

| Type | Where: | Home | Abroad | Year(s) | How long |
|---------------|--------|------|--------|---------|----------|
| Full time | | | | | |
| Part time | | | | | |
| Internship | | | | | |
| Volunteering | | | | | |
| Others | | | | | |
| Total (years) | | | | | |

Sponsorship:

Self.....

Parents/relatives/friends.....

Scholarship.....

Other.....

Section 2

| Research questions (RQs) | Interview questions |
|--|--|
| <p>RQ1</p> <p>What are the rationales or motivations for international students to study on a one-year Masters programme at a UK university?</p> | <p>Why pursue Masters study?</p> <p>Could you explain to me how you made the decision to study abroad?</p> <p>Did you apply to study at any other University in the UK or elsewhere? Where?</p> <p>Why did you choose to study your programme at Edinburgh?</p> <p>What did you know about your programme before choosing it? And how did you get this information?</p> <p>If the ranking of Edinburgh University influenced your decision, could you describe the process of identifying the ranking? Also, how why does the ranking matter to you?</p> <p>(If any) How would you describe what and/or who influenced your decision to study at Edinburgh?</p> <p>What would you describe as your main reason for coming to study for your masters abroad?</p> <p>Are there other reasons you can think of?</p> |
| <p>RQ2</p> <p>To what extent do international students' expectations of developing their employability match their experience?</p> | <p>Could you describe your expectations from your study?</p> <p>What do you hope to achieve during this period of your study?</p> <p>How do you think you can achieve your aims during your study?</p> <p>Aside from academic knowledge, what other benefits do you expect from your year-long programme?</p> <p>Do you have opportunities to discuss your future plans within your School or within the University? How did you find the discussions - if any?</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <p>What extra-curricular activities do you plan to get involved</p> |
| | <p>What, if any, aspect(s) of your PG experiences is different from your UG?</p> <p>Could you describe any aspect (s) of your experiences during your PG different from your UG in relation to extracurricular activities?</p> <p>How do you consider that your current study experience might fit with your future aspirations?</p> <p>Are there aspects of your study that you could relate to your future aspirations?</p> <p>What advice would you give anyone coming to study?</p> <p>What are your future plans?</p> <p>Is there anything you would like to add to this discussion?</p> |
| <p>RQ3</p> <p>To what extent do international students' perceptions of the benefits of studying on the Masters programme change over the course of the one-year of study?</p> | <p>Could you describe which areas of your studies have you found most interesting? Or challenging?</p> |
| <p>RQ4</p> <p>To what extent do students' perceptions relate to present discourses around employability?</p> | <p>Interview 2</p> <p>The interview questions to address this research were developed after analysis of the data collected from the first interview which would be compared with textual evidence, e.g. employability initiative document at Edinburgh and the wider literature.</p> |

Bold – overlapping 1st/2nd interview question

Appendix E - Interview 2 guide

Section 1

Name:

Marital status:

Do you have dependants? Yes..... No.....

Are your dependants with you in Edinburgh? Yes.....

No.....

Has any member of your family lived or studied abroad (or currently do so)?

| | Work | Study | | | |
|---------|------------|--------------|-------------|--------------------|---------------|
| | Count/year | Country/year | Institution | Programme /Subject | Qualification |
| Father | | | | | |
| Mother | | | | | |
| Brother | | | | | |
| Sister | | | | | |

Have you engaged in any of these activities during your study here?

| Type | Edinburgh | Outside Edinburgh (state the location) | Month | How long | Further details (e.g. membership of more than one clubs/societies) |
|-----------------|-----------|--|-------|----------|--|
| Full time work | | | | | |
| Part time work | | | | | |
| Internship | | | | | |
| Volunteering | | | | | |
| Clubs/societies | | | | | |
| Travelling | | | | | |
| Others | | | | | |

Any further details:.....

Section 2

| Research questions | Interview questions |
|---|--|
| <p>RQ2</p> <p>To what extent do international students' expectations of developing their employability match their experience?</p> | <p>How do you consider that your current study experience might fit with your future aspirations?</p> <p>Are there aspects of your experience that have been unexpected?</p> <p>What do you consider to be the main benefits for studying here?</p> <p>Have your expectations before you first arrived at Edinburgh changed?</p> <p>What do you hope to accomplish before the end of your study?</p> |
| <p>RQ3</p> <p>To what extent do their perceptions of the benefits of studying on their programme change over the course of the one year-study?</p> | <p>If you have not engaged in any of the activities listed in the questionnaire, could you explain why not?</p> <p>If you have engaged in any of the activities, do you plan to engage in more activities? And if yes, which ones?</p> <p>If you have engaged in any of the activities listed in the questionnaire, could you explain what motivated you to do this?</p> |
| <p>RQ4</p> <p>To what extent do their perceptions of the benefits of studying for their masters and any changes within these relate to present discourses around employability?</p> | <p>How did you get information about the activity?</p> <p>You said you engaged in (name activity, if applicable), was it difficult to get access to doing this?</p> <p>What motivated you to do this activity?</p> <p>Is the activity in any way related to your future plans?</p> <p>What are your future plans?</p> <p>How have you engaged with the university careers services?</p> <p>Is there anything you would like to add to this discussion?</p> |

Bold – overlapping 1st/2nd interview question

Appendix F - Sample interview transcript

I = Interviewer: Omolabake Fakunle

R – Respondent: Chao (pseudonym) Masters programme (EDU, China)

I: Why are you doing a Masters degree?

R: First of all, I am not ready to find a job, so I choose further study. I really have interest about studying education because my grandmother taught in a primary school for many years and I took some volunteer jobs as a teacher and even some professor in my UG school motivate me, if teacher can act like that. I change the major from Business to education to study in-depth.

I: Why did you do a BA in Business before the Masters in Education?

R: That is a very interesting question. In Chinese College entrance examination, I don't know if you may have heard about it. When I applied to the university I wanted to study law. But the law subject has a very high qualification. You need a very high mark, so I failed it. Also, I think that for that particular university the HR has more portion of the Arts subjects like accounting or something like maths. I also applied for another major like international journalism at another college but still also failed that major. So I was assigned to this major [HR Management]. Actually, I am not very interested in business. This is very different from many Chinese students. Some students just want to study business. I have another path. Though, I don't want to become deviant data

I: No, it's fine. But why did you want to do a Masters study abroad?

R: The intention to go abroad even started in my high school because I just want to experience another culture. To see another country. Later I want to study abroad for my Masters degree.

I: Can you explain how you made the decision to study abroad?

R: As I said I wanted to study law and I don't have the opportunity to study it for my undergraduate (UG) so I want to apply here Law degree in the future at Masters level. But as you can see I failed again because the GPA is not very high. So, it's also a part of the reason why I choose education because I failed when I applied for Law subject

I: Was this in China or the UK?

R: Hong Kong. Common Law system

I: Did you apply to study Law in the UK?

R: No. Not yet. Because it is very high standard, I don't need to apply. I perceive that I will fail. I don't need to waste the time to apply for this

I: Do you think you could try?

R: I think in Sheffield University, I can, but it is too long. I think it takes 2 years for those with non-legal background to apply. But I don't really think Sheffield University is as good as this university.

I: Why do you think so?

R: Because you know Chinese students look at the ranking of universities like Times ranking or something like that. And on the ranking Sheffield is not too high. Especially for the Law degree.

I: Did you check?

R: Yes, I do check

I: Why is the ranking important to you?

R: This is a very interesting question. Maybe because historically they only perceive ranking in the high school to place student academic ability so maybe they think university ability is based on the ranking whether it is good or not.

I: Ok. We will get to that. So, you decided to study abroad and you decided to change your major to education. But why did you decide to do this abroad?

R: You mean?

I: I mean why did you decide to leave China? Could you have done your Masters in China?

R: Oh no! No. I don't want to do my Masters in China. When I was a child I always wanted to see another culture. To see the world. And my parents really support me in this. They like the idea. They said you must do well and someday you can go outside and see western people or another culture. Experience another culture

I: And why is this important?

R: I think it's just to fulfil myself. At that particular time, I didn't think about contributing to the country afterwards or something. I just want to improve myself. Satisfaction. To use a business term, I will get more self-satisfaction and self-fulfilment.

I: How?

R: I will go about and learn more about and experience the lifestyles. Maybe drink coffee. It's true because in China the people don't have this kind of habit or this kind of experience. They also don't have this kind of vocation. So, it makes me very happy to study abroad.

I: Did you apply to study at any other university in the UK?

R: Six. Edinburgh, Sheffield, I apply there. Bristol University, but they refused me. Leeds and Glasgow. It's a long time I can't remember the rest. But it's all Education.

I: It's ok. So, which of these universities accepted you?

R: Except Bristol, they all accept me.

I: And why did you decide to study at here?

R: Again, it is because I checked the School webpage and the University has the best Education School. It is more specific to explore. Ah, another one is York [university], I remember.

I: ok

R: and I think that is why I choose the university, another interesting thing apart from academic ranking is that I ranked them according to the age of the School. I would like to join the most ancient one. I think Edinburgh is the good choice.

I: Why?

R: Because I really like to go to atmosphere that is the ancient time. I don't know how to describe it in English - ancient academic atmosphere. For example, the York is a very young college but I still want to because there is Harry Potter there. But I chose Edinburgh

I: What did you know about your programme before choosing it?

R: You mean specifically Education?

I: Yes.

R: I am not very familiar with this. I think there are certain information gaps. And the truth is because I don't have a major background in studying Education so I didn't choose a specific course like Child Education, I choose Education in general. That's the reason.

I: Ok. And how did you get the information about the programme?

R: Mainly on the School webpage

I: If the ranking of Edinburgh University influenced your decision, could you describe the process for you to identify the ranking?

R: First of all, do you mean how I ranked it?

I: ok

R: I went to the Moray House webpage it had more information about education. For example, York and Glasgow didn't provide some details so I perceive that they don't have many good scholars in specific areas. Another one is as I said the age of the college. Moray House was built in 18th century.

I: But how did you find out about the ranking of Edinburgh?

R: Also, the website. You know the media like Times or Guardian they provide the ranking each year. Of course, they may be influenced by the money the School donate to them. But I think it's still a good reference

I: Why?

R: It's a good reference because I think when you compare different media they still have common ground. For example, Edinburgh University ranking is no 10 in Times and in Guardian. I think this kind of common result can provide me with the more accurate information that I require

I: Why does the ranking matter to you?

R: Because in the Chinese employment, the employer when they scan our CV they really very pay attention to the ranking. Maybe because in their generation maybe

they didn't really get the opportunity to go abroad to study so they didn't really know how the western people know [assess] the academic ability so their focus is on the ranking to assess if you are graduate from a good school. So if I choose a lower ranked school I know the universities here themselves they don't care because each school may have their strength and are very good. But in my CV if I put this university and the person in China don't really know Edinburgh, then for this reason I can't find a job.

I: Really

R: Nowadays Chinese employers in their generation they are still bureaucratic in their view. They consider ranking. So, we also need to consider it a little bit.

I: Ok

R: Study is important but employability is also important

I: Why do you say employability is important?

R: Because I take the course, for example, Adult Learning, it's Adam's (pseudonym used for tutor) course. I know that learning is maybe for the democratic life, for the self-fulfilment. But if I can't get employability how can I live? That is important too! I can't follow country and be okay to contribute to the democratic life. That is how I consider it. So I think to some extent the learning for earning still have a big portion in life.

I: And what course was that?

R: Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

I: Do you want to talk more about that point? What you said now, the learning for earning?

R: Because that's about the assignment. We should debate that lifelong learning nowadays is too specific to pay too much attention to learning for earning rather than learning for living because lifelong learning has many dimensions. Like learning for democratic ideas or to pay attention to something like inclusion or fulfil our own desire. But nowadays we only focus on employer's skills for the work. But I think it's important. If I don't have the work, how can I live? I think I put this in the assignment. It's really important to guide others through their learning to get this kind of ideas. I really enjoy the course.

I: Ok

R: In the teaching assessment, I put 3 Es – excellent lecture, excellent lecturer, and excellent topic.

I: That's good. And what influenced your decision to study at Edinburgh?

R: One is my parents. We share a similar ideology that Edinburgh is the more ancient one and have more academic ability. And also my peers, former classmates they say that Edinburgh is better.

I: Did they study at Edinburgh too?

R: No. They don't have the same qualification like me.

I: They don't have what?

R: They don't have high academic standard. They also fancy about Business. So they might go to Manchester. Manchester has a more ancient Business School. They can choose that one.

I: What would you describe as your main reason for coming to do your Masters abroad?

R: I think it's still to get some fun for myself. It's interesting but not really specific I think the main reason is that I want to go abroad for my further study. That will make me very happy. The main reason is not that I want to get specific knowledge but just to experience new learning and the opportunity to go outside.

I: The opportunity to go outside. Why is this important?

R: For me it is the most important motivation. As I said it's a long desire. I was influenced by my mother and by the culture of television and in the book. I want to go to western country to go to the UK

I: Did you consider any other western country?

R: No. But I consider Canada because it's easier for immigration. But I more like Europe culture because it is old. And I am super fan of classical music so I think Europe is more suitable for me. America or Canada is too modern. So, part of the influence may also be related to my personality and character.

I: And is that not related to learning for living? Even if you said you argue otherwise in your essay

R: I didn't put that in my essay, but this is kind of learning for living or better living or better experience for myself.

I: So how do you relate that one to learning for earning?

R: Learning for earning is that I have my Masters. That's a certificate. This part is about the earning. Actually, as I have said to my mother and my mother said to me, nowadays get a Masters degree. If really you want to earn, a Masters degree is not enough. Because there are a lot of Master degree students in China. So if I really want to learn for earning I must have to study further. But for me now the Masters degree is enough. There is more fierce competition in China nowadays

I: Can you explain that further?

R: For earning is that I can get a degree to find a job, maybe a higher job. But learning for living is experience another country's culture. But how to bring them together. I just think they are two dimensions, but they are not in conflict with each other because learning here is the experience, but I also get a higher qualification. So I don't think they are in conflict

I: Why do you say that?

R: Actually, according to Janice 2008, I think he also make that point. If you have a good job and have a fun more this is a kind of self-fulfilment. I think the personal dimension and the earning dimension are overlaid. With Adam, I also don't want to

push this too much because he thinks more of professional life as earning than let us say, the political awareness of the person. I think I agreed in part that nowadays we are unconsciously learning more towards earning

I: And what do you think about that?

R: Not for me, but I think many classmates want to, especially my classmates who study business they want to have more job

I: And do you see yourself as different?

R: I think my perception is learning for myself is very important. I don't very care if I find a job. As I mentioned, the supervisor in China wants me to come back to work so I don't need to bother about that

I: What if the supervisor didn't do that?

R: From my experience, many of my classmates who didn't pursue further studies they still find *not very bad jobs*, so I think it's still okay

I: What do you think about the emphasis on learning for earning?

R: Because if we focus too much on that, the people in the society will be very selfish. We will always want to improve our own skills for the job, but we don't care how many children are suffering. But the learning context itself cannot bring awareness to us the learners. That is not good

I: So how do you relate that to your experience of doing a Masters here?

R: This is very difficult question, I think. I think this relates to you, as I may study harder to get the content of the teaching rather than wasting the one year time and at last get a certificate and know nothing, then get back. I think that is the difference between some of my classmates and me. Some classmates ask me why don't you choose HR Development course because we have this option last semester. And I said I already studied this course. Why would I study it again? I want to study something new. But they cannot understand. They think as I have the experience before I should choose that course because I can get easy task for the essay and just get the certificate and go back. But I don't think like that. I really want to study something new that I didn't learn before. This is kind of to get some awareness. To get some knowledge that can improve the society or to care more about the people who are excluded other than to get certificate to just get job for myself.

I: Why do you think so?

R: Because I think many former classmates have already done that. They just get an easy certificate to get a job. They didn't really study something. But I want to study.

I: Ok. And are there any other reasons why you came here?

R: More reasons. Ok, I summarise everything. The main reason is my personal and another reason is that I want to change my major. I really want to study in-depth about education and teaching. I don't know why many students go abroad. Also, my university in China is not very famous so if I use that university degree to find a job it is very hard. And takes 4 years study for the UG. If I didn't do further study, it's like I wasted those 4 years of study. 80% of students will go abroad for study.

I: I find it interesting that you like the idea of learning for living and you are trying to do that. But you then want to get a higher certificate abroad to get a better job. Where do they meet?

R: I think the concept of learning for living is more like living for other people and also yourself. But when you are learning for earning it is just to get your certificate to earn more money.

I: Which are you trying to do now?

R: I think I am trying to do this one of the learning for living but I have to get the certificate, so I automatically get the earning part.

I: Ok. That is interesting. I wanted to be clear about that. So for you, which is more important?

R: Learning for living. To get knowledge and more awareness and horizon to other people to the whole society

I: And why are you getting this then?

R: I study the Master degree to get this certificate. So this certificate is important or it is necessary or facilitator for me to go back to my own country to get a better job for myself. Maybe academic

I: But can you live abroad without getting a Masters?

R: You mean if I want to experience?

I: Yes

R: I don't think so. For me the Adult Teaching course provide us the opportunity to go to the City Chamber to have opportunity to be involved in community discussion. I think this kind discussion cannot be gained even by a million-dollar tour. Also, you still can have this opportunity. I think this is because the teachers have a connection to guide us deeper in understanding the society. If I just live abroad I will see maybe some scenery. I cannot discover the inner meaning of life. So I have this study

I: What is your expectation from your study?

R: I want to get more knowledge about the teaching method and broaden my horizon about learning policy or the situation about people in different countries and especially the children.

I: Ok. Is that what you expect?

R: I also want to have a higher mark

I: Why?

R: Well, maybe I can apply a PhD

I: And what do you hope to achieve during your study here?

R: Maybe the Head of Moray House. Just joking. Maybe get a PhD and I can work here in an academic institute.

I: You mentioned to me earlier that you that you would want a scholarship for a PhD. Why do you want that?

R: Because my parents do not have money for a PhD. It's too expensive

I: So what if you do not get the scholarship?

R: then maybe I will find a part-time job

I: Where?

R: Here in the UK or if I really want to further study

I: What if you cannot find a part time job in the UK?

R: I will have to go back to China. If I have no money for further study and to live here, of course, there is no point for me to stay. You know my UG study was taught in English in Hong Kong and here also is English in the UK. I don't think I can get a PhD in a Chinese university because all the knowledge and the language is disconnected. That's the reason why I think I will not get the PhD in a Chinese university

I: Did you apply?

R: No. Not yet. The thing is that the language and the teaching material and the style are all different. So it will be hard for me to reconnect back to the Chinese university system. I can, but I think it will be difficult

I: So was your UG taught in English?

R: Yes, I used Hong Kong UK or American textbooks. All the materials.

I: Really, is it a private university?

R: Yes, it's kind of private university or you can say it is supported by the Hong Kong government because all the curriculum design is by the Hong Kong Baptist Union. For me it is very hard to connect to the mainland Chinese university. The language, the learning and materials and the content is different. For example, some of my classmates do UG in a mainland school and they studied accounting in a more theoretical way while I studied accounting as a core subject. It was very practical for example we filled a Balance Sheet. I think it's very different. So I don't think I can go back

I: How do you think you can achieve your aims this year?

R: I have to work very hard to do the school subjects because I don't know the marks that will be considered for a PhD. If the mark is too low maybe I will also don't need to consider a PhD. So the mark is really important, and I am focusing on this semester courses to get a great grade.

I: Apart from your academic knowledge, what other benefits do you expect to get from your programme?

R: From the programme or the university?

I: From university or programme, or anyone?

R: From the university, I joined the Edinburgh Choir so I have the opportunity to communicate to with local students. I'm a Bass

I: And how is that going?

R: It's really good. You can go to the concert in March at the St Mary Church. This choir also have people outside the university and the age group is very dynamic so when I communicate with them I get idea about the UK. This I think is an extra benefit for studying in the UK.

I: How did you get to know about this?

R: As I said I really like the classical music and I searched, and I find this choir and I joined it.

I: Is it from the university?

R: Yes, it is the Edinburgh University Music Association. They have rehearsals in Moray House on Tuesday evenings. I really like that.

I: That's cool. So which other society have you joined?

R: Just this one. For the one-year Masters the reading is very much. There is a lot of work to do. So just the music society.

I: Ok. Do you have opportunity to discuss your future plan with people in the school or within the university?

R: No.

I: You mean you don't discuss with anybody?

R: Not yet. Because as I said I didn't have full or very concrete idea about the topic of my further study so I don't know what to tell the professor. Maybe later this semester, next month, or several weeks later, I will talk to them. I think my peers wouldn't help too much so I didn't talk with them because I don't think they will provide support for me

I: Why?

R: As I said they didn't really fancy about study. Just get the Masters degree and go back. So maybe they will not give me any valuable information. Also in this major there are not many male students and I didn't talk too much with the female students counterparts

I: Why?

R: Maybe because the talking in itself I need to change it. I can't totally talk with them about what I do in the past.

I: That's interesting. So how do you find your classmates?

R: They are good but not as good as me

I: And what do you mean by that?

R: Just joking. But I think that some actually have very high academic self, but sometimes I always think they don't really want to get more knowledge about this society because I don't find many of my Chinese classmates join societies or association of the school. But I want to explore more.

I: But what about your non-Chinese classmates

R: They are very active

I: So when you talk about your classmates are you talking mostly about your Chinese counterparts?

R: Yes and also because there are lots of Chinese students in this programme. So I am not very familiar with these foreign students

I: So do you have opportunity to discuss with them?

R: No. I do not. Maybe they have some language bias. Foreign students communicate together and Chinese students chat together.

I: Really. You've told me about the extracurricular activity you are doing, the choir, what do you enjoy from doing this?

R: First one is, I like singing music. Another one is, I can talk to other people with the same interest. And really I like building relationship between choir member and me and that choir member is not a student at Edinburgh. So I can have more connection with the host society and get more knowledge about it.

I: And is this important to you? I mean connecting with your host society and building relationships?

R: Yes, it is very important for me to explore this

I: Why?

R: Like I said I cannot get this from China, I think

I: So is your learning environment in China different from here?

R: Oh yes. In Chinese student club we didn't attract many people outside the school. So I was really shocked by it, that non-school members could join in. But I like it

I: What are the differences between your UG and your study here?

R: I think maybe the learning context is different. We also rely more on the textbook. You know in China when I read the textbook during the class then we discuss the content of the book. But what I found here at this Masters study is that when we read a book we discuss our own understanding of it. In the past I can highlight and just read during the class but now I can't do that anymore because they don't want to know what I read but my understanding. So it's more heavy work for us. It has cost me a lot of hair – it is falling off, especially after Jack's (pseudonym used for tutor) class

I: Jack's class?

R: Yes, before this semester when I buy the alcohol in the supermarket each shopkeeper will ask me my age. After the essay I write this week no one ask me again

because there is no need again. I don't know why. Maybe it is a coincidence. You can do a research on that.

I: How do you consider your current study will fit in with your future aspiration?

R: Of course if I want to become a teacher what I am learn will give me the knowledge to teach others. I can have different teaching styles. I can have Johns' style to my students. So it's not about the textbook knowledge but also about the teachers' personality. So I learn from them and I can observe it and I can define some efficient teaching styles.

I: So what are you doing now that you can relate to what you want to do in your future?

R: I think the learning content can benefit our further study as our foundation. And I can apply it to my own teaching because I teach children. And in the past, some of my professors also told me this. Different Perspectives. So may benefit my work in future.

I: And what are your future plans

R: Maybe lecture in school because you have more vacations each year. This is what attract me.

I: So you can have more vacations?

R: Yes, I think the teachers' job is the only job who can have two vacations within the year.

I: And is this what you plan to do? Not HR

R: As I said of course education and training context apply to me as a manager but as I said I don't really like business atmosphere, so I will still consider doing school work in the pure context

I: So in the pure context what kind of student do you wish to teach?

R: University is better

I: And where do you plan to do this?

R: Moray House or another university. I could become university teacher or a kindergarten teacher because I really like children. But I don't think I want to become a secondary school teacher because the workload is too much. I can't teach subjects like mathematics.

I: And what do you want to do after your Masters?

R: Apply for a PhD, hopefully

I: Do you plan to go back to China after your Masters or stay in the UK or go to another country?

R: Go back to China for half a year or something then come back here to pursue further studies. I don't think I will consider apply to study in another country

I: Why?

R: Because I more like to stay in Europe in the UK not in Germany. I think the UK is a good size for me

I: Is there any other thing you will like to add to this conversation, like what motivated you to come here, what you expect to benefit from being here and what your experience have been so far?

R: I come here to study because it's my childhood desire and my personal interest. I realise that I want to get some experience and knowledge about this subject education and I choose Edinburgh University because of its history and its academic abilities. And I quite enjoy my experience here because my experience in the extracurricular activity. I joined the student association so that I can meet more people and get insight outside school and get more knowledge about the UK context. Actually, I have more engagement with the society and I quite enjoy it

I: Did you expect that to happen before you came?

R: I hoped it will happen, but I was not really expecting it, but I really hoped it. I find that in that Choir I feel it is more relaxing

I: And in the Choir, do you find Chinese people there?

R: Very few. It's about 180 people but maybe only 4 Chinese.

I: So where are the people mostly from?

R: From my observation I can't really say but I think mostly from the UK. I think also from Germany

I: Well, thank you very much. It would be lovely to speak with you in some months' time.

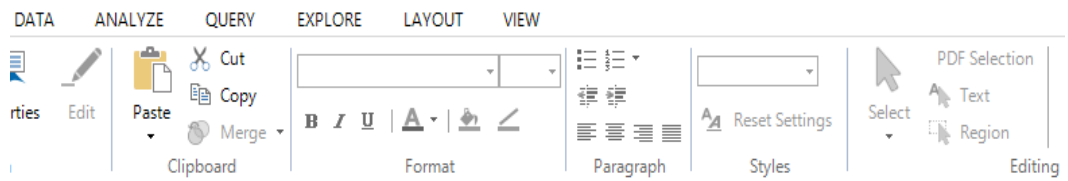
Appendix G NVivo nodes - Sample of an unutilised code

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface. At the top is a menu bar with options: FILE, HOME, CREATE, DATA, ANALYZE, QUERY, EXPLORE, LAYOUT, VIEW. Below the menu is a toolbar with various icons for workspace, item, clipboard, format, paragraph, styles, and PDF selection. The main window is titled 'Nodes' and contains a search bar and a list of nodes. The left sidebar shows a navigation pane with options: Nodes, Cases, Relationships, Node Matrices, Sources, Nodes (selected), Classifications, Collections, Queries, Reports, Maps, and Folders. The main area shows a table of nodes with columns for Name, Sources, and References.

| Name | Sources | References |
|---|---------|------------|
| asserting value of masters towards developing confidence to overcome challenges in future work sc | 2 | 2 |
| RQ1 related themes and nodes | 0 | 0 |
| Value ascribed to obtaining a foreign degree | 0 | 0 |
| value of masters as reward for financial investment and personal cost | 8 | 9 |
| memorable quote value of masters as reward for financial investment and personal cost | 2 | 3 |
| value of masters as a signpost for competence for self and future employers | 17 | 40 |
| MEMORABLE QUOTE value of masters as a signpost for competence for self and future empl | 5 | 9 |
| value of masters as a self achievement | 5 | 5 |
| Value of degree building confidence to work in international context | 3 | 3 |
| Seeing ranking as an an indicator of credibility, signal to employers and funders and value for m | 17 | 24 |
| Memorable quote Seeing ranking as an an indicator of credibility, signal to employers and fu | 6 | 6 |
| Stepping out of my comfort zone or not so comfort zone_A different experience abroad | 9 | 11 |
| seeking to live independently | 4 | 4 |
| Previous experience of visiting and or studying in the UK | 7 | 9 |
| Previous experience of visiting and or studying in the Edinburgh (Nodes) | 4 | 9 |
| previous experience of studying abroad outside the UK | 4 | 4 |
| openness to seeking knowledge to expand mind | 13 | 16 |
| Notions of opportunity for professional and personal development prior to starting the masters | 6 | 9 |
| Professional and personal development | 3 | 3 |
| opportunity to have a practical experience | 8 | 12 |
| Obtaining professional credentials | 1 | 1 |
| Developing confidence | 4 | 6 |
| Memorable quote The masters in terms of personal and financial costs | 4 | 4 |
| Memorable quote Stepping out of my comfort zone or not so comfort zone_A different experience a | 1 | 1 |
| Memorable quote Making the most of the MSc opportunity to in terms of knowledge and applied pr | 4 | 4 |
| Key influencers | 16 | 28 |
| MEMORABLE QUOTE key influencers | 7 | 9 |
| Alumni testimonial | 8 | 10 |
| Intrinsic interest in course | 9 | 18 |

Appendix H - NVivo nodes and references: Interview 1

Nvivo PhD Project 15OCT17.nvp - NVivo



Look for Search In Find Now Clear Advanced Find

| Interview 1 transcripts | | | |
|-------------------------|-------|------------|-----|
| Name | Nodes | References | |
| Harshad MGT 1 India | | 23 | 35 |
| Jun_MGT_China | | 27 | 40 |
| Chao EDU 1 China | | 28 | 41 |
| Alim SSPS 1 Turkey | | 30 | 49 |
| Lan MGT 1 China | | 30 | 41 |
| Yin MGT 1 Taiwan | | 31 | 49 |
| Qian SSPS 1 China | | 34 | 46 |
| SOFIA EDU 1 COL | | 37 | 53 |
| Bond MGT 1 SING | | 39 | 47 |
| Bola SSPS 1 NIG | | 40 | 63 |
| FANG EDU 1 China | | 45 | 65 |
| Adele SSPS_CAN | | 46 | 68 |
| Abby LLC 1 USA | | 48 | 87 |
| Jackie SSPS 1 USA | | 49 | 109 |
| Patricia LLC 1 Mexico | | 50 | 70 |
| Indira EDU 1_India | | 61 | 100 |
| Shi LLC 1_Taiwan | | 61 | 79 |
| Mariana LLC 1_COL | | 67 | 99 |
| Mandy SSPS 1_SA | | 68 | 111 |

Appendix I - NVivo nodes and references: Interview 2

NVIVO PND Project 1300117.nvp - NVIVO

DATA ANALYZE QUERY EXPLORE LAYOUT VIEW

rties Edit Paste Copy Merge **B I U** | **A** | Paragraph Styles Select PDF Selection Text Region Editing

Look for Search In Find Now Clear Advanced Find

Second interview

| Name | Nodes | References |
|---------------------------------|-------|------------|
| Interview 2 Bola SSPS Nig | 12 | 22 |
| Interview 2 Shi LLC Tiawan | 14 | 21 |
| Interview 2 Sofia EDU Colombia | 15 | 30 |
| Interview 2 ALIM SPS Turkey | 17 | 27 |
| Interview 2 Qian SSPS China | 18 | 25 |
| Interview 2 Indira EDU India | 19 | 30 |
| Interview 2 Lan BUS China | 19 | 28 |
| Interview 2 Abby LLC USA | 20 | 24 |
| Interview 2 Jackie SSPS USA | 22 | 35 |
| Interview 2 Yin BUS TAIWAN | 23 | 43 |
| Interview 2 Jun BUS China | 23 | 29 |
| Interview 2 Fang EDU China | 23 | 31 |
| Interview 2 Patricia LLC Mexico | 24 | 35 |
| Interview 2 Chao Edu China | 24 | 35 |
| Interview 2 Harshad BUS India | 27 | 40 |
| Interview 2 Mariana LLC Col | 30 | 63 |
| Interview 2 Bond BUS Singapore | 30 | 42 |

Appendix J - NVivo parent nodes and child nodes: Themes related to research question 3

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface. The main window shows a list of nodes under the heading 'Nodes'. The nodes are organized hierarchically. The following table represents the data shown in the 'Nodes' table:

| Name | Sources | Referen |
|---|---------|---------|
| RQ3 related themes and nodes | 0 | 0 |
| travelling during masters | 28 | 50 |
| Skills developed during masters | 0 | 0 |
| Time management skills | 2 | 2 |
| thinking skills | 1 | 1 |
| team working skills | 9 | 10 |
| soft skills compassionate | 1 | 1 |
| problem solving skills | 1 | 1 |
| presentation skills | 5 | 5 |
| planning skills | 1 | 1 |
| organisational skills | 5 | 7 |
| developing organisational skills | 2 | 3 |
| negotiation skills | 1 | 1 |
| Leadership position | 7 | 9 |
| key skills | 1 | 2 |
| interpersonal skills | 2 | 2 |
| intercultural learning | 20 | 31 |
| Memorable quote - intercultural learning | 9 | 10 |
| Memorable quote intercultural learning CONTRA | 5 | 6 |
| Empathy skills | 1 | 1 |
| Critical thinking skills | 9 | 12 |
| Confidence | 7 | 11 |
| communication skills | 17 | 22 |
| Becoming independent | 5 | 6 |
| analytical skills | 7 | 9 |
| adaptability | 5 | 5 |
| Perceptions of the importance of employability dimension versus the lifel | 2 | 3 |
| Perceptions of the importance of employability | 3 | 4 |

Annotations on the left side of the screenshot identify the following nodes:

- Parent node:** RQ3 related themes and nodes
- Child node:** Skills developed during masters
- Child node:** developing organisational skills
- First level branch of child node:** intercultural learning
- Second level branch of child node:** Memorable quote - intercultural learning