

## Mastering life abroad as an international student – seeking, learning, growing

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**Introduction.** International students' transition to a foreign culture and a foreign educational system disrupt their general order of things. This poster presents and discusses the results from a survey study of international master students' information seeking behaviour while preparing their stay and study in Denmark. Three issues of the pre-settlement period are in focus: international students' background, importance of information needs and hopes for the stay..

**Method.** Sixteen participants completed a questionnaire about their background, information needs, information seeking, self-efficacy statements and hopes for their stay.

**Analysis.** A conceptual model of everyday-life information seeking and cultural adaptation in context framed the analysis.

**Results.** Participants have high self-efficacy, rate both everyday and study-related needs as highly important in preparation of their stay abroad, and they hope to learn and grow.

**Conclusions.** International students seek study-related and everyday information before arrival to master life in the host culture. This makes insights into pre-settling activities valuable to both researchers and host institutions.

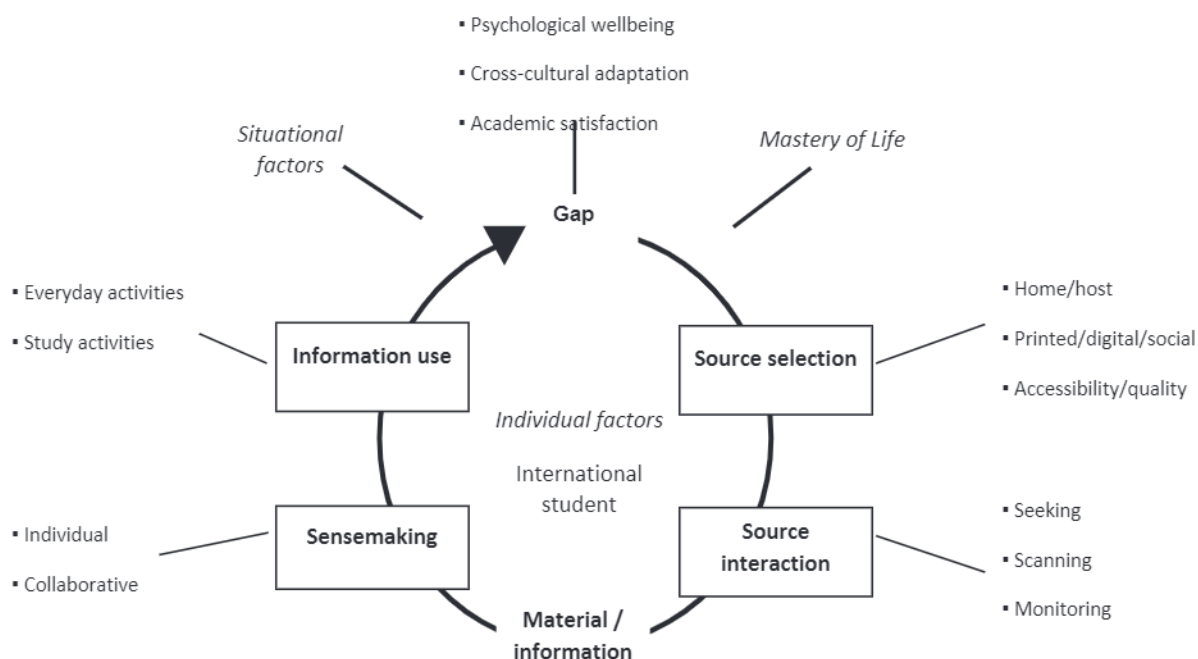
An increasing number of students study abroad (OECD, 2018) facing a foreign educational system (e.g. Hughes, 2013; Liao et. al, 2007; Mehra and Bilal, 2007; Song, 2005) and a foreign culture (e.g., Jeong, 2004; Khawaja and Stallman, 2011; Kim, 2001; McLachlan and Justice, 2009; Shafaei and Razak, 2016) that disrupt their general "order of things" (Savolainen, 1995). This poster presents and discusses the survey results from a study of sixteen international master students' information seeking behaviour while preparing their stay and study in Denmark in 2017. The study focuses on three issues of this often ignored *pre-settlement* period:

1. Perceived characteristics of language skills and self-efficacy
2. Perceived importance of study and everyday information needs
3. Hopes for the stay

The research is part of a longitudinal (diary and interview) study of how international students cope with study-related and everyday information needs abroad and how their information seeking blends with their cross-cultural adaptation and mastery of life.

### Theory

The study is framed by Savolainen's (1995) approach to Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) in the context of 'mastery of life'. To operationalize ELIS we employ McKenzie's (2003) understanding of ELIS as a dynamic process that includes different phases and modes of information practices. Inspired by Shafaei and Razak (2016) we conceptualize that gaps in international students' cross-cultural adaptation, psychological wellbeing and academic satisfaction are key drivers for their everyday information seeking. Figure 1 shows our conceptual model of international students' ELIS.



**Figure 1:** The international student’s everyday-life information seeking in context

## Method

Before arriving in Denmark the participants (7 exchange, 9 full degree; 10 female, 6 male) with different bachelor degrees and nationalities completed a questionnaire about their background, language skills, self-efficacy, information seeking and hopes for their stay. Participants rated their language skills (Danish/English), everyday information needs, study-related information needs and ten self-efficacy statements (Schwarzer et al., 1997) on scales from 1 (low/disagree) to 7 (high/agree).

## Results and discussion

Results of the questionnaire study and the accompanying issues for discussion are presented below.

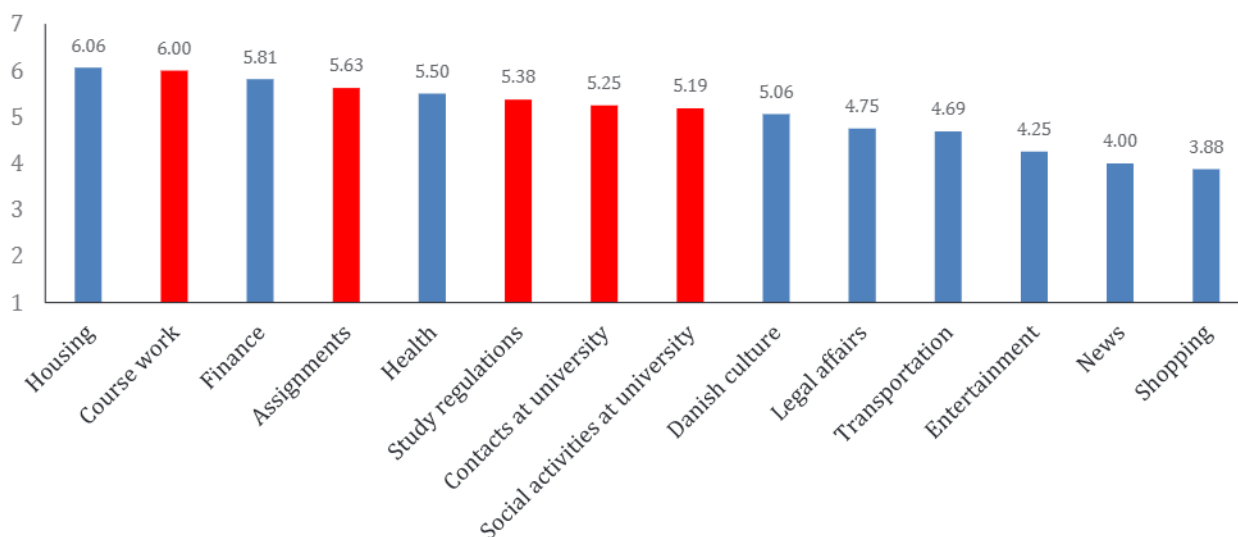
- Participants perceive themselves as skilled in English, but with no skills in the local language (Table 1) implying risks of double-language barriers (Sin and Kim, 2013).

**Table 1:** Background information of participants

	Mean	Std. deviation
Age (years)	25.1	3.21
English skills (1 - 7)	5.63	0.89
Danish skills (1 - 7)	1.81	0.98
Self-efficacy (1 - 7)	5.59	0.86

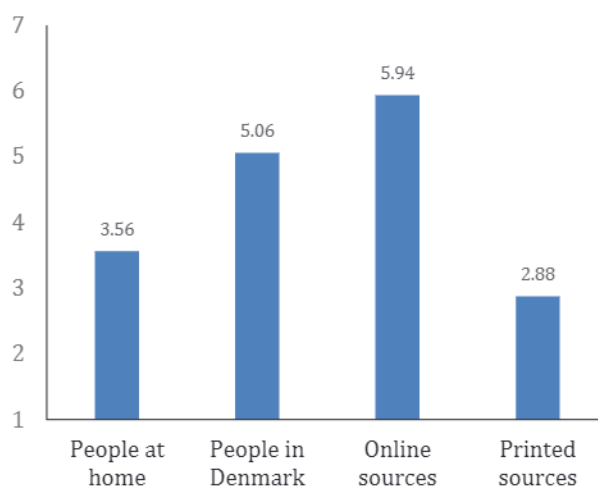
- Self-efficacy (Table 1) correlates positively with prior experience (8 had prior experience, 8 had none), but is in general high across participants. The reason may be pre-arrival preparedness, personality or inherent in the decision to go abroad.

- Information on 'housing' issues is more important to full degree participants, indicating that 'length of stay' affects ELIS. This is supported by Oh and Butler (2016;2019) and Yoon and Chung (2017).
- The top-five needs during planning are a mix of everyday and study-related issues (e.g. housing and coursework) (Figure 2). Needs of lower importance may though become relevant after arrival.



**Figure 2:** Importance of Information needs before arrival

- The important information sources for planning life abroad (Figure 3) are online and social sources (people in Denmark). This ties in with findings in Yoon and Chung (2017)



**Figure 3:** Use of information sources before arrival

- Linking Savolainen's (1995) four ideal types to the self-efficacy-responses, we speculate that international students have an optimistic-cognitive or defensive-affective approach to their "mastery of life" before arrival
- Participants hope to learn, but also to grow, make friends and see the world.

## Conclusion

International students seek study-related and everyday information *before* arrival to master life in the host culture. This makes insights into pre-settling activities valuable to both researchers and host institutions.

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