

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

**INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS' CONCERNS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TARTU**

Bachelor's thesis

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ABSTRACT

The UT attracts hundreds of international students each year, which means that they make up a significant portion of our student body. It is thus relevant to study what intercultural communication issues they face while studying in Tartu. The main section gives an overview of intercultural communication, intercultural competences, and intercultural communication competences. The paper will also look at the UT as an international environment and what systems exist so far to support international students. This background discussion provides the framework for the empirical study in which I will first analyse the International Student Ambassadors' blog page to see which type of content they provide and the extent to which it supports intercultural communication. To get the perspective of regular international students, a questionnaire was compiled to identify the challenges they are facing.

Keywords: intercultural communication, intercultural communication competence, international students

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IC – Intercultural Communication

ICC – Intercultural Communication Competence

ISA – International Student Ambassadors

UT – the University of Tartu

INTRODUCTION

Like many higher education institutions, the University of Tartu (UT) hosts a diverse student population, including many international students. This diversity brings rich cultural exchanges but also presents challenges in terms of integration and support. Understanding international students' main concerns and finding ways to support them and the local students in an intercultural setting is crucial for fostering a positive and inclusive university experience.

Other universities in Tartu also accept international students, like the Estonian University of Life Sciences and the Baltic Defence College. Still, for this thesis, I will only be looking at the UT. An overview of the UT's statistics and ideas regarding international students provides an essential information base for my further research. The UT is an intercultural environment, with more than 1500 foreign students from 98 countries attending the university. Most of the international students come from Ukraine (207 students), Finland (131 students), and Azerbaijan (108 students), but there are also students from other countries all over the world, like India, Hungary, Serbia, the Netherlands, and so on. In the autumn of 2024, 476 international students joined the UT. (TÜ Statistika 2024). International students make up 10% of the whole university student population across all levels of education. Most of the students are from European countries, which should make the integration process somewhat easier due to the potential similarities in culture, but there are also students from countries that might vastly differ in culture and norms. In both cases, universities should be ready to aid international students depending on the level of support they need.

The UT provides international students with the opportunity to study in English, with more than 30 bachelor's and master's curricula offered to students who do not have a proficiency in Estonian (UT homepage 2025). However, students who take courses in English but for whom English is not the first language may still struggle with everyday

communication, academic writing, and understanding lectures in English. Thus, language proficiency issues are important to research in the context of intercultural communication (IC) and intercultural communication competence (ICC) to raise student morale and understand the gaps in current systems. This is one of the reasons why the topic of IC and student mobility is important from the perspective of English Studies.

Taking steps towards an inclusive university community is also necessary for improving the quality of education and communication for the growing number of international students and employees in Tartu. The topic is also important at the UT due to the increasing number of students going to study abroad for a semester or two with the Erasmus exchange program or other programs to further their knowledge and skills. They, too, should be acquainted with the principles of IC and ICC before their mobility to ensure a smooth transition from one academic setting to another. Thus, the thesis can benefit both the support systems for international students in Tartu and the preparation of outgoing Tartu students.

The present thesis aims to identify what the existing research on IC and ICC states about the issues in university settings and how the issues brought out correlate to the situation at the UT. The literature review will be complemented with an empirical study of the International Student Ambassadors and the general international student population to find what issues they highlight and to what extent their experiences align with what is proposed in the international research literature. In addition to IC, issues related to language use, including English language proficiency, are touched upon. These topics are widely researched internationally in both academic (Andrade 2006, Lee 2016) and business settings (Washington 2012, Zheng 2014). Some work on this range of questions has also been conducted in Estonia, although the focus has often been limited to the integration of local Russians. For example, the collection edited by Aune Valk (2002) above all covers IC between Estonians and Russians, focusing on Russians living in Estonia, and gives an

overview of aspects that describe Estonians in intercultural situations (e.g., time and space use, politeness, silence). Though Valk's (2002) conclusions might not be as useful in finding solutions for international students whose home cultures and time spent in Estonia are vastly different from people who have spent most of their lives in Estonia. The book is also over twenty years old, and thus it is likely that many of the things discussed in the book may have changed. Liisa Suba (2014) similarly analysed possible solutions for the better integration of people, mainly of Russian descent, into Estonia. Though her thesis concentrates on people moving to live here permanently, there are valuable conclusions that can be used to compare Estonians' attitudes to this thesis' survey answers. For example, the thesis (Suba 2014: 89-91) discusses in length what type of communicators Estonians are and what to expect when trying to connect with them.

Not much has been researched about Estonian universities except for one bachelor's thesis by Olga Reili (2010) that, very similarly to my paper, covers the topic of how international students see Tartu, Estonians, and other related aspects. My thesis is informed by her work, but I will also be interested in identifying what has changed over the past ten years. I aim to understand whether what has been done by universities so far to support international students is enough or if the support needs to be restructured to consider the actual international student experience at the UT and to give greater emphasis to ICC.

In the literature review, I will discuss IC and ICC, the UT as an international environment, local and international students' roles in integration, and its challenges. This research will be the basis for my questionnaire for international students to get an up-to-date assessment of their stay at the UT. The questionnaire will be complemented by the analysis of the content created by International Student Ambassadors, to find out to what extent language and communication issues are covered by them.

THE NECESSITY OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The field of intercultural communication is deeply rooted in research on culture and cultural differences (Piller 2007: 14). According to Deardorff's (2009: 102) handbook, the effectiveness of IC can be measured from the level of shared meaning created from a conversation, and whether the intended message was received adequately and in a culturally accepted way by all parties of the conversation. This process can be complicated in intercultural encounters as the participants may have different values and different understandings of communication signals, like intonation, speech rhythms, lexical options, and so on (Piller 2007: 11). Gumperz (1982: 16) brings out that these signals might change the way messages are expressed, but not their meaning. Piller (2007: 11) disagrees and states that these signals are not universal. Conversations between people of varied proficiency levels of a language are one of the main causes for misunderstandings, often caused by the communication signals that carry different meanings in different countries (Piller 2007: 11). As a result, she highlights the necessity of effective communication strategies and ICC in cross-cultural interactions. Similarly, Allwood (2023: 3) remarks that IC is vital for exchanging ideas, and mutual understanding among individuals from different cultures is essential for harmonious living. Both scholars (Allwood 2023: 3, Piller 2007: 9) also recognise the critical role of language in IC, as it serves as the channel through which shared meanings are transmitted and understood.

Intercultural Competence

Because of the differences in values and communication strategies, effective IC requires an awareness that intercultural encounters differ from those with people from our cultural background. In an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world, the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds has become a vital skill across all sectors, from education and healthcare to business (Byram & Masuhara 2013, Fantini 2006, Barrett 2014). This ability, known as intercultural

competence, includes a complex set of cognitive (knowledge), affective (motivation), and behavioral (skills) components that enable individuals to navigate cultural differences with sensitivity and effectiveness (Deardorff 2009: 7). This is why both Deardorff (2011: 65) and Barrett (2014: 27) emphasize the importance of introducing this topic to students in an effective way, to promote the rise of intercultural competences.

Intercultural competence is broadly defined as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations” (Deardorff 2006: 247), where at least one of the people is perceived as being from a different culture (Barrett 2014: 16, Intercultural learning n.d.), based on one’s intercultural knowledge (cultural self-awareness), skills (to observe, interpret, and analyse), and attitudes (respect, openness and curiosity) (Deardorff 2006: 247, Barrett 2014: 16, Byram & Masuhara 2013: 143). This definition is elaborated through the Delphi technique, involving international experts to develop a consensus on a topic that can be difficult to agree on (Deardorff 2011: 66). It is difficult to define *being appropriate*, but Deardorff (2009: 102) brings out that it is usually assessed by other participants of the conversation. People with similar cultural and language backgrounds may develop shared meanings and similar ideas of being proper, though this cannot be relied on (Jackson 2012: 285). The development of intercultural competence is a dynamic and often challenging process. It requires individuals to unlearn ingrained behavioral patterns and adopt new ways of interacting that are situationally appropriate. This transformation involves stepping outside one’s cultural comfort zone and engaging openly with different worldviews.

Assessment of intercultural competence has evolved significantly since the 1980s and 1990s, when various tools were developed to measure this multifaceted construct. Deardorff’s (2009: 13) Pyramid Model (Appendix 1) outlines a progression from necessary attitudes (respect, openness, curiosity) to knowledge and skills (cultural self-awareness, listening, observation), and to desired internal and external outcomes, such as adaptability

and effective communication. Byram and Masuhara (2013: 150) state that “targeting these intercultural competences [knowledge, awareness, attitudes, skills] could help materials developers and teachers to treat language and culture as inseparable”.

In educational contexts, assessing intercultural competence involves evaluating students’ ability to reflect on their own cultural identities, understand others’ perspectives, and apply intercultural skills, like the ones mentioned in the last paragraph, in real-life situations. This reflective and experiential approach is essential for fostering genuine intercultural understanding (Barrett 2014: 37, 43).

Deardorff (2011: 69) also brings out the importance of understanding what it means to include intercultural competence in courses. Having a task or two about intercultural competence or group work between students of different cultural backgrounds does not do much to improve intercultural competence in the classroom (Deardorff 2011: 69). Knowing other countries’ history, literature, language, and other sections of “objective culture” is also not sufficient. More emphasis should be put on “subjective culture”, referencing beliefs, attitudes, to better understand the underlying cultural values and worldviews. (Deardorff 2009: 337) Deardorff (2009: 368) also brings out that becoming interculturally competent is a lifelong process, which makes it even more necessary for universities to play their part.

Intercultural competence is a multifaceted and essential skill in today’s global society. It involves more than just knowledge of other cultures; it requires a deep commitment to understanding, empathy, and adaptability. As the world becomes more interconnected, the ability to engage meaningfully across cultural boundaries will continue to be a defining characteristic of effective global citizens and professionals. Developing and assessing this competence must therefore remain a priority in education, policy, and practice.

Intercultural Communication Competences

Another important term for my research is intercultural communication competence (ICC). While intercultural competence describes the overall capability to appropriately adapt one's behaviour and perspective to cultural differences, ICC goes more in-depth regarding what is needed for the successful, mainly face-to-face, communication between people of different cultural backgrounds. Portalla and Chen (2010: 21) state that ICC involves being able to convey your points and ideas in intercultural settings by understanding how to politely communicate with people of different cultural backgrounds. Brian H. Spitzberg (2000: 379) has also argued that ICC can be described as using suitable language regardless of the situation that someone is in. Griffith (2016: 1) states that for students, mastering ICC has a critical role in today's interconnected and globalizing world, where communication between representatives of different cultures is unavoidable. Byram (1997: 28) also brings out that, in addition to conversing with people of other cultural backgrounds, learning new languages is another good way to get insight and understand the contrasts between your own culture and others. Through learning languages and comparing them to your native tongue, greater insight into your own culture and language, and others can be developed.

Many authors (Spitzberg 2000: 380, Portalla & Chen 2010: 21, Gudykunst 2005: 97) draw attention to two concepts that are commonly used to discuss communication competences: effectiveness and appropriateness. Effectiveness refers to the ability to achieve an individual's goal in any given environment while also manipulating it to their favor if necessary (Portalla & Chen 2010: 22). Manipulation in this context refers to an individual being knowledgeable enough on different cultures to be able to use that insight to their advantage. According to Chen and Starosta (1996: 358) appropriateness brings together elements like:

- Quantity - speaking enough, not too little, not too much;
- Quality – saying something meaningful and true;

- Relevance – adding something relevant to the topic at hand;
- Manner – delivering your responses understandably and quickly. (Chen & Starosta 1996: 358)

Furthermore, Gudykunst (2005: 101) brings out that appropriateness in communication requires predetermined standards that would indicate whether something can be considered appropriate or not. This, however, can be difficult to achieve in intercultural comparisons. Something appropriate in one culture may be seen as inappropriate in another. Thus, the best way to approach this topic is to presume that people lack common knowledge on appropriateness and rather consider “how” to develop appropriateness and effectiveness among people (Gudykunst 2005: 101).

When it comes to models of ICC, Byram (1997: 34) has proposed a set of factors that are important when talking about ICC:

- knowledge of different social groups in an individual’s country and of the process of interaction (Byram 1997: 35);
- attitudes towards people of a different culture, beliefs, and behaviors (Byram 1997: 34);
- skills of interpreting and relating points to having previous knowledge of one’s own and other environments (Byram 1997: 37);
- skills of discovery and interaction can work in social interactions, where an individual may discover new information due to the lack of existing knowledge (Byram 1997: 37).

Since UT is an international university, being aware of the importance and possible uses of ICC is essential for successful student integration, improving academic performance, and creating a cohesive study environment. It is necessary to understand how some aspects of conversations, for example, Estonians usually not leading the conversations, may be perceived by international students and whether it can hinder their progress. It is crucial to

begin implementing and discussing ICC already during the orientation period to avoid possible misunderstandings in communication along the way.

The University of Tartu as an international environment

On its homepage, UT is described as a national university. Still, under its core values, it is brought out that we also strive to collaborate not only in Estonia but on an international level as well. The university vision also describes the UT as one of the leading research universities in Europe (UT homepage 2021). To have and keep a leading position of this caliber, the UT must be mindful of IC and ICC to attract and maintain new talent. Communicating with international students while being aware of cultural differences is essential for university students to succeed in their professional careers, as it is a competence necessary in most fields (Petrusheva 2024: 63).

The UT is not alone in this challenge of integrating local and international students. Different scholars have proposed what universities could do to provide opportunities to international students that may promote IC in a university setting. Marta Giralt (2020: 194) brings out the importance of adding suitable modules into the curricula that allow students to join intercultural environments and develop their IC and ICC skills. Giralt's (2020: 192) course "Communication across cultures," for example, is structured to allow students to appreciate their own culture and also to connect with the cultures and experiences of the other students. She also mentions language learning opportunities, for example, tandem learning, where two people with different native languages work together to improve their language skills (Giralt 2020: 192). This permits local and international students to interact, and has now become an established part of the Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics school's language courses at the University of Limerick (Giralt 2020: 192). Another idea that was brought up by Reili's (2010: 42) paper was regarding accommodation. By separating local and international students into different dormitories or floors, the university

may hinder the chance of IC for the local students, and also limit the opportunities to improve ICC among international students. (Reili 2010: 42-43)

Some interactive IC opportunities are provided at the UT, from orientation courses to international student counseling, tutors, and international student ambassador programs (ISA). Additionally, there is the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), international associations like ENLIGHT, partner universities, and student exchange networks that can potentially offer IC and ICC opportunities of different kinds.

The university homepage also brings out various language support opportunities necessary to better integrate international students (Estonian Learning 2023). Andrade (2006: 131) notes that the initial language barrier is one of the main issues in the integration process. Thus, language courses and language cafes where people share their native language and experiences appear essential for international students to familiarize themselves with the language and local culture. In its 2021-2025 activity report, the UT (Tartu Ülikool 2025: 36) states that one of its key activities is teaching Estonian to international students to help them better integrate into the university and Estonia's society. The project has done well, with 51% of the students taking such courses in 2024, compared to only 28% of students in 2020 (Tartu Ülikool 2025: 14). However, English continues to be the main language of tuition and communication for international students, and thus it is also important to be aware of the extent to which international students cope with studying in English, a foreign language for the great majority of the international students in Tartu. This question has not, to my knowledge, been analysed by the UT but will be explored in the present thesis.

Mediators' and students' role in the integration and IC process

Caroline Debray and Helen Spencer-Oatey (2017) mention that it is essential for everyone to put in effort to integrate, not just international students. Building a social network in a new country can be difficult, and international students may feel isolated and

homesick, which impacts their overall well-being. Local students may have difficulties connecting with international students and understanding the cultural differences that may affect their integration into an environment that is not familiar to them. However, various steps can be implemented to develop mutual understanding and cooperation. It is vital to work out how to successfully promote ICC in students even before they are put in those situations.

A significant role in this dynamic is played by mediators who help build a bridge between the different cultural groups and promote healthy IC and ICC among peers. Andrade (2006: 133) emphasizes the importance for universities to face the fact that, without proper support systems, we cannot assume that international students will succeed at our university. She also suggests that universities should not base their understanding of international students' success on their grades and GPA, but arrange regular check-ins, tutors, and focus groups to have a grasp on foreign students' status in our university (Andrade 2006: 147). Lee (2020: 45) highlights the vital role of universities in ensuring that local and international students are given varied opportunities to connect, agreeing with Andrade (2006), and suggests organizing activities to engage local and international students both in and outside of the classroom.

Offering intercultural learning opportunities is essential at all levels of formal education. This includes having courses on IC topics and presenting opportunities available to work abroad or the courses available to study in partner universities. However, non-formal learning opportunities are just as important. Non-formal opportunities can be events held in public spaces, cultural organizations, clubs and the media. These aspects can all be looped together with a person's everyday life and personal experiences, if planned effectively. Offering students opportunities to build new friendships and share their experiences is essential, but the sustainability of such events is also important (Petrusheva 2024: 71). The events should be regular and vary in content to motivate as many students as possible.

Patricia M. King (2013), together with her colleagues, explored the topic of making intercultural learning effective. One of the main ideas that they discovered is that effective intercultural learning is based on comfort and safety King (2013: 69). If the students felt safe in the environment, they were more eager and willing to take on different intercultural experiences. King (2013: 69) The paper brings out 5 approaches that were most frequently used by students during intercultural experiences:

- Listen and observe – “when encountering differences /.../ participants /.../ responded by paying close attention to others and the environment” to gain understanding of intercultural differences (King 2013: 76);
- Compare and contrast ideas – students compared their background and experiences to the information they had been given. “They /.../ find connections between their cultural background and those of others to alleviate feelings of discomfort.” (King 2013: 76);
- Engage in personal reflection – after gaining information, students took time to think about the information given and then reflected on their own previous experiences (King 2013);
- Explore personal identity – “/.../ uses one’s personal background as an ingredient to fuel one’s desire to learn rather than as a frame of reference” (King 2013: 77);
- Empathize with others – students thought of how the interactions made them think and feel. In the process of trying to better understand others’ cultural background, they gained appreciation for it and tried to put themselves in their shoes (King 2013).

These approaches could be tried out by UT in courses, clubs, or other events that promote intercultural conversations. It is important to understand how students think and behave in new situations to plan out a system for effective and long-lasting events.

Students' motivation to interact with local or international students is a prominent factor in IC and developing ICC. Andrade (2006: 136) states that international students adjust better when interacting with the local students. However, only a small portion of international students said they had deep friendships with local students, primarily because of the lack of opportunities to befriend them or their preference to connect with other international students with similar experiences. She also stated that international students mentioned having more international friends than local students (Andrade 2006: 136). The same idea of students preferring to interact with people similar in culture and language was also brought out by Lee's (2020) study about South Korean university students' interactions with international students.

King (2013: 74) states, based on her study, that interest in intercultural learning opportunities rose after being exposed to others' experiences", like attending a class on religion different to one's own, because it helped a student to remove prejudice, make connections to their own culture, and gain understanding of other cultures. Many authors highlight the effectiveness of regular guided reflections and interviews (Lee 2012, Pedersen 2010) among international students. Lee (2012) additionally brings out the effectiveness of blogs, but mentions that blogs alone are not enough to promote deeper intercultural competences. Rather, they should be connected with other events and opportunities, like introducing an event or experience to meet new people or gain knowledge on other cultures. In Lee's (2012) study, weekly blogs and interviews were done by international students to develop their intercultural competence and understanding of other cultures. Local students were used as interviewees and subjects of these posts. This correlates somewhat with what ISA has done so far at the University of Tartu, since their blog page is very active. I will return to this topic in the empirical section below. In conclusion, though IC with domestic students may be an effective tool for integrating international students into the local university community, it is relatively challenging to organise them, especially activities that

would help students improve their empathy in an environment where they can safely engage in cultural exploration and discovery. The studies brought out so far, based on other universities, are a good stepping stone in developing a questionnaire for my thesis to identify the motivation levels of students and their interest in IC.

Estonian studies on these topics

Liisa Suba's master's thesis (2014) covers the topic of promoting intercultural contacts in Estonia. For her paper, she used a focus group consisting of 6 Estonians with past experiences with people of different cultural backgrounds. The group had mainly experience with Russians, but also people from Baltic and English-speaking countries. Though the direction of the paper was different from my thesis, the topics discussed were similar to those I was planning to analyse in my questionnaire. Suba (2014) concluded that Estonians are not quick to start conversations and tend to wait for the initiative of the other side but are not against conversing with people from other cultures. However, due to the initial passiveness, international students tend to search out other foreigners who are more likely to initiate conversations and be active participants. The conclusions of the paper can be successfully compared to my own.

Olga Reili's (2010) Bachelor's thesis is on the topic of Tartu's image as a place of study as seen by international students and experts. Similarly to my paper, Reili (2010) used a survey to gather information. However, in addition to the UT, she also collaborated with the University of Life Sciences and the Baltic Defence College, thus collecting over 150 answers. Reili's survey covered presumptions on Tartu, locals, and tolerance, reasons for coming to study in Estonia, study experience in Estonia, and communication channels. I also looked at similar issues, except for the reasons for choosing UT and the opinions of experts like people from the faculty. However, her data compiled from the international students gave room for comparisons.

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

To gather information on international students' opinions on studying at the UT, first, the ISA program was explored with special attention to the content provided on their webpage and blog, as useful information for international students. Second, a survey was compiled to get access to a broader range of student experiences and, especially, to understand the communication strategies. A survey was chosen due to it being a popular solution in other case studies (Lee 2016, Reili 2010) on similar topics, and was conducted in April 2025 by sending it out to international students via social media and personal messages. At the beginning of the planning phase, the survey was meant to be distributed in collaboration with ISA, but they were not interested enough in the topic to find a time for discussion and feedback on the questionnaire. Therefore, the plan was changed, and the questions were written based on topics discussed in the literature on international experiences introduced above.

The survey consisted mainly of open-ended questions to avoid strict barriers for answers. For the questions, simple English was used without specific terms that might cause misunderstanding of the questions. It was assumed that not all international students would be equally proficient in English.

As the data collection period was brief, the questionnaire data was complemented by the analysis of the ISA's blog page. This webpage is easily available to all international students at the university's homepage, and hence it is important to have a sense of how they approach international student experience and to what extent they engage with topics of IC or ICC. The aim was to understand what topics they had covered so far and whether there were topics that might need further discussion in the future. For the analysis, about three years' worth of blog posts were looked over and categorized from 2022 to the present.

International Student Ambassadors (ISA)

ISA is a group of international students who are currently studying at the UT and can be contacted by those interested in coming to study here and learn about Estonia from their perspective. Currently, there are 12 ambassadors from 8 countries (Azerbaijan, USA, Ukraine, Australia, Japan, Greece, Pakistan, and Egypt). The program has been active for more than 10 years, and over 125 students have taken part in it (ISA Homepage 2025).

ISA's homepage connects students with their blog and social media. They run a Facebook page informing students of events they can attend in Tartu, such as the "ISA City Photo Game" in collaboration with the Student Days, where participants have to explore the city and take photographs. They also share and promote events that have to do with the university and might be of interest to international students. However, when it comes to these additional events and connection opportunities, there is room for improvement, since their events seem to lack regularity.

ISA's blog page gives some insight into the international student ambassadors' lives while studying at the UT, with hundreds of posts published over the years. The topics of blog entries vary from posts about Tartu, study tips, fun facts, to topics that a specific ambassador seems to be interested in, their courses, hobbies, culture, and so on. (ISA Blog 2025) For the blog analysis, over a hundred blog posts were scanned to get an overview of the topics that have been covered so far and whether any topics should be added. Many of the ambassadors have written blog posts about their program of study, what it entails, and what they have experienced so far while studying in their field. Some examples from different categories of blog posts, such as culture-, student life-, "good to know"-, and Tartu-related posts are brought out in a table (Appendix 2) composed by the author .

When it comes to IC and ICC, there is not much posted on ISA's page when compared to other topics like the ones mentioned in the table (Appendix 2). Some posts briefly mention aspects of IC or ICC, for example, Dimitri's (2025) blog post about the

Enlight program and how it is, among other things, a good place to find new connections. He brings out that the ENLIGHT program offers a wide range of opportunities to meet new people and to travel to other countries, and also directs people to network. Thus, it works as a pushing mechanism for those who might not be able to find like-minded people in their everyday life. Cody (2024) brings out the same points as Dimitri, that taking part in programmes and being active in conferences and other events is a great way to make new connections and improve one's knowledge on other cultures, depending on the program. For example, through a linguistics event held in Kääriku, Cody (2024) was able to learn about Estonian sign language. These kinds of posts tend to highlight objective culture. Elsa's (2025) post about celebrating Valentine's Day in Estonia states how most of her friends are from all over the world, as there are not many Americans here. She mentions that being an international student is the means she uses to connect with other people, mainly international students. Andrade's (2006: 136) work backs the idea that international students prefer to connect with students of a similar background, which can mean similar cultures but also similar in experience, like being an international student. In her post, Elsa (2025) mentions having a traditional Estonian feast, but that the experience was again only shared between international students, not locals. To her, English was another important aspect in finding new friendships, mainly from classes, clubs, lessons, and other activities in English (Elsa 2025). It is not clear whether the reason here lies with the preference of a similar background or in not having enough opportunities to meet locals. This is one of the few blog posts that draws attention to the role of English as the language that brings students together, even if it is mostly international students.

There have not been many posts that specifically discuss the topic of IC over the last 3 years, but there are four posts that touch upon it indirectly. Anhelina (2023a) wrote in her post about acknowledging that learning Estonian would be difficult, but she saw it as a way to show gratitude to the country and people that supported her and other Ukrainian students

after the war began. Anhelina (2023a) also brought out that she finds making connections with Estonians easier now that she knows some basic phrases, and that we seem to appreciate her for at least trying to learn and use the language. Both Byram (1997: 28) and Suba (2014: 53) state that learning another language and trying to use it locally can work as a bridge between cultures, and Anhelina's (2023a) experiences correlate with that, as she mentions that she feels better connected to the Estonian culture and traditions through the language learning process. This conclusion was also brought out in Bing's (2023) post, where he and his Chinese friend, who are studying Estonian, feel more connected to Estonia and its culture, and feel like it has helped them to better adapt here. Anhelina (2023b) later added a second part to her blog post, which introduced additional resources for language learning, like summer camps, "language dates", tandem learning, and much more. These activity types are also recommended by Giralt (2020), who sees these types of interactive language experiences as crucial. The last post is about "8 words to better understand Estonia" (Vlada 2023), and it is a mixture of IC and intercultural competence as it talks about both the language and the cultural background of why the Estonian words she picked are important. The post mentions words like *vastlakukkel*, *mõis*, and *viitsima*. The list is somewhat unexpected. Two words (*vastlakukkel* and *mõis*) are derived from objective culture, as defined previously by Deardorff (2009), and help to understand the Estonian past and its continued relevance in the present. These kinds of phenomena are often included in language classes to help students learn about the culture of the country whose language they are learning. The word *viitsima* is somewhat more complex, as it explains a specific Estonian cultural attitude, a part of subjective culture, that can also affect IC and potentially confuse a foreigner.

Understanding Estonia and Estonians, and thus talking about aspects of intercultural competences, has been mentioned in quite a few blog posts over the years. Zhanet's (2022) post about "6 things that annoy Estonians" is one of the most prominent and fitting ones.

She brings out that when travelling to a new country, it is beneficial to know how to possibly avoid conflicts and misunderstandings, thus she put together a list of things to consider, based on her experience. Piller's (2007: 11) ideas agree with this notion that in IC, communication signals are not universal and thus they can cause misunderstandings between people of different cultural backgrounds when unaware. Additionally, one of the conclusions in Suba's (2014: 65) thesis was that both locals and foreigners felt it was necessary to know about the others' cultural differences to avoid being impolite and hurtful. The six points that Zhanet (2022) brings out are:

1. Personal space - Estonians like their own space and need time to let people close to them, but that does not mean that they do not like you.
2. Small talk - if there is nothing important to talk about, we would rather not talk just to fill the air.
3. Volume of your voice - Estonians prefer calm and peaceful conversations, rather than overly emotional and loud ones.
4. Smiling - smiling on the street to random people is not common nor expected.
5. Conflicts - Estonians try to solve conflicts calmly, without shouting.
6. Punctuality - For Estonians, being on time is a logical and polite thing to do.

(Zhanet 2022)

Zhanet (2022) mentions several aspects that she has contrasted with her own culture, but that can also be used to compare Estonian culture with the cultures of other readers of the blog. Regarding this, Barrett (2014: 46-47) brings out that a significant part of intercultural competence is the ability to reflect on one's own and others' cultures and consequently make changes in behaviour. The opportunity to read about other countries and cultures can also be a source of curiosity that inspires one to learn more (King 2023: 80).

Meriem's (2023) post about unique experiences in Estonia brings in other sides of our culture, like sauna and our connection to nature. These points on the list give an insight

into what Estonians consider important parts of their culture. On one hand, these are elements of objective culture, but they also affect subjective culture and hence may create intercultural misunderstandings. Three other blog posts also stood out for their topics and content that can be used for insight into Estonians and Estonia. Mike's (2022) post about religion in Estonia brings out the overwhelming number of atheists, but also takes the time to introduce the smaller religions found in Estonia. Covering cultural topics are vital for international students as they give an overview of what to expect after arriving and develop initial ICC by having some base knowledge about the culture. They also give some insights into topics that might affect daily interactions.

There are only a few posts that give insight into the ambassador's cultures, such as Elfi's (2025) post about how to celebrate her country's, Azerbaijan, traditional holiday, Novruz, and Vincent's (2023) post about the differences in celebrating Christmas in Estonia and the USA.

Different aspects of the Estonian language and culture have been mentioned over the years, mainly written from the perspective of the international student and their experience. This is beneficial since having personal intercultural experiences develops one's capabilities to effectively deal with intercultural issues and situations (Lee 2012). However, this also means that the posts do not describe the actual background of Estonia's traditions, culture, or beliefs, and, especially, why they matter for interpersonal IC. Due to this, some training may be needed for the ISAs to make them realise the importance of such topics for the daily life of international students. I would also suggest looking into collaborating with local students regarding blog posts, events, or interviews, like what was done in Lee's (2012) study, to add another side to these topics.

One addition to this section is a podcast episode recorded by the university's student union, where five international students talk about their experiences in Estonia (UTSU presents 2021). The podcast was recorded in 2021 and involved students from Ghana, China,

Germany, the US, and Belarus. Main topics discussed were the application process, living in Tartu, accommodation, their integration in Estonia, studying during COVID, and their future here. Though not many intercultural competences IC, or ICC topics were covered, the podcast still gave an overview of several positives and negatives that the students have experienced so far.

All of the international students felt that the initial on-boarding process was made easy by our online and offline systems. They mentioned being notified of documents and deadlines that they had to follow and submit before coming to Estonia. The same positive feedback was also concluded in Reili's (2010: 36) paper, with over 80% of the respondents being happy with the degree of our digital procedures and initial onboarding systems. Some also mentioned that after arriving, they were given a tutor who helped them with any questions they had. There were, however, some aspects like lease agreements, renting an apartment, and other important steps that they needed additional support with.

Two students from the US and Germany described Estonians as interesting and friendly, and felt that having them as friends helped their integration process heavily due to the constant Estonian language and cultural experiences. Suba (2014: 78) also concluded that Estonian friends can work as middlemen between international students and integration, culture, and language learning. Some said they would love to have more events connecting international students to locals, but they understand the planning difficulties.

From the ICC side, a few brought out their satisfaction with the UT's language courses. They find our vocabulary quite easy, but tenses and more in-depth constructions hard to grasp, even after years of studying. The regular department and UTSU meetings, where topics of student experiences in UT were discussed, or representatives chosen, were also brought out. International students were regularly invited, but some found it difficult to attend and follow since they were mainly held in Estonian, and no translations or translators were offered.

Most of the students imagined themselves staying in Estonia after their studies and hoped to find work here. They were impressed by our systems, e-services, and possibilities in the work field, and how easy it is to start your own business here. The students taking part in the podcast (UTSU 2021) were positively minded and saw potential in working in Estonia, but in contrast, Reili's (2010: 36) survey concluded quite negatively on whether there are good professional opportunities here, with one-third disagreeing.

The results of the questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix 3) was split into five sections to make it easier to follow the topics and simplify the analysis of the data. 12 answers were gathered thus not permitting the author to make generalizations about international students. Though, the answers provide insights that can be compared to the previous research and the answers of ISAs. The sections of the questionnaire are as follows: the basic, university life, conversations, behavior and stereotypes, and integration. Results of the questionnaire will be compared to the literature review.

The basics

Of the respondents so far, 5 are from Ukraine, 2 from the Netherlands, and 1 each from Serbia, USA, France, Germany and Czech. 6 people out of 12 marked Russian and/or Ukrainian, one English as their first language, 2 marked Dutch, and 1 each marked Hungarian, French, German and Czech. When it comes to the language that they use in Estonia, all 12 participants put down English, but 3 people also mentioned using Russian from time to time, and two also use their "broken Estonian" when English is not an option. 8 respondents study in the Faculty of Social Sciences, 2 in Science and Technology, and 2 in Arts and Humanities.

University life

When it comes to classes taken at the university, all participants said that they are currently taking classes in English, with the exception of two people who are also taking Estonian language courses on the side, and one each who are taking German and Russian language classes on the side. One student felt that there were not enough elective classes in English. They are mainly taking classes from their field of study and lack options outside of those mandatory courses.

In this section, they were also asked about who they conversed with during their school days (Figure 2). Unsurprisingly, international students tend to communicate with other foreigners or people from their own culture, if there are any. This idea was also backed up by Lee's (2020) study, where both local and international students expressed their preference for interacting with students of similar cultural background. Same with the international students in the UTSU's (2021) podcast. Suba's (2014: 52) thesis also pointed out that Estonians' passiveness is one of the reasons why international students find it easier to connect with other foreigners. Fortunately, it came out that some also converse with Estonians from time to time.

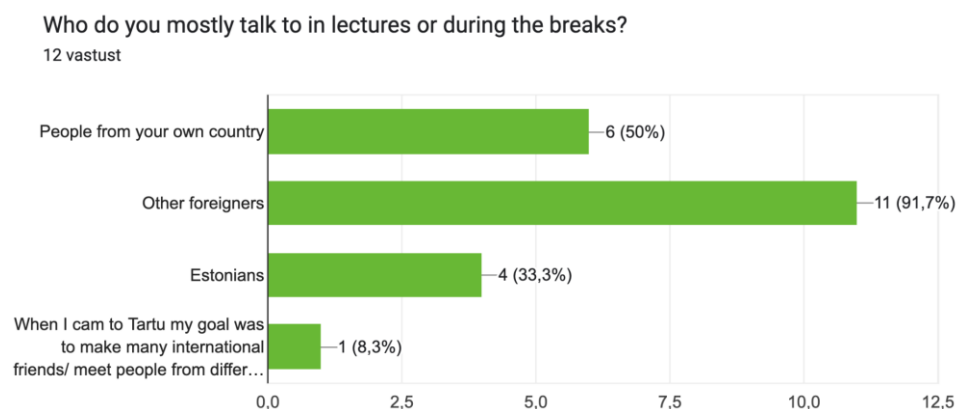


Figure 2: "Who do you mostly talk to in lectures or during the breaks?" with answers

Most of the participants pointed out that the level of English used by lecturers varies, with some using English similar to their proficiency level, but some being more difficult to

understand due to the vocabulary, accent, and level of English. Piller (2007: 11) pointed out that varied proficiency levels can cause misunderstandings and lead to lost information, but from the questionnaire, it does not seem to be too much of a problem. It was also mentioned that the understanding of course topics and assignments is usually not affected by the English used, but rather by the difficulty of the topic at hand or different learning styles. Two students pointed out that since English is not their first language, they struggled at first to relearn terminology for things that they knew in their native language but not in English. When it came to the question of whether something is perceived as missing from university life, English-speaking clubs were brought out. There are organizations outside of UT, but when it comes to in-school clubs held in English, only the Neuromarketing Lab was mentioned. As Lee (2020) stated, it is important to provide students with both non-formal and formal learning opportunities, such as clubs for people with similar interests.

Conversations

Mostly, the participants did not bring out any issues that they had when conversing with Estonians. Rather, they mentioned smaller things that they had to learn about, like our humor, what is considered small talk, accent, shyness, and the level of formality necessary to converse with lecturers. These are all potential issues of IC. One Ukrainian student, however, pointed out that they intentionally avoid speaking to Estonians as they do not feel like they are welcome here. They also brought out that in some cases, the conversations with other students start well but end up being about politics or war, mostly brought up by the other person. It was brought out by one participant that they enjoy speaking to students from Asian countries like India, China, Japan, but struggle to keep up with the active communication style of people from Western countries, like France and Germany. Understandably, one student mentions that they find it difficult to think of topics to discuss with other foreigners, but find it easy to converse with people from their own country, which

is again correlated to Lee's (2020) study conclusions that possible cultural differences hinder students' motivation to have conversations with students of other cultures.

As seen in the figure below (Figure 3), over half of the participants not only converse with Estonians during lectures, where it might be needed for group projects and assignments, but also during their free time. Andrade (2006) states that though friendships with local students are deemed helpful for international students' adaptation, they are quite rare. However, from the other answers, it can be assumed that the conversation in free time may not all be between friends but just necessary discussions outside of classes, such as asking for something or being a part of the same group, for example.

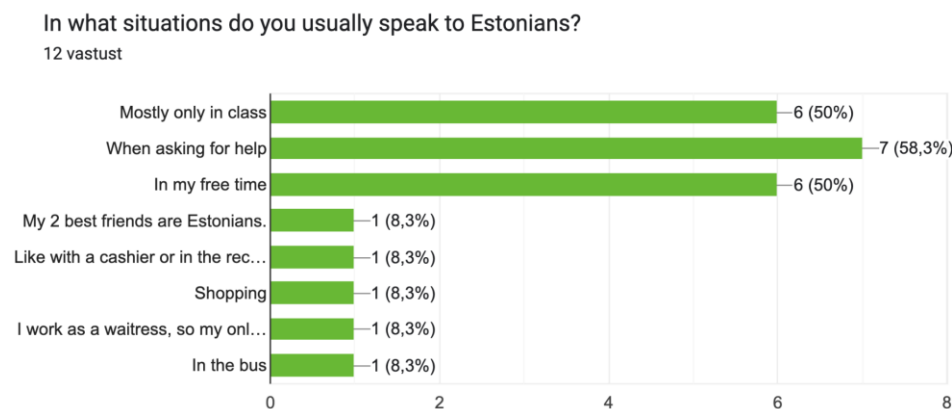


Figure 3: "In what situations do you usually speak to Estonians?" with answers

Another question with slightly surprising answers was about whether international students would prefer to have more local friends (Figure 4), due to previous answers suggesting that the participants were not too keen on having Estonians as part of their everyday circles, but the answers proved otherwise. Over half of the students answered that they would be interested in having local friends, with 3 enjoying conversations with other foreigners and 2 preferring people from their own country. This suggests that the UT would need to think of how to create more opportunities for students of different backgrounds to meet socially.

Do you even feel the need and/or interest to make contact with locals or would you rather be with other international students?

12 vastust

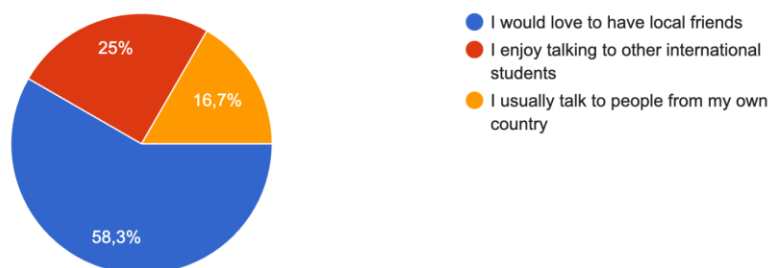


Figure 4: "Do you even feel the need and/or interest to make contact with locals," with answers

Behavior and stereotypes

When it comes to differences between generations, students, and lecturers, the main things mentioned were that younger people tend to be more open-minded and good at English, while the older generation seemed more conservative, and some had lower levels of proficiency in English. This coincides with the finding mentioned above, that some lecturers are more difficult to understand due to proficiency levels.

The topic of stereotypes brought quite similar answers to what they had heard or read beforehand: Estonians were considered cold, closed off, quiet, serious, introverted, and so on. Reili (2010: 30) also pointed to Estonians being perceived as shy and reserved by more than half of the respondents of her questionnaire. When it came to the students' own later experience, the answers fell into two groups. One side said that Estonians are difficult to get close to, that they do not want to leave their comfort zone and would rather enjoy speaking to other Estonians, not foreigners. Suba's (2014: 51) thesis also shows that Estonians with already developed friend groups might be less interested in expanding said groups. Others, however, mentioned that Estonians just need time to open up, and then they are very fun to be around, more so when alcohol is involved. The same was observed in Reili's (2010: 37) thesis, where many were surprised that the stereotypes were inaccurate and that Estonians were very helpful. One student brought out at length that they enjoy speaking to Estonians,

have been on several dates, and find them very open-minded. One of the main ways that some made Estonian friends was through other friends or organizations. This, again, demonstrates that by organizing events that cater to international students and local students interested in intercultural experiences, UT could support the rise of new connections. Suba (2014: 59) also concluded in her study that having a friend or partner as the middle person is an easy way to make new friends, but also brought out the necessity of similar hobbies and interests. The idea of Estonians feeling distant and hard to get to know is also visualized by another question (Figure 5), as most participants feel like they have to make the first move if they want to enter into a conversation with Estonians. This correlates to Suba's (2014: 51) thesis, which stated that Estonians are usually passive in both starting and continuing conversations.

Do you feel like you have to make the first move to converse with locals or do they approach you?
12 vastust

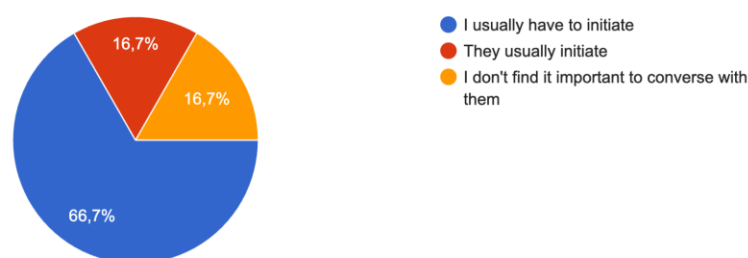


Figure 5: "Do you feel like you have to make the first move to converse with locals," with answers

When asked about what they found surprising about us, 3 people mentioned religion. They were surprised to learn that Estonia is one of the most atheistic countries in the world. One mentioned a joke that he was told by an Estonian that instead of religion, "we believe in real estate". Another interesting thing brought out by one of the students was that Estonians are a lot more similar to them than they expected, and that we value our traditions.

Integration

The first question in this section was designed to identify what types of steps the international students had taken to better integrate into the university and Tartu. Two people

mentioned joining ESN for the events and to be active, but other people had quite different directions. Integration ideas used were learning more about the culture; being social by visiting museums, bars, game nights, and so on; talking with lecturers; taking interesting internships; reading newsletters and websites; and participating in study projects and webinars. One student also mentioned using learning Estonian as their way of integration, just like Byram (1997: 28) thought necessary, and topping it off with working through UT's webpage. They have not mentioned whether using language learning has helped them better integrate. There was also one student who was honest about not being interested in integration but rather just working for their degree.

When it comes to support from the UT, 9 people felt that the support was quite apparent and suitable, but 3 people felt that the support system was not enough for them. Here is a list of things that the students felt could be improved on:

- "I would recommend an elective subject for language exchange, similar to the Tandem buddy program. Estonians could be paired up with for example Germans who want to study Estonian. They could meet up every week or two /.../ and practice the language while also getting to know each other. And the end of the semester, they could present what they have learned."
- "More availability in student counseling center, more personal blog stories about other international students who struggled (and how they overcame it)."
- "/.../ sometimes even when the course is in English, some material during the lectures is still in Estonian. It makes it more difficult to study the course"
- "A lot of clubs (like investment club) are in Estonian. Would be nice to have sth like that in English"
- "Maybe someone that checks in with you a couple of months after you started studying at UT to see how you are adjusting to life in Tartu."

- “The support system is seems to be aimed at being responsive to issues rather than proactive.”

Several of these issues brought out are fixable by reviewing the systems in place so far, for example, having an overview of how many people are open to becoming tutors for international students, and how to market this opportunity among locals. Andrade (2006) states that without university support, we cannot assume successful onboarding, and that regular check-ins are one way to survey student success in settling in. The idea of a tandem program can be similarly solved and is also recommended by Giralt’s (2020) study, where it was a success among students. Regarding blogs, it seems that ISA’s blogs are being read but lack some topics, like struggles in Estonia, that students see as important. When it comes to clubs, they are found essential by many authors (Lee 2020, Petrusheva 2024), but are difficult to arrange due to the need for leadership, financing, and other aspects to keep a club running.

On the other side, students also brought out things that they have appreciated while being a part of the UT:

- “Classes I have took, ESN section and their programs are especially great. And all the orientation days, help with administration”
- “Creating seminars on issues like procrastination and stress.”
- “Many chances to meet people at night, safe, good chances to find relevant job”
- “I really like that there are little side projects involved (or not little), like CDL, where you can take an internship and therefore integrate and familiarise yourself with the university a bit more.”
- “Everything is also in english (or you understand with some knowledge of Estonian)”
- “Guidance in important aspects of studying and especially living”

- “Collecting funds aimed to support Ukrainians. When I just came here, my parents struggled to support me financially due to the war. So before I learned a bit of Estonian language and found a part-time job, this help was essential for me”
- “Ut provides with needed information, program manager and coordinator quickly response to emails. The website, ÕIS, moodle are well-structured. Opening and closing days. Hacatons and AI-days in university”
- “I have a couple of courses where teachers get people from outside UT to give a lecture or part of a lecture when it was more their expertise. I like that.”

It can be brought out that some information is contradictory, but that is understandable due to people having different experiences and needs. ESN and other social programs were brought out throughout the survey answers, agreeing with Lee’s (2020) conclusion that social events and clubs are essential for students' well-being. Many mentioned that they feel supported on various levels, like guidance, seminars, and access to necessary information in English. The latter is supported by the fact that the UT’s homepage is accessible in both Estonian and English, meaning that important information does not get lost on the local level. Seminars on mental health and study topics happen consistently over the semesters, making it possible to pick and choose between various topics.

The questionnaire also asked about things that the students would appreciate being added to the UT. The main answer was clubs and organizations; most of the students mentioned that they would like English-speaking clubs that they could join based on their interests, such as investments and marketing, and women in finance. As an addition, some activity-based event ideas were also mentioned, like marathons, dance courses, and hikes.

When it comes to discrimination, both Suba (2014: 75) and Reili (2010) analysed this topic in their papers, but neither the ISA blogs nor the questionnaire brought it out as an obvious issue during the writing of this thesis. Though no direct questions were asked about

discrimination, there were several open-ended questions in the survey that could have been used to vocalize this issue. Rather, topics like close-mindedness or language issues were mentioned. This, however, does not mean that none of the responding international students have experienced discrimination, but may just mean that they have not noticed or deemed it as significant. During UTSU's podcast (2021), discrimination was brought up in connection with the rental system in Tartu. Thus, discrimination can be found in more specific aspects of living in Tartu, but not as much in everyday situations.

CONCLUSION

This paper's main aim was to map potential issues in the lives of international students living and studying in Tartu. An additional aim was to get an overview of opportunities the UT already offers to international students and whether they suffice or some aspects and topics should be addressed more thoroughly. From the UT's standpoint, feedback on their support system and potential fixes is essential to ensure that international students have a successful learning experience that might become permanent and also to maintain the UT as a top university.

The topic of IC is essential when talking about better supporting international students. The literature review emphasized the importance of being aware of the possible differences in proficiency levels of English on both the students' and lecturers' side, as that is the main language used for communication in the UT's intercultural settings. Thus, it was important to get an insight into how students cope with the level of English used in academic settings. In the academic setting, the conclusions were divided. Some felt that the level of English used by lecturers and fellow students was similar to their own, thus making understanding the lectures and communication quite easy. However, several students also mentioned that in some cases they had a hard time following the lecture since the proficiency level of the lecturer. Proficiency levels in personal settings are also important for easier

connections among students, however, that is not something that UT can improve itself. From ISA's side, this issue was not brought up in their blogs, but could be a future addition regarding the topic of IC. The same goes with the UT, as the institution should look into the usage and level of English used in their departments.

As suggested, UT offers a wide range of bachelor's and master's curricula in English, which seems to invite a lot of international students to Estonia. However, what came out from the questionnaire is that the curricula seem to lack English-based elective courses on topics that might interest international students outside of their mandatory lectures. Elective courses are mainly in Estonian; that is, they are only available for locals or international students with language proficiency high enough to manage courses in Estonian. Estonian is quite a difficult language to learn in a year or two. The topic of language learning was brought out in a few of the ISA blog posts, but it could be further developed in the future.

The thesis as a whole sought to draw attention to intercultural competences and ICC, which are both necessary when dealing with an intercultural setting like the UT. These topics were not widely covered in the questionnaire, unlike IC, but discussing them in the literature review created a base for why these topics are important in improving intercultural skills in both local and international students. For locals, this training can be a preparation for study abroad periods and other mobility opportunities, and for international students, it can provide better support for their onboarding and study period. Thus, the task for the UT would be to compose materials and courses that would effectively target IC and ICC among students.

The ISA's are doing a good job of running an active page that international students seem to use and read frequently. Although aspects of intercultural competences and IC are covered, they lack depth and can be further discussed in future posts. The blogs, being mostly about personal experiences, seem to hinder the addition of "structural" and "formal" topics that would work as a basis for introducing Estonian culture to someone just arriving to Estonia. Topics like language and culture are covered superficially, leaving room for

misunderstanding and a lack of knowledge. Based on Lee's (2020) paper, I would also recommend adding posts in collaboration with locals from time to time, for example, ISA asking locals questions that international students have pondered over.

Many of the conclusions drawn from the questionnaire matched with what Suba (2014) and Reili (2010) had concluded in their papers, like international students finding us silent and reserved, and that they usually hang out with other international students due to our passiveness. The topic of English proficiency also seemed to be a prominent topic discussed. Many seemed to find Estonians' level of English different from their own and also hard to follow due to the accent. From the questionnaire, it came out that international students value having local friends much more than anticipated, with more than half wanting more opportunities to develop friendships with locals. One of the issues brought out the most, however, was the lack of clubs and events catered to international students. Most of the clubs under the UT at the moment are led in Estonian, which creates a barrier for intercultural contact. Additional opportunities should be developed to create a safe space for international students to act on their hobbies and interests. Though the number of respondents is low, the answers give an initial idea of what issues international students view as important and current. Thus, despite its limitations, the study can be a beneficial source of initial data for the UT regarding the support systems put in place and possible areas in need of improvement.

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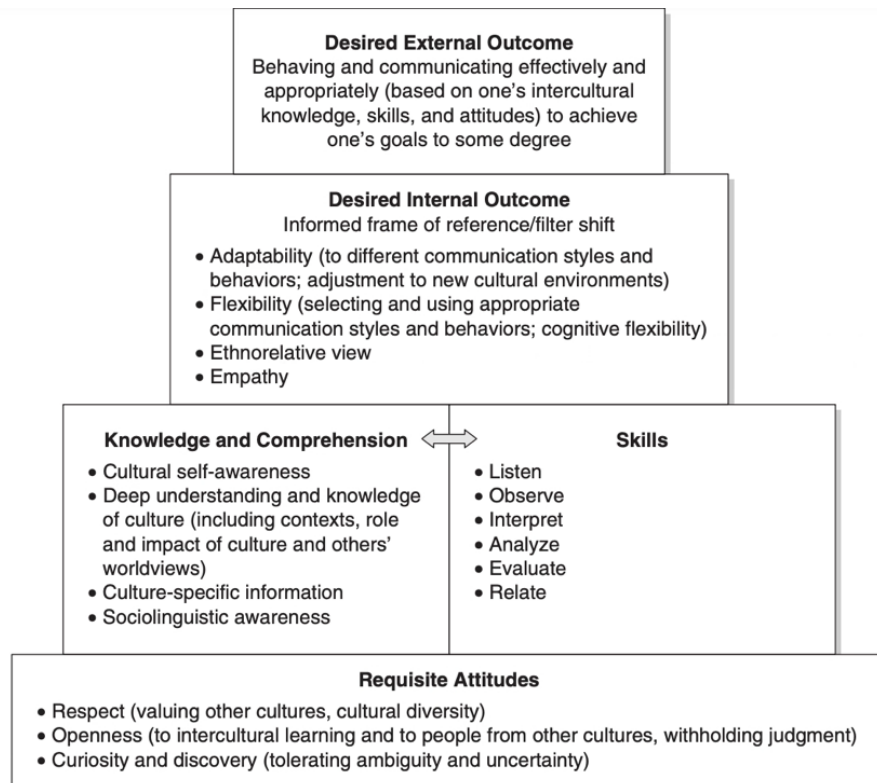
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Appendix 1

Deardorff (2006) Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence



Appendix 2

Examples of SA's blog posts from different topics

Culture	Student life	Good to know	Tartu
Celebrating Independence Day of Estonia by Anhelina (Ukraine)	Managing Work and Studies Without Losing Balance by Syed (Pakistan)	Tartu souvenir shop guide – where to go and what to buy by Temma (Japan)	Catu: Tartu, a city of Cuteness and Cats by Aikaterini (Greece)
New Year, New You, New Traditions: Bringing the Old Back with Näärid (New Year's) by Lachlan (Australia)	Essential tips to deal with anxiety while studying by Kateryna (Ukraine)	Where to Look: Job Hunting in Estonia by Cody (USA)	Clear Your Mind: Tartu's Top Brain Detox Destinations by Elfi (Azerbaijan)
Five Easy Estonian Recipes for Busy Weeknights by Danni (China)	Study Abroad with Kids: International Student Life for Young Parents at the University of Tartu by Azhar (Kyrgyzstan)	All About ISIC "I'm Saving, It's Cool!" by Polina (Russia)	Tartu's Street Art – Hidden Gems and Stories by Mara (Romania)

Appendix 3

Google Form Questions

How can the university better support international students in their integration process?

Section 1

1. What is your nationality? What country are you from?
2. What is your first language? (What language do you use at home?)
3. Are you here as an Erasmus student (1-2 semesters) or for the whole study period?
4. What language do you mostly use in Estonia?
5. For how long have you been in Estonia?
6. In what faculty do you study? You don't have to mention the specific course you take.

Section 2. University life

1. Do you take classes in Estonian or English? Which do you have more of?
2. Who do you mostly talk to in lectures or during the breaks?
3. How do you manage during lectures when it comes to the language spoken in class? Is your English and the lecturer's different or similar?
4. Do you understand the lectures and topics, or do you have a hard time following? (For example, it seems like others are more familiar with a topic.)

Section 3. Conversations

1. Is there something that has confused you in conversations with Estonians and/or in English? (behavior, vocabulary, etc.) Are there any difficulties? What are they?
2. Do you experience difficulties when conversing with people of different cultures? Do these difficulties, if any, occur with Estonians, foreigners, or both? What causes these difficulties?
3. How often do you converse with Estonians?
4. In what situations do you usually speak to Estonians?
5. Do you even feel the need and/or interest to make contact with locals, or would you rather be with other international students?

Section 4. Behavior and stereotypes

1. Do you see a difference between the younger and older generation of Estonians? (students, lecturers, people on the streets)
2. What do you see as the main Estonian stereotypes, and what are your experiences with them? Do you agree or disagree?
3. Is there something that you don't understand or find surprising about Estonians? (behavior, conversations, beliefs)
4. Do you feel like you have to make the first move to converse with locals, or do they approach you?

Section 5. Integration

1. What types of things have you used, tried, or done to better integrate into UT?
2. Do you feel like the university is giving out enough opportunities for international students to integrate into UT and do well here?
3. What type of support do you feel UT is lacking?

4. What type of things do you feel like UT is doing that you appreciate?
5. What types of events, activities, programs, groups, etc, would you enjoy being added to UT?
6. Do you feel like you have someone (local) to turn to if you run into trouble, need explaining, etc? If yes, then who? (local friend, lecturer, ..)

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Getrin Laanesoo

Intercultural Communication and International Students' Concerns at the University of Tartu

Rahvusvaheline Suhtlus ja Rahvusvaheliste Tudengite Mured Tartu Ülikoolis

Bakalaureusetöö

2025

Lehekülgede arv: 50

Annotatsioon:

Lõputöö eesmärk oli kaardistada peamised murekohad, mis rahvusvahelistel tudengitel võivad Eestis õppimise jooksul tekkida. Töö sissejuhatuses selgitatakse töö olulisust nii Tartu ülikooli kui ka üliõpilaste vaatepunktist. Kuna Tartu Ülikooli näol on tegemist rahvusvahelise keskkonnaga, millega liitub igal aastal sadu välistudengeid, on oluline aeg-ajalt nendega seonduvad süsteemid ja nende efektiivsus üle vaadata ja vajadusel neid arendada. Kirjanduse ülevaates käsitletakse nii kultuuridevahelist suhtlust, kultuuridevahelise suhtluse pädevust kui ka kultuuridevahelist pädevust. Kirjanduse analüüs toob välja olulised ja omavahel seotud teemad, mille läbitöötamisel on võimalik luua uusi üliõpilasi toetavaid materjale ja struktuure.

Lõputöö empiirilises osas analüüsiti rahvusvaheliste tudengisaadikute (ISA) blogipostitusi, välistudengite podcasti ning BA töö jaoks koostatud küsimustiku tulemusi. Analüüs näitas, et ISA blogipostitused ei sisalda piisaval määral kultuuridevahelise suhtlusega seotud teemasid, mis aitaksid riiki alles tulnud tudengitel luua esmast ettekujutust Eestist ja eestlastest. Küsimustikust tuli peamiselt välja suur huvi ingliskeelsete klubide vastu, mis toetaksid kohalike ja välistudengite suhtlust ja selle tekkimist. Samuti tehti märkusi inglise keele taseme kohta Eestis ja ülikooli keskkonnas, mis on küsimustiku järgi eestlaste seas väga kõikum.

Märksõnad: kultuuridevaheline suhtlus, ISA, kultuuridevahelise suhtluse pädevus, kultuuridevaheline pädevus

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