

**Student Mobility and Competence Development in Higher Education:
a study of Latvian students at English universities.**

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ABSTRACT

This research examines experiences of Latvian students pursuing undergraduate degrees at universities in England. Working with this population positions this research in the subject area of International Student Mobility (ISM). As a relatively new subject ISM is still developing suitable concepts, methodological practices and scientific terminology. This presents a challenge but also calls for more in-depth work in the area. As an exploratory study this research answers this call and proposes new directions in the development of ISM as a research field.

ISM is particularly interesting in the context of contemporary Europe where student mobility is considered as a vehicle of human capital across national borders. As such student mobility contributes to further internationalization of the European labour force and facilitates development of the knowledge-based economy. Finding out what students gain from university education abroad remains a topic of scientific debate. This research focuses on the practical but complicated part of Higher Education: competence development. The review of the literature reveals that the topic of competence development in Higher Education has been in and out of researchers' favour, but it has not been examined in the international context. This consideration is timely as more and more students seek education abroad and competences developed at foreign universities are transferred across borders.

This research is based on in-depth interviews with Latvian students in England, their family members and friends both in Latvia and in England. Interviewing family and friends enriched the self-reporting accounts of the students, thus capturing a more holistic representation of the students' experiences. In addition, accounts of the students' network representatives from England and from Latvia positioned this research in the international social networks of the students. This research finds that international social networks are the natural and necessary environments in which mobility of students takes place and argues that it needs to be studied with consideration to these under-researched environments. This study also proposes a longitudinal focus. The main participants of this research, the students, were interviewed three times over three years, which goes beyond most research studies on student mobility.

The analysis of the interview responses relies on multiple iterations between the literature and the data. The findings demonstrate that degree-seeking students develop competences that can be grouped in three main areas: gaining access to university education in England, socio-cultural acculturation and academic acculturation. In each of these areas students develop specific skills and abilities that support the three areas of competences. The development of the skills, abilities and competences is explained through a model created by Noel Burch for Gordon Training International (GTI). The model outlines four stages of development that progress from the level of unconscious incompetence, to conscious incompetence, to conscious competence and to unconscious competence.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale for researching International Student Mobility

My main motivation for researching academic mobility of students comes from personal experience. When I taught English to Latvian school-leavers and worked as a guidance counsellor for students who wished to continue their education in English-speaking countries I observed that many Latvian students were not ready to apply to foreign universities. This realization naturally triggered my interest towards ways of helping them.

Through preliminary readings on academic mobility I recognized that the process encompassed more than students' individual wishes, but is largely dictated by institutional, national and supra-national agendas. My growing interest towards student mobility is more than justified considering that in the 1950s the worldwide number of students studying abroad is estimated to have been about 200 000 in absolute terms whereas according to the latest statistics it has increased to more than 2 million (Teichler and Yagci, 2009). It is particularly important to pay attention to the English – Latvian relations because there are more Latvians studying in England than in any other country in the EU (Higher Education in Latvia, 2007, 2011) and one of the aims of this study is to investigate the reasons for this attraction. When I started this doctoral project in 2008 I wanted to understand the rules that shape international mobility of students with a purpose of devising ways of facilitating the process. However, I recognize that academic mobility is not an unequivocally optimal approach to post-secondary education and tried to maintain an unbiased attitude throughout this research.

One of the first discoveries was that mobility means mobility of students who travel abroad independently and those who travel within institutionally-supported exchange

programmes. While exchange mobility was in the spotlight of the researchers and policy-makers I noticed that the other kind of mobility, individual mobility, remained under-researched. One of the difficulties of conducting this study was a shortage of the statistical data on the individually-mobile students. This under-researched area called for the exploratory study that would highlight the salient questions in individual academic mobility of students, find promising directions for further research and provide implications for all interested stake-holders.

My first readings on student mobility demonstrated that ‘student mobility’ is an umbrella term hiding a number of processes (for example exchange and individual mobility as mentioned above). However, many researchers did not take care to explain the actual research population, which created a breach in understanding between the writers and their audience. To avoid similar problems the first aim of this research was to systematize existing definitions of student mobility, explain how they differ from each other and suggest more informed ways of defining mobility. In the course of reading I noticed that international student mobility is particularly interesting in the context of contemporary Europe where it stood out as a key to the Higher Education modernization and internationalization agendas.

1.2 Ways of researching International Student Mobility

The Review of the Literature introduces International Student Mobility (ISM) as an approach to research. The review demonstrates ISM from three platforms: globalization, internationalization and Europeanization. The predominant ways of researching mobility from the point of view of each idea are explained and critiqued. Section 2.2 explores possibilities and limitations of each approach and demonstrates how they contribute to this study. It is widely believed among scholars that students who come to

study in more economically developed countries tend to stay and work there after graduation (Wiers-Jenssen and Try, 2005). In Latvia this belief is in the core of the media's complaints that internationalization of Higher Education results in flight of human capital or 'brain drain'. First, 'brain drain' is a controversial idea as argued in the Review of the Literature. Second, there is no record of the number of Latvians who move abroad, no knowledge about their reasons for doing so and no data on the rates of return. With open borders between European countries these data will remain unrecorded, but a report on Latvian students based on the statistics collected by the receiving countries could provide at least a tacit indication of how many young people choose to study abroad. Information on Latvian students who study in English universities provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) was central to this research. This research is intentionally limited to universities located only in England. This allows avoiding comparisons of diverse university systems in other countries of the UK. Further qualitative studies in the area can make the plans of the Latvian students more visible. Without these data no successful policy can be designed to counterbalance the problem of 'brain drain'. This research is just the first step towards understanding the motivations and experience of academic mobility of Latvian students.

Even though there is no shortage of research reports from national and international foundations on Higher Education and student mobility in the EU (such as Higher Education Admissions and Student Mobility within the EU (ADMIT Project), Key Data on Higher Education in Europe reports, various OECD publications, surveys by the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEEN) and many others) the situation of Latvian mobile students is rather unique and findings from other contexts are not always applicable to Latvian students.

Due to the Soviet past of Latvian history education abroad has only become available to Latvians after 1991. Thus, very few parents of contemporary Latvian students could have studied abroad. Of course, exceptions happened, but as a rule international mobility of university students was not practiced in the Soviet era. This phenomenon places Latvian students and students from other Baltic states in the category of first-generation internationally-mobile students. First-generation students have been found to have different plans, poorer academic preparation, lower levels of parental support and involvement and different expectations from their peers even in their home countries (Choy, 2002; Chen, 2005). As EU accession countries the Baltic States are expected to contribute to the mobility quota suggested by the European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education (by 2020 the recommended quota is 20% of the total student population). But as first-generation internationally mobile students, they are often not in the position to make informed decisions about education abroad. Even though the agenda of widening participation in Higher Education has sparked much research explaining the differences between first-generation and non-first-generation entrants within home countries, no research is dedicated to the experiences of first-generation mobile students at universities abroad. Again, while there are no data to indicate how many students in contemporary Europe are mobile in the first generation, this research demonstrates that this is an interesting direction for further research.

In the course of reading on ISM from different points of view I realized that the same phenomenon, in this case mobility of students, can be researched from a number of academic perspectives or fields where each field adds unique theoretical and methodological traditions. In this way ISM is a highly interdisciplinary topic. The Review of the Literature explains that findings from any one field inform only one side

of mobility. Borrowing from different fields creates a fuller representation of academic mobility. Besides, thorough examination of the topic from different perspectives is one of the aims of any exploratory study. Drawing on findings from the fields of Migration Studies, Education and Sociology of Higher Education, the Review of the Literature discusses the population under investigation in each field. The literature shows how mobile students from Latvia can be investigated as student-migrants, international students or first-generation mobile students. All mobile students face one overarching challenge: achieving their goals in a previously unknown environment. A summary of the findings from the existing research demonstrates how this challenge is met by more established researchers. The limitations of the existing research point out the research questions for this study. More specific literature demonstrates not only the wealth of previous knowledge on access to Higher Education but evaluates how it can be applied to this research.

A substantive part of this research is informed by the findings from Sociology of Higher Education. First, findings from first-generation students and their problems as mentioned above are discussed in Sociology of HE. Second, related to the first-generation problems are issues of socio-economic class, parental education and individual cultural capital. Holdworth and Patiniotis (2005) notice that explanations of these problems call for the application of Bourdieu's theory of human capital and intergenerational reproduction of social class almost '*de rigueur*' (p. 84). While this approach has become a matter of course in research conducted in home countries within populations of home students, theory of individual human capital (as presented by Bourdieu) is not commonly discussed in the cross-national contexts.

Furthermore, Bourdieu's ideas lead me towards implementing the idea of competence development as a missing focus of this research. Bourdieu conceptualized human capital not only as a collection of tangible assets, but as a 'know-how' of competent practices in the social world. Since Bourdieu found all definitions too constraining and did not provide any, generations of followers are debating the meaning of 'know-how of social practices'. That conceptualization spun off a number of interesting outlooks on competence development, some of which were found useful for this research.

There seem to be two camps of scientists: those who believe that the idea of competence provides an observable measure for education, acculturation or even internationalization; and those who see competence as tacit, intuitive development of knowledge that is unobservable and often unreported because research participants are unaware of it. On one hand, in this research it would be easier to retain the first attitude to competence and provide a catalogue of competences that students develop in the course of their education abroad. On the other hand, as a teacher I cannot discard cognitive, affective and behavioural change that contributes to any learning and, certainly, to learning during study abroad. In my attempts to accommodate both views in this research I relied on a definition by Wood and Powers (1987) examined in the Review of the Literature (2.6). They see competence development as a re-structuring of integral cognitive and affective configurations, which rests on a number of skills and abilities. In this way competence is an outcome of mobility experience.

1.3 Developing research questions

Having identified the gaps in the literature and establishing the key themes led to the development of the research questions. For example, the theory of cultural capital explains that personal characteristics, cultural dispositions and means, strategies and

resources that influence students' entry to universities are inherited and acquired during childhood. But since the relevant means, resources and strategies that facilitate students' participation in international mobility are not implicit in the Latvian students' families' lifestyles, they could not have been inherited and acquired during childhood by the students. For this reason, the first research question asks: **what competences do prospective undergraduate students from Latvia develop as part of finding access to university education in England?**

Students who find themselves in new social environments need to adjust to these environments. These adjustments are often considered as acculturation. The most established way is to divide acculturation into socio-cultural and psychological acculturations (Ward, 1996). However, since the analysis of the data from the point of view of psychological acculturation requires specialized training, the psychological focus falls outside the scope of this study. The findings of this research refer to psychological and emotional states of the students as necessary and as my knowledge in the area allows, but mainly this research is concerned with socio-cultural and more precisely academic acculturation of the Latvian students to English universities.

Socio-cultural acculturation is imperative for the students' attainment and retention in Higher Education (Ryan, 2005; Farbrother and Hartwell, 2006). But students who have little or no previous experience of mobility (or sometimes even international travelling) do not have a chance to develop effective competences for socio-cultural acculturation. The development of appropriate competences during country-specific socio-cultural acculturation is the focus of the second research question of this study: **what competences do undergraduate students from Latvia develop as part of socio-cultural acculturation to the English environment?**

Within Education, the researchers recognize that students from abroad have to adjust not only to social conventions of daily life in a host country but to a specific academic culture. For the purposes of this study, international mobility of students is regarded as a primarily educational process for which speedy adjustments to the new academic environment, or academic acculturation, are crucial for the students' success. The underlying logic behind the third research question is based on the belief that the students willing to become successful members of the academic community must be proficient in specific academic competences. Hence the third research question: **what competences do undergraduate students from Latvia develop as part of academic acculturation to the English university environment?**

1.4 Structure of the thesis

As a result of the analysis of the relevant literature and in view of the practical constraints, I approached this research as a series of case studies (seven cases) with multiple participants as described in the Methodology (Chapter 3). The methodology first explains that a case in this study consists of the central participant – a Latvian student currently studying for an undergraduate degree in England and four of their nominated family members and acquaintances who can contribute their accounts on the various stages of the central participant's mobility process.

A substantive part of the Methodology is dedicated to the participants' recruitment and selection. To ensure that the central participants of the study fit the definition of a first-generation internationally-mobile student as discussed in the Review of the Literature, judicious selection criteria were applied to the choice of central participants. The

participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire that ensured their eligibility for participation in this study.

The investigative procedures are informed by the concrete examples from the literature that were modified to fit the design of the instruments for this study. Once the provisional interview schedule was designed, two central participants and four of their network members were accessed for a pilot study. As the first step of the pilot, initial interviews were conducted with each central participant. As the second step, network members of each participant were interviewed. As the third step, a follow-up interview was scheduled with each central participant. The data for the pilot study were collected and processed, and their potential to answer the research questions was critically assessed. Based on that assessment, interview schedules were changed in order to elicit more relevant and more thoughtful responses in the main study.

The last part of the Methodology chapter describes the nature of the qualitative data received as a result of the interviews and outlines the method of the data analysis. The analysis relies on the analytical framework developed by Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) where the analysis is a result of multiple iterations between the literature and the data. The Methodology chapter also includes a discussion of ethical issues in relation to this research, a discussion of the transferability of this study and limitations of this research project, including some methodological implications for further research in the area of student mobility.

Chapter 4, Data Analysis and Findings is organized following the three research questions. The first section of the chapter describes the individual situations of the research participants and explains what can be derived from these descriptions. Each

following section is concerned with answering one research question. The answers to the research questions are re-assembled in the conclusions for each section thus providing a comprehensive summary.

The last chapter of this thesis, Conclusions and Implications, extends the discussion and raises it to a more abstract level. At the same time it maintains a practical focus through suggesting the stake-holders who might be interested in a particular finding. The chapter offers some recommendations for practical actions and policy development.

Chapter 2. Review of the Literature

Chapter 2, the Review of the Literature is organized in seven sections: Section 2.1 defines student mobility and explains its types thus establishing a shared understanding with the readers. It also provides a short comparison between degree-seeking mobility and mobility within exchange programmes in order to demonstrate that the two models are hardly comparable. Section 2.2 explains the status of International Student Mobility (ISM) as a field of research and shows how ISM can be investigated as a part of Migration Studies. Sub-sections 2.2.1.-2.2.3 discuss research on student mobility from three points of view: globalization, internationalization and Europeanization. These ideas are not central to this study and serve mainly as a method of organizing the existing research on student mobility. Section 2.3 shifts the outlook from Migration Studies to the field of Education and discusses ideas that can be useful as analytical tools for this research and their limitations. The section explains selection of the key foci of this research: gaining access to university education abroad (2.3.1), socio-cultural acculturation of international students (2.3.2) and academic acculturation of international students at English universities (2.3.3). This section also deals with the three research questions for this study, their origins and the theoretical underpinnings. Section 2.4 is dedicated to researching ISM from the point of view of Sociology. The beginning of the section explains how mobility can be seen as a part of human capital and why such conceptualization is useful for this research. It also explains that all Latvian students are internationally mobile in the first generation and how research on first-generation students contributes to this study. Sub-sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 explain the two predominant ways of obtaining human capital and how it relates to mobility of Latvian students. Section 2.5 displays various academic authors' attempts to surpass the limitations of both, Migration and Educational Studies, by showing alternative viewpoints on mobility of students. The section demonstrates to what extent mobility of

student can be seen as a holistic process. Section 2.6 deals with the most central concept of this research: competence and competence development, outlines the debate surrounding the concept and explains its meaning for this research. Section 2.7 addresses important idiosyncrasies of researching mobile students from Latvia and implication it has for this study.

2.1 Defining International Student Mobility

Different understandings of the term 'mobility' complicate work of the researchers. For example, it is difficult to evaluate the scope, relevance and quality of research unless the particular type of mobility under investigation is precisely and explicitly defined. Furthermore, if research lacks an accurate definition of the type of mobility under investigation, policy-makers informed by such research are likely to make inappropriate generalizations. As a result, understanding, evaluation and development of policy may be impaired which, in turn, may affect the students as well as the institutions. On the other hand, different understandings of the terminology can initiate exchange of ideas and stimulate a discussion about what mobility actually entails.

While in Europe mobility of students is currently under the attention of supra-national agencies its executive definition is rather ambiguous even in the official documents. The European Parliament and Council (2006) in the European Quality Charter for Mobility explains it as 'a period of learning abroad (formal and non-formal), or mobility undertaken by individual young people or adults, for the purposes of formal and non-formal learning and for their personal and professional development' (p. 8). Since one does not have to be a student to participate in non-formal learning or personal development, this definition appears generic for all mobile individuals involved in any kind of learning process and not specific to students. Students, on the other hand, are

different from informal learners as they seek tertiary education that can be documented and subsequently recognized. Therefore mobility of students in Higher Education as a scientific term requires a separate, more precise definition.

Since mobility of students is studied across several academic fields (Population Geography, Migration Studies, Education, Applied Linguistics, Sociology, etc.) it is impossible to pinpoint one agreed way of defining mobility. Harnessing this flexibility, researchers seem to re-negotiate mobility depending on their domains. This part of the Review of the Literature captures the most widely used concepts and provides a foundation for building definitions for mobility of students. The most obvious property of mobility, the relocation from one place to another, is referred to as geographical mobility and it can be divided into intra- and international mobility. Intra-national mobility takes place within a country whilst international mobility crosses national borders and is also known as transnational. International, academic mobility of students can be virtual (computer-mediated, long-distance) or physical (also called spatial or geographical). Physical international mobility of students is studied as a subset of Migration Studies (King, 2002; Dreher and Poutvaara, 2005; Ferro, 2006; Hadler, 2006; Coleman, 2008; Favell, 2008) and is known as International Student Mobility (ISM). From the point of view of socio-politics, ISM can be inward (into a country) or outward (out of a country).

As far as I know there are no studies that organize the terms and definitions describing different types of academic mobility. On one hand, this lack of guidance allows researchers access to a great diversity of terms, on the other, the lack of convergence hinders understanding and evaluation of research. This part of the review of the literature undertakes to describe two major types of intra-European academic mobility

of students: 'individual mobility' and 'organized mobility'. Loosely defined 'organized mobility' is 'the exchange of students ... between different Higher Education institutions, for limited periods of time, and with the student ... normally returning afterwards to the home institution' (Wuttig, 2007, p. 10). 'Programme' in this case refers to an institutionally-supported programme of educational exchange within which students travel abroad. As of yet, I have failed to find a suitable definition of 'individual mobility', so independently I define it as mobility undertaken by individuals for the purposes of pursuing Higher Education abroad without the support of exchange programmes. Usually individually mobile students aspire to finish the whole course and earn a degree, while the students participating in the exchange programmes usually study abroad for a part of their studies. The focus here is on the word 'education' that, as explained above, is institutionally organized and formal, unlike 'learning' that can be formal or informal.

Individual mobility has a set of full or partial synonyms used seemingly at random by different authors: free-moving mobility (Szarka, 2003), diploma/degree mobility (Kelo et al., 2006), vertical mobility (Teichler, 1988), non-formal mobility (Wuttig, 2007), whole-degree programme mobility (ADMIT Project Team, 2001), self-organized mobility, spontaneous mobility (Gordon and Jallade, 1996). Organized mobility, on the other hand, is often equated with: credit mobility (Kelo et al., 2006), horizontal mobility (Teichler, 1988), formal mobility (Wuttig, 2007), temporary mobility (King et al., 2006), externally-organized mobility (Raikou and Karalis, 2007). Very few of these descriptors can be used as full synonyms or antonyms as there are sometimes significant differences between the definitions offered (or implied) by the authors who use them. For example, the fact that 'whole-degree programme mobility' is contrary to 'programme mobility' in meaning can be confusing. In the first case, 'programme' refers

to the course of study, in the second to the exchange programme under which a student is travelling. Another important distinction is between 'horizontal' and 'vertical' mobility. These terms are traceable to the work of Teichler (1988, p. 24) in the 1980s, where he explains 'horizontal mobility' as the one taking place between institutions of more or less similar academic standing and 'vertical' from a 'lower' academic institution to a 'higher' one. However, with time, the terms as used in the work of other writers started to be equated with organized and individual mobility. Therefore, in this study I chose to operate with the terms 'organized mobility' and 'individual mobility'.

Since many seem to believe that there is only one type of academic mobility -- mobility within exchange programmes, the following part of this review undertakes the task of explaining the differences between organized and individual mobilities. Ideally, to compare the two kinds of mobile students' experiences a systematic analysis of all literature in all the academic fields that inform research on mobility should be presented, but since such a task is too vast for this study, for the purposes of this review I suggest a very brief comparison that outlines some of the basic differences between organized and individual mobility. Since there are variations between the organized programmes, I take ERASMUS as an important example of an organized mobility programme. In search of the most comprehensive explanation of the principles of the ERASMUS programme, I sought out studies by Ulrich Teichler who has keenly followed the developments of the intra-European educational exchange programmes since the 1980s. Such unique expertise allows a historical perspective on the subject and makes works by Teichler a credible source among researchers. In his 1996 report on an evaluation study Teichler provides a list of issues that in his opinion define ERASMUS. Considering that ERASMUS is the most widely-spread exchange programme for

mobility I compared all the issues mentioned by Teichler to what is known about individual mobility.

According to Teichler (1996, pp. 155-156) ERASMUS promotes cooperation between European countries with similar cultural and educational characteristics rather than mobility between very different education systems and cultures. Individual mobility of students is not a strictly organized process and does not follow an 'official agenda'. ERASMUS promotes temporary, short-term study abroad. Individual mobility usually pursues a whole course of study although there is little reliable data as to how many individually-mobile students finish their degrees. Moreover, out of the people who do not finish their courses of study some may choose to drop out voluntarily and others do so due to academic, financial, or personal pressures. Again, there are no statistics on this subject. ERASMUS advises the institutions involved to provide systematic support such as foreign language training, help in accommodation matters, administrative and academic advice for the mobile students before they leave their home countries and upon arrival in the host institutions. This help is in principle also available to the individually mobile students upon arrival, but at home they can usually only access support through private providers or by relying on their own resources. Participation in ERASMUS awards a grant to cover the additional costs of study abroad, while individually mobile students apply for grants on an individual basis, and are often self-funded.

ERASMUS encourages 'curricular integration', ranging from joint or coordinated academic activities between the partner departments on the one hand, to the incorporation of the temporary study period into the home country curriculum on the other. The latter might be achieved through elements of joint curricula, joint selection of

students, mandatory periods abroad, regular recognition procedures, certification of study achievement abroad, etc. This last point is the only one on which ERASMUS mobility and individual mobility partially coincide as many institutions now internationalize their curricula as it is a mandatory part of the academic programmes' accreditation. Some universities design their curricula in teams with their foreign partners, others include elements of intercultural training in their syllabuses and of course in the EU's regular recognition procedures, and certification of study achievement is expected at most universities. This process was not very well developed yet in 1996, when Teichler conducted and reported this evaluation study, but has taken a firm hold since then as one of the aims of the Bologna Declaration (European Parliament and Council, 2006).

While organized mobility of students has established its research space especially since the beginning of the Bologna Process, the phenomenon of individual mobility of students remains under-investigated as many writers in the field point out (Gordon and Jallade, 1996; King, 2002; Hadler, 2006; Kelo et al., 2006; Guth, 2008). One possible reason is that organized mobility is easier to research. The student group in question is clearly defined and universities usually keep statistical data on organized mobility. This description of ERASMUS is just one example that shows that organized mobility is determined by processes that are different to those influencing other forms of mobility and findings from one type of mobility cannot be generalized to all the mobile students.

2.2 International Student Mobility as part of Migration Studies

As mentioned before there is no one 'correct' way to research student mobility, rather the approaches to research should depend on the research aims. Kehm and Teichler (2007) explain that 'research on academic mobility has not found a conceptual or

methodological home' (p. 263). In this Review of the Literature I attempt to demonstrate patterns in existing research and explain where, within these patterns, my research fits. One of the patterns in the literature shows that International Student Mobility (ISM) frequently parallels debates on globalization (Van Damme, 2001; Neave, 2002; Altbach, 2004; Teichler, 2004), internationalization (Van der Wende, 2001; Altbach and Knight, 2007; Kehm and Teichler, 2007) and, in the European context, Europeanization (Vink, 2002; Teichler, 2007; Guth, 2008). However, Dodds (2008) warns that neither idea is fully conceptualized or cleanly defined, which invites arbitrary analysis of the contexts and results in ideological and discourse inconsistencies. On the other hand, inconsistencies facilitate further attempts to define these ideas more accurately, which, in turn, extends the debate and develops the research field. First of all this review examines how research approaches to student mobility change in light of these ideas.

2.2.1 International Student Mobility as a process of globalization

Dodds (2008) explains that globalization usually refers to global flows of people, goods, money and information. Global flows of people are the movement of groups of people across international borders in the form of immigration, business travel, tourism and/or international student mobility. In Higher Education globalization is discussed in terms of the global flows of students and the economic, political and financial pressures these flows place on national educational systems. These global student flows are studied as a subset of Migration Studies, referred to as International Student Mobility (ISM), and aim to establish what directs the student cross-border flows geographically (Findlay, 2001), to explain their origins (Tremblay, 2002, 2005) and to analyze their impact on the national educational and economic systems (Skeldon, 2005).

Hadler (2006) finds that socio-economic factors are often the most important in promoting migration at international levels. In other words, the overall aim of international mobility in this case is the migrants' desire to improve conditions of life. This approach explains why the dominant stream of cross-border migrants is from less prosperous to more prosperous countries (Li and Bray, 2007). Findlay et al. (2010) analyzed findings of the key authors on ISM and similarly concluded that global student flows more often than not take place from less economically advanced to the more economically advanced countries. Analysis of institutional level among organized mobile students (Teichler, 1996) shows that availability of information about the exchange programmes (only relevant to programme mobility), credit transfer system, availability of preparatory language training and access to mobility grants are the main facilitators of mobility among the students at the institutional level.

However, decisions on the individual level are the most complicated to investigate because in this case research needs to discuss choices and motivations of the mobile students that often deal with students' visions of the past, their perceptions of the present and their ambitions about the future. Since these processes are in constant change and are subject to multiple interpretations, they are difficult to capture and to research. According to my observations, studies of the individual levels of mobility sometimes lack a clear aim and tend to be descriptive. Guth (2008) explains the discordance between research on international, institutional and individual levels is problematic because 'individuals' private life and career trajectory do not always fit easily with institutional, national or supranational objectives' (p. 401). To deepen my understanding of the matter I expanded the literature search into Sociology of Higher Education and discovered new perspectives that enrich research on student mobility. Researching

mobility from the point of view of Sociology of Higher Education is discussed in section 2.6 of this review.

According to King (2002) Migration Studies recognizes short-term, long-term and permanent migration patterns, in which mobile students are discussed as short-term migrants. This might be a valid approach for the students travelling within exchange programmes who study abroad for a short time, but the situation needs more thorough investigation for the students who travel independently, on their own accord, as they may be short-term, long-term or permanent migrants. King admits that even though the temporal characteristics are not defined, permanent migrants go through different processes than short-term migrants. Therefore, researching all mobile students as short-term migrants biases research findings. He suggests an interesting alternative of 'shuttle' migration, which describes more or less frequent, repeated travelling to one or more foreign countries. Even though the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) grading scale has been developed in order to facilitate such shuttle mobility, analysis of students' experiences shows that there is lack of information about the credit accumulation, no shared understanding of how the real workload of students should be measured, and no common credit systems in some countries (Papatsiba, 2006; Dodds, 2008; Schomburg and Teichler, 2011).

ISM tends to deal with student flows in terms of numbers and is complicated by severe measurement problems (Kelo et al., 2006). The authors explain that many publications of international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), or the European Commission (Education and Training Division) convey the impression that there is no shortage of data on international

student mobility. However, this impression is misleading because the statistics provided by the individual countries for the purposes of collection by these supra-national organizations report on foreign students, use the foreign nationality of students as a measure of mobility. Kelo et al. (2006) analyzed national data from 32 countries on mobility and found that only 10 collect, but do not always publish, data on genuine mobility, on students moving across country borders for the purpose of study. Kelo et al. (2006, p. 195) further explain that foreign nationality is not a valid measure of mobility because

up to two fifths of all foreign students had already been residents in the country prior to taking up tertiary studies and/or obtained their upper-secondary school leaving certificate there. At the same time, there are sizeable numbers of own-nationality students enrolled in some countries who lived and/or went to school elsewhere and who entered their country of nationality for the express purpose of starting Higher Education studies there. These students do not appear as mobile in statistics that try to capture mobility by means of “foreign nationality.”

Kelo et al. conclude that the non-existence of genuine mobility data in most countries severely limits the ability to measure progress in mobility.

Studies in ISM consistently characterize mobile students according to the following criteria: gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, country of previous domicile, mode of study, year of study, field of study (Straubhaar, 2000; Findlay, 2001; Tremblay, 2002; King, 2002; Dreher and Poutvaara, 2005; Skeldon, 2005; Coleman, 2008). This study does not seek to explain mobility in light of these variables, but uses some of these factors (nationality, country of previous domicile, mode of study, year of study, field of study) in two ways. First, these variables are used to sample the participants according to maximum variation sampling as explained in 3.2. Second, nationality, country of previous domicile, mode of study, year of study, field of study are used as criteria for comparing the mobility experiences of the participants in the sections on Data Analysis and Findings (4.1-4.4).

Despite the established list of the characteristics which describes the student flows, much of the research tends to be decontextualized. For example, unless specified, it is difficult to pinpoint what groups of students within post-secondary education researchers take into account: university students, college students, further education students, other groups of students or all the tertiary level students. Such discrepancies stand in the way of shared readings of the statistical data, weaken comparability of findings and decrease reliability of ISM as a research field. To avoid similar problems one of the aims of this Review of the Literature is to provide definitions of the research concepts and boundaries for the research context. For the purposes of this study I use terminology related to students, institutions and relocation according to the definitions used by the HESA.

Since the aim of ISM is to understand the principles of student flows, examination of the influences that direct the flows, also known as push and pull factors, has long become an established approach to analysing macro factors in ISM. Altbach (1998) explains push factors as unfavourable conditions that drive students away from their home countries and pull factors as the perceived opportunities that attract students to the host countries. The push and pull factors are usually grouped into educational, economic, political and socio-cultural categories (Mazzarol and Sautar, 2002). King (2002) warns that traditionally students do not qualify as economic or political migrants, although he questions these dichotomies in the first place. He believes that push and pull factors that govern decisions of mobile students predominantly lie in educational and socio-cultural domains. Indeed, Rivza and Teichler (2007) note that for ERASMUS students the main pull factors are hopes of gaining intercultural experience and upgrading language competence in the host country. For the students who choose to

travel outside of the exchange programmes the main pull factor is career advancement (Larsen et al., 2002). While the push factors have not been analyzed for the ERASMUS students, for most students travelling outside the exchange programmes push factors include lack of educational or technical provisions in their desired programme of study and in some countries the *numerus clausus* (Tremblay, 2002, 2005). *Numerus clausus* is used in some countries to limit the number of entrants to some academic programmes where the number of applications greatly exceeds the number of available places for students. The main criticism of the push and pull idea is that the analysis of push and pull factors focuses on external (macro) pressures that influence the mobile students known in this case as 'the agents' of mobility and ignores individual motivations.

Hadler (2006) is one of the authors warning that the essence of mobility experience lies in the interplay between the 'macro-level circumstances related to overall movements ... and individual, micro-level explanations that emphasize personal circumstances and characteristics' (p. 112). Citing Esser (1988), Hadler (2006, p. 115) advocates an actor-oriented approach to ISM that emphasizes individual perceptions (micro-level) as stronger motivators and recognizes external influences (macro-level) only as important in terms of their effect on an individual. Similarly, De Haas (2009) finds that human agency is often obscured in ISM research, traditionally concerned with numbers, and explains that push and pull factors may direct and define student flows but do not cause them. For the purposes of this study I adopt an actor-oriented approach where the focus is on the micro-factors and macro-factors are used to contextualize the data. As shown in section 2.4 the debate about the relative importance of the macro and micro levels influencing student mobility is also mirrored in Sociology of Higher Education as the dichotomy of 'agency' vs. 'structure'.

Understanding of push-pull models acquires additional complexity when the reversed factors of the models are taken into account. Usually pull factors are assigned to the host countries and push factors to the home countries, but Li and Bray (2007) find 'reverse push and pull factors' at play. They point out that home countries may also have strong pull factors to hold some students back; such as linguistic and cultural security, social and family ties, lower cost of living, etc. At the same time, students that consider or already participate in education abroad are very likely to experience the influences of various push factors while in host countries, but again the responses to these influences depends on a highly individualized and complex set of characteristics. Some of these push factors that participants of this research experienced in England are addressed in the Data Analysis and Findings chapter (4.1-4.4).

2.2.2 International Student Mobility as a process of internationalization

Unlike research on globalization, research on internationalization of Higher Education is concerned with trans-national provisions of Higher Education either via offshore presence of foreign institutions, e-learning components of courses, integration of international elements in Higher Education curricula, international collaboration in scientific research or cross-border mobility of institutions, courses, staff and students. But it appears that once the discourse shifts from globalization to internationalization, the analytical approaches to ISM also change. For example, if from the platform of globalization ISM is concerned with the student flows, paired with internationalization ISM is more interested in the study of human capital and finding channels for its dissemination across national borders (Findlay, 2001; Larsen et al., 2002; Tremblay, 2002, 2005; Musselin, 2004; Skeldon, 2005; Wiers-Jenssen and Try, 2005; Kehm and Teichler, 2007). While human capital as a concept can be delineated into other forms of capital, as Bourdieu suggests, this part of the review is concerned with theory of human

capital in which human capital is generic and may be regarded as collective or individual human capital. Different forms of capital according to Bourdieu and their relations to the theory of human capital are discussed in section 2.6 of this review.

Simplified reading of human capital theory states that personal incomes increase proportionately according to the workers' investment in education and training (Wiers-Jenssen and Try, 2005). In ISM human capital can be read as an assortment of individual or collective assets. In relation to mobility researchers interested in collective human capital attempt to measure how the presence of international students in a country, region or organization affects its performance. This concept is linked to findings from Migration Studies where academic mobility is believed to be highly correlated with later immigration of the students to the host country (Dreher and Poutvaara, 2005). In other words, it is believed that many of the students who study abroad choose to stay and work in the country of their education. In this case mobile students are seen as highly-skilled migrants and carriers of human capital into their host countries.

However, there are several problems with this idea. First, it is not clear if the mobile students are already highly skilled migrants when they first come to the host country, or if they become highly-skilled as a result of their education in the country. Second, this idea is built on the assumption that theory of human capital applies to education abroad in the same way it applies to education at home, which Hadler (2006) finds inaccurate. Third, it is undefined how long a graduate has to stay or work in the country of their education in order to qualify as a migrant. After all, students may choose to work in the host country for a period of time and then leave or vice versa, return home, go to other countries and then work in the country of education. In light of these criticisms the

theory of human capital alone is not an effective framework for the study of student mobility.

Otherwise, there is little theoretical guidance on how to analyze student mobility in light of the theory of human capital. For example, Rivza and Teichler (2007) find that ERASMUS students from Latvia find satisfactory employment in Latvia after graduation faster than their non-mobile peers, but it does not automatically mean that the ex-mobile students' success is due to the ERASMUS experience. Their success finding jobs quickly can also be attributed to the mobile students' socio-cultural rather than educational experience. There is also evidence that mobile students are more independent, entrepreneurial and open-minded than non-mobile students before they even go abroad (Wiers-Jenssen and Try, 2005) which may impact their success in finding jobs, too.

On the other hand, ISM researchers are struggling to estimate what international academic mobility adds to the individual human capital of mobile students and how it can be measured. Since the theory of human capital demonstrates that education adds to the individual's assets, it is understandable why academic mobility as a form of education could be perceived as an undisputed gain. This bias is not uncommon though Findlay et al. (2010) warn that there is only anecdotal evidence to support this claim and further research on the individual returns from academic mobility is needed. For example, Wiers-Jenssen and Try (2005) find that Norwegian students returning from the ERASMUS exchange actually take longer than their non-mobile peers to secure a suitable job. They conclude that even short-term mobility leads to a temporary loss of 'home country-specific human capital such as language, institutional knowledge, professional skills adapted to national requirements and information obtained directly or

indirectly through networks ' (p. 684) and often results in a long search for the desired position upon return. In view of the contradictory evidence this study does not seek to measure human capital of either students or countries, but examines how different types of human capital, cultural, social and economic, interact with the process of academic mobility.

Connecting student mobility with human capital theory calls for the investigation of the phenomenon known as human capital flight or, colloquially, 'brain drain'. Despite the popular belief that a large number of out-coming mobile students causes countries to lose their collective human capital there is no scientific evidence to support this view. Such opinion is likely to have originated from the belief that mobile students behave like highly-skilled permanent migrants, who tend to stay in their host countries. The difference between highly-skilled permanent migrants and mobile students is that (with exceptions) migrants are likely to have been educated in their home countries; many of them do not intend to live in their home country again; and the aim of their relocation is work, not education. Students, on the other hand, might develop their human capital in the host country during the course of education. Furthermore, even if they do not return home immediately, there are no 'rules' as to how long an individual can work abroad before their home country can count them as contributing to 'brain drain'. These differences point out that while connections between highly-skilled migrants and 'brain drain' may be viable, there is no credible evidence showing that mobile students contribute to 'brain drain'.

Another concern that is rarely addressed is the adequate measure of internationalization for countries, institutions or individuals. For example, many HEIs use internationalization as a desirable outcome of institutional development, but it is

unclear what measures assess how internationalized an institution is. In her thesis Deardorff (2004) explains that as a measure of internationalization some institutions offer numbers; such as numbers of incoming foreign students and faculty, numbers of courses in the internationalized curriculum, numbers of international partnerships, numbers of internationally-oriented outcomes in the syllabuses and so on. Deardorf (2004, 2006) further mentions a number of scholars who suggest assessing outcomes of internationalization through measurement of intercultural competences that graduates develop in the process of their education. Even though Deardorf greatly strengthens links between competence development and intercultural educational context, or development of intercultural competences in education, opponents are not convinced that competence can be an adequate measure of internationalization (Mayo, 2009). Definitions of competence for the purposes of this study and models of competence development as a possible framework for this research are discussed in more detail in 2.6. Differences between competences and competencies are discussed in 3.5, but for the purposes of this section they can be used interchangeably.

2.2.3 International Student Mobility as a process of Europeanization

Another difference between globalization and internationalization is that globalization is worldwide by definition, while internationalization may be regional. Limited to the boundaries of Europe, for example, internationalization is frequently described as Europeanization (King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Teichler, 2004; Ertl, 2006; Michaels and Stevick, 2009). Even though the mobility of academics and students in Europe has a long history, dating back to the Middle Ages (Wuttig, 2007; Guth, 2008), mobility had different goals at different stages. Teichler (1996) explains that in the Middle Ages, through the Renaissance and Enlightenment, individual mobility of students in Europe had no evidence of systematic character. The first systematic policies on mobility of

students date back to the 1970s when the aim of mobility was to achieve 'standardization' or 'harmonization' of Higher Education space (Ertl, 2001). These goals proved overly-optimistic and in the 1980s they shifted to recognition of qualification and transparency between HEIs in Europe (*ibid.*). However, most recently mobility of students emerged as an effective venue for transferring human capital and knowledge across national borders. Kelo et al. (2006) summarize how student mobility became one of the goals of Europeanization in the following way:

In the 1980s, student mobility received a big boost through the launch of the Erasmus Programme (1987), the original aim of which it was to enable a minimum of 10% of all Higher Education students in Europe to study for a period of time in another European country. The Sorbonne Declaration (1998) demands an increase in European mobility as a chief priority, and the Bologna Declaration (1999) continues in this vein. The EU's 'Education & Training 2010' agenda, the educational manifestation of the Lisbon Process, likewise names mobility (and European cooperation) as one of its 'concrete objectives' for European education (p. 194).

As the goals of Europeanization shifted towards developing Europe as a most advanced knowledge-based economy, European countries race towards becoming more information-driven and rely upon 'knowledge, skills and innovation as the resources to gain a competitive advantage leading to economic growth' (ESRC, 2008). To facilitate further knowledge transfer and skills distribution across borders, thus contributing to economic growth, European Ministers for Higher Education agreed on a more comparable, compatible and coherent system of Higher Education in Europe known as the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This goal is stated in the Bologna Declaration and the countries who signed it in 1999 thereafter agreed to change their Higher Education System to three tiers of degrees and introduce ECTS to promote easier mutual recognition of tertiary education qualifications. Among other things Bologna initiatives aim to facilitate further mobility of students by allowing them to move more freely between institutions regionally and internationally.

However, mobility within the exchange programmes has stagnated at about 2% (Teichler and Yagci, 2009), while the increase is in the numbers of students not participating in the exchange programmes but travelling abroad for the purposes of earning degrees has grown (Guth, 2008; Schomburg and Teichler, 2011). According to the HESA website (2012) the number of undergraduates from the European countries to England has grown from 64 165 people in 2006/2007 to 80 320 in 2010/11. Even taken into account that the student body of students in Europe as well as the numbers of school leavers has also grown, the increase is substantial.

Unfortunately we cannot know exactly how many of these students participate in programmes and how many are individually mobile. The only way to know how many European students are coming to study in the UK are organized and how many are individually mobile is to summarize the data from each participating country. But since many countries do not provide statistics on mobile students, such a count would be inaccurate. To give an indication of what the situation might be for Latvia, this study relies on a customized dataset prepared by HESA on Latvian-domiciled first-year undergraduate students in English universities (HESA, 2009a,b-2012). According to the datasets in the academic year 2004/05 4 out of 85 Latvian students entered English universities on exchange programmes. This number fluctuated between 2 and 6 students coming to England on exchange programmes in each academic year. At the same time, the number of Latvian entrants to England who travelled outside exchange programmes increased from 81 student in 2004/05 to 1 394 students in 2010/11 (Appendix 1, Table 2). Considering that the population of school-leavers in Latvia has actually decreased in the same period of time (Appendix 1, Table 3), this rise in mobility is even more substantial.

Relying on statistics from other EU countries Guth (2008) concludes that mobility within exchange programmes is too insignificant to contribute to EHEA, while non-programme mobility, which has more potential, is being ignored by the policy-makers. The imbalance between numbers of students participating in programme exchange and individual mobility is just one indicator that the two types of academic mobility might be different and should not be automatically equated. In light of promoting further Europeanization, it is important at this time that European Commission policies for Higher Education modernization are informed by accurately defined and conceptually appropriate research in the area of student mobility.

Besides economic rationales student mobility pursues civic goals. According to the Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture, and Youth, ERASMUS can be recognized for creating “truly European citizens” who act as “ambassadors of European values” (Figel, 2007). However, evidence is contradictory. King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) found that students who spent a year studying in foreign European countries were more pro-European and reported a more European identity than students who did not study abroad. But a more recent research showed that neither short-term foreign sojourn impacts Europeanization of students’ identity nor does it inspire more pro-European feelings among the participants (Sigalas, 2010). The debate is ongoing and presents one of the most contemporary directions for research on student mobility. However, most evidence comes from small-scale studies limited in national scope, based primarily on surveys of British students or students studying in the UK.

Since competence is a central concept for this research the role of competences from the point of view of Europeanization has to be mentioned as well. Halasz and Michel (2011) list initiatives that have taken place in Europe in the last ten years that take account of knowledge, skills and competences. They list the European Qualification

Framework for Lifelong Learning, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the HE diploma/certificate supplements, the Europass C.V., the Personal Skills Card and, of course, the European Reference Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (European Parliament and Council, 2006). Many of these tools are expected to further facilitate student mobility but it is unclear at this stage if and how mobile students use these tools and if they indeed qualify as competences. Powell et al. (2012) consider these developments as well as the earlier ones (the Bologna (1999), Copenhagen (2002) and Lisbon (2007) Processes) but nevertheless find that the intergovernmental European model of skill development identifies employability, not citizenship, as the central goal of education and training. They warn that issues of inclusion or equity are missing from the academic discussions, despite the fact that European integration implies civic and social participation, cultural exchange and identity formation.

2.3 International Student Mobility in Educational Studies

As explained in the previous chapters mobile students can be viewed from a number of perspectives. For example, from the point of view of Education, they are discussed as overseas, foreign or international students. Mobile, overseas, foreign and international students are not the same group of students, though certain characteristics overlap. Some researchers, predominantly from the United States, prefer to talk about educational 'sojourn' and 'sojourners' (Brown and Holloway, 2008a; Comp, 2008). The term has no clear definition attached to it, but is usually used to capture a short-term visit (sojourn) to a new culture.

The term 'overseas students' is sometimes equated with foreign or international students, but it would only be technically correct in case of countries where all the students from

abroad come from another continent. In the UK this would be accurate in the case of outward mobility from European countries to Great Britain. In continental Europe, on the other hand, the term 'overseas' can refer to the students from other continents, from the UK or other islands in the territory of Europe, thus excluding the mobility of students within the other continental European countries. It appears that some researchers who distinguish between European and non-European students refer to non-European students as 'overseas students'. Others make no such distinction and equate overseas students with all students from abroad. Due to such an irregularity, in this research I prefer to refrain from the term 'overseas' students, although, technically, students from Latvia who come to study in the UK do come from overseas.

Another widely used term in Education, 'foreign students', refers to students whose nationality is other than that of the host country (Kelo et al., 2006). However, significant numbers of these students may be second or third generation immigrants, carrying the nationalities of their parents. Thus, they should not be considered mobile students as they do not cross national borders for the purposes of education. International students, on the other hand, are considered by the country of previous domicile according to definitions by HESA, (2012) and are, in fact, internationally mobile students. However, many UK researchers of international students do not distinguish between EU and non-EU students in the samples of their research, although such a distinction would make sense at least because of the different fee levels.

There are several arguments that point to a need to reconsider homogenising international students for research purposes. First, since most international students come from non-European countries (HESA, 2012) the findings of studies on international, foreign or overseas students are likely to be skewed towards non-EU

students and not be always applicable to European students. Second, research concentrating on international students is usually conducted among students who have reached their destinations and largely disregards the phenomenon of mobility. Third, according to HEFCE (2009), international students previously domiciled in non-EU countries pay much higher tuition fees, which of course impact the process of mobility, especially at the decision-making stage. Fourth, it is implied that the main goal of international students is to earn a degree from a university of their choice (even though sometimes exchange students are included in the body of international students, too!). This goal defines the international students as ‘degree students’ or individually mobile students. That means that mobile students are in essence international students and research findings on international students may be applicable to the population of mobile students. But, there is no way to know all the contextual and research differences, so one of the limitations of this research is that data generated by this research and data in literature are not necessarily comparable. Despite the potential discordances, the field of Education provides useful insights into experiences of international students.

2.3.1 Finding access to university education abroad

Murphy-Lejeune (2002) finds that the first step in actualising mobility is the evaluation of objectives and motivations, and this is why this review needs to delve into decision-making research. Concepts of decision-making in Higher Education are sometimes informed by a book by Carroll and Johnson (1990). If simplified, their framework of temporal stages of decision-making suggests the following constructs: recognition of the impetus, formulation of the idea, assessment of inaction, information search, evaluation of the alternatives, action and feedback (pp. 21-24).

Keep (2008) prefers to look for the incentives that drive the students to study at universities. Since incentive is associated with stimulus or drive to reach a return, it is predominantly used in the discourse on return from educational investments. Another alternative is proposed in research on teaching and learning, where the discussion is usually centred around 'motivations' seen as a condition of being encouraged to behave in a certain manner (Windham and Peng, 1997). In Education, return on investment is associated with extrinsic factors, incentive is equated with instrumental motivation (Dornyei, 2001). But both kinds of motivations, instrumental (external) and integrative (internal) working together are more effective than any one. Bourdieu's idea of *habitus* is one way of reconciling motivational dichotomies. He believes that the strength of any one motivation at any given time depends on the interplay of external factors.

Besides, decision-making in HE is multidimensional and even within university education alone concerns choices of university, mode of study, subject area and location in case of mobility (local as well as international) and possibly others. Individual-level motivations of the UK students for pursuing degrees abroad have been studied by Findlay and King (2010, 2012) and by Brooks and Waters (2009a, 2009b, 2010; Waters and Brooks 2010a, 2010b). They find that desire to attend a world-class university, opportunity for adventure, steps towards an international career, limited places for some courses, high student fees and family encouragement are the main motivators for individual mobility of the UK students.

Researchers seem to agree that these choices are also modified by the idea of prestige. Ball et al. (2002) explain that in view of the expansion of Higher Education and deflation of degrees middle-class parents are worried that their children will not have enough competitive advantage in comparison to their peers. In that case the prestige of

the degree adds to the return on educational investment and provides a 'distinction strategy' for children of middle-class parents. With home students prestige is discussed in relation to the choice of universities (Choy, 2002; Chen, 2005), subject area (Ball et al. 2002; Fuller, 2008) and even in relation to the class of degrees (Bratti et al., 2008). Matters of prestige among mobile students are touched upon by Brookes and Waters. They find that British students who fail to enter universities of choice at home seek prestigious universities abroad as 'a second chance to success' (Brooks and Waters, 2009a). Baker and Brown (2010) point out that there is 'lack of attention to the imagery surrounding university choice and how it intersects with questions of culture, economic privilege and socio-demographic division that usually inform research on access to HE' (p. 378). They suggest conceptualizing this imagery as 'symbolic capital'. They explain symbolic capital as scaffolding for success whose power is only just beginning to be understood in educational research.

Applying Bourdieu's idea of *habitus* to choice in HE Ball et al. (2002) explain that choices are made within restricted 'opportunity structures' where decision-making is context-related, and cannot be separated from the family background, culture and life histories of young people. Citing Hodgkinson and Sparks (1997, p. 33) Ball et al. (2002) also reason that decision making is at least in part opportunistic, based on fortuitous contacts and experiences. They find that the choice is constrained by the opportunities available to the students' and their families' socio-economic class (SEC) and that HE-related choice is largely influenced by the school cultures of the participants. The authors also conclude that all decisions are only partly rational and are also influenced by feelings and emotions (p. 55). One of the challenges of researching choice occurs due to the need to capture these feelings, emotions and fortuitous events. And secondly in a foreign context some of the ideas, for example SEC and schools that students

attended may not have the same meaning. Section 2.7 of this review demonstrates how these concepts take on a new meaning in the Latvian context.

In addition, prospective students and their families need to secure the necessary resources. For example, it is to be expected that some families would not have the money for HE at their disposal and obtaining the money requires development of what is known as financial literacy (Hanna et al., 2010; Csongor, 2011; Harrison and Chudry, 2011). However, because most prospective students are young and have no personal finances, it is their parents who are likely to develop most financial literacy at the stage of gaining access.

Another issue is finding access to the relevant information about HE. The theory of transmission of intergenerational capital states that university-educated parents transmit their knowledge, experience and skill of entering and studying at universities to their children, but it is unclear to what extent this capital is useful to students who want to enter universities abroad. Plus, in a country in transition, like Latvia, the educational system has been undergoing constant restructuring since 1991 and generations of parents have been educated in a different system. In addition, prospective mobile students from families with no experience of HE also need to be informed and find access, but it is unclear how these students gain the relevant capital. To this end this study undertakes to answer the following research question: **What competences do prospective undergraduate students from Latvia develop as part of finding access to university education in England?** In addition, a comparison between the answers of students whose parents are university-educated and those who are not can explain if the parental experience of HE education in one country is relevant to their children's HE in another country. And if so, what is the nature of these relations?

2.3.2 Socio-cultural acculturation of international students

Ryan (2005), Farbrother and Hartwell (2006) find that the students' goal of earning a degree becomes difficult or unattainable if students do not adapt to the new, foreign culture. Ward (1996) explained earlier that adaptations take place on two levels: psychological and socio-cultural. Since adjustments on both levels are necessary they are inseparable and one cannot be prioritized over the other. Researchers agree that adaptations on a psychological level are responsible for the psychological and physical well-being of students (Ward and Kagitcibasi, 2010; Spencer-Oatey, 2006). However, I cannot analyze the data from the point of view of psychology because it requires specialized training. So this research is limited to socio-cultural adjustments which imply students' relationships with people and surroundings, and that includes students' adjustments to the new university environment.

Socio-cultural acculturation is a very broad topic that includes international students' academic development and their progress at the university. Since mobility is primarily an educational process, academic acculturation of the students is analyzed separately in 4.4, but this chapter deals with socio-cultural acculturation of the students outside the university.

Socio-cultural acculturation is defined as an 'ability to negotiate interactive aspects of the host culture' (*ibid.*, p. 132) or more precisely as 'a set of external outcomes that link individuals to their new contexts, including their ability to deal with daily problems, particularly in the areas of family life, work and school' (Berry, 1997, p. 14). Another conceptualization of socio-cultural acculturation is development of appropriate behaviour. Chen and Starosta (1996) stress that crossculturally competent persons are

those who can interact ‘effectively and appropriately’ with the host environment and people in it. However, one problem is that each new context requires new appropriate behaviours (Deardorff, 2006) and, of course, the diversity of situations that international students find themselves in is endless and unpredictable. In relation to this, development of appropriate behavior should be a key competence, that once developed can be used effectively in different situations. But further in-depth investigations of multiple situations are required to ascertain this idea.

Empirical and analytical researchers often undertake finding out what elements socio-cultural acculturation consists of. For example, Crano and Crano (1993) developed the Inventory of Student Adjustment Strain, and the results allowed them to establish the sub-scales on which socio-cultural acculturation of students takes place: education, host family, language, ‘culture shock’ problems (e.g. dietary concerns, health), personal welfare (e.g. homesickness) and social (e.g. dating). Themes that emerged from a study on acculturation of international students by Brown and Holloway (2008b) include language difficulties, academic challenges, social interactions, identity, food habits and changes in the self. Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2008) canvassed their interviews along the issues of health, cultural practices, experiences of exclusion, establishing legal status and securing appropriate housing. Comp (2008) found that researchers can only grasp students’ perceptions of the socio-cultural experiences and thus divides them into perceived knowledge of the host country, appreciation for life, target language competency, perspectives for future directions and academic performance. A number of studies have attempted to identify the problems experienced by overseas students. Elsey and Kinnell (1990), Bennett and Paige (1993), Crano and Crano (1993) and Biggs (1999) found that the participants of their research most commonly mentioned concerns

regarding education, host families, language learning, physical health, personal welfare and socialization.

Even though findings are diverse, few of them can be useful for this research. First of all, while existing studies on international students in Education provide useful information about their participants, they are usually dedicated to representatives of geographically and culturally 'far' countries (Berry, 1997). Since Latvia and England are geographically and culturally close, socio-cultural acculturation of Latvian students may follow a different pattern. Probably for that reason participants of this study did not raise concerns about food or climate. Establishing legal status is also not a problem for the participants because under the European Freedom of Movement, nationals of Latvia as a EU country can live and work in all other European member states. Thirdly and most importantly, a variety of analytical approaches does not allow identifying patterns, which means that it is difficult to choose a framework for instrument design or analysis. As a result, instrument design is explained in the Methodology chapter (Chapter 3). The iterative cycle of the data analysis dedicated to socio-cultural acculturation starts with the data and not with the literature like other sections of the Data Analysis and Findings chapter.

Socio-cultural acculturation is naturally linked to the issues of socialization. In literature it is reflected as investigating connections that international students make outside universities and the way it affects their socio-cultural acculturation. Berry (1990) and Berry et al. (1995) find that acceptance of the home culture and positive attitudes towards social interactions with the members of host group facilitate acculturation. Rejection of the home culture and preference for interaction with members of the host

group achieves a medium rate of acculturation, while maintenance of original culture and preference for interaction with people from home does not speed up acculturation.

Research on international students shows that successful acculturation at socio-cultural level influences students' overall well-being and allows them to pursue their goals more effectively (Cortazzi and Jin, 2001; Forman, 2000). To continue with Bourdieu's explanation, individuals have a 'know-how' of competent practices in the social world. Thus, when finding themselves in a previously unfamiliar environment the students apply the 'know-how' of competent practices to adjust to them. In the case of the previously unfamiliar university culture a faster rate of socio-cultural acculturation is imperative for the students' attainment and retention (Ryan, 2005; Farbrother and Hartwell, 2006). But since their competences for socio-cultural adjustments are implicit in their families' lifestyles and have been developed in their home countries, we do not know how effective these competences are abroad. The development of appropriate competences for country-specific socio-cultural acculturation is the focus of the second research question of this study. **What competences do undergraduate students from Latvia develop as part of socio-cultural acculturation to the English environment?**

2.3.3 Academic acculturation of international students

Traditionally researchers include academic acculturation in the process of overall socio-cultural acculturation. However, as mobility is primarily an educational process academic acculturation in this study is regarded as a separate focus. In this study academic acculturation of international students is regarded as a change that the international students have to experience in order to become members of the new national, linguistic, institutional and subject-specific communities. While acculturation is a mutual process that leads to 'cultural synergy' (Cortazzi and Jin, 2001), this Review

of the Literature looks at what foreign students are expected to bring into the acculturation process. Thus, acculturation here is regarded as acquisition of British academic culture by international students.

Entwistle and Tomlinson (2007) explain that the reason students need to adjust to the academic environment is that they can graduate as competent professionals in their chosen field. For them, academic competence is impossible without development of appropriate discourse. Some applied linguists recognize discourse as a social practice that has a history and implies an inherited set of values (Ivanic, 1998; Hyland, 1999). As such academic discourse operates with culturally-preferred rhetorical structures. However, the meaning of culture implies many dimensions, such as: ethnic, national, linguistic, institutional, possibly departmental, area and subject-specific. So the challenge of the international students is to achieve competence in all these overlapping academic communities. Taillefer (2005) found empirical evidence that discursive communities are distinct across national cultures, and what is learned in a home academic community may not be suitable in another country. But her study took place with postgraduate students who have already acquired some academic competences in their home countries and had to develop new habits. In this study, participants have not had a chance to develop any academic competences before they left for England, so the competence development process is likely to be different for them.

In order to understand how students develop expertise in academic discourse, Marton (1981) and his research group developed the methodological approach of *phenomenography*. Entwistle and Tomlinson (2007) explain:

The essential features of this approach involve interviews which encourage students to consider their learning experiences in successive steps as the researcher gently probes for deeper insights into those experiences. The analyses then separate out distinguishable categories, describe them through extracts from the interviews and consider the relationships existing between them. (p. 3)

Further, Entwistle and Tomlinson outline several theories of student learning, but it is difficult to determine how theories of learning relate to mobility and inform this study. This research is not phenomenographical as it does not focus explicitly on academic learning; rather, as far as learning is concerned, this study is interested in the learning of competences for mobility. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) came to the conclusion that capabilities which promote mobility are not innate or ‘given’ to the students, but ‘learned’. However, the author does not attach this learning process to a theory; instead, as her data suggest, she shows learning of mobility in its temporal stages. The way in which these temporal stages influence this study are outlined in more detail in Methodology 3.2.

University learning is also often linked to the development of critical thinking or criticality (Richards, 2004; Jones, 2005). Much of the literature sees critical thinking as a set of cognitive skills, but Gent et al. (1999) relates it to the students' disposition for enquiry, self-awareness and reflection, analytical approach and depth of study (in Richards, 2004, p. 64). Richards further elaborates that among other techniques willingness to interact with other members of the academic community (tutors and peers), self-development and general positive attitudes towards the acculturation process foster critical thinking. There are many definitions of critical thinking in the literature, but for the purposes of this study, I see critical thinking as a cognitive development process based on students' university learning and deliberate reflection on this learning. It appears to be largely up to individual researchers' interpretations to decide what counts as critical thinking. Even though this approach can be criticized for its subjectivity, this study continues this tradition.

Another concept that arises from theories on university learning is autonomous learning. According to the Dearing report (1997) autonomous learning is one of the principal aims of university education. Despite strong promotion of autonomous learning for university learning in general and for academic acculturation of international students in particular, the definitions remain weak, and evidence of development of autonomous learning is subject to the personalized interpretations of the researchers. Most researchers of international students (Biggs, 1999; De Vita, 2002; Carroll and Ryan, 2005), however, agree that autonomous students should take responsibility for their own learning, which involves taking ownership of the processes such as making decisions on learning objectives, selecting appropriate learning strategies and monitoring self-progress. Students from abroad might find it challenging because in some countries these tasks typically belong to teachers, especially at a secondary level (Littlewood, 1999).

Moreover, the development of academic discourse, critical thinking and autonomous learning is sometimes seen as a step towards academic acculturation and sometimes as its outcomes (Crome et al., 2009). However, in this study I see the development of discourse, critical thinking and autonomous learning as competences that allow students to adjust to the university. In my opinion, discursive competence, critical thinking and autonomous learning are not concepts, but frameworks consisting of elements that are specific for each singular research population or context. The data for this research are analyzed in line with this view and discursive competence, critical thinking and autonomous learning are just some of the skills and abilities necessary to sustain academic acculturation of the participants of this study. Therefore the third question of this study asks: **what competences do undergraduate students from Latvia develop as part of academic acculturation to the English university environment?**

2.4 International Student Mobility in Sociology

As was stated previously in the Introduction to this study, students from Latvia are not only international students, but first-generation students as well, so their experiences of study abroad are also framed by this characteristic. According to Thomas and Quinn (2007) there has never been an attempt to theorize a notion of a first-generation student, so a working definition has to be established. Traditionally, the first-generation students are defined as students in whose case 'neither parent has had access to a university education and completed a degree' (*ibid*, p. 50). Since this study investigates the population who have neither parents nor elder siblings who studied abroad, technically they should be labelled as 'first-in-the-family internationally mobile students', but for ease of understanding I will keep using the term 'first-generation students' in this research. Unfortunately, not all researchers explain the population of students that they study when they refer to 'first-generation' students, which is another limitation to the comparability of this research with other studies.

Usually, first-generation students are studied in the Sociology of Higher Education. Pationis and Holdsworth (2005) compile ideas of several key authors in the Sociology of HE in order to investigate why some students prefer to stay at home when they enter university and others prefer to move away. Their work is relevant to this study because it deals with relocation for the purposes of HE, although they work with English students within England. The authors compare processes of university choice and relocation decision-making between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' entrants. Even though 'non-traditional entrants' were a mixed group in their research, when the paper was first presented at a conference the authors acknowledged that 'non-traditional' entrants included a significant proportion of first-generation students. Holdsworth and

Patiniotis notice that explanations of the problems of first-generation HE students call for the application of Bourdieu's theory of capital and intergenerational reproduction of cultural capital almost '*de rigueur*' (p. 84). Bourdieu (1986) recognizes capital in three fundamental guises: as economic, cultural and social capital. He explains:

Economic capital is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights; *cultural capital*, is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of a title of nobility (p. 4).

Some researchers see these three types of capital as subsets of overall human capital as in Migration Studies (mentioned in section 2.2); however, Bourdieu talks about all three types separately.

2.4.1 Transmission of cultural capital

It is an established concept that those whose parents have no Higher Education are considerably less likely to succeed than those whose parents have earned a Bachelor degree (Bourdieu, 1986; Choy, 2002; Knighton, 2002; Chen, 2005). On the other hand, it is unclear whether the parents' familiarity with post-secondary education at home universities is relevant to their children's attainment at universities abroad. For example, while in ISM human capital is expected to travel across borders unchanged, research on international students presented in section (2.3) of this review shows that the academic skills acquired at home are not helpful in a foreign context. Thus, one of the aims of this study is to examine how the cultural capital that the students inherit from their parents travels across borders.

Knighton (2002) explains that intergenerational transmission of cultural capital works because parents with more education tend to share in their children's intellectual

pursuits and pass down skills and beliefs that are conducive to achievement. They are more involved in their children's education, have higher expectations for academic success and have greater familiarity with schools and teachers and with the post-secondary process and experience. The high value that parents place on education can thus be transmitted when they actively provide their children with an environment that encourages educational attainment (p 29).

First-generation students have been found to have different plans, poorer academic preparation, lower levels of parental support and involvement and different expectations from their peers even in their home countries (Choy, 2002; Chen, 2005) which often weakens their participation, achievement and retention rates. Even though the agenda of widening participation in Higher Education has sparked much research explaining the differences between first-generation and non-first-generation entrants, only few studies ask how the first-generation students succeed at universities without having inherited the necessary cultural capital.

2.4.2 Transformation of cultural capital

Bourdieu argues that there is a mechanism that helps first-generation students break the cycle of intergenerational reproduction and allows them to alter their 'normal biographies'. In the contexts of contemporary Europe those students who change their 'normal biographies' break free of their expected trajectories. For that reason they have been presented as the 'trailblazers' (Park, 1990), 'the new strangers' (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002), the 'Eurostars' (Favell, 2008), 'globally-mobile children' (Hayden and Nette, 2007), 'globetrotters' (Mahroum, 2000), or those contributing to the future 'transnational capitalist class' (Sklair, 2001). Despite the hyperbolised discourse, if we

continue with Bourdieu's idea we have to accept that the possibilities of changing trajectories are not infinite.

Working with Bourdieu's idea (1986) that types of capital can under certain circumstances transform into each other, Gudmundsson (2000) provides examples of how capital depends on a mechanism that allows not only to transmit it, but to transform it into more relevant types of capital. Gofen (2007) offers an approach that stresses that 'a family can utilize and channel its nonmaterial resources, such as priorities, time, and behaviour for the accomplishments that are usually achieved by utilizing resources that are not within the family's reach.' (p. 2). In the same vein, Kennedy (2004) finds that the highly skilled migrants

...demonstrate the abilities to utilize de-contextualized, transferable knowledge, the ability to adapt to initially unfamiliar situations and to draw strength from participation in an occupational community (p. 67).

Such conclusions allowed Rochford and Rosenbaum (2008) to develop what is known as 'immigrant family optimism', a principle that makes the immigrant children committed to education. Of course, the immigrant optimism hypothesis may not hold true for the present research participants because the students' families remain at home, but it is an attractive idea, worth looking into.

However, these findings need to be treated with caution. For example, families' ability to transform one type of capital into another is only possible in constricted 'opportunity structures' as Bourdieu warns. The constraints of the opportunities can be performed on the three levels: (inter)national, institutional and individual scales of analysis. In relation to organized students, the findings of most key authors are rather consistent and are best summarized by Findlay et al. (2010). The authors find that on the national level the choices of students participating in mobility may be constrained by economic, cultural,

linguistic or immigration barriers. On the institutional level, lack of information about the exchange programmes, inefficient credit transfer systems, lack of preparatory language training, difficulty in accessing mobility grants are the main barriers to mobility. The individual level is the most complex one because here the researchers often tend to discuss the choices and motivations of the students whilst ignoring the constraints on these choices and motivations. This is why I integrate the aforementioned study of Ball et al. (2002) even though it relies on studies that discuss HE choice in the students' home countries. For the purposes of this study, I reason that decisions about international mobility on the individual level take place within the students' opportunity structures where the choices are limited by constraints such as those mentioned above (*ibid.*). This research seeks to illustrate the decision-making for internationally-mobile Latvian students, taking into account the constraints that frame these structures. Even though none of the research questions is explicitly dedicated to the decision-making of Latvian students, it is a significant part of the first research question and will be re-addressed in the Data Analysis and Findings chapter (section 4.2).

According to my knowledge no research has been conducted investigating whether and how cultural capital travels across borders or how first-generation mobile students develop the necessary competences in order to access universities abroad and earn their degrees. Answers to research questions suggested for this study (2.3.1-2.3.3) have potential to clarify this issue.

In Giddens's (1991) terms, non-traditional students experience loss of 'ontological security' as they enter an unfamiliar world in Higher Education. The author presents evidence that loss of ontological security may impact academic attainment and students can effectively counterbalance the insecurity by sharing familiar routine practices with

well-known people they trust. Since such people are usually family members and friends, non-traditional students may choose to study at their home university in order to find support and counterbalance the insecurity that they have to deal with. Basically, students may find that staying at home may help them deal with university work more effectively. 'Non-traditional' is not defined in Giddens's study but the context implies that the term may apply to 'first-generation' and international students alike because for both, life at university is a *terra incognita*. This work is revisited in the presentation of findings of this research from the point of view of gaining access to the universities (4.2). Overall, it is hard to say how relevant this work is to decision-making because even though feelings, emotions and fears do contribute to the decisions, there is little evidence that first-generation students feel differently from their non first-generation peers. Moreover, Giddens's study finds no evidence that first-generation students or international students are aware of their 'non-traditional' status. Therefore, they may not be aware that they would need the support of family and friends. In this case the need for support should not influence decision-making.

Another author who approaches mobility from the students' standpoint is Murphy-Lejeune (2002). One of her findings is that the main difference between mobile students and their non-mobile peers rests in the acquisition of 'mobility capital'. She sees 'mobility capital' as a subcomponent of human capital, enabling individuals to enhance their skills because of the richness of the international experience gained by studying abroad. The author divides 'mobility capital' into capabilities coming from families and personal history, previous experience of mobility including language competence, first experience of adaptation which serves as initiation, and the personal features of the mobile students. Murphy-Lejeune founds her study on unstructured interviews with mobile students participating in various exchange programmes. The students' responses

were written up as individual narrations, which allowed comparing students' experiences of mobility under different programmes. This study is interested in individual mobility and relies on semi-structured interviews. However, I believe that the theory of 'mobility capital' can serve as a meaningful way of thinking about mobility because it does not limit experiences of mobility to educational issues. Thus this study builds on the idea of investigating the development of 'mobility capital'. Previous international experience of students, their family histories and initial socio-cultural and linguistic adaptations shaped the interview questions for this study, among other ideas, as shown in the Methodology (section 3.4).

Murphy-Lejeune sees mobility capital as a subset of overall human capital while Brooks and Waters (2006) believe that it is more meaningful to situate mobility capital alongside the types of capital suggested by Bourdieu: social, cultural and economic.

Bourdieu states that:

economic capital is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; cultural capital is convertible in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and social capital, made up of social obligations ('connections'), is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in a form of a title of nobility' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 47).

Bourdieu's approach not only separates the forms of human capital, but also explains how one form may change or transform into another, if circumstances permit. For example, educational qualifications, which are usually conceptualized as cultural capital, permit people to enter academic networks. The acquaintances within the networks often provide a way to further useful introductions. New opportunities gained through acquaintances are seen by Bourdieu as an example of social capital. But in this particular case social capital is a result of transformation of cultural capital. Positioning mobility capital alongside other forms of capital allows Brooks and Waters (2006) to

conclude that mobility capital can be transmitted to the students by an older generation or can be a result of transformation of other forms of capital. This study is based on this notion and applies the idea of transformation of capital to the Latvian students' individual mobility because intergenerational transmission of mobility capital does not apply to this context.

Working further with Bourdieu's idea of intergenerational reproduction of capital, Brooks (2003) investigates UK students at home universities. Simplified intergenerational reproduction of capital means that forms of capital are implicit in family cultures and are passed from older to younger generations as tacit knowledge and systems of values, beliefs and behaviours. Brooks finds that middle-class families use HE as a distinction strategy or as Ball et al. (2002) explain to avoid 'fear of 'falling''. Their reason is that in view of the expansion of Higher Education and deflation of degrees middle-class parents are worried that their children will not have enough competitive advantage in comparison to their peers and slip to a lower socio-economic position. So, according to Ball (*ibid.*) middle class parents hope that degrees from foreign countries, especially from countries with a more prestigious education system than the home country, will allow their children to compete with their peers and maintain the middle class position of the family.

For example, Teichler and Janson (2007) found that ERASMUS offers to a lesser extent an exclusive experience now than some years ago. According to their research, the professional value of the ERASMUS experience is more modest for recent generations than for those having studied in another European country some time ago. This study cannot determine whether the perceived 'exclusivity' of individual mobility has changed

over the years, but it is interesting to find out what contributes to the people's perceptions when they evaluate universities at home and abroad.

The idea of education abroad as a distinction strategy led to Waters's article (2007) in which the author finds the shared and recognizable *esprit de corps* among the overseas-educated people that allows them to form 'an exclusive club through sharing experiences of education and migration' (p. 480). She finds that Hong Kong nationals who studied in the UK for a full degree recognized each other as 'members of the club' through a special style of communication, high English language ability and distinct ways of articulating their thoughts. However, perhaps due to the space constraints the author does not demonstrate this distinct style of communication and it remains to be rediscovered for other contexts. In earlier work, however, Waters (2006) acknowledges that belonging to the 'club' depends on the overall social connections, and not only on the connections with other mobile students. The idea of an 'exclusive club' for the educated abroad is a continuation of work by Brooks (2003) who draws on Bourdieu's ideas of reproduction of inequality in education. She found that parents who saw entry into HE as a distinction strategy struggled to maintain the middle-class status in face of the expansion of HE. In any case, it is a challenge to find out whether the participants of this research indeed become members of that 'exclusive club' and if so, what it is that grants them membership and retention.

2.5 International Student Mobility as a holistic practice

One possible lens to challenge the attitude towards the students as a homogenous group is to locate student mobility within the student-inhabited transnational social fields. Gargano (2009) explains that transnational social fields are spaces of interlocking

networks of international students where ideas, practices, and social networks can be organized, exchanged, and transformed. She points out that:

the lack of robust concepts that can capture international student experiences and identity reconstructions is to blame for homogenizing and generalizing the negotiations of international students when great dimensions of difference actually exist (p. 332).

She argues that viewing the mobile students as members of their social networks allows positioning them not only in geographical and institutional localities but in the social structure as well as viewing each individual as a member of their transnational community. This approach allows her to capture not only the phenomenon of relocation but also the dynamics of the relationships that are constantly re-negotiated among the members. While Gargano does not offer empirical research or possible methodologies, her article first alerts us to the need to challenge the attitude towards international students as a homogenous group, to recognize that the students' experiences are shaped through ongoing interactions and to situate the experiences of the students within their transnational social networks and not only within geographical localities. The section on socio-cultural acculturation of Latvian students (4.3) demonstrates how these ideas take meaning in relation to the participants of this study.

Tracing back the idea of transnational spaces, work by Collins (2008) clarified that transnational spaces are situated between students' home countries and countries of education. If Gargano's article is of an analytical nature, Collins's work is one of the few studies that researches mobility of students through investigating the representatives of the mobile students' social networks. A similar approach has been used with migrants (Conradson and Latham, 2005) and highly-skilled workers (Kennedy, 2004; Ferro, 2006), but since Collins's research takes place with students, the context of his research is the most relevant to this study. Collins reasons that mobility is a transnational

process and the 'bridge' that connects the transnational spaces is rooted in 'the economic activities of education agents and ... the interpersonal networks that assist in the movement and settlement of international students and the role that former international students play in promoting overseas study' (p. 399). Thus Collins suggests one more way of examining the debate about the influence of macro and micro factors on mobility decisions and/or extends the argument about prevalence of agency or structure. In conclusion, the author makes a strong case for the importance of interpersonal connections for the construction of the students' mobility process though does not elaborate on the nature of these connections or what aspects of mobility are influenced by them. Gargano's and Collins's work allowed me to appreciate the necessity of researching mobility in the students' home country and in their country of education at the same time. One way this research can reflect the bilateral nature of the research context is via investigating mobility through the students' social networks located not only in Latvia but also in England. On the other hand, it is expected that international, foreign and home students concentrate around university campuses and locate their social networks there, thus creating not just a theoretical but a tangible, physical transnational space.

While researching mobility through the networks of students' families and friends is discussed in further detail in the Methodology chapter (3.2), this Review of the Literature analyzes the potential of the ideas yielded by this approach. For example, Anna Ferro (2006) incorporates the idea of researching the relocation of highly-skilled migrants as a part of 'migratory projects'. She explains that migratory projects hinge on

...how individuals articulate their motivations, how they decide between aspirations for a career abroad and a life in their own country, and how external conditions and personal decisions could make workers opt for a livelihood abroad. (p.172)

For the purposes of this study I use Ferro's principles of 'migration projects' construction to generate 'mobility projects' of Latvian students studying in England. In Ferro's work the holistic migration experience, a 'migration project', is a sequence of processes that results in immigration. The concept of the migratory projects goes beyond the evaluation of push-pull factors and the intentions of the migrant. She finds that they include the local context and dimensions explaining why people emigrate and with what perspectives. The migratory project is influenced by the expectations that migrants have for their future/possible life abroad and by the deprivation they feel in not being able to fulfil their aspirations at home. Ferro makes a convincing conclusion that this holistic approach allows her to assess migratory projects on the individual level of the participants. Ferro's descriptions of the migration projects are based on the patterns of issues shared by the participants, their friends, and their families' members. While the findings are not relevant to the current research because Ferro's work is detached from education and takes place among a narrowly-defined group of highly-skilled migrants, the framework of migration projects provides a useful methodological tool. Building on Ferro's work, this study also extends the frames of mobility to include the period before the relocation and is re-addressed in the Data analysis and Findings (4.4).

Combining the idea of mobility projects with the findings of other authors allows me to visualize the nature of the data that is necessary to show the mobility projects of Latvian students. For example, Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune (2002) dedicated a book specifically to the mobility of students in Europe. Even though her work is limited to students travelling as part of exchange programmes, it is solid theoretically and suggests new ways of approaching mobility. It supports some of the findings of this study with regard to the experiences of mobile students inside and outside universities. In Murphy-Lejeune's work, the descriptions of the mobile students' narrations reveal the patterns

shared by the participants. Murphy-Lejeune divides these patterns in several ways, but for this study the chronological divide of mobility seems the most appropriate. Murphy-Lejeune suggests that all mobile students consider the following issues:

objectives and motives before the experience [of mobility], the strategies during the process of adaptation [to the host culture], and outcomes and transformations as a result of experience' (p. 38).

This delineation is useful for constructing the interview schedules for this study and for organizing the data analysis. As such it is further discussed in the Methodology chapter (3.3) of this study.

2.6 Role of competence in international education

The idea of competence seems to accompany research on ISM but since it is a contested notion, it needs to be discussed in some detail. However, in this review only some key definitions are discussed mainly in order to demonstrate the scope of the debate. The idea of competence and its application to this research are discussed again in the Methodology chapter (3.5) along with other theoretical frameworks that are used for analysing the data.

One of the earliest significant attempts to define 'key competencies useful for a successful life for individuals and a well-functioning society' is the 'DeSeCo' (Definition and Selection of Competencies) project launched in 1997 by the OECD. Key competences here are the competences that once developed can be used effectively in different situations. According to DeSeCo research key competencies can be classified in three broad themes: ability to use tools interactively, ability to interact in heterogeneous groups and ability to act autonomously. Each of these competencies is divided into three categories (1-3) and each category into three groups (A-C). Each group of competencies is accompanied by descriptions of concrete behaviours that

individuals should use to develop these abilities and increase their quality of life. This approach to competence was found too prescriptive for the purposes of this study. Besides the DeSeCo report has never been followed up with research to support the notion that mastery of DeSeCo competencies can impact quality of life.

Eraut (1994) warns that ‘competence’ is sometimes not defined properly by using the term interchangeably with ‘competency’ (‘performance’ or ‘skill’ (Henggeler et al., 1994). Whereas *competencies* refer to specific capabilities (Ertl and Sloane, 2005), as in DeSeCo, *competence* is not only concerned with what a person is competent in. Since *competence* and *competency* look similar in text and may confuse readers, a decision was made to use ‘*competence*’ as a central concept and ‘skills’ or ‘abilities’ for description of *competencies*.

In his 1994 book on development of professional competence, Eraut collected and critiqued many definitions of competence, but for the purposes of this study I rely on the explanation by Wood and Powers (1987, p. 414) that seems to be the one most related to the context of learning in Higher Education, rather than work:

Education entails not just the accretion of knowledge, but the constant structuring and restructuring of knowledge and cognitive skill. Successful adaptation to the circumstances encountered as one develops is more often accomplished through the co-ordination of abilities and appropriate knowledge, affect and behaviour patterns than through the capacity to utilize a single ability or reproduce a piece of information on demand. “Competence”, then, must be distinguished from the ‘competencies’ assessed in contemporary testing programmes. It rests on an integral deep structure (‘understanding’) and on the general ability to co-ordinate appropriate internal cognitive, affective and other resources necessary for successful adaptation. A successful conceptualization of competence would show how specific competencies are integrated at a higher level and would also accommodate changing patterns of salience among these skills and abilities at different ages and in different contexts (as cited in Eraut, 1994, p.178).

According to holistic definitions of competence provided by many educationists (e.g. Pring (1995), Løvlie and Standish (2002), Prange (2004), Pieper et al. (2007), Hammershoj (2009) among others) initiatives by the European Parliament and Council, 2006 described in section 2.2 are more in line with descriptions of skills and are not helpful for this research. Indeed, since the nature of HE and academic mobility is changing (Teichler, 1996), the competences that students develop are dynamic as well, which means that findings on competences from previous research may lose their relevance in today's world. But investigation of competences is suitable for this research because the core of nearly all competence constructs is change and adaptability. Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) explain: 'no other aspect of competence and effective social functioning seems so universally accepted as the ability to adapt to changing environmental and social conditions' (p. 35). In this way competence is linked to acculturation which is also considered primarily as 'a facet of adaptation and change' (Berry, 1997, p. 14).

Educationalists who maintain that a focus on *competence* provides only a surface understanding of overall development are usually concerned that it gives no space to tacit, intuitive development of knowledge that is unobservable and often unreported because research participants are unaware of it. However, depending on the choice of competence development model this is not always true. Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) addressed this issue by discussing competence as growing awareness. Another example is a model by Noel Burch developed for Gordon Training International (GTI) that outlines four stages of development that progress from unconscious incompetence, to conscious incompetence, to conscious competence and to unconscious competence. The full model is replicated in Appendix 9. This model recognizes two levels of development. One level is conscious, where development is on the surface, is

observable, recognized and therefore can be reported and analyzed. Another level of development is unconscious, where development takes place on a deeper level, is not observable, often unrecognized and unreported and therefore missing from research findings. Due to the recognition that the GTI model gives to the unconscious processes that respondents are unaware of, it addresses the main concern in competence research. This is why the GTI model was chosen as a framework for analysis of the participants' competence development.

Seen in a more holistic way, the idea of competence is also relevant to this study as part of any type of human capital, including 'mobility capital'. Bourdieu (1986) explains that education in the form of cultural capital has predominantly symbolic value. Therefore academic qualification can be perceived as a certificate of cultural competence and any cultural competence yields profits of distinction to its owner. He further posits that competences as a part of cultural capital 'can be acquiredin absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously' (p. 4).

Based on the differences between conscious 'learning' and unconscious 'acquisition' of knowledge, I originally approached development of competences as acquisition. In Applied Linguistics acquisition is seen as a way of understanding and internalizing a language without the agent's conscious effort. The classic example is that of children who 'pick up' their native languages seemingly without effort (Braine, 2002; Krashen, 2003). The Dreyfus brothers (1980) use 'acquisition' too, in relation to competences. However, there is evidence that adults learn languages faster through conscious application of learning strategies (*ibid.*). Even though this evidence is contested and is directly relevant only to Second Language Acquisition, the students might lose valuable momentum at the beginning of their studies if they wait for the unconscious acquisition

of the relevant competences. It is particularly important because the initial stage of university study is critical not only for how much students learn but also for laying the foundation on which their subsequent academic success rests. For example, Reason et al. (2006) calculated that 'first-to-senior-year gains students make in English, science, and social studies are at 80% in students' first year of college' (p. 150). So, this research investigates the process of study abroad from the point of view of the participants, whether the competences for socio-cultural and academic acculturation are acquired or learned, and explores the mechanics of this process.

2.7 Researching Latvian students

As mentioned before, the main constraint for the organized mobility of Latvian students is financial difficulty. Many Latvian students find it problematic to pay for accommodation abroad, as the cost of staying in other EU countries versus those of staying in Latvia are higher and the state does not normally grant additional funding to cover lodging (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, 2008). I have no evidence that shows how significant the shortage of personal finance is for individually mobile students from Latvia, but can only assume that students from families with lower income are likely to have problems collecting resources to move, to pay tuition fees and associated expenses, especially considering that the cost of living is higher in England than it is in Latvia.

However, according to some findings from ISM, in times of economic strain, many students choose to study abroad in the hope of future immigration because they want to escape the unfavourable economic situation in their home countries (Tremblay, 2002, 2005). Due to the dramatic changes in the economic situation in recent years, Latvia currently is in an almost unique position to study this phenomenon closely. From 2004

to 2008 Latvia was presented in the media as the fastest growing economy in Europe, associated with increased salaries, high public spending and easy conditions of credit. Incidentally, this period saw the biggest increase in Latvians studying in English universities. According to the HESA (2009a) in 2006/7 the number of Latvian undergraduates entering English universities increased by 64% in comparison with 2005/2006. The rates of increase have dropped since then, though the number of Latvian students entering English universities has kept increasing.

But, following the 2008 economic crisis, Latvia suffered diminished salaries, cuts of government support from all public sectors, severe unemployment and problems in acquiring personal bank loans. Researchers cannot agree whether these adverse circumstances increase or decrease overall outward migration and mobility of students in particular. According to the Latvian Statistical Agency in 2006 and 2007 the unemployment rates in Latvia fluctuated between 6 and 7%, but in 2010 the unemployment rates reached an all-time high of 20%. In the past two years unemployment rates have decreased, but the number of the unemployed is still high in Latvia at 14% of the working population. In the Latvian Statistical Agency's report on the first glance it appears that numbers of students in Higher Education have been decreasing in Latvia from 30 633 in 2005/6 to 24 181 in 2009/2010. These data have been used to show how the economic situation in the country pushes young people away and contributes to 'brain drain' among that group. However, the population of school-leavers for the same years has decreased as well from 41 135 in 2005/6 to 17 397 in 2009/10 (Appendix 1, Table 3). So, the decrease in mobility of students may be attributed (at least to some extent) to the diminished numbers of people of the student age group in the overall population in Latvia.

Another push factor influencing some of the Latvian students may be rooted in Latvia's current political situation. As most analysts covering the Baltic region agree, Latvia is a country segregated into distinctive ethnic Latvian and Russian-speaking communities (Batelaan, 2002). According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia (2008) 47% of the Latvian population is ethnically Russian and Russian-speaking. Since 1991 there have been persistent complaints in the local media about Latvian officials discriminating against the Russian population although there is little factual evidence to support this. Thus, the Russian students who feel discriminated against may consider study abroad as an escape from the political pressure (King, 2002). Usually mobile students are discussed as short-term voluntary migrants (*ibid.*), but in this situation the Russian students emigrating from Latvia may be regarded as political and not voluntary migrants. Political migrants are influenced by a specific set of factors, different from voluntary migrants, so while analysing the interview responses I am considering that they may contain evidence of political pressures. Besides, awareness of the segregation in Latvia dictated including equal numbers of Russian and Latvian participants, plus one who is bicultural and bilingual.

Language matters in Latvia may be another push factor for the Russian minority students who are not proficient enough in the Latvian language to study at a university. According to the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, 1996, Chapter VI, Section 56 (3) (Saima, 1996) state university academic programmes must be carried out in one of the languages of the European Union. While Latvian is a language of European Union, Russian is not. As a result, the choice of Higher Education providers for these Russian speakers is limited to private institutions. But private institutions in Latvia typically have higher fees and lower prestige than the state institutions.

The State Language Law of 1999 (Djachkova, 2003) stipulates that a Latvian national or resident who received secondary education in other than the state (Latvian) language must qualify for one of three linguistic proficiency levels. With the exception of citizens of other countries, workers of knowledge-based professions must qualify for the highest level; otherwise they cannot be hired for a permanent position. The Russian minority students may perceive this socio-linguistic issue as a push factor. Also, many believe the time and effort required to learn a language for the purpose of earning a degree is better spent learning the world's *lingua franca* – English – rather than the geographically peripheral Latvian language. These educational and political constraints may add to the students' incentives to seek Higher Education abroad and need to be discussed in this research.

As the first part of this Review of the Literature shows, the findings in the field of international student mobility are difficult to compare due to the different approaches to studying mobility and a lack of conceptualization of the field. Despite the likely inaccuracies, Findlay et al. (2010) reviewed the most influential academic literature in the field and distilled it to a comprehensive summary of the major research findings available on all mobile students in Europe. According to their summary, mobile students are often high achievers at school, belong to a middle SEC, are private-school educated and are likely to have a previous family history of mobility. However, when analyzing these concepts in relation to the Latvian context, a few particularities need to be taken into account.

When Findlay et al. (2010) talk about high-achieving school students they are talking about high exit examination grades, but this does not mean that the same grades reflect the same level of achievement in different countries. In addition, the nature of the link

between exit examination grades and mobility is inconclusive. For example, high exam results may facilitate mobility because they are a result of cumulative knowledge required for mobility, or they may indicate the successful application of study skills. On the other hand, the high examination grades may bolster the students' belief in their academic ability and give them the required confidence to go abroad. Or the connection may be even more subtle and the grades may actually reflect higher SEC of the students' families, parental involvement or many other factors that are known to increase examination results (Gofen, 2007).

It is also interesting that in research on widening participation in Higher Education (Ball et al., 2002; Thomas and Quinn, 2007) and on student mobility (Findlay et al., 2010, 2012; Brooks and Waters, 2002, 2007) taking place among British students, types of schools that the participants attend are one of the significant incoming variables. However, studies on mobility that take place with students from other countries (Raikou and Karalis, 2007 (Greek students); Araujo, 2007 (Portuguese students); Taillefer, 2005; Pineda et al., 2008 (Spanish students)) do not take participants' schools into account. Perhaps this is due to the fact that in England school is an indicator of SEC while in other countries such a connection is not straightforward and notions of SEC are problematic.

Not only are there no absolute measures that determine SEC accurately, but even the notion itself is problematic. Cirino et al. (2002) explain:

Socioeconomic implies at least two dimensions to inequality—social and economic. Although these two dimensions are understood as closely associated, they nevertheless incorporate two different aspects of stratification. The economic dimension is best represented by money or wealth as reflected in employment income, home ownership, and other financial assets (e.g., pension plans, property ownership). The social dimension incorporates education, occupational prestige, authority, and community standing. (p. 145)

Perhaps due to its two-dimensional nature, there is no universally-accepted method for measuring the SEC of the population. The situation is also complicated in the case of students, as their SEC is usually measured by parental education, occupation, family income or a combination of these (Yang, 2003; Yang & Gustafsson, 2004). Furthermore, SEC is a different concept in different countries, especially in a country such as Latvia with a route of development very different from the UK. Up until 1991, while the UK developed as a free-market economy, Latvia was a socialist country. As a result, in Western Europe high SEC is usually associated with high cultural capital, but the situation is more complicated in Latvia. Eyal et al. (1998) and later Batelaan (2002) explain that the *post-perestroika* stratification is such that one class of people have lost their financial assets during the change of political regime, but are rich in cultural capital ('the impoverished intelligentsia'). The other class consists of people who have earned a substantial amount of money for the same reason ('the nouveau riche') but have not gained the cultural capital to the same extent. Even though there is no up-to-date research measuring the two facets of socio-economic class in post-communist countries, the incorporation of the economic and social dimensions results in contradictory findings, while either one measured individually is not sufficient. Perhaps this argument is best supported by the fact that the HESA 2010/11 dataset shows that out of 2 530 Latvian students studying in England 1 599 (63%) marked the 'not classified' tick-box for their SEC, and 717 (28%) labelled SEC as 'unknown'.

Regarding the third important characteristic of mobile students, private school background, there is no statistic as to how many Latvian students who study in England or become mobile are educated in private schools. Private schools, especially private high schools, are still rare in Latvia and are usually much more expensive than state schools. As a country in economic transition, Latvia is a society with a relatively small

middle class (Batelaan, 2002). Perhaps this explains why the differences between state and private school pupils in Latvia seem very significant. Working as a state schoolteacher in Latvia up to 2006, I have noticed that international dimensions were not well integrated into the curriculum. The goal seemed to be to prepare the pupils for the Latvian exit examinations. In private schools, on the other hand, much was geared not only towards examinations but also to preparing pupils for study at English-speaking universities. For example, in addition to the English language courses, pupils were often offered electives in IELTS preparation and academic skills that were designed to help them succeed at universities abroad. This comparison of Latvian private and public schools is based only on my personal observations and conversations with my colleagues and is not informed by official sources. At first I wanted to integrate this dimension into this study, but when I started contacting the potential participants I realized that most of them have studied in both types of schools at different stages of their lives.

The last feature that characterizes European students of today, the previous familial history of educational mobility, is also different for Latvian students than for students in other countries. Due to the Soviet past of Latvia, none or almost none of the parents of the current student-aged population studied abroad. Although there is no statistic on the subject, it is safe to assume that the parents of the contemporary students were of student age between the 1950s and 1980s, when they were restricted from international travel, especially for the purposes of education. This simple calculation demonstrates that practically all students from the post-Soviet countries who study abroad are first-generation internationally mobile students. In summary, the characteristics of European mobile students collected from the field's academic literature have little or no relevance to the Latvian situation (with a notable exception of the private/state school factor) and

cannot be applied directly to the participants' situations with any degree of reliability. Thus, another aim of this study is to suggest an alternative set of traits that describe first-generation individually-mobile students from Latvia who study at English universities.

Research in the area of student mobility tends to be fragmented because it usually concerns only one of the elements of mobility, for example education. Research that analyzes relocation is studied as a process of migration and does not cross paths with education and the phenomenon of mobility tends to be overlooked. This study adopts a more holistic approach, providing deeper insights into the area of student mobility. The idea of competence development is a useful overarching concept because it allows connecting the three questions without constraining the data.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The general approach to this research is a series of case studies with multiple participants. It is a working assumption of this research that the agents of the mobility process, the mobile students, can provide relevant knowledge by sharing their first-hand experiences. A 'case' in this study is a group of participants consisting of a central participant (a mobile student) and the representatives of his/her social network. The central participants were undergraduate students from Latvia who studied in England at the time of the initial contact. Their network representatives were family members and acquaintances who could provide information on the central participant's mobility process.

There are very few methodological guidelines in literature on investigating academic mobility. But since the overarching aim of this research is to explore experiences of academic mobility from the point of view of the participants the study relies on a qualitative approach to research design and data analysis. Most qualitative researchers employ variations of a data-driven approach based on Miles and Huberman (1994), ranging from grounded theory to the multiple and extensive readings of the interview transcripts. Since many of them emphasize the value of rich description I decided to invest time and effort into collecting more detailed information from fewer carefully chosen participants rather than collect less data from a larger number of participants. Rich description is necessary to position experiences of the participants in their contexts and to reveal participants' holistic experiences as outlined in the Review of the Literature 2.5. Since the overarching aim of this research is to explore the participants' experiences of mobility this description allows identifying salient themes for more

detailed examination. Descriptions of the participants are provided in the first section of the Data Analysis and Findings chapter (4.1).

Since the mobility process is inseparable from other social processes that shape participants' realities, I used the data provided not only by the participants themselves, but also by the representatives of their social networks: family members, teachers, friends. This approach brings additional perspectives to the data analysis, thus strengthening the case study design. Besides, it allows stepping beyond the usual self-reporting of a single participant and reveals issues related to mobility that the participants themselves may be unaware of.

Research validity is often in question in the qualitative paradigm. Richards (2004) suggests that it is more helpful to conceive of complementary rather than competing perspectives and offers the term 'crystallisation' as an alternative to triangulation, in which case comprehensiveness may be a more realistic goal for qualitative research than internal validity. Another reason for designing a case study is the complex nature of mobility. In the literature mobility is perceived by some as an action and by others as a context, within which the agents (students) function. In situations where the boundaries between context and the phenomenon in question are vague Yin (2003) recommends the use of cases.

3.2 Participants

3.2.1 Maximum variation sampling

As the first stage in approaching potential participants I used my personal connections via online social networking systems such as Draugiem.lv, One.lv and Odnoklassniki.ru as an initial point of entry. I approached 5 Latvian students in the UK that I personally

knew and asked them to put me in touch with any other Latvian students in the UK that they knew. Within 3 weeks I had 168 'friends' who were Latvian students in the UK. The design of the online social networks assumes that I become a 'friend' to each potential participant I encounter. This allowed me to access other 'friends' of the potential participants and to be contacted by them. This process made me a marginal member of the students' social network with insider's access. Becoming a part of the students' network was not an aim of this study and I never took active advantage of my 'insider' position, but being a passive observer of the virtual communication that the participants engaged in provided insights and ideas for the development of this research.

Sending questionnaires to the pool of potential participants pursued a dual goal. Its first goal was to aid maximum variation sampling. A school of prominent case study analysts headed by Yin (2003), Stake (1995) and De Vaus (2001), maintain that if the patterns of responses are repeated within the significantly diverse sample, further transferability of the findings can be claimed, thus strengthening the validity of the research. But the criteria for comparing potential participants must be carefully chosen.

In this study questionnaire design was informed by the Morris and Rutt research on European students in the UK (DIUS report, 2008), HESA custom-made datasets (2004/05-2010/11) on the population of Latvian students in England and my knowledge of the Latvian context. For Morris and Rutt questionnaires were a single method of data collection, and were significantly more extensive than this study required. In this study questionnaires served to plan the preliminary steps for research and did not need to be as detailed as Morris and Rutt's were. For that reason I only used the first 10 of the questions used by Morris and Rutt and customized some of the remaining questions for the interviews.

Questionnaires that the participants received asked to provide information on the following items:

- Gender, age
- Country of permanent residence, nationality, citizenship
- Type of institution, type of degree, current subject area, academic year (year of entry), current mode of study
- English language proficiency (IELTS score at the time of application), type (pre/in-sessional) and length of English language university training if any
- Type of financing, previous mobility experience, type of current mobility (programme/individual), parental education, preferred language of communication

Even though in this research I used definitions suggested by HESA, with the participants I decided to avoid complicated terminology. When approaching participants I changed academic terms into everyday words for the purposes of interviews and questionnaires. I realize that this may impair the accuracy of the data, but, on the other hand, it may add participants' perspectives and highlight potentially disputed issues. In addition, layman's terms are not as intimidating as academic terms especially for the participants who are not familiar with academic language.

As discussed in section 2.7 countries of nationality and citizenship can be different for some Latvians, this is why in these questionnaires both delineations were used in addition to country of permanent residence as opposed to country of domicile, since 'domicile' can be misunderstood. I also wanted to see what country students associated with as their country of *permanent* residence, since time perceptions are known to be subjective.

The second goal of the questionnaires was to determine characteristics of the potential participants that neither Morris and Rutt, nor HESA collected, but that were found relevant to mobility by previous research, such as: English language proficiency and preparation, previous mobility experience, family history of mobility, preferred language of communication, parental professional qualifications, type of financial support. These answers gave me a fuller picture of the participants' realities. Besides, they helped ensure eligibility (such as making sure that every central participant was indeed a first-generation mobile student), aided additional differentiation among the participants on these characteristics and provided a convenient snapshot of the participants' profiles.

After 36 questionnaires were returned, 30 potential central participants proved eligible according to the questionnaire responses. Network representatives of these 30 potential central participants were asked to sign participation consent forms, but 19 were received. 19 cases were analyzed according to the maximum variation sampling. In the end, I selected 7 central participants with the following variations: three men, four women with an age range from 18 (the youngest) to 33 (the eldest); three participants were Latvian, three were Russian and one was bicultural and bilingual. Interestingly, one participant answered that the UK was his country of permanent residence, one participant left this answer blank and the remaining five answered that Latvia was the country of their permanent residence. Two participants attended post-1992, 'new' universities, three participants attended 'Plate Glass' universities and two others went to Russell Group Universities. Participants ranged through three or four years of a typical BA programme. Several participants took a year of internship and some studied part-time. None of the participants was repeating a year. One participant was studying Computer Sciences, two were in Engineering (Chemical and Civil), two were in

Business Studies, one studied English Language and Literature and one student was in Russian and Slavonic Studies. Students from Law and Medicine were intentionally excluded from this research because they obtain country-specific qualifications that usually restrict their work opportunities to a country of education. More detailed descriptions of the central participants are provided at the beginning of the Data Analysis and Findings chapter (4.1). A summary in the form of a table is attached as Appendix 9.

3.2.2 Network representatives

Findlay et al. (2005) explain:

it would be easy to conclude ... that a full understanding of Student migration can be achieved purely from in-depth Student interviews. In practice such an interpretation would be just as incomplete an interpretation of the geography of Student mobility as would be an analysis resting only on questionnaire returns (p.197).

In order to overcome this limitation, at least to some extent, I asked the central participants to nominate at least four members of their social networks. Two of the network participants were always from Latvia and two were from England (though not necessarily English). The two Latvian participants provided information on the pre-mobility stages and the participants from England on the active stages of mobility. One of the Latvian representatives was always a family member and the second one was a friend or somebody who had observed the pre-mobility process closely. Originally, I wanted at least one of the English representatives to be a university tutor, an instructor or somebody working at the university who could have observed the central participant's academic acculturation, but most of the central participants could not secure their cooperation, so I opted for course mates instead. Another English representative was a friend or a co-worker, who was more familiar with the central participant's life outside university.

The literature provides several examples of using social networks of the participants for eliciting their views on Higher Education at home or abroad. For instance, Fuller et al. (2008) provide a detailed example of using ‘networks of intimacy’ in their report on non-participation in HE. Their study is based on in-depth interview responses of prospective students and representatives of their ‘networks of intimacy’. Their report was used as a model for eliciting parental perspectives on Higher Education choices. But the literature is not limited to the networks of family and close friends. Collins (2008) demonstrated that former international students play a role in promoting overseas study and explained how transnational ‘interpersonal networks’ serve as pathways to international academic mobility. Publications by Brooks and Waters also provide a significant contribution to student mobility research through participants’ social networks. I followed their work from 2006 to 2012 and studied their development of ideas that connect student mobility with social networks. Summarized in a very simplistic manner their most salient contributions helped this study in several ways. First of all, their work explained that student mobility was a socially-embedded process; secondly, it demonstrated the role of social networks in creation of social and cultural capitals; thirdly, it pointed out the reproductive role of these networks and provided implications for construction of ‘mobility capital’.

Besides, in this study the four network members were not merely observers but co-creators of the mobility experiences. The working assumption was that as such they could share important information on the aspects that were the most prominent for a concrete participant. Other benefits of employing network representatives included the possibility of examining the process of mobility in its natural social context. Plus, it was a rare opportunity to step beyond the central participants' perceptions and usual self-

reporting. It is possible to argue that this research design resulted in the network members' perceptions instead, but I see their involvement as a chance to discover new viewpoints on mobility, enhance and challenge the central participants' perceptions and to examine mobility in transnational social fields (Collins, 2008; Gargano, 2009). As expected, exploring the inconsistencies in responses of different participants within a case allowed more profound level of analysis. The third reason for involving the network members was to provide an additional source of data collection, which is an integral part of any qualitative study.

3.3 The pilot study

The most development on the design of the study and the instruments took place as a result of a pilot study. Before the beginning of the pilot work methods of this research were approved by CUREC (Central University Research Ethics Committee). For the pilot study I processed and analyzed three cases with 4 network members for each central participant as the design of the study indicated. These cases were not included in the main study. Two of the central participants chosen for the pilot study were my personal acquaintances, but the third one was contacted in a typical 'snowball' fashion. The participants seemed curious about the research project, wanted more information than the information sheet provided and preferred informal email communication before they signed the consent forms. A number of significant changes were implemented as a result of the pilot work. I kept track and reflected on these changes through a journal I kept throughout the pilot stage.

In 2010, when the pilot study began, I had accessed the majority of the literature used in this study and had a good understanding of what went on in research on mobility. However, research questions for this study were not fully developed and the focus was

not clear. For that reason I collected a number of issues that interested me in existing research on mobility and migration and asked pilot participants to share their experiences regarding these issues. The responses indicated the relevance of these issues for the participants of this research. The interview questions were grouped around these issues and later developed into the thematic parts of the interviews.

The very first interview I conducted with one participant was excluded from the pilot study because the data that it yielded were not comparable with other interviews. I believe that the problem with the first interview was that I did not interrupt the participant and ended up with an unmanageable amount of data that was not relevant to the questions asked. However, it was a useful exercise that let me decide on how structured the interview schedules should be. During interviews with the other two participants and their network representatives I asked more structured questions that provided shorter answers. Also, I broke the interviews into parts and timed each part, so that I could dedicate about equal amount of time to each part. The pilot interview schedule is provided in Appendix 5.

After the first interviews with the central pilot participants I approached their social network representatives. Interviews with the network representatives were normally shorter than the interviews with the central participants and provided only partial accounts. However, combining these accounts revealed a rather comprehensive description of the central participant's situations. The first attempts of reporting the interview answers revealed significant gaps in the information. At that point a decision was taken to approach the central participants one more time for follow-up interviews. Each initial interview identified unique issues that I would like to pursue, so the follow-up interviews were custom-made for each case.

In the follow-up interviews that I used for the main study I included requests for concrete examples of the situations, asked participants to explain how they knew to do certain things and what would they have done differently had they had a chance. The follow-up interview was also an opportunity to probe the deeper levels of the participants' experiences. I tried to follow whatever sounded particularly interesting or unusual about the responses, requested clarification on what made no sense or contrasted with network participants' responses, and asked additional questions to make my understanding of the cases more solid.

3.3.1 Changes suggested by the pilot study

The pilot study showed that this research was more grounded in Sociology of Education than I anticipated and required a more detailed investigation of theories on choice and decision-making. Processing the interviews from the first pilot case, I realized that I cannot claim a deep level of analysis without understanding the participants' family histories. Having talked to the participants' parents I was reminded how different the previous generation's educational context had been from contemporary opportunities. That realization pointed to the literature on first-generation entrants and the application of Bourdieu's theory of human capital. My early discoveries in this field caused significant additions to the Review of the Literature and ultimately changed the scope of this research.

As expected during a pilot study I also improved my interview technique. I realized that I needed to encourage the interviewees to shorten their answers and keep them centred when they digress. I practised translating and transcribing the interviews, wrote reports

on individual cases and learned to use participants' quotations more appropriately in my reports.

For the analysis of the pilot study I tried to code and categorize the interview responses, but I soon found out that the codes and categories reflect the themes and topics of the questions in the interviews. Thus the pilot demonstrated that the interview questions must not be random, but grounded in the existing literature. In this sense qualitative studies are not fully data-driven, because the emergent themes ultimately reflect the questions that have been asked. After all the changes were thought through and implemented the main interview schedule was re-developed (Appendix 6) and the main study began.

3.4 The main study

3.4.1 Data collection and analysis

The process of data collection for each case took place in four phases, including the questionnaires. Descriptions of the proceedings are summarized and the timeline is attached as Appendix 2. During the first phase questionnaires were distributed and collected and potential participants were checked for eligibility. During the second phase all initial interviews with the central participants and their network representatives were conducted, processed and analyzed. During the third stage follow-up interviews with the central participants were conducted, processed and analyzed. As a fourth phase a concluding set of interviews took place and the data were added where necessary.

Following the lessons from the pilot study the reason for scheduling the follow-up interviews was to collect central participants' commentary on the information yielded by

the network members, to clarify and to help interpret difficult moments in the mobility process and to validate my interpretations of the initial interviews. Since a significant period of time sometimes had elapsed between the first and the follow-up interviews, the follow-up interviews allowed the discussion of the relevant issues that emerged through the process of data collection, recording, reflection, interpretation and analysis. I approached each case in sequence to allow adjustment of the instruments before each next case if necessary. Precautions were observed to ensure that the instruments were not changed significantly and the data remained comparable. This idea is a development of the sequential approach to case studies advocated by De Vaus (2001, p. 227).

The follow-up interviews yielded more focused responses and captured the process of change that the participants had gone through in the time between the initial and the follow-up interviews. The longitudinal focus allowed me to capture competence *development*, which added an analytical focus to this study. To increase this focus I scheduled another set of interviews with the central participants in the spring of 2012, the concluding interviews. Since some of the participants had already graduated it was also interesting to see how their perspectives on their mobility experiences changed. At the time of the concluding interview one of the participants had become unavailable, but 6 were willing to tell me about their current situations. Another reasons for phase four of the study included comparison of the participants' plans during the initial and the concluding interviews. Where possible explanations of what influenced the change of plans was drawn out. The analysis of the concluding interviews also indicated how the participants saw their experiences in retrospect.

Overall I conducted 7 initial interviews with the central participants, 28 interviews with network representatives, 7 follow-up interviews with the central participants and 6

concluding interviews with the central participants. All interviews were under one hour in length.

If I were to do this study again I would design the study with the longitudinal aspect in mind, but at the time when the study design decisions were made I could not have predicted the time I would need to complete this research. I would like to have even more time elapse between initial and follow-up interviews. In fact, I would like to analyze all the initial interview responses first and then conduct the follow-up interviews. That way I could have benefited from the students' input on a wider set of concepts. I would have liked to conduct interviews with the students in a less rigid manner. After all, whatever they choose to talk about is of concern to them and therefore to me. However, the friends and acquaintances of the participants often tended to talk about themselves rather than the central participants and needed to be directed back to course. The parents of the students were the most helpful network representatives, because usually they were deeply engaged with their children's projects and enjoyed talking about their children's experiences.

I interviewed the central participants separately from their network members and each network member separately from each other in order to avoid spreading of personal information within or across the cases. Researchers who use inter-personal research designs (Murphy-Lejeune (2002), Findlay et al. (2005), Ferro (2006), Brooks (2008), Fuller et al. (2008)) are often interested in the value of the dialogue between the participants and choose to interview the participants together in a focus group interview fashion. However, it appears that in this study such dialogues may lead to the undesirable spreading of the intimate information. Each approach has benefits and each approach would yield different responses. But in this research I wanted to engage with

the central participants on a more personal level and chose to interview them separately from their family members and friends.

The questionnaires, interviews and other communications took place in the participants' preferred language (Russian or Latvian) and in their preferred territory. I personally conducted, voice-recorded, transcribed and translated the questionnaires and interviews. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants all their names were changed during the transcription and only their pseudonyms were used in this study. Since I am a native speaker of both languages, Russian and Latvian, I chose to transcribe responses in English, translating and transcribing at the same time. Relaying the responses correctly and precisely in English was sometimes problematic, but, hopefully sufficient. Style sometimes had to be sacrificed in favour of accuracy. To ensure that the translation was indeed accurate another professional translator was consulted from time to time, with the anonymity of the participants strictly preserved.

3.4.2 Development of the interview questions

The interviews for this research were developed as a result of two approaches. The first approach was based on the statistical information on Latvian-domiciled students in the UK from 2005/06 to 2010/11. At first I approached one of HESA's senior analysts (see acknowledgements), described my research and explained the information that I needed. The population in question was Latvian-domiciled undergraduate students currently registered at universities in England. With his advice the following markers were decided on: age, gender, institution, subject area, mode of study, year of study and an exchange programme marker. This information was updated every year. In order to show the dynamic of Latvian student mobility to England information on the first-year Latvian-domiciled undergraduate students in England was ordered separately. The

design of the study does not demand full analysis of these datasets and therefore they were consulted as needed throughout this study to support the arguments, to construct interviews schedules or to strengthen data analysis.

The agency also collected information on the socio-economic background of students based on occupation of the students aged 21 at the start of their course, or for students under 21 their parents', step-parents' or guardians' occupations. The SEC marker was excluded intentionally because, as I argue in the Review of the Literature (2.7), parental occupation is not always indicative of the family's SEC in countries like Latvia. Plus, the HESA datasets (2012) show that out of all Latvian students studying in England 63% marked the 'not classified' tick-box for their SEC, and 28% labelled SEC as 'unknown'.

The second approach to constructing interviews was informed by a number of empirical studies on student mobility (see below). First, the types of questions used to elicit descriptive data based on the participants' experiences were identified in the existent research on student mobility. Second, I modified these questions/prompts to suit the topic of my research questions. Third, the findings of the existent research were used as 'scaffolds' to build my research instruments on. I also based the questions on less formal discussions with various mobile students, university instructors who work with international students in the UK and explored my own ideas. As a result of analysis of the literature I divided the interview questions into the following groups: pre-mobility, mobility and post-mobility. Each group is in turn divided into the most characteristic stages. The studies that informed these stages are referenced in brackets.

Pre-mobility: decision-making (Carroll and Johnson, 1990; Ferro, 2006; Finlay et al., 2005, 2010, 2012)

The first part of the literature is dominated by decision-making in Higher Education. In this research concepts of decision-making are largely informed by the book by Carroll and Johnson (1990). If simplified, their framework of temporal stages of decision-making suggests asking the participants about the following topics: recognition of the impetus, formulation of the idea, assessment of inaction, information search, evaluation of the alternatives, action and feedback (pp. 21-24). Modified by other sources in this research only some of these ideas were used.

In her study on migration of highly-skilled workers Ferro (2006) captured the pre-migration attitudes of the participants through collecting their personal narrations. Directing the interviewees to a natural storytelling course she charted a progression of their feelings as the actualization of relocation became closer. Finlay et al. (2005) dealt with the motivations of outwardly mobile UK students. While their research context was different from mine, the researchers found that motivations of mobile students had a significant influence on their experiences and understanding of these motivations is necessary to capture the holistic understanding of mobility.

Pre-mobility: Preparations (Commission of the European Communities, 2009)

Surprisingly little information was found on the issues of preparations for mobility, but my personal and professional experiences suggest that students invest a lot of time and effort investigating the admission procedures, obtaining and filling in the necessary forms, collecting, translating and preparing the supporting documents and statements. A 2009 Green Paper issued by the Commission of the European Communities looked at that aspect of mobility in detail, but they worked only with students who engaged in

organized mobility. They pointed out that in the exchange programmes the staff was in charge of these administrative proceedings. Thus, students who travel within exchange programmes do not deal with paperwork and do not report it to the researchers as an issue of concern. But since researchers sometimes apply findings from the programme mobility context to individual mobility, issues of preparations rarely feature in the literature. In my experience as a university administrator, securing funds for the tuition fees and the associated living expenses, finding and negotiating suitable accommodation, ensuring sufficient English language proficiency, filling in the UCAS application, writing personal statements, etc. are all recurring themes in students' experiences. Hence, some of the interview questions were based on these topics.

During mobility: socio-cultural acculturation (Brown and Holloway, 2008a; Brooks and Waters, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Waters and Brooks, 2010)

Literature on the students' socio-cultural acculturation seems to be largely centred around developments and challenges of the 'U-curve' model of adjustments where 'the first stage is characterized by positive feelings; this is followed by a stage of maladjustment; and finally adjustment is reached' (Lysgaard (1955) as cited in Brown and Holloway (2008b, p. 34). Among others a study by Brown and Holloway (2008a) was singled out as the closest to the present study in methods and aims. They suggest a way of constructing the acculturation pattern by asking the students about the ways of combating the fears of the unknown, loneliness, stress, insecurity, homesickness. But in order to achieve a more balanced picture I also paid attention to the positive accounts. At the time of the interview design the latest topics in student mobility started to be concerned with positive change that students experience and how this change occurred (e.g. Van Mol, 2011).

During mobility: academic acculturation (Richards, 2004; Wells, 2005; Entwistle and Tomlinson, 2007; Crome et al., 2009)

Since the findings of research on academic acculturation are context- and sample-bound, they are usually communicated through qualitative, small-scale, in-depth, individualized studies (Brooks, 2008). Ideas of learning in formal contexts were informed by definitions found in Richards (2004) and Entwistle and Tomlinson (2007) and are outlined in the Review of the Literature chapter (2.3). As mentioned previously, little research has been conducted on students from Latvia. So rather than describe the wealth of all the findings on academic acculturation in irrelevant contexts I decided to focus directly on what is known about Latvian students. My 2005 Master's dissertation was dedicated to academic acculturation of Latvian students at British universities. The following categories have emerged as challenges for the academic acculturation of Latvian students: incorrect perceptions of workload and time management, weak ability to cope with self-directed learning, misunderstanding of criticality as an academic concept.

Post-mobility: transitions to labour market

A number of studies have been carried out with the purpose of charting the ex-mobile students' transitions to work (Van de Bunt-Kokhuis and Bergman, 1994; Teichler and Jahr, 2001; Teichler 2002; Jalowiecki and Gorzelak, 2004; Wiers-Jenssen and Try, 2005). The aims of these studies were to measure the numbers of graduates at certain positions and to assess the time that was required to achieve these positions. Some of these studies have taken place with programme students, others with undefined populations of the mobile students. The participants of these studies were the ex-mobile students who became workers at the time of research, so they reported the retrospective, not the anticipated experiences. This study is interested to find out the hopes and the professional ambitions of the participants. Mainly, I am interested in self, peer and

family's assessments of the study experience as a vehicle for the attainment of the personal and professional ambitions. I have not found other studies with such aims, so the questions that I asked the participants were tailored according to my own understanding of these issues.

Post-mobility: anticipated benefits (Van Hoof and Verbeeten, 2005)

Van Hoof and Verbeeten's empirical study (2005) used Likert-scale questionnaires to collect data on the perceived benefits of the programme mobility in different parts of the world. It is one of the few articles with a detailed description of the instrument design and a helpful appendix in the end. These additions allow linking specific questions to the more or less specific answers. I paraphrased some of these questions to fit the semi-structured interview method in order to collect similar data.

3.4.3 Data analysis

The first step of data analysis was engagement with the data for the purposes of translation. In fact, the work took place on two levels. First, the answers were being translated and transcribed, on the other level, all the issues that seemed contradictory or unclear at that point were noted. Since the broad themes were pre-conceived, the second step was to select relevant quotations and to describe what went on in each theme and what smaller categories the data suggested.

The analysis of this study was positioned between the data and the literature. To aid the analysis, literature was used in several ways. First of all, the overall design of the study, the construction of the questionnaires and interviews, and the approaches for data analysis were informed by methodological literature with a focus on qualitative research

and particularly on qualitative case studies by Stake (1995), De Vaus (2001), Yin (2003).

Secondly, this study relied on examples from descriptions of empirical, interview-based studies and adopted or rejected methodological approaches depending on the results that they returned. Full reports that have the space to describe the detailed procedures and provide appendices were the most useful at that stage. For example, Johnson's methodological review (2007) served as a model for the social network research. Her report described enough detail for me to make a judicious choice of adopting or rejecting her techniques.

The literature review on ISM (International Student Mobility) by King et al. (2010) showed a scope of issues to be addressed that may have been overlooked otherwise. Since the report was issued just as I was preparing to start data analysis, it also served as validation of my early tentative findings. A research study conducted for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills by Findlay et al. in 2010 is an excellent example of a study researching motivations and experiences of internationally mobile students. At the end of this research project (2012) an article on motivations and meanings of the outward international mobility of the UK students by Findlay et al. came out. The authors found that education abroad increases students' cultural and social capitals and is typically used as class reproduction of distinction. They suggest that mobility as a strategy for increased distinction should be placed within the students' wider life-courses and modified by their personal attitudes, beliefs and personal histories. The analysis stage of my research was almost at the end when the article was published so it did not influence the data analysis. Rather it served as further

reinforcement that my interpretation of the overall picture on student mobility was congruent with that of more experienced researchers.

Thirdly and most importantly a wealth of literature from a number of disciplines was used for comparison of the findings between this and previous research. Once a broad theme was chosen for the analysis, I searched the databases for the relevant sources and scanned the abstracts in order to choose studies that could be used for comparison. I asked what my tentative findings were similar to, what they contradicted and why. Since in most cases the methods and sometimes the contexts were different, the results were not always comparable strictly speaking, but, nevertheless, differences in the findings needed to be explained so literature with more specific focus was brought in. Literature outlining similar findings was important as well because it tied together similarities in phenomena that are usually not connected with each other. I found that this process was similar to the one described by Berkowitz (1997, p. 42) where she describes qualitative analysis as:

a loop-like pattern of multiple rounds of revisiting the data as additional questions emerge, new connections are unearthed, and more complex formulations develop along with a deepening understanding of the material. Qualitative analysis is fundamentally an iterative set of processes.

To systematize comparisons between the data and the literature I used the iterative framework developed by Eisenhardt (1989), and an approach developed by Hopwood and Srivatsava (2009). They suggest addressing every next iterative cycle with a question that would guide the search for the relevant sources. This approach was challenging because the constant adding of the new sources resulted in the constant restructuring the Review of the Literature. Eventually, an arbitrary choice had to be made to stop searching for new sources.

3.5 Competence development framework

Since the research questions for this study are concerned with competences development, a competence development framework needed to be chosen. Originally I used a study by Weinert (1999) where he outlines and critiques different ways in which competence has been defined and categorizes conceptual spheres of competence. However, his work only exists in draft form and is not citeable. (The official report was supposed to come out but has not come out yet). Secondly, I used a competence typology by Le Deist et al. (2006) where they find three generic types of competence: cognitive, functional and social, that result in meta-competence. While this study does not explicitly contradict this typology, it is unclear how this typology can be applied to the data. Another typology used was a model of four ‘savoirs’ developed by Byram (1995). He recognizes that there are 4 types of ‘knowing’: *savoir* as declarative knowledge, *savoir-faire* as a ‘know-how’, *savoir-être* or one’s beliefs and *savoir-apprendre* or ability to learn. While this typology is among the better-known ones, only parts of the data from this research fit into it.

Competence development models introduced by Eraut (1994) were found to be more transparent, simpler to use and more applicable. He demonstrates that competence is not a state of being but a state of change and there is little merit in trying to capture competence without understanding the dynamic of its development. The data from this study also point out that competence is in a constant state of development and perhaps, this is why it fits well with levels of competence mastery by the Dreyfus brothers (1980). Their model is a flowchart that shows increasing stages of mastery. However, Eraut and the Dreyfus brothers work within work-based learning and contexts of their research are too different from the context of this study.

Studies grounded in more formal education directed the search towards intercultural competence development and intercultural academic competence development specifically. But as demonstrated in the Review of the Literature (2.6), most studies, especially those that focus on competence development by international students are from the area of applied linguistics and are skewed towards foreign language learning. The participants of this study revealed that development occurred in several domains of their social and personal lives, but that they only became aware of it after the process had taken place. On one hand, this inability to articulate their experiences made this research difficult, on the other hand, it also led to the most interesting findings of this research in the area of competence development. It also is another indication that retrospective research may be suitable in this case study.

While looking for additional sources about competences I found a model called ‘Four Stages of Learning any New Skill’ (credited to Noel Burch of Gordon Training International). The model outlines four stages of development that progress from unconscious incompetence, to conscious incompetence, to conscious competence and to unconscious competence. As mentioned in the Review of the Literature (2.6), most analysts who criticize the idea of competence as an analytical tool complain that it is too shallow and gives no space to tacit, intuitive development of knowledge. The GTI model addresses this issue by incorporating the observable manifestation of competence (conscious level) with the deep, unobservable processes (unconscious level). As such it is the most suitable model of competence development and was chosen to analyze the findings of this research. The full model is attached as Appendix 8.

Another difficulty of this research was to find connections between competence development and other theory supporting this study. Theoretically, this study is

grounded in Sociology of Education and intergenerational transmission and transformation of cultural capital. For example, it was difficult to connect students' development of 'mobility capital' with competence development until I noticed in the original writings by Bourdieu (1979, 1986) that he often uses 'competence' as an element of cultural and social capitals gained as a result of education. Of course, Bourdieu is known for his aversion to definitions (1999), but considering that 'mobility capital' is an education process and as such a derivative of cultural capital, I think Bourdieu would agree that competences are elements of 'mobility capital'.

3.6 Challenges and limitations of this research

As stated previously, this research is qualitative in nature and does not pursue statistical generalization. This research is designed to provide answers to the research questions applicable only to the individual cases.

I am aware that approaching the potential participants through online networks may have biased the sample towards the students who participated in virtual communities and excluded those who did not. Unfortunately, no statistics are kept on the users of One.lv and Odnoklassniki.ru, so it was impossible to say whether most Latvian students use these sites or not, but it has been my impression that most of the students prefer to be registered on the social online sites as it is a convenient way to stay involved with their friends from home while abroad. One.lv appeared to be the most active website with the greatest number of Latvian members, while Odnoklssniki.ru was a Russian website that targeted people from the ex-Soviet territory and attracted Russian-speaking people from Latvia. (one.lv became incorporated into Facebook in 2011).

Acquiring the point of entry through these websites automatically made me an insider of the students' networks. While being an 'insider' may weaken the objectivity of the researcher, such a position also allows for the greater depth of engagement (Hewitt-Taylor, 2002). This research is concerned with the participants' subjective meanings of mobility experiences and for that reason I tried to maintain some distance during data analysis and the reporting of the findings. Since my interpretations of the interviews inform the outcomes of this study, it was challenging to stay detached and not to assume shared understanding with the participants. This is why member-checking (Creswell, 2003, p. 196) during the follow-up interviews was a valuable addition to this study. It is only to be expected that every 'newcomer' influences the network's members and their interactions. As a 'newcomer' and a researcher I inevitably altered the networks, but the state of constant change is natural to the networks of intimacy, thus my presence did not interfere with the principles of the networks' functioning.

To capture the entire network for the research purposes was an impossible task by definition, so the network members were only representatives of the networks and did not reflect the entire dynamic of the complex network functioning. Instead they were chosen if they observed a central participant during certain stages of mobility. In addition, these members were nominated by the students and the students were expected to base their choices on personal and arbitrary reasons.

The original pool of potential participants for this research were chosen through the snowball method of sampling, which can be biased, but in this case it was chosen for convenience, flexibility and a more personal approach, which, I believe, increased the rate of return of the questionnaires and thus the population of the potential participants. The alternative would be to aim for a stronger, stratified sampling by pre-selecting

universities and departments and by ensuring cooperation of the administrative staff in those departments. The recruitment of the participants then could take place through the departments, but such an approach is known for low rates of return. Since this study does not seek statistical generalization this approach was rejected in favour of convenience.

One of the biggest challenges for this study was to decide who the central participants should be. Since mobility is a dynamic process with no fixed temporal frames, mobile students can be students at various stages of mobility. They can be students in Latvia just thinking about mobility (prospective students), they can be actively preparing for mobility (applicants), they can be already living in England, studying at a university, taking a pre-sessional course or waiting to begin a programme. They can also be Latvian graduates of English universities of many years ago. Revisiting the definitions of mobility collected and explored in the beginning of the Review of the Literature (2.1) this research is only interested in the geographical, international, physical, academic mobility of Latvian domiciled students enrolled in Bachelor degree courses at universities in England.

Since the research questions ask about competence development it would be interesting to investigate mobility of students at vocational institutions, where competence development is a more prominent concept and considered as an observable outcome, but I am unfamiliar with the context of vocational education, so the choice was made in favour of students pursuing Bachelor degrees at universities.

A longitudinal research study examining the participants from the beginning until the end (however unidentifiable these concepts are) would have been well-suited, but it was

difficult to predict how long completion of such project would take and this study was under time constraints. Instead I opted for a concluding interview after 2 years of the initial interviews. The concluding interviews served as reinforcement that participants' current situation in time influenced their visions of the past, present and future and therefore influenced their interview answers. Another option, common for capturing a dynamic process, would be to recruit participants at different stages of mobility and chart their responses in order to capture their mobility process. However, analysis of this idea revealed that such a population would be too varied to draw a sample and I questioned how comparable the data would be. The current students on the other hand, are a better-researched group and there are frameworks providing theoretical and empirical information on them.

Another challenge of this research was to cope with processing 48 hours of audio interviews. The interviews not only needed to be transcribed, but also translated. As is customary for the purposes of scientific research accuracy was given priority over style. However, reading the interviews in English did not evoke the same ideas as listening to them in the original did. In the end reading the English transcription served as the basis for analysis and listening to the original recordings helped me engage with the participants' stories on a more direct level.

I also had to be careful about wording my interview questions and staying neutral during interviews. Coming from a mixed Latvian-Russian background I am aware of the issues that people in Latvia would consider sensitive. One of the difficulties was determining people's SEC. Any questions that concern family, parental or personal income and occupations are considered rude in Latvia. On the other hand, if people volunteer this information it is acceptable. Since it was crucial to make as good a guess

about the students' SEC as possible, I had to manipulate the conversation in a way that would promote the participants to talk about the family income on their own accord. Participants gave more or less direct clues as to the family's SEC, but it is definitely a sensitive subject. As mentioned before perhaps this is why 63% of Latvian students in England marked their SEC as 'not classified' and 28% as 'unknown' (HESA 2012 dataset).

After the pilot study the interview schedule became 'heavier' in content, which made interviews a trial for some participants. On the other hand, six of them have said in the end that answering difficult questions caused them to reflect on their experiences in a more systematized manner, critically re-evaluate their goals and plan steps necessary for their achievement. In exchange for the central participants' time I offered to share my experience as a Latvian student with many years of study in England and as a teacher of English. Ironically, in many cases, the problems that were named during the interviews were not the same as the problems students asked advice on informally. Students cannot always identify their problems and often do not know the correct terms for their problems. One student reported herself as having dyslexia, after which we discussed why she did not report to the dyslexic support unit of her university. Having talked to her informally I realized that her understanding of dyslexia was incorrect and while she focused on finding the remedy for dyslexia, the real problem kept being unattended to.

Last but not least I found that titles in the literature are often incomplete or misleading, which slowed down the database search on keywords. Looking for 'academic mobility' or 'students' and 'mobility' often turned up sources on regional mobility, social mobility, etc. which was not always evident from the title and the source. Sources that deal with academic mobility often do not state their definitions of mobile students and sometimes

do not explain how they sample their participants. As a result, in some cases I did not know if I was reading about exchange programme students, individually mobile students or a mixture of both. However, in the conclusions for this thesis I acknowledge that as of late researchers have become more aware of the differences in programme and individual mobilities.

Chapter 4. Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Description of the research participants

This section starts with the descriptions of the central participants of this research and does not engage in analysis. On the other hand, a small number of central participants allows for the detailed descriptions of their individual situations. Appendix 9 summarizes these descriptions in a table for easy reference. These descriptions originated from notes in my research journal, but as I found out more about the participants and added new information to the notes, the descriptions became fuller and now include information from questionnaires, network representatives and all three interviews.

4.1.1 Explanation of the descriptions

These descriptions also allow comparison of the central participants to each other according to the criteria outlined in the Methodology (3.2). These criteria are: gender, age, nationality, type of the university (where ‘Red Brick’ is a university founded between 1836 and 1941; ‘Plate Glass’ is a university founded in the 1960s after the Robbins Report; and post-1992 is a previous Polytechnic), year of study, subject area, mode of study, previous experience of educational mobility, parental education. In addition, three more categories are included in the descriptions that did not come out as important from the literature, but appear significant for the participants of this research. These categories are: English language proficiency at the time of application (IELTS score at the time of application), academic English university instruction, university Grade Point Average (GPA at the time of initial interviews). These categories indicate only approximate situations because they are based on the participants’ evaluations. On the other hand, this entire research is based on the participants’ perceptions, so this approximation does not weaken quality of the data.

This data chapter demonstrates that English language proficiency at the time of application was a challenge for some participants of this study at the beginning of their projects. The participants have taken a variety of English language tests, so in the descriptions I used a TOEFL equivalency table (www.secure.vec.bc.ca) and converged the results of the different English language proficiency tests to IELTS, as IELTS is the most commonly-accepted test of English at English universities. I chose to focus on the test scores at the time of application, not at the time of the beginning of the academic study, before students gained pre- or in-session academic English training or went on an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course.

In most cases language proficiency ties in with the type, length and intensity of language instruction that the students are required to take if their language test score is not high enough. It appears that the decisions about the academic language instruction are made at the levels of individual universities. Lack of common policy on the matter of the academic language provisions complicated analysis of the data. I found out information regarding the Academic English courses at the participants' universities from the universities' websites, from personal correspondence with the admission officials and the participants themselves. Ideally I would have liked to compare these data to the situations at other universities in the same group. The only available statistics can be collected from individual universities, but only a few keep relevant statistics and even fewer are willing to share them. In the end, I studied randomly selected websites of individual universities of the same type in order to gain an overall understanding.

I found that the ancient universities in the UK (Oxford, Cambridge and some universities in Scotland) do not offer additional Academic English courses because they

only admit students with IELTS scores of no lower than 7.0 and other high qualifications. But that is not relevant to this research as none of the participants studied at an ancient university. It appears that most other universities offer in-session Academic English programmes for the postgraduate students that take place at the same time as their main study course, but this research is only interested in undergraduate provision. For undergraduate students Academic English courses are largely independent from the main study and take place separately before the main study course begins. These courses are referred to as pre-session Academic English courses or Foundation Degrees.

On the undergraduate level universities seem to differ by type in respect to the Academic English provisions for the undergraduate entrants from abroad. Besides language test like IELTS admission to the 'Red Brick' universities requires a university placement test. The students are required to attend Academic English course according to the results of this test rather than standardized language tests results. An Academic English course at 'Red Brick' universities usually lasts from 4 to 8 weeks and is supposed to advance the students' language proficiency by 0.5 or 1.0 IELTS points depending on the length and intensity of study. At the end of the course the students are tested again and only if they have progressed sufficiently, can they begin their main study course. At the new universities ('Plate Glass' as well as post-1992 universities) the situation is mostly similar except often students do not have to take an exit test at the end of their Academic English course.

Mode of study, on the other hand, is included in the descriptions because it affects the length of the programmes. Full-time students are on the three-year course and part-time students are on the four-year course. However, some of the full-time students take a

year of internship in the middle of their programme, which extends their programme to four years. Interviews show that working participants of this study cannot say precisely how much time they dedicate to work. Besides, they often work unpredictable hours, which interferes with their time-management.

The first two participants interviewed evaluated their progress in terms of perceived university grade point average (GPA) and I decided that it is a useful measure of the students' academic standing. These scores are not precise (in most cases) and only reflect the students' perceived academic standing rather than the objective situation. Plus, grades are important in the discussion of the issues connected with assessment.

In the descriptions I also explain the previous travelling experiences of the students and instances of previous educational mobility as these are known to affect socio-cultural acculturation. In the descriptions, I also include students' motivations, or the way I assess their motivations at the time of the interviews. This part of the findings is purely descriptive and aims to give an impression of the central participants and indicate how they compare to each other on the criteria outlined above.

Baiba's case

Latvian network members: best friend, Marta; mother, Liene

English network members: landlady, Diane; course mate, Fiona

Baiba is a 28 year-old woman from Riga. Her parents are both university-educated although she has a family of her own now and the parents had relatively little influence on Baiba's mobility project. Baiba is Latvian and speaks limited Russian, but it does not seem to be an issue for her. Baiba's husband holds a Master degree in Journalism from

the University of Latvia and works for a Riga newspaper. He often has to write about the ex-pat community of Riga and Baiba and he are frequent guests at the social events and parties. They have a 4 year-old son who attended a kindergarten at the time of initial interviews but now goes to a private school that emphasizes foreign language learning. Baiba is confident that he will grow up an interculturally-aware and cosmopolitan citizen.

During high school Baiba participated in the national Italian language competition among pupils her age and she won the first prize, a trip to Italy for a 2-week language course. Baiba enjoyed her time there very much and took every opportunity to travel abroad ever since. Nevertheless, for Baiba education abroad was a difficult decision because she knew that she would have to leave her husband and son behind for extensive periods of time. Baiba studied part-time and as she was a mature student her department made provisions for her where she only had to be present at the university at the beginning and at the end of each semester and for her examinations. While she was away her son stayed mainly with Baiba's mother who worked for herself and had time to take care of the grandchild.

Baiba has been learning English for a long time, even though the possibility of education in England had entered her line of vision relatively recently. Initially she started learning English because she enjoyed learning languages and she admired English culture. Later she saw that her interests could be converted into a job opportunity if she would gain suitable qualifications. Upon the completion of her BA at the time of initial interviews she was aiming to go into a part-time Master programme (at the same university in England) so that she could return to Latvia and work at the State University of Latvia teaching English Literature to undergraduate students.

Baiba's attitudes to her field of study and for learning in general indicated an intrinsic motivation. At the same time, she had a clear plan for using her degree in the labour market.

Many years of English language instruction allowed Baiba to earn a high score for CAE (IELTS equivalent of 7.0), which was unconditionally accepted by her university of choice. She had to sit for a placement test, but she scored highly and did not need any additional pre- or in-session English language instruction. At the time of the initial interview Baiba finished two years of her BA degree in English Language and Literature at a Red Brick university in London. Baiba was the only participant who knew her precise GPA (67%). Her second year was more successful than her first year and she was aiming to graduate with a first class degree.

During the concluding interviews Baiba graduated with a 2:1 in English Language and Literature. She decided against staying for the Master course. Baiba returned to Riga and she reconsidered teaching at the university as well. Instead she is researching opportunities for teaching English literature at a secondary school. She is not at all disappointed by a slightly more modest outcome that she had anticipated and her only regret is that she could not spend more time in England. She is pleased with her overall experience and is determined that her child should experience study abroad when he grows up.

Besides Baiba I interviewed her best friend, Marta in Riga, who encouraged her mobility project from the offset and participated in the decision-making and finding access at the university in the UK. I also managed a short interview with Baiba's mother, Liene, who was involved in the project at the pre-mobility stages, but was not

too keen on Baiba's idea. In England I met with Baiba's temporary landlady, Diane, who rented a room to Baiba when she came to England. Diane was able to tell me about Baiba's socio-cultural adaptations and she focused on the kinds of questions that she remembered Baiba asking. Diane is retired now but she used to work as an administrator for a university when she was younger and her accounts were insightful. I also met with Baiba's course mate from Hong Kong, Fiona, who knew more than others about Baiba's academic progress, because they took many courses together.

Sandra's case

Latvian network members: mother, Daira; school friend, Kristine

English network members: university instructor, Chris; roommate, Karro

At the time of the initial interview Sandra was 19. She came from a small town in Latvia, Tsis. None of her family members went to a university; in fact, her brother and she were the first in the family to graduate from high school. Sandra is the only central participant whose family and friends in Latvia did not support her decision to study abroad, at least not in the beginning. At the time of the initial interview they did not think that the financial investment would be justified and, according to Sandra, at the time of the concluding interviews they were not convinced either. Sandra was a difficult interviewee because she seemed shy and did not feel comfortable talking about herself. She preferred to avoid answering questions that made her feel insecure. At the time of the initial interview she was unhappy and seemed in need of emotional support.

Sandra's IELTS score at the time of application required her to take an 8-week pre-session Academic English course at her university. The course began 9 weeks prior to the beginning of her first semester. At the end of the course she passed the university

placement test and according to the results did not need further English language-related training. Sandra had not had any international travelling experience before moving to the UK and relocation was difficult for her due to her lack of confidence, experience and skill. Sandra's motivation for study has been instrumental all along and has remained so.

At the time of the initial interview Sandra had completed her first year of a full-time Business Administration course at a new (post-1992) university. She failed to submit a few of her assignments and she was not sure if she should return to the university for her second academic year. Sandra voiced many concerns of an academic nature and indeed was struggling because her highest grades were in the low 50s. Part of the reason for Sandra's low performance was her low confidence, which seemed to decrease even more with every negative comment she received.

According to the initial interview Sandra did not take advantage of the university provisions for international students, in fact she was not even aware of what help she could count on. Once directed to the university counselling, special learning needs unit, academic writing centre, library training courses and support group for international students Sandra chose a few seminars and workshops that she attended throughout the course of her studies. After three months she reported a slight increase in grades and self-esteem.

At the time of the concluding interview Sandra graduated with a pass (third class degree) but she was not disappointed. She enjoyed the learning process despite the difficulties. In her third year Sandra had to take a job, but she decided not to transfer to the part-time mode of study. She worked as a maid at a London hotel and even though

she did not enjoy her work, it allowed her flexibility. In her third year Sandra applied for hotel receptionist position and soon was hired to work at a small hotel staffed by immigrants from Russia, the Baltic States and Eastern European countries. Sandra thinks that she may have been hired because she speaks English, Russian and Latvian not because she had a degree.

Besides Sandra, I also interviewed her mother and her school friend in Tsis. They were not very well informed on the routine of accessing universities of choice, in comparison with network members from other cases, but they articulated some of the concerns that family and friends at home may have and perhaps provide a reversed pull factor. In England I interviewed Sandra's friend from Croatia who lived in the same dormitory and observed Sandra struggle with many problems. I was also lucky to manage an interview with her university instructor who was willing to share his opinions.

Inga's case

Latvian network members: mother, Jana; aunt Valya

English network representatives: boyfriend, Gareth; housemate Stefany

Inga was 18 at the time of the initial interview. She is from a mixed Russian-Latvian family and is bilingual and bicultural. Inga's mother has attended Daugavpils Pedagogical University, one of the more prestigious universities for teacher training in the Soviet Union. She worked as a curriculum designer at various schools in Riga. Inga's father was a Naval officer, educated at the Riga Marine Academy, but he had passed away when Inga was a child. Her step-father is an entrepreneur with no Higher Education experience, but with much respect and interest for the arts and sciences.

Inga's mother claimed that Inga could read sentences at 3 and had higher than average intellect.

When she was a teenager Inga had travelled to the United States as a George Soros Foundation student together with some of her classmates. She had a private language tutor for all 11 years of school and her IELTS score and her university placement test score have been high enough to avoid any additional English language training. At the time of the initial interviews Inga completed her first academic year in Business Administration at a Red Brick university. She evaluates her progress as 'mediocre' even though she estimated her GPA to be around 65%

Inga's mother makes no secret that she conditioned Inga for education and life abroad from an early age. As a result, decision-making and finding access to the English university was a process of many years and careful planning for her mother, but it was a given for Inga. She did not consider other options. In my opinion Inga was driven by instrumental motivation and she appeared more interested in earning high grades than in taking advantage of the learning opportunities. Even though she enjoyed her course, she admitted that she was not very interested in the material. In the concluding interview she said that she would be more successful if she studied what she enjoyed. At one time she looked into transferring to Journalism, but she had to start the course from the beginning and she did not want to spend any more time or money on education.

Inga's initial plan was to work for a large international corporation in London, but she reconsidered at the time of the concluding interview. Inga's long-term plan now is to earn a MBA from Riga Business School. RBS is a joint project of University of Buffalo, NY and Riga Technical University, located in Riga. All courses are taught in English,

many by foreign lecturers and graduates are said to hold prestigious positions in Latvia and abroad. However, one of the pre-requisites for enrolling into an MBA programme is to obtain at least two years of work in industry. So now Inga is looking for suitable employment in Riga that would allow her to gain relevant experience.

Inga's mother, Jana and her aunt Valya were Latvian representatives of Inga's network who shared their perspectives on Inga's mobility experience. I also interviewed Inga's boyfriend of a few months, Gareth. He is a 27 year old lawyer, originally from New Zealand, who has lived in Great Britain for many years and earned a Master degree from a prestigious university in Scotland. He is an unusual participant because he met Inga a few months after she had arrived in England and he had not witnessed the relocation or the early periods of adjustment. To fill in this gap I interviewed Stefany, a German housemate of Inga's, who was a 3rd year student in Humanities when Inga had first arrived, but who has graduated since.

Vlad's case

Latvian network members: girlfriend, Olesya; older sister, Masha

English network members: friend and colleague, Sean; EAP tutor, Lynn

When I first met Vlad he was 33. He is a mature student from Riga and the eldest of the participants. He is the only participant of this study who is distinctly above average age and has significant work experience. He is also the only one who moved to the UK not alone, but with his girlfriend. Probably the most significant difference between him and other participants is that Olesya had earned a BA in England and was applying for her Master programme at the same time that Vlad was applying for his Bachelor course. Naturally, Olesya provided his main source of academic and social support. It is also

interesting that Vlad is a first-generation student and a first-in-the-family university student, but not the-only-in-the-family because his sisters are at universities in Latvia.

At the time of the initial interview Vlad had just completed his first year in a part-time BSc (Hons) course in Computer Sciences at a new (Plate Glass) university. Vlad's IELTS score at the time of admission required him to take a 7-week Foundation degree (English for Specific Academic Purposes course) but he completed it successfully and according to the university placement test did not need further English language-related training. He has not had much travelling experience, but his girlfriend has. She has been an exchange student in France and enjoyed her experience very much.

I first allocated Vlad into a group of students driven by instrumental motivation, but in the follow-up interviews he was more inclined towards learning and during concluding interviews he showed a considerable sense of pride for his achievements. Vlad estimated his GPA for the first year to be in high 50s. He realizes that this grade was low and he was anxious to improve. Vlad was very open about his background, situation, experiences and enthusiastic about participating in this research. He has a tendency to criticize himself, but he is energetic, willing to learn and appreciative of any opportunity to do so.

Besides Vlad, I also interviewed his fiancée, Olesya. She was among the unusual participants because Vlad and she enrolled at universities and went to England together. At the time of the initial interview she was writing her MA dissertation in Media Studies. Vlad and she had been together for some time, so she witnessed all the stages of Vlad's mobility project and was willing to talk about them from her perspective.

According to Vlad, Olesya comes from a family with Higher Education tradition and educational qualifications were important to Olesya. Her family would not approve of her marriage to Vlad unless he obtained a university education, so a decision was made to postpone the wedding until Vlad earned his degree. Since Olesya's family liked him otherwise, her mother sponsored Vlad's bank loan, so that he could pay his tuition fees.

Vlad and Olesya both worked while in England, so they both studied part-time. Vlad changed jobs several times in the course of his study, but at the time of the concluding interviews he was working at an IT firm as a systems analyst. Olesya and he were no longer together and Vlad's aims had changed. Originally he was planning to start a family with Olesya in London, but now he is starting to save money to help his sister to enter a university in England as well. He is still enthusiastic about learning and is going to earn a Master degree although he is not sure when.

Vlad's older sister, Masha helped Vlad to form his decision, access the universities of his choice and was happy to talk about it. I also interviewed Vlad's friend and colleague, Sean, who told me about Vlad's working and social life. I was lucky to interview Lynn, Vlad's EAP tutor. Although she did not know much about Vlad's overall academic life, she was a knowledgeable informant to discuss Vlad's academic acculturation and English language-related issues in depth.

Denis's case

Latvian network members: mother, Andzhela; English language tutor, Galina

English network members: roommate, Gennadiy; course mate, Sam

Denis was 23 at the time of the initial interview. His parents have not studied at a university although his mother had taken several professional courses in accounting, two of which were university-based. Denis is ethnically Russian and at the time of the initial interview he was planning to apply for Russian citizenship. During the interviews Denis came across as a strategic thinker and a communicative person. He was open about his situation and provided full, thought-through answers.

At the time of the initial interview Denis was in his fourth year of university study writing his undergraduate dissertation. He was completing his BEng. course at a new ('Glass Plate') university in Chemical Engineering plus a year of internship at a pharmaceutical laboratory. Denis has initially been motivated by instrumental goals, but he marked a shift to more intrinsic attitudes. He estimated his GPA to have been in the low 60s, although, his actual grades must have been higher because he graduated with a first-class degree.

Denis's initial plan was to continue studying for his Master degree in Chemistry in Russia, but the outcome of his education exceeded his own expectations. After he completed his course he applied to several engineering firms. After a 3-month search he got a job at a Swedish company in England. He was so successful at his work that the management made a decision to pay for his Master course at the University of Stockholm. In return Denis signed a contract obliging him to work for the company for three more years after graduation. Denis is pleased with his life and his prospects, he is learning Swedish and he thinks that his Bachelor degree from England was the best investment that he had ever made.

Besides Denis, I also interviewed his mother, Andzhela, who participated in the decision-making and pre-mobility process and Denis's English language tutor from high school, Galina, who had helped him to apply to the universities of his choice and trained him for the TOEFL test. Denis's TOEFL test scores were high (IELTS about 6.5-7.0) and he did not need to have any pre-sessional or in-sessional language instruction. In England, I interviewed Denis's Kazakh roommate of 2 years, Gena, who had become a close friend of Denis's and an Indian man, Sam, who was in the same cohort of students as Denis, taking many of the same classes over the years.

Juris's case

Latvian network members: father, Leo; childhood friend and classmate, Pavels

English network members: Juris's friend, Elsa; colleague and supervisor, Afram

Juris was 20 at the time of the initial interview. His mother holds a 'Kandidat Nauk' degree in translation studies from the prestigious Tver University in Russia. In Latvia, as well as in many other European countries her degree is now recognized as equivalent to a Doctorate. Juris's father went to Riga Technical University and received his first degree in Architecture there. He has travelled widely on business since 1990s and recently became involved in the Latvian real estate market. He kept going to other European countries to participate in trade shows and took Juris along, not only on trips, but to the trade shows as well. Even though these trips do not qualify as educational mobility, they had an impact on Juris's overall experiences. Juris's initial plan was to join his father in business, but since 2008, when the real estate business in Latvia collapsed, Juris and his family had to re-assess Juris's plans.

In Riga he studied at a special ‘English school’ where he received intensive English language instruction for 11 years. He earned a 6.5-7.0 on IELTS and his university placement test was satisfactory as well, so he did not need any additional English language training. Juris has always been in the top of his class at school and at the university he saw himself as an underachiever even though he seemed reasonably aware of the classifications of degrees.

At the time of the initial interview Juris had finished two years of part-time university study. He was taking a part-time BEng course in Civil Engineering at a Red Brick university in London. His first job in England was at a warehouse where he loaded and unloaded deliveries. Later he worked as a freelance on-line mathematics tutor for several school pupils in Riga. He had no clear understanding why he wanted to earn a Bachelor degree from England. At the same time he enjoyed learning meeting people from other countries and living independently. At the time of the concluding interviews he was finishing his final year. Since he managed to save some money, his short-term plan was to go travelling. He had no long-term plans.

I interviewed Juris’s father, Leo, who was helpful in explaining Juris’s background and the conditions that facilitated mobility. However, Juris’s childhood friend and classmate, Pavels, provided information on Juris’s pre-mobility doubts and fears, which created a fuller context to Juris’s account. In England I interviewed Juris’s friend Elsa from Brazil, who was 18 and at the time enrolled in a commercial language school in London. Juris and she had met on-line just before Elsa’s departure for England. She was one of the few network members who had less experience living in the English culture than the central participants. Another English participant was Juris’s Pakistani colleague and supervisor, Afram.

Svetlana's case

Latvian network members: sister, Nadya; classmate, Sasha

English network members: roommate, Alice; colleague, Maria

Svetlana was 22 when I met her for the first time. She is Russian though she speaks near native Latvian. She is a first-generation student as none of her family members have had university experience. Her mother is an independent hairstylist and a fashion consultant and her father is an auto mechanic though he did not live in the same town and had minimal involvement with Svetlana's life in the past several years. Svetlana's family were reluctant to support her mobility project and provided little in terms of advice or resources. She had no previous mobility experience though she has travelled on holidays abroad with her family.

At the time of the initial interview Svetlana had finished her first academic year at a new (post-1992) university where she was enrolled in a BA Slavonic studies course. She worked part-time as an administrator at a beauty parlour. She started her mobility project after graduation from high school at 19, but because of the limited resources and need for English language training she only enrolled at the university after 2 years. Despite the language instruction she had taken in Latvia her IELTS score was not high enough. All the universities she applied to required her to attend 12-18 weeks of Academic English programmes. Instead of enrolling into one of these programmes, Svetlana postponed her enrolment for a year and studied English in Riga. Her second attempt at IELTS was more successful, though she still needed some academic English instruction. At the end she accepted an offer from the university that required the

shortest pre-sessional course. She took a 4-week Academic English course before the university induction week began.

Svetlana enjoyed being a student and she liked her course, but she has never been very successful. She estimates her GPA as in the mid-60s, although her average grades are affected by her high results in the Russian Language and Literature course. Otherwise, she has always struggled academically and notwithstanding Russian Language and Literature course she guesses her results to be in the low 50s.

In the first year Svetlana failed in several of her subjects but was reluctant to drop out. She was still registered as a student for the duration of the second academic year but by then she stopped attending lectures and submitting course work. By the time we met for the follow-up interviews she was thinking of quitting her programme.

Svetlana chose not to participate in the concluding interview, but I know that she was working at a beauty parlour in London and enjoying her job. She said that she decided to become a hair stylist and she was looking into some professional courses. She met a partner, from Bulgaria and they are planning to get married next year.

Svetlana's younger sister, Nadya was the keenest family supporter of Svetlana's mobility project and was interviewed to provide information on Svetlana's pre-mobility processes, especially on the decision-making. Her classmate, Sasha, contributed to the more practical side of the pre-mobility stage, especially gaining access. I also interviewed Svetlana's roommate from the university dormitory, Alice, who was in her second year and with whom Svetlana consulted when feeling academic pressure. The second network member from Britain was Svetlana's colleague from Cyprus, Maria,

who informed me about Svetlana's social adjustments to her life in the UK and occasionally about her emotional states and how she dealt with them.

4.2 Gaining access to university education in England

The principal aim of this section is to answer the first research question of the study: **what competences do prospective undergraduate students from Latvia develop as part of finding access to university education in England?**

The data that help with answering this question are discussed through the lens of the literature on competence development, on international students' experiences in foreign education, on first-generation home university students, my knowledge of the Latvian context and through the theoretical framework of intergenerational transmission of human capital as suggested by the followers of Pierre Bourdieu. As mentioned in the Review of the Literature (2.4) this framework is suitable for analyzing the process of finding access to HE by first-generation students, and in the case of this research, first-generation mobile students. In English language publications first-generation students are usually analyzed through the prism of their families' income, cultural capital and socio-economic class. In this research, however, the framework is applied to the students from another country where characteristics of socio-economic class are dissimilar. So another aim of this chapter is to find out how families' intergenerational capital influences the participants' experience of finding access to their universities of choice.

For the sakes of accurate discourse it is important to mention that there are no guidelines in the literature as to how students-to-be change their status throughout the process of finding access to universities. Strictly speaking, the participants of this study

should not be referred to as students in the analysis because in this section they report on the events that took place when they were prospective students. I decided to follow the example of UCAS and refer to the participants as prospective students before they apply to the universities, as applicants - after they applied and then as offer holders.

4.2.1 Participants HE-related decisions

Impetus, incentive or motivation for mobility

Carroll and Johnson (1990) suggest that the first step in education decision-making and in this case the ‘beginning’ of mobility might be impetus recognition. Even though impetus recognition is not directly linked to the aims outlined for this section, it is connected with students’ motivations that impact the learning experiences of the students and arguably even the outcomes of the learning process (Ryan, 2005; Farbrother and Hartwell, 2006), this is why it is discussed as a part of this section.

To Carroll and Johnson (1990) the idea of impetus is an initial force that sets educational decision-making processes in motion. For them ‘impetus’ is an impulse that prompts prospective students to make certain decisions. They see impetus as something that results from the circumstances, without the students’ involvement. But according to Bourdieu’s ideas agency of a person and structure (circumstances) constantly interact and influence each other, so they are not entirely separate in the usual sense of the word (Ball et al., 2002).

One alternative is to look for the incentives that drive the students to study at universities, the way Keep (2008) sees it. Since incentive is associated with stimulus or drive to reach a return, it is predominantly used in the discourse on returns from educational investments. Another alternative is proposed in research on teaching and

learning, where the discussion is usually centred around ‘motivations’ seen as a condition of being encouraged to behave in a certain manner (Dornyei, 2001; Windham and Peng, 1997). Data provided by the participants of this study contribute to this debate.

Several participants of this study and their parents were very keen on gaining returns on educational investment, but at the same time they show that incentives permeate the entire mobility projects and change depending on the immediate situation at hand. For example, Inga’s mother explained at the beginning of the initial interview:

I expect Inga to be able to have a dignified lifestyle... ...I know that that’s what she wants as well and this is why she did it [entered the BA programme at an English university].

Jana (Inga’s mother)

Here ‘dignified lifestyle’ is Inga’s incentive for study, but at the same time later in the same interview Jana added also intrinsic motivation to Inga’s incentive.

I think Inga has always wanted to study. She is gifted. She needs to develop her talents.

Jana

Inga was asked in the follow-up interview to elaborate on what she wanted to gain from the education in England. She said:

I want to make sure that I gain education not only useful in Riga but in England or other countries.

Firstly, it appears that both incentives and motivations were present in Inga’s case. The initial drive was probably a combination of both because on one hand, she wanted to ‘gain education’, on the other it had to be ‘useful education’. However, this evidence should not be seen as contradictory, rather, it emphasizes the link between incentive and motivation. In economics it is believed that incentives increase motivation (Prendergast,

2008). Similarly, in Education, where the return is associated with extrinsic factors, incentive is equated with instrumental motivation. But both kinds of motivations, instrumental (external) and integrative (internal) working together are more effective than any one alone.

Secondly, Inga recognizes that what is ‘useful’ in Latvia may not be necessarily useful in other countries (i.e. England). And thirdly, Inga believes that she cannot obtain education useful for other countries in Riga. These ideas do not directly contribute to answering the research question but may be of interest to those researching educational outcomes. Since very few publications can include appendices, it is almost impossible to understand the interview questions that the participants were asked. But according to my knowledge almost no researchers on student mobility ask their participants why they decided *not* to study at their home countries. In the follow-up interviews this question yielded different responses than a more typical question: ‘Why did you decide to study abroad?’

Baiba’s interview showed distinctly that her ideas related to university study changed depending on her priorities in life. For example, Baiba clearly shows that her priorities changed after she became a mother.

When I was single I had this idea [to study at a university] for a long time, but the time has never been right. I wanted to have a good job, then a career, then to speak English like a native. Now I just want to be a good wife and mother and I want to learn and to grow as a person and become a professional. That’s why, I think...

Baiba

Unlike Inga, Baiba emphasized that she pursued education because she wanted to learn, to experience personal growth and to obtain professional qualification. So, in her case as in Inga’s, motivations for growth and learning were combined with incentives to obtain

a qualification. Baiba's instrumental approach to making educational choices is re-addressed further on in this section.

Other participants described their incentives for study abroad in clear terms. For Vlad and Svetlana finding work was clearly an outcome that they expected from education.

I think ... I should try to find a job here [in the UK] at the end.

Vlad

I don't think I can be comfortable in Latvia working as a specialist in Russian and Slavonic Studies, there are not enough jobs in the area. I'll try to find a job in England.

Svetlana

Firstly, Vlad and Svetlana did not believe that they could find jobs in the UK unless they obtained their degrees there, and intrinsic motivation such as desire for learning did not play a significant role in their cases. Secondly, it was unclear if the participants of this study believe that university qualification should bring the expected rewards, or if the learning that they experience while working towards a degree should provide the desired outcome. All participants of this study may have had different reasons for needing or wanting a degree, but it is safe to conclude that they shared the same overarching goal – to earn a Bachelor degree at an English university. While this finding is similar to that of other researchers, it is important to keep in mind that 'the expected wage effects of skill acquisition or learning are never the whole story, but simply one part of a much wider spectrum of incentives that at any given time, for any given individual, will impact on decisions' (Keep, 2009a, p. 3).

Elliot and Dweck (2005) posit that the recognition of the *need* to develop a competence is what drives competence development. Participants of this study recognized the need to alter their 'normal trajectories' and that prompted them to make a critical step from

the unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence. According to the GTI model of competence development this is a pre-requisite for further development. Even though at this point it was difficult to see what concrete competences participants developed as part of finding access to English universities, it was interesting to notice that the same motivational factors that promoted desire for study abroad also influenced competence development for finding access to the universities in England.

These data indicated that the children of university-educated parents were slightly more driven by the intrinsic process of learning than students whose parents were not university-educated. As the theory of intergenerational transmission of cultural capital suggests, children inherit their parents' attitudes to and beliefs in education and learning (Archer, 2003; Archer and Francis, 2006; Gofen, 2007). Thus, participants of this study whose parents have studied at universities may have inherited parental views that the universities' function is to educate, not to provide return on investment. With this attitude they also should have inherited a more intrinsic motivation. But since most of the Latvian parents studied at universities for free, it is only natural that they would not see education as an investment. Their children, on the other hand, have to pay university fees in most cases (wherever they study) and that is likely to impact their motivations. Also, despite the inherited attitudes, children may form their own opinions based on the ways they see their parents use their education although this did not come across in the interviews.

It appears that in this study impetus recognition, incentives or motivations for education abroad are dynamic concepts that change according to the participants' immediate situation. At the same time, perhaps, a range of motivations is present at all times, but the participants prefer to articulate what is currently the most important. Bourdieu

(1986) would argue that the motivation that is the most prominent at any given time depends on the dynamics of students' *habitus*, where external factors shape what is going on inside at any moment in time.

Gathering relevant information

All the students participating in this study described multiple and sometimes unexpected ways of gathering information about access to universities abroad. So the following part explores various ways that the participants and their families used for obtaining information about university education in England. All participants mentioned social connections where information gathering about education was concerned. Much research has been conducted to this end, resulting in a well-accepted view that young people's education-related decisions are embedded in their transnational social structures (Brooks, 2003b, 2007; Waters, 2007), but this research aims to show what types of social connection prospective students use and to explain their choices where possible.

Inga, for example, spoke to a daughter of her parents' friends who was a student at the University of Aberdeen.

I am very grateful that she met with me and spent time with me. She was telling me all about the UK and Scotland and Aberdeen. She also told me that I had to just be brave and approach the universities myself because they want me just as much as I want them.

Inga

Most participants of this study either knew someone or could connect with someone who studied at a university abroad through mutual friends. The establishment of these connections was easy for the participants who have finished prestigious schools where the rates of mobile students among the graduates are high. Other participants who have

not gone to prestigious schools needed to search for suitable contacts a little further. But in either case, these information exchanges could be full of potentially confusing misunderstandings.

For example, Denis was confused for a long time about the meaning of the word ‘college’ in British and American contexts. A friend from the US university told him that college and university was the same thing. But since Denis was planning to apply to England he lost some time investigating English colleges rather than universities.

It worried me that I read about colleges in England and I thought that it was like a continuation of school. I was really scared, but then some blogger helped me understand!

Denis

But his experience was not altogether negative. Denis found an online forum where another international student from an English university helped him to understand the differences between a ‘college’ and a ‘university’ in the UK context.

Denis not only evaluated the information that was available from his American friend critically, but he also initiated online contact with a person with *English* experience in order to verify and clarify information. Therefore, in this case, it is possible to argue that Denis developed his criticality and possibly increased his ability to find relevant sources of information and to initiate contact with them. On the other hand, he used the same strategy that he had used successfully before – he searched online. It is possible to argue that according to the GTI model of competence development Denis already started at the level of conscious incompetence where he recognized the fact that he needed some more information.

Some of the participants did not spend much time looking for acquaintances with previous mobility experience, but went to the ‘authority’ that could explain the situation to them. Baiba’s and Juris’s parents recalled how their children searched for information.

I called the Embassy [UK Consulate] and asked them and they said to call the British Council and so Baiba did.

Liene, Baiba’s mother

Juris went and asked at the British Council. His mother went with him, but he went there many times, I know, I don’t know why, but he worked with them.

Leo, Juris’s father

It is interesting that in many cases when the participants approached the ‘official sources’, it was their university-educated parents who insisted on this way. This study does not show that this view is inherited by the children, but it shows that the preference of the university-educated parents is to seek advice from the official authorities rather than from acquaintances.

Unfortunately, not all prospective students benefit from useful advice or find their way to it. Svetlana paid a significant amount of money to a firm in Riga that specializes in ‘sending students abroad’. She had heard that such firms existed but she did not know where to find them. She called the city information service, asked for firms that specialize in universities in England and obtained contacts in three services. Having talked informally to an operator of the information service that Svetlana used I found out that according to their training, operators search the local browser using keywords such as ‘university’ or ‘Higher Education’, ‘England/UK’ and ‘Riga’ to search their database and Internet sites. Svetlana could have easily managed that herself, but that strategy did not occur to her. In the end, Svetlana contacted all three firms and chose the one that seemed to have the lowest fees.

Svetlana: They gave me some brochures about this university, I took them home and I really liked it. They said that they have many Latvian students who go there and they have the system all worked out.

I: How many universities did you look at?

S: Just that one. But I really liked it.

Svetlana

I did not ask Svetlana if she was aware of the various rankings of the universities and neither did she volunteer on the subject, but her university is a new university and is listed low in the league tables. However, it is remarkable that Svetlana's university has the highest concentration of Latvian students amongst other universities in England. According to the HESA dataset out of 2 226 Latvian undergraduates studying in England in 2009/10 (at the time of the interview), 274 were in Svetlana's university. I asked various officials of the university how they explain such attraction: they connected a large number of Latvian students with participation in educational fairs that take place in Latvia. Since there are many other universities that participate in Riga educational fairs it is impossible to conclude what attracts so many Latvian students to that particular university. But in Svetlana's case it was definitely promotion of the university by the agency. There can be a number of reasons why 26% of all Latvian undergraduates concentrate in three universities in England, but promotion of the universities by the educational agencies must not be ruled out.

Sandra's experience was similar. Originally she went to the British Council, but found their help insufficient and even after she contacted a few universities only one responded and she ended up paying one of the educational agencies as well.

I didn't like the people at the British Council - they are not very friendly. They basically told me to use a computer and gave me many websites, but I got too confused. And a friend told me that she, well, her friend, used that agency (name of the agency). I knew that they would charge, but at least I didn't feel like a fool there.

Sandra

Apparently staff at the Riga British Council acted in a less friendly manner than Sandra anticipated which made her 'feel like a fool there'. In other words, she lost her confidence and decided to go to the paid agency where she could count on customer service and would not need to deal with this unpleasant feeling. Participants who had parental support did not experience loss of heart and took advantage of the 'official' authorities. Even though this research does not tease out connections between parental involvement and their children's level of confidence, these connections are evident and persistent throughout this study and have been explored in literature on psychology.

I did not ask Sandra or Svetlana additional questions about their experiences with the educational agencies, but having talked to the agency's representatives I found out that they charge separate fees for different services or a negotiated fee for a whole 'package', that sometimes includes even the travel arrangements to England (airline tickets). What is remarkable though is that neither Svetlana nor Sandra realized that they did not *choose* their universities, rather they chose to attend the university that was first recommended to them.

Svetlana and Sandra both stated that they had positive experiences at the educational agencies, so in the future they would probably try to avoid the 'official sources' but try to pay the 'unofficial' provider again. However, I believe that in the long term those prospective students who have found and contacted the 'official' sources themselves or with their parents benefited from the process more, because initiating contact and overcoming intimidation developed their confidence which contributes to the development of affective skills. On the other hand, it can be argued that recognizing the need for additional help is a valuable skill, too, that seems undervalued in the current

academic environment and does not feature in research on international students or competence development.

It appears that all participants rely on their social networks in their search for information on mobility. But availability of the informed acquaintances is different for the children of university-educated parents and those whose parents have not studied at universities. The first group of participants was only one step removed from the acquaintances who could be helpful. Usually they were Latvians studying in the UK who were friends of friends or graduated from the same schools as the participants. In these cases it is possible to argue that thanks to their parents' choice of schools, children had better social connections. University-educated parents are known to be more involved in their children's education and choice of schools. At the same time, children whose parents have not gone to universities had to take more steps to find relevant connections.

In summary, this part indicates that there are two main sources of obtaining information on access. For most participants the first preferred source of information was an acquaintance with mobility experience. Brooks (2003b, 2007) and Waters (2007) in their investigations of student social networks find that university education abroad is promoted by the growing numbers of the mobile students who 'live to tell the tale' and provide a source of information. On the other hand, in this study the data show that while such connections might contribute to motivation and provide a source of information they can be misleading and are not equally available to all.

The second choice is to find 'an authority' on mobility. The authorities seem to be divided into the 'official sources' (British Consulate and British Council) and

‘unofficial’ ones (commercial educational services). The ‘official sources’ do not sell services for money and therefore do not treat prospective students like customers. Perhaps, the representatives of these sources do not always make an effort to put the prospective students at ease and their status and behaviour can intimidate a prospective student. It appears that the participants who enjoy parental support dealt with the intimidation easily. While others, like Sandra were so put off that they quit after the first attempt. This is similar to Choy’s findings (2002) that low parental involvement correlates with low confidence among first-generation college applicants in the United States.

In this study participants who lacked confidence to deal with their first choice of information source turned to ‘unofficial sources’. The ‘unofficial sources’ were the educational agencies trusted by the prospective students to organize access to the universities for money. There is not enough evidence to demonstrate how the parental influence impacts the choice of information source, but it is possible that parental support gives students confidence to deal with a larger variety of sources.

Pre-requisites for mobility

As outlined in the Review of the Literature (2.4), decisions are made within restricted ‘opportunity structures’ where decisions are constrained by the opportunities available to the prospective students and their families. The boundaries of these opportunity structures limit the scope of what is possible and need to be extended in order to widen the range of possibilities. By interviewing admission officials at a wide range of universities in 2004 HEFCE identified four key deterrents to the programme mobility of English students who studied abroad. In this study participants were asked to comment on three of the issues that HEFCE identified: financial problems, language barriers, and

their attitudes. Institutional constraints were omitted because they usually refer to the recognition of ECTS and have no relevance to degree mobility. Degree recognition by the Latvian State could be an issue but none of the participants of this study were at the stage where they would be concerned or aware of it.

All participants of this study took the traditional route to university: after receiving basic school qualifications, they attended high schools, and then entered universities in England based on their high school centralized exit examination results. While there are other paths for university education abroad (i.e. through vocational colleges, adult education programmes, continuing education, etc.) exploration of these routes is beyond the scope of this study.

This study assumes that most school-leavers have a provisional plan regarding their future at the time when they sit for their centralized exit school exams. But in their last interviews Inga and Denis highlighted a nuance that is missing from the literature.

I have always been an OK student, but I went to the hardest, or one of the hardest, at any rate, schools in Riga. At another school I could have been a 'straight A' student... ...As soon as you leave your home town nobody cares [how 'hard' your school is], nobody even knows!

Denis

I just assumed that a higher quality school is always better. Should have gone to the worst school in Riga and be a 'star' there [laughs], and get all the best grades. I maybe could have entered Oxford then.

Inga

In Latvia information about schools seems to be implicit in the social networks and spreads through word of mouth. Official schools' ratings are not easily available, although some schools advertise their statistics. Some schools are simply *known* as 'difficult'. Usually they are also considered to be more prestigious. That means that

pupils from a 'difficult', prestigious school who make poor grades could be earning much higher grades at an 'easier' school. In the pupils' hometowns this implicit, unwritten school rating is supposedly recognized by the HE admissions officials and possibly employers. However, it is unclear what impact the school grades for course work have on university admissions. Even though Inga and Denis assume that their school grades are not very important for admission to English universities, UCAS explains that universities' and colleges' decision-making process differs between and even within institutions and they can give no general guidelines about the importance of different criteria (UCAS, 2011). All students who apply through UCAS have to submit the results of their A-levels or equivalent. In Latvia centralized school leaving examinations are equivalent to the A-levels and are submitted for university admissions in the UK.

However, sufficient results of the secondary education exams alone are not enough to apply to universities in English-speaking countries. Another boundary of opportunity structures is English language proficiency and this part discusses how the participants of this study overcame it. All universities in England have language requirements aimed to ensure that the students who arrive from abroad have enough English language knowledge to fully participate and take advantage of the study process. The participants of this study have taken a variety of English language tests, so I used the TOEFL equivalency table (www.secure.vec.bc.ca) and converged the results of the different English language proficiency tests to the IELTS scale, to make the data more comparable. IELTS is the most commonly accepted language test at English universities and is intended to measure both academic and general English language proficiency. The score that the prospective students receive is supposed to indicate to what extent they are ready to study at a university in English as a language of instruction. But there

is an ongoing debate among the Teaching English as Second or Other Language (TESOL) specialists concerning the validity of IELTS results (Chalhoub-Deville and Turner, 2000; Brown and Holloway, 2008b). Experienced practitioners and researchers recognize that there are shortcuts that students can use in preparation for IELTS (Moore and Morton, 2005; Green, 2005, 2007). For example, many students master the strategies for passing this particular test and this approach allows them to gain a higher score. But in these cases the results do not show authentic English language proficiency, rather they indicate only the student's ability to pass IELTS. Thus, the ability to pass IELTS alone does not always indicate academic readiness to study or receive training in English at undergraduate level.

Participants of this study dealt with language tests in a variety of ways. For Juris and Inga it was part of the school culture. But while Juris decided to sit for IELTS as an interesting challenge, Inga studied for it specifically.

When I decided that I would like to study in England, my mom and I decided that I needed a teacher who would prepare me just for IELTS. The teacher said that I already have enough English, I just needed to get used to the test. It wasn't too difficult.

Inga

Juris has always had outstanding grades in English, so IELTS for him was an interesting challenge. Some of his classmates were taking the test, so Juris decided to take part before the idea of university study in England had crystallized.

I've been lucky with English, but we had a really great teacher, too. We did more exercises from IELTS in class than we did from the school book. My score was about 6 safely when we tried in class. On the real test I got lucky and got 6.5.

Juris

While Juris attributes his success to luck and a good teacher, IELTS preparation was clearly a widely-known idea in his school. Indeed, Juris's school promotes preparation for IELTS probably because it considerably widens the choices related to university study and facilitates considerations of academic mobility. The number of students that choose to study at universities abroad is probably becoming a matter of prestige for schools in Latvia. Even though this study has no evidence to this effect, it appears that more and more schools are choosing this strategy to increase their competitive edge.

It appears that in Latvia university-educated parents simply 'know' how the schools 'rank' in relation to each other. According to research (McFadyen, 2003) people acquire this information from the social circle they are in. But this does not explain why parents with no university education do not use such knowledge. There is not enough evidence in this study to form an argument about this issue, but it is possible that the university-educated parents have had a chance to compare their university course-mates from different schools and decide how students from different local schools compare academically. Parents with no university-experience do not have such a chance. In addition, they probably do not often find themselves in companies where education is discussed.

Baiba and Denis also were successful in their preparations for IELTS. They both hired private tutors who had a record of successful students. Vlad, Sandra and Svetlana, on the other hand, did not achieve the necessary score. For applicants who do not achieve the required scores most universities in the UK offer a range of pre- or in-session language preparation programmes. These programmes can be costly, but the decision to enrol in a foundation course in all three cases was taken before the financial issues were

sorted out, so discussion of covering the cost of the language preparation course is included in the overall discussion on finance.

Sandra had not gained the necessary score in her first IELTS attempt. At that point the consultant at the educational firm she was using advised hiring a tutor. But at that time Sandra already knew what university she wanted to apply to and she also had learnt about their foundation courses.

The university also had sent me materials about a foundation pre-course and I decided to take it. I wanted to get used to the university, to find out about jobs and be there to see for myself before the studies began.

Sandra

Svetlana knew that her knowledge of English was not enough to earn the necessary score so she went the other way and took the lessons from the tutor recommended by the education agency she was using. But even with the help of the tutor she failed to achieve the necessary Band 6. However, the time was critical for the UCAS application submission and Svetlana followed the advice of her counsellor and applied anyway. As predicted by the counsellor the university of choice (the only one she applied to) suggested that Svetlana should attend an 8-week pre-session course. After the course she had to pass a university-designed placement test. Svetlana's placement test scores were high enough and she started her Bachelor programme in September.

Preparation guides and courses for the standardized language tests (and particularly IELTS) are often criticized for promoting a 'surface approach' to learning (Moore and Morton, 2005; Green, 2005, 2007). But in this research there is not enough data to show the participants develop true language competence by preparing for IELTS or if they use a remedial, 'surface approach' for test preparation. This issue crosses over to the subject of academic acculturation at pre-mobility stages and is also reflected in 4.4

where language proficiency is discussed as a competence developed as part of academic acculturation.

As expected, children of university-educated parents did not have severe difficulties in gaining the necessary IELTS score for their chosen institutions. Since they attended schools with stronger English language instruction, IELTS presented less of a difficulty and in some cases was part of the school culture. Children of non-university educated parents had to find alternative ways to prepare for the examination.

Financing education as a pre-requisite for mobility

Since all the participants of this study have gained access to universities in England they obviously fulfilled the necessary prerequisites. According to the literature these primarily include financial and administrative pre-requisites. Since Latvia became part of the European Union no administrative preparations are necessary for Latvian citizens to travel, work or study in England. Visas and working permits are only necessary for non-citizens who hold permanent resident status. Among the participants for this study only Denis has no citizenship and holds a permanent legal resident status in Latvia. He preferred not to naturalize and to keep his permanent resident status, so that after graduation he could apply for Russian citizenship. Russia and Latvia do not allow dual citizenship. However, as a non-citizen of the EU he had to pay full, international student tuition fees.

I am Russian and I want to live in Russia. I want to work in Moscow. I think this is where the real growth is. So I'll graduate and then apply for Russian citizenship and so I'll look for a job in Moscow... I think I can have a good chance there if I have studied in England.

Denis

It may be worth mentioning that tuition fees used to be higher in Russia for students from other countries than they were in England, but as of 2011, when the tuition fees in England have increased it is cheaper to study in Russia than it is in England. This route to education abroad may become particularly attractive to Latvians whose native language is Russian, especially considering that costs of living in Russia are still considerably lower than in England. Geographical proximity and the ease of travelling is another factor attractive to mobile students from Latvia. The only aspect that may hinder academic mobility to Russia is intense competition for university places in Moscow and St. Petersburg, the most desirable locations. The selection of applicants in Russia is based on the results of unified state examinations (centralized university entrance examinations) and admission to universities, especially in Moscow and St. Petersburg is known to be extremely competitive.

This relates to the most troublesome prerequisite for university education in England: financing education. In line with most other studies that have taken place either in England or abroad financing education is one of the most significant barriers that the participants of this study mentioned. Not only the tuition fees are high, but associated expenses and cost of living are significantly higher in the UK than in Latvia.

Only two of the participants' families paid all tuition fees and all living expenses in England. All other families had to seek additional sources of support. These included personal loans, bank loans with collateral (security pledged for repayment of the loan) and student loans. Some parents covered tuition fees only or tuition fees and accommodation, but several participants also worked to support themselves either fully or partially.

A few participants were taken aback by the ‘impossibility’ to study for free.

I thought that I could pass the entrance exams very well and they would let me study for free. How come there is no entrance exam? It’s really clever. It makes it impossible to study for free even if you can show that you are good in your subject.

Denis

Denis’s confusion is likely to come from the idea he developed in relation to universities in Latvia and in Russia. In Latvia the university decides if the candidate is strong enough academically in their chosen subject area. A percentage of top candidates is admitted without tuition fees. Many applicants in Latvia aspire to receive a free place at the university because that would keep their expenses low, especially if they lived at home. In case they study in England, tuition fees account for only a fraction of the participants’ overall expenses.

In this study all participants but Vlad found the money to pay for education as a joint project with their families. Parents were the first source to which the participants appealed and appear to be principal financial decision makers. In each case the financial situation was pivotal for the feasibility of the overall mobility project. So it was one of the most crucial conditions on which the mobility projects depended and much of the decision-making took place around the probability to finance education. There is no way of knowing how many students who consider study abroad do not do so because of a lack of money or other constraints, but among Latvian students their percentage is likely to be high.

Of course, we [Denis and his parents] worried about the money a lot. What’s the point of applying, of choosing, asking questions if you know that in the end you can’t pay for it, right?

Denis

Parents and students often mentioned that it was harder and more time-consuming than they expected to secure money for tuition fees and maintenance expenses. This seems especially true in relation to government-secured student loans that are widely advertised by many banks. Further information is available on the website of the Ministry of Education Latvia (<http://www.sza.gov.lv/?lang=1>), but only in the Latvian language. The Latvian Ministry of Education offers a special student loan for those studying abroad. The repayment schedule is flexible and interest rates are low, but none of the participants of this study managed to obtain this loan although six out of seven had applied for it. Two of the participants' parents paid the tuition fees from personal savings and others loaned money from banks. Most participants of this study who dealt with banks noted the complexity of technical financial jargon and the unhelpfulness of the bank representatives. Some were annoyed that the banks' representatives did not inform them of the next step of the process before it came. That meant that the participants and their families often wasted time on processes that they could not complete because more and more unanticipated requirements were put forward at each step of the way.

Had we known how much time, money, frustration, hustle it [obtaining a loan] would take we would have quit at the beginning. But at each step we thought "well, we are almost there now, we can't quit now!"

Jana (Inga's mother)

In the follow-up interviews the participants were asked how they would go about securing the maintenance and tuition money if they were to repeat the process. Inga, Denis and Baiba said that they would spend a lot more time in advance investigating all the legal procedures at different banks.

I would spend a lot more time preparing and finding out all and every detail. If my parents could not come up with the money I could not have gone [to study in the UK]...

Inga

I wish I could take an entire year just getting the money sorted. I am sure I'd be better off then. The only problem is that you can't get the money before you are accepted and how can you go through and become accepted if you don't know about the money?

Denis

I think there are also opportunities to get money from universities. If I were a normal (full-time) student I would get it out of them with time. But all this money stuff is so time-consuming!

Baiba

Inga, Denis and Baiba emphasized the insufficient time they allocated to solving the financial matters. They sensed that there were other opportunities to finance education than the routes that they had chosen but they did not have the time to investigate these opportunities and to see how they could be used.

Vlad, Juris and Sandra all said that if they were to repeat the process they would try to accumulate some money beforehand.

Finding a flat and a job takes much longer than you expect, it's best to start looking for them while at home. If you start there you must have money to last for at least the first two months or you'll end up getting the first available job and the first available place.

Vlad

It was very hard at least for me to work and study at the same time from day one. I really wish I could first get started at the university and then start looking for a job.

Juris

It would be a lot less stressful if I knew how much money I would need and when. People always told me that England was extremely expensive and I was always afraid that I would run out of money before I found work.

Sandra

In a way Vlad, Juris and Sandra wished for more financial stability and security so that they could understand their budget. Otherwise, they had to make work commitments before they allocated time for study and that later interfered with their studies.

Even though in the end each family was successful in securing the necessary money, it was a learning path not only for students, but for their parents, too, and in some cases, predominantly for parents. It appears that all participants who dealt with obtaining bank loans extended their knowledge about the banks' principles of work, legal and administrative procedures as well as professional jargon. All three elements regularly feature in research on development of financial literacy (Hanna et al., 2010; Csongor, 2011; Harrison and Chudry, 2011). The extent to which literacy can be conceptualized as competence depends on the chosen definitions of these ideas. But in this study it is evident that participants develop a degree of financial literacy as a part of gaining access to the universities in England.

However, because most prospective students are young and have no personal finances, it is their parents who develop most financial literacy at the stage of gaining access. If we accept that university-educated parents are more involved in their children's educational pursuits as Bourdieu suggests, they were probably more helpful in financing education in the UK. In this study university-educated parents were indeed more willing to finance their children's education abroad. Moreover, parents who were the most involved also learnt the most, which probably means that university-educated parents develop the most competences in relation to securing finance. But even though this is the case in this study, it may not be the case in the overall Latvian population.

4.2.2 Making specific mobility choices

Ball et al. (2002) suggest that in Higher Education students' choice is a form of problem solving. To them choice suggests openness in relation to a psychology of preferences but decision-making alludes to power and constraint. According to Carrol and Johnson

(1990) choice is a part of decision-making, where the participants do not make an overall decision about education abroad until all the choices have been analyzed and the optimal ones chosen. The responses of the participants in this study also seem to indicate that choice needs to be divided into finer categories. Again, there is no strict guidance from existing research, but in this study participants appear to make specific choices as part of the overall decision to study abroad. Their choices are divided into: choice of England as a country of education, choice of university, choice of subject area, course and mode of study. But before the evidence on these topics is presented it is important to address participants' decision to go to Higher Education in the first place.

Choosing academic mobility

First of all it is important to keep in mind that mobility is neither migration nor education alone. Mobility in the context of this study inherits from both disciplines and decision-making needs to be regarded in relation to both domains, too. All students participating in this research have already made their decision to study at a university at the time of interviews but for most of them the issue of HE is not separate from the issue of mobility.

For example, at different instances during interviews Baiba mentioned that she had 'always wanted to study at a university', but the opportunity to study abroad added *additional* appeal to the desire and resulted in the right combination of factors to prompt Baiba to go ahead with it.

There is so much opportunity now! It is so romantic to be a student abroad! Well, it is less so now [when she actually studies abroad], but I thought it would be like in a French novel [laughs], when a girl goes to university abroad ...

Baiba

The situation was similar for Juris.

Riga just didn't excite me any longer. So many people were studying abroad. I thought that I had to go there, too and just see for myself.

Juris

Juris implied that at some point he had considered education in Riga, but later things changed and in comparison with education abroad education in Riga gradually lost its appeal. It is unclear if Juris is talking about educational establishments in Riga or life in the city, but in any case, Riga as a place of life or as a place of education did not seem stimulating in comparison with perceived opportunities that life and education abroad had to offer.

On the other hand, Svetlana became interested in university education *because* of the possibility to do it abroad. In other words, if there was no possibility to study at university abroad, Svetlana would not have gone to the university at all. I asked her in the follow-up interview what she would do if she did not start university in England. She said:

With Russian and Latvian, I speak both, and English... I would probably work as a receptionist, at hotel or club ... But getting education from a foreign country sounded more interesting.

Svetlana

For Denis the international aspect of mobility seems to have been the driving force rather than an additional benefit of education. It appears that he was rather anxious to live independently of his parents, but the only way to gain independence was to move abroad.

I wanted to go and work in England in summer after school, but my Mum would not hear of it. But I really felt that it would be better for me to be independent, but I knew that my family wanted me to finish university first. So I did what she wanted and she did what I wanted her to do.

Denis

Here Denis referred to a compromise where he satisfied his mother's expectation and entered university, but in return she had to give him independence and let him live abroad.

For Vlad the situation was quite specific. His girlfriend, Olesya, had already earned her first degree in England and when they had first met, Vlad knew that her plan was to obtain a Master degree in England as well. University education is not something that Vlad had originally considered for himself, but because of Olesya's influence he decided to enter university, too. Olesya further explained that Vlad should study at university in England because they plan to live there and it would be easier for Vlad to find employment with a Bachelor degree obtained in England. Since they wanted to stay together Vlad moved to England *to live*, so, in a way, he entered a university in his country of residence, but the country of his residence is not his native country. It is interesting that in research on Migration he would be classified as an unskilled migrant, but in educational research he would be regarded as an international student and therefore a highly-skilled migrant. Such inconsistency illustrates the debate on theory of human capital and 'brain drain' described in the review of the literature (2.2).

Choosing a country of education

There are several issues that are recurrent in the literature when choice of the country of education is mentioned. Language, geographical proximity to home, friends or relatives, climate (Findlay et al., 2010; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002) have been found to influence students' choices. In this study participants mentioned language, geographical proximity, tuition fees and prestige as elements that contributed to choosing England as a country of education.

Of course, the spoken language in the country of education as well as the language of university instruction are central issues for all students who consider study abroad. All the participants were more or less proficient in English at the time when they were making their choices about the country of education. That means that the English language was either not a barrier or a small barrier on their way to education abroad.

Since I already knew English, I could speak and write well. I also wanted to go to America, but it is so far! And in England you don't have to pay this much.

Inga

The poor child went to see me for his English lessons like clockwork for so many years. But at least he can study in so many places now: England, America, Australia...

Galina, Denis's English language tutor

Parental involvement and familial cultural capital take a different turn in relation to English language study. Children of university-educated parents in this study received more English language instruction because their parents had made a decision to enrol the children at schools that put emphasis on English language teaching or hired private tutors. Even though at the time when children started schools few parents could have predicted the possibilities of future academic mobility, they nevertheless decided to widen the opportunities for the children if not with a view to immigration, at least with a view to better secondary education.

Along with research on mobile students in the UK (Waters, 2006) in this study it appears that participants first chose the countries whose languages they could already speak. Secondly, out of these countries they chose the ones that are closest to their home countries. But in this study these choices are also modified by the idea of prestige.

I have always been very proud of Olesya for having studied in England, it made people know that she is bright and kind of ... special or something...

Vlad

I know how important it is for Vlad to get a really good education, like Olesya's... If he studied in Riga, he wouldn't make any money with that degree in England, right? They [degrees from Latvian HEIs] are not even recognized, right?

Masha (Vlad's sister)

I didn't want Sandra to go, but when she got accepted it made me so proud I thought that maybe she ought to do it. It would be really unusual and she could have a much better job... Nobody in my family has been to England before.

Daira (Sandra's mother)

The data from the interviews indicate that the participants and their network members see university degrees obtained in England as more prestigious than university degrees obtained in other countries. For these participants prestige is clearly associated with the country of education and not with the fact that their family members (prospective students) will be at the university. Sandra was the first in her family to travel to England and she was the first in the family to go to the university. But it is her *life* in England, not education, that is perceived as the more prestigious aspect by her mother. Ball et al. (2002) explain that in view of the expansion of Higher Education and deflation of degrees middle-class parents are worried that their children will not have enough competitive advantage in comparison to their peers. In that case the prestige of the degree adds to the expected return on educational investment and provides a 'distinction strategy' for children of middle-class parents. The issue of prestige is raised again in relation to the choice of universities (Choy, 2002; Chen, 2005), subject area (Ball et al., 2002; Fuller, 2008) and even in relation to the class of degree (Bratti et al., 2008). But all these studies took place with British participants in Britain. While a university degree from England may add competitive edge in other countries or in Latvia, in the UK it may somewhat equalize Latvian students' chances of finding employment upon graduation.

Choosing a university

For Baiba the choice of the university was limited by her circumstances, since she had a husband and a small child in Riga and she wanted to complete her undergraduate education as soon as possible. As she had studied at the University of Latvia previously and earned some educational credits, she wanted to go to the university in England that would accept the most of her credit points. The more credits were transferred the less modules Baiba would need to take for earning her degree. This may be seen as a contradiction to her intrinsic motivation for university study as shown earlier in this section, but on the other hand it provides some evidence for the idea that different aspects in educational choice are driven by different types of motivation.

For Vlad the choice of the university was determined by location because he wanted to live with his girlfriend who had already accepted a place at a university in London. He also knew that he wanted to be in computer sciences, so he made sure that the department that he applied to was well equipped for this course. Olesya and he believed that Vlad needed to apply to a ‘new university’ with more sophisticated technology.

Olesya: We thought that for something like computers a new university would be better.

Interviewer: What do you mean by ‘new’? ‘New university’.

Olesya: You know, universities that have all the new things. Better labs, technologies, you know the *new* stuff that you need for computers.

Similarly, Juris said that he searched online for ‘Chemical Engineering’, ‘University’, ‘England’ together and started examining the first several university websites that came up in his search. His choice was driven by the quality of universities. Neither he nor his family doubted that he would graduate from high school with excellent results, so his grades did not constrict his choice. As the criterion of university quality Juris and his family chose universities’ on the basis of ranking in league tables.

I knew that in England, too [like in Latvia] some universities are not as good as others and so I think I just had Juris ask the British Council about the ways to compare universities and they gave him those official lists...

Leo (Juris's father)

Unlike Sandra, Juris found people working in the British Council friendly and helpful. With his father's prompting and his mother's supervision, the British Council was his first port of call and he reported to have had a good rapport with the people working there and rated his experience as positive. Having asked Leo how he knew of the different statuses of universities in England he just said that in his opinion it was 'common knowledge'. This probably means that in his social circle such information is common, but none of the other participants indicated that they had known anything about that.

For example, Svetlana and Sandra did not 'choose' universities in the fullest sense of the word. They did not apply criteria nor did they compare the universities that were suggested to them by the education firms. In a way, avoidance of the choice-making was a choice, too. It appears that the perceived risks of making a poor choice were too great for both girls and they preferred to follow the recommendation of the 'authority', in their case the educational firm. In a way, they did not have enough knowledge to make a choice and they had nobody to learn from. Since the educational agencies submit university applications on students' behalf they provide no space to make informed decision.

For Sandra a very strong incentive was that the agency that she used advertised having more than two hundred 'success stories' from Latvia. However, she never enquired about what 'success' meant, numbers of applicants or numbers of graduates.

Sandra: I had no idea how to tell if a university is good or not. And I didn't want to go to Oxford or something. It would be too hard. So, when the counsellor at the firm suggested (my university) and told me why it was good, I liked it. And there were many other Latvians there... that were successful.

Interviewer: What do you mean 'successful'?

Sandra: I don't know, like me, Bachelor degree, I guess?

One theme that emerges from these answers is the influence of the social networks on the students' decision-making. The literature agrees that undergraduates claim that parents and friends are their major source of information. As mentioned in the review of the literature (2.5) studies over the last decade conclude that the opinion of friends was a major influence on students' choice of their host institutions (Brooks, 2003b, 2004, 2007; Brooks and Waters, 2010). However, Latvian students lack a solid and wide network of friends with relevant experience, it appears that the family members are more involved than friends. Sandra and Svetlana's experiences demonstrated the girls' inability to choose their universities independently. Neither of the girls mentioned any friends with previous mobility experience and from interviewing the parents I knew that they were not involved with the mobility projects. Sandra and Svetlana did not think of looking for information online and preferred to pay somebody who knew the process and had a proven track record of helping other students choosing institutes of education in England.

In this case it could not be claimed that Sandra or Svetlana used the principle of transformation of different types of capital. As discussed in the Review of the Literature (2.6), the theory suggests that one type of capital can be transformed to another type of capital under the right circumstances. In this case, however, the girls did not transform their financial capital (money) to cultural capital (information, knowledge, skill) because they did not learn much. They only learned the minimal information that is

necessary to them in their particular case, received little knowledge about universities in the UK and developed no skills.

One of the most prominent elements of choice in relation to universities is students' use of the league tables. It is interesting that participants of this study seem to think that there is one 'official' organization that rates universities from better to worse. At the same time, none of the participants went into enough details to find out that league tables differ from each other and are often based on the perceived quality of either research or teaching.

Yes, my husband told me all about it that they are all selling themselves [laughs]. I even tried reading about how these tables were made but it was too tedious and complicated.

Baiba

Among the participants for this study Baiba went the farthest and she read the Key to the Columns from the Complete University Guide but found it tedious, complicated and overall unhelpful. However, Baiba was the only one of the participants who went a step further in their investigations of the university rankings and was willing to understand the terminology, but she quickly gave up. Indeed the Key to the Columns that Baiba has read is rather technical, uses statistical jargon and seems to go far beyond the level of understanding of most applicants, especially those whose native language is not English. On the other hand, Baiba attempted an objective approach to decision-making while other participants seemed to have been informed by more subjective views.

In view of the expansion of HE researchers show much interest in the matters of choice of HEIs by home students in the UK and attempt to explain why different students choose different types of HEIs. Race (Ball et al., 2002; Reay et al., 2010), gender (David et al., 2003), previous educational institution (Reay et al., 2010; Ball et al.,

2002b; David et al, 2003), social class (Reay et al., 2010, 2005; Ball et al., 2002a; Brooks, 2003a, b, 2005), the influence of peers (Brooks, 2003 b) and the involvement and influence of parents (Brooks, 2003b; David et al., 2003) are all factors that have been explored. Gunn and Hill (2008) present three interesting findings in relation to the university rankings in the league tables and their influence on the number of home applications a university receives. They find that at the initial time of development of the league tables (2004) the influence of rankings on the number of applications was high, but this variance declined, suggesting that universities' ranking in the league tables stopped being a key factor in the students' choice process. Their analysis also shows significant difference in the growth of applications each year across universities, with pre-1992 universities outperforming post-1992 universities in the early part of the period but with the latter recently catching up quickly, despite little change in their rankings. Their finding that is the most relevant to this study demonstrates that students apply to universities divisionally rather than to a particular university. 'Division' in their study refers to the type of university ('Ancient', 'Red Brick', 'Plate Glass', 'New'). For example, students who apply to Oxford prefer to apply to Cambridge, too, implying a divisional approach. Fewer students who apply to Oxford also apply to Oxford Brookes University implying that locational preference is less important to them. However, it is unclear from this study and from most others if students from other countries were included in the research. The assumption is that these outcomes are only true for the UK students.

Surprisingly, there are no scholarly publications on the choice of English universities by prospective students from other countries although there are some papers that discuss English university reasons for recruiting students from overseas. One of the more theoretically-developed publications is that by Cubillo et al. (2006) where they see

international students as consumers of services provided by the HE institutions. According to the authors' analysis of the relevant literature, while evaluating this educational service consumers (applicants) take into account several elements: academic reputation of the institution, the quality and the expertise of its teaching faculty, attractiveness and campus atmosphere. However, they talk about participants' perceptions of these elements and it is unclear how or under what influences these perceptions originated.

These data support the position (explored in more detail in 2.6) that choices of universities are grounded in social networks, where applicants who went to better schools have easier access to the relevant networks, while others have to look for it (e.g. in online social networks) or pay money in order to benefit from advice. It appears that more enterprising prospective students, like Denis, develop the most while choosing a university abroad. Denis had a problem, he needed clarification, but did not know where to obtain it. To solve the problem he found confidence to ask for advice on the internet and critically evaluate the quality of response. According to the GTI model of competence development Denis has gone from the level of conscious incompetence to the level of conscious competence.

Choosing a subject of study

HESA, UCAS, HEFCE and some other national education agencies use what is known as JACS codes (Joint Academic Coding of Subjects) to identify subject areas. They recognize 17 subject areas. Each subject area is further divided into courses of study that indicate principal subjects to be studied. Thus, subject areas may include art and design, languages, engineering, business and administration studies, law, biological sciences, etc. Each subject area consists of several courses. For example, engineering

consists of civil, mechanical, naval, chemical, electrical and other types of engineering. Courses often involve combinations of subjects, and so cannot always be described by a single JACS code. Overall, there seems to be little guidance or cohesion across universities as to what qualifies as a subject area, course of study or modules within a course of study.

Needless to say, this creates much anxiety, confusion and insecurity for the applicants and their families.

I have been over and over that website. I simply wanted to know what my timetable would be so I would know what subjects I was taking and when. I wasn't sure if I should go into English Language and Literature or English Studies. I made the right decision but it was impossible to judge by the website, I just got lucky.

Baiba

I didn't like that I could not find out what classes I would be taking till after the course had started. I know now it is not like at school. But I was very nervous, not understanding what 'module' was and how it was different from 'class'. What were 'seminars' and what I would have to do in them.

Denis

Some students asked representatives of their universities for clarifications, others did not, but it appears that gaining access overlaps with academic acculturation at pre-mobility stage. Thus, strategies that the participants used to deal with misunderstandings and competences that they developed in the process are further discussed in the section on academic acculturation (4.4).

In this research some participants made seemingly surprising choices of subject areas but they tied in with their overall plan. For example, it appeared odd at first that Svetlana should go to England to read Russian and Slavonic Studies. She seemed reluctant to answer questions on choice, but throughout the interviews she used the following reasons:

I am interested in Humanities and I like Russian culture and literature...

Svetlana (initial interview)

I could not get a job in that area in Riga because there is just no demand for Russian and I don't want to live in Russia. But if I got a degree in England, I could maybe teach Russian, I don't know, being Russian would be a good thing, right?..

Svetlana (follow-up interview)

Yes, I thought that I could make better grades because of Russian... But there are many things I have to do in English, too...

Svetlana (follow-up interview, later)

According to the HESA dataset (2012) out of 274 Latvian students attending this university 32 took the Russian and Slavonic Studies course. The number of people in this subject area is only smaller than in Business Studies and Human Resource Management. There is not enough data to speculate what exactly attracts Latvian students to Russian and Slavonic studies, but further research could provide some interesting findings. It could be particularly interesting to investigate how this option co-exists with the prospective students' motivations to improve their English and learn about English culture that is prominent in existing research. For example Svetlana listed three predominant categories: she enjoyed the subject area, she believed that her studies would be easier because she already knew the language that other students would have to learn. Lastly, she hoped that with the credibility of an English degree and an added benefit of being a native speaker she could have a job in England. In the concluding interview, however, she admitted that these reasons were outlined for her by her counsellor at the educational service.

Sandra's experience was slightly different. She had been asked what she would have liked to study by the counsellor at the agency and Sandra said that she wanted to study the most popular course among Latvian students. Business Studies satisfied her and this is how she justifies her choice.

I didn't know what I was doing. I just thought that I would do what most people do. If they all do it, it must be the right thing.

Sandra

As mentioned before Denis and Vlad are the only two participants for whom the subject area was pre-decided. Vlad was studying for a degree in his profession (IT specialist) and he hoped that a degree in his professional field would allow him a more competitive edge when he would apply for a permanent position.

Denis's case is more complicated. He has long loved Chemistry, but choosing between pure science, Chemistry, and a more applied direction, Chemical Engineering, that his parents wanted him to pursue, caused some debates in the family.

But my parents think I should not just be a scientist, a chemist, but like a professional, a chemist with some professional skills. I didn't want to at first, but now I think that education is education and it doesn't matter what department or school you are in, you still take the same modules with other guys (Chemistry).

Denis

This is interesting, because it appears that Denis is saying two things here: first, the field of the school or institute within the university, which usually coincides with the subject area (in his case engineering) matters little to him. What is important is that he has enough modules in Chemistry to satisfy his interest in the discipline. Moreover, some of the modules are the same in Chemistry and in Chemical Engineering and take place in the same cohort of students. Therefore, the course of study is just as important to Denis as the subject area. It appears that Sandra, Vlad and Denis made their choices first of all in the subject areas and only then in courses.

Having asked the participants how they would act if they were to choose a course of study again the most common response was that they would request more information about the content of the modules that they were to take.

I still don't understand why I have to write papers about the influence of IT on people's lives. I am in Computer Sciences, not in Writing... Maybe I should have been in Engineering, I don't know. I should have found out.

Vlad

This response shows that the pre-arrival packages for international students do not cover the syllabuses and the students do not make fully-informed decisions about their subject area, course of study and the modules that they are to take. However, the ramifications can be serious because according to existing research, poor choice of area, course and (to lesser degree) mode of study often result in a non-completion of the degree (Mortimer, 1997; Sam, 2001).

Like choice of universities, choice of the area of study has also been linked to the ideas of educational prestige. According to Werfhorst et al. (2003) traditional students of higher SEC tend to choose subjects such as Medicine and Law, and students of lower SEC tend to choose more applied subjects that gear towards professional education. This is further linked with the students' incentives to study a particular subject. The authors argue that the students of lower SEC are more interested in financial returns on their educational investment, while students from higher SEC are also concerned with working within a prestigious profession. It appears that this study is based on the premises that higher and lower SEC correlate with higher and lower family income, but as discussed in section 2.7 this is not always the case for Latvian students. However, it does seem that participants whose parents have not been to university choose the subject area that is perceived as either safe (most Latvian students major in it); easy (foreign language studies, where a student already knows the language); or connected to their

professional experience (degree as competitive difference). However, there is not enough relevant information to make inferences about participants whose parents are university-educated.

Choosing the mode of study

This study is only interested in physical mobility of students, which means that only students who physically relocated for the purposes of study were considered for this research. This means that mode of study in this context refers to study full-time or part-time study. Moreover, all participants registered in on-campus cohorts who had to be present for their studies (although institutional and departmental policies differ on the issues of attendance). According to the literature study modes result in different degrees of time flexibility and therefore affect learning (Carrol and Ryan, 2005). In cases of computer-mediated mobility mode of study would refer to students' participation in on-line learning.

Vlad, Juris and Svetlana opted for part-time courses for one basic reason: they knew before they started their education that they would have to work. Both mature students in this study (Baiba and Vlad) studied part-time because they both had family commitments. Baiba needed to dedicate time to her family and Vlad worked to support himself and his girlfriend who was a full-time student and worked just a few hours a week. Juris and Svetlana studied part-time because they worked to share the educational expenses with their parents.

Even though no questions were asked in interviews on the perceived importance of work over study, it seems that for Juris, Baiba and Vlad university study is a dominant aspect of their life in England, while for Svetlana it is unclear if she perceived herself as

primarily a mobile student or perhaps as a migrant worker who studies. She felt that she could not allocate enough time to her studies because she was pressured to work overtime.

They (my employers) think it is such a great chance to work overtime because, of the pay, you know, but I am tired and I can't go straight to the library and I don't want to refuse them all the time... .. or they will stop offering...

Svetlana

In any case, she seemed unable to manage her work in a way that would not interfere with her study. The way this affected her study process is further explored in the section on socio-cultural (4.3) and academic acculturations (4.4).

Denis and Sandra were both full-time students but they, too worked in order to cover their living expenses. Denis's manager was rather flexible and Denis could reschedule, minimize or maximize his working hours from week to week depending on his study load. Sandra, on the other hand, worked 15 hours a week on a fixed timetable. Details of the participants' working lives are discussed in the next section (4.3) but here it is important that participants' financial situations caused many of them to apply to jobs before they knew how much time they needed for their study. There was no perceptible difference in this respect between children of university-educated parents and non-university-educated parents. In the situation when perspective students chose whether to study full or part time and make commitments related to work they needed to maintain a certain degree of flexibility.

Surprisingly, unlike the subject of study, the mode of study was not a difficult choice for the participants of this study. It appears that from all the aspects of choice the mode of study is the least conditional and the least implicit in other choices. In fact, most participants knew from the very beginning if they were going to study part-time or full-

time. For the participants of this study the choice was dictated by how much time they needed to dedicate to earning money or by family commitments (as in Baiba's case). As discussed in 2.7 in contemporary Latvia representatives of higher SEC are not necessarily wealthy, and this means that the connection between parental education and students' need to work is weak. The time that students allocate to earning money usually impinges on the time that they can spend on study, which can result in poor attainment (Carroll and Ryan, 2005). This topic is also discussed in section 4.4 in relation to the academic acculturation of the participants.

4.2.3 Managing the application process

Filing the application

One step that the prospective students need to take on the way to accessing their university of choice is filling in an application. Typically, undergraduate applications in the UK go through UCAS, a centralized system of university and college admissions. Participants of this study found a number of problems while filling in the UCAS application forms. But since all of them eventually became successful it is possible to assume that they developed some new, relevant abilities. However, there are no scholarly publications about preparation of university applications by international (or home!) students, although there is a wealth of instructional materials explaining how application forms should be filled to maximize applicants' chances of success. These materials not only advise home applicants, but specifically address applicants from other countries. However, in this research only two applicants took advantage of these materials.

Sandra and Svetlana avoided many of the application-associated problems. The firms that they used appointed a special counsellor who filled in the applications on behalf of

the prospective students. Svetlana was interviewed by the counsellor (in Russian) for the purposes of sharing information necessary for the application and then was told what documents to bring and who to contact.

It [the application] was all based on what I had said. All the things were true, but I would have never said it so well... sounded so impressive...

Svetlana

Svetlana doubted her ability to fill in the application form even before she knew what was involved and reinforced her doubts when she saw the final product. Probably this means that she indeed was not capable of filling in the UCAS application. Svetlana seemed reluctant to answer questions concerning the application process, so in this study it is not clear whether she was actually capable of filling in the application or not. But in further research, establishing a correlation between students' experiences of application processes and their further academic experiences could provide interesting insights.

Baiba, on the other hand, decided to write directly to the admission offices of the universities she was thinking of applying to. She wanted to arrange a special course that would allow her minimal in-class attendance and maximum long-distance study, so she knew from the beginning that the traditional application route was not for her. At the same time she did not want to study in an on-line course because she thought that in the end her certificate would be inferior to those who had followed conventional courses. Namely she was concerned that the Committee of Academic and Professional Recognition of Foreign Qualifications in Latvia would not recognize a certificate received as a result of distance education as equal to a conventional certificate.

I just wanted to make sure that my certificate would not say that it was an on-line degree or something... ...Who knows what they [Committee of Academic

and Professional Recognition of Foreign Qualifications] will decide, but I want a normal, standard certificate.

Baiba

The literature constantly debates the educational value, the effectiveness and the execution of on-line education. Studies that specifically look at the experiences of international students with on-line components of undergraduate degrees find that on-line work helps international students become more autonomous (Errey, 2005) and promotes faster academic acculturation. I believe that more empirical work is needed in order to discuss the experiences of international students with online components of degrees, but in my previous work with Latvian students (Wells, 2005) the respondents registered strong dislike for on-line work. The negative attitudes were largely due to technical obstacles, but several participants said that they found the on-line component ‘useless’. Considering that on-line technologies, provisions and opportunities change rapidly, as well as their involvement in our day-to-day lives it is possible that these findings are not valid anymore.

In the end Baiba had to file a UCAS application as well, which along with other participants she found surprisingly time-consuming. But she read the instructional materials advertised on the UCAS website explaining how to file the application to the best of the applicant’s advantage.

I made so many stupid mistakes before, [laughs] I always read manuals and instructions.

Baiba

Since Baiba was also the only participant who read the Good University Guide in order to find out how to read the league tables, this thoroughness is consistent. There are no indications that Baiba developed any competences by reading instructions, but it demonstrates an autonomous approach to problem-solving.

Inga and Denis could not figure out how to translate their qualifications from high school to match the UK requirements. Inga's mother recommended Inga to approach the most prestigious translation agency in town and consult with a professional translator.

I can understand why she would not know what to put there for the exams, you know?... They [the qualification documents] just needed to be translated but I think we needed a professional, somebody who had experience with... documents required in England.

Liene (Inga's mother)

Since Liene knew to approach a translator who had experience in translating academic qualifications, she must have realized to some extent that translation of educational documents is not only a matter of working with the English language, but with a highly specified type of language that requires contextual understanding. In other words, she anticipated that academic qualifications are country-specific and are likely to use different terminology. As Liene had graduated from the University of Latvia in 1986 she had received qualifications of the USSR. In 1999 all the Soviet-issued academic qualifications needed to be converted into equivalents recognized under the Bologna Convention. It is likely that Liene developed her notion of country-specific discourse through that experience, but, of course, this or similar experience concerns only university-educated participants. This discussion is raised again in 4.4 where more examples of academic discourse and how participants dealt with it are explained in relation to their parents' education.

Denis, like Baiba, relied on the strategy that he had used previously when he tried to sort out differences between 'college' and 'university'. He found a student-led online forum, where he posted his questions.

Many people are happy to answer and just talk about what they did. But finally some other Latvian guy answered and he showed me a website where you had it all explained. I kind of knew that he knew what he was talking about... I could check with others, too, if I wanted...

Denis

Besides describing his experience, this quotation also shows that Denis found a successful strategy for solving problems - locating the people with similar experience on the internet, approaching them and asking for information. Denis said that he used to spend a lot of time over the past few years playing computer games, competing with people all over the world. So, he was confident approaching strangers online and he was somewhat familiar with the 'netiquette' of gamers (Shea, 1994). He applied this strategy successfully to a new online community - mobile students. Of course, the advice found on the internet may be of questionable quality, but Denis is aware and checks information with several people. In a way he is developing a more critical attitude and is developing a habit for working with reliable information.

Preparing references

Vlad relied on his girlfriend's help. Having studied for her BA in England before, Olesya was familiar with the application process and did not mind repeating it for Vlad. But she forgot that a reference would be needed and Vlad did not have a good referee in mind. Vlad was a mature student and he had spent the past 15 years mostly working at various IT shops installing and setting up computers. He had long lost all connections to the education system and could only provide references from work.

The problem was that none of his potential referees could write English well enough. Finally, the admissions tutor from Vlad's university advised that the reference would be written in Russian or Latvian, but then the text translated by a notarized translator. The notary public would then certify authenticity of the copy of the document and the

translation and Vlad could send it to UCAS. Eventually, Vlad's supervisor from work was contacted by UCAS and given login details allowing him to access the page where the reference should be written. He gave the details to Vlad, who posted the translated text and sent it.

The interviews show that application processes are difficult and confusing for students from abroad. In short, they create another problem on the way to mobility that needs to be solved. Currently the problem of preparing a UCAS application is not reflected in the academic literature, but it is a part of students' experiences and needs to be taken into account by researchers.

However, it seems that children of university-educated parents (Baiba, Inga, Juris) try to solve the problems themselves with their parents' support, advice and often direct involvement. In a few cases parents said that they went to places together with their children, especially during the information-gathering process. Children of the parents with no university education (Svetlana, Sandra, Vlad, Denis) did not benefit from parental involvement and relied on someone else to actually do things for them, like filling in the application forms. One notable exception were Denis and Baiba. Denis was comfortable in various internet settings and applied this knowledge to dealing with the new situation. Baiba identified the key person who could answer her questions and appealed straight to them. I believe that these participants were more confident than others in dealing with strangers and especially with strangers from abroad.

4.2.4 Summary of the findings on gaining access to university education in England

This section was dedicated to the issues of finding access to HE in England. Several topics emerged from the answers to the interview questions: making general mobility-

related decisions, making specific mobility choices and fulfilling the pre-requisites for university study in England.

The first sub-section on decision-making shows decision concerning education abroad as a process where the participants realize, compile and restructure appropriate knowledge in order to make it useful for informed decision-making. Since decision-making forces the participants to coordinate the available resources it answers the definition of a competence. However, this competence rests on a number of skills and abilities. In this research decision-making is based on the participants' ability to recognize impetus to study abroad, to gather the relevant information and to fulfil the prerequisites for university education in England.

The participants of this study have different, often unique goals for wanting to receive their Bachelor degrees in England. It appears that impetus, incentives and motivations for mobility are present for all participants and change depending on the immediate context of the interviews. This may mean that impetus recognition, incentive or motivation is an attitude. As such it is implicit in family culture and is transmitted from parents to children (Gofen, 2007; Rochford and Rosenbaum, 2008). Assuming that people who have studied at universities have more intrinsic motivations for learning, study and education, it is not surprising that children of university-educated parents would have these attitudes rather than the more instrumental attitudes of those participants whose parents have not been to a university. Clearly, a small sample of this study does not allow for a generalization of this observation.

According to the GTI development model at this stage of decision-making participants seem to develop from a stage of unconscious incompetence to a stage of conscious

incompetence. This development stage is characterized by the emerging awareness of needs, lacks or wants. In other words, participants recognized their own lack of competence, and the value of learning before moving on to the next stage. According to the data all participants but those who preferred the help of the educational agencies learned enough to realize that there is much to learn.

The interview responses demonstrated that participants employed a number of techniques to obtain and evaluate the information that they needed to make informed decisions on mobility. This study supports the views found in the literature (2.5) that mobility is a social practice implicit in the social networks of the participants. It seems that families with a history of HE have more relevant and helpful social connections than families with no HE social capital. It is hard to say at this point that children of university-educated parents developed more competences for finding information than those whose parents were not university-educated. But it appears that children of university-educated parents relied on official sources whenever possible, or at least attempted to look for the most official-seeming source. This may not qualify as a competence but according to research (Gofen, 2007) such behaviours become internalized without necessarily having been consciously learnt. This means that in these cases the competence of finding sources of information is acquired rather than learnt which supports the idea that competences (or at least some competences) are acquired without conscious effort and not developed in the full sense of the word. Approaches to acquisition of competence are discussed in the review of the Methodology (3.5).

Academic mobility is constrained by a number of factors, many of which are outlined in the Review of the Literature (2.3). According to Bourdieu's understanding of agency

and structure (Bourdieu, 1986) prospective students also can only actualize their mobility projects if they find the opportunities to do so. However, in this research the idea of pre-requisites for university education in England seems more appropriate since these are the steps that all students from foreign countries have to complete. First of all, there are pre-requisites that all perspective students experience before they leave for their country of education: a need to finish secondary education with suitable qualifications, a need to demonstrate sufficient English language proficiency and find a way to finance university education in England.

Financing education features as a particular difficulty constraining the academic mobility of Latvian students. Latvian families deal with it in a variety of ways, but usually these ways involve receiving bank loans and the development of relevant skills. But prospective students rarely have the suitable credit history or the financial standing to acquire the loans, and in most cases their parents have to step in. In the case of Latvian students and their families, as explained in 2.7, university education or other attributes of cultural capital are not always associated with financial wealth. Moreover, in the case of the first-generation users of banking institutions cultural capital is not associated with financial literacy either. So, in this research it appears that the parents who are involved in the mobility projects of their children are the ones who develop financial literacy at the stage when their children find access to universities in England.

Choice in this research is regarded as something separate from decision-making and specifically is concerned with choice of the country of education, choice of university, subject area and mode of study. Issues of choice are difficult to describe because for all the participants choices are implicit within other choices, are often conditional, depending on the future circumstances, sometimes inexplicable and based on emotions

rather than on reason. In addition, the opportunity structures within which the choices are made depend on the personal, familial, social, economic and cultural backgrounds. However, making informed, successful choices also seems to fit a definition of competence.

Choices are inherently connected to loss of certainty and ability to take risks and it is not surprising that issues of personal confidence are recurrent in this study. Similar to the UK parents, Latvian parents with a university education are more involved in their children's education and since academic mobility is an education process, it is to be expected that they are involved in mobility, too. Even though Latvian parents have no relevant cultural capital and may not inform their children on the specifics of university education in England, they are present at the stage of making choices. In my opinion this support makes their children feel more confident, which in turn helps them to make more informed choices.

The data from the interviews indicate that neither the central participants nor their network members were aware of the differences that universities in England have or the implications of taking one subject of study over another. In fact, it appears that for the participants Higher Education 'from England' is already a brand associated with high prestige and high return on investment. In this case, it is indeed a distinction strategy used by the parents who want to avoid social 'falling' as Brooks and Waters (2009a, 2010) explain. However, Latvian families see all English universities as the same and do not realize that the universities differ on a number of levels, ranking and prestige being only two of them. Possibly, such misperceptions do not affect students who return to Latvia to work, but those mobile students who plan to work in England are likely to

be evaluated by their employers partially based on the prestige of the university they have attended (Bratti et al., 2008).

This research also revealed some findings that are not usually present in the literature on access to education abroad. These findings are concerned with management of the application process and are divided into filing the application and to preparing the references. It is obvious that language and language qualifications would feature in relation to international students, but it appears that not enough attention is being paid to the development of discursive competence at the stage of finding access to universities abroad. However, lack of discursive competence is what interfered with the participants' applications to the universities. Not only did they not know how to 'translate' their Latvian qualifications to the English system, but they also did not always have easy access to a referee who was capable of providing a full and relevant reference in English. In fact, other than the participants' English language teachers nobody else was mentioned in this study. This can be problematic for applicants who cannot approach their English language teachers for whatever reason.

The concluding interviews did not reveal anything interesting for this section of the research except all participants with no exceptions found the process unsettling and stressful. They also recognized the importance of making informed and insightful choices in relation to university education. And all with no exception said that they needed more time than they allocated to learn how to make these choices more informed.

4.3 Socio-cultural acculturation of the participants

The aim of this section is to answer the second research question: **what competences do undergraduate students from Latvia develop as part of socio-cultural acculturation to the English environment?** One of the premises of this research is that students who find themselves in new social environments need to adjust to these environments in order to pursue their goals effectively (Cortazzi and Jin, 2001; Forman, 2000). As explained in section 2.3 of the Review of the Literature adjustments or acculturation take place on two levels: socio-cultural and psychological (Ward, 1996). However, since the analysis of the data from the point of view of psychological adjustments requires specialized training, psychological adjustments of international students will be described from the point of view of participants but analyzed only minimally. Research on socio-cultural acculturation, on the other hand, seems to be concerned with almost everything else including the participants' academic development and their progress at the university. Since mobility is primarily an educational process, the academic acculturation of the students is examined separately in 4.4, but this chapter deals with socio-cultural acculturation of the students or the issues of acculturation outside university. Of course, all aspects of acculturation are interconnected and impact each other (*ibid.*), so in some cases it requires an arbitrary decision to state where one type of acculturation ends and another begins.

Socio-cultural acculturation is defined as an 'ability to negotiate interactive aspects of the host culture' (*ibid.*, p. 132) or, simply put, an ability to act in an appropriate manner. But obviously, implicit understanding of what is appropriate is different in each context. As the Review of the Literature demonstrates (2.4) findings on socio-cultural acculturation of students are disparate and inconclusive as far as outlining the elements of the acculturation. This is why unlike in other sections, analysis of this section is data-

driven, where the initial themes are derived from the data, and the literature appropriate for the analysis of these themes is used as the second step. The data in this section fall into several themes that can be grouped under the umbrella of socio-cultural acculturation. These themes are: constructing social networks, dealing with everyday tasks (spatial orientation, transportation) and developing appropriate and effective communicative strategies. Thus, this section (4.3) is divided into three parts that follow these ideas. Data from each sub-section are compared with the findings from relevant literature and possible explanations are offered. Particular attention is paid to the competence development literature and literature on intergenerational transmission of capital and possible connections between the data and these topics are teased out.

4.3.1 Constructing social networks

In the literature construction of networks of intimacy is not conceptualized as a competence, but the following data suggest that such conceptualization is possible. Eraut (1994) reminds us that competences rest on a number of skills or abilities that are on an observable, surface level. So the aims of the following sub-section are to find out what skills or abilities are required to support the creation of social networks by the participants of this study and how these skills are co-ordinated on a higher level to sustain social network construction competence.

Most of the students participating in this study, with the exception of Baiba and Vlad, lived in university-provided accommodation (dormitories) at least at the beginning of their courses. Baiba was in England only part of the time and stayed at short-term private lodgings and Vlad rented a flat off campus with his girlfriend. Other students preferred university accommodation for a variety of reasons. Some participants explained that it was a matter of convenient overall location, others mentioned that they

wanted to be close to the university and the facilities such as library, student union, gym, etc.

It's convenient, close to all university buildings; I don't have to deal with it if anything goes wrong, and something always goes wrong; and, mainly, it's safe, I won't be cheated, burglarized. When I am more used to being here I might look for a flat with a flatmate, but for now, dormitory is good.

Juris

Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2008) find that first-year international students tend to stay at university accommodation because they find it psychologically more secure. They find that living at university accommodation is supposed to facilitate a feeling of belonging to a community. But Juris only talks about his appreciation for a physically safe environment. On the other hand, he may be unaware that he is looking for a psychologically safer place, too.

No participants except Denis had applied for a dormitory with an explicit purpose of making friends or social connections, but it appears that dormitories became just that. For example, Inga did not like the conditions in her dormitory, but she never considered looking for lodgings elsewhere because she was attached to her friend there. She elaborated that even though she trusted her boyfriend, whom she met in England, she needed a girl-confidante to talk about love-life.

You can talk to him about anything in the world, almost, but not about him, us. And Steffy has an English boyfriend, too. And sometimes I just want to complain, or there are small problems... And you need another girl for that who understands.

Inga

Juris seemed to like the atmosphere of a dormitory where connections are made easily between boys and girls.

Everybody [boys and girls] in the dorm are just 'friends'. For us [Latvians] guys and girls are almost never just friends, you know. If they spend time together

they are like girlfriend-boyfriend. I like it that I can be just friends with girls. It is much easier to get them go out with you that way [laughs].

Juris

Svetlana seems to appreciate the opportunity to meet many people at once and to need no special reason to establish connections.

At first I was scared of all the different people of different nationalities. But it is easy to get to know people at the dorm if you want. You live together like in a communal flat.

Svetlana

Juris noticed that his friendships changed and become more judicious with time.

First I made friends with this guy from India who was in my room. He was ok, but then, as I met more people from my course we just stopped hanging around together that much. But there was no conflict, so that was ok, we just didn't have much in common.

Juris

For Steffy the connection she had with Inga was a sufficient basis for friendship.

I think Inga and I got along at once because we are the same age... we both like fashion... going out... chatting... I mean we study in the library or a cafeteria, but our room is like our girl space.

Steffy, Inga's friend

Initially Steffy and Inga being in the same room was a coincidence, simply an opportunity to meet, but there were a few factors that both girls had in common that quickly suggested that they could move on from being just roommates to being friends as well.

Interestingly, it appears that social connections were built in the same way even when the participants met other people in Latvia. Pavels and Juris were classmates in Riga (coincidence that provided an opportunity) but they also had a common interest in constructing things.

Juris and I were at school together and, I don't know, just hit it off. We were also part of the Handicrafts club (a club where pupils learn to build things) run by our physics teacher... .. We were the only guys from our class.

Pavels, Juris's friend from Riga

A similar principle worked for Sandra and Kristine in Riga.

With Sandra we lived close so we walked home from school every day and often to school, too. We were the worst students in algebra [laughs] and it brought us closer and then we started hanging around together after school, too.

Kristine, Sandra's classmate

They met at school and lived close (a coincidence that provided an opportunity to meet) but because they both struggled in algebra they felt close to each other and this closeness developed into friendship.

From these responses it seems that the first connections that participants make are random and fortuitous or perhaps based on proximity (roommates). They simply provide an opportunity for people to meet. Later connections are made more consciously and are based on commonalities, such as subject area. What is interesting is that it seems that the participants use the same principle of making friends that they did even back at home. This might indicate that using a certain principle of making friends is a habit that developed at home. For the participants this principle works in a new context in the same way it worked in the home context. Since this behaviour appears effective for the participants (and their new friends in England) it is possible to conclude that situations in Latvia and in England are similar and students from Latvia should not expect difficulties making social connections with their peers in England.

The main reason why university accommodation is mentioned in this study is to demonstrate that international campuses are physical places that contain transnational fields. As explored in the Review of the Literature (2.5) many researchers think of

transnational fields as having a structure but no physical location (Collins, 2008; Gargano, 2009). A few researchers who think of transnational fields as physical spaces usually investigate international corporations, because their research is dedicated to highly-skilled migrants and expatriates (Kennedy, 2004; Conradson and Latham, 2005; Ferro, 2006). But what goes on in international working sites is not necessarily similar to what goes on in international students' spaces. The data from this research indicate that campuses and particularly university accommodation sites are physical spaces that contain transnational fields. This is important because physical representation of transnational fields allows observation of the relationships within the field and is thus easier to capture for research purposes. This study indicates that these transnational fields are held together by the interpersonal connections that students make with other students either by chance or more purposefully.

Existing educational research on international students' interpersonal connections rarely takes into account such variables as gender, commonality of interests/subject area or age. Mostly it is concerned with the language proficiency (Berry, 1990; Berry et al., 1995; Brown and Holloway, 2008a) of the participants or their openness towards the host nationals (*ibid.*). Literature on socialization of non-student migrants is fuller in this respect and shows that highly-skilled migrants tend to make connections according to a set of principles (Kennedy, 2004; Conradson and Latham, 2005; Ferro, 2006.) However, these principles depend on the purpose of migration, dispositions of character, migrants' biographies, motivations, family situations and other highly personalized factors (Ferro, 2006). Even though admirable efforts have been invested into the area, additional work is needed to show how these factors influence experiences of migration or mobility. Also since these factors are likely to be different for students this is one more reason why comparisons between migrants and mobile students should be made with care.

Literature on the development and transmission of social capital is also helpful for analysing the creation of social networks. For example, Bourdieu and Passeron (1997) would add that agents (in this case international students) exchange markers of their class and decide if they 'belong' together based on the evaluation of these markers. Brooks and Waters in a number of their publications use this theory to demonstrate that student mobility has become a mark of class distinction. Finlay et al. (2012) recognized the value of this approach and included these theoretical findings in their latest research. They found that there are diverse approaches to cultures of mobility, one of them being reproduction of distinction. While this study supports such outcome, it also indicates that where experience of academic mobility is not special, but common (such as on an international campus) additional principles of making affiliations are used. In this research they are first of all age, gender, commonality of interest. Unfortunately this part of the research does not provide enough empirical evidence at this point to conclude whether choosing a principle of building networks of intimacy is a competence or not and if so where it belongs in the developmental model.

It is interesting that neither Baiba nor Vlad highlighted making friends as an important issue. It could be due to their age (Baiba is 28, Vlad is 33) or it could be due to the fact that both have stable live-in partners and as it has been found that married migrants naturally tend to socialize primarily within their families (Rosenbaum and Rochford, 2008).

Baiba and Vlad's choice of words is slightly different than that of other participants. All participants were asked about friends in the sense of *buddies* or *mates*. The word 'friend' in either Russian or Latvian usually is more specific than it is in English and

applies to a close person, usually a life-long friend. I believe that Baiba and Vlad show more awareness of the difference between a casual buddy and a close friend and chose their words more accurately. This awareness may be a result of strongly pronounced home values that people of the older age are less willing to give up than younger students. The existing research on migrants finds that older people are slower to adapt to the host culture because they have stronger attachments to habitual values (Pimpa, 2005). On the other hand, specialists in applied linguistics find that students' awareness of the home culture is one of the factors that speeds up socio-cultural acculturation (Berry, 1990; Berry et al., 1995; Deardorf, 2006).

Home representatives of the social networks

Not only participants' families featured as important for finding access to universities abroad, but they did not lose their influence over the participants' lives during the stage of socio-cultural acculturation. For example, Baiba said that she talked to her family daily, but her role as a wife and a mother is different from that of most participants and assumes more responsibility and control.

But Svetlana, too said that being in England made her spend more time talking to her family members than she had spent in Latvia.

I talk to Nadya [sister] on Skype every evening, it is obligatory. You know, at home we hardly talked this often, maybe 2-3 times a week...

Svetlana

Sandra said that she had been looking forward to being independent but when she arrived in England she missed her mother, especially in critical or high-stress situations.

At the beginning I sometimes felt about 4 years old and I just wanted my mother to come get me.

In the concluding interview, in 2012, Sandra said:

I think that living alone makes you grow up very fast. You have to become an adult and take care of yourself.

These quotations show that Sandra was overwhelmed by the independence that she finally achieved, but from time to time she was not ready to handle responsibility that came with it. At the time of the first interview Sandra was 19 years old and had only lived with her parents previously. Two years on she could say that living without her family in a foreign country made her feel older and more able to take care of herself. This quotation indicates that socio-cultural acculturation may not be limited to adjustments to a foreign environment. Sandra shows that she also needs to get used to independence and the responsibility that it inevitably brings, to accelerated psychological change and to the need to take care of herself.

Inga had a different experience. Even though she was only 18 at the time of the first interview she felt that she had to apply some effort to being emotionally independent from her family.

I knew that I would miss them and I was not looking forward to it, I just keep hoping that being older and stronger I would not spent hours crying like I did in America.

In the concluding interview Inga added:

I met Gareth and my mum and auntie are very supportive, they are like girlfriends and I guess I wanted to be involved with him because that would mean the beginning of a new life, you know? And my auntie always treats me as a grown-up anyway...

At the time of the last interview commenting on being away from her family Inga explained how her feelings have changed over time.

You just get used to missing them. It's not that you think of them less, you think of them a lot and sometimes you miss them so much! But you are just used to living with this feeling deep inside you.

During her previous experience of mobility Inga had missed her family very much and in this case she was afraid that she would have to go through it again. But being aware of it she mustered her emotional resources that helped her deal with a feeling of loneliness. Of course, she dealt with it in her own personal way, only suitable to her in that particular situation, but it is possible to argue that she was aware of her weakness. This awareness is associated with the second stage of competence development of the GTI model, the level of conscious incompetence. Eventually, she did not learn to miss her family less, she seems to have learnt to deal with it better.

On the other hand, keeping in touch with one's family is conventional and expectant behaviour. The inner sense of security among mobile students, migrants and other travellers is a pertinent issue in research on psychological acculturation, but, this study does not analyze data from this point of view. For this reason here it is sufficient to say that there is a slight inconsistency in the issue. On one hand, large-scale research conducted by the Commission on Human Security (2003) in the United States pointed out that migrants who feel more secure are known to adjust to their host environments faster. On the other hand, research carried out specifically among international students finds that students who are overly dependent on long-distance communication with their families are slower to acculturate (Forbes-Mewett and Nyland, 2008), although they do not explain what *overly* dependent might mean.

Even though the next part of the findings does not contribute to answering the research questions it provides interesting implications for further research. In the follow-up and concluding interviews participants were asked to compare their friends in Latvia to the

friends that they had met in England. Mainly they said that the childhood friends from Latvia are permanent, are emotionally closer and friends that they had made in England are more transient and are friends in a sense of colleagues, or companions for fun.

Vlad: You think that they [his friends in Riga] would think that I have become different, because of being at the university!

Interviewer: Different how? What would they think exactly?

Vlad: Oh, I don't know. They would probably think that I would come back all show-offy and arrogant. And I hate that.

Vlad assumes that being a student in England would assign him a certain status among his friends in Riga. However, he says that the elevated status may be granted because he had become *a university student*, not because he had become a student in England.

The situation is slightly different for Juris. His friend from school, Pavels, commented on Juris's changed status.

When he comes back he is one of us of course, but we just like annoying him. Like last time Juris got pretty angry when one guy kept calling him 'Professor Jones' all the time. It is a pretty special thing Juris is doing.

Pavels

Pavels acknowledges that friends in Riga see university education in England as something special. In Juris's case it is *England* that makes his education special. Pavels himself attends a prestigious university in Riga, but the fact of university study in itself is not unusual.

Vlad's parents have not been to university and he has graduated from an ordinary school, while for Juris's family Higher Education is an expected part of 'normal biography' (Bourdieu, 1986) and his school is known for its high quality of teaching. That means that for Vlad and his friends just the fact that Vlad goes to the university attracts attention. Among Juris's friends university education *per se* is nothing unusual,

so, to have a degree from another country makes it stand out. What is unclear here is whether a degree from *any* other country adds the perceived prestige or if *English* education is particularly valued among representatives of the Latvian middle class. This idea has potential to demonstrate how approaches to educational choices change in internationalized society.

Denis explained how his education in England affected his relationships with his friends at home.

Sometimes I need to have some fun the way I used to have in junior high school. That's when I want to be with my old friends, my friends here [in England] just won't understand that humour, that behaviour. People [in Riga] just can't catch up. Even parents can't. You have to have done it, you can't explain it to others.

Denis

In this quotation Denis says that he has two sets of friends for two different purposes. With his Riga friends he can share childlike, relaxed fun. Since they have known Denis for a long time he does not expect them to be judgemental and he does not feel a need to impress them. His new friends from England cannot participate with Denis's 'old' crowd. But they are necessary to co-construct memories of his life in England as a student. Each set of friends is unique and Denis is likely to seek association with one or the other group depending on the situation. This behaviour is known as emotional 'code-switching' and can probably be analyzed in more depth from the point of view of psychological acculturation as Ward and Kennedy (1999) suggest.

It is interesting that he uses the expression to 'catch up'. Denis does not use 'catch up' in a way that means to share the latest news. He uses it in a sense of being on an equal level, in this case, intellectual level. Denis realizes that the people from Riga do not

have a full picture of his life anymore, they only know about one side of his life and they will never fully understand another part of his life that takes place abroad. It is a little unclear which aspect of mobility Denis refers to in the last sentence, university education or life in England. But in Denis's family university education is not altogether unusual because his mother has taken a number of university courses, so it is possible to assume that he is talking about life in England in this case. Whichever aspect of mobility he refers to, his response shows that mobility is on one hand an enriching experience, on the other hand it is isolating.

Other participants of this study have spoken of a similar effect that education abroad brings about.

It was kind of a big deal when I went to the university (University of Latvia) but when Vlad got accepted to his English university some people started treating him strange. Our dad kind of acts threatened... ...He often talks like he wants to say that it was a stupid decision or that we don't want to be like him... ...Vlad always tries to act like it's not a big deal, but there is Olesya, too.

Masha, Vlad's sister

It seems that Masha described that her and Vlad's father did not appreciate that his children went to universities. Masha pointed out that he would be more comfortable if his children had taken a less different path from his own. It is particularly complicated for Vlad. Masha had mentioned that Vlad's girlfriend from Riga, Olesya comes from a family where both parents and she put a high priority on university education. Vlad struggles to preserve a balance by acting as if his education abroad did not affect him very much, but in his case this experience is a cause for tensions within his family.

Sandra spoke to similar affect.

I grew up a lot more than they [friends in Latvia] did and you can't explain your previous life [in England] to them. But part of you will always be different now.

Sandra

Aries and Seider (2005) find that first-generation students experience somewhat paradoxical tensions. On one hand, first-generation students struggle to be like their university peers from middle-class families, on the other they worry that their university experience can distance them from their previous friends and family. Normally researchers examine the tensions among the non-traditional students including first-generation students (Dumais, 2006), students from low-income backgrounds (Aries and Seider, 2005), working-class students in elite universities (Crozier and Reay, 2011; Crozier et al., 2011). While they are theoretically useful, their findings cannot be applied to the participants of this study because they take place among home students at home universities and only consider social mobility.

Several researchers challenge the ‘defeatist’ view that non-traditional students have difficulties adjusting to university environments. Pimpa (2005), Archer and Frances (2006) (among others) suggest examples of first and second immigrant youths who succeed at universities. Even though immigrants as well as home first-generation students are considered ‘non-traditional’ students their backgrounds are not comparable and therefore, there is no foundation for generalizing across these groups. However, findings on immigrant students who are well-adjusted for the universities in their host countries find that higher family expectation makes immigrant children more committed to education. This view is the basis of what is known as the ‘immigrant family optimism hypothesis’ (Rochford and Rosenbaum, 2008). But as mentioned in the Review of the Literature the immigrant optimism hypothesis may not hold true for the present research participants because the students' families remain at home.

Baiba adds that in Riga she has an assigned role, but in England she could step outside that role.

In Riga I am my usual self: a daughter, a wife, a mother, there is no sense pretending [laughs]. But in London I could imagine that I was someone else, a sophisticated student, cosmopolitan and contemporary and smart and people there would know me as such.

Baiba

This quotation is probably indicative of the identity change that according to Van Mol (2011) is an integral part of mobility. In Riga Baiba has assigned roles each of which comes with its responsibilities. Being in England, however, she was free of these responsibilities that shape her life in Riga and could come across as a different ‘sophisticated, cosmopolitan and contemporary’ person.

But there is an important distinction between Denis and Baiba. Denis applied to university in England six years ago because he wanted to establish his life independently from his family. That was a long-term plan that required some dedication and possibly application of more conscious effort. Baiba, on the other hand, had known from the beginning that her experience in England was to be short and transient. For that reason perhaps, her acculturation is of a different kind and illustrates the complex nature of the term ‘acculturation’. In fact, Baiba’s experience is very much in line with experiences of students who travel within the exchange programmes. As outlined in the Review of the Literature 2.1 ERASMUS students are usually more interested in acquisition of language, culture and identity change (Teichler, 1996), while students who aim to earn a degree deal with the stress of life-changing responsibility because they know that they will be in the country of education for a long time. This research adds to this discourse that it is not always only the type of mobility that dictates the experience. Sometimes experience of mobility can be shaped by the simple awareness of how long it will take.

In sociology of education student mobility has been firmly established as a distinction strategy of the middle class families (Brookes and Waters, 2009, 2010; Waters, 2009; Findlay et al., 2012). To extend this conclusion, researchers need to investigate how foreign qualifications take on different roles in different countries. For example, in this research an undergraduate degree from England stands out among Latvian undergraduate degrees, but is just one of many in England. At the same time, since none of the participants had moved to another country by the time this research was finished, it is impossible to say how university degrees from England are received elsewhere, in countries other than England or Latvia.

English representatives of the social networks

Overall, data generated in this study are more closely aligned with social research than with educational. One of the reasons can be due to the divide between *host* and *home* as two opposites that permeate educational research. According to research by Berry (1990), Berry et al. (1995), Yew and Farrell (2000), Bamford (2002) among others only home nationals represent home culture, and only host nationals represent host culture. Without delving into detailed definitions, this research's participants seem to describe a different reality. The host culture for them is not represented by English people or English students, but by a 'melting pot' of people and students from many different countries and nationalities. Of course, as the effects of internationalization become even more pronounced, this divide is likely to be reconsidered, too.

I know some English, of course, but I can't say that we have made friends. I don't really care what a person's nationality is, and I don't look to make friends only with British.

Denis

Gareth has a friend from here [England], but I only met him once. And then there are some people in the course, but other than tutors I don't know anybody English well.

Inga

Several participants gave conflicting accounts of who they consider British or English.

This prompted further investigation of their understanding of 'Englishness'.

Interviewer: Do you know many English people here?

Inga: No, just a couple... And then there are some Muslim people I know. And Chinese and ... other Asians.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about your Muslim and Asian acquaintances?

I: The Muslim guys and girls, they were born here, most of them, but we are not very close. I think they tend to keep to themselves. Although they are quite friendly. Asians, they come from China and Korea and all over Asia and they are OK, too, but their accent is hard to understand sometime.

In this conversation Inga indicates that when she talks about the English she excludes British nationals of non-white or Muslim background. Similar distinctions are found in Juris's interview. When he was describing his employer he said:

Afram was born in London, but he is Pakistani. His parents are from there... [later] ... I don't meet many English. People I work for are Pakistani (Afram) and Gennadiy's bosses are Greek. At the uni there are many Asians...

Juris

In the interview I asked Afram where he was from and he said 'from here' meaning either England or Britain, or even London. Later he added as a way of explanation 'my parents are from Pakistan'. I did not pursue this issue of national identity further, but it brought about the following idea.

These mismatched attitudes probably indicate that Latvian students come from a racially homogeneous society and the idea of multiracial national space is a new one to them. At the same time, they should be aware of the ethnic tensions since the rights of the minorities remain a topic of debate in Latvia. The literature on minority students at British universities reveals that different understandings of 'Britishness' or 'Englishness' are more than common between ethnically English students and second/third generation immigrants (Modood and Ahmad, 2007). Accounts of white international students' perceptions of 'Englishness' are missing from research. But Jacobs (2006) finds that even more confusion, unawareness and misunderstanding exist

among white students from other countries than among white English students due to lack of knowledge and education; this seems the case for the participants of this study.

In the follow-up interview I asked participants what they thought of international students who only seek to make friends with the English. Denis and Sandra clearly attributed their behaviour to matters of ‘prestige’.

I don’t know. I guess they think it is more prestigious for them, maybe.

Denis

If you have English people taking your course you can study as well as they do, not only as well as other international students.

Sandra

Baiba offers an interesting metaphor that emphasizes her view.

It is more important to compare yourself to the English, it’s their native language and they are used to the system. You play on their ‘home pitch’

Baiba

Baiba reveals that it is more challenging to compete with English students than other international students. This quote also demonstrates that British students as perceived as having advantages over international students. This issue is discussed in further detail in the section on academic acculturation of Latvian students (4.4). According to personal correspondence with the HESA analysts’ records of the classes of earned degrees are not available for English and non-English students. So there is no statistical evidence to show that English students are more successful in their academic pursuits. At the same time, British students in their home country do not need to go through nearly as extensive an acculturation process (at least outside university) and avoid linguistic problems. So, it is only logical that they are perceived as having an advantage over international students.

According to the extensive literature review by Durlauf and Fafchamps (2004) this issue of more or less prestigious connections is not reflected in the literature on socio-cultural acculturation of international students. As mentioned before in educational research acculturation is mainly studied in applied linguistics and often focuses on language and communication issues. As a result research outcomes indicate that international students who want to improve linguistically seek connections with English students because they provide a naturalistic context for language practice and cultural learning (Berry, 1990; Berry, 1995). Murphy-Lejeune (2006) found that students in her research sample sought connections with the host representatives because for them it was a way to learn about the host culture. Of course, all Murphy-Ljeune's participants were programme students, who do not seek degrees from universities abroad and who are known to be interested in cultural exchange. In this research, however, some participants have spoken to a different end. Denis, Sandra and to an extent Baiba seem to think that people who explicitly seek connections with host nationals do so because these connections are perceived as more prestigious than connections with other international students.

Prestige is sometimes conceptualized as an element of 'symbolic capital'. According to Richardson (1986) Bourdieu states that symbolic capital is associated with feelings of self-worth. If so, accumulation of symbolic capital might be a strategy employed by students to increase their feelings of self-worth. This idea crosses over to the area of psychological comfort of international students and is reflected in literature on psychological acculturation and on mobile students' identity. In this research the issue is not developed further, but it might provide an original direction for further research.

Participants of Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune's research (2002) also reported that they experienced a 'home feeling' while communicating with other mobile students, and this is not necessarily the case with host nationals. Similarly, a growing number of researchers (Kennedy, 2004; Conradson and Latham, 2005; Ferro, 2006; Collins, 2008; Gargano, 2009), urge to step away from the classical host/home divide and to situate international migrants' experiences in the dynamic transnational networks as explained in detail in 2.5. In this sense, participants do not adjust or adapt to the English society, but enter the society of other international students.

This finding does not contribute to answering research questions directly, but it is important because it may have an impact on the definition of acculturation, or at least socio-cultural acculturation of the mobile students in England. In the Review of the Literature (2.3) acculturation is initially introduced as one of the two concepts. One way to see acculturation is as a mutual process between host and home nationals as Cortazzi and Jin (2001) posit. Another way, considered for the purposes of this research is acquisition of the target culture by people from other countries. However, in this study acculturation of mobile students is neither. Since it takes place within transnational fields it seems to be a mutual process among students who participate in these fields should they be home nationals, foreign students or international students. In this case a new conceptualization of socio-cultural definition emerges where socio-cultural acculturation is a process of mutual change that takes place among the participants of the transnational field.

It is hard to say why participants of this research prefer a more naturalistic (less purposeful) approach of choosing friends than participants of some existing studies. As mentioned above, the latest research on mobile students (Brookes and Waters (selected

publications 2002-2011); Findlay et al., 2012) states that shared experience of academic mobility is the main principle that guides the construction of social networks of mobile students. Older research on international students finds a high correlation between international students' English language proficiency and the number of friends from other countries (including England) that they have (Berry, 1990; Berry et al., 1995). This research indicates that first of all these findings are not mutually exclusive and second that there are some principles at play that existing research does not take into account. Particular attention needs to be paid to the connections made on the basis of gender and age. However, the role of nationality as a factor of in/exclusion from a social network is also interesting.

4.3.2 Communicative competence development

All participants expressed concerns at some point about appropriate communication in England. On one hand, in the academic literature this topic is an important issue in relation to socio-cultural acculturation of students, on the other hand, it is too wide in scope. Even though researchers prefer to discuss 'appropriate communication', for the purposes of this study a decision was made to conceptualize appropriate communication as 'effective communication' because the participants mainly described communication that was used to achieve a goal. This part demonstrates how development of communicative competence helped participants in their search for part-time jobs while in England.

For example, Vlad, Svetlana and Juris had to combine work and study and they show three approaches to finding a job in England. Vlad and Olesya had a long-term plan and it was decided that they both would have part-time jobs. Olesya waited tables at a café

near her campus when she had time, but Vlad worked permanently at an electronic repair shop. Vlad changed his approach to application several times until he found a job.

His first time was not good. That really made him depressed. He just read about IT/computer companies in his town and that is not enough. Some guy from Riga... How is he going to find someone who knows people like that in the UK?

Masha, Vlad's sister

Masha displays a belief that the best way to find a job is through acquaintances, or through a social network. In the studies outlined in the Review of the Literature (2.5) many researchers talk about the role of social networks on the working life of the migrants (Kennedy, 2004; Conradson and Latham, 2005; Ferro, 2006), but their studies have to do with participants who migrate *because* of the job and do not inform us on the experiences of looking for work in an environment where the support network has not been established yet and the network from the home country does not extend across borders.

I remember when I was in high school we, guys would sometimes pick up extra cash by hanging around the private garages. But I knew all the people there and could speak the language well. Here I couldn't just barge in on shops asking if they need someone working for them. I was already feeling like an idiot.

Vlad

First Vlad emphasizes that at home finding casual work would be a simple matter of 'hanging around' the right places. By saying that he indicates that in the new environment it is unclear to him where the right places are or who the right people are. This re-emphasizes students' ability to overcome intimidation and the importance of social ties for mobile students. Vlad prepared fliers where he listed all the technical services he could provide and distributed them to the shops that might find his skills useful. Vlad found a method to avoid undermining his confidence further, but at the same time he informed potential employers that he was looking for work. In a way this is a more impersonal form of initiating contact. Rather than approaching potential

employers directly Vlad invited them to initiate contact. His second strategy was similar. He posted his CV on various recruitment websites and submitted them to recruitment agencies. It took Vlad eight months to find acceptable work that way and generated serious financial difficulties. In addition, Vlad conceded that these first months were the most difficult psychologically.

I hated being afraid of the future so much. I think I even stopped sleeping and eventually stopped going to uni, it all seemed so useless.

Vlad

A few researchers found that most students who withdraw from college also worked (Bennett, 2003; Hutcheson et al., 2011). This research indicates that students might choose to discontinue their studies not only due to the lack of time, but as in Vlad's case due to the anxiety. Students' anxiety is more related to psychological problems, but researchers agree that anxiety resulting from negative experiences outside academic life impairs academic outcomes (Spenser-Oatey and Xiong, 2006; Ward and Kennedy, 1999) and thus can potentially jeopardize students' entire mobility projects.

Connections between lack of time, work and attainment are further explored in the section on academic acculturation (4.4). the research of Bennett (2003) and Hutcheson et al. (2011) research took place among home students but there is nothing to suggest that the situation would be better for working students from other countries. In addition, most international students have to obtain working permits for the UK, which is known to add to the administrative problems of finding a suitable job (Forbes-Mewett and Nyland, 2008). For Latvian students this is not an issue as they are allowed to take up employment for twenty hours a week during term time and for forty hours during the holidays without a permit (Guth, 2008).

Svetlana, on the other hand, was unusually lucky in finding a job. Svetlana's mother was against Svetlana's study abroad, but when Svetlana started her course despite the admonitions, her mother became more supportive of the idea. Among her friends was a Cypriot woman married to a Latvian. This friend has a sister in England, Maria, who is running her own beauty shop. It was through these links that Svetlana was offered a job at Maria's beauty shop. Even though Svetlana's mother is not educated beyond high school, she participated in many professional courses for hair stylists. In one of the courses she met Maria's sister and the two women became friends. Even though Svetlana was recommended and Maria expected her, Svetlana did not make the first step to acquaintance.

I was getting ready to go, but because there was no concrete day or time, I just waited ... And my mom was kind of pushing me. Eventually, when I got my telephone, she [Maria] was the first person to call and I just went to talk to her and she took me.

Svetlana

It appears that Svetlana was not looking forward to establishing communication with Maria. She seems to have procrastinated for some time despite her mother's pressure. There could be many reasons for such behaviour, but procrastination is found to be one of the most common coping strategies among international students in relation to academic tasks (Carrol and Ryan, 2005). This technique is obviously unsuccessful and is usually attributed to the psychological discomfort of students. In other words, Svetlana did not muster the right affective skills in order to initiate communication with the potential employer, even though she was already expecting her.

Baiba did not look for a job but she used her social skills to her advantage. When she started the academic programme she knew that her family circumstances only allowed her to be in England part of the time and she would miss many classes/lectures. Even

though all class materials were supposed to be on Blackboard (the university virtual learning portal) before the lectures, sometimes there was a delay or a technical problem. Thus it was extremely important for Baiba to make friends with classmates who would not mind collecting materials and sharing notes with her.

Baiba: I was hoping I would find another Latvian or Russian, but there aren't many, so I saw some girls who were bright and just approached them at coffee break.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about these people?

B: Just some girls. We knew each others' names, but not much else. But they answered [lecturer's questions] in class, so I could see they were ... involved.

I: And how did you start talking to them the very first time? What did you say?

B: I just asked them if I could sit with them and I smiled a lot [laughs] and told them that I liked what they said in class. I think flattery is universal... ...So what if they think me weird? They'd eventually get used to me.

This is an interesting passage because Baiba describes application of communicative competence in action. In her case it involved several steps. The first step was to choose people who could help her. Baiba did that by observing different students' behaviour during class and chose a group of active, involved students who seemed bright. She then chose an informal setting to initiate communication with some of them (an on-campus café). Baiba believes that flattery has a universal appeal, but this reply also reveals that she is aware that most things are not automatically appealing all over the world. Interestingly, Baiba felt that her classmates should get used to her and not the other way around. Later I asked Baiba how she knew to follow this pattern and she said that she learnt from many American and English friends that her husband has in Riga.

The three examples used in this part of the chapter show that the passive initiation of contact that Vlad used was not successful, or at any rate took a very long time. Svetlana, who had a connection established for her did not have the heart to approach the potential employer for a long time and only Baiba seemed forceful and efficient. To establish these connections Baiba used affective skills to overcome insecurity; cognitive

skills, because she consciously chose to start with compliments; and, of course, foreign language skills because the conversation took place in English and she was able to pay a compliment in a foreign language. These are the types of skills that Baiba coordinated in order to initiate successful connection with people of other nationalities. Coordination of these skills at a higher level resulted in an increased level of communicative competence. At the same time, according to the GTI model of competence development (Appendix 8) Baiba seems to have started from the third level in a competence development model, conscious competence. She indicated that she can perform reliably at will, but she still needs to concentrate and think in order to perform the skill, she can perform without assistance, but not reliably unless thinking about it - the skill is not yet 'second nature' or 'automatic'. Again there are probably a number of factors that explain why her competence is higher than that of other participants, but a very likely explanation is her previous positive experience of academic mobility as well as her connections in the expatriate community of Riga.

In the follow-up interview (that took place within two months after the first one) participants were asked explicitly how they became better communicators, but they could not answer this question well.

I don't know, I just try to be nice to people...

Svetlana

I don't know, I just do stuff... Just like I've always done.

Vlad

It is different here. I think it is just something you have to know from childhood or be born with, in a place, all different rules. You just know it if you are from there.

Juris

The three examples here can be used to demonstrate three levels of awareness. Svetlana uses rather vague language that makes her response sound inconclusive. Vlad gives a little more information and says that in England he chooses the most effective form of

communication just like he has done in Latvia. And Juris explicitly states that each place has different rules of conduct and the only way to know these rules is to be from that place. This has methodological implication for interview schedules because participants seem to avoid answering explicit questions and the most relevant data emerge in responses to other questions.

Implicitly participants acknowledged that their behaviour became more effective over some time. In the same interview participants elaborated:

Before I tried to do things correctly: speak correctly, be polite, smile. Now I just say what I need in the simplest way. I used to think that it was my problem that I couldn't understand. Now I know that my English and my manners are better than most English people who come here [to the hair salon]!

Svetlana

Who cares if I make a mistake? There are more important things. At this level [postgraduate level of studies] it is not how you say things but what you say. In our field [Theoretical Chemistry] if you know what you are saying, I think people are willing to forgive accent or grammar.

Denis

The other day we had guests over and they wanted to play a word game. I just knew better than to try. You just can't play language games with people in their own language. May as well accept it.

Inga

Over the last two years Svetlana learned that for her the secrets of successful communication are not about the manner but about the factual exchange of information. Denis attests to the same discovery and specifies that in his opinion the higher level of professionalism excuses a few mistakes in English. However, there is a slight indication that Inga, on the other hand, accepts that even years of formal and informal learning of the English language do not result in truly native-like linguistic proficiency, but she, too does not react to the situation strongly. Even though these answers sound as if the participants are not aware that in order to become more effective communicators they

needed to have developed certain abilities at some level the necessary development took place. Researchers from applied linguistics, for example, Braine (2002) and Krashen (2003), point out that such responses indicate that communicative competence is likely to occur as an unconscious acquisition rather than a conscious development.

Besides purely linguistic concerns, the shift in attitude towards communication and realization that is also prominent in these responses. In language teaching and learning research it is believed that focus on both meaning and form results in faster Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Brown and Holloway, 2008b). However, participants of this study found that content is more important for the success of communication. To an extent this divide is recognized by the teachers of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), who teach students to choose whether the texts should be approached as a vehicle for information or as an example of genre (Carroll and Ryan, 2005). But even those participants who have not had any EAP training have found content more important than form which indicates development of language skill. However, in this research all participants, regardless of training, developed this skill experientially, by trial and error.

It seems that some participants learn how to interact with the foreign world from observation.

I was waiting for the bus and two of my buses went right by without stopping! I wanted to ask the lady who was also waiting there, but did not have the courage. When her bus approached she stepped out and raised her arm for it to stop. I would have never thought of it!

Inga

In Latvia all public transport stops at a designated place whether there are passengers waiting or not. These minute details of everyday life are taken for granted in the home

environment but in another country they can be embarrassing, annoying and perhaps sometimes result in loss of confidence or efficiency. Like Inga, Baiba also uses observation as a tool to advance her socio-cultural acculturation.

I noticed that it is not good to complain. Even to your friends. You can only complain about busses or the weather [laughs]. In other cases, it is best to say something positive.

Baiba

In this case Baiba observed that in England there is little mention of negative feeling even among friends. According to Baiba in order to act in an appropriate manner one should imitate the behaviour of the host representatives. This cycle of observation-imitation might be a shorter version of listen/observe-reflect-adjust-imitate cycle that Deardorf (2006) found her participants to employ as a part of developing intercultural competence. In fact, according to her findings ability to listen/observe rates as a significant factor for intercultural competence development.

But imitation has not worked in all situations equally well. Svetlana noticed that young people say 'cheers' more commonly than they say 'thank you' and she started doing that until a senior customer at the salon where Svetlana worked told her that she sounded 'like a working-class person' and that 'thank you' is 'more appropriate'.

I didn't know that, but, of course, I didn't want to sound like an uncultured person. It's like using foul language in Russian. It just makes a bad impression. I even started saying 'good afternoon' to older people and customers especially instead of 'hi' all the time.

Svetlana

Svetlana was told that using informal language makes her sound like she belongs to the working classes. She does not think of herself as a working class person and she does not want to be perceived as one. She realized that more formal language is associated with people of higher class and if she wants to come across as one of them she needs to use more formal language. Svetlana made a comparison with her native language and even though her evaluation was amiss, this comparison helped Svetlana realize that

language form (in this case a level of formality) is one of the indicators of belonging to a certain social group (*ibid*). There is no consensus among Sociolinguistics specialists whether colloquial English has a place in the English for Academic Purposes or indeed English as a Foreign/Second Language curriculum (McKay, 2003). However, the important point is Svetlana's growing awareness that language conveys more than content. These cases call for more attention to principles of manner acquisition in intercultural context. In this research it is unclear how participants choose their role models for imitation. But wrong choice of a role model may lead to projecting undesirable image and interfere with effectiveness of the students' behaviour.

4.3.3 Dealing with daily life tasks

Besides dealing with people, participants of this study also mentioned some degree of difficulty dealing with the new environment. While this is unsurprising, the relative simplicity of this topic highlights more complex issues such as competence development and the role of previous mobility.

This is how Sandra's case illustrates this point. The very first night when Sandra arrived in England she joined a party for international freshers. After the party was over a large group of students invited her to go to a night club with them. When Sandra was ready to return to the dormitory she could not find her friends and decided to walk back, but lost her way.

That does not happen to me often. Even in strange places I usually remember the way, but we went by car and I could not see, so this is why I got lost.

Sandra

I asked other participants in follow-up interviews if that had happened to them and here are some of the answers.

I get lost all the time... ..I asked my tutor whom people call when they need help and she got me a special university number that you can call even at night if you get lost.

Inga

I always carry some emergency taxi money with me, not in my wallet. My mum always does it, too.

Svetlana

I remember, they call it 'zoning'. You get in one of these 'zones' and there will be no shops, no people, 'dead city'. You have to turn back and find some civilization. There you can ask for directions.

Denis

These answers represent a range of preventive techniques used by the students who are aware of the possibility of losing their way. Denis gained this awareness from previous experience of being in England. Inga also knew from frequent occurrences of getting lost that lack of orientation is a likely nuisance for her. Svetlana, on the other hand, followed her mother's example, just in case.

In Sandra's case we know that she had very little experience of travelling, being in strange places and probably losing her way. Since she has no relevant experience she did not have a chance to develop awareness about this matter. This is a clear example of unconscious incompetence level according to the GTI model of competence development. The other participants were a step ahead of Sandra due to their previous experiences and were on the level of conscious incompetence (Inga saying: 'I get lost all the time') which allowed them to take precautions against the potential problem.

Even though outside the scope of this research, it is interesting to see how the change from unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence occurs. In other words, what change do participants go through in order to progress from stage 1 to stage 2? To

answer this question in detail and with certainty, a different research would be required but limited to this study it appears that awareness develops as a result of experience. For example, Sandra gains the experience as a result of some actions that she takes (going out on the first night). I asked her what made her go out on the first night.

I felt so out of place, I thought that I needed to meet some people immediately...
... I just knew I needed to be with people.

Sandra

This quote shows that taking action was a result of dissatisfaction with the situation at hand. In order to change this situation Sandra took some action. She did not know if it was the right thing to do but it felt to her as the right thing. The action allowed her to gain experience and experience triggered growing awareness, thus letting people become conscious of their limits, or reaching a conscious incompetence level. To summarize: Sandra found herself unhappy (out of place) and that prompted her to take a certain risk (going out with people she had just met). As a result she gained some experience (albeit the unpleasant experience of being lost).

A similar principle of intercultural competence development is mentioned in Mezirow (2000) who finds that by experimenting students can 'become critically aware of the context and effect a change'. In other words, Mezirow points out that experiment is a necessary part of development. Gill (2007) also states that students change as a result of critical awareness of the context.

This discussion also resonates with the debates around the influence of 'culture shock' of the international students as outlined in the Review of the Literature (2.3). Leonard, et al. (2003) makes a point that the idea of culture shock is often unnecessarily problematized, while in fact the discomfort of the culture shock may instigate action,

which provides valuable experience pivotal for growth in the new context. Dierdorf (2006) finds that risk-taking is a part of an affective competence framework and as such is probably more related to psychological acculturation. Sam et al. (2008) add that risk-taking is one of the skills that immigrants use in order to increase their rate of socio-cultural acculturation, but they do not elaborate if this skill is conscious or not. But if experience translates into awareness, this further awareness allows students to become conscious of their limits, or to reach a conscious incompetence level.

If Sandra started to experiment because she felt ‘out of place’, the situation was different for Denis.

I felt great. I was a new person, or I could become a new person. I could start again and show myself to the world in any way I liked. Every day I would go out and try a different mood [attitude?]. ... even my English would change.

Denis

Denis displays a positive attitude towards being a newcomer. He is clearly excited to experiment with language and behaviour and sees his new environment as an opportunity to do so. But despite polar opposite feelings Sandra and Denis both developed their awareness through experiments. Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) would argue that due to Denis’s more positive disposition his acculturation rate would be faster. While this research cannot support this theory, it does indeed seem that Denis mentions more positive experiences and fewer problems than Sandra does.

4.3.4 Summary of the findings on socio-cultural acculturation of the participants

Multiple iterations between the data and the literature revealed several complications associated with research on socio-cultural acculturation. Socio-cultural acculturation is often exemplified by forced immigrants or indigenous minorities adjusting to the dominant culture by adopting their values and behaviours. Mobile students, however,

are rarely treated as subjects of acculturation research relative to other acculturating groups. Thus mobile students' experiences and processes of socio-cultural acculturation remain largely unknown.

The second complication is in the traditional subdivision of acculturation into socio-cultural and psychological acculturation. As explained in the Review of the Literature, psychological acculturation refers to psychological well-being or good mental health and satisfaction in a new cultural context, whereas socio-cultural adaptation relates to learning new social skills to interact with the new culture, to deal with daily life tasks and perform effectively (Ward et al., 2001; Ward and Kennedy, 1999). In this research this separation was found unhelpful because in practice neither participants nor researchers can draw a line where socio-cultural acculturation ends and psychological acculturation begins. It is probably for this reason that participants' interactions with the host environment and people in that environment were so interrelated with their state of mind, emotional well-being, perceived success in other areas of life (e.g. academic, romantic, financial), etc. In the end, it became impossible to delineate whether psychological or socio-cultural factors influenced interaction with the environment at any given time. Neto et al. (2005) and Neto (2006) recognize this is one of the constraints on socio-cultural research and question the practical value of such dichotomy.

The same holds true for research on culture shock or other acculturation models. Researchers suggest ways for mapping acculturation patterns, but they always acknowledge that these patterns are subject to change under the pressure of personalized factors. In fact, participants' realities take place much more in these personalized domains than in predictable acculturative routes. This discrepancy has usually been

explained as resulting from social constraints (e.g., opportunities) on people's behaviours (Berry et al., 2002), but such explanation can be only sufficient if individual biographies and family histories can be taken into account (*ibid.*).

In this research participants acknowledged several elements of socio-cultural acculturation: constructing social networks, developing appropriate and effective communicative strategies, dealing with the everyday tasks (spatial orientation, transportation).

This section finds that the observable elements in the social network construction are behaviour patterns and linguistic skills. Like many other studies, this research clearly demonstrates that socio-cultural acculturation of mobile students in part depends on communicative competence, but patterns of communication vary within different social groups. In existing research these networks of people are divided by racial, ethnic, national or linguistic factors. In this research, however, connections that participants made with other people were governed by such a complex set of factors that they may as well be random. As discussed in the Review of the Literature (2.5) construction principles of social networks are constantly changing and universal rules of network functioning are still to be established.

It appears that in comparison with Latvia, the establishment of social connections is accelerated because it is assisted by the universities (social events for freshers, international students, returning students, parties in dormitories, etc.). According to the participants, the university environment in England is very conducive to creation of multi-national social networks. These networks are the essence of transnational social

fields that are not only mental concepts as Collins (2008) and Gargano (2009) envisioned but quite physical spaces that occupy university campuses.

The data point to the principle on which social networks are being built changes over time. First connections with others seem to be based on proximity and are random. In later stages of acculturation they seem to progress towards more purposeful connections. Particular attention needs to be paid to the connections made on the basis of gender and age. However, the role of nationality as a factor of in/exclusion from a social network is also interesting.

Communicative ability in this research is a behavioural pattern where not only the linguistic but also cognitive resources are being used. In this research participants who initiated communication with others did so with the intent of becoming a part of a social group and with a conscious choice of skills. Of course, communication, no matter how clever, cannot be sustained without the language skills of the participants. But it seems that for the participants of this research proficiency in the English language did not feature as a problem.

Affective skills feature as confidence to initiate communication with the representatives of the host culture. For the participants of this research it seems that communication is particularly difficult when it has to be initiated with an explicitly instrumental nature such as for finding employment. In this research confidence seems to be strongly linked to previous experience of mobility. In previous research on the socio-cultural acculturation of students communication is mainly constrained by language barriers, but for Latvian participants language rarely was a problem, but confidence sometimes was.

On the other hand, it is hard to compare levels of confidence of different research participants because of the weak conceptualization of the appropriate criteria.

Besides developing communicative skills for becoming a functioning part of the social network of other students, participants of this research also needed to communicate with people outside their universities. Most participants were surprised at how few English people they met. But as this research shows they have not developed a realistic understanding of 'Englishness' or 'Britishness' appropriate in a contemporary, multicultural society such as England. Such low awareness is unexpected because in Latvia integration of the national minorities has been a persistent topic of debate since the early 1990s. It is hard to say how the participants' understanding of multiculturalism affected their communicative competence, but it may be an interesting direction for further research.

For the participants of this study the cycle of communicative competence development often starts with an observation-imitation sequence, where the participants observe and try to imitate behaviour of those around them. But it is not clear how participants of this research chose their role models for imitation. Their goal is to be more effective in their communication, so the assumption is that they chose to imitate someone whom they see as effective. On the other hand, not only may they not judge the effectiveness of others correctly, but they also do not consider different audiences. While this part of research is partially based on guesses, more detailed research could provide findings that would extend knowledge on development of communicative skills by international students.

In dealing with daily tasks some participants anticipate their further actions in new situations based on their existing experience. Nassaji (2007) explains that in unknown

situations people compare the new, unknown concepts to the old, known concepts. If they see the two situations similar to a sufficient extent they rely on previous experience in the new situation. This is known as a principle of schema theory. Some participants, however, find that they have no relevant previous experience to use in the new situation that they encounter. In this study some participants like Sandra prefer to take action in order to change the situation that they do not enjoy or they simply avoid the situation like Svetlana.

It appears that tentative connections can be made between parental education and success in socio-cultural acculturation. In this research participants whose parents have earned a university degree acculturate with more ease. Considering that the parents have not had direct experience of acculturation to foreign countries and people in these countries, some other factors must be in play, but more detailed research is needed to establish firm correlations. In this research it is clear though that participants with parents who have university degrees are more successful communicators and appear to be more confident.

4.4 Academic acculturation of the participants

This section, 4.4, is concerned with answering the third question of this research: **What competences do undergraduate students from Latvia develop as part of academic acculturation to the English university environment?**

As a way of introducing section 4.4 I use some quotations from the participants of this study to demonstrate that academic acculturation is an important step for mobile students. Academic acculturation of international students to English universities is discussed in the Review of the Literature (2.3) as a change that the students have to

experience in order to integrate with the members of the new community. More specifically I define academic acculturation of international students as a change that the mobile students have to experience in order to become members of the new national, linguistic, institutional and subject-specific community. In existent research academic acculturation is one of the necessary steps that students need to make in order to achieve their academically-related goals (Comp, 2008; Reason et al., 2006; Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006; Errey, 2005; McVittie, 2004; De Vita, 2002; Furnham, 1993). Academic progress is of critical importance to the participants of this study because their primary goal is to earn a Bachelor degree from an English university. While the goals might vary and extend beyond obtaining qualifications, one overarching motivation of all the participants is to earn a Bachelor degree.

Of course, I want to have a Bachelor degree at the end. I really need it.

Baiba

I think English education, English qualification, is necessary for me to work in England and I should try to find a job here at the end.

Vlad

We all want her [Inga] to have a job in London. She is hard-working and bright. I think she can do it and be successful while young. But she can only start a career after she earns her Bachelor degree, so, yes, we all want it for her.

Valya, Inga's aunt

Researchers (e.g. Ryan, 2005; Farbrother and Hartwell, 2006) find that this goal becomes difficult or unattainable if students do not adapt to the specific academic culture of their university community and discipline. This process of adaptation is known as academic acculturation and is commonly seen as a part of the overall socio-cultural adjustments of the international students. But, because academic acculturation is such a critical issue for the individually-mobile international students, I decided that it needs to be discussed separately, and in some depth. For this reason, the interview schedule included a separate set of questions on academic acculturation (Appendix 6)

and this section of the findings is focused on analysis of the participants' answers to these questions.

Section 4.4 is organized into two sub-sections. Sub-section 4.4.1 deals with the academic acculturation of the participants at the pre-mobility stages. For convenience it is divided into parts that are indicated with subheadings in italics as in other chapters. The first sub-section demonstrates that academic acculturation starts to take place before the students leave for the UK. In this sub-section I try to explain the nature of the difficulties that the participants reported using the existing research findings, participants' voices and sometimes my knowledge of the Latvian context. It is possible to argue that competences developed at the pre-mobility stage are not academic competences in the full sense, but as these competences are university-related they advance the development of academic acculturation.

4.4.1 Academic acculturation of the participants at pre-mobility stages

There is little guidance in existing research on the chronology or the time frames of mobility. We do not know where mobility projects begin and end and in what order stages of mobility progress. As discussed in the Review of the Literature (2.5), Murphy-Lejeune (2002) includes the pre-departure experiences of her participants in full descriptions of mobility. She finds that the objectives and motives that drive the students are formed before the relocation to the host country and in part they predetermine how the students approach the overall mobility projects. Even though her research cannot support this claim, the participants of this study describe many pre-departure experiences that can be linked to academic acculturation.

All the participants mentioned that they tried to learn about studying in England and tried to predict how they could suit the English university environment, which in most cases was associated with some difficulties. Some of the network members in Latvia contributed valuable insights into these difficulties. For example:

He [Denis] said that he was still scared to go [to England] because he still didn't understand how his university would work, and he really spent a lot of time trying to learn.

Denis's mother, Andzhela

There is so much information but it is hard to sort out even for me! I wished there would be a guide that would explain what the different standings of different subjects, courses, programmes and disciplines are. Or it is very difficult to understand why Chemical Engineering takes place in the same building as the Chemistry department but is in another School...

Denis's English language tutor, Galina

Olesya, Vlad's girlfriend, also tried to explain to Vlad her experience and understanding of British universities before they left Riga. Vlad relied heavily on her opinions of her experience of international academic mobility.

He [Vlad] drove me crazy! [laughs] I would come home and he would spend hours discussing how he is going to study and go to the library and write everything down. I hate it when he says that he is 'dumb' or has no memory or is 'too old for learning'. It is not about memory or brains or age, I would try to tell him it was about being logical and strong and ... not trusting things kind of ...

Olesya, Vlad's girlfriend

Vlad did not remember how he had said he would study, but he admitted to have thought a lot about appropriate behaviour, imagining himself in a classroom full of young people.

I wondered if they would laugh at me and I would have to explain why I was doing my degree now, at 33 or if they would just ignore me. Explaining it to foreigners and sounding reasonable and doing it in English?! [Vlad makes a symbol and a sigh to signify something that is far away from him].

Vlad

Baiba, on the other hand, knew that no amount of preparation could truly prepare her for what was coming. She had studied abroad for two weeks when she was a schoolgirl and travelled a lot since. This is what she said based on her previous mobility experience:

You know that you'll be surprised by many things in each new place, so you just have to be ready to take them as they are and not try to understand why, this will come later.

Baiba

She further said that preparations were, nevertheless, necessary at least as a psychological benefit if nothing else.

I think people try to prepare because it keeps them busy and they are less nervous that way. If you sit and do nothing the fears grow and grow. This way, you have no time to be afraid [laughs].

Baiba

These quotes show that not only is there much anxiety at the pre-mobility stage about adjusting to the new culture, but stress due to inability to figure out how universities in England are structured, how they operate, what is required for learning and what is the correct behaviour within them. To some extent, the quotes also demonstrate that the students were willing to change but did not know or understand how they need to change. Change is probably indicative of psychological adjustments but psychological adjustment is not a separate part of this research. Most of the changes that I thought were of psychological nature are grouped with the socio-cultural acculturation (4.3). This is based on the view that socio-cultural and psychological acculturation cannot be separated, as explained in the Review of the Literature (2.3).

Richards (2004) defines academic acculturation in its broadest sense as a change that implies becoming part of a different national and cultural group. He believes that students need to change in order to become members of this new group. The quotes

above do not capture change in the participants' views about English universities but they indicate that pre-mobile students are thinking about university life in England and prepare themselves to adjust to the new academic culture before they leave for England. These preparations reflect adjustments of values, beliefs, expectations and perceptions about their university studies that are recognized as part of academic acculturation. Based on this evidence, I maintain that academic acculturation begins before relocation to England takes place and coincides with making decisions and finding access to universities of choice. Other quotes used in the following section of this chapter strengthen this point, too.

It is interesting that Baiba shows awareness, at least with hindsight, that preparations at the pre-mobility stage provide only limited help. She is the only central participant with experience in educational mobility and extensive travelling, so she knows that each new situation is unpredictable and is willing to live with the uncertainty. Of course dealing with uncertainty is a natural part of everyday life, but in new situations where uncertainty is likely to be high it can create stress that has been found to slow down academic acculturation (Cortazzi and Jin, 2001; Forman, 2000). It seems that some participants like Vlad and Denis, try to minimize future stress by learning about the new system of education early.

University-related communication at pre-mobility stage

While talking about the pre-mobility stage the participants in this study frequently recall how they communicated with the universities of their choice:

I have got a million emails, a whole folder full of them, from the university administration and accommodation office... .. Sometimes it would take me two days to understand what they even asked and two days to write a reply.

Juris

I was even afraid to leave home in case I miss an email from the university. They always sound so important!

Inga

Usually all the emails come from the same person, but then there were a few from another one and I didn't look at them very attentively and put them in spam. Then all other messages from that person went to spam, too. When I realized that I missed crucial correspondence I thought I would have a stroke!

Svetlana

I cannot claim that the communication that takes place at the pre-mobility stage can be fully classified as academic communication since the students are not immersed in academia, but the quotes above are evidence of university-related communication. These statements also show that the pre-mobility communication with the universities is long-distance, mostly through written texts. There is a variety of written texts related to universities that participants of this study used. Participants mentioned emails, on-line information portals, blogs, articles, university prospectuses and official letters from admissions offices.

Translation as a problem of university-related communication

Understanding the information from these sources is not always easy for Latvian students, and feeling unsure about the meaning probably explains the anxiety and frequent confusion that comes across in these examples. For example, Sandra could not understand if she was going to study for a degree or a diploma:

I want to be Bachelor when I finish. I want a '*diploms*'. Why will I have a '*sertifikāts*'?

Sandra

The problem is that 'certificate' translates into Latvian '*sertifikāts*' and is issued to graduates of vocational courses. '*Diploms*' on the other hand, is what Latvian university graduates receive. Similarly, Denis asked his friend who studied in the USA to help him

with some of the information. As a result he understood even less, especially because the name of his university of choice has the word 'college' in it.

It worried me that my university was called a 'college' because he [a friend from the US university] told me that college and university is the same thing. Then I read about colleges in England and I thought that it was like a continuation of school. I was really scared, but then some blogger helped me to understand!

Denis

Vlad had completed his first academic year at the time of the interview and Olesya, his girlfriend had completed her BA in England a few years earlier and was finishing her MA. Nevertheless, they believed that a 'new university' is called 'new' because it has more sophisticated technology.

Olesya: We thought that for something like computers a new university would be better.

Interviewer: What do you mean by 'new university'?

Olesya: You know, universities that have all the new things. Better labs, technologies, you know the *new* stuff that you need for computers.

These examples demonstrate how mistakes result from simplistic translations of words. Not only is translation a slow process but it is often difficult for Latvian students to process information that they receive from their universities. It seems that university-related words of Latin origin present a particular problem for Russian and Latvian speakers alike, often leading to confusion.

Even though at pre-mobility stages the communication with the university may be mainly one-sided, with the university providing most of the information, at some points the students need to respond to letters, or engage more actively and initiate contact. They mentioned writing queries, sending requests or providing additional information about themselves. More specifically, while talking about correspondence with universities, participants mentioned writing to the administrative staff, such as admission officers or, later, to academic staff, such as pre-sessional or in-sessional

tutors and subject instructors. While none of the participants report any issues regarding writing *per se* at the pre-mobility stage, Juris, Vlad and Baiba said that they have been frustrated by the administrative personnel who did not understand them.

I remember what I wrote. I wrote [speaks English] 'Dear blah-blah-blah, I want to live close to the university if possible but not be in the university all the time.' He wrote back 'You need to be in the university only to visit lectures.'I mean later I knew that they say 'on-campus' and 'off-campus' but I thought that if I say that I live in the university or not, it is clear.

Baiba

In Latvian it is common to say the students who live in university accommodation live in the university, but in English to be *in* university is understood as being located in the buildings where the lectures take place.

I said that I worked as a [speaks English] programme tester, but he [the admissions officer] said he didn't understand. I should have said system analyst, they call them all system analysts, but I was just trying to be precise. Do you know the differences between a [speaks Russian] programme tester and a system analyst?

Vlad

One commonality these examples in reading and writing display is that Latvian students rely on translation as a communication strategy. However, as the quotes show, simplistic translation of words obstructs understanding. Students do not realize that words become terms, part of professional jargon, when used in an academic community. The simplistic translation of terms is not uncommon among foreign language learners according to the 'schema' theory. Nassaji (2007) explains that the schema theory organizes our knowledge and assumptions so that they become available for interpreting and processing new information. Nassaji finds that in unknown situations people compare the new, unknown concepts to the old, known concepts. They recall the old concept that is most similar to the new one and equate the new concept with an old concept. In the case above, the student equates Latvian '*sertifikāts*' with English

'certificate' because the two words sound and look similar and obviously share the same origin. An assumption that the two concepts are equal leads to the misunderstandings outlined above.

Another way of looking at this strategy is through competence development. Participants who relied on translation applied competences developed in English language classrooms to specific, professional contexts. For example, Vlad is aware that in his native language there are fine differences in his professional jargon, but when it came to understanding and communication in English he did not translate this awareness to university context.

This strategy of direct translation may be an outcome of the Latvian students' over-reliance on their general English language skills. It is hard to say how this over-reliance relates to language ability. The only indicator that can be used in this research is the participants' language test score and as explained in (4.1) these scores do not always reflect true proficiency level. Therefore I have no way of knowing my participants' true English language ability. But regardless of the linguistic proficiency, the data show that over-reliance on general linguistic knowledge creates problems for successful communication between the students and universities. In addition to the language knowledge, students need to learn how to understand and use professional discourse (Farell and Yew, 2000). But proficiency in discourse requires more than mere language ability. According to Farell and Yew (2000), discursive competence is a crucial element of university-related communication and thus pre-mobility academic acculturation. At the same time, participants show that at the pre-mobility stage they are unaware of the need to develop discursive competence.

Parental influence on the development of academic discourse

In dealing with the intricacies of academic discourse people of older generations who have attended universities in Latvia did not help the participants, but rather confused them.

When my wife's degree was re-assessed [after 2000] they first recognized it as Master, but then we found out that Master only takes a year! It took her six years to earn 'Kandidat Nauk' [name of the Soviet degree equivalent to a doctorate]. I just hope when Juris comes back they will recognize his degree from the UK for what it's worth.

Juris's father, Leo

This quote shows Leo's unawareness of how the Soviet academic degrees were recognized after 1991, in the Second Latvian Republic and how they were re-assessed and later converged to become comparable with the three-tier degrees of the EU. He seems to think that Latvia and the UK still have different systems and clearly does not understand what Juris's qualifications in the UK would mean in Latvia.

She [Inga] is not going to PTU (Russian abbreviation for a vocational college), she is going to a real university and so she's going to get a real degree.

Inga's mother Jana

In this quote Jana possibly reveals her belief that all 'real' universities as opposed to vocational colleges award only 'real', academic degrees. However, there are also various diploma courses. Usually the diploma courses in England give an academic qualification and can contribute to the cumulative academic credit, but they do not result in a full academic degree (Bachelor, Master or Doctor).

She [Liene, Baiba's mother] is in her 60s, she has not been following change. It is hard for her to understand that I don't only want to be 'university educated'. I need it [Bachelor degree] and more if I want a long-lasting, secure job.

Baiba

In this quote Baiba comments on the many conversations that she had with Liene about the value of university education. It appears that her mother values education for the learning benefits, while Baiba is hoping for more job security.

Part of the reason explaining the differences in understanding between parents and their children could be that the dated Soviet system of education was very different and relied on understanding that has little relevance in contemporary Latvia or Europe. The main difference probably lies in the fact that all education was free and therefore was valued less as a potential return on investment, but more for its potential to contribute to the graduates' cultural capital. Parents who did not attend university are usually less involved in their children's educational processes (Choy 2002; Chen, 2005; Gofen, 2007) and it is not surprising that they do not participate much in the mobility process, either. What is normally seen as a problem of the first-generation students may be to their advantage in this case because the parents who are less involved do not influence their children's decisions with their interpretations. As a result in this case, their non-participation may save their children additional confusion.

Language proficiency as an approach to university-related communication

According to the analysts and researchers in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), successful communication, written or spoken, requires communication that is based on culturally-preferred rhetorical and behavioural structures (Clarke and Saunders, 1999). But the participants in this study appear to understand communication in a narrower way.

Communication is not a problem, he [Juris] always talked in English, even at school, in classes. Writing may be more difficult, but speaking, no, he could always talk well.

Pavels, Juris's classmate

Communication was always my strength. I didn't think I would have any trouble with speaking. Grammar not so good, maybe, but speaking is ok.

Svetlana

When they gave us an option of making a presentation or writing an assignment I always chose a presentation. And when you could choose between oral and written exam I was never afraid of oral--I preferred it. I was always a good communicator.

Sandra

These answers emphasize that students simply confuse communication with speaking which does not include written communication. Students who are proficient in speaking English may think of themselves as successful communicators, but spoken communication is just one form of communication. But university representatives need the prospective students to *communicate* well, which includes not only speaking but writing as well. I did not interview any university representatives for this study, so there is only indirect evidence that communication between the students and the admission staff is problematic due to different understandings of what communication entails.

In this study, participants display an overreliance on the linguistic proficiency at the pre-mobility stages. Even Juris and Inga, who have higher language tests scores than other participants, registered surprise that their communication was impaired despite the high test results. Others expected that the higher their high school English examination result was, the easier they should be able to communicate with the universities of their choice.

I didn't think he should have so much trouble [communicating with the universities]. He's always been like a star... I mean in English, everybody always copied their homework from him and on the tests everybody wanted to sit with him. I think his exam was really high, too. 9 if not 10 [out of 10]. If *he* cannot understand. Maybe it's the British sense of humour...

Pavel, Juris's classmate

I don't understand what's wrong. I've always had good marks in English. I got an 8 [out of 10] in the finals. I don't think it's me... It's just the way they prefer to talk.

Inga

Quite opposite to the students' expectations, researchers explain that linguistic proficiency is limited to correct syntax, grammar and vocabulary use, while communication is context-bound, much broader and more complex (Ivanic, 1998; Hyland, 1999). Furthermore, if the communication in question takes place in the university-related context, it is university-related communicative competence that students need to develop.

It appears that participants at this stage of pre-mobility are starting to understand that they lack the skill required for effective, successful communication with the university representatives. This might indicate that they are progressing from the first to the second level of competence, developing according to the model of competence development, where they become aware of their inadequacies and try to develop the necessary skills to put them right.

Dialogue as an approach to university-related communication

The misunderstandings that the students experience are known to lead to confusion and increase stress and thus negatively impact academic acculturation and ultimately attainment (Carroll and Ryan, 2005). On the other hand, recognition of misunderstandings calls for clarification which leads to a constructive dialogue between the university representatives and the students. Farrell and Yew (2000) find that negotiation of meaning through dialogue allows students to raise their textual awareness, develop necessary discourse and start communicating with the university representatives more successfully. In addition, Farrell and Yew reason that the process

makes students more empowered, motivated and confident and through that eventually leads to increase in grades. This is how the participants of this study approach the establishment of dialogue with the university representatives

Svetlana admitted that she was too shy to ask about what she thought were mundane and stupid questions.

I couldn't understand my timetable, because one week there would be one lesson, in another week five different lessons and then some seminars and I just didn't know if I have to be there or not. ... This was very important for me because I was also trying to look for a job and because I didn't ask, I couldn't accept a really good job.

Svetlana

Inga, on the other hand, demanded clarifications:

The tutors, admission tutors hated me because I asked them about everything. If I will be met, if I can move in [to the accommodation] at once, what is the induction week and do I have to participate in excursions or are they optional... But it is their job, in the end.

Inga

Juris, too thought that he should have his questions answered.

There is no shame in asking, right? How else am I going to learn? And nobody can answer my questions better than the university. Better ask them.

Juris

Baiba, Juris and Inga, whose parents are university-educated, mentioned instances of learning. Baiba's quotation does not tell when the learning took place, but eventually it did happen sometime between the admission process and the end of the first academic year. Juris clearly states that he prefers to ask university representatives for clarification and Inga asked them about 'everything.'

In this respect Vlad's case is interesting. Even though Vlad's parents have not studied beyond high school, Vlad comes across as an open and confident person in comparison with most other participants. But he is also the eldest of the participants and has another advantage: his girlfriend at the time had studied at a university in the UK and helped him with his mobility process every step of the way. And yet, Vlad would spend hours discussing the anticipated study process with her, but there is no mention that he asked for clarification, explanation or help from the university representatives.

In the follow-up interviews and particularly in the final interviews I went through their quotes with the participants who have provided them and asked them to comment if the situation had changed, how it changed and what did they do to change it. Most commonly participants answered that they didn't know or that there was no one particular instance when they learned these things. But all of them mentioned learning that took place in the environment, that means after they moved to England and became students.

Summary of the findings on pre-mobility stage

Quotations used in this sub-section emphasize several important points: academic attainment is of critical importance to the participants of this study because their primary goal is to earn a Bachelor degree from an English university. Without academic acculturation attainment is likely to suffer, therefore academic acculturation is a necessary step towards the participants' goals. This study finds that international applicants start developing academic acculturation before relocation to the country of education takes place. As mentioned in 4.2 finding access to university education abroad can be conceptualized as a competence. Competences are sustained by relevant

abilities and skills. There are several abilities or skills that participants of this study mention in relation to academic acculturation before beginning their education abroad.

The data show that at the pre-mobility stage students learn to find the optimal way of communicating with the university representatives. This communication takes place via exchanges of mostly written texts, which need to be correctly understood by both parties. In order for this understanding to take place, first of all applicants need to be proficient in the English language, so linguistic proficiency is one of the skills that sustains academic acculturation of the participants at the pre-mobility stage.

But, the data demonstrate that applicants tend to use layman's language while university representatives use professional discourse. As explained in the Review of the Literature Taillefer (2005) recognizes that discourse implies a presence of cultural and academic identities, or 'academic literacy profiles' that are very distinct across national cultures. Applicants have no way of realizing this before they become members of the academic community. But I believe that several quotations in the last sub-section indicate that the pre-mobility stage may be the time when applicants first become aware of their inadequacies.

Besides, in order to initiate dialogue with university representatives, applicants need to overcome shyness and intimidation, which indicates the development of affective skills. Affective skills are not explored in-depth in this study because this issue belongs to the domain of psychological acculturation. There is no evidence in the literature to support or to contest this outcome, because academic acculturation studies are concerned with students' experiences that take place within universities (and not before, so those studies do not capture the anxiety that is captured here). And a few research studies that investigate how pre-arrival information affects students' university experiences

(Mortimer, 1997; Sam, 2001) are purely descriptive and do not touch on academic acculturation.

In this study all the participants were accepted at a university in England at the time of the first interview, so it is possible to argue that they had already developed all the competences they needed before the time period they describe in the interviews. But as discussed in the Methodology (3.5) overall competence is not a faculty that students either have or lack but a continuum of degrees or a progression from lower to higher stages of awareness.

Students whose parents are university-educated are often found to be more confident at universities (Choy 2002; Chen, 2005). Presumably, the confidence that they enjoy at universities is a result of an intergenerational transmission of cultural capital, but as Gofen (2007) explains, personal confidence may also be a faculty developed due to the parents' involvement in their children's upbringing. In Baiba's case, confidence and self-awareness may also have resulted from the previous educational mobility experience and extensive travelling. Not surprisingly, in this research the older participants seem to behave with the most confidence.

Communicative competence development is not possible without the necessary language proficiency to support it, so, in this sense communicative competence is also a result of the participants' previous history of English language learning and teaching. Even though, according to Crozier et al. (2011) students educated at private schools would usually be expected to have received better education, this is not necessarily the case in Latvia as some of the private schools are not accredited and use questionable teaching methods and certain state schools deliver by far higher results, particularly in

foreign languages. The elements mentioned above (high confidence, previous mobility experience, better schooling) with the exception of age are likely to be more available to children from wealthier families. In Western Europe wealth is usually associated with higher SEC, but in the Latvian context, such an assumption may also not hold true.

4.4.2 Academic acculturation of the participants at universities in England

Sub-section 4.4.2 is organized in the same manner as the previous sub-sections. The first part is longer than others because it deals with the issues of misunderstanding the English system of university grading by Latvian students. Misunderstanding the system of grading may lead to incorrect self-assessment and might slow down academic acculturation. Even more importantly, the discussion about the grades brought out confusion regarding the classifications of the university degrees in England. While this is not related to academic acculturation, the issue needs to be highlighted because it can cause students to re-align their trajectories if they want to reach their long-term goals. The next part is again concerned with the issues of academic discourse. It demonstrates that Latvian students often misunderstand the tasks that the subject instructors set at universities. While in the literature this misunderstanding is commonly attributed to a weak knowledge of English, this sub-section demonstrates that linguistic proficiency alone does not enable students to evaluate their academic tasks correctly. The next part deals with the development of critical thinking as an academic competence. Since ideas of criticality and critical thinking are under-developed in the academic literature, this part is mainly descriptive and only demonstrates instances that indicate development of criticality in cases used for this research. The next part deals with development of autonomous learning as an academic competence. The conclusion of this sub-section discusses what competences Latvian students develop for academic acculturation and what abilities and skills these competencies may consist of.

Most research on academic acculturation tends to focus on international students who are already at universities and are engaged in the study process. These studies tend to research the overall population of international students or students from specific countries because the process of academic acculturation of international students has been found to depend heavily on the students' national cultures (Carroll and Ryan, 2005). But the research on the overall population of the international students in the UK is likely to be skewed towards Asian students; in research on national cultures, there are no useful studies on Latvia. Since acculturation is largely influenced by the home culture there is little merit in comparing the experiences of Latvian students to the experiences of the overall population of international students in the UK or to students from other countries. So, for this study I constructed the interview questions using the findings on academic acculturation of Latvian students in the UK obtained during my research in 2004/05 as explained in the Methodology chapter. Several categories related to academic acculturation emerged following the constructs: development of the academic discursive competence, development of critical thinking as an academic competence and development of autonomous learning as an academic competence.

System of assessment as an element of discursive competence

Two participants of this research mentioned in their first interviews that it was difficult for them to understand the system of assessment at the beginning of their courses. I asked others about their perceptions of the assessment system more explicitly in the follow-up interviews and the results show that there was much confusion about the assessment system among the participants of this study.

You can fail anywhere from 0 to 50 or you can pass from 50 to a 100. But the first 50% is all just 'fail' and it does not really matter how badly you fail, you

fail anyway. Then 50 to 60% is a low pass, 60 to 70 is a high pass and 70 to 100, 30% is a distinction. And again it does not really matter how great of distinction it is.

Juris

I still don't understand why she [Inga] is so proud. What's that 68, 69? 6 is a 6, right? Basically, it's a 3+.

Valya, Inga's aunt

I think it is silly to give people grades at university level. It is not that they will be punished. Just pass/fail should be enough. Would save lecturers lots of time, too.

Angela, Denis's mother

These quotes reflect differences in the grading system between Latvia and the UK on several levels. First of all, Latvian students are used to the grades on a scale from 1 to 10 because that scale has been in use in all Latvian primary and secondary schools since 1993 and most participants (except Baiba and Vlad) started school after then. Secondly, their parents are accustomed to a different scale of grades, from 1 to 5, and often children have to 'translate' from the 1-10 scale to the 1 to 5 scale. The 1 to 5 system of grading has been used in Latvia and Russia since 1837 (Russian Ministry of Education and Science). The references to this system are now used metaphorically in both languages, Russian and Latvian, to evaluate not only achievements but to characterize people, things, events, etc. Most importantly, in education, the full range of one scale or the other has been in use, and it is difficult for Latvian students and their families to understand that there is a finer variety of meanings implicit within grade types such as fail, low/high pass or distinction.

It is interesting that children of the university-educated parents, like Juris and Inga, seem to have more trouble accepting the UK system of university grades than those whose parents are not university educated. Angela, Denis's mother, has no university education and her view of how performance should be assessed reflects neither the

Latvian nor English system. This is similar to the phenomenon of learning university-related discourse discussed in 4.4. The quotes given there show that people of an older generation who have attended universities in Latvia did not help their children understand the terminology, but rather confused them. In relation to grades, parents who had not attended university did not impose their interpretation of the grades on their children and may have saved their children additional confusion. Part of the reason for this similarity is that the system of assessment is a part of academic discourse, but it was not discussed in the previous section because grades are not relevant at pre-mobility stages.

Misunderstanding the assessment and its impact on the students' long-term goals

The misinterpretation of grades by the students may be dangerous as it leads to incorrect self-evaluations of academic progress.

When I realized that I got 52% on my assignment I was quite content. I thought it was like 5 [out of 10] only even a little more. But their 50 is like our 4, barely a pass... My tutor spent an half an hour explaining it to me.

Svetlana

I got a 68 on my assignment and a tutor said: 'Congratulations' when she gave it to me. I didn't know why she said this. I thought that grade in the 60s meant like a 6 [out of 10]. Only half a year later Fiona [a fellow student] told me that it's more like an 8. But I think it is difficult if you only get grades from 5 to 8.

Baiba

It is interesting that for Svetlana, the misunderstanding of the grading system led to overestimation of her progress, while it caused Baiba to underestimate hers. The only cases discussed in the literature show how misunderstandings of the grading system cause the students to underestimate their progress (Hlavac, 2011), but, of course, overestimating academic progress is more dangerous because it may cause students allocate insufficient time or effort for study. In Svetlana's case the mismatch between

her expectations and actual experiences is particularly prominent and will come up throughout this section.

On a deeper level, not being able to self-evaluate academic progress correctly may be in part responsible for the little importance that the participants attach to the different classes of degrees. While this discussion is not directly relevant to academic acculturation, it is useful here because it demonstrates how a misunderstanding of academic discourse by the international students may affect the students' long-term goals.

I don't know why everybody is so concerned here that they get a first or a second. If it's Bachelor, it's Bachelor, why should it matter what kind? Does it even say it on the certificate?

Vlad

In Vlad's case I was surprised that Olesya, his girlfriend who had studied in the UK, did not explain the differences to him. But then he reminded me that Olesya had never worked so she would not know if and how the classification of degrees might affect employers' evaluations of job applicants. After Vlad revealed that he did not see the difference between a first and second class degree, I purposefully asked other students about it in subsequent interviews. The following two passages are just two of the examples, but all participants showed no or little awareness of the classification and divisions of degrees.

Interviewer: What type of a degree are you aiming at?

Juris: What do you mean? Engineering...

I.: I mean first-class or second-class degree? [repeat types of degrees in English]

J.: [in English] First-class of course!

I.: And what grades will you have to have for a first-class degree? [Latvian from now on].

J.: Good, high grades.

I.: But you estimated your grades to be around 65. Is that enough for a first-class?

J.: I don't know, really... But I think that's a good result, no?

Interviewer: How high will your grades need to be in order to make a second class degree?

Sandra: I don't know, but I am sure I will pass. I think I can pass into a second-class degree.

I.: Will you aim for a lower or higher division?

S.: I am not sure I know... What's the difference?

Some of the network-members from the universities (students from other countries) were a little unsure about their understanding of the different classes and divisions of degrees, but overall they seem better informed than the participants of this study. All English (and English-speaking) network members that are related to Higher Education seemed to discuss degrees with confidence. But the most informative were the interviews with the network members who work at universities. I asked Lynn, Vlad's EAP tutor, if introduction to the classification of degrees was a part of the EAP curriculum. She explained:

No, not of the curriculum, I don't think. Not specifically. But I am sure they are explained... The prospectus, or during the induction week? I am sure, they explain it during the induction week.

Lynn

I also asked Sandra's instructor Chris if he knew how aware the students are of the classification of degrees and its importance.

They ought to know, don't they? But I thought they would already have been told. By the tutors... We do have induction here...

Chris

In order to investigate how different degrees' classes and divisions are being explained to students, I searched their universities' websites, but could not find programmes for induction weeks. Svetlana and Inga retained their copies of the induction week programmes, but there is no evidence that explanation of the types of degrees took place during those periods. Of course, this does not mean that explanation of degree classifications is not integrated in one of the talks or lectures, but participants have no

recollection of it. Then again, only one of the central participants could confidently say that she was present and attended all the induction events.

The consequences of not understanding the classifications of degrees and the grades needed to achieve the desired degree may be very serious on several levels. First of all, it may affect the study process because if the students cannot understand what result they aim for, they cannot plan the study process appropriately and choose approaches for reaching their goals. Such mismanagement is known to be a sign of a 'surface approach' to learning that often leads to poor academic performance (Edwards and Ran, 2006).

Secondly, such unawareness may have serious repercussions for someone like Vlad who plans to make a career in England. As Bratti et al. (2008) show in their extensive research, labour market returns on education vary by academic performance. According to their findings, in Great Britain 'employers will base their choice across candidates on the grade score achieved at the given qualification level: in the case of graduates, this means on the class of degree awarded.' (p. 4). Bratti et al. also find that the type of secondary school attended as well as the students' socio-economic class are strong predictors of the class of the degree that students earn. But these determinates are not reflected in this research. The types of secondary schools in Latvia are too different from those in the UK and socio-economic class is also a contested notion, in Latvian context.

On the other hand, the class and division of a degree may indeed be of little consequence to the students who plan to return to Latvia. There is no evidence demonstrating how Latvian employers read the degrees from abroad, but in my

experience they do not differentiate between the classes of Bachelor degrees awarded in England. In Latvia there is only one type of Bachelor degree and the academic performance of a student is not reflected on the certificate. In order to see what grades have been achieved in the course of study a separate document, a diploma supplement, needs to be consulted. That said, the situation in Latvia is likely to change. Since mobility of Latvian students, especially to the UK, is still rising, more and more Latvians with English degrees are likely to return Latvia to seek employment. This means there will be more competition among the graduates from English universities and employers will have to distinguish between candidates who carry Bachelor degrees from England.

Understanding academic tasks as an element of discursive competence

One of the most prominent issues that the participants of this study mentioned was their misunderstanding of academic tasks. Several participants pointed out that they had painful experiences before they recognized their misunderstanding of academic tasks. For example, Chris, Sandra's instructor, who was interviewed for this research, complained that Sandra did not understand what was expected of her:

I asked for a comparative essay, a comparison of the two business structures... Instead Sandra brought me two poorly-written compositions. And that's in her second year!

Chris, Sandra's instructor

Chris further said that he could not assess that work and had asked Sandra to re-write it. Sandra recalled that incident in a follow-up interview and said that she had not expected such feedback. She claimed that she had always made good grades in her writing. She further explained that she approached the task in the manner she did because she thought that a comparison would be more evident from the two analyses. The instructor, however, expected one piece of writing comparing the two business structures.

In the literature, such misunderstandings are usually attributed to the interference of a different national culture, a home academic culture. However, Sandra could not explain the reason so I cannot rule out that this is an example of differences between school and university approaches to tasks. Whatever the reason, Sandra claims that rewriting that essay caused her to miss deadlines for her other assignments, thus threatening her chances of completing her second year successfully.

Sandra complained to 'the first available person', her roommate. The roommate is a final year Bachelor student from a different department of the same university and she recommended that Sandra make an appointment with her personal tutor to discuss the problem. I could not interview the personal tutor, but Sandra said that the tutor spent an hour with her explaining what a 'comparative essay' meant and that the explanation helped her rewrite the task in a more acceptable format. Through this experience, Sandra developed her understanding of the nature of academic tasks at her university within her discipline. She also learned a wider meaning of the term 'comparison' than she did before, so this answer also contributes to the evidence that students develop their discursive competences by learning smaller units of discourse.

This is similar to some of the examples provided by Brooks (2010) where she uses her case study to illustrate the students' use of social capital. Even though Sandra's roommate does not share the same discourse, she knew enough to refer Sandra to someone in her discursive community. This case demonstrates that development of discursive competence is a socially-embedded practice where the students seek *specific*, not random network members, in this case, members of their discursive community, to seek competent advice. In Sandra's case it might have been serendipity that 'the first

available person' was a member of the academic community. On the other hand, access to the community of students is part of the reason why students are given an opportunity to live with other students and capitalize on their experience (Pationis and Holdsworth, 2005).

There is another example where the data point out that development of discursive competence relates to the understanding of academic tasks. One of the more successful students, Juris, shared that when a tutor handed out printed articles to the class, the tutor asked the students to 'scan the material at home'. Juris literally scanned it in into his computer. In the next lecture, Juris found out that the tutor had expected the class to read the texts, noting the overall structure and meaning. But Juris was unfamiliar with 'scanning' as a reading technique, and even though he did not understand the point of scanning the material into a computer, he decided:

if a lecturer said that we need to do something, we need to do this, not ask why we need to do this.

Before the next lecture some of Juris's classmates were discussing the contents of the articles and Juris was surprised that everybody but him read the materials. According to Juris that particular instructor often asked the students 'to scan' texts as part of their homework, and only when texts for scanning were given in an electronic form did Juris find out that 'scanning' meant a particular technique for reading. It is unclear from this example if the instructor wanted the students to scan the texts for gist or to read for content, but Juris learnt to be more attentive and more critical of the tasks. He explained:

I learnt to think like they [the lecturers] do. I thought that if they want me to know what the article is about I need to read it slowly and attentively, but sometimes they would say 'read' but they only want you to look at it. ... Once she [the lecturer] just wanted us to see the format of the chapter, not what it's about, so I didn't really read, just looked over.

Juris

This example shows that students may need to familiarize themselves with more than subject-specific discourse. This example indicates that they may also learn to differentiate between individual instructors' use of language. Explaining individual use of language may also be the instructors' responsibility, but instructors are likely to be accustomed to their language patterns and may not be aware that they might be misunderstood, especially by the non-native speakers. In addition, this example demonstrates that students become more aware of the fact that different instructors may use the same language with different meaning. This demonstrates transition from conscious incompetence (making a mistake and knowing that it is a mistake) to conscious competence where students purposefully pay attention to the instructors' individual use of discourse. In addition, this case indicates development of another academic competence, critical thinking, because Juris learnt to question and to evaluate the aim of tasks and not just follow instructions.

Development of critical thinking as an academic competence

As explained in the Review of the Literature (4.3) 'critical thinking' and 'criticality' are fuzzy concepts in academia, but are related to students' disposition for enquiry, self-awareness and reflection, analytical approach, depth of study (Gent et al., 1999), willingness to interact with other members of the academic community (tutors and peers) (Richards, 2004), self-development and general positive attitudes towards the study process (Jones, 2005). Due to the multi-layered and indistinct nature of the ideas of criticality, this part of the data discussion is based on my interpretations of what qualifies as the development of critical thinking and how it links to the academic acculturation of the participants.

In the follow-up interviews I asked the central participants if they had developed any *new* thinking habits that facilitated their learning in England.

Interviewer: Do you remember when you said during our last meeting that your thinking has changed since you became a student? ... That you can think about different things?

Inga: Yeah... I said I could think about other things, differently that I didn't know before.

I.: Like what?

Inga: It's that I can doubt things more now and not just trust anything. Before I would search on line and I would just read the first thing that came up, now I look if it's a reliable source or not...

Inga's reaction to the paraphrased question would support Farrell and Yew's (2000) idea that old habits or old academic identities should not be 'replaced'; rather, new English academic identities, should be added. Farrell and Yew (2000) call these 'selves that understand and interpret the world and present information' in their study from a British perspective. According to Taillefer (2005) development of these new 'selves' amounts to development of new academic identities. The development of international student identities seems to be a growing area of investigation. Perhaps, in the future it will be conceptually solid, but for the time being it is not useful for this particular research.

Denis also described the development of criticality in an interesting way:

For me it is all a task of applying formulae to practice. I am not very good at it, but when I fall on hard times with my assignments I just remember that.

Denis (Chemical Engineering)

Besides showing that Denis learnt a specific academic task, this quote might illustrate that critical thinking is not generic but a subject-specific competence. I asked Juris, who studies Civil Engineering, explicitly during a follow-up interview if he had learnt to think like an engineer and what it meant for him. He said:

I think like a student, I think. I think about principles of construction and what it means to me as a student and people around me when I work. I think about what

engineering means to me more often now, but I am still not sure. I think I knew more if I had a job in Engineering but this will have to wait.

Juris (Civil Engineering)

Based on these two quotes, I cannot claim that critical thinking is a subject-specific academic competence, but it might be an interesting direction for further research. The difference between Denis and Juris is that Denis is a final year student and Juris is a second year student. This seems to matter because Denis has been through an internship and Juris is just approaching one.

Indistinguishable from the notion of criticality is the idea of learning. The data from this research seem to indicate that the participants see ‘learning’ differently depending on their year of study.

I studied and studied, I almost learnt that whole chapter by heart, but she [the lecturer] still said that she wanted an analysis!

Inga, 1st year student

I asked Stefany, her final year network member, to comment on this situation. She immediately pinpointed this issue:

‘Learning the chapter’ is useless when the teacher asks you to analyze something.

Stefany, Inga’s housemate, a final year student

Svetlana, also a first-year student said:

Learning happens when I can remember information, right? The teacher tells me what I need to learn ... I learn it, I remember and I know it.

Svetlana, a first year student

In contrast, Denis, who is in his fourth year, defines university learning differently:

To me I learn when I think and when I write reports. It’s hard, but that’s how the new ideas come. You write and then you just go ‘Gotcha!’ ... that feels good.

Denis, fourth year student

Similarly, Baiba, who is a mature, 28 year old second year student said:

Learning is a journey. I look at my 4 year old son and I am thinking: “You know, we are not so different.” It is still a discovery of the world. When he discovers new space he walks around it exploring. And I think we, adults, too, when we discover new thoughts or ideas if it is interesting or useful we explore them and learn.

Baiba, second year student (28 years old)

As hard as development of critical thinking is to capture in interviews, there is some evidence that participants resist a deep approach to learning and rely on coping strategies. For example, Sandra explains:

When I read I copy pieces of text to my computer and use them in quotation marks later, but my instructor says that I need to paraphrase. What’s the purpose? I can’t say it better than they say it. My own ideas are in my words, isn’t that what is important, my ideas?

Sandra

I sometimes think that tutors don’t know what they want. They ask to describe literature in the historical context and they ask why. When I explain why they always ask what my evidence is. I just know.

Svetlana

Sandra does not seem aware that paraphrasing is a necessary and a useful skill, but moreover, she does not seem to understand that one of the purposes of working with the literature is the advancement of her thinking and the development of ideas into arguments. She appears to focus on a single technique (using quotes to support ideas) to answer the assessment demands, the technique that seems the easiest, and she does not appear interested in developing other approaches. Similarly, Svetlana’s responses seems to show that she aims strictly at what she has been told—to explain but she does not seem to understand how to use sources to support these explanations. In the literature, such over-reliance on single technique is one of the indicators of a surface approach to learning, where students might become capable of reproducing information, but it does not advance learning and slows down academic acculturation.

It is interesting that definition of the surface approach to learning corresponds almost exactly to the Dreyfuses' novice level of competence development, where people adhere to the taught rules and have little situational perception or discretionary judgement. At the same time it appears to be one of the 'underwater stones' between levels of GTI competence development two and three. Students who rely on surface approach to learning are aware that they need to develop some skills, but they do not know what exactly they need to learn, how to learn it or they may not want to learn them. Coping strategies may result in a passing grade but Biggs (1999) warns that they do not enhance academic learning in the long run.

There is not enough data to explain why Sandra and Svetlana rely on the surface approach more than other students, but is trying to explain this tendency two similarities came to attention. One is the low grades that both girls have. While Johnston (2001) provides empirical evidence that low grades can cause students to revert to a surface approach, Edwards and Ran (2006) insist that low grades are actually outcomes of a surface approach. Also, there is not enough evidence to support the idea that the surface approach is always ineffective for university education. While the surface approach may not contribute to true learning, it often results in a passing grade, thus advancing the mobile students towards their goal of earning a Bachelor degree.

The second similarity is that both girls gained access to universities in England by using educational agencies in Riga. A surface learning approach and the girls' use of the agencies show a tendency to take the path of least resistance. The data analysis in the section on gaining access (4.2) suggested that the use of commercial agencies may result in mobility but it probably results in poor experiences. By the same principle a

surface approach to learning may bring a passing grade but probably results in a poor educational experience.

Overestimation of the language proficiency

Another issue that is associated with surface learning is students' overreliance on linguistic proficiency (Errey, 1994; Wells, 2005). This was briefly addressed in the beginning of this sections evidence that over-reliance on linguistic proficiency hinders establishing communication with the university representatives. Sandra and Inga were the two participants who talked about what influenced their grades. It seems to them that the grammatical and stylistic correctness of the language should influence their grades significantly. But researchers conclude that UK tutors evaluate content, organization and structure of the written work first, and language only incidentally if problematic (Errey, 2005). This is what Sandra and Inga say:

I think that sometimes English students get better grades because they study in their native language. If I could write English like they can or could write in Latvian I wouldn't have any problems.

Sandra

It is interesting that Sandra's tutor, Chris, was particularly unhappy about Sandra's inability to understand his tasks correctly.

Sandra brought me two poorly-written compositions. I could not assess it. What she brought was not the assignment.

Chris, Sandra's instructor

I did not ask Chris how important he thought the language was in the assessment of Sandra's work, but I assume that if he is like most UK tutors he does not mark down significantly for language errors. Similarly to Sandra, Inga reported:

If I could write exactly what I think I am sure my grades would be higher. My thinking is good, I think, but I cannot find the right words to explain my thoughts in English.

Inga

It is interesting to compare how Lynn, Vlad's EAP tutor remembered Vlad's presentations during the foundation degree course and how Vlad explained his learning process:

Vlad can talk your ears off! And he is very persuasive, but he could not understand that presentations also need to be organized in some kind of format. And not just some, but connected to the aims, audience and so forth. He would just get up and talk and show slides. The slides were always very good, and so were his speaking skills, but no organization. Just all over the place. He refused to follow a format and I asked him to prepare a new one, I think on a couple of occasions.

Lynn, Vlad's EAP instructor

I thought that I had to make myself talk more and I pushed myself very hard. But then I realized that I don't need to talk more, I need to think about what I say first. This is not the case when quantity transforms into quality. This is all about thinking here, not about doing so much.

Vlad

The last response points out that Vlad recognized the need for being more thoughtful. I asked him to elaborate during the follow-up interview and he summarized his thoughts very succinctly: 'working with you brain, not your tongue, as my teacher used to say'.

The three quotes do not provide evidence that Sandra, Vlad and Inga assign more importance to the language than their tutors, because the perspectives of the tutors are unknown. In addition, researchers find that correct style and grammar vary across academic disciplines and tasks (Hyland, 1999; Taillefer, 2005). They find that students' ability to communicate well in academic language is more important for students in Humanities and Social Sciences, than for students in Sciences. Their findings support Taillefer's view (2005) that discourse is subject-specific. That means that part of the academic competences that participants develop are subject-specific competences. But regardless of their subject of study, Latvian students may not realize the difference between learning English and learning *in* English. Such confusion is understandable,

considering that in Latvian schools English is usually a separate curriculum subject, not a vehicle for information.

Overestimation of linguistic proficiency may cause students to adopt ineffective learning strategies because their efforts would be directed towards learning the English language, while instead, they need to focus on developing effective academic and subject-specific competences suitable to the English academic and discursive environments. Moreover, it may make students feel that they are putting tremendous effort into learning but failing to succeed, because their grades do not improve. Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) point out that it is pre-sessional tutors' responsibility to show students how to analyze their true needs for university learning so that students do not waste time developing unproductive skills and abilities. This debate of productive and unproductive skills and competences resonates with the argument on appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in the previous section on socio-cultural acculturation.

Time management as an academic skill

There are many instances in the data when students refer to time issues and particularly to time deficit. There is a body of literature dedicated to time management in academia. For example, Bennet and Piaget (1993) find that use of timetables and peer support help effective planning and ultimately save time. There is little evidence in this research that students develop any of these strategies. In contrast to the literature the participants' responses indicate that in some cases they did not plan their time in advance effectively.

Svetlana explained that she had an essay due, but she felt pressure to work overtime at her job. She had already been given two extensions and was under serious threat of failing the course.

My essay was due in literature and I thought it would be easy at first, but when I started writing I saw that it was awful, simply awful! I knew I think how to do it and I thought about it a lot. I just couldn't find the time to work on it very much then. I sometimes have to work overtime. I mean I got a really good job and if I am unavailable all the time...

Svetlana

These findings are also in line with Hlavac's idea (2011) that some international students are likely to estimate their abilities much higher than their tutors, for instance. She finds that such misunderstandings may lead to insufficient time allocated to academic tasks, which might force the students to revert to surface learning or use of coping strategies that aim to meet minimal academic requirements, but do not foster academic acculturation or learning.

I think that Svetlana demonstrates a tendency to overestimate her abilities to comply with academic tasks, and at the same time, she overestimates her progress because of her misinterpretation of the grades as discussed above, at the beginning of this section. This also supports the conclusions of Kember and Leung (1998), who find that when it comes to time management, students respond to their perceptions of workload rather than to the more objective academic demands. This study does not focus on the contested question of objectivity, but indicates a possible pattern among participants who overestimate their academic progress due to misunderstanding of the grading system in England. Svetlana's response also might show a possible trend among students who make time commitments, such as employment commitments, at the beginning of the semester or even earlier, before they can correctly estimate the time they need to dedicate to their study. Besides, as mentioned in the section on socio-cultural acculturation (4.3) Tracey King and Evelyn Bannon (2002) find that most students who withdraw from college also work full-time.

Baiba provides another interesting example:

Every time I am in England I feel like I need to run, run, run and then I go to Riga and I have to run again only faster [laughs]. The only time for me to think is between, on an airplane. I often read tutors' comments on my work on the airplane and there I can read one line and think about it for 15 minutes. But I also get distracted and have to force my brain to think about assignments, not something else.

Baiba

Svetlana and Baiba both experience time deficits, but these particular answers show evidence of development. For example Svetlana mentions that she thought about her essay but could not find the time to write it, and Baiba explains when and how she finds the time to reflect on her learning. This response supports De Vita's idea (2002) that the ability to focus the thoughts on study experiences helps students evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. This strategy also allows them to divide their time more reasonably between study and other activities. In other words, the ability to concentrate allows students to be more critical of their learning.

In terms of the Dreyfuses' model, this criticality would probably show that Svetlana and Baiba progressed to the level of a 'competent user' as far as time allocation is concerned. This next level is characterized by an ability to see actions in terms of longer-term goals, conscious deliberate planning and standardized and routinized procedures. It is more difficult to explain how critical thinking develops as a competence according to the GTI model. It appears that progression from unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence is only a preliminary step and students receive little guidance on how to progress to conscious competence level. Ryan and Helmundt (2005) among many other EAP (English for Academic Purposes) specialists emphasize the importance of explicit, transparent instruction. But in this research the type of instruction that the participants received is unknown so it is not possible to see to what extent more explicit teaching advances acculturation or competence development.

Development of autonomous learning

In the literature, the problem of time-management is linked to a wider issue, the issue of autonomous learning (e.g. Ryan and Helmundt, 2005). In this research, autonomous learning is not only related to thinking but extends to students' learning behaviours. Interviews show that participants often do not cope well with the autonomous, more responsible university learning style that is expected of them in England.

My tutor told me that I needed to pay attention to my writing. In the assignments, you know. Academic... And I ask if there is a book they can recommend and she said: 'Library's that way.' It hurt my feelings at first, but then I thought that indeed, I don't need her advice, I can go to the library and find books on academic writing myself!

Juris

This response demonstrates that Juris was shown an example of how to be more autonomous and self-reliant. He followed that example and as a result developed a new belief; namely, that he can help himself. Again, from the competence development point of view, Juris progressed to a more advanced level of learning, where he is capable of relating the example that he was given to other similar situations. Crome et al. (2009) also describe an example where a student was referred to the library by a tutor, but the student gave no indication that he had learnt from it. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the student in that particular case, but perhaps he is similar to Sandra in some respects who says:

I don't understand why we need to do things in a more difficult way?! If the instructor would just give us a text to work with it would be so much faster. But, no, we have to go online and *find* our texts we want to compare. It just takes up our time!

Sandra

Sandra does not understand the benefits of finding her own materials for writing assignments, so it is only natural that she would see it as a waste of time. Later when

she started attending workshops at the language centre, she was given a brochure on self-reliant learning by representatives of the international students centre. In this brochure 'self-reliant learning' is used interchangeably with 'self-directed', 'independent' and 'autonomous learning'. The brochure explains that the self-reliant learning style speeds up students' adjustments to the British university culture, but Sandra's goal is not to adjust to the British university culture, it is to earn a Bachelor degree. While she may be convinced that self-reliant learning contributes to her cultural acculturation, she does not understand how cultural acculturation can help her achieve her goals.

Whereas Sandra's motivations focus on earning a degree, Juris has consistently demonstrated more engagement with the learning process. In the literature such interested attitude is recognized as a facilitator of competence development and that includes autonomous learning. This may be the reason why Juris reacted to the tutor's comment in a more positive manner. Not only is motivation notoriously difficult to research, but it is not a focus of this study to do so.

There may be dangers in misunderstanding the role of autonomy in the British academic context. If students doubt the benefits of more responsible learning, the need for autonomy may be underestimated, which results in procrastination and increased stress (Ryan, 2005). Perhaps the discrepancy in learning styles of Latvian and English students can be explained through teaching styles at school. Galina, Denis's teacher explains:

In Latvia teachers tend to control their students, remind them of deadlines, and evaluate their progress all the time.

Perhaps Latvian teachers tend to be more controlling than English teachers due to the differences in the working context. In Latvian schools, there is often only one teacher per subject, which means that they work with the same cohort of students for many years (sometimes as long as 11 years), watching the same students grow, change and develop. They inevitably engage with their students' progress and take much personal responsibility for their overall development and academic growth. Juris describes:

In Latvia teachers call you at home, catch you in corridors, shout at you when they want you to do something on time. In my university in London, teachers don't care if I do something or not, they simply fail people.

Juris

Burgess (2003) and Levine (1996) found weak attention to autonomous development of learning styles when they researched the attitudes of the post-Soviet secondary and high school teachers in Russia. Whilst it is incorrect to equate Latvian and Russian school teaching styles, the two countries necessarily must share some characteristics of post-Soviet educational cultures, so it is likely that in Latvian educational culture attention to autonomous learning is also weak.

University support of academic acculturation

Students of this research have indicated a number of problems that they experience during their university study in the UK that can be linked to academic acculturation. However, UK institutions have taken many steps to ease and expedite the process of academic acculturation. Among such steps are continuous development and upgrading of the pre-arrival information packages; improving the distribution of the packages; organising university induction weeks (also known as orientation weeks); establishing foundation degrees or additional in-session instruction; creating various sources of ongoing formal and informal support; and promoting peer-support.

All of them attended induction weeks. In addition, Vlad, Sandra and Svetlana attended pre-sessional training courses of various lengths. I found no academic research investigating the purposes of the university induction weeks, so I have relied on the extensive searching of participants' universities' websites. I found that most of the institutions describe induction as a period before the beginning of studies that allows students to become familiar with the environment, meet members of the university community and sort out any urgent problems that might interfere with their studies. In this definition, 'environment' means not only the country, the region and the city/town, but also more specific environments, such as university campuses and dormitories. Similarly, the term 'university community' means members of administrative or academic staff as well as the entire student body, including other international students. Even though this definition is broad it does not correspond to the experiences of induction among the participants of this research.

There were two inductions, one was for international students, another one was for freshers. They took place at the same time and some things we did together, others international students did by ourselves. It was supposed to give us an opportunity to meet other people from other countries. I spoke to a couple of Chinese, but it got so busy that I lost count of all the people I met! But it was fun!

Denis

When I realized that I am not going to learn anything about the university or my lectures, I spent most of my time at the uni and at the library trying to meet people. I knew I would need friends, so I thought I would start right then.

Baiba

Now I would use it to learn as much as I can about the university, where things are, who are the people there. I would spend this time making the campus *my* place.

Sandra

These quotes display university induction as an event with a social angle that promotes informal interaction among students, provides orientation within the town and generally gives time for the students to handle the initial culture shock in an atmosphere where

they do not have to perform academically. Sandra particularly appreciated the induction week as a ‘breather’ between travelling and the beginning of studies. Some of the participants expected to spend the induction week learning about the university, but instead the period was spent socializing. Even though some participants did not appreciate it, it was useful because it provided specific time for the participants’ socio-cultural adjustments and gave them an opportunity to establish personal networks. Indirectly, socio-cultural adjustments reduce stress and, in this way, advance academic acculturation.

4.4.3 Summary of the findings on academic acculturation of the participants

This section of the findings chapter answers the third research question of this study: **what competences do undergraduate students from Latvia develop as part of academic acculturation to English university environment?** First of all, the data used in this chapter demonstrated that academic acculturation has no definite time-frames, no rules or signposts that show that acculturation started or ended. The data do not treat academic acculturation as an event, but rather as a process that is parallel to the students’ education and has an ongoing dynamic relationship with it. However, the overarching motivation of the participants of this study is attainment of a Bachelor degree, not merely academic acculturation, so I made a decision to rely on existing research and assume that academic acculturation was one of the processes that promoted the study process and earning of the degree (e.g. Ryan, 2005; Farbrother and Hartwell, 2006).

The participants’ answers to questions regarding academic acculturation point out that academic acculturation begins before the students leave Latvia for the UK. Should the word ‘academic’ be considered inappropriate in relation to pre-mobility stage, I would

still argue that students advanced the following university-related skills and abilities before they left Latvia: communicative ability appropriate to university-related contexts, appropriate level of linguistic proficiency, and affective skills that help students to overcome intimidation.

Participants demonstrate a diversity of developmental paths, but the overall pattern fits the GTI model of competence development. Moreover, it is clear that participants had no awareness of what they needed to learn. It is possible that this incompetence is due the fact that participants of this study are mobile in the first generation and have no easily available sources of information. But to ensure that this is indeed the case, similar research, taking place at pre-mobility level would need to be conducted with students whose parents/elder siblings have experience of international academic mobility.

According to the analysis of the interviews, there are several competences that students develop while they advance their academic acculturation mainly during their course of study: development of academic discourse, and critical thinking and autonomous learning. Since the definition of competence is not well-conceptualized in the literature, there is no proof that the development of discourse, critical thinking and autonomous learning are indeed competences. Based on the definitions explored in 2.6, these concepts are closer to competences than to abilities or skills.

In this study, the development of discursive competence includes developing understanding of degree classifications, grading systems and academic tasks. Moreover, the participants of this research find that discourse can be general academic discourse, subject-specific discourse or even individual teacher discourse. The development of discourse is deeper than the development of language proficiency, but

some participants of this research seem to relate many of their problems to weak language skills and spend effort improving their language skills, whether justified or not.

As part of academic acculturation, students develop new critical thinking habits in addition to the ones that they already possess. Since this study is not designed as phenomenography, development of critical thinking was difficult to investigate. But in this research the development of criticality appears indistinguishable from the processes of experiential learning. The examples that the participants provide include learning to evaluate information sources, learning to apply theory to practice, and learning to be more analytical. In addition, it appears that students also learn to reflect on their learning, to engage with their future professional identities, recognize the origins of new ideas and explore their potential. In the literature it is recognized that critical thinking contributes to a deep approach to learning, which facilitates academic acculturation (Johnston, 2001). However, there may be resistance on the part of some students to develop a deep approach to learning because their goal is not primarily acculturation but qualification, and they do not connect the two ideas.

Related to the ability to think more critically is the issue of autonomous learning. There is strong evidence that participants of this study are not accustomed to autonomous learning due to their previous educational experience. However, it is unclear if Latvian students are unaccustomed to autonomous learning because of the national educational traditions or simply because their previous experience took place at schools, not universities. Evidence in this study indicates that development of a more autonomous approach to learning may be linked to students' motivations. Not all students welcome the idea of autonomous learning. While some (like Juris) seem to be excited by the

opportunities it opens, others (like Sandra) do not understand the purpose of it. The incidents that students describe which seem relevant to the autonomous learning include the development of more effective time-management, and more planned and concentrated thinking.

In the literature, effective time-management as well as more strategic thinking are related to either critical thinking or autonomous learning or both (Bennet and Piaget, 1993). Since the participants of this study talk about planned and more concentrated thinking in relation to time-management, rather than learning, I decided to relate these concepts to autonomous learning and not to critical thinking.

Chapter 5. Conclusions and Implications

5.1 Shift in International Student Mobility research

In the past four years I observed the topic of this research, international student mobility (ISM) gain increasingly more momentum across disciplines. While originally ISM was studied in Migration Studies over time contributions from other fields became more valuable. Now ISM is studied from the point of view of Education, Sociology, Psychology, Network research and even Tourism. Since each field has its own ontological and epistemological traditions, the diversity of research approaches results in a variety of findings. Analyses and comparisons of these findings stimulate an on-going dialogue in the research community. Following the interdisciplinary traditions this study also explored questions of ISM from different points of view.

Particularly noticeable was a shift from study of student mobility as a subset of Migration Studies to study of mobility as a socially-embedded practice. While the two approaches are not mutually exclusive, in Migration Studies the discussions centre around flows of mobile students as a vehicle of human capital across national borders. Even though there are several studies that call attention to the personal factors in migration they are the exception rather than the norm. In Sociology, on the other hand, mobility became recognized as a way to gain personal cultural capital. Especially prominent in this respect are works by Rachel Brookes and Joanne Waters cited throughout this thesis. Working predominantly with UK students they suggest that in view of the deflation of university degrees international education has become a distinction strategy of middle-class British families. This shift relies on the established theory of formative relationship between individuals and their socio-cultural surroundings (Bourdieu, 1986) and suggests using Sociology of HE for the theorization of academic mobility. The theory and the topic bonded so firmly that even distinguished

specialists in Migration Studies, such as Allan Findlay and Russell King (with colleagues as cited throughout this study) pay increasingly more attention to this sociological aspect of student mobility.

As of late I have also noticed that more attention is being paid to the evaluation of research practices in ISM. In summer of 2012 *Research in Comparative and International Education* (Volume 7, Number 1, 2012) dedicated an entire issue to examining the tradition of researching education abroad from the platform of comparative education scholarship (Teichler, 2012; Whalen, 2012). Even a cursory look at the titles reveals that exploration of student motivations, experiences and outcomes of educational mobility remain on the top of the researchers' priorities. The next logical step in research is likely to establish links between these stages of education abroad, identifying how these stages influence each other.

Much work has been done to this end already and the level of scholarship keeps rising. For example, when I began this study, in 2008, few authors in the academic community were aware of the unreliable statistics, vague definitions and lack of methodological or conceptual guidelines in research on international student mobility. Of course, even now these problems are far from being resolved, but researchers are more alert to these issues than before. This awareness changes the character of research on student mobility and establishes higher standards for further work in the area. The change is already evident in the national and supra-national reports. One of many examples is the difference on how the topic of student mobility is treated in Key Data on Education in Europe published by the European Commission. The 2007 edition only mentions overall student mobility without explaining who are the mobile students in question. The 2012 publication of the Key Data series differentiates between mobility facilitated

by the exchange programmes and degree mobility. This change indicates that in the past few years 'student mobility' became an 'umbrella term' that hides a number of related processes that result in education in a foreign country.

One more interesting theoretical direction that became prominent in this study is investigation of transnational social spaces. Work has been done by Kennedy (2004), Conradson and Latham (2005) and Ferro (2006) with populations of various migrants, from refugees to highly-skilled workers. But there are very few empirical studies investigating the transnational fields of international students. The most prominent work has been done by Collins (2008) and Gargano (2009). Their work is analytical and is mainly directed at explaining the theoretical composition of the transnational fields. This research suggests that transnational fields are physical spaces where people from different countries live side-by-side and socialize on a daily basis. According to this research university campuses in England are such physical transnational spaces where experience of education abroad serves as a mark of recognition and principle of bonding among the international students. While host universities regularly organize Open Doors days, where prospective students can visit the campuses, more formal spaces where visitors can meet other students from abroad could be useful.

Participation in the transnational social fields indicates a shift in student behaviour, possibly due to the substantial increase of mobile students coming to England in the past decades. While earlier work, done in the 1990s (for example, see Berry, 1990, 1995), demonstrated that international students tended to congregate according to their nationality and linguistic proficiency, participants of this research showed that they made connections with people based on convenience, gender and commonality of interest (e.g. subject area) regardless of country of origin, nationality or native language.

This finding contributes to research on the English language as the world's *lingua franca*. Linguists notice that most speakers of English worldwide are non-native, and their communication minimizes the importance of language proficiency and maximizes communicative competence. This has implications for the English language teachers and curriculum designers in both home and host countries.

There is overwhelming evidence that decisions and choices of students concerning exchange and degree mobility are grounded in their social networks and are primarily influenced by recommendations from friends. But some students have wider access to these networks than others. This is why creation of new mobile students networks, support groups, 'buddy programmes' should be a priority for the local branches of international student organizations such as the European Student Union who seek to facilitate mobility. Current evidence shows that on-line groups can be just as successful as physical spaces.

5.2 Competence development as part of International Student Mobility

The focus of this study was identification and investigation of competences that the participants of this research develop as internationally-mobile students. Ultimately, appropriateness of using 'competence' in this research depends on its definition, but diversity of definitions is such that judicious choice is difficult. Usually researchers use the definition of competence that accommodates their research purposes. In this study definition of competence by Wood and Powers (1987) was found the most useful. The findings of this research pointed out that participants developed what can be called 'awareness'. But, since no consensus has been reached in the literature as to whether awareness is a part of competence (Deardorf, 2004, 2006) or competence part of

awareness (Mayo, 2009). In this study I use competence as an overarching idea and skills and abilities as underlying elements of competence.

In this study the idea of Key Competences (OECD, 1997) was initially rejected as overly prescriptive and was only cursorily mentioned in the Review of the Literature, but the data pointed to the fact that the idea is relevant and deserves more detailed examination. I found that parents who have been educated in Latvia cannot help with competences useful to their children at universities abroad. However, they transmitted general or ‘key’ competences. Key competences are believed to be general competences that are useful and effective across different contexts and conditions. But it is yet to be established to what extent key competences can compensate for a lack of content and context-specific skills.

In this research general competences that participants acquired at home influenced mobility experience, but their influence was less direct than that of competences developed specifically for study abroad. For example, in 4.4 I argued that communicative competence starts developing at home and continues abroad. So parental cultural capital influences this competence at the beginning, providing a general base -- an overall ability to communicate with other people at a level that is considered appropriate in each family. However, when the participants begin study abroad they develop new competences (for example, subject-specific discursive competence) on the basis of this general communicative competence. These context-specific competences are more appropriate to the new situations and allow international students to be more efficient in their communication while at the universities in England.

One of the early empirical findings was that competence development is a continuing process. Capturing these changing ‘patterns of salience’ (Wood and Powers, 1987) was one of the difficulties in this research but their examination was necessary to show the process of competence development. While many models of competence development were applied to the data, one was found more suitable than others. It is credited to Noel Burch of GTI (1978). Even though the model is known as *Four Stages for Learning Any New Skill*, its principles provide a useful tool for organizing competence development for mobility. Participants of this research rarely gave direct answers to interview questions on learning or development. Mostly they communicated their ideas through examples. It was my goal as a researcher to see what patterns these examples follow and what model of development accommodated these patterns.

In most cases participants of this research started development of the context-specific competences (making specific mobility choices, dealing with daily life tasks, developing critical thinking or autonomous learning) from the first level, the level of unconscious incompetence. For most participants the incentive to seek ways to develop from the level of unconscious incompetence to the level of conscious incompetence was dissatisfaction with the current situation. This development is characterized by the emerging awareness of one’s needs, inadequacies or ambitions. In other words, while searching for the way to become more efficient participants recognized their own lack of competence, and the value of learning before moving on to the next stage.

One exception is the development of language skills. Participants of this research tended to underestimate their linguistic ability and felt pressured to upgrade their knowledge, especially at the beginning stages of mobility. This indicates that language skills are developed from the level of conscious incompetence to the level of conscious

competence. Participants knew (or believed) that they needed to develop more English language knowledge, but they may have actually been wrong. In many cases participants invested time, effort and money into learning the English language while they needed further development of communicative or discursive competences.

I believe that the correct ‘diagnostic’ of the problem is a responsibility of the university representatives, such as International Student Centre representatives or those responsible for the pre- or in-session English for Academic Purposes instruction. Part of the problem may be in using IELTS scores as an indicator of academic English. In 4.1 I argue that IELTS does not necessarily capture the linguistic proficiency of the students and is even less precise as an indicator of academic English knowledge. In order to maintain transparency, recognition and transferability of the results the International Student Centres which provide EAP instruction use IELTS as a common standard. But an IELTS score alone is not a full indicator of students’ proficiency and results from other tests used in combination with IELTS could provide a fuller picture.

5.3 Academic mobility as cultural capital

Another way to capture understanding of academic mobility was to see mobility as ‘mobility projects’ (after Ferro’s ‘migratory projects’, 2006), or as a sequence of processes that results in academic mobility. Separating mobility projects into stages, pre-mobility, mobility and post-mobility, was helpful at first, but the data did not always neatly fit into these stages. One of the reasons is the ambiguity of the chronological frames in mobility. Neither the central participants, nor their network representatives could say when mobility began and, of course, they could not tell how and when its effects would expire. In this sense a concept of ‘mobility capital’ is more suitable. Murphy-Lejeune, who coined the term, sees ‘mobility capital’ as a

subcomponent of human capital existing in parallel and overlapping with economic, cultural, social and other types of human capital. Since mobility is predominantly an educational process, according to Bourdieu it would be seen as a type of embodied cultural capital. As such it is expected to have certain characteristics. One of these characteristics is its ability to be transmitted from older to younger generations.

This direction was interesting in this research particularly taking into account the ‘first-generation’ status of the participants. This research is based on the theory that cultural capital can be developed or transmitted from the older to the younger generations. One of the aims of this research was to see how relevant cultural capital transmitted by the parents is in foreign countries. To this end I tried to compare the participants whose parents have studied at universities at home and those who have not. But the data demonstrated that parental university education did not have a direct influence on the development of mobility capital by the participants. At the same time there were subtle, more indirect connections that emerged through analysis of the interview data. These connections were particularly evident when the participants talked about decisions and choices. In this research this period was largely characterized by finding access to education abroad and by pre-university stages of academic acculturation. One such connection seems to be the development of affective skills or, to put it simply, personal confidence. The theme of confidence is recurrent throughout this research and the overall result is unsurprising: children of university-educated parents are generally more confident in their behaviour. As a personal faculty confidence permeates entire human biographies and its effects are observable in mobility, too. This is one of the indirect links that parental education at home has on competence development for education abroad and others are mentioned throughout the data analysis when appropriate.

All central participants of this research were first-in-the-family mobile students. As discussed in the Review of the Literature (2.7) owing to socio-historical idiosyncrasies parents of contemporary Latvian students could not have studied in foreign countries and therefore did not acquire the necessary mobility capital that they could transmit to their children. That means that their children had to develop their mobility capital without direct help from their parents. This is one finding that can be generalized to the entire population of Latvian students practically, but this will probably not hold true for long. In a few more years children of the first mobile students will be old enough to leave school and make university-related choices of their own. In that case, mobility capital acquired by the parents may play an important role in their children's choices related to Higher Education. Participants in this research and their families remedy the situation by transforming other types of capital into a more relevant mobility capital. This is very much in line with findings on first-generation students by other researchers whose studies took place in their home countries. Several examples are explored in the Review of the Literature (2.4), but none of them took place in the context of education abroad. Rochford and Rosenbaum (2008) find that successful transformation of one type of capital into another helps develop a principle that may be responsible for the immigrant children's high commitment to education. Of course, the immigrant optimism hypothesis may not hold true for the present research participants due to significant contextual differences, but could be a feasible theoretical basis for further research.

5.4 Answering research questions

5.4.1 Answering the first research question

The first proposed question for this research was: **what competences do undergraduate students from Latvia develop as part of gaining access to university**

education in England? According to the respondents three overarching ideas can be suggested as competences that are developed as a part of finding access to university education in England: decision-making competence, competence of making educational choices and skill of managing the application process. In this research decision-making of the participants concerned overarching question about education, such as whether to pursue higher education at the current time or not. More specific choices, such as choice of the country of education, university, subject area and study mode were made after the decision to study at a university was taken. As explained above the extent to which these patterns can be conceptualized as competences remains arguable even though all of them, including the last one, require coordination of inner resources and rest on a number of skills and abilities. In this sense they fit the definition of competence used in this research. However, a decision was made to single out application management as a skill because participants did not need to re-structure their knowledge to fit it to a new context while managing their university applications. According to the data these competences are based on the following skills and abilities.

In this research HE-related decisions were based on the participants' ability to recognize impetus to study abroad, to gather the relevant information and to fulfil prerequisites to education in England. It appears that impetus, incentives and motivations for mobility are present for all participants and change depending on the immediate context. This may mean that impetus recognition, incentive or motivation are attitudes. As such they are implicit in family cultures and are transmitted from parents to children (Gofen, 2007; Rochford and Rosenbaum, 2008). Assuming that people who have studied at universities have more intrinsic motivations for learning, study and education, it is not surprising that children of university-educated parents have similar attitudes rather than the more instrumental attitudes of those participants whose parents have not been to a

university. Clearly, the small sample of this study does not allow for generalization of this observation, but further research establishing a correlation between motivations and mobility experience could fill this gap.

Arguably, there is no ‘wrong’ motivation for learning or education, but motivations and experiences of mobility are influenced by expectations. I believe that in one or two cases participants did not always enjoy positive experiences because they did not have realistic expectations. As a result, when they realized that their degree would not help them reach their aims they grew disappointed, lost motivation for investing further effort into learning and suffered a decrease in attainment. While it is impossible or very difficult to change the overall situation to fit the desires of students, expectations of study process and educational outcomes can be adjusted. Participants of this research developed their expectations of the educational outcomes based on the reported experiences of their friends and acquaintances. Few of them actually talked to the people whose experience they hoped to replicate and their expectations were based on hearsay. I believe that talking to Latvian graduates of English universities could be invaluable help to the prospective students. The organization of such dialogue (either in on-line or physical environment) could be a suitable task for national ESU representatives.

At the time of the overall decision-making participants started to seek ways of obtaining information that would help them make a sound judgement concerning education in England. According to the data from this study, participants employed a number of techniques to obtain and evaluate the information they needed to make informed decisions on mobility. The most commonly-mentioned technique was embedded in more or less purposeful communication with other people, friends, classmates,

acquaintances, etc. Thus, this study agrees with the literature (2.5) that describes mobility as a social practice implicit in the social networks of the participants. So, in a way, experience of mobility may depend on the quality and relevance of the social connections available to the students and their families.

As expected, families with a history of HE have more relevant and useful social connections than families with no HE history. Children with university-educated parents had to make fewer steps towards obtaining reliable information than those whose parents did not study at a university. It also appears that children of university-educated parents employed official sources of finding information whenever possible, or at least attempted to look for the most official-seeming sources, such as the British Embassy and the British Council. Children of parents with no experience of university education preferred to deal with less official sources of information. In my opinion they did not have the confidence to approach the unknown official organization and opted for less accurate but more accessible sources of information.

I believe that at this time guidance counsellors need to be introduced in Latvian schools. Currently it appears that some teachers of English help the students deal with the application process to universities abroad, but they are not always qualified to do so and often do not have time to take on additional work. According to the concerns articulated by the Latvian Minister of Education and other government officials in the media Latvia needs to invest in re-structuring teacher education to ensure that teachers are knowledgeable and competent in contemporary approaches to education, including further education advice. There are organizations that work towards this objective, for example CAREER-Eushop, the Career Guidance Shop sponsored by the European Commission. The objective of this project is to provide EU guidance counsellors with a

common framework of best career counselling services, methods and practices in public and private institutions and authorities, and develop a training programme for career counsellors. Collaboration with such organizations can ensure that students make more informed choices.

But even with the best advice academic mobility cannot take place without certain prerequisites. For example, all students wishing to apply to universities in England need to finish secondary education with suitable qualifications, they need to demonstrate sufficient English language proficiency and they need to be able to pay their tuition fees and associated living expenses. Participants whose parents were university-educated dealt with the first two prerequisites easier than those whose parents were not university-educated. The connection is probably the same as discussed above: university-educated parents are more involved with their children's educational pursuits, they tend to send their children to better schools and they facilitate foreign language learning as they believe that it widens the scope of opportunities (Ball et al., 2002).

Financing education is the only prerequisite that could be actually considered as a 'barrier' to mobility. The literature suggests that university-educated parents are more willing to help with financing education abroad (Hanna et al., 2010). But Hanna's research only takes into account Western European or American populations where the university education of the parents is also associated with higher family income. In Latvia such associations are not necessarily viable and no connection between parental education and parental ability to help finance education in England can be made. What is interesting in this context is that many of the parents had to develop some financial literacy in obtaining personal loans, etc. It was out of the scope of this study to find

correlations between parental education and their level of financial literacy, so I did not ask them about this learning process. But a cursory look at the data did not reveal any differences between the ways how non-university educated and university-uneducated parents dealt with the financial institutions. According to this research families who search for financial assistance should be aware of the time that such a process may take and make according adjustments. Again, dialogue with others who have had experience of financing education in a foreign country could be helpful in this respect.

Choice is difficult to separate from the overall decision-making but in this research such division helped organization of the themes that emerged from the interviews. The specific choices that the participants made included choice of country of education, choice of the university, subject area and mode of study. For the participants the choice of the country of education was associated with expectations and issues of prestige. It appeared that for many students, a degree 'from England' was perceived as a desirable brand. The participants and their families also seemed to believe that most employers at least in Latvia would recognize the degree as such, too. This study did not look into this but in future research it would be interesting to pay attention to the change in attitude of Latvian employers. Even though it is still widely believed that academic mobility is a pathway to immigration to the country of education, a few younger scholars now provide evidence that contests this view (Milligan et al. 2011). If more students educated in England return to Latvia employers will have to learn to differentiate among their degrees. With time a degree simply 'from England' will lose its unequivocal prestige and other criteria such as prestige of the university, relevance of the subject area, class of the degree and professional competences will enter their spectrum.

Financing education abroad and making the degrees more relevant to the needs of the local labour market could be facilitated by the introduction of tuition reimbursement schemes. Such schemes allow private employers to sponsor a promising employee's education, usually in exchange for the contract that obliges the employee to work for the company after graduation under certain conditions. These schemes are practised worldwide and are known to help with educational and professional choices (especially choice of the subject area), help students make more realistic career plans and help them feel more secure about the future. Such systems can help businesses ensure more internationally and interculturably-competent personnel with more relevant knowledge and skills. On the national level implementation of tuition reimbursement schemes has great potential to increase return of the mobile students, to facilitate 'brain gain', to promote internationalization and to encourage development of the knowledge-based national economies. This is also in line with the pan-European agenda of acquiring a more competitive edge in the global arena. Various representatives of the Latvian government have articulated these goals and I believe that examination of tuition reimbursement schemes in other countries and the possibilities of their implementation in the local context should become a priority. This topic was outside the scope of this study and is only a sideline of this research, but further investigation into the area would be timely.

This study does not find a single pattern of choosing a university in England, rather every participant laid their own path. This section demonstrated how first-generation mobile students found information that was new to them in principle. The data demonstrated clearly that while choosing universities in England Latvian students were on the level of unconscious incompetence, or the first stage of the GTI competence

development framework. On this level they have no understanding or knowledge of how to choose a university or what implications this choice would have, but what was more, they often did not recognize the deficit. This is the danger of being on the unconscious incompetence level. Students do not realize their shortcomings and they do not try to overcome them. This is probably why some Latvian students prefer to seek help from commercial educational firms that manage mobility projects on behalf of prospective students. The problem is that students who use these agencies may miss out on the choices available to them.

Only one of the participants chose her university using the league tables, but as she started reading the Keys to the League Tables she found the language too technical and too hard to understand. One participant chose the 'new' university because he did not understand that 'new' related to the higher quality of the physical infrastructure. One more participant chose the degree before he chose a university, so he looked for the universities with the biggest departments in his subject area. Two participants, who used agencies, avoided making specific choices altogether whether they were aware of it or not. Each of these two participants applied to the one university recommended to them by the agency representatives. The recommended universities already have a high proportion of Latvian students and one of the participants saw that as an attractive factor, which meant to her that she would have probably chosen that same university on her own accord.

Some UK universities are more active in recruiting Latvian students than others. Several universities participate in annual educational fairs where prospective students and their families can meet people who work in the admission offices and ask their questions in person. In this research several participants visited educational fairs but did not use

them as a route for education abroad. This research cannot identify a single pattern of how the participants chose their universities in England probably because too many personal factors affect these choices. In this research it appears that choices are made as a process of constant iteration between the desires and opportunities. A survey that involves a higher number of participants might be more suitable for this purpose.

In this research participants chose the subject area that was perceived as either safe (the most Latvian students major in it); easy (foreign language studies, where a student already knows the language); or connected to their professional experience (degree as a competitive advantage in their professional field). The responses showed that online information or the pre-arrival packages for international students did not cover the syllabuses and the prospective students did not make fully-informed decisions about their subject area, course of study and the modules that they were to take. According to existing research, poor choice of the subject area is one of the main causes in non-completion of the degree (Mortimer, 1997; Sam, 2001). Even though in theory students can change departments I found no research explaining if, why or how students change subject areas, departments or courses of study, but such research could provide implications for those responsible for supporting not only international, but home students, too.

The choice of the mode of study seemed to be dictated by the financial situations of the participants. The connection was simple: the less money the participants had, the more they had to earn it and the less time they had to study. Sometimes participants were under pressure to work overtime and even though they would have liked to dedicate more time to study, they were afraid of losing their jobs. However, in this research detailed discussions about the financial situations of the participants or their families did

not take place, because questions about this topic are considered rude. The mode of study was the easiest of choices, because those participants who did not need to support themselves did not work and dedicated their time to studies and socializing. Other students, who needed to work, chose part-time studies.

There is no secret that some students prefer to avoid time-consuming and difficult decisions and choices regarding HE abroad. They are willing to pay the educational agencies who ‘help’ students find access to university education abroad. Participants of this research who used such agencies in Riga described their procedures. Analysis of these procedures revealed that the agencies are in essence third-party recruiters whose main job is to direct as many students as possible to certain universities. The problem is not unique to Latvia and in fact has been a subject of heated debates in media. For example, on the pages of *Inside Higher Education* (23rd of August, 2010 and 25th of January, 2011) Phillip Altbach has said that the only solution to the problem of unethical conduct of the third-party recruiters is abolition of these agencies. Such a strong statement caused a wave of controversial feedback. Most of it amounts to the opinion that the commercial recruiting agencies will exist as long as there is a demand for their services and the best the national governments can do is to lay down professional guidelines for their operations and procedures of control, such as accreditation.

Overall, this part of the research coincides with Philip Altnach’s opinion that the websites of many universities reveal a lack of transparency sometimes bordering on false advertising. Moreover, according to the participants of this research the same can be said about websites that present the league tables and many other HE-related online resources. As far as I know, universities that are interested in recruiting more

international students constantly struggle to simplify their websites. At the same time, they provide the entire wealth of information about the university from a number of perspectives. Perhaps, if those responsible for recruitment would focus only on significant information that has potential to impact student choices they could achieve more transparency. But, of course, more detailed research is needed to investigate the optimal procedures.

5.4.2 Answering the second research question

The second proposed research question was: **What competences do undergraduate students from Latvia develop as part of their socio-cultural acculturation?**

Answering this question revealed a number of conceptual difficulties associated with the notion of socio-cultural acculturation. The literature traditionally divides acculturation into psychological and socio-cultural levels of acculturation. First of all, such a divide was not helpful in this research, because the interview responses showed that the border between the two domains is blended. Second, a few available definitions of socio-cultural acculturation are context-bound and not relevant to the participants of this study. Third, most research on socio-cultural acculturation lies in the domain of Applied Linguistics and is linked to target language proficiency. In this research, however, participants demonstrated that language proficiency mattered less than communicative competence. Therefore, the section on socio-cultural acculturation (4.3) is based on less structured interviews and the analysis is driven by the data, not by the literature. This approach allowed the participants to name the important issues that they encountered during their study time in England. The data fell into three main themes that can be conceptualized as competences: establishing and maintaining social networks, increasing communicative competence and dealing with daily life tasks.

There were two types of social networks that participants were part of at the same time: home networks and host networks. Of course, home networks did not have to have been established, but they had to be maintained. I decided to include discussion of home networks because these data demonstrated that mobility affected the dynamic within those networks. Some of the participants felt alienated from their childhood friends because from their point of view the mobile students have chosen an atypical path that has made them too different. For some participants the choice of the HE path marked a divide between them and their childhood friends who did not go to a university. For those whose friends went to universities at home the migration component of mobility marked a difference.

Recognizing the increasing distance from their childhood friends made many participants sad, but, at the same time, it was one of the reasons why participants were motivated to make friends with other international students, who shared and understood the mobility experience. Brooks (2003b) and Brooks and Waters (2010) noticed a similar pattern among the UK students who study abroad. There are also publications in socio-economics concluding that students returning from ERASMUS exchange notice deterioration of social ties at home (Wiers-Jenssen and Try, 2005). Considering that degree students are away from home for a longer period of time a loss (or at any rate weakening) of social ties is only to be expected. For the participants of this study maintaining the connection with family and friends from home was an important part of their emotional well-being. Perhaps maintenance of the home network does not fully fit the proposed definition of competence, but I decided to include it as a significant element of the participants' socio-cultural acculturation.

Connections that the participants of this research established in England are primarily concentrated in multi-national campus and university environments where ideas of nationality take on a different meaning than they do in other environments. As outlined in 2.3 other researchers have spoken to this effect but I have noticed that participants of this research have a rather neutral attitude to other Latvian students that they met in England. They neither sought their company, nor avoided it. All participants mentioned other Latvian students that they have met but none have made a close friend with another Latvian. This again speaks against the language-based principle of establishing social frameworks.

In this research the communicative competence of the participants was an essential development in their overall mobility experiences. The interview responses demonstrated that the most difficult aspect of communicative competence was learning how to initiate communication. Participants provided examples of their attempts to initiate communication and I noticed that the more successful ones included not only ability to speak the same language but coordination of affective skills as well. In this research affective skills are illustrated by the participants' ability to be confident enough to initiate communication, to overcome shyness, intimidation and risk of failure. Participants of this research often thought that they did not speak English correctly and could not initiate and maintain successful communication. However, with time they learnt that their English was correct enough, but they still experienced problems initiating a dialogue. However, this research does not grasp how much the participants' language skills improved in their course of study, which undoubtedly influenced the success of communication. More importantly, the participants' perceptions about their linguistic ability changed, which was likely to increase their communicative competence. So the interaction between language and affective skills is complex, and

both skills are important to sustain communicative competence. In addition, the participants did not indicate that their communication with native-speakers and non-native speakers was different and this is probably one more indicator that communication does not depend only on linguistic ability.

Participants' responses indicated that communication is a special type of behaviour skills. In this research paralinguistic features that aid communication, such as phrase intonation, facial expressions, gestures and others are considered as parts of the behaviour rather than language. Several participants were aware of having observed behaviour of other people around them and tried to imitate it. Others seemed less aware but they agreed that they imitated behaviours of the people they thought successful whether consciously or not. Imitation was intermittently successful depending on who the participants tried to imitate and who the target audience for such behaviour was. It is interesting that choosing the role models and being aware of the audiences seem to progress from stage one in the *Learning Any New Skill* framework directly to stage four. In other words, the participants started as unaware that they needed to know whom to imitate and for what purpose. During the last set of interviews participants rated themselves as significantly more successful in these skills, but did not show increased awareness about the matters. Probably, such unawareness is a sign of unconscious acquisition rather than conscious learning. But more detailed investigation is needed to determine the principles of competence development.

5.4.3 Answering the third research question

This section summarizes answers to the third research question of this study: **what competences do Latvian undergraduates develop as part of academic acculturation to English universities**. First of all, the data used in 4.4 demonstrate that academic

acculturation had no definite time-frames, no rules or signposts that show the beginning or the end of acculturation. It is interesting that in the literature the *rate* of academic acculturation is an accepted measure of the success of the process. This is understandable because acculturation does not occur only as a result of formal learning and application of learning strategies; it can also be acquired without conscious effort. But mobile students cannot afford to wait while acculturation occurs because they need to start performing at their universities as soon as the courses begin. This, as well as other findings discussed in this sub-section, suggests implications for the universities in England. These implications are outlined at the end.

Some empirical research shows that application of conscious strategies speeds up academic acculturation and is therefore conducive to attainment (Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006). On the other hand, such an approach may give way to misunderstanding of acculturation as something that needs to be cleared away before proper learning can begin. According to this research academic acculturation is more complicated. The data do not treat academic acculturation as a separate event, but rather as a process that parallels education and has on-going dynamic relationship with it.

According to this research academic acculturation began before participants left for England. Perhaps the word ‘academic’ is inappropriate in relation to the pre-mobility stage, but I would still argue that students advanced the following university-related competences before they left Latvia: communicative competence appropriate to university-related contexts, appropriate level of linguistic and affective skills that helps students overcome intimidation.

Participants demonstrated a diversity of developmental paths, but the overall pattern fits the GTI model of competence development. Moreover, it is clear that participants had no awareness of what they needed to learn. It is possible that this is due to the fact that participants of this study are mobile in the first generation and have no easily available sources of information. But to ensure that this is indeed the case, similar research, taking place at the pre-mobility level would need to be conducted with students whose parents/elder siblings have experience of international academic mobility. A comparisons of the answers of this group with the answers of the participants of this research could indicate what part of mobility capital can be transmitted from parents to children and what needs to be developed independently.

According to the analysis of the interviews, there are several competences that students develop while they advance their academic acculturation during their course of study: development of academic discourse, critical thinking and autonomous learning. Since the definition of competence is not well-conceptualized in the literature, I cannot insist that discourse, critical thinking and autonomous learning are indeed competences. But based on the definitions explored in 2.6, these concepts are closer to competences than to abilities or skills.

In this study, the development of discursive competence includes developing understanding of degree classifications, grading systems and academic tasks. Moreover, the participants of this research find that discourse can be general academic discourse, subject-specific discourse or even individual teacher discourse. The development of discourse is deeper than the development of language proficiency, but some participants of this research seem to relate many of their problems to weak language skills and spend effort improving their language skills, whether justified or not.

As part of academic acculturation, students develop new critical thinking habits in addition to the ones that they already possess. Since this study is not designed as phenomenography, the development of critical thinking was difficult to investigate. But in this research the development of criticality appears indistinguishable from the processes of experiential learning. The examples that the participants provided included learning to evaluate information sources, learning to apply theory to practice, and learning to be more analytical. In addition, students also learnt to reflect on their learning, to engage with their future professional identities, recognize origins of the new ideas and explore their academic potential. In the literature it is recognized that critical thinking contributes to a deep approach to learning, which facilitates academic acculturation (Johnston, 2001). However, there may be resistance on the part of some students to develop a deep approach to learning because their main goal is not acculturation but qualification, and they do not connect the two ideas. Plus, some students, especially those under time pressure, do not have time to engage in deep approaches to learning.

Related to the ability to think more critically is the issue of autonomous learning. There is strong evidence that participants of this study are not accustomed to autonomous learning due to their previous educational experience. However, it is unclear if Latvian students are unaccustomed to autonomous learning because of the national educational traditions or simply because their previous experience took place at schools, not universities. Evidence in this study indicated that development of a more autonomous approach to learning may be linked to students' motivations. Not all students welcomed the idea of autonomous learning. While some seemed excited by the opportunities autonomous learning allowed, others do not understand the purpose of it. The incidents

that students describe which seem relevant to autonomous learning include the development of more effective time-management, and more planned and concentrated thinking.

Even though academic acculturation begins before students leave for England it takes place in communication with the UK universities (although at the beginning it can be one-way). But certainly, the most significant developments in academic acculturation take place when students begin their studies. As was mentioned in 4.1 many students receive instruction before the study course or pre-session courses. Usually such courses are provided by the International Student Centres sponsored by a university and supported by The British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP). Accreditation of the International Student Centres is not mandatory. Moreover, students and their families are not aware of the quality of these centres. Additional research can indicate ways in which students' awareness can be increased.

Concluding remarks

I would like to conclude this thesis with the participants' words that summarize their opinions about their experiences of being a mobile student. After all, it is their perceptions and perceptions of other students like them that shape the academic mobility of students today.

I think everybody should do it. Sometimes people need to go away in order to discover what they are.

Baiba

Not everything was perfect, but I am happy even for the difficulties that I've had because having overcome them I became a much stronger person.

Sandra

It was both exciting and difficult. I am still nervous about writing my special project [undergraduate dissertation] but I am really proud of myself for having done it.

Inga

It was difficult and I really wish I knew what I was doing when I started it! But then it was too late to give up and I am glad it turned out this way.

Vlad

I thought that overall it was a fantastic experience. Now, when I come to Latvia I feel like I am among the smartest youth there is in this country -- the people who get education abroad.

Juris

I think there should be a system that lets people go to a university only if it is in a foreign country. I think that the world would be a more interesting place. Then more people would speak foreign languages, learn new ways of doing things and would have knowledge about other cultures.

Denis

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Appendix 1: Tables

Table 1: Latvian-domiciled undergraduate students in English universities

Academic year	Total
2010/11	1 559
2009/10	1 364
2008/09	1 166
2007/08	1 065
2006/07	805
2005/06	495
2004/05	85

Table 2: Latvian-domiciled undergraduate first-year students in English universities

Academic year	Incoming on exchange programmes	Students not on exchange programmes	Total
2010/11	6	1 394	1 400
2009/10	5	1 115	1 120
2008/09	3	1 022	1 025
2007/08	3	962	965
2006/07	3	693	696
2005/06	2	353	355
2004/05	4	81	85

Table 3: Number of school leavers in Latvia compared to the numbers of Latvian-domiciled undergraduate first-year students in English universities

Academic year	Number of school leavers in Latvia	Number of students entering universities in England
2010/11	12 218	1 400
2009/10	17 397	1 120
2008/09	24 932	1 025
2007/08	30 693	965
2006/07	36 674	696
2005/06	41 135	355
2004/05	46 789	85

Appendix 2: Data collection timeline

	PARTICIPANTS	ACTION	OUTCOME
Hilary 2010	PILOT STUDY		
	2 personal acquaintances eligible to be central participants invited to participate in the pilot phase	nominate 1 more central participant for the pilot study	3 central participants for the pilot study
	3 central pilot participants	the participants invite 4 network participants each	3 cases organized
		initial interviews conducted with the 3 central participants of the pilot phase	1 pilot interview rejected and excluded from the study
		2 initial pilot interviews transcribed, translated and analyzed	some changes considered for the interview technique
		interviews planned and conducted with 8 network representatives (4 for each pilot case)	
		8 interviews with network representatives transcribed, translated and analyzed	changes to the interview schedule
		2 central pilot participants invited for the follow-up interviews. Answers transcribed, translated and analyzed	
		development of the questionnaire	final changes to the interview schedule
Trinity 2010	MAIN STUDY		
	PHASE 1: ORGANIZATION OF CASES		
	5 personal acquaintances were invited to participate in the study	nominate other Latvian students in England	168 online 'friends'
	168 online 'friends'	• explanation of research sent to 168 'friends' • criteria set 1 applied • 168 'friends' approach their network representatives	62 potential central participants remain interested
	62 potential central participants	potential central participants are sent research information sheets and participation consent forms	36 potential central participants return signed consent forms
		network participants are sent research information sheets and participation consent forms	• 19 signed consent forms returned • 19 potential cases loosely

	36 potential central participants	36 questionnaires sent to potential central participants	30 questionnaires returned
	19 potential cases	19 cases were analyzed according to the maximum variation sampling	8 cases proved eligible
	PHASE 2: INITIAL INTERVIEWS		
Michaelmas 2010	8 full eligible cases	8 central participants approached for first interviews	8 central interviews were recorded and preliminary analyzed 1 central participant dropped out
	7 cases	28 network representatives were interviewed (4 for each case)	all interviews conducted
		all interviews transcribed and translated	
		all interviews analyzed	follow-up interviews planned
	PHASE 3: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS		
Trinity 2011	7 cases	follow-up interviews with 7 central participants conducted, transcribed and analyzed	
	PHASE 4: CONCLUDING INTERVIEWS		
Hilary 2012		approach the central participants for the last interview	1 participant dropped out
		6 last interviews conducted and analyzed	

Appendix 3: Participant information sheet

Dear Latvian fellow student!

You are invited to participate in a doctoral research at the University of Oxford. This research is on Latvian undergraduate students who study at English universities. If you are one of these students please take time to read the following information carefully and decide whether or not you would like to be a part of this research.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study is an investigation of Latvian students' experiences of university study in England. It attempts to understand principles of academic mobility, motivations and barriers and hidden influences. Generally, the study seeks to reveal what the whole process of academic mobility looks like and what it means to you, as a Latvian student in England.

Why have I been chosen?

This research depends on the information about your experiences that you are willing to share with me. You have been chosen because you said that you are from Latvia, you now study at a university in England and you are an undergraduate student.

What will I have to do?

If you decide to help me with this project, the first step would be to sign official consent forms for the participation in this research. I will email the form to you, but you can mail them back by post, by email or just hand them in when we meet. As the second step I will email you a 1-page questionnaire. At that point I will ask you to nominate some friends and acquaintances that can provide some information on your process of mobility. They will be issued a consent form and an information sheet as well. Then I will schedule a one-hour long interview with you. Next, I will meet with your nominated friends and ask them almost the same questions that I have asked you. None of the information that you will have shared during the first interviews will be disclosed with your nominated friends, but, their information will remain confidential likewise. After some point later I will ask for the follow-up interview (up to an hour-long, but not longer). I will probably ask you some additional questions, or ask to explain something or ask you to give me feedback on my understanding of your situation. Each interview will take place at your convenience between March 2010 and December 2010. I would like to voice record your answers if possible, but if you would rather not, I can keep notes. All the data collected will be password safeguarded on my personal computer for my exclusive access and will not be publically available. In the end of the project all the records will be deleted.

Do I have to take part? What are the risks and benefits of taking part?

It is your decision whether you would like to take part in this study. You can decide to stop participating at any time. You do not need to answer questions that you do not wish to. Every effort will be made to preserve your and your nominated friends' confidentiality so there are no known risks to taking part. Your participation will benefit other Latvians who will become students in this country after you. In addition, taking about your current experiences may give you ideas on how to improve them.

What will happen to the results of this research?

All the information that you share will be used for the purposes of this research only and at the end it will be safely deleted. Whatever your decisions in regards to

participating in this project might be now or in the future I guarantee that it will not affect your social, personal or academic life in any adverse way. I promise that I will be the only person to work with the voice recordings or the original notes. I guarantee that it will remain strictly confidential and your name or contact information will not be shared with anyone. Some results maybe published in academic journals concerned with exploring educational policy. If you wish to obtain a copy of the published results, please inform the researcher. The study will take place over the next two to three years after which time the published results will be publicly available.

Who is funding and organizing the research?

The research is funded and organized as an independent doctoral research project in conjunction with the Department of Educational Studies, University of Oxford.

Contact for Further Information or Follow-up

If you have any further questions about this research, please feel free to contact me:
Anna Wells, Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, UK OX2 6PY.
anna.wells@education.ox.ac.uk.

Thank you and I hope to meet you soon!

Appendix 4: Research participation consent form

RESEARCH PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Individual Mobility of Latvian Students to English Universities. (provisional)

Name and title of the researcher:

Anna Wells, Department of Education, University of Oxford

Contact information of the researcher:

64 Hayfield Road, Oxford, OX2 6YU, UK

E-mail: anna.wells@education.ox.ac.uk

Mobile number: 0794 1520 301

The purpose of the study:

This study is a doctoral research that seeks to investigate principles of the student mobility in Europe, aid conceptualization of the existing research, advance discourse on student mobility and inform all interested parties on the potential possibilities of solving the problems associated with student mobility.

Declarations:

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions and receive satisfactory answers. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without a penalty by advising the researcher of this decision. ☐

I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. ☐

I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored; and what will happen to the data at the end of the project. ☐

I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

I understand how to raise a concern and make a complaint (see [complaints procedure](#)).

Complaints procedure: If you have a concern about any aspect of this project, please speak to the researcher concerned (tel. 0794 1520 301) who will do his/her best to answer your query. If you remain unhappy and wish to make a formal complaint, please contact Dr. Chris Ballinger, Secretary of IDREC for Social Sciences, Social Sciences Division, 75 George Street, Oxford, OX 1 2BQ (chris.ballinger@socsci.ox.ac.uk) who will then direct your complaint to the appropriate body.

Participants signature: _____

Participant's name and surname (printed): _____

Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Researcher's name and surname (printed): _____

Date: _____

Appendix 5: Pilot study interview questions

Why did you decide to study abroad?
Why did you decide to study in England?

Have you considered entering university in Latvia? Why didn't you study in Latvia?
Have you considered education in other countries besides England?
Why didn't you end up going to those other countries?

How did you choose the city where you would like to live?
How did you choose the university where you would like to study? How many universities did you apply to?
How did you choose your course of study?
Why did you think that this would be a good course *for you*?
Who advised you on these things?

What was the most difficult to find out about study in England? What were other difficulties?
What was the most surprising thing that you found out while preparing for study in England?

How did you know that your English is strong enough for study in England?
Did you take a language course? How long did it last?
What did you learn? How helpful was it? How relevant was it to your study programme?

Tell me more about the application process? What did it involve?
How much time has the preparation taken you?

What did your parents think about this idea of studying abroad?
When did you first tell them about this idea? What did they say?
What was your reaction to this?

When you first arrived to England how did you feel?
Why do you think you felt this way?
When did this feeling change? What happened to make it change?

What did you think about the English culture around you at first?
Did this feeling change? How did it change?
What did you think about the English language?

Who were the people that you have made friends with first?
How did you choose to be friend with these people?
Who initiated the first contact? How did it happen? Under what circumstances?

What was the most difficult part of getting used to the environment?
What was the easiest part?
Do you feel more English now? Explain details.

What did you think your university studies would be like while you were still in Riga?
How was it different in reality?
What was the most surprising aspect of your university studies?

What did you think when you received your first homework? How did you approach it?
What did you think of the method of teaching? How effective did you think it was?

What did you think of the modules that you took?
How relevant were they to your course of study?

What is the most difficult aspect of being a university student in England?
What is the aspect of your university studies that you enjoy the most?
Do you consider yourself a successful student?
What did you think a university should do to help you be more successful?

Appendix 6: Main study interview questions

Finding access to universities:

How did you first decide to study at a university abroad?

Why did you choose to study in England?

Have you ever changed your opinion about studying in England? If so why?

How did your family and friends react to your decision?

Why did you choose your university?

How did you know to do that?

Have you ever changed your opinion about studying at studying here?

How did you decide to apply to BS in your subject area?

How much do you like your subject area?

Have you ever changed your opinion about studying your subject area?

Why did you choose this mode of study?

What other options were available to you?

How would you go about making these choices now if you were to do it again?

Knowing what you know now do you think you would be at a different place? (If yes)

Why don't you transfer?

What was the most difficult choice you had to make during this process?

How would you make 'it' easier if you were to make these decisions again?

Tell me about the application process please.

What was the most difficult part of the application process?

How would you speed up the process if you were to do it now?

How did you know that your English is strong enough for study in England?

Did you take a language course? How long did it last?

What did you learn? How helpful was it? How relevant was it to your study programme?

Socio-cultural acculturation

Have you ever been to the UK before that time? Can you tell me about that experience?

Have you been to other countries? What was it like?

How did you feel when you first arrived to England?

What was your most favourite activity? What was your least favourite activity?

How do you feel about them now? Can you describe the change that you have experienced?

Can you tell me about the people that you see the most frequently?

Tell me about your friends here. Who were the first people that you have met? How did you first start talking to them?

What do you do together with your friends?

How are your friends at home different from the friends you met here?

What is your understanding of a word 'friend' (English)?

Academic acculturation

Did you attend the induction week? How useful was it to you? What was the most useful thing that you have learnt or did during the induction week?

How did you feel about your studies at the beginning of the programme?
Did any of these feelings change? What do you think caused the change?

What is the most difficult thing about being a student here? How did you solve these difficulties? How did you know to do that?

What do you think your university should do to help you solve these problems?

What are the main things that you have learnt in your time at the university?
How do you learn?
If a student works: How do you manage both, work and study?

Future plans

What are your plans after you graduate?
How does this degree prepare you for being a professional in your field?
What will your future job involve?
Do you think you will ever study again?
Where would you like to study next?

Appendix 7: Questionnaire

Dear fellow-student, please fill in this questionnaire and return to anna.wells@education.ox.ac.uk. Please circle the correct answers where the answers are provided. Feel free to write as much as you want. Attach another sheet if necessary.

Thank you for your help!

- 1) How old are you?
- 2) Are you a man or a woman?
- 3) What language do you prefer to talk in?
Latvian Russian English Other (please explain)
- 3) What is your citizenship?
- 4) What is your nationality?
- 5) What is your country of permanent residence?
- 6) What is the name of your current university?
- 7) What is your current programme of study?
- 8) What is the name of your course?
- 9) When did your course of study begin?
- 10) When will your course of study end?
- 11) Do you now study part-time or full-time?
- 12) Are you participating in a student exchange programme? YES NO
- 13) What kind of English language test did you take before coming to England?
- 14) What was your English language test score?
- 15) Did you take an English language course at your university?
YES NO If yes, when did the programme take place and how long did it last?
- 16) How are you paying your tuition fees?
- 17) How are you paying your living expenses?
- 18) How many hours a week do you work?
- 19) Have you studied at another higher education institution before? YES NO
- 20) Have you ever studied abroad? If so where did you study and for what purpose?
- 21) Have either of your parents finished university? YES NO
- 22) Have any of your family members studied at a university abroad?
YES NO If yes please explain who and where
- 23) Do you have any family members residing in the UK?
YES NO If yes, please explain who and where
- 24) Would you be willing to participate in a series of interviews for the purposes of this research?
YES NO If no, can you explain the reason?
- 25) List the people who have agreed to participate in the interviews about your experience of study abroad and their relation to you.

Thank you ☺

Appendix 8: Four Stages for Learning any New Skill

	COMPETENCE	INCOMPETENCE
C O N S C I O U S	1 - unconscious incompetence the person is not aware of the existence or relevance of the skill area the person is not aware that they have a particular deficiency in the area concerned the person might deny the relevance or usefulness of the new skill the person must become conscious of their incompetence before development of the new skill or learning can begin the aim of the trainee or learner and the trainer or teacher is to move the person into the 'conscious competence' stage, by demonstrating the skill or ability and the benefit that it will bring to the person's effectiveness	2 - conscious incompetence the person becomes aware of the existence and relevance of the skill the person is therefore also aware of their deficiency in this area, ideally by attempting or trying to use the skill the person realises that by improving their skill or ability in this area their effectiveness will improve ideally the person has a measure of the extent of their deficiency in the relevant skill, and a measure of what level of skill is required for their own competence the person ideally makes a commitment to learn and practice the new skill, and to move to the 'conscious competence' stage
U N C O N S C I O U S	4 - unconscious competence the skill becomes so practised that it enters the unconscious parts of the brain - it becomes 'second nature' common examples are driving, sports activities, typing, manual dexterity tasks, listening and communicating it becomes possible for certain skills to be performed while doing something else, for example, knitting while reading a book the person might now be able to teach others in the skill concerned, although after some time of being unconsciously competent the person might actually have difficulty in explaining exactly how they do it - the skill has become largely instinctual this arguably gives rise to the need for long-standing unconscious competence to be checked periodically against new standard	3 - conscious competence the person achieves 'conscious competence' in a skill when they can perform it reliably at will the person will need to concentrate and think in order to perform the skill the person can perform the skill without assistance the person will not reliably perform the skill unless thinking about it - the skill is not yet 'second nature' or 'automatic' the person should be able to demonstrate the skill to another, but is unlikely to be able to teach it well to another person the person should ideally continue to practise the new skill, and if appropriate commit to becoming 'unconsciously competent' at the new skill practise is the single most effective way to move from stage 3 to 4

Appendix 9: Summary of the participants' descriptions

Name	Gender	Age	Nationality*	Type of university	Academic year	Subject area	Mode of study	IELTS score	Previous mobility	EAP training	Average grades	Parental education
Vlad	M	33	R	'Plate Glass'	1	Computer Sciences	Part time	5.5-6.0	No	Found- ation degree, 7 weeks	≈55-60	Upper second. school
Denis	M	22	R	'Plate Glass'	4	Chemical Engineering	Full time	6.5.-7.0	No	None	≈58-62	Upper second. school+ prof. courses
Sandra	F	19	L	Post-1992	2	Business Admin.	Full time	5.5-6.0	No	Pre- sessional Acad. English, 8 weeks	≈55	Seconda ry school
Inga	F	18	Both	'Red Brick'	1	Business Admin.	Full time	6.5-7.0	Yes	None	≈65	5 and 7 years of universit y
Juris	M	20	L	'Red Brick'	2	Civil Engineering	Part time	6.5-7.0	Yes	None	≈65	Master and Bachelor degrees
Svet-lana	F	22	R	post-1992	1	Russian and Slavonic Studies	Part time	5.0-5.5	No	Pre- sessional Acad. English, 4 weeks	≈50-55	Upper second. school+ profes- sional courses
Baiba	F	28	L	'Red Brick'	2	English Language and Literature	Part time	6.5-7.0	Yes	None	≈65-69	Bachelor degree+ husband MA