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Exploring International Students' Goals for Full Degree Mobility in Finnish Higher
Education Institutions

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Exploring International Students' Goals for Full Degree Mobility in Finnish Higher Education Institutions (Daria Zaikovskaia)

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Abstract

This thesis explores the goals of international students pursuing full-degree mobility in Finnish higher education institutions. It aims to identify how these goals evolve over the course of their studies. The research questions focus on the goals of students, the achievement goal orientation profiles of international students, and the stability of the reported goals throughout their degree program. The research used semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect data from 22 international students pursuing a full degree in Finland or who recently graduated from a Finnish educational institution. The study identifies several goals that motivate international students to pursue a degree in Finland, including personal growth, career development, cultural enrichment, and access to high-quality education. The research also identifies different achievement goal orientation profiles among the participants, with some students exhibiting a mastery-oriented orientation and others a performance-oriented orientation. The study reveals that the stability of achievement goal orientation profiles varies among international students, with some maintaining a consistent orientation throughout their degree programs. In contrast, others experience changes in their approach to goals and success. This research provides insights into the goal-setting process for adult learners pursuing a full degree in higher education institutions in Finland and suggests several areas for further research.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction.....	5
2 Theoretical Framework.....	6
2.1. The evolution and dimensions of achievement goal orientations.....	6
2.2. Mastery and performance goal orientations	8
2.3. Factors influencing students' achievement goals	14
2.4. The role of achievement goals in higher education	18
2.4.1. Students' goals for studying abroad	20
3 Aim and Research Questions.....	22
4 Research Methods.....	22
4.1. Profile of the Sample and Context.....	22
4.2 Data collection	23
4.2.1. Semi-structured interview	24
4.2.2. Individual in-depth interview	25
4.3. Data collection procedures	25
4.4. Measures	25
4.4 Data Analysis.....	27
5 Findings	29
5.1. What goals did students have to decide to undertake a full degree in Finnish educational institutions?	29
5.2. What kinds of achievement goal orientation profiles can be distinguished among international students studying in higher educational institutions in Finland?	38
5.3. How stable are the achievement goal orientation profiles throughout the degree program?	40
6 Discussion.....	42
6.1. Summary of the Study	42
6.2. Discussion of the Findings.....	43
6.3. Implications	46
6.4. Limitations	47

7 Conclusion	49
7.1. Conclusion	49
7.2. Further Research	49
References.....	50
Appendices	70
Appendix A – Consent form for the current study	70
Appendix B – Participants information	71
Appendix C – Interview Protocol	73
Appendix D – Codebook for Students’ Goals for Mobility	74
Appendix E – Codebook for Goal Orientation Profiles.....	78
Appendix F – Codebook for Goals Stability and Change	80

1 Introduction

Every year, the number of applications from international students who want to study at Finnish universities is increasing. The Finnish National Agency for Education reports that the number of people who applied to higher education in Finland in the spring of 2022 was about 10,000 more than the number of people who applied in the spring of 2021 (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). Figures released in November 2022 by the Finnish Immigration Service revealed a record number of first-time residence permits for studies granted to applicants from outside the European Union (*Finnish Immigration Service, 2022*). However, upon graduation, many recent graduates leave for their home countries or other countries in and outside of the European Union (EU). Based on the available statistics from 2020 (Opetushallinnon Tilastopalvelu, 2021), domestic students seem to have found employment more easily than international students. Among Finnish university graduates with Finnish citizenship, 76% have found employment one year after graduation. For comparison, 51% of university students from outside Europe and only 34% of the university students from the EU and European Economic Area (EEA) countries have found work in Finland one year after graduation. At the same time, 45% of the university students from the EU and European Economic Area (EEA) countries and 19% of students from outside Europe moved away.

This data arouses a set of curiosities concerning the goals students set before leaving their home country to undertake a degree abroad, specifically in Finland. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries, for example, in Finland, international students have proven to be high-skilled workers. Arriving in a country after being admitted to a university, they might later decide to stay in the host country by, for instance, becoming employed (Czaika, 2018). On a global scale, students' reasons and motivations for pursuing a degree abroad range from exploring different cultures and finding social understanding to finding better job opportunities or immigration (Dewey et al., 2013; Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016).

Understanding the initial goals set by international students when they arrive and how they approach their learning process can help accommodate these goals to facilitate students' learning. Finding out whether the student's learning goals have been met, transformed, or abandoned and how it influenced their level of participation in the educational process and the decision to stay in or leave Finland may give us additional insight into the ways learning motivation influences one's behaviour.

The goals set by students to pursue a degree in Finland are particularly relevant for researchers, educators, company owners, and higher education workers looking for motivational constructs they can enhance to prevent recent graduates from leaving the country and retain international talent.

2 Theoretical Framework

The student period is an important step in the development of a young person, with university studies being, for many students, a time of psychological growth and transition into adulthood (Lairio et al., 2013). However, being a student in a higher education institution can be very stressful (Bewick et al., 2010; Lunau, 2012). Various studies have shown the prominence of such alarming conditions as anxiety, burnout, and depression in university students worldwide (Kleiveland et al., 2015; Ribeiro et al., 2018; Robotham & Julian, 2006; Saleh et al., 2017). Studying at a higher educational institution, even without changing the place of residence, implies having to collaborate with a new cohort, an increase in the volume of new information, as well as changes in the usual educational process of the individual. While getting a higher education in a higher educational institution located in another city or another country entails other stressful experiences, such as needing an accommodation, experiencing cultural shock, and feeling alone with no sense of affiliation or community (Newsome & Cooper, 2016).

To understand the reasons for students to engage in such highly competitive achievement settings as higher education, specifically higher education in a different country, achievement goal theory has been chosen as the theoretical background guiding the design of this study.

2.1. The evolution and dimensions of achievement goal orientations

Students' motivation has long been considered an indispensable factor for effective learning (Ryan & Connell, 1989). In turn, maintaining a high level of motivation is inextricably linked with goal setting. Setting specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals (Morrison, 2022) can help students focus on what they want to achieve (Werle Lee, 2010) and provide a clear understanding of what they want to accomplish. When learners understand what they are working for, whether it is a particular grade or obtaining specific knowledge, they are more likely to have the motivation to put in the effort to achieve their goals (Harlen, 2006). One of the most acknowledged and recognized theories in educational psychology is the achievement goal theory which

became particularly notable in the 1980s, although the traces may be found in much earlier conceptions of achievement motivation (Elliot, 1999; Meece et al., 2006). The theory first emerged as a new strain of the existing social-cognitive theories of achievement motivation and included the expectancy-value theory (Eccles et al., 1983), social-learning theory (Bandura, 1986), and attribution theory (Weiner, 1980). As a result of the joint work of Nicholls (1984), Dweck (1986), and Ames (1992), a whole new research area within the academic motivational field was introduced. According to Ames (1992), achievement goals are distinct individual determinations attributed to learners' achievement-related behaviour. These determinations can potentially make clear how learners identify with, approach, and perform academic and personal tasks. Given this, achievement goals can determine or instigate learners' academic performance and behavioural patterns (Ames, 1992). By another definition, suggested by Pintrich and Schunk (1996), achievement goals were described as joined patterns of learners' beliefs concerning their intentions for approaching or performing a learning task. By another interpretation proposed by Elliot (1999), the goals' primary function is to be the foundation for learners' participation and perception while engaging in an achievement setting.

The goals for learning are assumed to be dynamic modes of being determined by the composite of students' innate attributes and contextual factors. Achievement goals are multidimensional and future-oriented; however, they can diverge from individual target goals to long-term, more general goals. For example, a student might set a target of getting at least 8 out of 10 points while taking an exam or quiz or set one's heart on pursuing a particular profession. These goals determine student judgements and approaches to academic performance, perceptions of failure, resolutions towards the effort, and individual competence (Pintrich, 2000).

In the years since the emergence of the achievement goal theory, the interest in student motivation and goal setting has grown significantly, not only in academic literature but also in popular science and self-help literature (Elliot & Thrash, 2001; Senko, 2016). Several enabling factors can explain this increased interest towards the achievement goal theory. To begin with, exploring the disparities between the meanings of the notion of achievement by different people is an auspicious framework for motivational studies. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) defines achievement in the standards for test construction (1999) essentially as the competence an individual has in a specific field or area. Nevertheless, what is an achievement in principle? Dictionaries define achievement as completing a challenging and worthwhile goal ('Merriam-Webster

Dictionary', n.d.). Although we might not all agree on which goals we consider to be worthwhile and which not so much. Completing an essay, finding a job, and getting out of bed might be routine tasks for one individual and achievements for the other. Gwen Bradford (2015) believes that achievement is when an individual competently completes an action by overcoming a difficulty, where "competently" means "understanding what they are doing". In her viewpoint, achievement requires two central components: the difficulty of the activity itself and the competent causation, and she argues that achievement is not limited just to academic performance.

Another factor that draws attention to the achievement goal theory is the hypothesis that learners' interpretation of their communication and social transactions with teachers, education officers, and other academic workers can have an impact on their academic success and learning progress. Learners' behaviour and beliefs may be influenced and even formed by these perceptions and experiences (Ames, 1992; Pintrich & Duncan, 1991; Was, 2006).

The third enabling factor making the achievement goal research compelling is achievement goals being social-cognitive constructs, thus making data collection relatively easy through questionnaires and interviews. It is undisputed that not only these three factors enabled research in the field of achievement goals, but, as a result, over the years, there have been numerous studies within the achievement goals framework that mostly used self-report surveys as their research method (Hulleman et al., 2010). Experiments, questionnaires, and qualitative interviews are also often used as a methodology in achievement goal research (Jagacinski & Duda, 2001).

2.2. Mastery and performance goal orientations

A goal is a desired result or outcome that a person or group aims to achieve (Locke & Latham, 1990). *Goal orientation*, or achievement orientation, is a psychological concept that refers to a person's tendency to focus on their own abilities or the outcome of their efforts (Vandewalle, 1997). Achievement goal theory generally defines two different goal orientations: mastery, which is also referred to by some researchers as a *learning* orientation (Coad & Berry, 1998; Gong et al., 2009; Maurer, 2002), and performance orientation. Goal orientation determines how a student approaches and reacts to tasks, leading to different patterns of cognition and behaviour (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Students who are mastery-oriented emphasize self-improvement and knowledge acquisition and tend to find intrinsic satisfaction in solving challenging problems and overcoming obstacles. Such students devote themselves to learning and developing new skills and aim

for an in-depth understanding of their academic work. The effort is considered to be the determining factor in their success (Ames, 1992). Mastery goals are generally linked with personal interest, perseverance, regulation of one's learning, and, under certain circumstances, achievement (Senko, 2016). As the learners pursuing mastery goals are commonly believed to be more intrinsically motivated, they are at the same time comparatively less interested and inspired by external factors such as rewards or grades (Elliot & Church, 1997).

On the contrary, students with a performance goal orientation are driven by the need for extrinsic endorsement, for example, performing well compared to other students. Performance-oriented students are thought to be focused mostly on their academic output (Ames, 1992). The need for the successful demonstration of their competence and dependence on other people's opinions and evaluations is an indicative characteristic of students of this type of mentality (Dweck, 1986; Shatz, 2015). Success, as perceived by performance-oriented students, is a consequence of their higher skills and superior ability compared to their peers (Senko & Harackiewicz, 2002). Another determining motivational factor for such students is positive reinforcement from their teachers or peers for success and inclinations toward the tasks with detailed instructions with clear grading criteria (Siegle & McCoach, 2005). In contrast, mastery-oriented students do not seem to exhibit a strong relationship between positive affirmation and achieving goals (Morrone et al., 2004). Some researchers believe that performance orientation potentially leads to self-restraint from challenge and negative achievement results (Ames, 1984; Butler, 1987; Elliott & Dweck, 1988).

As noted above, goal orientations were previously divided into two fundamental categories. Learners were understood to be either mastery or performance-goal-oriented. Later the division was made by Elliot and Church (1997) between the performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals. This separation helped later introduce a new, trilateral model of achievement goals:

- A) Mastery strategies characteristic of learners striving to improve competence;
- B) Performance-approach strategies typical of students whose desire is to perform well compared to others;
- C) Performance-avoidance strategies applicable to students who are driven by the desire to not do badly compared to other students (Anderman & Gray, 2015; Elliot & Church, 1997).

Several similarities can be found between mastery-oriented and performance-approach oriented learners. For example, performance-approach oriented students can demonstrate high ability in their academic tasks and focus on making great progress in their studies (Grant & Dweck, 2003). Moreover, such learners are thought to be more persistent and persevering; and tend to put much effort into completing an academic task, especially if encouraged and endorsed (Elliot et al., 1999). However, unless knowing they will be highly evaluated, performance-oriented students tend to refrain from putting much effort into the task and avoid tasks where they risk making a mistake and receiving a bad evaluation (Payne et al., 2007). On the contrary, it would seem that mastery-approach goals are more likely to improve a student's performance if they are given no external feedback or public evaluation of any sort (Midgley et al., 2001). Further research has also shown a relationship between performance-approach oriented students' academic success and their willingness to continue to engage in adaptive academic behaviours. However, the opposite pattern has also been observed: performance-approach students tend to disengage from the educational process and discontinue attempting to perform better after failing to reach a certain level, obtain a desirable grade, or win a prize (Grant & Dweck, 2003).

As the term suggests, performance-avoidance-oriented students tend to avoid negative evaluations and judgements about their abilities or competencies. Such learners fear failure and often prefer not to take risks. According to Elliot and Church (1997), the performance-avoidance orientation can potentially decrease the level of students' intrinsic motivation and lead to maladaptive educational outcomes, such as excessive test and exam anxiety. Moreover, performance-avoidance-oriented students seem likely to disengage from their academic tasks out of anxiety or low motivation levels. Such learners are also more willing to give up faster while performing their tasks, especially if they are boring or challenging (Wolters, 2004).

Later, a 2 X 2 achievement goal framework was proposed and tested. The approach-avoidance distinction was applied to the mastery goal orientation comprising the mastery-avoidance orientation. This pattern, as had been expected, manifested to be more negative than for the mastery-approach orientation and more positive than for the performance-avoidance orientation (Elliot & McGregor, 2001)

The two mastery orientations stand in stark difference from each other. Mastery-approach-oriented learners experience high levels of motivation and positive emotions when presented with a challenging task. They are characterised by having an inquisitive mind and a desire for self-development (Elliot & Church, 1997). Mastery goals are often compared and even equated with intrinsic motivation and thus viewed as the ultimate form

of regulation based on competence (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). In contrast, mastery-avoidance-oriented learners tend to show no interest in the advantages or costs usually attributed to all the other achievement goals. Social comparisons have little value to them. Such students are not motivated by the rewards for completing academic tasks, for example, grades or the teacher’s praise (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Instead, mastery-avoidance-oriented students are driven by their understanding of competence and compare their current performance with their earlier performance. Mastery-avoidance-oriented learners often include perfectionists who are driven by fear of making any mistakes and are scared to do anything wrong or perform worse than before (Flett et al., 1998). Because perfection is an impossible goal to reach, perfectionists are also prone to obsessive thoughts about “what might have been”, negative introspection, excessive reflections, and high anxiety levels (Watson & Clark, 1984). Research has shown that, similarly to perfectionism, mastery-avoidance goals are often associated with significantly elevated cognitive anxiety, negative affect and fear of failure (Sideridis, 2008).

Summarizing the above, mastery-avoidance orientation differs from mastery-approach orientation in terms of the valence of competence, performance-avoidance orientation in terms of the definition of competence, and performance-approach in terms of valence and the definition of competence (Elliot & McGregor, 2001).

		Definition	
		Intrapersonal (mastery)	Normative (performance)
Valence	Positive (striving for success)	Mastery- approach goals	Performance- approach goals
	Negative (avoiding failure)	Mastery- avoidance goals	Performance- avoidance goals

Figure 1. The 2 × 2 achievement goal framework (Elliot & McGregor, 2001).

Considering all of the above, however, it cannot be said with certainty that mastery-approach orientation is objectively better and more desirable than others. According to some research, mastery-approach-oriented students were indeed more interested in the class material and deepening their knowledge. However, students adopting performance

goals ended up achieving higher levels of performance, suggesting that both mastery and performance goals can lead to positive results academic outcomes (J. Harackiewicz et al., 1997). Approaching performance orientation outside of the mastery goal versus performance goal dichotomy has shown that only performance goals associated with avoiding failure lead to the deterioration of intrinsic motivation (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996).

In the last decade, the previous 2x2 model has been expanded, and the 3x2 achievement goal model was introduced (Elliot et al., 2011; Murayama et al., 2012). The 3x2 achievement goal model is a broadened framework for understanding how people approach and think about their goals. It identifies six different goal orientations that individuals can have, based on the combination of two dimensions: the focus of the goal (on ability or performance) and the direction of the goal (toward approach or avoidance).

Six goal orientations in the 3x2 achievement goal model are:

1. Task-approach, or work-approach: This goal orientation is characterized by a lack of focus on either ability or performance and a positive attitude toward the task. An example of a task-approach goal might be to complete a project or a school assignment without worrying whether it is the best possible result or whether it will receive a high grade. Another example could be learning a new skill or taking up a new hobby because of a personal interest rather than achieving a distinct outcome or volunteering for a specific cause or organisation because of a personal interest in helping others.
2. Task-avoidance, or work-avoidance (King & McInerney, 2014): This goal orientation is characterized by a lack of focus on either ability or performance and a negative attitude toward the task. For example, a student may choose not to participate in a project or not start an assignment because they find the assignment uninteresting or useless, or they make the least effort to complete the assignment, finding the easiest way to solve the problem, "just to get rid of" the need to complete the task.
3. Self-approach: This goal orientation is characterized by a present focus on improving one's skills, with a positive attitude toward the task. An example of a self-approach goal would be learning a new language to improve one's understanding of one's surroundings and communication skills or exercising to tone one's muscles and improve physique.

4. Self-avoidance: This goal orientation is characterized by focusing on avoiding failure and improving one's abilities and skills, with a negative attitude toward the task. Self-avoidance goals, as the name suggests, involve avoiding negative outcomes or consequences or declining performance, for example, exercising to avoid getting sick or overweight, or continuing learning a language to avoid losing the skill.
5. Other-approach (previously performance-approach): This goal orientation is characterized by a present focus on demonstrating ability and outperforming others with a positive attitude toward a task. Other-approach goals are goals set to achieve positive outcomes for oneself or others. Such goals are often motivated by an ambition to improve one's circumstances or status or to seek out rewards, whether material, such as a prize or a grade, or nonmaterial, such as a sense of achievement. Seeking out ways to improve one's living conditions by moving to another country or networking and applying for positions in hopes of finding a new job could be examples of other-approach goals.
6. Other-avoidance (previously performance-avoidance): This goal orientation is characterized by a present focus on demonstrating ability and outperforming others, with a negative attitude toward the task. Other-avoidance goals involve avoiding negative outcomes concerning one's performance compared to other people. For example, a student can study hard for an exam to avoid failing or underperforming and thus feel self-conscious or embarrassed in front of their peers.

		Definition		
		Absolute (task)	Intrapersonal (self)	Interpersonal (other)
Valence	Positive (striving for success)	Task- approach goals	Self- approach goals	Other- approach goals
	Negative (avoiding failure)	Task- avoidance goals	Self- avoidance goals	Other- avoidance goals

Figure 2. The 3 × 2 achievement goal framework (Elliot et al., 2011)

The 3x2 achievement goal model can be useful for understanding and predicting how individuals will approach and perform in different tasks and situations. It can also help identify strategies for promoting positive goal orientation and motivation.

An instrument originally developed by Niemivirta (2002) was adapted to identify the achievement goal profiles for the needs of the current research. The five achievement goal orientations that Niemivirta identifies are:

1. Learning orientation, characterized by a focus on personal improvement, growth and development, and a desire to acquire new knowledge and skills.
2. Achievement orientation, characterized by a desire to succeed and achieve high standards, with no regard for the performance of others.
3. Performance-approach orientation, characterized by a focus on outperforming others and achieving relative success, rather than achieving personal bests.
4. Performance-avoidance orientation, characterized by a focus on avoiding failure or negative evaluation, rather than striving for success.
5. Avoidance orientation, characterized by a lack of motivation to achieve or succeed, and a tendency to avoid challenging tasks.

Niemivirta emphasizes the necessity to differentiate the achievement and performance-approach orientations despite their seeming similarity. Achievement orientation is characterized by the need to succeed without regard for other students' performance. In contrast, performance-approach orientation includes a focus on *relative success*, for example, not necessarily getting the highest possible grade but performing better than the rest of the class.

2.3. Factors influencing students' achievement goals

Achievement goals can present themselves as a singular occurrence, but generally, they arise as a sequence of goals. Learners may pursue similar goals with each task of the sequence, or the goals may vary in their orientation as time passing (Fryer & Elliot, 2007). Both stability and change in the achievement goal endorsement can be expected for several reasons. One of the reasons to expect achievement goals to be stable is the assumed hierarchy of achievement motivation (Elliot & Church, 1997). Achievement goals are particular objectives and intentions that stem from individual dispositions such as achievement motives (J. M. Harackiewicz et al., 1998) and character traits (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). Additionally, classroom environment, teachers' qualifications, and assessment methods may also be the factors influencing the stability of the pursued achievement goals

(Urduan & Turner, 2005). However, even after the goals have been decided on, these aspects can still influence the learners' motivation levels (Elliot & Thrash, 2001).

Another reason it is logical to assume that an achievement goal is a rather stable construct is a hypothesis that by setting an achievement goal, people thus program themselves for a certain perception of the tasks associated with achieving the goal, as mentioned earlier (Dweck, 1986). Becoming motivated to succeed before or after adopting a task affects and enhances one's motivational beliefs making a learner more likely to arrive at the conclusions they want to arrive at (Kunda, 1990). To elaborate on this, adopting either mastery-avoidance or performance-avoidance goals may ultimately lead to either the presence or absence of a negative outcome, in other words, successful avoidance of a negative result or failure to avoid it. As neither of these outcomes has the potential to lead to a positive result, adopting avoidance goals is unlikely to shift the learner's perceptions and beliefs and is thus unlikely to motivate them to adopt an approach goal (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). While exploring the professional learning environments, a study by Laine and Gegenfurtner (2013) showed no significant difference between mastery-goal-oriented, performance-approach-goal-oriented, and performance-avoidance-goal-oriented learners in terms of stability and change while testing the effects on training time and length. These results may indicate the stability in the achievement-goal orientation in the context of professional training.

Given all the above, however, there are reasons to believe that achievement goals may be a volatile construct. With achievement goals being a form of self-regulation (Locke & Latham, 1990), it is important to keep in mind that a successful self-regulated learning process requires not only setting the goals but also tracking the work related to reaching the goal and reflecting on the results or the absence of thereof (Zimmerman, 1989). The self-regulatory process of goal pursuit is hypothesized to benefit an individual's well-being by providing a structured routine and keeping an individual engaged and motivated (Diener et al., 1985). However, the very claim that the pursuit of a goal is a conscious and self-reflective process has been and continues to be contested by researchers (Chartrand & Bargh, 2002). Goal setting and pursuit may occur without a learner's awareness and intent (Chartrand & Cheng, 2002), and even non-conscious goal pursuit and hope for a desirable outcome may produce positive psychological effects and increase a learner's intrinsic motivation (Carver & Scheier, 2002).

However, pursuing goals that turned out to be more difficult to achieve than originally assumed due to various reasons (imprecise goal setting, incorrect assessment of

the complexity of the goal, or force majeure factors), or a learner's failure to progress towards their achievement may cause negative psychological effects (Carver & Scheier, 1990).

Learners are generally expected to be able to overcome obstacles and progress in their goal pursuit by increasing their levels of motivation, for example, receiving encouragement; putting in more effort; or finding an alternative way to an achievement goal (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995). When the adopted goal turns out to be overly abstract, it may still be achieved by being decomposed into concrete steps that will help a learner pursue their goal successfully (Powers, 1973). For example, an individual may reach the goal of being an efficient student by reflecting on the qualities and activities generally associated with it and then by taking specific steps to achieve it. Nevertheless, the set goal may prove impossible to reach due to the goal being unattainable from the very beginning of goal setting. Examples of such goals may include the goals that were originally set without considering an individual's capabilities or time restraints (e.g., being prepared for an exam while started revising the night before) or goals that had to be transformed or abandoned due to some unforeseen factors (e.g., an unexpected illness, forced unemployment) or with the time passing (e.g., growing older and not being able to stay in good health). In some cases, revising, changing, or even abandoning one's achievement goals may be considered a reasonable option that may help decrease the levels of psychological distress (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Wrosch et al., 2007).

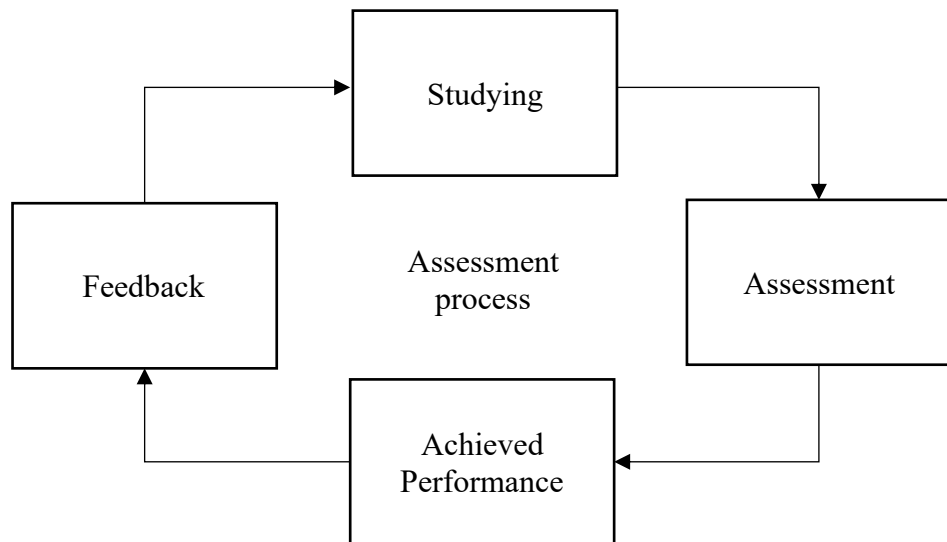


Figure 3. Assessment of learning (Brown et al., 2016)

Various factors may prompt goal revision, even at an early stage of goal pursuit. For example, early performance feedback has the power to shift learners' competence perceptions, thereby affecting the levels of motivation and engagement in the task (Senko

& Harackiewicz, 2005). In the context of formal school education, learning tends to be a fairly consecutive process. It involves students being presented with learning material, acquiring information, and then assessed to attest to academic success or failure and learning needs (Figure 2). When teachers provide feedback, they expect their students to use it actively, reflect on their deficiencies and improve their future performance. However, this remains an unproven assumption (Brown et al., 2016). Students' perception of the teacher's assessment does not always correspond to the teacher's intentions. When delivered in ineffective ways, for example, if most of the evaluation consists of pointing out students' mistakes, feedback may either promote no change or even lead to the student abandoning the task (Annie, 2011). Thereby, students' shifts in their goal orientation can be predicted and depend highly on the types of goals promoted and encouraged in their school and classroom (Anderman et al., 2002, p. 8). A negative and tense atmosphere in the classroom and bullying experienced by a student at school can have a long-term negative effect on their learning motivation, which can be long-lasting and affect their goal-setting processes even after leaving school and entering higher education (Goodboy et al., 2016).

An achievement goal may also be readjusted shortly after it was adopted if the initial information about the task (e.g. how difficult or time-consuming it is) was incomplete or misinterpreted. (Bong, 2005). Another common phenomenon among people who set achievement goals for themselves, especially if these goals are related to work on health, appearance, education, or habits, is discontinuing the goal pursuit at an early stage. A vivid example of achievement goal abandonment shortly after its adoption could be giving up on new year's resolutions (Norcross et al., 1989). To motivate themselves, people assign a certain value to goals and their assumed outcomes, thus making them reference points (Carver & Scheier, 2001; Heath et al., 1999). As a result, by focusing on a goal's instrumentality, an individual's experience while pursuing the goal-oriented activity may be affected negatively and perceived as more challenging and demanding (Fishbach & Choi, 2012). When individuals pursuing a behavioural change do not see the results quickly enough, or when they realize that the changes do not bring them the envisioned happiness, they tend to experience a drastic drop in their level of motivation and find it easier to abandon a pursued goal (Tunajek, 2007).

As mentioned above, if we conceptualize goals as a sequence of events rather than a singular occurrence, we can speculate that learners may choose to pursue the achievement goal partially, with a goal change being a shift in the degree of goal pursuit (Fryer & Elliot,

2007). Furthermore, goal change does not always mean abandoning the achievement goal, as the change may take place in two different ways: goal intensification (increasing or decreasing one's commitment to goal pursuit) and goal switching (shifting commitment from one goal to another) (Senko & Harackiewicz, 2005).

Considering both sides of the argument, it seems feasible to assume that goals, whether intrapersonal or normative, are expected to be stable to some degree but may also be transformed over time (Fryer & Elliot, 2007).

2.4. The role of achievement goals in higher education

The motivation for learning, especially in the school and classroom context, is complex and has to be present for the student to be able to be engaged in learning activities, apply effort and perform academic tasks successfully (Barkur et al., 2013). Students' goals and personal involvement in undertaking a particular course have been argued to provide clearer direction and practices for the self-regulation of learning (Boekaerts, 1992, 1993; Volet & Lawrence, 1988). A highly motivated student is often expected to demonstrate stable progress, better academic performance, a higher level of involvement and the successful use of learning strategies (Boekaerts, 2002). On the contrary, not being motivated enough or at all can lead to adverse consequences. For example, in a survey conducted in 2006 among high school students, among the respondents who dropped out of school, 70% explained their action by the fact that they were not motivated (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Some studies have found a moderate correlation between grades and performance goals, with the students' motivation gradually declining during the school year (Wolters et al., 1996). At the beginning of their studies, or coming after a big break, students tend to be in high morale and higher levels of motivation and productivity. However, as the stress from classes and early morning rises accumulates, as well as with the growing number of tasks and tasks, the level of motivation drops over time. Moreover, despite students' non-self-determined or *controlled* motivation increasing slightly as their studies progress, as students' self-determined or *autonomous* motivation decreases consistently over the school year, the quality of teacher-student interpersonal relationships seems to deteriorate as well (M.-C. Opdenakker et al., 2012). A related phenomenon has also been observed when the quality of teaching decreases over the course of the academic year, and this, in turn, leads to a correlative decrease in the levels of students' motivation (Maulana et al., 2016). This is bound to have a nullifying impact on learners' self-efficacy as it is generally assumed

that patterns of behaviour induced by forms of autonomous motivation have a more positive effect on an individual than those induced by controlled motivation (Hagger et al., 2014; Vasalampi et al., 2018). Furthermore, autonomous motivation has been linked to goal progress, while controlled motivation does not seem to influence an individual's goal progress to any extent (Koestner et al., 2008).

However, some research seems to have provided conflicting results. On the one hand, adopting mastery goals is assumed to be associated with a positive perception of their classroom and academic environment. On the other hand, when mastery-approach and mastery-avoidance goals are adopted simultaneously, students seem to perceive their academic environment more negatively (Cano & Berbén, 2009). The learning environment and the way a student perceives it plays a very important part in one's learning process and is closely connected with an individual's goals and learning motivation (J. Lee et al., 2009; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Spearman & Watt, 2013; Young, 2005). In the context of elementary-level education, research has shown that perceived classroom threat may lead to students' adoption of mastery-avoidance goals and is not likely to lead to the adoption of performance-approach goals, with mastery-approach and performance-approach goals being linked with intrinsic motivation (Sungur & Senler, 2010).

In terms of goal stability and change, longitudinal or long-term, stability of achievement goals and goal orientations in the context of higher education has been explored in relatively few scientific papers. Muis and Edwards (2009) conducted two naturalistic longitudinal studies among university students in introductory educational psychology class, providing evidence for stability and change in achievement goal orientation. In addition, Fryer and Elliot (2007) conducted three longitudinal studies that yielded evidence for stability and change of achievement goals over time. Generally, in the context of higher education, research has shown that goal pursuit seems to remain fairly stable throughout the semester. However, with the approach of the exam season, the levels of intrinsic motivation, mastery goal and performance-approach goal pursuit are expected to decrease significantly. In addition, learners are more likely to exhibit increased performance-avoidance goal pursuit (Senko & Harackiewicz, 2005).

Major testing events such as final exams are presumed to have the highest chance of changing students' perceptions of their learning environment, depending on the means of evaluation, and the way test results are communicated (Ames, 1992). For example, clear communication of the exam format and expectations from students and practising on test items can significantly reduce anxiety levels for both students and teachers (Spratt, 2005).

Another way to create a more positive classroom and promote goal stability may be endorsing students' motivation to maintain their initial positive goals rather than encouraging them to set learning- and task-approach goals (Hazley et al., 2014).

In general, most assessment methods in schools evoke students' extrinsic and not intrinsic motivation. Some assessments, especially high-stakes assessments, endorse explicit performance-approach or other-approach goals for students. In communities where academic success is perceived as the key to future success, such as in South Korea, China or India, academic underachievement is perceived as a failure, leading to depression, anxiety, and rising rates of teen suicide (Im & Jung, 2002; Jayanthi et al., 2015; S. Lee et al., 2010; Moon, 2006; Sun et al., 2012). Other kinds of assessments, particularly those needed for school accountability, endorse other-approach goals for teachers (Taylor et al., 2009), which influences a teacher's motivating style (Jang, 2019).

2.4.1. Students' goals for studying abroad

The decision-making process and students' achievement goal orientations regarding pursuing full-degree mobility, as well as the ways their goals transform, is a fairly new area of research as the findings considering international student motivations are primarily applicable to the students undertaking their degree in either English-speaking developed countries such as the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), or Australia (Bamber, 2014; Counsell, 2011; Freedman, 2010; Kitano, 2020; Klahr & Ratti, 2000; Nakagawa & Payne, 2011; Volet & Lawrence, 1988), less common destinations outside of Europe such as Mexico (Cantwell et al., 2009), China (Gan et al., 2004; Jiani, 2017), Russia (Merenkov & Antonova, 2015; Smolentseva, 2004), or the Middle East/North Africa (Lane-Toomey & Lane, 2013). A significant body of research is dedicated to student mobility within their regional hub (Jon et al., 2014), for example, student mobility within Europe (Camiciottoli, 2010; Mitchell, 2012; Van Mol, 2013; Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014).

Given the seemingly indisputable fact that studying abroad has many positive consequences for learners, the decision to study abroad, even for a shorter exchange period, requires a certain level of motivation and readiness from a student (Chang, 2012). The goals that students consciously set for themselves before making the decision to pursue their studies abroad rather than in their home countries are of scientific interest. Exploring those achievement goals may yield results that could be useful for both educators and the international education community.

Students' motivations and intents for studying abroad have been of research interest during the past decades, with a number of past studies on student mobility surveying and interviewing students as freshmen (Salisbury et al., 2009; Stroud, 2010). The most often applied framework on students' motivations to study abroad is the *push-pull* model, implying that some students are pushed out of their home countries by difficult circumstances and pulled by the opportunities and possibilities in the host country (Altbach, 1998). Another driving factor for student mobility is believed to be limited or no access to higher education in developing countries (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Furthermore, students may pursue a degree abroad and leave their home countries due to the lack of employment opportunities and political turmoil while being attracted by the higher education institution's reputation and programs (Altbach, 2004). However, international students' motivations are not limited by strictly extrinsic factors such as personal, professional, and academic growth (Pope et al., 2014), interest to explore other cultures (Chen, 2007; Li & Bray, 2007), and more opportunities for immigration upon graduation (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) have also been observed as reasons driving student mobility.

The push-pull model and the achievement goal theory can be connected in the context of students studying abroad by considering the factors that motivate students to pursue study abroad options. The push and pull factors that determine a student's motivation to go on mobility may influence the type of goals they set for themselves (Azmat et al., 2013). We can assume that students motivated by pull factors, for example, being admitted to a prestigious university, may be more likely to be performance-goal-oriented and set goals like achieving high grades. In turn, students motivated by push factors, such as a lack of academic opportunities at home, might be more interested in gaining new knowledge. Existing studies have also shown that students' goal orientation and motivation to study abroad differ depending on their home country and the country of their studies. Thus, students who come from developing countries to study in another developing country will pursue the goals of personal enrichment, financial stability and career prospects, while students from a more developed country who decide to study in a developing country are more often driven by the desire to explore a different culture and internalization (Ahn, 2009; Cantwell et al., 2009; Jiani, 2017; Kondakci, 2011; J. J. Lee & Schoole, 2015).

Students' goal orientations and the value they put into their studies abroad cannot be unequivocally formulated for the entire mass of students since they are determined by many external and internal factors (Cantwell et al., 2009).

3 Aim and Research Questions

This research aims to identify the goals international students report to have opted for Finnish educational institutions for full-degree mobility and to establish whether the reported goals transformed in the course of their studying in Finland.

The research questions are:

1. What goals did students have to decide to undertake a full degree in Finnish educational institutions?
2. What kinds of achievement goal orientation profiles can be distinguished among international students studying in higher educational institutions in Finland?
3. How stable are the achievement goal orientation profiles throughout the degree program?

4 Research Methods

4.1. Profile of the Sample and Context

The study involved a total of 22 full-time students (See Appendix B) from different countries pursuing their degrees from three universities in different parts of Finland. Participants included 12 female (55%) and ten male (45%) students representing 15 nations, who ranged from 18 to 47 in age ($M = 26.86$, $SD = 5.8$). Of these students, two were bachelor's students (9%), 19 (86%) were master's students, and one participant was pursuing a PhD (5%). Four of the participants were 1st-year students (18%), 14 were 2nd-year students (64%), and four were recent graduates who graduated approximately six months prior to the date of the interview (18%). Participants took part in the study on a voluntary basis and were informed in written form about the purpose of the study before the interview. A consent form outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and participants' rights was provided to each interviewee and signed by them. The consent forms were not shared with any third parties. Participants were allowed to ask questions and have them answered before signing the consent form. This study was conducted in strict compliance with the guidelines and regulations of the Finnish Advisory Board of Research Integrity

(TENK, 2021). The participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. Ethical issues and personal boundaries were respected at all times. Participation in the interview did not carry any risks for its participants, and the respondents could refuse to participate or stop the interview at any time. All written testimonies and interview results do not contain data that would reveal the participant's identity. For the purpose of anonymity, no personal information will be explored or used in this study.

Higher education in Finland is marketed as free to the applicants. However, there are exceptions. Finnish nationals and students from the EU are indeed exempt from paying tuition fees. In contrast, non-EU students must consider tuition fees and related scholarship options before starting their degree in Finland. The final annual tuition fee depends on the university and the program, ranging from 3,000€ to 18,000€ (*Study in Finland, 2022*). Sixteen of the participants (73%) are or were tuition-fee paying students, with only 3 students from the 16 (18% of all the tuition-fee paying students or 13% of all the participants) having been granted full (100%) scholarships to cover the cost of their tuition fee. 13 (59%) participants were given either partial or no scholarship.

4.2 Data collection

The target population for the present study was higher education students who met the following criteria:

- 1) The student is not a Finnish citizen and did not reside in Finland before the start of their studies.
- 2) The student is doing their full degree in Finland, OR The student has done their full degree in Finland and graduated no longer than six months ago.

For the purpose of this research, the convenience sampling method (Emerson, 2015) was chosen to collect the data. A convenience sampling method is a non-probability data collection method with the sample being taken from people who are easier to contact or arrange interviews with; for example, through posting calls for participants via available social media channels (Saunders et al., 2009). This method was chosen because it allows for conducting research faster, finding the participants for the research more easily, and does not inflict any costs (Henry, 1990). With this research method, the data can be collected among people from the same environment as the researcher (Burke & Christensen, 2012).

The interviews were conducted between November 1st, 2022, and November 23rd, 2022.

In the present study, the priority was given to the face-to-face interview delivery, which involved the direct contact of the researcher asking questions with the respondent providing answers and their face-to-face communication (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Traditionally, the interview involves the direct presence of the interviewer and the respondent in the same room. However, due to the geographical separation, in seven cases, the interviews were conducted by videoconferencing, which proved to be an equally effective way of interview delivery (Carr & Worth, 2001; Haddouk et al., 2013). Usually, the researcher has a way of recording the information received from the respondent, whether it be paper notes or video or audio recordings (Maxwell, 2012). In this case, the interviews were recorded on audio and transcribed.

Interviews can take different forms depending on the questions and how the data is processed. The boundaries between them are flexible. While in a standardized or *structured* interview, the wording of the questions and their sequence are predetermined and the same for all the respondents, an *unstructured* or non-directive interview does not imply a specific list of approved questions (Bailey, 2008). Interview formats can also take various forms, for example, laddering, which aims to establish causal relationships between product attributes, consequences, and consumer values (Miles & Rowe, 2004). For the purposes of this study, the data was collected through semi-structured individual in-depth interviews.

4.2.1. Semi-structured interview

A *semi-structured* interview is the most often used method in research in social sciences and can be conducted either with an individual or in groups (Knott et al., 2022). In this study, the interviews were conducted individually. An interview of this type usually involves a specific list of questions, with additional potential questions arising in the process of dialogue with the respondent (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Since a semi-structured interview combines the features of structured and unstructured interviews, it has the advantages of both methods. Interviewed participants can give more detailed and free answers and ask clarifying questions, which allows them to provide more detailed explanations and give a more accurate and valuable answer for the research (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Newcomer et al., 2015). Despite the advantages of this method, the researcher must prepare before starting the interview to conduct a semi-structured interview. Also, for the results of the study to be accurate, a sufficient number of respondents is needed. Since the questions are open-ended, careful attention must be

paid to the wording of the questions in order to get the answer needed for the study, but at the same time, not to lead the respondent to the answer that the researcher wants to hear (Barriball & While, 1994; Hove & Anda, 2005; R. Opdenakker, 2006; Wood, 1997).

4.2.2. Individual in-depth interview

A one-on-one interview with a respondent allows for a more in-depth look at personal experiences and individual perceptions. A group interview allows for a more desultory, albeit more extended, look at different experiences (Chirban, 1996; Fine et al., 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). In-depth interviewing has been chosen as a research technique for this study because it can provide a more complete narrative of one's experience and thoughts (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

4.3. Data collection procedures

The interviews were conducted according to the participants' schedules and availability. The locations of the interviews were either the university or online. Participants who chose to be interviewed online received the link for participation in the interview in the email. Interview questions were open-ended. The interviews were conducted in English except for one participant, parts of the interview with whom were conducted in Russian since certain grammatically and verbally complex constructions limited the ability of the respondent to clearly express their thought, and therefore it was easier for them to convey their idea to the interviewer in their native language. The interview was later translated into English. Overall, 22 interviews were recorded and transcribed. The total time of the interviews was approximately four and a half hours, with the average time being 12 minutes.

The master list of the participant information was kept separate from the data collected in the interviews. During the interviews and recording on audio, the names of the participants were not mentioned at any point. The names of the universities were omitted during the transcription of the interview. The students' responses were edited by the researcher for filler words and interruptions only. The responses were not edited further for coding.

4.4. Measures

Interview Protocol

For the aim of the current research, the interview questionnaire was built based on the items from The Study Abroad Goals Scale (SAGS) (Kitsantas, 2004). Developed on

the basis of Opper, Teichler & Carlson's (1990) research, this scale consists of 15 questions regarding students' goals designed to explore students' reasons for studying abroad. Another relevant questionnaire is the Motivation to Study Abroad (MSA) Instrument, developed to explore students' motivation to go on mobility (Anderson & Lawton, 2015b) from which items were adopted for the needs of current research. While having the abovementioned scales as a reference, the interview protocol to explore the students' goals to study abroad was adapted and modified for the needs of current research from the interview questions used in one doctoral dissertation and one master thesis:

- 1) Understanding the study abroad experience of university students (Gemignani, 2009)
- 2) A qualitative approach to understanding the study abroad experience (Cuss, 2012)

Other relevant research on conducting in-depth interviews (Boyce & Neale, 2006), student long-term mobility (Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Jiani, 2017; Yasmin et al., 2022) and immigration (Parker et al., 2022) was used in order to refine the protocol.

In order to improve instrument validity, several steps were implemented. First, a pre-test was used to assess the interview's reliability and procedures. Then, a pilot test was conducted to evaluate construct validity and reliability.

During the pre-test, conducted with an individual volunteer not subsequently participating in the study itself, interview questions were assessed and tested for clarity and ease of understanding. Based on the feedback, several modifications were made to the wording of the interview questions to ensure that the participants understood what the question was about.

The pilot test was conducted with a different volunteering party not participating in the study. During the pilot test, the reliability of the interview questions was tested. The pilot test allowed the interviewer to see to which extent the interview questions measured what they originally intended to measure, and necessary modifications were made.

All the interviewees were asked the same questions in the same order. Additional clarifying questions were asked to obtain more information depending on the participant's answer.

Overall, the interview protocol consists of 11 items (see Appendix B).

4.4 Data Analysis

For current research purposes, qualitative analysis was used to explore the international students' goals and identify the Achievement Goal Orientation Profiles of the sample.

More than 40 years ago, Van Maaren (1979, p. 520) gave a definitive description of qualitative research methods as “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretative techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world”. By being more flexible than quantitative research (Silverman, 2016), qualitative research allows for a richer and deeper exploration of the experiences and perspectives of a study participant, which is particularly important in understanding the complex nature of international students' goals which is highly dependant on the context and circumstances. Qualitative research also allows putting the participant at the centre of the analysis and getting insights into their experiences and understanding of the world through another individual's prism of perception (Austin & Sutton, 2014), therefore allowing the students taking part in this study to express their ideas in their own words.

The interviews were transcribed and coded using Qualitative Data Analysis Software NVivo and the literature supporting its use (Edwards-Jones, 2014). The content analysis method was chosen to analyse the semi-structured interviews in this study. Content analysis was chosen as it would enable the researcher to identify and categorize themes and patterns in the data related to the goals of international students, allowing for a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Content analysis also provides researchers with a replicable and evident method of data analysis (Krippendorff, 2018), allowing for findings to be examined and verified. Furthermore, content analysis can be used to analyze large amounts of textual data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), making it suitable for analyzing data from individual in-depth interviews. Students' responses on what goals they set for themselves before arriving in Finland and starting their degree and whether their goals have changed were coded, quantified, and then analysed.

Achievement goal orientations

To account for the many different motivations underlying international students' goals for studying abroad, achievement goal orientation profiles were defined based on the students' reported goals and the context in which they were presented. This process consisted of identifying recurring patterns in the reported goals and determining the

motives behind them that drive students to pursue those goals. While it might look obvious and logical to single out individual goals and assign them to a particular orientation profile, we must examine the underlying motives and circumstances around each reported goal. For instance, the goal of “Learning the language” may be motivated by the love of learning and striving for personal improvement, which aligns with a Learning Orientation. However, depending on the context, the same goal may very well be pursued to stand out from other students and have an advantage over other job-seekers, which aligns with a Performance-approach orientation. In the current study, the context in which each goal is presented was taken into account, allowing us to gain a more detailed understanding of the different motivations that drive students to pursue a full degree abroad.

Even though learners’ achievement goal orientations tend to fluctuate in different learning situations, this study does not explore the students’ goals in relation to a specific subject, course, or another learning event. Thus, achievement goal orientations are conceptualized within the context of this study as students’ general orientations towards the degree. For all the participants, studying for a degree in a Finnish educational institution goes far beyond the educational process, and the goals set by students apply directly to their education (=learning) and to life.

To determine students’ goal orientation profiles, predetermined codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) were used to systematize students’ transcribed responses to the open-ended questions about their goals.

Reliability and Validity

In terms of reliability, this study employed semi-structured in-depth interviews as its data collection method, ensuring consistency and standardization across interviews. Every participant was asked an identical set of base questions, with additional questions emerging depending on the respondent’s answer. All interviews were conducted by the same researcher, fluent in both English and Russian (for the needs of one of the participants). It is important to remember that since no second coder was involved in the data analysis process, inter-coder reliability measures could not be employed during this research. As a result, we cannot rule out the potential for researcher bias and subjectivity in the interpretation of the data completely. Nonetheless, the researcher took steps to minimize these limitations by engaging in self-reflection and reflexivity throughout the research process and taking breaks between rounds of coding.

Regarding validity, this study utilized a convenience sampling strategy with elements of purposive sampling, targeting international students who were available to the researcher but also met specific criteria, thereby increasing the validity of the findings by reducing the potential for confounding variables. The study employed qualitative analysis, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the research questions and enhances the validity of the findings by capturing the complexity of students' experiences and perspectives. However, some limitations in terms of validity may arise due to the small sample size, which may not be representative of the broader population of international students in Finnish higher education institutions. Additionally, the findings of this study are specific to the context of Finnish higher education institutions and may not be generalizable to other educational settings.

5 Findings

5.1. What goals did students have to decide to undertake a full degree in Finnish educational institutions?

Among the participants in the study, there were no respondents who set themselves a single goal before starting their degree. On average, each participant had at least two or three short-term and long-term goals. Students noted that even if one or two of the goals remained the same, the others were changing. In the current study, the majority (21 of out 22 participants, or 95%) reported finding employment as their primary goal for undertaking a degree in Finland. Of 22 participants, 13 mentioned that moving to Finland specifically was their goal but for different reasons. Some hoped that the focus placed on technology and the value put on education in Finland would help them find employment in related fields. The promise of higher salaries and better work-life balance prospects attracted others. Overall, 13 distinct goals for full-degree mobility were mentioned by the participants.

The respondents had various reasons for choosing Finland, a certain city, or a certain university. 13 of the participants wanted to move to Finland specifically as their goal. However, most of them did not have a preference in which city or university they would like to study as long as it was in Finland. Several students mentioned that their decision to move to Finland was partly due to the good reputation of the level of education in Finnish universities:

“Because of the quality of university, I would say. I’ve heard some good reputation about Finnish universities, and the overall general education is supposed to be quite good.”

“I was looking for it and Finland has some kind of good quality education. That's what, like, Internet says. So that's why I went to look for, like, Finnish, their higher education.”

Three of the respondents chose to pursue full-degree mobility after completing their one-semester exchange previously, with two of them returning to the same university they did their exchange in:

“I participated in exchange program 10 years ago in Finland. That's when I fell in love with this country.”

“I wanted to actually receive a degree from, like, Europe, not in my home country, and I had my exchange here earlier, so I am familiar with academia here in Finland. So that's why I was, like, it is a little bit, like, safe and familiar environment to me to continue my higher education.”

However, five students wanted to choose a particular city or university in Finland that would correspond to their specific goal. One of the students highlights the emphasis placed on the computer science degrees in University A:

“Also, the computer science and engineering program in Finland, specifically here is really good because it allows you to do cross-disciplines”.

One student highlights the importance of the geographical position of the city they chose to pursue their degree due to the language learning goals:

“I also speak Russian as a second language, and I wanted to be an area where I know I'd have the opportunity to still use Russian. And because of its proximity to the Russian border, I knew that would be an option.”

For nine respondents, the goal of getting an education in a certain field or pursuing a particular subject was more important than moving to a certain country. Eight students overall expressed having had the desire to study in Europe. One student said:

“I mean, I’m not actually aiming to study in Finland specifically because my first need is to find the perfect degree or program that will be suitable for my knowledge requirement.”

Several students expressed the desire to pursue a particular subject and ended up going to Finland due to the scholarship or a project requirement:

“The Fulbright Scholarship was very important to me, so Fulbright sends people around the world, and they pay for their tuition and give them a stipend to compensate for the increased cost of living. So, the only supply management master’s that was available was in Finland. So that’s why I chose Finland.”

“Finland wasn’t the... like the target? It was my... mostly the secondary. It was mostly a result of me finding a project, so I didn’t specifically go for Finland.”

Furthermore, one respondent would have preferred to be educated in their home country but chose Finland because it was their only chance to pursue a degree in a field they wanted:

“Well, I would’ve honestly preferred my home country, but I couldn’t do that because the system is very fixed, and they don’t accept irrelevant bachelors for a master’s program. Only in Finland they found that flexibility because my bachelor’s was engineering-related, and I wanted to do master education-related, and I didn’t find that anywhere except in Finland. I’ve also tried other countries than my home country, but they’d all tell me to start a new bachelor’s; it’s not possible to join a master’s”.

Content analysis was used to discover the goals the students set for themselves before arriving in Finland and commencing their studies (Table 1).

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Rank
Find employment	In Finland	21	1
	In Europe		
	In the home country		
Improve knowledge and skills		17	2
Obtain the degree		16	3
Explore the culture		11	4
Learn from experts in the field		11	4
Meet new friends		10	5
Challenge myself		9	6

Improve living conditions	8	7
Stand out from peers	7	8
Stay in Finland after graduation	6	9
Continue my education	6	9
Learn the language	3	10
Travel	2	11

Table 1. Students' Goals to Pursue a Degree in Finland (N=22)

The theme that emerged repeatedly was finding employment. 21 out of 22 students reported that the main goal was to find a job before starting their degree, and for some of them, even before applying. In turn, this goal has been divided into four main categories. Find a job in Finland, Europe, a student's home country, or wherever possible. Six respondents were dedicated to working in Finland specifically for various reasons. One student mentioned that there are more opportunities in Finland:

“Finland has more opportunities in my field, in the tech field.”

Two students said they wanted to have experience working in a Finnish company:

“I'm trying very hard to secure a position with a company because I do want to understand what it's like to work at a Finnish company.”

“[The goal is] to experience the workforce in Finland”.

Two students did not limit their goal to find their future employment in Finland in particular but wanted to explore the opportunities within Europe:

“I would like to work in Europe for a couple of years, not necessarily Finland.”

Two of the participants knew from the very beginning of their studies that they would be going back to their home country whether to continue their career that was put on hold for the sake of doing the degree or explore a bigger city in their home country:

“I was interested in how teachers use technologies in the classrooms, how does school management manage to provide better choices for technologies while they have limited financial funds, and so from the description of this master's program it appeared to me that I might be able to find answers and get well prepared to solve such questions when I return.”

“And ideally, I would also like to be in [a bigger city in my home country], because I think there's a lot of opportunities there compared to where I'm from”.

Other interviewees that reported wanting to pursue a career upon graduation either did not have a preference for the place of possible work and wanted to get a job "wherever possible" or did not mention the geography of their potential employment.

The second most reported goal was to improve one's knowledge in skills. Although the self-development goal and “learning new skills and improving my knowledge” was reported by 17 out of 22 students, the context, namely “learning new skills *for what?*” was expressed differently. For some respondents, the goal to learn new things and expand their knowledge was motivated solely by the practical application of the acquired skills. For example, several students tied this goal to their primary one, which is to find a (better) job:

“I want to learn your new stuff that I can apply later in life, in a job that I am willing to do.”

Answering the question, “What drives you to learn new things in your studies?” one student answered:

“I think, whether or not it's something that would be useful in a future software engineering position. So, it's usefulness to my future employment.”

One student stated that their goal to learn as much as possible from their degree was driven by the possibility of applying the knowledge and skills in raising their son:

“Yeah, I would like to know how to implement my knowledge for upbringing my child.”

However, many of those set to improve their skillset were not driven solely by a promise of better job prospects and wanted to learn new things because of their personal interest or to “grow as a person”:

“I want to be the best possible version of myself”.

“I think just I just really like learning about learning and how that works, and I think what, like, what drives me most is that I've learned so much about myself and my

own learning processes during this program, and I really like that and that helps me to, like, regulate my motivation.”

“My short-term goal would be just, you know, learn about this field, about education and explore the field.”

More than half of all the respondents, 16 students, mentioned that their goal is to complete their studies and obtain the document proving their qualifications. Answering the question of what goals they set for themselves for mobility, they responded with:

“[My goal is] to be able to graduate, first of all, doing my degree”.

“The degree, higher education degree from Finland is high value back in my home country as well”.

“It's just I think the degree will be worth... good, yeah just a good degree”.

Most students emphasized that the grades they received during their studies didn't matter to them as much as the fact of receiving the degree certificate itself:

“I think I became less strict on myself about what grades I was receiving and just kind of focusing more on completing the degree”.

“[I focus on] getting the degree in a sense, of course, is getting the paper just finishing, finishing it”.

Two of the respondents did mention wanting to receive good grades.

“[My goal is] to finish my master's degree as soon as possible with good grades”.

The categories tied fourth were ”To learn from experts in the field” and ”Explore the culture”. 50% of the respondents, 11 students, talked about their goal to learn from the best in the field they chose to pursue and take in the best practices:

“Learn as much as possible about the practical side of settings in the educational places in Finland and experts in the industry... meet experts in the industry to, to ask them questions”.

“[I wanted to be] learning from where the best learning practices are because Finland is famous for its educational system”.

As well as the educational and career goals, the goal to explore the culture, experience “the Finnish way”, and integrate was the goal that repeatedly emerged with 11 students mentioning they set a goal to enrich their cultural knowledge. Students mentioned they wanted to “broaden their horizons” and leave their comfort zone, the environment they spent their whole lives in, and that they wanted to “switch the context”. Even though not all of them said they were interested in Finnish culture specifically (some were infatuated by the Nordic culture in general, and some wanted just a different experience different from what they were used to), students mentioned wanting to see the Northern Lights, experience the Finnish working life, the Scandinavian lifestyle. One student mentioned that being in an international environment among other students will also open up possibilities for him to explore other cultures, and not only the Finnish one:

“I got friends from Nigeria, from Bangladesh, from Kuwait. That’s really interesting because I never seen how people live there and it’s really interesting because they are totally different in their traditions and in some maybe experience but they are very similar in everything also”.

Consequently, the next emerged goal, ranked 5th, was “To meet new friends”. Ten students talked about their goals to be more sociable, to find friends from all over the world, network, and participate in social activities. Students wanted to “meet people from Finland” and “meet new international students”.

“My goal [is] of, you know, to explore, to learn new things, like, making friends”.

“My goal is to be very involved with, like, ESN, to be very involved with, like, other students”.

Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is an international student organisation that covers 42 countries both within the Erasmus+ program and outside Europe. Its goal is to support and provide guidance to exchange and international students within their local and national section, develop student exchange experience, and introduce the internationals closer to the host country’s culture by organising events, providing information, and working closely with the higher education institution (*Erasmus Student Network*, n.d.). In Finland, there are 16 ESN sections (*ESN Finland*, n.d.). Of the 22 interview participants, ten were or are currently active members of their local ESN section.

Nine students aimed to challenge themselves by stepping out of their comfort zone and trying something new, becoming more independent.

“I just compete with myself, it's very cliché saying, but like but, yeah, I just finished all the time like if I get better than my previous self is... it's already good for me”.

One student reported having to change their program after arriving in Finland and realizing it was not challenging enough for them:

“The first thing was that this master's was too easy for me. I don't like to be arrogant or sound arrogant, but it was just the way that I have learned quite a lot in my bachelor's already and I can see a big overlapping from my bachelor's to my master's and therefore the master's was quite easy, that the programs I had yet. And I have looked into the curriculum again and I have identified quite a lot of courses which are similar to the ones I already had in my bachelor's and therefore this was just an idea of switching”.

With nine students wanting to compete with themselves, seven reported that their goal was to stand out from their peers, making it the 8th-ranked goal.

“[I was occupied by] submitting some outstanding essays or being, like, getting better grades than... than average”.

Three students reported the competition as their main motivator to study harder:

“It's really important. You always compare yourself to somebody else and usually, it's your mates because they are near and they're in a similar position or age. So, it's really important for me. [...] It's important to be better because you are always part of some society and then you better it usually mean the next level of your life. Like, after school it's university, after university it's work. After work, I don't know, maybe it's family, maybe it's business”.

“The American culture is very competitive and even in high school, you're always on a ranking system. So, when you're in high school, everybody's given a number and your number changes basically every semester to tell you where you were ranked in your school. Umm, so I would say that it's very important for me”.

“When I see my friends work, if they are better than me, like, I, for the next homework, next assignment, I am even, like, trying to perform even better”.

Eight students set the goal of improving their living conditions by moving to Finland or obtaining a Finnish degree, and six students were set to stay in Finland after graduation, even before arriving in the country.

Furthermore, six students aimed to continue their studies by pursuing a master's degree (one student) or a PhD (five students).

Other less consistent goals were to "Learn the language" which three students mentioned, and the goal of "Traveling" emerged in two of the interviews.

Building on the previous categorization, we can delve deeper into each goal and categorize further based on Niemivirta's (2002) work. For example, finding employment could be seen as a performance-approach goal, while improving one's knowledge and skills could be seen as a learning goal. The goal of obtaining the degree and receiving a certificate could also be seen as a performance-approach goal. Learning from the experts in the field would be a learning orientation.

However, if we take a closer look at the context of every goal mentioned, straightforward categorization may be the wrong way to approach the goals. Finding a job can be either seen as an achievement orientation or a performance-approach orientation, depending on the individual's motivations and priorities. If the job-seeker is motivated by a desire to secure employment and meet their personal standards and needs, regardless of how they compare to others, it is an achievement orientation. However, suppose this individual is focused on finding a job that pays more or offers better benefits than those of their friends or peers. In that case, they are demonstrating a performance-approach orientation. In this case, the focus is on outperforming others and achieving relative success rather than meeting their own needs and standards.

Every goal could turn out to be not what it seems at first look as soon as the surrounding context has been recognized. The goal ranked sixth, "Challenge myself" may very well belong to two orientations simultaneously. Suppose a person enjoys a challenge and likes being surrounded by ambitious and hardworking people who inspire and push them to put in more effort. In that case, it is a combination of achievement orientation and performance-approach orientation. The individual is motivated by a desire to succeed and achieve high standards (achievement orientation). They also enjoy the challenge of outperforming others and striving for relative success (performance-approach orientation).

The focus is on both personal improvement and growth as well as relative success compared to others.

5.2. What kinds of achievement goal orientation profiles can be distinguished among international students studying in higher educational institutions in Finland?

The findings of the current study show that international students studying in higher educational institutions in Finland and those students who have recently graduated display a diverse range of achievement goal orientations (see Table 2). The results suggest that half of the respondents (11 out of 22, or 50%) have a Learning Orientation Goal Profile, which indicates a focus on personal growth and improvement of one's skills and knowledge. Despite mentioning other types of goals in the interviews, this suggests that the students with the Learning Orientation Goal Profile are motivated to acquire new knowledge and develop themselves rather than achieve a particular outcome or a certain grade. The second largest group of students (8 out of 22, or 36%) had an Achievement Orientation Goal Profile, which entails a focus on achieving high standards and success. The study also revealed a smaller group of students (3 out of 22, or 9%) with a dominating Performance-avoidance Goal Orientation profile, characterized by a fear of failure and a desire to avoid underperforming compared to others. Lastly, only one student had a performance-approach Goal Orientation profile which suggests a desire to achieve relative success and higher grades than their peers. Despite having a prevailing Goal Orientation profile, all students also reported other goals.

Category	Frequency	Rank
Learning Orientation	11	1
Achievement Orientation	8	2
Performance-avoidance Orientation	2	3
Performance-approach Orientation	1	4
Avoidance Orientation	0	5

Table 2. Students' Goal Orientation profiles

As far as the frequency of the orientation profiles reported is concerned (see Table 3), all the participants (22 out of 22, or 100%) exhibited having both Learning and Achievement goals. Even though there were no students who could be characterized as having an Avoidance Goal Orientation profile characterized by complete avoidance of challenges, finding the path of the least resistance, or lack of motivation to engage in learning situations, those goals were mentioned at least once or repeatedly in the majority (15 out of 22, or 68%) of the interviews, ranking it third most mentioned type of goals.

Performance-approach goals were reported in 14 out of 22, or 63% of the interviews, ranking them fourth. Lastly, Performance-avoidance goals emerged at least once in half (11 out of 22, or 50%) of the interviews, making it the least reported goal.

Category	Frequency	Rank
Learning Orientation	22	1
Achievement Orientation	22	1
Avoidance Orientation	15	2
Performance-approach Orientation	14	3
Performance-avoidance Orientation	11	4

Table 3. Students' Goal Orientation Occurrences in the Interviews

After two rounds of coding with five pre-existing codes, 233 occurrences were coded. Learning Orientation goals emerged 90 times overall in all 22 interviews, making it the most reported type of goal. The second most reported type of goal was the Achievement Orientation goal, with them being reported 75 times. Performance-approach goals were mentioned 28 times, and Performance-avoidance and Avoidance goals were mentioned 20 times each, thus making them the least popular type of goals mentioned by international students (See table 4).

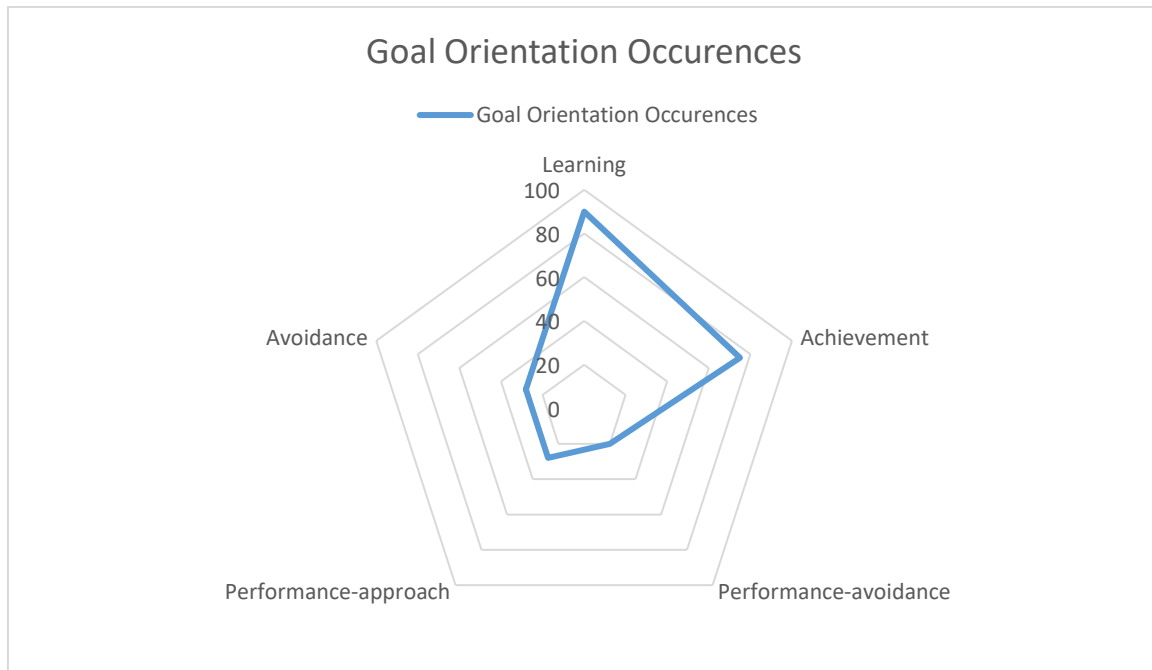


Table 4. Overall Occurrences of Goal Orientations Emerged in Interviews

5.3. How stable are the achievement goal orientation profiles throughout the degree program?

Overall, 15 students reported some change in their goals (See Table 5). For several, the changes were in small details, for example, shifting their approach to the task. For others, the change in the previously set goals was quite dramatic. For example, one student was aiming to finish their degree and move to a different country but changed their mind after exploring more local culture, the living and working conditions in Finland, and the university education:

“Okay, so, initially, I was thinking about graduating as soon as possible and then maybe moving somewhere else. But then, honestly, I’ve seen a lot of benefits of staying here”.

Another student reported wanting to continue their studies or find a temporary job upon completing their master’s degree:

“Finland has greatly altered my goals, like, now I want to have a couple of years of experience abroad and I don't necessarily want to get into my career right away”.

For different reasons, six students reported the necessity to give up on their set goals. Four students mentioned their disappointment with the program they had chosen, with one deciding to switch to a different major early in their degree. One respondent said they had to abandon the goal of pursuing their PhD due to the higher education in Finland is not what they had imagined:

“[My goals] changed because I was like, yeah, maybe I can just go for the PhD as well? But now I am like, no, I cannot do this anymore, I don't think I can do this anymore in Finland, and the number one influence was just in general how things work here”.

Learning Finnish was mentioned by several students as a difficult language to learn. Even with those three students who adopted the goal of learning the language, all of them reported they decided to either give up or postpone it:

“Well, it’s hard to learn Finnish, so... I wouldn’t say that that goal changed, but the timeline changed”.

“Actually, I had a goal, but now I don't have it because when we started survival Finnish, it seems like OK, yeah, I can do it. It's not that hard. But then soon after finishing

survival Finnish, I started to look for more Finnish materials to study. But Finnish is really hard. So, then I gave up like, no, I'm going to do it later after my graduation. Maybe”.

“Well, I'm definitely not learning the language, so that goal has fallen away”.

In contrast to the unexpected changes expressed by more than half of the respondents, 11 students also reported no major change in their goals. It was expected that four of the respondents who were 1st-year students to report little or no change in their goals as it has only been three months since the beginning of their degree in Finland. However, only one of them reported no change in their plans, with the other three reporting major changes and some achieved or well-progressed goals. On the contrary, several students who were only months away from graduation and some recent graduates reported little progress and no significant change in their goals.

Four students mentioned that studying in Finland was an eye-opening experience that made them re-evaluate many things both within and outside their studies and set new achievement goals for themselves. While for most students, this experience meant positive change; two interviewees reported being hurt by the reality of living here after having set too ambitious goals and having high expectations, which made them re-adjust their plans.

Category	Frequency	Rank
Transformed	15	1
Did not change	11	2
Were abandoned	6	3
Were achieved	5	4
Are progressing	5	4
New goals were set	4	5

Table 5. Students' goals' stability and change

A recurring theme that resurfaced in interviews with several respondents was not so much change as awareness of one's goals. Four students independently said that studying in Finland made them “see their goals more clearly”:

“I would say I'm at the moment much more clear on my goals. As I said in the beginning, I didn't come here with quite clear.... clear goals, like, they were quite general, and I would say now they are much... much better articulated and clear”.

“I think [my goals] just became more clear in a sense, that it's just like... Okay, so in a way it became more clear as in... the general things got more clear. Like, okay, I

want to learn more about this or learn more about that, and this is like... just more the general things”.

“...at this point, I think I have a more clear vision because I could have achieved some part of my plan out of my dream. Now I have a more clear vision of, like, what I might want to have from life in the future”.

More than half of all the respondents, 12 students, reported peer influence as an important factor in their academic, professional, and everyday interactions in Finland. For some, being in an international community meant finding new friends, exploring new cultures, and learning about different parts of the world. Others appreciated being a part of the heterogeneous learning community and being exposed to different cultures, ways of thinking, and approaches to problem-solving, which helped broaden their perspective and helped them develop new skills. Five students mentioned enjoying studying alongside hardworking and determined people because it inspired and motivated them.

Another important factor that has a major role in shaping a student’s achievement goal orientation, well-being and outlook on life that is worth mentioning is the student’s financial situation. Out of 22 respondents, 19 (86%), in one way or another, mentioned their financial struggle. Five respondents chose Finland because it would be cheaper for them to study here due to either the higher cost of education in their home countries or the higher cost of living. For the other 14, obtaining a higher degree in Finland meant sacrificing their careers (three respondents), paying high tuition fees due to the collapsing economy in their home countries (two respondents), having to work alongside their studies (two respondents), and depending on the parents/family money (nine respondents). The word that kept emerging was “investment”.

6 Discussion

6.1. Summary of the Study

This study explored the goals that international students set to pursue a full degree mobility in Finland among selected students from different countries either studying or having recently graduated from three universities in different parts of Finland. The study was designed to find out what goals students reported and what achievement goal orientation profiles could be distinguished, as well as establish the goals’ stability and change.

Overall, 22 students were interviewed, chosen through a combination of convenience and purposive sampling after having met the necessary criteria: 1) The student is not a Finnish citizen and did not reside in Finland before the start of their studies, and 2) The student is doing their full degree in Finland, OR The student has done their full degree in Finland and graduated no longer than six months ago. Each interview was recorded and later transcribed for the purpose of qualitative research. Content analysis was used to determine the emerging themes with the frequencies presented in table format. Direct participant quotes were used to support and illustrate the emerging themes.

6.2. Discussion of the Findings

In some ways, the findings of this research are surprising. In others, they are expected. Goals, dreams, and motivations are popular topics of discussion among international students in a non-formal context. International higher education students often share their ideas about what they wanted from the experience of studying abroad and what prompted them to pursue bachelor's, master's, or the PhD degree in Finland rather than in their home countries. Those could be informal discussions within small friend groups, well-being events and talking circles, or more formal feedback sessions organized by the higher education institutions' academic affairs services. Each interview respondent has a unique background, experience, and story. Behind each goal orientation profile, there is a lifetime worth of causes and effects which influenced an individual's goal-setting modus operandi.

The existing research on students' motivations to pursue a degree abroad suggests that a student's decision to undertake a full degree abroad is multifaceted and consists of many factors, both contextual, such as the international situation, state of affairs at home country, and specific institution, and individual, like gender, age, and competencies (Daly, 2011). After having read through every interview, a similar conclusion can be made. There is no single goal driving an individual to pursue their degree abroad. However, several most reported and therefore most important goals emerged during the interviews.

The most frequently mentioned goal, which in one form or another emerged in 21 interviews out of 22, thus making it the highest priority for most students in this study, was the goal of finding employment. This fact is of some interest in comparison, for example, with the results of studies and surveys conducted among exchange students. According to the latest data published in the ESNsurvey - 14th Edition conducted among more than 10,000 Erasmus students from different countries, motivation to "enhance future career prospects abroad" was relevant for 47.74% of respondents (Telesca et al., 2022). We can

speculate that the goals of those students who go abroad to complete their full degree have a narrower and more professional focus. This may also be due, for example, to the higher average age of the students surveyed, as well as to the home country of the surveyed, and could be a topic of further research.

The second most reported goal was to improve one's knowledge and skills, which aligns with the results by Kitsantas (2004), where "becoming proficient in the subject matter" falls under the three most reported goal categories for students to study abroad. This finding also aligns with other research on students' motivation to pursue education abroad; for example, in the study conducted by Anderson and Lawton (2015a) on 352 students, World Enlightenment and Personal Growth were the highest-rated motives for studying abroad.

However, although the fifth-ranked goal, "to meet new friends," aligns with the third goal by Kitsantas, "to socialize", the participants of the current study did not mention the goals of enhancing their cross-cultural skills, while mentioning the goal to explore a new culture. To Erasmus+ for study students going on a short-term (one or two semesters) exchange, the goal of meeting new friends turned out to be the second most reported one, with more than three-fourths of respondents mentioning a desire to find friends, and about a third wanting to build up a personal and professional network (Telesca et al., 2022).

Other important goals mentioned by students were to obtain a degree, to learn from experts in the field, to improve the living conditions, to challenge themselves, to stand out from their peers, to stay in Finland after graduation, and to continue their education.

An interesting and surprising result is that only three respondents had or still have the goal of learning the language. This is at odds with existing studies done on, for example, exchange students, where the goal of learning a foreign language consistently ranks among the top five most popular goals. This is true both for older studies; for example, a study by Krzaklewska and Krupnik (2008) showed that for 90% of students, learning a foreign language was one of the primary goals for their exchange studies, but also for recent research, for example, the most recent, 14th Edition of ESNsurvey (Telesca et al., 2022) showed that 74,42% of Erasmus+ for study students reported having a goal to learn or improve a foreign language. This opens up much room for discussion and speculation, as well as room for future research on why students coming to study in Finland are highly motivated to find employment but are not motivated to learn the language.

Even though having a particular goal does not necessarily determine one's achievement goal orientation profile, each individual's goals can be seen as building blocks contributing to their overall profile. Half of the respondents have a Learning Orientation Goal Profile, which suggests that international students studying in higher education institutions in Finland are mostly motivated by personal growth and development and new knowledge acquisition. This aligns with the results from several studies unravelling the prevalence of Learning Orientation goals among higher education students. Elliot and McGregor (1999) suggest that university students with a Learning Orientation are more likely to take part in those activities that promote their personal growth and development by seeking feedback and challenging tasks. Other studies, for example, by Vansteenkiste et al.(2004) and Senko et al.(2011) suggest that students with a learning (mastery) orientation exhibit higher levels of engagement and overall well-being compared with students with a performance-approach or performance-avoidance orientation. These studies prove that a significant part of university students tend to have a learning (or mastery goal) orientation, which is generally associated with more positive academic outcomes.

The result of 36% of interviewed students having an Achievement Goal Orientation indicates that high standards and success play an important role in international students' lives.

Having determined that only two students of the study have the Performance-avoidance and one student has a Performance-approach goal orientation profile, a conclusion can be made that only a small part of the total number of students are mostly driven by the search for relative success and competitive achievement which aligns with previous studies.

No students were assigned to have an Avoidance goal orientation profile indicating that largely international students pursuing full-degree mobility in Finland set their learning and career goals by striving for knowledge, improving their skills and achieving high standards rather than having a lack of motivation to succeed and choosing the path of the least resistance.

In terms of goals' stability and change, the results indicate that this is a multifaceted and dynamic process. A majority of the participants reported having at least some change to their goals, which suggests that the set goals are not necessarily fixed but can evolve and shift over time in response to many factors, such as, for example, mental

state, environment, and life events. Five students reported having achieved some of their goals by the moment the interviews took place, with five students reporting having made sufficient progress with achieving their goals. The results additionally highlight the importance of perseverance and effort in goal pursuit.

Half of the respondents reported maintaining the same goals set for themselves before starting their degree in Finland, suggesting that goals can be a fairly stable construct. However, not all goals have proven to be equally stable. Over a quarter of the participants reported having to abandon their goals, proving that plans could be interrupted and goals can prove to be unattainable due to various reasons. A minority of the participants reported having set new goals for themselves, highlighting the dynamic nature of goal setting.

The results align with the previous research on goals' stability and change (Fryer & Elliot, 2007) and highlight the importance of continuous self-reflection and self-regulation, as well as show the value of goal-setting in one's motivation regulation.

6.3. Implications

This study provides insights into the goal-setting process for adult learners pursuing a full degree in higher education institutions in Finland. From the collected data, students described their goals before starting their degree and moving to Finland, as well as their expectations and struggles. In this section, the implications of this study are presented.

It is important to keep in mind that each international student decides to pursue a degree in Finland while having a unique background, skillset, predisposition, expectations, cultural characteristics, and mental state. Apart from those, other differences between international students may influence their achievement goal orientation and the goal-setting process. It is unreasonable to expect the policymakers to be able to attend to all the needs and differences. However, a more present awareness of the goals that students set for their higher education and their personal backgrounds may accommodate the goals international students set and promote a better learning experience. Overall, the implications of the following study include the following categories:

1. *Contribution to the literature.* The present study contributes to the existing body of research on the goals and experiences of international students in Finland. It provides a foundation for further research in the field of achievement goals. Additionally, based on the results, it can be recommended that further consideration is given to the

importance of differentiating between achievement and performance-approach orientations. Furthermore, the research could be extended by exploring the impact of different achievement goal orientations on student academic performance, engagement, and well-being.

2. *Higher education institutions.* The findings of the current study could be useful for higher education institutions (universities and universities of applied sciences, as well as other adult learning organisations) in Finland in terms of understanding the motivations, expectations and goals of students coming from different parts of the world. This understanding can become the foundation for developing strategies to support students' academic, professional, and personal goals. For example, based on the findings that students have a clear goal of finding employment as a result of receiving a higher education degree, institutions are advised to pay special attention to the applicability of the taught skills that students can acquire during their studies, which can be of great value to them in their search for a potential job. Also, in the strategic planning of the curriculum, it is recommended to determine the opportunities for internships with options for subsequent employment after a student's graduation.

3. *Policymakers.* The current study could also be of interest to policymakers in Finland, as it may provide insights into the reasons why international students choose to study in Finland and the outcomes they hope to achieve. This information could inform policies related to international education, academic affairs, and student mobility. The findings of the current study indicate that a significant part of international students choosing Finnish educational institutions for their Bachelor's, Master's degree or a PhD express a strong interest in being employed upon graduation, strive to learn from experts in the field and find Finland to be an attractive country for the purposes of education. An increase in international applicant numbers to study at universities and other educational institutions in Finland may prove to be an effective means to solve the lack of working specialists in particular professional areas and attract more international talent.

4. *International students.* The results of the current study could also be beneficial for international students as well as those considering pursuing a higher degree in Finland, as understanding the goals and aspirations of their peers may help them set their own goals and plan for their future studies.

6.4. Limitations

Several limitations are important to consider when interpreting the results of the current study. The small number of participants ($N=22$), with most of the participants

belonging to the same age group (the twenties), could be considered a considerable limitation of the study. Qualitative research captures only the descriptive participant data, which should not be applied to a greater population. An absolute majority of the interviewees were undertaking or have recently graduated with their master's degree, with only two participants of the study undertaking a bachelor's degree and one participant doing their PhD. Furthermore, with 16 of the participants (73%) being tuition-fee-paying students, their goals and aspirations are expected to be affected by the financial struggle and the necessity to have sufficient funds to be able to pay the tuition fees and living costs in Finland and are expected to be more practical and these students are expected to be more extrinsically motivated. The participants included students from only three universities in Finland. With the majority of the participants (15 participants or 68%) coming from university A, it might not be possible to generalize the results to other universities. The participants' field of study may also be another limitation of the current study, with ten students (45%) pursuing a degree in Education and seven participants (31%) being Computer Science students.

The limitations stated above, such as the relatively small sample size and homogeneity of participants (similar age, field of study, and university), have been managed by focusing on the needs of the current study. The purpose of the study was not to generalize to the large population but to provide a detailed understanding of the participants' experiences and motives. Thereby, for the purposes of the qualitative study, the small sample size was considered sufficient. Additional measures have been taken to maintain the reliability of the study. Even though the participants were selected through convenience sampling and were chosen based on availability to the researcher, the selection process for respondents was purposeful to ensure that the participants met the selected criteria and were representative of the population of interest.

It is also possible that, as a qualitative study, the interpretation of the results may be influenced by the researcher and participants' subjectivity. The results of the current study might not apply to other contexts. It is impossible to verify whether the participants answered the interview questions honestly and whether they remembered all the relevant information during the recording of the interviews.

The limitations of this study have been acknowledged and kept in mind while interpreting the findings. However, the study results provide valuable insight into the participants' experiences and motivations despite its limitations.

7 Conclusion

7.1. Conclusion

The reported goals to pursue a degree in Finland include personal growth, career development, cultural enrichment, access to high-quality education, and other goals. The achievement goal orientation profiles of international students in Finnish higher education institutions show variety, with some students exhibiting a mastery-oriented approach and others exhibiting a performance-oriented approach. The stability of achievement goal orientation profiles among international students in Finnish higher educational institutions varies, with some students maintaining a consistent orientation throughout their degree program. In contrast, others experience changes in their approach to goals and achievement. Some participants felt hopeful and inspired to take up new learning, professional and personal goals, whereas others felt depressed and disappointed and abandoned their initially set goals.

7.2. Further Research

Based on the findings of the current study, several areas were determined that could be explored in further research on the goals that international students set when undertaking a full degree in Finland:

1. *Career outcomes.* More research could be conducted on the career outcomes of international students after they complete a degree abroad. The goal stability and the achievement rate could show the achievable goal for international graduates to find employment in Finland. Further research could be conducted on how international students' goals and expectations compare to those of domestic students.

2. *Support systems.* Exploring and analysing the types of support systems (academic, social, financial) that international students have access to and how these may impact their ability to achieve their goals could be beneficial to distinguish inequalities and reasons for the institution's dropout rates, the levels of students' well-being, and reasons for recent graduates to leave Finland.

3. *Persistence and retention.* Studies on the persistence and retention rates of international students and how they compare to domestic students could provide important information on the challenges and successes of this population.

4. *Impact of cultural differences.* Examining how cultural differences between the student's home and host country may impact their goals and experiences could provide valuable insights.

5. *Motivations for pursuing a degree abroad.* Understanding the factors that drive international students to pursue a full degree in Finland can help Finnish universities and policymakers better understand and support the needs of this population. It would be interesting to study how the motivations to study abroad could differ depending on age, country of origin, field, and other factors.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Consent form for the current study

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

MA Thesis in Educational Sciences. Title: Exploring International Students' Goals for Full Degree Mobility in Finnish Higher Education Institutions

I understand that participation in the study is voluntary and that I can stop participating at any time, without giving a reason. There will be no negative consequences for me if I withdraw. The data collected about me up to the point of withdrawal may still be used in the study.

I have been adequately informed about the study and the processing of my personal data. I have received the information sheet about the study, as well as the privacy notice. I have also had the opportunity to ask the researchers further questions.

I consent to audio being recorded of me for research purposes, but it has been processed in such a way that I cannot be identified.

Yes No

I consent to be contacted at a later stage for possible further studies (follow-up or equivalent to this study).

Yes No

I confirm that I will not participate in face-to-face data collection if I have flu symptoms, fever, am recovering from illness, or am feeling otherwise unwell.

Yes

I understand the information that I have received and agree to participate in this study.

Yes

By signing this form, I accept that data will be collected from me as described in the information sheet, my data can be used in accordance with the procedures outlined in the privacy notice.

I give my consent to the sections specified above by ticking the "yes" boxes.

If I do not wish to participate in a particular section, I have the right to refuse by ticking the "no" box.

However, I still agree to participate in the study otherwise.

Confirmation

Contact details:

Appendix B – Participants information

Student	Degree	Year	University
1	Master's	2 nd year	A

2	Master's	2 nd year	A
3	Master's	2 nd year	A
4	Master's	2 nd year	A
5	Master's	2 nd year	A
6	Master's	2 nd year	A
7	Master's	2 nd year	A
8	Bachelor's	2 nd year	B
9	Master's	2 nd year	A
10	Master's	2 nd year	B
11	Bachelor's	1 st year	B
12	Master's	1 st year	B
13	Master's	1 st year	B
14	Master's	1 st year	A
15	Master's	recent graduate	A
16	PhD	2 nd year	C
17	Master's	recent graduate	A
18	Master's	2 nd year	C
19	Master's	2 nd year	A
20	Master's	2 nd year	A
21	Master's	recent graduate	A
22	Master's	recent graduate	A

Appendix C – Interview Protocol

Introduction: Thank you for participating in the interview. The purpose of the study is to explore the goals that international students set for themselves for pursuing full-degree mobility in Finland. At this point, I would like to ask your permission to record the interview so that it could be transcribed later. No personal information will be used in the study, and your responses will be kept strongly confidential and anonymous.

1. General questions: How old are you? What is your sex? Where are you from? What kind of degree are you doing?
2. Why did you choose to pursue this discipline?
3. How far are you into your degree? / How long ago did you graduate?
4. Why did you decide to study in a higher education institution in Finland rather than in your home country?
5. What goals (both short-term and long-term) did you set for yourself before starting your degree in Finland?
6. Did you discuss your decision to study abroad with family/friends/colleagues/etc.? How did it influence your decision process?
7. How important was the material side of the issue (scholarship, salary, your socio-economic background, etc.) for you in the process of choosing an educational program?
8. In your studies, what drives you to learn new things?
9. How important is it for you to perform better than your peers/colleagues? Why?
10. How do you think your study in Finland affected the (type of) goals that you set for yourself?
11. How have your goals changed since the beginning of your studies? What do you think influenced this change?

Appendix D – Codebook for Students’ Goals for Mobility

Code	Description of Code	Example
Challenge myself	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to step outside a student’s comfort zone and strive for personal improvement and test one’s abilities.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of looking for new experiences, taking up challenges and overcoming difficulties.</p>	<p>“I think I learn quite something when I am challenged.”</p>
Continue my education	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to continue studying above their current level.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of obtaining additional degrees, taking additional courses after graduation, or taking part in other learning situations.</p>	<p>“I am also considering continuing for PhD.”</p>
Explore the culture	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to experience new cultures and traditions.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of learning about foreign cultures, trying new food, learning about foreign traditions and customs, and taking part in other cultural activities to broaden one’s horizons.</p>	<p>“The second goal was to experience the culture fully, so I wanted to experience something that was a lot different than my home country.”</p>
Find employment	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to secure full-time employment after or during graduation.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of looking for vacant positions, preparing for job interviews, considering different careers, networking, or engaging in other activities aimed at finding a job.</p>	<p>“I’m trying very hard to secure a position with a company because I do want to understand what it’s like to work at a Finnish company.”</p>

<p>Improve knowledge and skills</p>	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to improve one’s existing skills or obtain new knowledge.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of taking courses, reading books and articles, studying, or engaging in other learning activities for the sake of gaining new skills and knowledge.</p>	<p>“My goal to explore and learn new things.”</p>
<p>Improve living conditions</p>	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to improve the quality of one’s day-to-day life and environment.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of improving one’s financial situation, surroundings, health, or well-being.</p>	<p>“The quality of living during my studies would be higher or better during like... if I studied in Finland rather I would study somewhere else.”</p>
<p>Learn from experts in the field</p>	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to get knowledge from those who have extensive experience or expertise in a particular professional field.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of attending workshops or lectures given by experts, reading books and articles written by renowned specialists in the field, or engaging in other learning activities aimed at gaining knowledge from those who have expertise.</p>	<p>“I want to learn as much as possible about practical side about settings in the educational places in Finland and experts in the industry... meet experts in the industry to, to ask them questions.”</p>
<p>Learn the language</p>	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to acquire fluency in a foreign language.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of attending language classes, enrolling in language courses, self-studying, practising receptive and productive language skills with native speakers, or engaging in other learning situations aimed at becoming more proficient in a foreign language.</p>	<p>“I don't know if that counts, but now I'm studying Finnish.”</p>

Meet new friends	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intentions to form new connections and build relationships with other people.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of getting involved in societies and clubs, attending events, or engaging in other activities aimed at socializing.</p>	<p>“My goal of, you know, to explore, to learn new things, like, making friends.”</p>
Obtain the degree	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to successfully complete the program and receive a degree certificate. This code includes mentions of completing coursework and engaging in other activities aimed at fulfilling the requirements for a degree.</p>	<p>“...getting the degree in a sense, of course, is getting the paper, just finishing, finishing it.”</p>
Stand out from peers	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to differentiate oneself from others in a positive way.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of receiving good grades, partaking in challenging projects, or engaging in other activities that would allow the individual to set themselves apart from others.</p>	<p>“Like if my friends like when I see my friends work, if they are better than me, like, I for the next homework, next assignment I am even, like, trying to perform even better.”</p>
Stay in Finland after graduation	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to remain in Finland after completing the degree.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of looking for employment, ways to extend the residency, or engaging in other activities that would allow the individual to remain in Finland upon completing their studies.</p>	<p>“I want to live in Finland after my studies.”</p>
Travel	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to travel within or outside the country of their studies.</p>	<p>“I get to experience so much more travelling.”</p>

This code includes mentions of visiting new places, going on trips, or engaging in other activities that would allow the individual to travel.

Appendix E – Codebook for Goal Orientation Profiles

Code	Description of Code	Example
Learning Orientation	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to develop one’s knowledge and skills.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of wanting to improve, gain new knowledge or achieve mastery in a particular field.</p>	<p>“I like to focus on my goal which is, like, acquiring knowledge.”</p>
Achievement Orientation	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to achieve high standards and success without regards of others.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of doing the best they can, completing a task successfully, or achieve a particular level of skill.</p>	<p>“It’s important for me to feel, like, yeah, I’m doing the best I can.”</p>
Performance-avoidance Orientation	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to avoid failure and negative evaluation of one’s knowledge or skills.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of fear of failure and desire to be on the same level as others rather than striving for high levels of achievement.</p>	<p>“Yeah, sure, sure. Because, like, if I cannot perform well, and if there are some students who had, like, great backgrounds, even though I really study and work a lot, I cannot reach their level. So, I feel bad about it.”</p>
Performance-approach Orientation	<p>This code refers to statements that express a desire or intention to achieve high standards and success in comparison to other people.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of acquiring high grades or outperforming others.</p>	<p>“It’s important to be better because you are always part of some society and then you better it usually mean the next level of your life.”</p>

Avoidance Orientation	<p>This code refers to statements that express a focus to avoid failure and negative outcomes, as well as a lack of motivation to achieve high standards.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of choosing the easiest path, lack of motivation to complete the tasks or depending on others.</p>	<p>“But I also knew that I want to stay in Europe because it's just easier in a lot of ways and more affordable.”</p>
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Appendix F – Codebook for Goals Stability and Change

Code	Description of Code	Example
Transformed	<p>This code refers to statements that express a change in one’s goals, plans, or priorities.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of changing the direction, rethinking what’s important for the student, or a change in one’s motivation.</p>	<p>“Finland has greatly altered my goals like now I want to have a couple of years of experience abroad and I don’t necessarily want to get into my career right away.”</p>
Did not change	<p>This code refers to statements that express a lack of change in one’s goals, plans, or priorities.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of remaining on the same path as before or consistent motivation.</p>	<p>“Actually, my goals are not changing that much.”</p>
Were abandoned	<p>This code refers to statements that indicate that a participant had to give up on one or more of their initially set goals.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of changes in motivation or priorities and goals that are no longer pursued.</p>	<p>“Oh yeah, at first, I also have the goal of like becoming teacher. But after coming to Finland, I like I’m found out that I can’t be a teacher in school and because I don’t have the ITE degree.”</p>
Were achieved	<p>This code refers to statements that indicate that a participant successfully accomplished one or more of their initially set goals.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of goals that have been accomplished and plans that came to life.</p>	<p>“I think I’ve achieved a lot of my short-term goals.”</p>

Are progressing	<p>This code refers to statements that indicate that a participant is making progress toward one or more of their initially set goals.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of goals that are now in progress and mentions of participants feeling closer to achieving the set goals.</p>	<p>“I feel like I'm doing pretty good in school, no complaints there. So that goal is doing well.”</p>
New goals were set	<p>This code refers to statements that indicate that a participant has set new goals, made new plans, and established new priorities.</p> <p>This code includes mentions of goals that have been established in addition to or instead of the previously set goals.</p>	<p>“Here I have a new goal that I didn't have in America.”</p>
