International students’ stress

_Innovation for health-care service_

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Abstract

With the trend of increasing international academic exchange, the number of international students in Sweden continues to expand over years. The stress faced by international students has attracted more and more attention from university organizations and the society. This project takes the current mental health-care service for international students at Linnaeus University as the research object. Based on the participatory design and service design theory, challenges faced by the international student health-care service system and improvement opportunities were investigated through a stakeholder map, semi-structured interviews, observations, questionnaires and co-creation workshops among other methods. By introducing participatory design into the development process, an improved mental health-care service system with integrated online and offline information is presented as an example for universities’ organizations for improving the mental health-care service for international students.

Key words: International students, Mental health-care service, Participatory design, Co-creation tools
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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Nowadays the academic exchange among countries is becoming more and more frequent than ever before. As a result, students have more opportunities to participate in international programs for higher education. Because of differences between culture and society, international students have higher risks in facing the challenge of mental-health and well-being while stepping into a new environment. Studying and living without the traditional support from their families is the most common reason. (Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, & Forbes-Mewett, 2010; Marginson, 2011). Due to the increase of certain student population, the living conditions of this group of people have gradually received the attention from the society and government.

Sweden keeps attracting students from all over the world over years because of its welfare and higher education system. Although the implementation of the tuition policy applied in recent years has slowed down the growth rate of incoming international students to Sweden, the total number of international students is still increasing. Among non-EU students who need to pay tuition fees, Asian students are the majority.

![international students coming to Sweden](image)

Figure 1.1: the number of international students coming to Sweden from 2013 to 2017

The increasing number of international students also brings new challenges to the public service system of the universities, especially the mental health-care service. University mental health-care service is essential for solving mental health problem such as stress since they offer professional support. Sweden as a country concerns about the mental health, the government has already started some projects to provide corresponding psychological counseling services for students.

From 2011 to 2014, a project called PSYNK was carried out by the Swedish Government (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs) and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL). This project is aimed at developing methods so that young people with mental health problems, including young adults up to the age of 25, would be given thorough professional help, regardless of the area where they live. The international students were included in the target group, but there was no specific solution focus on the certain high mental-problem-risk group.

In 2015 the Swedish Government designated a new national coordinator on government measures in the
area of Mental Health. The national coordinator will support the work carried out by the authorities, municipalities, county councils and organizations in the area of mental health. The coordinator will also identify areas in need of improvement and promote cooperation between actors (Socialdepartementet 2015b).

In order to improve users experience, services and processes, designers started thinking more focused on the users. Taking final users into the design research process has already become a necessary part (Sanders 2006). Participatory design is one of the design field formed from this thought. The participatory design states that users practical experience would become a valuable resource for improving the quality of design work. (Ho et al., 2011; Ho and Lee, 2012)

Simonsen, Jesper, and Robertson (2013) mentioned that during the participatory design, the participants act as both users and designers for which designers need to understand user situations and learn particular technology on improving the condition.

This study mainly focuses on discussing the possibility of applying participatory design and co-creation tools into improving the mental health-care service especially for international students in universities. At the same time, by investigating and analyzing the current service, the challenges it faces, and the opportunities that exist would be found. Participatory design theory has been used during the process of developing an improved service system and confirming main action and service process.

Linnaeus University is an international university with more than 50 international programs. Based on the data from universityadmission.se, the official university application system of Sweden, the research took Linnaeus University as the study object. During the research process, the working mode and the process of the mental health-care service system can be clearly understood through different research methods applied on various aspects related to the service.

As part of the international master program ‘Innovation Through Business, Engineering, and Design’, the author has an opportunity to work with people from all over the world in a multidisciplinary environment at Linnaeus University. Because many international students around the author complained about their stress during the study life, the author started to think about improving international student mental health condition.

1.2. Objectives

The study aims at firstly investigating and understanding the current situation of mental health-care service provided by Linnaeus University for international students, and analyzing the opportunities and obstacles for improving the related service. Secondly, workshops would be held for collecting data on different needs of international students related to the mental health-care service. By summarizing the result, possible improvements will be proposed.

The project scope is to provide Linnaeus University with an overview that shows the factors that affect health-care service effectiveness in helping Linnaeus University reaching out the international students in need.

The university public service has many internal organizations. Mental health-care service is an important part of the organizations. The main focus of this study is on increasing students' understanding and access to the mental health-care service. Since the complexity and the multiple sources of the international
students’ stress, universities need to prepare different solutions for different situations which take time and has limited resources of public service. The improvement is determined by analyzing the existing service and including users (international students) into the development and improvement process. The research question can be determined as: How to provide a more convenient and quick-accessed service for improving Linnaeus University's international students’ mental health condition through participatory design and co-creation tools?

2. Theory

2.1 International students’ stress

International students are a special group of people since they are as both foreigners and students. Besides the study pressure, international students have to face all the pressure that occurs while being in a foreign country and sometimes in a completely new culture. Even the universities can be well prepared on helping the new international students, the efforts might be not enough or lack in some aspects. According to the Equality in Higher Education: statistical report 2013, ECU, in the UK around 1 in 125 students (0.8%) have disclosed 'mental health condition’ in their university.

Further research in UK, USA, and Australia show similar results: international students are at a bigger risk to suffer from the mental health problem. They also suffer from several different kinds of extra pressure than local students. The researchers aimed at the same problem about international students’ mental pressure which is a general problem among international students.

According to Lisa McKenna (2017) and Rachel A. Smith (2011), the general extra pressure can be summarized into six aspects: Communication barrier, differences in the academic system, discrimination, cultural or religious requirements, family expectation and financial pressure.

Considering the communication barrier, based on Lisa McKenna’s research, despite international students have been trained and tested in foreign languages (for example English), the communication problem still timely happened in the daily life due to the language ability. Situations such as going to a hospital and making phone calls may lead to some difficulties. According to Busà, Maria Grazia (2016), body communication such as gestures can also be different from culture to culture. Despite some of the gestures are shared with all human, many daily gestures may have different meanings in specific cultural environments. Gestures such as pointing a finger, waving, shaking or nodding the head may even lead to terrible misunderstanding.

For the academic system, huge differences can be found in knowledge points and examination forms. As the students receive a fixed type of education in the academic system in their own countries, the new academic system in another country may have an impact on the understanding of the new academic system.

For discrimination, according to Lisa McKenna (2017), international students may face with excluding from the local society. According to their research, in Australia, international students have more problems in making friends with local students. On the other hand, local students also tend to work in groups with local students. Despite local students do not mean to exclude international students in most conditions, discrimination happens sometimes.

Cultural or religious requirements are also one of the largest problems the international students need to
face with. One of the typical examples is celebrations. In their own countries, there may be some special events and customs for celebrations. However, these occasions may not belong to the local culture and the international students cultural or religious requirements cannot be satisfied. For example, Christmas in many European countries and the Spring Festival in some Asian countries have a different date for celebration. As a result, it may results in the lack of sense of belongings and upset the international students.

For family expectations, in most situation, it is an honor for a family to have an international student which means a promising future. However, it is the higher expectation from their family that bring pressure to international students.

For financial pressure, in many situations, international students need financial support for their tuition fee and life spending. In the Swedish educational system, only international students from non-EU countries need to pay the tuition fee for which partly decrease the influence of the financial pressure. However, the life-spending still exists. The financial support can come from several sources such as family support, bank credits, part-time job or scholarship. Spending and earning is a contradiction that brings an extra pressure to them.

2.2 Participatory design

According to Eysenbach, Guenther, et al. (2015), the common participatory methodologies for mental-health design research include community-based participatory research (CBPR), participatory action research (PAR), participatory design (PD), and user-centered design (UCD). The research and design outputs of Participatory design, based on iterative design cycles, are shared between researchers and the users. The participatory design and co-design can directly or indirectly impact the system from the micro level by the data at the macro level of the organization as a background support. They can also promote the information and reform of the system through their solid cooperation. (Huybrechts, Liesbeth, et al, 2017) During the participatory research process, final users, as co-researchers, can participate in research and design processes through reflection and disclosure. Different viewpoints are brought together into new achievements through this mode which is called "cooperative research". (Graham, Tanya, et al. 2014) The participatory design can be practiced by co-creation tools such as co-creation workshops.

2.3 Service design tools

Service design tools are a series of design methods aim at solving service design tasks. According to Ostrom et al. (2010), Kimbell (2011) and Wetter-Edman et al. (2014), service design is mainly a study field about consumption experience and evaluation of the touchpoints that occurred during service development. As a core factor, the identification of touchpoints and the understanding of user experience determine the success or failure of service design. (Payne, Storbacka, and Frow 2008; Teixeira et al. 2012).
3. Methodologies

3.1. Research design

Johnson, Andrew, et al. (2015) described a method by participatory design and service design on understanding and exploring teachers and students potential demands on university library service without taking the resources from physical library. Based on their project, by applying participatory design and service design, they clearly identified the current role of the library with visual results completed by the participants. At the same time, they carried out the principle for the new library service for which meet the students and the teachers real needs. Their research proved the possibility of introducing participatory design and service design into improving universities public service which is a strong basement of the research in Linnaeus University.

In order to take the advantage of participatory design and practice the theory on solving real tasks, the main purpose of this study is to explore the possibility of importing participatory design and co-creation tools into the improvement of mental health-care service for international students at universities. For this reason, participatory design and service design was clearly defined as the methodology.

Because of the sensitivity of psychological problems, the voice from the target group is valuable but hard to be heard. Before the end of the design research process, the co-creation is made among the professionals and the users. The users’ voice is directly imported into service with the guidance of the professionals. The co-creation will be both the design research method and the guidance of designing the service since a co-creation workshop is held for collecting the material for final design work.

3.2 Data collection

Because qualitative research can clearly show the trend of complex problems and provide guidance for later designs, qualitative research is applied for data collection. The data collection process is made based on the following methods: stakeholder map, questionnaire, observation, semi-structured interview, and co-creation workshop. All these methods can clearly show the gap between university mental health-care services when trying to reach out international students' from the perspectives of international students' real needs, the reality of school work, and the connection between related organizations.

**Stakeholders map** is made to guide the research. According to Bella Martin and Bruce Hanington (2012), it is an effective method of visualizing the relationship between key constituents and setting the stage for research and design project. In this research, it is formed by reading the school's existing guideline for international students and interviewing related university staff. It is mainly to describe the main organizations or individuals that affect the mental health-care service of the school. It is also one of the main facts for drawing the service map.

**Questionnaires** are very suitable for collecting the common viewpoints of the target population. Based on Bella Martin and Bruce Hanington’s (2012) explanation about the questionnaires, well-structured questionnaires with good judgment in wording can receive better results by taking the advantage of the software and online services. Therefore, online questionnaires among international students can directly collect general opinions of international students on common stress problems and their understanding about the situations.
Observation is an efficient way of collecting the real user effects in the service. According to Bella Martin and Bruce Hanington’s (2012), observation can be applied in different degree of formality based on the prepared questions. Since it allows unexpected events, this method can be a good opportunity for designers solving problems in a new way. The designer is able to clearly understand the weaknesses of the service by observation. At the same time, it deepens the designer's understanding of user behavior in the service. This method is one of the main factors for determining the gap and influencing the service design.

Semi-structured interviews are applied for important stakeholders. Martin and Bruce Hanington’s (2012) explain the method as a direct contact to people related, aimed at collecting personal accounts of experience, opinions, attitudes, and perceptions. As a time-consuming and quality-assured research method, semi-structured interviews can be used for deeper understanding the service system. By setting brief contents of the interview, it ensures the relevance of the interview results to the research and freedom.

Co-creating workshop is the last and most important part of the participatory design research. International students, as the main participants, send the voice of users to designers through the workshop. Then, the designer carries out a more user-friendly service by collating and professionalizing the results of co-creation. The feasibility of introducing participatory design can also be verified through design output.

User journey map is one of the most direct ways for visualization in order to understand users’ experience of using such service. Bella Martin and Bruce Hanington’s (2012) mentioned it is a method that tells a story about how users act, feel and think in a certain service or using process. In the user journey map, each step would be considered in the order of the service flow. All the situation the user may face with can be found in the user journey map. It is also a clear way of showing the relationship between different parts of the service system. This method is used for mapping out how the service would be improved.

4. Research and analysis

4.1. Research framework

According to the theoretical and methodological studies, a research framework was developed. This framework contains several different research methods for different parts of the research.

In order to understand the reality as much as possible and look for possible breakthroughs, the research methods are applied with different aims.

Although the research is defined as a qualitative research, quantitative background data is still an indispensable factor. The questionnaire is still an important method to provide background data support. Through questionnaires, international students’ basic characteristics and cognitive level on mental health-care service are collected.

Semi-structured interviews and observations are co-existing as two factors for face-to-face research. Through interviews, various organizations’ real working situation can be understood and their points of view on international students' mental health-care services can be collected. Interviews with international students are combined with observation methods. Not only through the talking, but also through practical
actions to understand the behavior of international students.  
Through the way of co-creation workshops, it allows international students to think and demonstrate their real needs in a highly interactive environment, providing direction and materials for designers' improvement.

4.2 Research application  
4.2.1 Semi-structured interview  
The respondents' real beliefs can be found from the interview. However, it is more time-consuming, so the interviewees are set as Student Welfare office (SWO) and several international students on the campus in Växjö.

1) Student Welfare office (SWO)  
Based on the international student guidance published by Linnaeus University, student welfare office is one of the most important parts in the mental health-care service. In order to get the first-hand research resource, interviews are applied as the main method.
The semi-structured interviews to the Student Welfare Office include three sections: about their current work, about international students’ condition and the outlook for the future improvement. The time spending of the interviews are planned as 1-1.5 hours. Each section takes about 30 minutes for ensuring enough questions and quality of the answers.
This interview is mainly to confirm the working content of the Student Welfare Office and to understand the status of the students in the eyes of the relevant organizations. At the same time, through the prospect of their future work to explore possible improvements.
The interviewee is the welfare officer of Linnaeus University. Based on the description on the university website page about the student welfare office’s working range:

'We work to promote physical and mental health for our students. We offer free individual counselling to aid you with any problem that may make your studying or student life difficult.'

The office is working on solving Linnaeus University students’ problem, especially on mental issues. According to the description of the welfare office’s work, for those who try to contact and meet with the student welfare office to talk about stress issue, about 10% of the visitors are international students.
Based on the statistics from the Linnaeus University, the international students are about 900 while the total number of students is around 14000 which means the percentage of international students only takes about 6% of the total student number. The comparison between the percentage of International students of Linnaeus University and the students asking for help on mental issues shows that international students in Linnaeus University have a higher rate on facing with mental health challenge than local students. The officer also mentions that there are few differences between free movers and exchange students.
When it comes to the activities the Student Welfare Office, the officer mentions monthly events, promotion during the special day (such as orientation day and welcoming day, etc.) and the introduction on the website page. The monthly activities include ‘Relax your mind’ and ‘open workshop’ for which
attract students at the top amount as 30 and 7-8 in average. The number of participants proves the necessity and effectiveness of the activities, and the officer also believed that having more forms of activities would attract more students to face and solve mental health problems in a more professional way.

2) International students

Student A is an exchange student from Japan. She has been in Sweden for nearly one year. According to her description of mental health in schools, the following are mainly included:

Her main stress comes from learning and expectations for the future. Due to the huge differences in the education system, her studies in Sweden often cause her to feel a surge of stress, especially near the end of the course. Due to the time cost and economic cost of her international study, her expectations for the future have also correspondingly increased. The increase in goals brings more pressure to her at the same time with motivation.

She says that she has never used mental health-care service of Linnaeus University. When it comes to whether she understands the mental health-care service system, she says that she knows that the school has this type of student service but does not know exactly how to look for them.

At the same time, she also mentions that under the cultural context of Asia, psychological issues are considered to be weak at certain times. Therefore, if she is able to resolve her own stress, she does not want her own stress known by others.

When it comes to whom she would tell mental pressure, she says that her family and friends from Linnaeus University were the main targets. Due to the time difference, family support cannot be as timely and effective as friends. Friends are more of their own peers and have a better reference for similar issues.

Student B is a master student from China. He has been in Sweden for 1 year. According to his description of his own situation, in general, there is no over-stress. When it comes to the peak of stress he has faced during the international study, he mentioned that the study pressure once caused an excessive pressure at the end of the last semester. According to his description, the case happened during a group assignment. At the end of the previous semester, the differences between the team members' ability let him down. In order to guarantee the learning result, he had to undertake much more work than individual work.

He also mentions family’s expectation as a source of pressure. His family hopes that he can be an ordinary person and live an ordinary life. However, he believes that families have to bear a lot of economic pressure for his international study. So he needs to work harder on learning and working for his family.

For relieving stress, he achieves that through understanding himself and his hobbies. He shares his experience during the corridor dinner with his friendly neighbors for which are his close relationship during study life.

When talking about student mental health-care service, he clearly states that he would ask the International Student Office for advice. But he does not know exactly who to look for or which organization provides such service.
**Student C** is a Master student from Russia. She has been in Sweden for 1 year. According to her description of her own main stress source, it is more about the cost of living which belongs to the financial pressure. Since she is living with her husband who is currently studying for Ph.D., they need to face living expenses during the studying. She gains financial support through part-time work.

When asked if the language is a source of stress, she directly says that although there is a short period of adaptation just after the arrival, the language should not be a main source of stress after a period of time. She also mentions the cultural differences. As in many cultures, people have to pretend to be strong. They would be described as weak if they show their stress to others.

When it comes to her understanding of the university mental health-care service system, she says that although she knows the existence of the service, she knew little about it. And she did not have any experience in using the current system.

4.2.2 Stakeholder map

A stakeholder map can clearly show the relationship between stakeholders and the organization that may be involved in the service system. Research about the work of different organizations can clearly show the routine when the international students facing mental pressure and trying to get help from the school’s organizations. The path of time and possible gaps are where the improvement should be made.

By combining the results from different research methods, the stakeholders’ map gradually formed. When making stakeholders map of International Students’ mental health-care service system at Linnaeus University, the number of stakeholders is big and the relationship between the stakeholders is complex. Therefore, the information layer method is adopted in the visualization process. The stakeholders' map can mainly divide into three layers:

The first layer is the basic stakeholder map. In this layer, only the relationships between stakeholders or people groups are listed.

![Figure 4.1: the first layer stakeholders map](image-url)
The second layer is the service map. In this layer, the mental health-care related services for international students provided by relevant organizations are listed. It is clear that student Union is more focus on student activities and projects. While international student office takes in charge of study recording and general registration work. The Student Welfare Office is the organization directly working on international students’ mental health issue.

![Figure 4.2: the second layer stakeholders map](image)

The third layer is the service flow map. In this layer, the core mental health-care service and the main flow of mental health-care service are specially marked in order.

![Figure 4.3: the third layer stakeholders map](image)
Through the progressive position of three-layers stakeholders map, the core part of the mental health-care service system is clearly visualized for which become the basement of the following user journey map and the system map.

4.2.3 Questionnaire
The questionnaire is mainly formed in the online platform, using the Google questionnaire platform to produce and publishing the questionnaire in related groups of students on Facebook and other social platforms to attract international students and local students of Linnaeus University to participate in the research process. Since the study is applied as a qualitative research, the questionnaire, one of the main methods for quantitative research, is mainly used as background support for design research with countable data of international students in Linnaeus University. Therefore, the main goal of the questionnaire is to understand the basic situation and characteristics of international students of Linnaeus University.

![Survey about international students pressure](image)

Figure 4.4: the screenshot of questionnaire

The questions in the questionnaire mainly include the common characteristics of international students, the attitude to psychological stress, the degree of understanding and applying of mental health-care service, and the different treatment methods for different psychological pressures.

In order to collect more views from different Linnaeus University students about the international student mental health issue, the questions become different based on the different answer in the previous question. When the participants are local students, the questions are mainly focused on the mental health condition of the international students they knew at Linnaeus University.

The questionnaire eventually receives 48 valid feedback, of which 41 come from international students at Linnaeus University. The remaining 7 come from local students at Linnaeus University. Regarding the source of stress, 35 international students share their own sources of stress. At the same time, 26 students answer the questions about the stress source on international students around them. Although there are differences in the order of precedence, the top four sources of pressure are exactly the
same: differences in academic systems, financial pressures, loneliness, and communication barriers. The differences in academic systems take the top position of the pressure source. Among the 48 students who participate in the questionnaire survey, only 12 of them have a clear understanding of the mental health-care service system at Linnaeus University. However, 20% of students know nothing about mental health services. The majority of participated students (41) do not have experience on mental health-care service system. 77.1% of participants believe that the Linnaeus University mental health-care service system needs more channels. At the same time, 50% of participants consider that the mental health of international students’ needs special attention. When it comes to mental health-related activities that they have taken part in, among the 20 people who respond the questions, 13 of the answers refer to Student Union's activities and projects. By ranking the key factors that may influence the mental health-related activities, students of Linnaeus University believe that high interaction, knowledge from the activities and feedback on the results are the top three most important factors. At the same time, more than half of participants believe that online and offline activities are equally important. The majority of participated students show their concern about mental health services and activities. Only 4 participated students are not interested in participating in related services and activities in the future.

4.2.4 Observation
The observation is made by giving a task to the participants of the observation. The task is to find out the right way of connecting with the mental health-care service provided by the university. Due to the complicated structure of the school website, international students can only understand their mental health-care service through the search for keywords: student welfare. According to the observation with more than 10 international students of Linnaeus University from various countries, the students participated in the observation can rarely find out the right way of reaching out the mental health-care service directly, even for those who have already known Student Welfare Office provides such service. The information on the website pages is listed in both English and Swedish. For the language the students used as the keywords for searching, they use English in most cases. Although the international students have already completed the English language training before coming to Sweden since many of them are not native English speaker, the meaning of the English keywords for searching may have a gap with the real meaning that they try to search in the system.

4.2.5 Co-creation workshop
According to Pennie Frow (2016), traditionally, health care provision has been regarded as a process through which patients passively receive care from service providers. However, patients can become active contributors to their health-care outcomes, and there is evidence that supports the benefit of a patient-centered approach to health solutions. Comparing with the general health-care, the mental health depends more on the person’s own feelings. Knowing the reason for the feeling is the first step. In order to solve the mental health issue for a certain group of people, the understanding of the reason and source is not the most essential, but the way that is acceptable to the target group. By including the target audience into a co-creation process, they are able
to maximize their ability to draw out their needs and the most acceptable ways.

As an important part of co-creation, the workshop, by setting the theme so that participants (mostly international students) incorporate their own opinions into the workshop's results, will guide designers in discovering the existence of gaps and innovative solutions.

![Welcome!](Welcome.png)

**Figure 4.5: Screenshot for introducing co-creation workshop**

The co-creation workshop attracts 8 international students from Linnaeus University. The workshop took about 1.5 hours on different activities. Starting with writing down their own stress source, the participants made a discussion on how to solve the pressure problem with many innovative ideas.

The participants shared their different individual stress source including language barriers, academic pressure, loneliness, climate, career planning, etc. During the discussion, the participants reach agreements on cultural exchange, cooking food, parties, and academic assistance.

![Some of the results from the Co-creation workshop](results.png)

**Figure 4.6: Some of the results from the Co-creation workshop**
4.3. Analysis

Linnaeus University is working in many fields to ensure international students better integrating with local life in Växjö and Kalmar. The process can be described as preparation for coming and adaptation after arrival. In preparation for coming, Linnaeus University has an official guidance for international students from all aspects of university life and other aspects of the future study abroad. The university makes full use of the close relationship between the Student Union and the students. Members of the student union with the same nationality can answer the new students’ questions by telephone communication.

When it comes to adaption after arrival, Linnaeus University has a clear introduction about student welfare on its official website for which including a special section on mental health issues for international students. At the same time, the university has offered online students psychological counseling and advice through online lifestyle tests. Mental health-related activities for international students are also held monthly and international students who are feeling under pressure are encouraged to participate.

By comparing the results of the questionnaire and interview, although Linnaeus University has established mental health-care service, the students' understanding of the system is limited. According to the description from Student Welfare Officer, international students have a higher frequency of using the system than local students, which proves their larger demand on mental health-care service system. On the other hand, most students think that the mental health service system needs more channels to solve! the gap between the service and the demand.

By comparing the stakeholder map and further analyzing the service flow of mental health services, the progressive service content and timely involvement of related organizations can be found during the service. Therefore, the gap between the service and the demand does not exist in the service itself but exists in the system entrances that the user groups (international students) can understand for reaching out the service system. In another word, the gap that needs to come cross is about how to help the mental health-care service reaching out the international students in a better way.

The questionnaire shows that the mental health-related projects and activities the international students are familiar with, mainly come from the International Students Union. According to the stakeholders’ map, the International Students Union provides activities for international students to enrich their campus life, rather than providing professional psychological counseling and other professional services. However, these repeatedly mentioned activities confirm the important role of the International Student Union in the stakeholders’ map. At the same time, the relevant activities of the International Student Union are one of the key factors in improving and integrating the system.

For the Student Welfare Office which is the core of the mental health service system, their work mainly is to help students get a better solution to their emotions when faced with stress. At the same time, they also provide consulting services and contacting related organizations if it is necessary. For their current promoting channels, the service is promoted through official websites, welcome packages, monthly activities and the events during the Orientation day. That means the daily promotion is quite weak except every year’s September. As new students have to accept and process big amounts of information when they enter the university, students’ understanding of the mental health-care service system would be
limited. For the international students who have larger needs for mental health-care service, their busy hours would undoubtedly cause serious limitations and influence on their understanding of the mental health-care service system because of the amount of information as well as the time spending for adapting to a completely new environment. For most students, the peak stress tends to occur at the end of their courses, which is in the middle of the semester or at the end of the semester. However, the promotion of related health-care service during this time period is not frequent, which is also result in students’ lack of understanding of the system. Therefore, the design project needs to keep the focus on how to allow international students to reach out relevant information and service more frequently and more easily. Based on the research, the current mental health-care service system map was made.

Figure 4.7: Current service system map

After completing a series of research with different methods and aims, as well as summarizing relevant research results, the co-creation workshop is planned as a research method for which international students are placed as the main participants. The Co-creation workshop takes participatory design as the main theoretical support in this part of the study since it has both the role of being a research method and a useful tool for creating the design outputs. The Co-creation workshop is carried out after the research in other methods, since the co-creation workshop, as a research method, needs to have a more clear purpose before the real application.

Through direct contact with more international students and setting up team activities, international students from different countries have created many creative ideas in cooperation. Besides, the storytelling step leads the participants into creating complete, authentic and interesting international students stories in a relaxed and pleasant environment with a highly interactive game. Through the stories told by the participants, the Linnaeus University international students’ pressure sources were reconfirmed.
5. Project

5.1 Service Framework

In the design project stage, based on the research analysis, the service design focuses on expanding the entrances of the service to obtain more convenient and quick-accessed international students' mental health services.

![Diagram of service framework](image)

Figure 5.1: Sketch about possible service

When the participatory design is introduced into the current system map, it will bring a lot of voices of users to the system. Although many of these voices are not directly aimed for improvement of the service, it does reflect the real demands of the users (international students of Linnaeus University). Guiding participants into discussions and interactions, they can exchange some experience with each other and get advice from other participants for which including international students and people with a professional background. Their experiences during the activities will later become part of the service. The new service system map is as follows:
The new service system integrates online and offline service portals. By taking the advantage of online service high diffusion and offline service high interaction, the number of service portal users is mutually increased. The red solid box in the improved system map represents a new service portal, and the red dotted box represents improvements of the existing service portals. The new services include Co-creation workshops and an APP for Linnaeus University international students’ life. The improvements of the existing service portals include the contents in the welcoming package and the official website.

In order to develop the improved service, a series of Co-creation workshops need to be held on campus first. By attracting students’ attention, they can participate in the service development process and provide the first materials for the new service system. The results obtained from the workshops will then be screened and edited before becoming the contents of the new welcoming package, official website page, and the APP.

The new mental health-care service system starts working after the international students confirmed the admission results. Before coming to the campus, international students can easily get information about related service through the official website page. After the arrival, they can read the improved brochure to learn about mental health-care service, related event information, and download links for the APP, when they receive an improved welcome package on the Orientation day. The APP provides activity information, campus forums, and stress-tracking service. The APP makes it possible for international students to gradually understand and become more familiar with the mental health-care service. International students can get the information through different channels and participate in Co-creation workshops organized by the Student Welfare Office staff. In these activities, they can get mental health advice and share their own stories in highly interactive workshops. These real stories from international students will soon become the main contents of the APP and the brochure in next year welcoming
package with participants’ permission. Since all the portals in the improved service system are connected, the international students can get information from one portal to another. For example, international students can get the introduction about the Co-creation workshops on brochures while they can get the workshop time on the website page and the APP. To sum up, introducing participatory design into the service will bring a large number of interactive elements into the system. Participants can not only get advice from mental health-related activities but also share their experiences with other international students in need. Activities such as Co-creation workshops collect material for the mental health-care service while the welcoming package and the online platforms (including the website pages and the APP for Linnaeus University international students’ life) attracting more people to participate into the maintaining and improving the mental health-care service system.

![User journey map](image)

**Figure 5.3: User journey map**
5.2 Improvement 1: Co-creation workshop

The Co-creation workshop is the first step of the mental health-care service improvement and it is also one of the most important parts of the new service system. Based on the participatory design theory, it provides an important participation portal for new mental health-care service system.

The participants of the Co-creation workshop are mainly international students. People who can provide professional help also need to be included in the process. The process principle for the Co-creation workshop can be summarized as follows: Sharing-Reflecting-Creating. In detailed, participants share their stress and related cases anonymously and get suggestions from other participants. Then, the participants create stories based on their own experience with the provided materials and communicate with other participants.

The project in the thesis provides one plan for holding the Co-creation workshop. And it was tested among 8 international students of Linnaeus University. The co-creation workshop mainly consists of two parts:

Step 1: Tell about your own solution for your stress

![Image](image.png)

Figure 5.4: Step 1 Know your pressure source

In this section, each participant is firstly given 10 minutes to think back on how his or her own stress during the international learning process. After that, they are asked to write down the main sources of stress and rank the strengths. Then, they are asked to write down their solutions. Finally, the participants’ papers are stick to a large piece of paper and participants discuss the results.
Step 2: Create a story comic about mental health based on your own experience

In this section, the participants are given many clip arts and stickers. They are asked to pick up one of the typical stories from their study life. They are given 30 minutes to conceive and use the material in front of them to create comics and write lines for characters.

In order to get the best results, the preparation needs to include location selection and material preparation. Considering that the Co-creation workshop is mental health-related activity, the place for the workshop needs to be quiet and relaxed. Since the workshop involves posting and sharing notes, the place needs a whiteboard or a blackboard. At the same time, since hand making activity is included, it is necessary to have a large table and comfortable chairs. In this project, the living room of a student corridor is selected. If conditions permit, the group-work rooms in campus facilities are also places that meet the requirements.

According to the contents of the Co-creation workshop, the following materials need to be prepared in advance: glue sticks, tape, scissors, colored paper, clip art, stickers, specially produced forms, markers, snacks, and drinks.
The entire workshop is planned to take about 1.5 hours. The first step takes about 40 minutes. Ten minutes are used for thinking and sorting. 10 minutes are used for completing the form, and the remaining 20 minutes are used for discussion. The second step took about 50 minutes. The creating of comics takes 30 minutes. The remaining 20 minutes are spent for the presentation. After completing the above steps, the participants will make a short discussion and get some suggestions from the others. Because of the participation of staff with professional knowledge into the workshop, the quality of the suggestion is guaranteed. The comics will be created for which providing material for the other portal in the mental health-care service.
5.3 Improvement 2: The University official Application; Life in Linnaeus University

In order to better integrate service resources, provide solutions for international student stress issues and improve the quality of international students campus life, an APP named as Life in Linnaeus University is developed as a new service portal. The software is positioned as an on-campus student life service and information platform which is officially released and managed by Linnaeus University.

![Figure 5.7: Life in Linnaeus University APP](image)

5.3.1 Function

The APP has three main functions: stress-tracking, events information, and campus forums.

1) Stress-tracking

The APP has a timely notification asking users about the feeling of stress and recording the answer regularly. After a period of time, the data is accumulated and the stress level statistics are collected. The user can know the recent mental pressure change by observing the curve and predict the incoming stress. When a number of pressure values exceed a specific range within a short period of time, the software would remind the user for stress situations and provide the user with mental health-care organizations contact information. Since users log in with their student account for which is linked with the email box, the user can directly send an e-mail to the organization and get in touch with the service by clicking the contact information.
2) Events information

The Events section has the function of listing information about incoming events which are held by university organizations. Since university organizations are in charge of updating their own activities on this official platform, it is a one-stop information platform which is authoritative and more convenient. With this official information platform, students do not need to turn to various social platforms to get relevant information. It can also help the user adding events to the schedule and setting reminders with a simple operation.
3) Campus forums

The campus forum function was established to help to solve international students' common issues. The establishment, expansion, and improvement of the forum function are mainly based on the participation of international students, which means the design of the forum section is also based on a participatory design theory. According to the result of the co-creation workshop, this area is mainly divided into six theme sections.

![Figure 5.10: screenshot of campus forums function](image)

**Learning Assistance:** Many international students meet with troubles when it comes to academic issues such as academic writing. This forum mainly focuses on assisting study issue. Students can post learning assistance information in this forum after login with their student account. They can exchange learning experience or schedule an offline communication with other students.

**Food Life:** This forum provides international students with a place for sharing cooking methods in different countries and sharing diets.

**Cultural Q&A:** This forum provides an online platform for questioning and answering culture issues. Students who are interesting in other culture but afraid of offending people with another background can get quick answers here. Considering the international character of Linnaeus University, students' need for communicating and understanding the differences between cultures can be satisfied in this forum.

**Second-hand information:** As non-local students who live on campus need furniture and other household products, the transaction of second-hands between students is very popular. This forum provides a
platform for listing second-hand information on the sale or in need. Since people who can browse this forum are students log in with their student account, it provides a reliable identification to buyers and sellers. The platform is just for listing the information, the transaction still keeps offline.

Party Planet: According to the results of the research, attending parties is a very popular method for decrease stress. Students can publish party information in this forum to attract other students to attend.

Tree Hole: This forum is anonymous. This forum is created for users who wanted to hide their identities and receive suggestions from other students. The question published by the student does not include any personal information, and the respondent does not show any personal information too. The students are questioning and those who are answering are more focus more on the problems than who they are through anonymous interaction. The forum's name, 'Tree hole', comes from the general name of the anonymous section in the Chinese social platform.

![Figure 5.11: screenshot of questioning and answering in campus forums](image)

5.3.2 Typical points

**Identification**—The student account is used for logging in. It is a guarantee for identifying the users' identity. After logging in, users can contact with university organizations quickly by sending e-mails with the quick-access button. It avoids the difficulties in finding related organizations. In the Event section, the interested events can be added to the users’ schedule after logging in. Users can also send questions and answer questions in campus forums after login with their student account.

**Privacy**—In order to keep the private security, the stress-tracking service is a local service for which data is just recorded in a local database. The possibility of leakage of stress information is avoided by not uploading data.
5.4 Improvement 3: the contents of the welcoming package

The international students' guideline is included in the current welcome package as an official introduction. In this project, the improvement is focusing on contents. An example brochure that meets the design principles is made to show its position and features in the improved service in a more intuitive way.

The brochure needs to reflect its relationship with other mental health-care service portals, including international student stories from Co-creation workshops, online platform information (including the official website address and download links to the APP), the relevant organizations' introduction and their contact information.

Figure 5.12: Brochure
5.5 Improvement 4: The entrance of the website pages
According to the fact that the international students use official websites from the research, due to the website structure, searching function on the main page of the website can reach out a series of keywords-related research, articles, and books instead of direct connection to the related service. It causes great inconvenience for students who urgently need mental health-care service. Therefore, a design example is proposed in this project to guide the browsers reaching out the mental health-care service in a better way. A new section called 'Campus life' need to be introduced onto the navigation bar of the homepage. The contents of this section need to be listed based on students' needs instead of the name of organizations. By adding the new button, services related to student's daily life, especially international student's life are listed in the secondary menus including mental health-care service provided by Student Welfare Office.

![Figure 5.13: screenshot of improved website page](image)

6. Summary and Discussion
Through the comparison between the research results of this project with the results of the relevant research in literature, the stress condition of international students at Linnaeus University has been confirmed. The conclusions are similar to other studies despite some slight difference. The difference lies in the fact that discrimination is not obvious, but loneliness has been mentioned frequently as a special cause. Therefore, establishing more communication methods and channels is one of the innovation points in this project.

International students and related organizations can perceive the existence of problems in the current mental health-care service. However, they can only solve the problems within a limited range. The core of mental health-care service is to bring international students a clear understanding that there are specialized organizations in the university taking care of about their mental health issues. This project focus on creating more channels for international students understanding this through participatory
design. By integrating information resources for providing more convenient service, improving the related organizations' work efficiency and their service quality, the reputation of the university can be improved and attracting more international students study there.

By introducing participatory design into the project, the actual participation and in-time reflection can be found during improvement process. With the help of participatory design, the international students have the opportunity to tell their actual demands. The positioning of participatory design in the entire service system is equivalent to the foundation. It provides information support to the service improvement, whereas the improved mental health-care service expands the influence during the practice of participatory design. In other words, the improved mental health-care service is based on the participation. It will be more active and close to the student life than current mental health service systems.

The improved service needs to maintain the balance between international students and local students. International students are the main target group, but local students are also welcome for avoiding exclusion among students. The difference between international students and local students only appears in some specific aspects of service contents. Therefore, although this improved service is mainly aimed at the characteristics of the international students, in fact, due to the improvement of the mental health-care service especially for international students, local students' user experience of the service is also improved.

From the technical perspective, the technologies used in this project are all mature existing technologies. Therefore, the mental health-care service system can be improved in a short period of time with few technical difficulties. For the costing perspective of this project, despite the development of the APP, the modification of the brochures in the welcoming packages and the website pages will bring economic costs, the remaining portals are more of changing the way of operation and principle. Therefore, the overall cost is controllable and reasonable.

Due to limited time, the proportion of international students actually participating in the project only takes a small percentage of the total number of them. Although the number of participants is enough for drawing out the trend, it is still possible to obtain more accurate research results by expanding the data volume. At the same time, because of the University's privacy policy, the author, as a design researcher, cannot get the statistics on the distribution of international students' nationality from university management departments. Therefore, the official launch of the project by Linnaeus University is necessary for including more detailed and accurate data on supporting its own service improvement.
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Appendix

Appendix 1: Questionnaire about international students pressure

This is a survey about Linnaeus University international students pressure and the understanding of mental health-care service provided by Linnaeus University. Several questions will be asked, the survey will take about 10 mins. Thank you for your participation.

Where do you come from?

![Pie chart showing the distribution of countries where students come from.]

Your gender?

Female

Male

Prefer not to say

![Pie chart showing the distribution of gender responses.]

48 responses

25% Female

72.9% Male

Prefer not to say
Are you an international student?

Yes

No

48 responses

Yes: 85.4%
No: 14.6%
International students

How long have you been in Sweden?

- 1 year (34.1%)
- 2 years (19.5%)
- 3 years (24.4%)
- 4 years (19.5%)
- 5 years
- >5 years

How do you handle your own pressure?

- Talk to family
- Talk to friends
- Talk to teachers
- Contact related university organizations for consultation
- Doctors
Participate in activities (such as party, etc.)

Drink alcohol

Solve the pressure by yourself

Others

Have you ever experienced mental pressure during your international student life?

Yes

No

Have you ever experienced mental pressure during your international student life?

41 responses

85.4% Yes

14.6% No
About your own experience

What is your mental pressure?

Communication barrier
Different academic system
Cultural or religious requirements
Discrimination
Financial pressure
Family expectation
Loneliness
Others

When do you usually have a peak of pressure?

Before examinations
Emergency cases
Relationship issue
Climate change
Others
How often can you handle your pressure by yourself?

- Most of the time
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Never

---

How often can you handle your pressure by yourself?

35 responses

- Most of the time: 37.1%
- Usually: 25.7%
- Sometimes: 37.1%
- Never: 0%
About international students around you

Are there any international students around you suffering from mental pressure?

Yes

I don't know.

Are there any international students around you suffering from mental pressure?
48 responses

45.8% Yes
54.2% I don't know.
About helping international students around you

What are their mental pressures?

- Communication barrier
- Different academic system
- Cultural or religious requirements
- Discrimination
- Financial pressure
- Family expectation
- Loneliness
- I am not sure
- Others

Are you willing to help?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
How do you help them?

Listening and giving them advice

Providing contact information for university organizations

Helping them contact professional agencies

Participating in or organizing activities such as parties

None

Others

- Translating for them, spending time with...
- Speaking about my own experiences
- Providing contact information for...
- Participating in or organizing activities...
- None
- Listening and giving them advice
- Legal advice
- Just bringing positive energy, love and...
- Helping them contact professional agencies
- Ask them to join a fun thing with other...
Understanding of school services

Do you know that the University provides mental health-care services?

Quite clear
A bit
No

What kind of mental health-care services are provided by the university as far as you know?

Nothing
Have no idea
no
Individual conversation
Appointment with therapist, talking,,
Sorry I didn’t know.
stress management
just know they have that service
consultation
don't know
Nothing!
Yoga
breath course
pressure etc
I don't know
I have no idea
constant
I don't know
psychologist
not sure
Mental clinic service
Some services at Olympen
There is mindfulness training, psychologists, therapists, and places where students can talk
Counseling, meditation, talks, lectures
Counseling / psychological support, meditation sessions
Consultancy and advice... Offering a place to openly talk about personal issues and provide information for further help
Drop-in hours at the healthcare center for students/ 5 meetings are without paying/ you can also get fixed appointments
Student health?
I don't know
Counselling?
Help to reduce stress
Psychologist?
Weekly sessions where you can relax for an hour. Also, I think they offer a therapy session as well.
Talking
Curators and support groups

Therapy.

Meditation, private meetings

There’s general help with stuff like examinations and there’s counseling available as well

Student Welfare Office (workshops about certain topics like procrastination, stress management, direct one on one talking sessions with a therapist, crisis help/crisis management, group talking sessions, extra opening hours and projects if something happened that might affect several students majorly)

I don’t know

Student welfare office/counselling

Linnéstudenterna, Campus H?san

Psychologist

Psychology

I don’t know, we did not get that kind of information

Mental support

Counseling

Speaking with counselors, staff or nearby health clinic

Have you ever used mental health-care services provided by the University?

Yes

No
Have you ever used mental health-care services provided by the University?
48 responses

- Yes: 85.4%
- No: 14.6%

If you need help on pressure issue, will you come to use the mental health-care services provided by the university?

- Yes
- No

If you need help on pressure issue, will you come to use the mental health-care services provided by the university?
48 responses

- Yes: 60.4%
- No: 39.6%

How do you get contact information of these organizations?

- Welcoming package
Official website

Friends or teachers suggestion

Related activities organized by them

Others

Have you ever participated in projects or activities especially for international students?

Yes

No

Have you ever participated in projects or activities especially for international students?

48 responses
If yes, can you share what kind of activities you have experienced?

Friend family, workshop
VIS welcome party
Moon festival
Mostly likes have nice dinner with friends or party trip, party
about how expand visa and how to apply a job.
Welcome and goodbye dinner, Friend Family project, Culture night
Friend family program
VIS activities, nation activities etc.
Welcome week, Vis party, friends family and buddy program
VIS welcome dinner
vis welcome party
Events with friend-family scheme. Careers night
Sports saturday and working with VIS at stallarna
Nearly all VIS activities, workshops and lectures organized by the university in English, career inspiration for international students, activities from Linnéstudenterna
Events organised by KLUBB
Dinners
meditations
The buddy program
VIS events, fika, trips

If no, can you share your reasons?
I don’t like to be in the crowded group or activities.

busy with other things

it will be better using different languages

No proper activity for my interest

I do not need it

I’m not an international student and I am quite an introvert

No time, prefer to solve struggles by myself, with close friends or nature

I think that I am in sweden to get in touch with swedish culture/people. When you do activities with VIS (or other events for international students) you are also in a bubble, which doesn not really open to such experiences.

Because I am not a very out going person and I get anxious when I want to meet new people, because I feel like they’re judging me.

Idk

Focused mostly on my own studies

Not interested

Because I am a long term here I usually get invited to more general things rather than international specific things

Not aware
Are you willing to participate in such projects or activities in the future?

Yes
No
Maybe

48 responses

- Yes: 52.1%
- No: 39.6%
- Maybe: 8.3%
About improving services

Do you think special focus should be taken on the international students mental health-care services?

Yes
No
Maybe

Can you share your reasons?

Sometimes, it is needed.

they come to the new place which they are not familiar with, they are afraid of some new environment somehow

Not only the pressure from the study, we as international students need to face the pressure about the visa and other emergent issues by ourselves.

Because different cultures, life habits and language problem

We are all equal. There shouldn’t be a separation between international and national students in that sense. Everyone should be able to receive help. However, the people helping need to be able to use good English so they can help as many as possible.
I think there is a difference in what Swedish students need and what troubles internationals in some cases but both are important.

Especially students coming in from different cultural backgrounds (non-European) are coming into a completely different culture and academic system. There are language barriers, requirements are unclear and it is often not easy to connect to locals. There is a need for support for many, especially if you are new and maybe lonely in another country.

The difficulties international students have are probably different and more diverse than the ones of national students, due to the fact that they are in a new country and maybe even exposed to a new culture. However, also national students have to deal with pressure from university for example, so it’s quite a thin line on whether resources should focus on one group more than the other... I’m unsure.

It does not matter if you are from Sweden or not; everyone should have the same prerequisites. However, based on cultural and language problem it is maybe for some international students harder to get in touch with such information/services.

Should for all students

Being far from their families and old friends, the pressure of studying in a different atmosphere, and also being in the Swedish culture (since they’re not as open to new people), all of these make it hard for international students to feel comfortable and feel like they can survive.

It is a lot harder for international students to create networks and friends. I think the loneliness is harder for them than for native students.

We are much further from home and often out of our comfort zone in a different country than our own.

In my opinion for international students there might occur problems that don’t occur for local students, as they are coming from a different culture, may have language barriers, are away from their family and friends, might feel alone or uncomfortable or not able to deal with the new environment they are living in. I think it is important to provide good services for Swedish students as well as English services for internationals, especially with a bigger focus in the beginning of the semester. Students who come to LNU and might be unable to find an apartment, struggling with all things that are different from what they are used to need special support also from the university’s side and not only from organizations like LNS or VIS where there are no professional therapists etc.

It might be that this type of information is not in easy reach for internationals.
But I am not sure about it.

Because of cultural differences, people feel rejected because of Swedes being distanced

Because people are new to this system and culture

I think it should be the same focus on both international and Swedish students.

Do you think more channels are needed for students to reach out these services or activities?

Yes

No

What kind activities do you think are more important? Online (internet social platforms, etc.) or offline (physical activities in schools) activities?

Online

Offline

Equal
What kind activities do you think are more important? Online (internet social platforms, etc.) or offline (physical activities in schools) activities?

48 responses

- Online: 52.1%
- Offline: 31.3%
- Equal: 16.7%

What do you think is the top 3 factors that can attract more students to participate in activities?

- Interaction (eg games, etc.)
- Number of participants
- Knowledge from the activities
- Popular location
- Feedback on the results of the event
- Others
International students’ Story
Appendix 3: Website page