The Value of Hiring Study Abroad Alumni in Business Related Positions in Light of the Experience’s Influence on Soft Skills.

Szarvady Jázon
BA in Business and Management
2018

Thesis Supervisor: Meisel Sándor
I would like to specially thank Professor Sándor Meisel for his invaluable insights and guidance during the writing of this Thesis and Isabella Herbert for showing me light in the maze of the English language.

I’d like to dedicate this Paper to all the exchange students who helped me with their responses and the many of whom personally helped me get inspired. I would also specially thank the staff and faculty of the Corvinus University of Budapest, the Kedge Business School of Bordeaux and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology for enabling me to participate in all the experiences that led me to write this Thesis.
Table of Contents

1 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1

2 Literature review and theoretical background .................................................................................. 2
   2.1 The valuable employee .................................................................................................................. 2
   2.2 Previous research on employability skills .................................................................................... 5
   2.3 Soft skills under the umbrella of employability .......................................................................... 6
   2.4 The effects of study abroad on creativity and problem solving skills ....................................... 9
   2.5 Study abroad experiences’ effects on employability through soft skills ................................. 10
   2.6 Negative impacts ......................................................................................................................... 13
   2.7 Implications and limitations of previous research ....................................................................... 14

3 Methodology ......................................................................................................................................... 15
   3.1 Research background .................................................................................................................. 15
   3.2 Research approach ..................................................................................................................... 16
   3.3 The questionnaire ......................................................................................................................... 17
   3.4 The interviews ............................................................................................................................ 19

4 Analysis of the primary research ...................................................................................................... 20
   4.1 The Questionnaire ....................................................................................................................... 20
      4.1.1 Review of the impact on employability skills ...................................................................... 20
      4.1.2 Influencing factors ................................................................................................................ 27
      4.1.3 Negative aspects of studying abroad .................................................................................... 28
   4.2 The Interviews ............................................................................................................................. 30

5 Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 33

References ............................................................................................................................................. 36

Appendix .................................................................................................................................................. 37
   1. Interview Guidelines ....................................................................................................................... 37
   2. Transcribed interviews ................................................................................................................... 39
      Interview A ..................................................................................................................................... 39
      Interview B ................................................................................................................................... 43
   3. Online survey ................................................................................................................................. 48
1 Introduction

According to UNESCO, the number of students participating in a study abroad experience in 2017 is almost 5 million globally (UNESCO, 2018). The number has been steadily rising by 5% annually on average in the past 20 years, creating an ever-growing niche on the labor market (UNESCO, 2018). Less internationalized companies still fail to recognize the potential in the ‘mobile-alumni’, which contributes to the fact that participation rates are still relatively low. Participation rates in the world’s largest study abroad program, the European Union’s Erasmus Programme are still only at 1% compared to the total student population of Europe (European Commission, 2017, p. 19.).

The aim of this thesis work is to research the implications of study abroad experiences’ on hiring business graduates. Specifically, how the experiences can alter the participants’ skillset which may be valued by employers. Let it be about language skills, communication skills, intercultural skills, budgeting skills, teamwork or problem-solving skills, once employers better recognize the advantages of hiring study abroad alumni and start requiring their applicants to possess international experience, the participation rates of such programs will likely increase. More students gaining such international experience, could also ultimately lead to a greater economic prosperity on a global scale through the alumni’s skills’ added value in their workplace. In today’s highly competitive and globalized World, only those companies can really strive, that have workforce which is familiar with such an international environment. Moreover, previous research shows, that 80% of success in one’s career is considered to be related to personal attributes and soft skills in contrast to hard, technical skills (Mann, 1918).

For the purpose of this paper, a study abroad experience is defined as the participation in a university program in a country, other than the country where the participant has been brought up and where the sole purpose of moving to the given foreign country was the participation in this university program. Soft skills are defined as “interpersonal qualities, also known as people skills, and personal attributes that one possesses” (Robles, 2012), such as communication, inter-personal skills, teamwork and flexibility. (Robles, 2012). For the purpose of this work ‘business student’ or ‘business graduate’ will be defined as any university student participating in a program related to Business, Management, Finance,
Accounting, or Marketing.

To present a proper theoretical frame to this research paper, the following hypotheses are formulated and tested:

H1: Study abroad experience is a signifier of generally more advanced soft skills of applicants for a business-related job.

H2: Study abroad experience of new-hire business graduates has an added value to the employing company.

Firstly, a thorough literature review is necessary to gain a further understanding of research already completed within this field of study. Such research already conducted on value-adding effects can be compared to other studies which discuss the valuable nature of soft skills sought after by employers. The literature review will also give a theoretical base that can be applied to, and further researched regarding the field of Business.

In order to validate and compare the outcome of previous studies to the field of Business studies, business students will be asked to answer a carefully written questionnaire about their experience studying abroad. With a series of quantitative and qualitative questions, it is possible to shed light on the key areas of skills that are impacted by the experience. Through this questionnaire it will be also possible to find out in detail, how the Erasmus students perceive their study abroad in terms of their professional and personal development. To have a perspective from the employers’ side, professionals will be asked, in the frame of interviews, about their opinion on the most important skills needed in their teams. They will also be asked about their views on fresh graduates working for them and how they see a foreign study experience can add value to their performance. In the end a conclusion will be drawn and recommendations made.

2 Literature review and theoretical background

2.1 The valuable employee

‘People are our most valuable asset.’ This very old saying seem to be losing it’s support among top level managers. Academics also agree that workforce should not be described as a sheer resource anymore as they are a much more integral part of a company (Ferraro,
If not a resource though, it is very hard to assign an exact dollar value to characteristics and skills that make a valuable employee. As such, to date there has been no research conducted, that could provide universal guidelines to assess the value of all the skills and attributes of a present or future employee. To respect the complexity of employee value therefore, first a general picture about today’s world’s economy and companies is needed in order to see where and how employees can add real value to both.

Robert Reich, the former Secretary of Labor for Bill Clinton, recognizes three categories of future jobs in his influential 1991 book, ‘The Work of Nations’. The first one is routine-production services. This category entails jobs that are relatively repetitive and require little creativity in their nature. These jobs are traditional back-office jobs where strict steps should be followed and the key skills needed are loyalty, precision and capacity to take direction (Reich, 1991). Companies, whose main added value in their value chain comes from such repetitive tasks are in danger of substitution according to Reich and their long-term success is questionable. The second category is in-person-services which are less relevant for business graduates and the third one is symbolic analytic services according to the author. Workers in the third category are the ones who use their merit, creativity and experience to analyze, convert and communicate ‘symbols’ in the form of data. The category includes management consultants, top-level managers, strategists (Reich, 1991). People in this category rely much on their experience in the World, they are independent by nature but can cooperate well with a diversity of colleagues and customers. Good interpersonal skills paired with experience can help the systematic analytic and his company succeed. The author predicts that future economic value will be mainly produced by the last category in developed countries. To be a good symbolic analytic however, one’s education cannot be restricted to the passing over of theories and single-minded viewpoints, it is essential that students get exposed to as many ways of thinking as possible (Reich, 1991).

The book, written 25 years ago provides an accurate reflection regarding public sentiment on globalization and technological advancements which soon would become reality at the end of the century. Routine-production jobs faced limited obstacles as they were easily transferred to countries with cheaper labor. On the other hand, more creative, multidimensional jobs remained in developed countries. Today, the most successful companies in developed countries are the ones that can attract talent and that can solve the problems of tomorrow. This is supported by additional research which emphasizes the

One element of the theory where Reich might have been wrong in his 1991 prediction of today, is that jobs nowadays are not as black and white as he has imagined them to be. There are varying degree of repetitiveness and creativity involved in almost all kinds of work. To apply this theory to business graduates and companies hiring them, we can draw the conclusion, that the most promising applicants for jobs are not necessarily the ones who can execute their precise jobs today, but the ones who can also shape and develop their work of tomorrow.

To illustrate the value of creativity, leadership and merit in today’s World, one can just take a glance at Time magazine’s list of the globe’s ten richest people (Calfas, 2018). Six of those men are self-made billionaires, who had modest family-backgrounds and earned their fortune through their own merit. It is not only the top-management of companies that benefit from these skills however. For instance, in back offices it can be very beneficial as well, if one can see beyond his or her tasks and realize the points where processes can be made more efficient and effective. Real value is rarely added, in today’s World by the mastering of one single domain. One doesn’t just have to be good at sharpening swords or painting landscapes, as it has been the case for centuries, but a real value-adding employee must also be a good team-worker, a good presenter and communicator as well. Another study supporting this idea shed light on the differences between the more developed west and the less wealthy east of Europe in this regard. The study found that graduates from the west regard personality and other soft skills more valuable on the job-market, whereas their eastern peers still regard technical skills, field of study and computer skills significantly more important (Bracht-Engel-Janson-Over-Schomburg-Teichler, 2006). The basic conclusion of the book is that communication, listening-skills, teamwork, creativity and the ability to discover are the tools that will bring companies, economies and ultimately societies forward and the equipment of the future’s workforce with these tools is essential for success (Reich, 1991).

The book gives a good basis for understanding the value of certain skills that can be categorized as ‘soft skills’ in today’s competitive economic environment. On the other hand, it only provides a very abstract theory on skills that are required for today’s jobs, thus a more practical approach is needed to compliment Reich’s theory.
2.2 Previous research on employability skills

To define a practical and measurable link between the desirability of a graduate by employers and the skills and knowledge he or she possesses, a technical category is needed. For this purpose, the term employability will be used which is defined as:

“a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.”

(Yorke, 2006)

Yorke’s definition is very broad at defining the kinds of attributes that contribute to employability, but it is clear that they are not limited to technical skills and include a variety of personal dimensions such as ‘understanding’ and ‘personal attributes’ as well, which can be described as soft skills. This is supported by additional research on the field which emphasizes the importance of soft skills such as communication, self-management and social skills, besides field-specific technical and computer skills (Maclean-Ordonez, 2007). One other study even suggests that employers are more concerned for such general skills as team-work, communication and critical-thinking, than field-specific hard skills (Harvey-Moon-Geall, 1997). Another scholar gives a wider scope about the problem and explains this phenomenon in light of the current economic and social era. He argues that the economic environment of past decades used to require work-force that had the necessary skills for the execution of their work only at the very time of their hiring, while today’s fast paced innovation-era created a demand for employees with more timeless skills (Maclean-Ordonez, 2007). Indeed, decades ago, before the rapid digitalization and globalization of our world, everything, including jobs, have been less complex and more universal. A blacksmith in Hungary is likely to have had the very same tasks, and the same skills required as a blacksmith in the United Kingdom or as in China. Today however, as the world becomes more complex and interdependent, jobs will follow that same pattern and become increasingly specific.

To illustrate the complexity and specificity of the average job today, one just has to think about how parents struggle explaining to their kids, what their job at the office really entails. One can imagine the tremendous amount of technical skills a job-seeker would
need to be equipped with in order to fit in any of these positions, therefore more general skills and adaptability are becoming increasingly important.

There is a trend that jobs are becoming less well defined by the field of work and more by the company they are being done for. As an example, companies don’t simply need ‘accountants’ any longer, they require a workforce which understands their own applications, databases and other related systems. They need someone who can handle a variety of tasks in a range of situations as computers are taking over traditional accounting functions such as doing calculations, keeping track of incomes and expenses, sending receipts and receiving bills. Maclean et al. illustrates this with the number of degrees’ universities offer nowadays and he adds that it is virtually impossible to have a curriculum at these institutions that can fully prepare the students for their workplace four years ahead of time. This is because the skillset required might change profoundly during the period of their education (Maclean-Ordonez, 2007). Additionally, employers therefore seek more ‘trainable’ and a more universal workforce. Maclean et al. provides the example of Proctor and Gamble and Goldman Sachs. These companies continuously hire applicants with seemingly irrelevant academic backgrounds but with advanced universal skills such as good communication, teamwork, trainability and flexibility (Maclean-Ordonez, 2007).

The previous definition also provides a link between these characteristics and added value for the company and its stakeholders. Yorke doesn’t just focus on the sheer relationship between recruiter and applicant, but rather includes other stakeholders, such as the workforce of the company, society and the economy as the benefactors of the success of graduates through their employability (Yorke, 2006). This idea is also supported by other studies, that indeed state that there is a direct link between economic development and university students’ performance (Srivstava-Tyagi, 2017). It is clear therefore, that the relevance of the issue of employability is very complex. It is the economic interest of educational organizations and governments to develop future workers and their employability skills. In order to succeed, programs which include the enhancements of the above mentioned skills are extremely crucial.

### 2.3 Soft skills under the umbrella of employability

Within the previous section it has been concluded that soft skills are just as integral part of employability and the value-package of a business graduate as field-specific hard skills. In
the following section, the relation between the two skill sets will be examined and their contributions to overall employability, thus to the value-package of soon-to-be-employee graduates.

There has been numerous research on the characteristics related to employability in the case of fresh graduates. One of the most thorough ones has been assigned by the European Commission and published in 2013 (Humbug-Velden-Verhagen, 2013). The study presents almost a thousand European employers’ points of views on recruiting fresh graduates. According to the study, professional expertise and interpersonal skills are the two most relevant skills graduates need to possess in order to help the company succeed. Professional expertise includes traditional hard skills including the theoretical knowledge acquired at university about the given field, while interpersonal skills can be characterized as traditional soft skills, including communication and teamwork.

Professional expertise, the most important attribute, is closely related to how close the graduate’s field of study is to the actual job he is applying for. As many professions, such as engineering, law and medicine are very specific in nature, it is understandable that the average employer requires expertise within that given field. It is noted, that employers find it costly and uneconomical if they have to train their new hires too extensively due to the lack of their field-specific expertise (Humbug-Velden-Verhagen, 2013). Companies realize that professional expertise is of no worth without the ability to communicate effectively within work-teams. This is also indicated by the fact, that interpersonal skills are the second most important skill according to Humbug et al. The authors also establish that employers are more likely to penalize an applicant more if he lacks ‘at least average’ interpersonal skills than if he lacked ‘at least average’ professional expertise. The explanation of this phenomenon is the increasing level of interaction with clients in most jobs and companies regarding interpersonal skills very hard to train, compared to professional expertise (Humbug-Velden-Verhagen, 2013).

Another noteworthy finding of the study is that employers tend to prefer students with an international orientation, however it is rather a factor that can decide between two candidates, all other things being equal. They also attribute value to students who spent parts of their studies abroad, when compared to students who spent their entire university period abroad or in their home countries (Humbug-Velden-Verhagen, 2013), likely because of the demanding nature of adapting to the foreign environment students go
through during their studies abroad. Employers were found to take study abroad as a sign of one’s willingness to explore and a sense of independence, besides being beneficial for inter-cultural and language skills.

As the European Commission’s research aims to cover the whole range of professional positions available to university graduates of all scientific fields, its findings can just partially be translated to the field of business-related jobs. One field specific research publication is from GMAC, the joint admission organization of 220 leading business schools. In their research ‘Corporate recruiters survey report 2017’ the organization sheds light on the hiring tendencies of companies recruiting graduates who hold business related Masters diplomas. To further clarify the jobs that employers are wanting to fill with business graduates, the survey asked employers. The top five positions were marketing, business development, finance data analytics and consultancy services (GMAC, 2017). Employers were later asked to designate an importance-score to 25 skills in 5 categories, according to these skills perceived importance when hiring graduates for mid-level jobs (see Figure 1.).

As seen in Figure 1, fort out of the top five skills are communication related making this skill group the most important according to hiring managers. Communication is closely followed by teamwork, another important soft skill. Technical skills take the third position (Figure 1.). The difference between GMAC’s and Humbug’s survey can be explained by the difference between business-related positions and other professional fields. Also, as GMAC’s research concentrated on mid-level positions, it is possible that respondents

![Figure 1.: Skills Companies Seek in Graduate Business School Hires, Based on a Standardized Analysis of Skill Proficiency (GMAC, 2017, p. 49.)](image-url)
considered technical skills as a given of any candidate applying for the positions, which could make these skills appear less important. One thing is clear though, employers do value employees with good soft skills (GMAC, 2017) (Humbug-Velden-Verhagen, 2013). Other research indicates too, that the demand for such soft skills has been on the rise in past centuries, as globalization became reality (MacDermott-Ortiz, 2017). One study, that distinguished between the different fields of universities found, that business graduates consider their jobs far less demanding in field-specific knowledge compared to students from other fields study (Bracht et al., 2006). According to this study, business students regarded problem-solving, initiative, computer skills, decisiveness and accuracy far more important skills, than theoretical knowledge.

2.4 The effects of study abroad on creativity and problem solving skills

As we saw in the first part of the the study, skills like creativity and problem-solving are predicted to be invaluable to companies’ long-term success (Reich, 1991). In the following it has been validated, that companies, business related especially, seek soft skills in their future hires, as they regard these skills highly necessary in their companies’ positions. It is necessary therefore to discover the effects of study abroad on such soft skills in order to validate H1.

Secondary research exists on the effect of study abroad experiences and many of these pay special attention to the advancement of the participants’ soft skills. One study of the Singaporean Management University focuses on multicultural exposure’s effects on the very skill of creativity and problem solving (Leung-Maddux-Galinsky-Chiu, 2008). The research involved undergraduate European and American students being exposed to a presentation comparing Chinese and American cultures. Students were then asked to write a children’s story specifically for kids of a third culture. The results were then compared to a group of students who haven’t been exposed to any presentations and to students who only saw a presentation on Chinese culture without comparisons. The results clearly indicated that the first group of students, exposed to both cultures, wrote more creatively and more culturally-attentive stories than the rest. What is even more interesting is that the difference were noticeable even seven days after the experiment took place.

This is in line with other research, which concluded, that MBA students with study or work experience abroad had developed more advanced problem-solving skills and had
developed more unconventional solutions to problems than their non-mobile peers (Cho-Morris, 2015) (Maddux-Gallinsky, 2009). The research involved business graduates having to solve a variety of problems requiring them to think ‘outside of the box’. The research found that students with multicultural exposure were 20% more creative at solving problems than others (Maddux-Gallinsky, 2009, p. 1053.). In one experiment students were asked to take part in a business negotiation task, where the only possible solution was a very unconventional one. The research discovered that students who spent time abroad other than travelling were significantly more likely to arrive to the solution than those who haven’t had such experience. The results remained consistent even when they were adjusted to variables as personality traits (Maddux-Gallinsky, 2009). The authors found that the link between creativity and study abroad was the level of adaption students had to acclimatize to new cultures and ways of thinking while living abroad. (Maddux-Gallinsky, 2009). This seems to prove the point made in Humbug et al.’s research, which suggested that previous adaption to the unconventional situation of a study abroad period can be viewed as a positive attribute within employability (Humbug-Velden-Verhagen, 2013).

These findings suggest that study-abroad has a positive effect on the skills mentioned in Robert Reich’s book, as the skills, that can lead to long lasting success for companies (Reich, 2009). Additionally, other critical soft skills of GMAC’s study, like oral and written communication, adaptability and teamwork are found to be positively influenced by studying abroad as well, according to the European Commission’s ‘Erasmus impact study’ from 2014 (Brandenburg-Berghoff-Taboadela-Gajowniczek-Gehlke-Hachmeister-Leichsenring-Petrova-Vancea, 2014) and the German VALERA (Value of Erasmus) study (Bracht et al., 2006). The Erasmus impact study and the VALERA study have both found that students returning from their Erasmus study periods went through positive personality changes and moreover, had 80% more advanced soft skills on average (Brandenburg et al., 2014, p. 89., 108.). Examples of such skills inter-cultural understanding, oral and written communication skills, adaptability, team working and decision-making skills.

### 2.5 Study abroad experiences’ effects on employability through soft skills

In order to test H2, the hypothesis that study abroad adds value to the employing company, employability, the indicator of employer needs, has to be connected with study abroad
experiences. The Erasmus Impact study has extensively dealt with this issue as well (Brandenburg et al., 2014). Although this study wasn’t exclusive to business students either, the field of Business and Management took up 20% of the 56,000 students and 25% of the 18,000 alumni who participated in the survey.

Table 1. Erasmus Impact Study (Brandenburg et al., 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Actual Improvement (%)</th>
<th>Expected Improvement (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the host country’s culture, society and economy</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to adapt and act in new situations</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work with people from other cultures</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign language skills</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-cultural competencies</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and writing skills</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of European citizenship, Europe-wide perspective</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and organisational skills</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making skills</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector/field specific skills</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team working skills</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative potential and entrepreneurial skills</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical and problem-solving skills</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Depicts the findings of the Erasmus Impact study in regards of mobile students’ self-declared actual and expected improvements in terms of various skills. Even though the study wasn’t focusing on employability skills and doesn’t provide scientific validation to its findings, other than the students declaration of their own perceptions, there is a trend emerging within the paper. This points in the direction, that a study abroad experience, such as the Erasmus Programme, significantly enhances the participant’s soft skillset.

Figure 2’s ‘knowledge of foreign culture’s’ can be directly connected to Figure 1’s tenth most important employability skill ‘cross-cultural sensitivity’ and other important skills appear on the top of Figure 2, that are related to Figure 1’s important team work skills. Such are ‘adaptability’ that is agreed to be improved by Erasmus by over 90% of the alumni, but ‘ability to work with people from different cultures’, and ‘teamwork’ are also connected to the second most important employability skill as well. The same questions, whose results are shown in Figure 2, were asked from the faculty of the universities too and results have shown that over 90% of professors agree too, that the Erasmus alumni has improved in these team work related skills (Brandenburg et al., 2014, p. 107.). The
VALERA study has found similar results when researching the previously mentioned skills. Additionally they also discovered, that the most important-employability skill of business graduates, communication (GMAC, 2014), has been very significantly improved by foreign study periods. This skill, also appears on Figure 2, above the 90% line.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competences at the time of graduation (1)</th>
<th>Job requirements about 2-3 years later (2)</th>
<th>Difference (1 - 2) (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign language proficiency</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical competences</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving ability</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication skill</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning, co-ordinating and organising</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field-specific theoretical knowledge</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power of concentration</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting personally involved</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy, attention to detail</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty, integrity</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness, decisiveness, persistence</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field-specific knowledge of methods</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 from the VALERA study depicts how business graduates valued their particular competencies at the time of their graduation compared to perceived job requirements two to three years later, when the survey had been conducted. Figure 3 provides a perspective on how mobile students’ skillset compares to actual job requirements. It must be realized, that the level of these competencies after graduation have likely already been influenced by the Erasmus Program in a significantly positive way (Bracht et al., 2006), thus the values seen under ‘competencies at the time of graduation’ are already higher than the competencies of those who have not participated in the program. The table gives a suitable reference point to see which competencies have indeed turned out to be ‘employability skills’ after graduation. Observing the table, one can note that adaptability and written communications are the only two important skills where demand from employers and supply from business graduates seems to meet each other. On the other hand, problem-solving, analytical skills, planning and taking initiative, skills that are highly important for company success (Reich, 1991) are all in significant shortage compared to employer’s expectations. On the contrary, field-specific business knowledge, universities equip their students with, are already 9 points higher than the level actually expected from them. This suggests a mismatch between the skillset graduates leave their universities and skills that are actually required from them and this gap is significantly higher when observing soft
skills compared to hard skills.

### 2.6 Negative impacts

Both the Valera study and Erasmus Impact Study have lacked the clear exploration of any negative effects of studying abroad. Two key attributes have been realized in these studies, that are related to how valuable an employee is to his or her employer and to the economy. The first attribute is more connected to the employer-employee relationship. This is the measurement of how likely mobile and non-mobile students are to change jobs which is directly related to companies' is employee retention. The other factor is more related to employees’ impact on economies and effectively companies of that economy. This is the measure of how likely students are to migrate abroad.

Regarding employee retention, the Erasmus Impact Study has found that around 25% more mobile students have changed their employer at least once than their non-mobile peers (Brandenburg et al., 2014, p. 127.). The Valera study has found that 56% of mobile business students have already changed jobs at least once, which is marginally less than the average of the whole student body (Bracht et al., 2006, p. 59.). The Erasmus Impact Study reported the results of the same measurement to be only 40% among all mobile students (Brandenburg et al., 2014, p. 127.). The limitation of the two previous research is that they haven't specified how long these students have been employed in total at the time of the research. The more one works, the more likely he or she is to change jobs. Another limitation that they haven't measured how mobile students themselves feel about changing jobs and how this is influenced by the experience of studying abroad.

The two studies’ had similar approaches when researching the level of migration. The Valera study concluded that 48% of mobile students are willing to work and live abroad (Bracht et al., 2006, p. 71.) and the Erasmus Impact Study has found that 40% of the ex-mobile alumni have already changed countries of residence since their graduation (Brandenburg et al., 2014, p. 127.). Migration itself can be very beneficial to an economy, but to be beneficial to all countries, it has to be balanced among them. Neither of previous research has explored the direction of migration of mobile alumni. In case all these students tend to migrate to the direction of more developed countries, it is entirely likely that less wealthy countries suffer a significant loss as a result.
2.7 Implications and limitations of previous research

The previous literature review provides a deeper theoretical basis and guidelines for further research. The book ‘Work of Nations’ gives an idea on the most valuable characteristics of employees that can boost success for all stakeholders (Reich, 1991) while the literature on employability gives a more concrete picture on the skills adding value to companies from employer’s point of view and the relative value of hard and soft skills. Later it was examined what multicultural experience can add to the mind-set of a business student in terms of creativity and problem-solving, that can make him and the company employing him more successful in the World presented in the ‘Work of Nations’. The VALERA and Erasmus Impact Study research papers presented how the internationally mobile alumni perceived the influences of their study abroad on previously discovered employability skills and how students perceived their performance compared to employers’ demand a few years later.

The limitation of previous research lies in its lack of representation from employer’s side and the lack of field specific research on business-related fields. It is essential to explore the benefits of a study abroad program within the field however, as there is an ever increasing amount of CVs which include foreign study experience. This indicator could potentials signify higher potential for the company in candidates, based on the participants’ past experience abroad, and its benefits on certain soft skills. The limitation of the VALERA and Erasmus studies are also their lack of scientific validation in the form of tests of the Erasmus Program’s effects on the participants’ skills, rather than basing the finding on self-declared results. Many of the skills mentioned in these studies are very difficult and costly to measure; however, the sheer number of respondents compensate for this lacking feature. Other studies utilized scientific testing on multicultural exposure’s effects on creativity (Leung et al., 2008) and foreign study experience’s effects on problem-solving (Maddux-Gallinsky, 2009), but these studies were missing the perspectives of stakeholders other than graduates.

Another limitation found in previous studies regarding the effects of study abroad is the lack of proper exploration of the negative aspects of such experiences. It is entirely possible that these experiences and more exposure to the world in general can be counterproductive in certain jobs. It is also possible that internationalization has an effect on retention rates of companies, especially in less developed countries, where more
internationally aware graduates are likely to migrate away from, leading to a gap in the job market. Previous research has given a foundation for exploring negative effects of study abroad experiences (Brandenburg et al., 2014) (Bracht et al., 2006), however there is a need for more accurate research on this issue.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research background

The ultimate aim of the design of this research is to create a framework that helps identify the elemental value of studying abroad when recruiting and employing business graduates. To further clarify this aim and to help concentrate on the focal point of the paper two hypotheses have been introduced in the beginning:

H1: Study abroad experience is a signifier of generally more advanced soft skills of applicants for a business-related job.

H2: Study abroad experience of new-hire business graduates has an added value to the employing company.

It is clear, that where previous research and this paper diverges from each other is their focal points. Previous research concentrated on providing results that can help understand the issue of study abroad from the perspective of participants, universities and governmental organizations. This paper’s focal point will be the perspective of employers and the economic value of the impacts of studying abroad on participants. Contrarily to previous research, possible negative effects will also be examined.

The secondary research in the form of the literature review has given a solid ground for the design of further papers. The positives and negatives of the different kinds of approaches, introduced in previous publications have been analyzed to help shape the unique approach of this thesis. The approach will be focusing on methods that can deliver the results necessary to provide information from the perspective of employers on the sheer economic value of study abroad experiences. Any divergence that generates superfluous data needs to be vetted out.
3.2 Research approach

There are two direct stakeholders in a graduate’s job performance. One the one side are graduates on the other employers. To have a full picture of the issue presented in this paper, both parties’ views need to be examined with a series of quantitative and qualitative methods in the primary research. For the purpose of this thesis the position of students has been recorded through an online survey while the employers’ point of view will be represented in the form of interviews.

First the online questionnaire will be analyzed that has been returned by over 60 mobile or formerly mobile university students and graduates, 50 of which has been studying business-related courses. The survey is available in the appendix (Appendix 3, Online Survey). The survey has been structured so that first sample characteristics can be characterized, followed by a series of qualitative and quantitative questions. The benefit of using the combination of quantitative and qualitative questions is that while quantitative answers can provide a clear and precise numerical result, qualitative questions can deepen the insight into certain issues. Quantitative questions will be asked in regards of the skills that were found important previously. Much like the VALERA and Erasmus Impact Study, this paper will rely on self-declaration of the impacts of study abroad. An experimental research, such as the ones of Leung et al. and Maddux-Gallinsky (Leung et al., 2008) (Maddux-Gallinsky, 2009) is over the scope of this paper as it is very costly and complex to execute. Furthermore, employability skills are more complex than creativity or problem-solving, thus their measurement through experiments would be tremendously difficult. Qualitative questions will enable the discovery of nuanced details in the respondents’ answers, that would otherwise be lacking from a solely quantitative survey. In a way this will enable the paper to ‘look behind the numbers’.

The two manager interviews have been conducted in a much more qualitative nature. Even though an interview guideline has been prepared (Appendix 1, Interview Guidelines), the aim of the interviews was to provoke the interviewees to immerse themselves in the idea of hiring study abroad alumni. It was unknown if the managers had already had opinions about the connection between study abroad and certain skills, therefore it had to be presumed that they hadn’t. It was a goal as well, to provoke them to think about how the skills, developed through such an experience,
could have influenced their currently employed mobile colleagues.

### 3.3 The questionnaire

When deciding on the method of distribution for the survey one of the main factors was that it had to be easy to spread around the world to have an appropriate cross-section of the population of mobile students. It was important that the sample does not have too many things in common, such as home country or the country they studied in, therefore the idea of a paper-based survey, spread in a classroom was not an option as it would have introduced a significant bias factor in the survey. For this reason, an online survey has been created. An online survey eliminates the option to answer possible questions from the respondents however, which indeed resulted in some minor misunderstandings of the questions for a few of the respondents. On the other hand, it was the quickest and most economic option to ask people from all around the world about their opinions.

One of the benefits of studying abroad is the chance of establishing a far-reaching network of friends and acquaintances. To profit from this factor, the snowball sampling method has been selected. The initial twenty people, the survey has been sent to, were acquaintances from three different universities in Asia and Europe. These students were then asked to spread the survey to their friends from their study abroad periods and to tell them to spread it even further. While this sampling method has its negatives, namely the lack of control over the sample giving room for biases, the method appeared to be very successful in reaching a good variety of people. A

---

**Figure 4.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where are you from?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-America 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-America 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your current occupation?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fulltime student 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student with internship or job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate with job 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I started my own company 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---
good reflection of this sampling method has been reached as all six continents are represented in the sample (Figure 4).

The survey has been first shared in the end of the first quarter of 2018 and has been open for submissions for one month. The approximate time it took to fill it out was ten minutes.

The sample characteristics represent a very diverse sample as seen on Figure 4, 5 and 6. The majority of students are from Europe but North America and Asia have significant representation as well (Figure 4.). Thirty-nine of the students were studying abroad with an inter-university program while 23 were enrolled in a foreign university full time (Figure 6.). Twenty of the inter-university students spent one year aboard and 19 of them studied one semester or less in a foreign country which gives a very good base for comparison. Most of the students studying abroad full time and students studying abroad for one year were currently enrolled abroad, while the rest has mainly completed their study abroad terms 1-3 years ago (Figure 6.). It is also worth noting that more than half of the students had a job or internship already. Three of these graduates were self-employed entrepreneurs; which category is beyond the scope of this paper however.

It is also worth noting that almost 97% of the students have had their courses taught in English during their study abroad. For 75% of these students English was a secondary language. As English is having an ever-growing importance in the world of business, especially in multinational companies, it will be worth exploring how this intensive exposure to English can help participants improving their communication and foreign language skills.
3.4 The interviews

There were two interviews taking place in the beginning of the second quarter of 2018, the transcript of which is available in the appendix (Appendix 2, Transcribed Interviews). For the purpose of simplicity and anonymity of the managers the interviews will be called interview A and B. The interviews took place in the Budapest office of one of the world largest investment banks’ where the the interviewees work as middle-managers. Just as the questionnaire, the interview guidelines started with questions aimed to better understand the sample characteristics (Appendix 1, Interview Guidelines). Although at interview B it was difficult to coordinate the interview, interview A provided a full description of the company and the teams the managers are leading. The office has been categorized by interviewee A as a Shared Service Center or SSC. This means that the profile of the office is supporting front offices and other back offices with a variety of services.

The two managers work in the finance department and are both leading teams which are in daily contact with management in New York and colleagues all over the world, mainly in North America, Europe-Middle East and Asia. It has been confirmed that the work language is English around the offices of the firm and the interviewees also confirmed the high level of diversity within the firm, even in local offices. They stated that it is the company’s goal to increase age and nationality diversity as well and implied that this internationalism is deeply embedded in the company culture.

The above characteristics imply that the office is a good representation of the average company which hires business graduates.

The team of around 20 colleagues of interviewee A specializes in the management-reporting for the managers of the wealth management branch of the bank, while the other team consists of 4 interns and one part-time employee. This team is maintaining the structure of cost centers for accurate book keeping. Both of the teams have an advisory aspect to them, meaning that their understanding of their tasks is often relied on to solve various discrepancies and issues related to their tasks. This involves constant communication with other stake-holders of their jobs.

The two managers have a long experience of hiring business students and graduates, as their teams are all relatively young and the turnover rates are high therefore. They both have and have had subordinates who where studying abroad for longer or
shorter periods of time and they also had employees who were of foreign nationality, which is an indicator of their cultural sensitivity and therefore their ability to recognize talent on this field. Interviewee B has confirmed what interviewee A implied, namely that for most of the jobs at the office a basic financial and technological knowledge is enough to execute daily tasks. This means that the majority of services the Budapest finance team provides is less numerically challenging that implies a generally lower requirement towards these technical and field specific skills.

The main limitation of the interview section is the low number of interviewees and the lack of representation of different business-related fields. On the other hand, an SSC office is a good basis for exploration what the average business-related job is like for the majority of business graduates. Another limitation was time. Both interviews were conducted under 25 minutes as this is how long the managers could afford to leave their work.

4 Analysis of the primary research

4.1 The Questionnaire

4.1.1 Review of the impact on employability skills

The analysis of the primary data will start with the evaluation of the responses received to the online questionnaire. The questions of the survey regarding sample analysis have been followed by quantitative questions. The aim of this part of the research was to connect previous research on the impacts of study abroad on the skillset of participants (Brandenburg et al., 2014) and the research on skills employers of business graduates value the most (GMAC, 2017). Business students and graduates were asked to evaluate the impact of their study abroad experiences on 8 specific skills (Figure 7.) on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 represented no impact and 10 the highest level of positive impact. The 8 skills were clearly defined to mitigate the possibility of misunderstandings.

To further nuance the finding of the research, students are grouped by their length of studies abroad in Figure 7. As all three groups are almost equally represented in the
sample, discrepancies are not expected in this regard. The average positive impact on the 8 skills was reported to be 7.2 on the scale of 1 to 10 with a standard deviation of 1.6. This means a coefficient of variation of approximately 21.5%, which is although not insignificant, cannot mitigate the fact that students declared the positive impacts of their studies abroad overwhelmingly significant.

The first obvious observation one can draw from figure 7 is that the most impacted skill in all the groups of students has been cross-cultural skills with the highest average of 8 and the lowest standard deviation of 1.7. This finding is in line with the Erasmus Impact Study’s results, where the three most impacted skills were reported to be knowledge of foreign cultures, ability to adapt and the ability to work with people from different cultures (Brandenburg et al., 2014). These skills are closely related to this paper’s definition of cross-cultural skills (Figure 7.) and also to GMAC’s important employability skills of adaptability and cross-cultural sensitivity (GMAC, 2017).

Another clear conclusion one can draw from Figure 7. Is that students who spent the entirety of their university studies abroad declared the impact of their foreign experiences generally higher than the average. It must be noted however that these students have considered the whole 3-5year duration of their studies as the period
that impacted their skills, while other concentrated on their significantly shorter periods abroad. This linear relation of time spent studying in general and the level of written communication abilities is clearly observable in the case of written communication. This skill can be considered a general university skill that develops over the years as a result of the sheer number of essays and research papers university students are expected to write. Even though it clearly develops during studying abroad as well, study abroad should be considered a poor signifier of more advanced writing skills. The same pattern seems to emerge in the case of presentation skills as well, however the gap between studying abroad full time and part time is less significant. This can be due to the fact that most student are likely to chose schools in more developed countries where the education system tends to concentrate more on team works and presentations. This idea is supported by Interviewee B as well and also with the survey’s findings that students are more willing to move to more developed countries than their own, compared to same or less developed countries.

Moving along the comparison of part time and full time study abroad one can observe that while the line of experiences of one semesters or less always stay under the line of full time students. On the other hand, the line of one-year study abroad experiences can reach or even surpass the line of full time students in the case of three skills, namely creativity, team-work and cross-cultural skills. All these skills are to be found on the upper half of GMAC’s diagram about employability skills (Figure 1). It is important to notice that students who study abroad part time have the advantage of being exposed to two different cultures and educational systems in most cases. Their home university’s and the one where they study abroad. This can explain the level of positive impact of part time foreign study experiences on cross-cultural skills. The same phenomenon in the case of creativity is in line with Leung et al.’s findings as well. They found as well, that exposure to more cultures can be very beneficial to students’ creativity (Leung et al., 2008). Creativity and problem solving have both been integral part of Robert Reich’s proposition about the skills that can bring economic prosperity to all of the employees’ work’s stakeholders. Teamwork, GMAC’s second most important employability skill group (GMAC, 2017), is following the same pattern as the previous two skills, which can be explained partially with the previous argument of more developed countries’ universities’
tendency to concentrate more on teamwork and presentations (Interviewee B, 2018) and partially with the enhanced cross-cultural skills that directly help working in a diverse team as well. The results show however that one has to spend more than a semester abroad in his or her secondary university until these skills are significantly affected. This is a very clearly measurable signifier of a advanced creativity teamwork and cross-cultural skills for employers however, as finding out the length of the study abroad period of a candidate is very easy. The literature review also implied that employers indeed recognize the value of part-time study abroad and full-time study abroad as well to some extent (Humbug-Velden-Verhagen, 2013).

GMAC’s most important employability skill (GMAC, 2017), oral communication hasn’t been separately researched due to its close relatedness to English skills, teamwork, listening skills and presentation skills. All these skills have been reported to be very positively influenced by any length of studying abroad, especially listening skills that is the third most positively influenced skills with a positive impact of 7.2 on average and with a relatively low standard deviation of 2.0. An interesting discrepancy appears when observing listening skills, namely that students who spent one semester or less abroad rated the impact on this skill higher than those who studied abroad for a whole year. This discrepancy will be attempted to be answered later in this paper.

One skills where there is unusually high variance among respondents is English language skills. At the measurement of the impact on this skills students with English as their mother tongue have been vetted out, as well as the 3% of students who didn’t study in English. Even after these measures there was a very high variance, which could be explained by the students possibly having very good skills before studying abroad, as it is a very important factor in business related jobs as well (Interviewee A, 2018).

The skill that neither the Erasmus Impact Study nor GMAC researched is the skill of budgeting or managing money. Surprisingly, this skill come out to be the second most positively influenced skill among all the eight skills. This skill is especially relevant among business students, as they are the most likely to be required in their future professional life to manage others’ money compared to other university students. Let it be about a legal entity’s funds or a client’s wealth, business students’
budgeting skills can be very relevant. It has been suspected that studying abroad can enhance participants’ budgeting skills, as many of these students are responsible for their own finances the first time in their life. They usually don’t have family members to support them with managing money in the destination country. This idea has been validated by the results of the questionnaire (Figure 7). One important thing to note here though is that the same discrepancy is observable here as in the case of listening skills: The line of students who studied abroad one semester or less is above the line of those with one year of experience. For the explanation of this finding the evaluation of the quantitative questions was not enough. The first clue came from the coding of the last question of the survey.

A very vague and open ended question was strategically placed to the end so that the respondents have time to think through the impacts of their studies abroad during the answering of all the previous questions. The aim of the question was to provoke respondents to write down the first thing that came to their mind regarding their study abroad. It could be about its importance or its impact. The main goal was to find out what they think about this experience without being forced to evaluate it within strict numerical boundaries.

As there were no limitations to what the respondents answer should be, there was a variation in how the students approached this questions. Only one student stated that it was fun but had no particular impact on him or her. Many others emphasized that everyone should participate in such an experience but mentioned no or very few actual impacts. Another group that has been established through the coding process is responses who mentioned positive or very positive impacts to their personal and professional lives. A typical answer in this group is ‘Positive, would do it again’ or ‘It was a very useful experience that added value to my personal, professional and study life’. The fourth group summarizes all the responses which went further and mentioned that the experience has in many ways changed their personalities and lives. Many answers here included that this experience helped them grow and mature as well. Typical answers here include ‘It makes you mature’, ‘It completely change the way I look to the world’ or ‘It was the biggest step in my life’ and other responses that were considered more enthusiastic than the ones in the group ‘positive impact’.
Figure 8 depicts the findings about the results for the question. The differences between the different length of studies are easy to observe on the chart. Most of the students with experience of one semester or less abroad mentioned no impact and just recommended the experience to others. The only student who said there was no positive impact is from this group as well. Students with longer experience were more definitely positive about the impacts of the experience. Especially students who studied abroad full time mentioned life and personality changing experience. This implies that the amount a student is influenced and the length of the study abroad is linearly related. The more one studies abroad the more one matures and grows as a person. The definite advantage is when someone studies abroad full time, but one year studies abroad are overwhelmingly positive as well with a ‘life changing’ experience in almost half of the cases. This relation implies a possible connection between the discrepancy observed in the case of listening and budgeting skills (Figure 7). As these two skills are the ones that are likely to be influenced first when a student is maturing as a person. The skill of taking care about one’s own self is related to budgeting and listening is also a skill that provides a basis to most of the other skills of Figure 7. Without good listening skills, one can rarely acquire knowledge of the world and thus mature further. As students with one semester or less experience abroad are the ones who are less matured through the experience, it is likely that these two skills would be among the first ones that would improve during the experience. For a more serious impact on one’s maturity, at least one year abroad and exposure to multiple cultures is needed.
The above idea is supported by Figure 9 as well which summarizes the coded answers to the question what students’ main motivations were to study abroad. The chart as well, has been established by coding open ended questions. – For clarification purposes, the group ‘other’ includes reasons such as one’s love or family life or just the want to leave the home country. – There are two very distinct trend lines emerging in the chart. Namely two linear relationships. The longer students study abroad, the more important the quality of education is for them at the host institution and the less students study abroad, the more important role exploration of new cultures plays. Also, the most students, who stated that study abroad is only about leisure and travelling came from the group which studied only one semester or less abroad. As previous research found, going abroad for the purpose of travelling has a far less significant impact on soft skills than a a longer and deeper immersion into a certain culture (Maddux-Gallinsky, 2009). Indeed, this paper found a relation in Figure 8 and 9, that someone who wants to just travel, has a less chance to have positive impact on his or her skills. One semester or shorter advantages have a significant disadvantage here. Figure 9 is also in line with the findings of Figure 7, where it has been established that full time students acquire the most academic skills, hence the high importance of the quality of the host university (Figure 9.) Figure 7 also found experiences of one semester or less abroad to be the first step in maturing and growing as a person, hence the tendency that these students chose to go abroad for less series reasons, such as leisure and exploration. This might also be the reason while their first association at the last question was rather ‘everyone should do it’ rather than elaborating on the changes they went through as a person. As such, this is also a disadvantage, as previous research indicated employers appreciate the aspect of studying abroad, that students are taking risks and expose themselves to new situations to grow as a person (Humbug-Velden-Verhagen, 2013).

The last noteworthy observation is that ‘personal growth’ was for students with one year studies abroad the most important. Also, this group had the most balanced combination of reasons. It can be argued that these students chose to study abroad twice as long as the other part-time study abroad group because they want more from this experience than just travelling. For exploring cultures one semester could be enough, but these students also want to mature more as a person and as a professional. Compared to the full time students, one year students’ decision is
probably less influenced by parents as well, as part-time study abroad decisions are usually made after already being enrolled at a home university. At this point of their life, university students are arguably more independent than before enrolling at university. This could explain the high importance of the quality of the university for full time students. It could also explain why reasons as exploration, education and personal growth are in such balance for one year students, as they are meaning a more independent decision than full time students and a more serious one than one semester ones.

4.1.2 Influencing factors

In this part, factors will be explored that have led to differences in how students evaluated their studies abroad. Once such factors are realized, they can help employers better understand differences between individuals who studied abroad. Figure 10 depicts the average of the how positively the students valued their studies abroad in terms of personal and professional development on a scale of 1 to 9, where 1 stood for ‘waste of time’, 5 for no impact and 9 for ‘very useful’. The average of the answers was over 8, although one can observe the clear linear relation, that the more involved students get in the life of work instead of school, the more they realize the practical positive impact of this experience. On the other hand, Figure 11 depicts the average of the answers received for the questions where students were asked to evaluate the impact on their eight soft skills. Here, one can observe that there is a declining trend. It suggests that the farther students get from this experience in time,
the less they see the theoretical value of it, but the more and more they get into their professional lives, the more they feel the practical value of the experience (Figure 10).

Another factor that has been explored is how universally applicable these impacts could be to the whole of the student population, in case study abroad was made mandatory for university students. Figure 12’s horizontal axis shows values, based on where students put themselves on a scale where 1 stood for 100% introvert and 9 for 100% extrovert. The vertical axis shows the average result for the eight skills of Figure 7 for each group. One clear conclusion is that extreme introversion leads to a less positive impact regarding these skills. A more surprising finding is that extreme extroversion is also less beneficial than students closer to the middle of the scale (Figure 12). Although more extroversion seems to be needed for a successful study abroad, some introversion is also needed for the most optimal growth. This finding has the implication, that studying abroad can’t have the same positive impact to any student and thus students’ ability to decide if they want to study abroad should be held. Previously it also has been found, that the decision itself to study abroad can possibly carry a significant meaning for students and is a meaningful factor for their personal growth. Consequently, an optionally taken study abroad is a good signifier of one’s personality and willingness to try new things.

4.1.3 Negative aspects of studying abroad

The framework for exploring the negative sides of studying abroad will rely on the two aspects, introduced in the literature review. It will be studied, how a foreign experience can influence one’s job loyalty and his or her willingness to migrate abroad. Students were first asked if they are more or less likely to work for the same company for more than five years than before studying abroad. Contrerary to previous research (Brandenburg et al., 2014) (Bracht et al., 2006), the length of work has been specified in five years and the question also concentrated on how the students changed their attitudes about the issue after their studies abroad. The same question has been asked about pursuing a career abroad. 0 represented less likely 5 represented no impact and 9 stood for more likely. The mean and median for the question about changing jobs was 4.0 with a standard deviation of 1.9. This means studying abroad has a not insignificant effect on participants’ loyalty to their
workplace. This is a clear negative, as recruiting talent is very costly. First, finding the perfect candidate is time and resource consuming and secondly, the time it takes to train them can also be time consuming for employers.

The results for the question about study abroad’s impact on students’ willingness to migrate abroad was a mean and median of 7.0 with a standard deviation of 2.0. These numbers indicate, that students are significantly more open to migration. This in itself bares only limited negativity, as incoming migrants could even bring new freshness to the workforce of a country and thus its companies. As a later question about the direction of these students’ likely migration revealed however, the case is more nuanced than that.

Figure 13. depicts how the individual students rated their likeliness to travel to the three categories of countries’. 0 stands for the student being unable to imagine living in the country, 2 means indifference and 5 stands for the student being very likely to migrate to the type of country. Observing the graphs, it is very clear that most of the students cannot imagine living in a less wealthy country than their own without a single one of them indicating ‘very likely’. Students are mainly indifferent towards living in similar countries as their own, although it must be noted, that it is possible that many of these students came from wealthier parts of their continents, where the development of the economy is no issue. The least balanced graph is the one of countries with higher GDP though. Only 9 students placed themselves on the left side of the scale, while another 9 are indifferent, meaning that over 70% of students can imagine migrating to such countries. Over 50% of students even stated that they are very likely to migrate to wealthier countries than their
own. Combining this with the finding that studying abroad significantly increases a student’s likeliness to migrate abroad one can draw the conclusion, that this is a very impactful negative effect for countries with less developed economies. As this group of students leaves the labor market of such countries, companies will likely have to pay higher prices for the same or less talented workforce than those who left.

4.2 The Interviews

The aim of the two interviews was first to have a practical insight into the world of companies who employ business graduates and to explore their views on today’s workforce. It was crucial to get first-hand validation on how employers value certain skills with special regards to the relation of soft and hard skills. The second goal was to explore their opinions about studying abroad and how it can affect a candidate’s skillset and his or her performance at the job effectively. Both interviewees indicated their significant experience at hiring and working with graduates in entry level positions. They also both work at the same shared service center of an international bank, which factors made them suitable for the exploration of a workplace that is possibly very close to the average workplace where business graduates work.

The interviewees agreed that there is a trend of internationalization at their office. Not only have they noted that there is an increasing amount of foreigners in the local office, but they also mentioned the very high level of internationality among colleagues people from the local office are in touch with on a daily basis. Interviewee B pointed out the significant differences in communication style that colleagues around the world have and the difficulties that could arise from being unfamiliar with such cultures. Interviewee A approached the question from a more positive side mentioning that having a high level diversity benefits the firm. She added:

‘From the aspect of effectivity, the more diverse inputs a process gets, the more effective these processes become.’ (Interviewee A, 2018)

The firm’s policies to nourish diversity of age, gender and cultures were also mentioned, further supporting the idea that today’s workplace is getting more and more diverse. Regardless of the positives and negatives, there is a trend emerging from the answers, that the company is getting more and more diverse culturally.

The two interviewees were then asked to give an insight into how they select new
employees and what skills are the most important during the selection process. Both the managers stated that technical hard skills are often times less important than soft skills. This is in line with GMAC’s findings, where soft skills took the top of the list of the most sought after skills while technical skills were in the middle (Figure 1). Interviewee A even quantified this difference and rated soft skills 60% important compared to hard skills’ 40%. Both interviewees stated that the average business graduate is very well equipped with technical knowledge for the average job and that most of such skills can be and has to be taught on the job in the form of trainings.

*I am less interested in the candidate’s technical knowledge (...) I can just teach and train these.* (Interviewee B, 2018)

This is very closely resembling Robert Reich’s image of the today, where general knowledge and trainability is valued more and it is the task of companies to train their employees with the actual technical skills they require (Reich, 1991). Interviewee A went even further by saying, soft skills are much more difficult to teach, whereas anyone with a certain IQ level is able to learn the technical skills needed for the job (Interviewee A, 2018). This directly relates to graduates needing to learn these skills before getting their first job. This is also in line with previous research that found, that employers penalize the lack of soft skills more harshly than the lack of at least average technical skills (Humbug-Velden-Verhagen, 2013).

Significant meaning has been attached to the first impression during the job-interview as well. Interviewee B talked about ‘chemistry’, while interviewee A discussed how good communication skills can go the longest way to get a job. It seems that employers tend to choose from candidates based on far less scientific and measurable factors than one would imagine. Indeed, when interviewees were asked if they value study abroad experiences of candidates, they both stated that they do not. On the other hand, they agreed studying abroad can significantly benefit the very skills they consider important for the execution of one’s job. The were cautious with generalizing however and stated that one without such experience can have the same advanced skills as well.

*It needs a lot of courage to study abroad, so it already says a lot about the person’s openness. (...) Who dares, wins.* (Interviewee B, 2018)

*For (mobile students) problem-solving comes more naturally. They are more pro-active and they depend less on others.* (Interviewee A, 2018)
Both agreed that studying abroad can mature the individual and it helps becoming more independent and better at solving problems. Also, the significant advantages of studying abroad on cross-cultural skills were mentioned by both interviewees and they agreed that it can directly benefit how one can fit-in and perform in such an international environment. All these aspects are very close to the findings about students’ views on the issue as well, as it has been found by the online survey too.

There was a consensus between the managers when they were asked about the attributes that brings an employee and effectively the team and the company forward.

*It’s not enough anymore to just do your job, you also have to ‘sell’ this performance to your boss. You also have to build a network with your more important clients from key locations (...), if someone can satisfy our clients and then that person is spreading good words about us, that can benefit us greatly.* (Interviewee B, 2018)

Interviewee B stated that there is fierce competition among the offices around the world about the distribution of responsibilities. She said that in order to bring the team forward, it is more important that its members are flexible, good problem solvers and very good communicators, rather than just doing their assigned tasks well. Also the other manager stated that without good soft skills, no one can move forward and get promoted (Interviewee A, 2018). She also mentioned problem-solving and teamwork as very important attributes to one’s performance. Interestingly, when they were asked about any negative aspects of studying abroad they couldn’t mention any. They didn’t notice any trend that such graduates would be less loyal to their jobs, however they mentioned the very high rate of turnover in the company which could partially explain, why such trends would be hard to distinguish.

Overall the interviews shed light on the views of employers who are in direct relation with business graduates. They confirmed that their workplaces are getting more and more international and that there is a need for graduates who can easily fit into such an environment. They also stated how one has to stand out with exceptional skills to bring the team forward and they elaborated on the importance of soft skills. It also turned out that the way these employers hire business graduates depends a lot on first impression and how well the candidate can communicate his or her interests and skills. Less importance was attributed to hard facts such as studying abroad and although the managers clearly
recognized the benefits of such experiences’ they were cautious to attribute too much importance to it.

5 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis work was to explore how studying abroad can benefit the stakeholders of a business graduate’s work through the skills that can be enhanced during such an experience. The novelty of this paper lies in its focus on business graduates and in the focus on the very practical skills, that can economically benefit employers as well. The literature review provided initial insights into a world where business graduates have to compete. Additionally, it shed light on the complexity of studying abroad and of the skill-set it benefits the most: the student’s soft skills. The two most thorough research within the field, the Valera study and the Erasmus Impact Study provided a great basis that suggested that participation in study abroad can significantly enhance students’ cross-cultural skills, team working skills, communication and adaptability. While other research conducted more evidence-based research how exposure to foreign cultures can positively influence problem-solving and creativity (Leung et al., 2008) (Maddux-Gallinsky, 2009).

The concept of employability skills has been introduced in order to create a link between such skills and the skills employers seek. It has been established that foreign experience can very positively influence employability skills such as communication, adaptability or teamwork. To test the validity of this in the field of business a more detailed study was needed however.

The goal of the design of the primary research was to create a framework that could deliver detailed results about how this experience can add practical economic value to the employing companies and also to expose the possible negative aspects of studying abroad, that was lacking from previous research (Brandenburg et al., 2014) (Bracht et al., 2006). To have a view from both sides, students were asked about their opinions in an online survey and employers were interviewed as well. The conclusion of the evaluation of these interviews and the survey will follow the framework of the hypotheses, set in the beginning of the paper.

H1: Study abroad experience is a signifier of generally more advanced soft skills of applicants for a business-related job.
H1 has clearly been validated by the responses received for the online survey and to most extent it has also been supported by the two manager interviews as well. In the quantitative part of the survey study abroad experiences impact was tested on 8 mainly soft skills. The result was that on the scale of 1 to 10 on average, students rated the positive impact of the experience to be 7.2 (Figure 7.). Among the most positively influenced skills were cross-cultural skills, budgeting, problem-solving, teamwork and creativity. One skill where H1 has been rejected is writing skills, where participation in any university program has been found more beneficial than the location of those studies.

One new layer of research has been introduced by the distinction of students based on their length of their studies. It has been discovered that students who study abroad one semester or less are significantly less likely to mature during the experience. Most of these students’ study abroad just for the sake of travelling and to experience new cultures. Full time student’s and students with one-year experience studying abroad mature much more during this period, and they consider the experience much more ‘life-changing’. For full time students, however the quality of the host university is far more important than personal development. For this reason, and the reason that these students are only exposed to one foreign university culture compared to one year students, the one year students were found to develop their personalities more in cross-cultural skills and creativity. They also improved their team-work skills in one year almost as much as full-time students during the full 3-4 years of their studies.

H2: Study abroad experience of new-hire business graduates has an added value to the employing company.

H2 has also been overwhelmingly validated by the students who rated the usefulness of their studies abroad very positively (Figure 10.). Another clear indicator of the practical benefits of studying abroad is that the more involved a student was in working, the better he or she rated the benefits of studying abroad to his professional and personal development. During the interviews the need for soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability and cross-cultural skills has been confirmed as well, which directly supports the validation of H2. Although the sheer fact that one participated in a study abroad doesn’t seem to influence the hiring process yet, the interviewees agreed, that one, who participated in such an experiment can have significant benefit over others, when it
comes to independence, problem-solving or communication.

The negative aspects of studying abroad have also been mentioned which may contradict H2. The two most likely negative impacts were identified to effect job loyalty and migration from less developed economies to wealthier ones. Indeed, both have been confirmed by the results of the survey where students were found to be rather less likely to be willing to work for one company for more than five years. Although this effect of studying abroad hasn’t been noticed by the interviewed managers, but they mentioned the issue of migration of young workforce. The students have also clearly indicated that they are more likely to seek livelihood away from their home countries, most likely in wealthier economies. This would ultimately lead to a gap in the workforce of the less developed countries which would negatively influence companies there as well.

Implications of this paper include that business students should be encouraged to participate in a study abroad, although it is important that it remains a choice. Also, employers can rely on statistical evidence that this experience can indeed create value to the company and ultimately to the economy as well. It has also been realized, employers have to rely mainly on their impressions about candidates for a job, which opens doors for further research that could quantify the economic benefit of each employability skill. For this purpose, observation and evidence based research is needed that could realize which skills bring the most value to the stakeholders of a job. Until then one finding seems to be secure: studying abroad can bring significant benefits to a company which hires the mobile alumni.
References


### Appendix

1. **Interview Guidelines**

   Time period: Approximately 25-30 minutes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPICS</th>
<th>Interviewer questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intro</strong></td>
<td>Introduce myself again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Talk about anonymity and recording.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Define soft and hard skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ask if the interviewee has any questions before we start.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Company/Work description</strong></td>
<td>1. Briefly describe your company, your position and the work you do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. How many people belong under you? Did you participate in their recruitment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. How many entry level positions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. How many international people in the office?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Describe company culture with a few words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. How important is English in the job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirements/needs from employees</td>
<td>7. How important is turnover in the company/team?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the most important skills required for most of the positions?</td>
<td>1. What are the most important skills required for most of the positions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are the skills that make an employee outstanding in the job?</td>
<td>2. What are the skills that make an employee outstanding in the job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How important is social interaction for the job?</td>
<td>3. How important is social interaction for the job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How are hard and soft skills important for the job and how does each help one’s added value to the company?</td>
<td>4. How are hard and soft skills important for the job and how does each help one’s added value to the company?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Which of the following soft skills are important and why?</td>
<td>5. Which of the following soft skills are important and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teamwork</td>
<td>- Teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Written communication</td>
<td>- Written communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Problem-solving</td>
<td>- Problem-solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cross-cultural skills</td>
<td>- Cross-cultural skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Listening Skills</td>
<td>- Listening Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Creativity</td>
<td>- Creativity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment</th>
<th>1. What are the most important factors when recruiting new hires?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. What is missing from the average applicant?</td>
<td>2. What is missing from the average applicant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What makes you deny an application?</td>
<td>3. What makes you deny an application?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What do you think about study abroad experiences of applicants?</td>
<td>4. What do you think about study abroad experiences of applicants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What’s your first association when you read someone studied abroad</td>
<td>5. What’s your first association when you read someone studied abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Does such an experience influence directly or indirectly the recruitment process?</td>
<td>6. Does such an experience influence directly or indirectly the recruitment process?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Study abroad experience.
1. Do you have any employees who have studied in a foreign country?
2. How are such employees different from others e.g.: soft skills, job prospects, loyalty, devotion?
3. Have you participated in a study abroad experience?

Conclusion/Debrief
1. Do you have anything more to add before we end the interview? How international employees can add value to the company?

Thank interviewee

2. Transcribed interviews

Interview A

I: My Topic is related to the effect of the Erasmus Programme on the added value of an employee in an entry-level position. This is what I would like to make an interview about with you. In the beginning I would like to ask you what kind of company you work at and what is your position. Just in a general way.

A: SSC, Finance. Within finance I am leading one of the functional teams, which is conducting management reports mainly with some accounting functions as well. Would this be accurate enough?

I: Absolutely. Is this company Hungarian or international?

A: The company is American with a support office in Hungary.

I: So it means that the work language is English right?

A: Yes, mainly English.

I: Could you say a few words about the company culture too?

A: What aspects of it are you interested in?

I: How international is, how is the employee turnover rate etc.

A: It is absolutely international, which is also reflected in the company’s goals and policies. It means we are aiming to hire a diverse group of people in the teams. Let it be based on age or nationality, even in local teams. Also most of the employees work directly with colleagues from offices all around the World. From this aspect, this office is very...
international and colleagues have to work in a very diverse environment. This is also why the work language is English.

I: Do you see any advantages of being so diverse and in working across borders, rather than having more independent offices in each country?

A: When I came here, to a junior but not entry-level position, it was one of the most exciting and appealing things for me, that this office was so international. Once I had to talk to someone from Manila, then I had a talk with New York, London, Asia, so I think this makes this environment more appealing for young people. Also from the aspect of effectivity, the more diverse inputs a process gets, the more effective these processes get. The more viewpoints we clash, the better the situation is.

I: You mentioned the goal of the company to get more diverse. Is this also reflected in your team? Do you have foreign colleagues too? Also young, mobile people?

A: I have two foreigners in my team. Of course diversity is an aim, but so is finding the most fitting people for the position. If we can achieve this with hiring a foreigner, that just makes it better. This brings freshness into the team and into the processes too, so it is really beneficial. I am not saying this is my most important objective, but I am happy when we can hire a foreigner.

I: Are hard skills, like technical skills more important for the execution of this job, or are soft skills like written communication, teamwork, problem-solving, cross-cultural skills, creativity and such. In what percentage do these skills influence one’s performance at the team?

A: It’s a very interesting question. It is important though what kind of position we are talking about. Even in my team, there are five sub-teams, which do slightly different work. Parts of the work require more oral communication, other parts require written communication and it also has more technical parts too. I also want to add, that we are only hiring from a pool of people who already have business related backgrounds. So I don’t know how well a history major graduate could do this job, because I don’t have experience in that. I still think that soft skills are very very important here, because for an effective work within the team we certainly need the individuals within the team to have social skills. He/she needs to be able to cooperate with others, to give and ask for help if he is in need of it, and he needs to learn quickly to understand our culture too. Many times we underestimate the value of this in individuals on the labour market. We tend to give too much importance to the candidates’ technical knowledge, even though these skills are easy to learn on the job in most of the positions I know of. Of course you need a mind-set where numbers are not strangers, but these things are learnable in contrast to communication skills and teamwork. Those things are much harder to teach.

I: Are you saying someone in the team with a set of soft skills has a hard time improving those skills?

A: No, I am just saying these skills are just harder to teach. Using applications and Excel or understanding financial products is easier to learn, because above a certain IQ level you can just sit down and learn these, but soft skills are hard to influence. It is our aim though
to improve soft skills, If people wouldn’t improve in these aspects, then no one would be promoted. They are improving, but it’s not so easy.

I: I am going to jump ahead. Do you think a study abroad can influence your skills? Is your evaluation of someone at a recruitment interview influenced if you find out that he/she has studied abroad.

A: My evaluation is not influenced about someone if I know that he studied or lived abroad, but I think someone who has such an experience, especially at a younger age, then he has many benefits when working at such an international company, compared to someone who is lacking such experience. Here I mean that in a situation when we someone has to communicate with a colleague from Asia, India, or America with a very different cultural background and a mind-set that is very different from ours, then his performance at that communication is much influenced by how much he has seen of the world. Of course we expect our colleagues to accept cultural difference, but this needs to be learnt too. Someone who was already in a situation at university, that he was put in an international group of other students and had to build relationships with them, has routine at this.

I: I wouldn’t say it either that just the fact that someone studied abroad should have a positive impact on the selection process, but could’ve say that such an individual is more likely to have better soft skills than others?

A: I am not saying it’s certain that his skills are better, but I am sure he can learn a lot from such a semester. It is hard to answer because no two such person exist who are absolutely the same besides one having a study abroad experience and the other not.

I: I think the fact that someone chooses to participate in such is also influenced by his personality and if he thinks he’d be fine during this time.

A: Yes, of course. I know many people who didn’t go to Erasmus but have the same 100% communication skills as those who participated in the program too. I am not saying good soft skills depend on this, but I think people learn a lot through such an experience.

I: If we get back to entry level positions and internships, can you make a difference between someone with such an experience and someone without it?

A: I haven’t done any research about it but I think, for someone who has been abroad, problem-solving comes more naturally. They are more pro-active and they depend less on others. This experience can help get more independent.

I: If I can ask, based on what criteria are you choosing from the candidates and what is important or less important for you?

A: I can just have the same answer as previously. It depends a lot on what soft and hard skills the given position requires. It is very important in entry level positions too, what the candidate’s attitude to the interview situation and to his future tasks is and how well he can communicate. It influences how he will perform in the job. If someone is very curious to the world that can be more important than having a sound accounting or finance knowledge. It is important how the candidates handle situations like this, communication
wise, but this is not the only important thing. I know people who are very good at communication, but lack the technical knowledge and in the long term that is not good either. If I should mention numbers, I would say the distribution of importance is 60/40 in favor of soft skills.

I: If we really boil it down to the level of an income statement, what is the one skill of the employees that can add the most value to the company?

A: We are aiming to have diversity in the company so that everyone can bring something else to the table. There are a million kinds of values that people bring. Technical knowledge, communication organizational skills, helpfulness or being proactive and good at problem solving. Obviously I can’t rank these. I can name the most important skills in one individual, but we aim at diversity to have a little of everything.

I: Can you name things that are missing from the average candidate? Something you would like future applicants to possess.

A: Interesting question. We meet many new interns every year in assessment centers and there is a big turnover too, so we really see many interns these days. My impression is that there are only extremes among them these days. One extreme is someone who knows what he wants, and is willing to take the necessary steps to get there, understands he has no experience and accepts that others know more than him, but there are many who aren’t like this. They think they already know much that we should apply them in the position of the CEO. These people don’t understand why I have so many questions at the interview. Why I am splitting hair, which is not the case, I just need to assess their knowledge and experience level. It is very interesting how there are these extremes.

I: Do you see any tendencies or gaps between generations here?

A: Well, 15-20 years ago I haven’t been interviewing interns so I can’t answer this question.

I: In what direction are we moving though?

A: Today it is the bare minimum that someone speaks good English. This hasn’t been the case 20 years ago. This is of course very important. I can also see a difference in experience using Excel. This is important, because even though we have all these other applications, Excel is still very important in our everyday work. Until 5-6 years ago we didn’t see the tendency that schools prepared students with these skills. They only used to have a very basic knowledge about Excel. Today on-boarding is easier, because we don’t have to start from ground zero. It is also easier for the teams to train them.

I: Can you see any drawbacks of a more international mindset? Here I’m thinking about job-loyalty. If someone with more base for comparison with other countries would be more open for mobility outside the firm.

A: I usually see graduates and interns who are very flexible. They are open for opportunities and they are looking for them. We have to learn how to live with this as a team lead too. It is not what it used to be, that you sit down to your desk and you can be sure that you will be doing the same thing in five years, but it can well be that within a few
years you will move to another team to another company or to another country even. I can’t see such connection though, that someone who studied abroad, wants to migrate abroad too. It was a very specific question, but I can’t see this connection. It might exist though.

I: Thank you, these were my main question. As a conclusion can you name a few skills that can be impacted most by a study abroad?

A: Problem solving, communication, teamwork.

I: Can you see advantages when handling clients and colleagues from different cultures on the job or you think one or two semester can’t have an effect on this?

A: Obviously it helps, because you see more kinds of people abroad, but I don’t think this would be the most important factor in one’s ability to handle such situations.

I: Thank you for the interview!

Interview B

B: I work for this company since 2001. Already back then there were many students who joined us at the company with international study experiences. The difference was very obvious, I think, due to the fact that in foreign schools, project works and research tasks are far more common, than in Hungary, where lexical knowledge still plays the key role. These students are also more ready to take action and they are brave enough to say if a process is not efficient and could be done in a better way. They have much better ideas in contrast to the ones who studied in Hungary, who come, wait, and do what they are told without daring to have different opinions. This is an obvious difference.

I: And you think this is because in different western cultures this is part of the culture that they stand up?

B: Yes, I’m sure and I am very perceptive about this because I studied in a German-speaking school with Austrian professors, and their conception was totally different to Hungarian schools. In our schools there were classes, well, all the classes were filled with Hungarians. Mine was the only class where there were foreigners and this class gave you a German matural exam. I already saw the differences back then, but EU borders were still in place at that time. I applied to the University of Vienna’s Micro economy course, but in the end I didn’t go because I was afraid that it would’ve been too much of a financial burden for my parents back in 1997-1998 compared to studying in Hungary. In the end I studied in Hungary, but I have had some elder class-mates who could go and study in a foreign country, because they were in the financial situation to afford it. I saw in them… I later worked with one of them for 5-6 years here at ‘company’ (edited by the author for privacy reasons), who worked out there at Raiffeisen before coming here. He had a totally different mentality and perception of things. I think this is because western culture is not about lexical knowledge and strict rules, but they give much more room for for your own interests and they allow you to deepen those interests, rather than forcing you things like for example studying 18th century literature, but rather you can just take a Thomas Mann seminar what is the only thing you have to be good at. You don’t need to be good at everything and if I could… I’ve talked a lot about this with my husband… I wouldn’t like
to live here and I don’t want my kids to grow up in this school system, but due to his own enterprise that he can’t just move abroad, we never moved. He speaks perfect German too though, so we don’t need to go far, just to Austria, but I won’t give up because I would like my kids to go to university here. Neither to high school, but especially not to university here. My parents live very close to Vienna, so my son should move there, to have someone, because they have very good schools in Austria.

Also, those interns who studied abroad in the UK, France, Austria said that they had been lagging behind their peers abroad, because there already in high school, they are learning this mentality and they had a hard time fitting in. So I think there is a huge difference.

I: Do you see any advantages of studying abroad, other than superior Universities? For example, being exposed to different cultures and mentalities?

B: Yes, someone like that is much more accepting. So this is obvious. If I can give a personal example, when we still lived here in the city I saw that it became normal to see all kinds of different people on the street, but we moved out to Törökbálint and there there only are white people. There is a Chinese kid in school and one African-American boy I used to see. After all this, when I come to the city by car (I don’t take public, so I don’t see many people), but if I come see my tenant or I have something to do at the doctor’s office, I see all these different kinds of people and I realize how I am forgot all about this. All these people are here, students mostly (or illegal migrants at Blaha Lujza tér who aren’t coming to study). If you go to a ‘company’ (edited by the author for privacy reasons) office abroad, you have a very different picture in front of you. People aren’t so homogenous there and this is also what you can experience at a school abroad. This you will never experience here, because due to the language difficulties, far less students come here from abroad. It’s completely different here.

I: Could we also say that a company, which employs such students, has more added value from the student’s study abroad experience, compared to employing the same person without such experience?

B: I think so. Also the present leadership is absolutely pro diversity and wants equality. They don’t understand, though how difficult it is in this country. Our clients are all foreigners though. Not simply just British anymore, but there are also Africans, Indians, not to mention how diverse America is. There aren’t even white people in those offices anymore.

I: Would this change (to diversity) be helped by employing such people?

B: yes, of course. These people have very different communication styles. There are more aggressive and they don’t admit if they don’t understand something. Someone who has never experienced such people gets confused when reading their emails and messages, but if he/she has already met someone like this, he’ll understand that this is what their culture is like. That person can handle such situations much better. I think this is very important. It would be important to have a certain degree of diversity in this office too. You can’t see the same diversity of nationality or age here. Because of the soviet era, we don’t have elder people with the necessary financial skills either. We can only hire young people., which is a boundary of this office already.
I: So would you say, that soft skills such as communication and problem-solving are an important part of the work done in this office?

B: I think it is important because there are many competitions between Budapest and London, which office is being down-scaled now, but when the corporate support finance division wasn’t closed there yet, nor in America, there was fierce competition who gets the responsibility for certain processes. The winner wasn’t the one with the most efficient way of executing the process, but just the one who ‘wins’. If we work according to the Americans or to London, not to mention Asia. Asia is a less important location for the company, they are not taken seriously. They do the job but it’s not a real market. I think it’s important.

I: How are you taking into consideration a foreign study experience when you’re interviewing for a position? What is your first impression when you read it in a CV?

B: I don’t directly take this into consideration. There are people who studied abroad, but aren’t ready for this job. When I was interviewing recently, though, there were almost exclusively only foreigners. Russians, Mongolians, less western people and more Asians. They didn’t want to do this kind of work though, regardless if I liked them or not. Even though I wanted a multicultural team, the individual applicants weren’t interested in this kind of job. I can’t only take into account foreign experience, but everything has to come together well.

I: Can you name some pros and cons of a foreign study experience, in the case if there is no other relevant difference between two candidates?

B: Well, no one can deny, that in such cases, only sympathy can decide. If both are equipped for the job and want it too, only chemistry and impression can decide, which one will be hired. A foreign study experience matters less than if someone fits in the team well or not.

I: Can we connect these two dots? Does someone with a study abroad experience and more experience at human interactions win over your sympathy easier than someone without this experience?

B: Yes, for sure. For sure.

I: How could you compare the importance of technical, hard skills and human, soft skills in the work your team does?

B: I am less interested in the candidate’s technical knowledge, because I am only looking for an analyst usually, not a manager and everyone, coming out of a university has the technical background I need. In other cases, I can just teach and train these technical skills too. Here I am thinking about excel skills for example. I had employees who couldn’t conduct a pivot table, but I showed it to him and after that he knew how to do it. So these people have the basics, so it’s not that they don’t know what Excel or Databases are.

I: only for the record, could you say what kind of job you are doing, how many people your team has, how many entry level positions you have and how many foreigners there are in your team?
B: I don’t have any foreigners in my present team. I have 3-4 employees based on the numbers of hours they can commit to. In previous years I had more foreigners in my team though. Not only people who studied abroad, but foreigners too.

I: What kind of work is being done in this office, generally speaking? Also, how much of this work is related to soft and hard skills?

B: I would say the most important skill is problem-solving, because of the positions this office has. Everyone has been hired for there professional orientation, and than trained for the actual job. Also, because of migration we have higher diversity. Many Hungarians leave the country for better jobs. In the same time, people from countries of less economic prosperity, like Portugal Croatia or Greece, are migrating to Hungary too in increasing numbers.

I: You mentioned that the technical skills, required for this job, are general enough that everyone with such orientation have them. Could we say that today’s workplace has less specific positions and needs employees with high degrees of adaptability, who can learn the specifics of the given job? What I mean is that the specific skills needed for this job can’t be learnt in school.

B: Yes, this is not the valuation review group, where you need the Backsaw model. Here, a general financial knowledge is enough for reporting purposes at the support finance team. There are also people with a more technical background as VBA, but this is not general. It is not a requirement either. Also, just a few people like this is can meet the technical demand of a large team too.

I: Can you name any negatives of studying abroad? For example job-loyalty and turnover.

B: Well, most of the people quit this job because of money.

I: Could we say that someone who has foreign experience has a higher expectation about this job?

B: It could be, but it’s irrelevant.

I: Would it influence his/her job-loyalty?

B: It depends on the individual’s bounds to the country. For example, we have a Hungarian colleague who hasn’t lived here for a while and he doesn’t understand the Hungarian system. But generally speaking, someone with no financial burden, secure accommodation and friends here, will stay in the country, but someone who can’t see how he’ll afford an existence here and also progress in his career will leave the country. I think this is very subjective. I am generalizing too.

I: You mentioned that in your last recruitment process there were many people from the east of Hungary. Could we say that Hungarians are migrating towards the west too, generally speaking?

B: Yes, they had very specific expectations though.
I: They were all applying for entry-level business-related positions.

B: Yes.
I: What are the characteristics, that make someone perform better in your team?

B: Flexibility and seeing the opportunity. It’s not enough anymore to just do your job, you also have to ‘sell’ this performance to your boss. You also have to build a network with your more important clients from key locations. You have to do extra circles. Calling them, giving tips, being helpful and flexible are all important to get recognized. This will spread the word about your performance within management. There are people who do everything correctly and in time, but without communicating with anyone. This really can set someone back when it comes to recognizing their performance. It is a very complex subject. I would say you need an X-factor that sets you apart. You need good communication skills for sure.

I: Even if a study-abroad doesn’t influence all these skills, could we still say that the person who applies to such an experience is better at these things?

B: Well, of course. When I was at University, the Erasmus programme has just started. Many of my peers were too shy to apply, but of course, those win in life who dare to do things. It needs a lot of courage to study abroad, so it already says a lot about the person’s openness.

I: Can we also connect the two dots that if the individual is performing better, it also gives value to the company?

B: Of course. Even if we consider the technical help some of our colleagues gave to us. It helped with our consistency a lot. But also, if someone can satisfy our clients and then that person is spreading good words about us, that can benefit us greatly too, what will eventually mean more responsible tasks for us.

I: Thank you this would be it.
3. Online survey

Study abroad and employability (5-10 Min.)

The aim of this survey is to shed light on how much employers should value participation in a study experience abroad.

Kép címe

How long did you study abroad? *

- Less than a semester
- 1 Month
- 1 Year
- I study abroad full time
- Egyéb...

When did you finish your study abroad?

- I am currently studying abroad
- Less than a year ago
- 1-3 years ago
- more than 3 years ago
What is your major? *

- Business or Management related
- Finance or accounting
- Marketing or communication
- IT related
- Egyéb...

What is your current occupation?

- Fulltime student
- Student with part-time job
- I finished school and I have a job
- I started my own company
- Egyéb...

Where are you from? *

- Europe
- North-America
- Asia
- South-America
- Africa
- Australia

How culturally different was the country you studied in from your own? *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Total culture shock</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Similar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Did you study in your mother-tongue? *

- Yes
- No

Did you study in English? *

- Yes
- No

Are you less or more likely to work for the same company for more than 5 years, than before you studied abroad. *

Less likely: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 More likely

Are you less or more likely to pursue a career outside your home country, than before you studied abroad?

Less likely: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 More likely

What kind of country can you imagine migrating to? 0=can't imagine, 5=very likely

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GDP Comparison</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower GDP than home country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same GDP as home country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher GDP than home-country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Which of your skills were impacted the most? *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soft skills (interpersonal skills, communication, teamwork, problem solving)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard skills (technical, e.g. finance, math, theories)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How useful did you find your time abroad for your personal and professional development? *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It was a waste of time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Useful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How many new friends/acquaintances did you make?

☐ 0-5
☐ 5-15
☐ 15-50
☐ 50+

Do you consider yourself more extroverted or introverted? *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introvert</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrovert</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How much of an impact your time abroad had on the following skills...
How much of an impact your time abroad had on the following skills...

English Skills (if applicable) *

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

No Impact

Listening Skills (ability and willingness to listen to others’ ideas) *

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

No Impact

Team Work (ability to actively work in a group of diverse people) *

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

No Impact

Written Communication (ability to express yourself clearly and precisely in emails, essays etc.) *

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

No Impact

Presentation Skills (ability to present your ideas for an audience) *

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

No Impact
Creativity (ability find creative solutions for problems) *

No Impact 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 High Impact

Problem-solving Skills (ability to analyse complex problems and find a solutions for them) *

No Impact 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 High Impact

Cross-Cultural Skills (ability to accept, understand and cope with cultural differences) *

No Impact 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 High Impact

Budgeting Skills (ability to manage own or others' money) *

No Impact 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 〇 High Impact

---

Open Ended Question

Leírás (nem kötelező)

---

What were your main motivations for studying abroad? *

Rövid szöveges válasz

How do you think your study abroad effected your employability in your opinion? *
If you are already employed, how much do you think your experience abroad helped you getting a job?

Rövid szöveges válasz

Overall Speaking, how did your soft skills (communication, dealing with people and problems etc.) change?

Hosszú szöveges válasz

How did your expectations about your career change? How did your ambitions change? How did your expectations about your future employer change?

Hosszú szöveges válasz

How do you think the friendships you made could possibly influence your future life/career? And what value see in having international friends?

Hosszú szöveges válasz

Did your time abroad have an effect on your personality (e.g. confidence)? If so, in what way?

Hosszú szöveges válasz

What is your opinion about the overall importance/impact of your study abroad?

Hosszú szöveges válasz