

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO - HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET - UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

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<p>Tiivistelmä - Referat - Abstract</p> <p>The study examines current and former students of the Open University of Helsinki who do not hold a degree from senior secondary school (NSSGs). The objective of the study was to identify NSSGs’ motives for attending Open University, substantiate the meanings they attribute to studies at the university, as well as demonstrate how they perceive the overall educational experience.</p> <p>The Open University was originally established to cater especially for NSSGs. Yet, the vast majority of students today are secondary school graduates (86, 2% in 2010). The educational background of NSSGs is at least partly devoid of the general education that is deemed a pre-requisite for university studies. Consequently, studies at the Open University necessitate ways of thinking and learning NSSGs are unaccustomed to, based on their educational background. Nonetheless, prior quantitative studies show that despite minor difficulties, the performances of NSSGs have been on par with other students of the Open University.</p> <p>The study was based on qualitative analysis of eight interviews, conducted in the spring of 2010. The group of interviewees was comprised of five female and three male students. Theory driven theme-based content analysis was the method utilized in examining the research data.</p> <p>The results of the study showed that the reasons for NSSGs’ attending Open University were numerous, diverse and interlinked. Notably, as a result of attending Open University the NSSGs’ motives for study had become more degree-driven and subsequently Open University studies were viewed upon as an important means of entry to the University of Helsinki. Without a senior secondary school diploma, most of the studied NSSGs were unable to directly apply to university, which meant that Open University was seen as a platform for entry to the University of Helsinki. Prior to starting, NSSGs were concerned with the perceived level of difficulty of the studies and their ability to cope with forthcoming challenges. During the course of their studies, NSSGs did experience some difficulties with e.g. foreign languages, scientific concepts as well as reading and writing scientific text. However, an account of the educational experiences overall showed that in spite of their educational background, NSSGs had adopted well into the Open University surroundings. Having received the bulk of the skills required in the studies through vocational or other life experiences, NSSGs had performed as well as their fellow students on average. The benefits of Open University studies were seen to stretch across private and professional domains of everyday life. The studies were also seen to have a positive impact on social life as well as personal development. Overall, NSSGs held the Open University in high regard and saw it as an important part of their lives. This suggests that NSSGs as well as other underrepresented student groups should be researched further in the future.</p>		
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