Contemporary Mobility Decisions of International and Danish Students in Denmark Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract
The study investigates the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mobility decisions of international and domestic (Danish) students in Denmark employing a phenomenology research design. The study revealed that some of the study participants’ mobility decisions and future employment prospects were largely impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Even those who had their internships abroad confirmed, uncertainties abound whether it will be done remotely or physically. Also, the switching from physical to online classes makes students-students and students-lectures interaction and relationship very challenging resulting in some cases, poor academic performance, loneliness, depression, and mental health problems. Besides, we discovered some positive endorsements towards the Danish government’s handling of the pandemic. Finally, the study proposed for a complete opening of the higher educational institutions and libraries in Denmark for physical teaching and learning to occur, with adherence to the safety protocols.

Keywords  Global mobility · COVID-19 pandemic · International students · Danish students · Discursive institutionalism · Critical mobility · Migration

Introduction
The globalization of the world has accelerated the quest for students to cross over national and regional borders to acquire new and sophisticated knowledge, broaden their horizons, and pursue other objectives. Globally, an enormous 1.5 billion international and tourist
travelers are on the move (Khanna, 2021). Within the cleavages of the European Union (EU), a total of 17.5 and 17.9 million movements were reported in 2018 and 2019 respectively (Fries-Tersch et al., 2021). Research demonstrates that between 1963 and 2017 the number of students in foreign countries had increased by 9 folds, and that the demand for cross-border education would increase to 7.2 million by 2025 (Institute of International Education, 2018). Nonetheless, the great impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has shaped the mobility decisions and patterns of students in both the Global North and South (Choudaha, 2021). The travel restrictions prompted a significant number of airplanes been grounded resulting to more than 70% reduction in air traffic (Gammeltoft-Hansen et al., 2020). More so, some global travel restrictions — necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic — are still in place. However, about 180 countries or areas have adopted 755 exceptions paving ways for mobility despite the travel restrictions, and 16 countries, or areas issued 21 new exceptions while 11 countries, or territories removed 15 exceptions (IOM, 2021). Therefore, we argued that the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions could have impacted on international and domestic (Danish) students in Denmark. These inter alia included the mobility decisions of some students seeking to obtain internship — degree/credit mobility abroad.

Before the pandemic, international students’ migration and mobility had attracted several research interests, and discussed by different scholars (Choudaha, 2021; ICEF Monitor, 2020; Abdulai & Roosalu, 2020; Gammeltoft-Hansen et al., 2020; IOM, 2021; Graf et al., 2017; Saarikallio-Torp & Wiers-Jenssen, 2010). To begin with, Abdulai and Roosalu (2020) considered the recognition of the degrees obtained in European universities, low tuition fee charges, and employment prospects as the push and pull factors determining the mobility decisions of many sub-Saharan Africans studying in Estonian universities. Choudaha (2021) also analyzes how external events (such as the terrorist attacks of 2001 in the USA, the global financial recession in 2008, Brexit, and as well as the American presidential elections of 2016) have induced the choices and favorites of global students’ mobility decisions.

In addition, ICEF Monitor (2020) alluded that the COVID-19 pandemic had substantially led to international students deferring their studies to a later date, but a moderately inconsequential upsurge in admission annulments.

Largely, the scholars have examined international and local students’ mobility decisions and contributed significantly to the global mobility discourse. However, their focus did not purposefully combine the international and Danish students. Secondly the previous studies did not consider the COVID-19 pandemic so much as an influencing factor for the mobility decisions of both international and Danish students. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to adopt a phenomenological research approach to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the lived experiences of international and Danish students’ quest for degree/credit mobility as well as integration into the host society.

Specifically, this research seeks to find answers to this research question: What are some of the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the mobility decisions of international and domestic students in Denmark?

This study is important because different students (international and Danish) might have had varied lived experiences relative to the mobility decisions amidst the pandemic. Also, the impacts of the pandemic on the mobility decisions of our study participants have not yet attracted much academic scrutiny in the Danish context. Therefore, the study would unveil and contribute to enriching the academic discourse about the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the mobility decisions of the international and Danish students.
The study is structured as such: the introduction, the study context, literature review, research methodology, theoretical foundation, the findings and discussions, conclusion, and limitation as well as direction for future research.

**The Study Context**

Denmark documented 56,000 immigrants on a long-term and permanent basis and 7,113 international immigrants of working age between 20 and 64 years by 2018. The concept of long-term labor mobility refers to the movement of people from their home countries to another country for at least 1 year to take up or seek work. The legal term permanent residence denotes the right to permanently live in a country after a residence of at least 5 years (Fries-Tersch et al., 2021). One of the basic requirements for permanent residence in Denmark is for one to have at least 8 years uninterrupted legal stay at the time the Immigration Service reaches a decision about your application for permanent residence (The Danish Immigration Service, 2021).

The number of international students at Danish universities during the years 2000 to 2013 rose from 3,503 to 13,647, which is equivalent to 8.7% of the total students’ population in 2013 (Tange & Jæger, 2021). In 2014, the total number of international students enrolled in Danish universities was 15,000 which represented 12.5% of the students’ population (Wilken & Dahlberg, 2017). Additionally, international students numbered nearly 8,699 and 8,420 in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Danish students abroad were around 15,071 in 2018 and 14,034 in 2019 (Denmark Statistics, 2021). The figures above are indications of a reasonable number of Danish students going for degree/credit mobility abroad, and international students moving into Denmark.

It has been demonstrated that international students have in one way or the other contributed to the host country’s socio-economic development by paying income tax. They also enhance the diversity at the educational setting and host society, as well as a source of labor for some key sectors. Denmark for instance received a net gain of DKK 156.5 million from the tax income of 6,000 international students who graduated between 1996 and 2008 (Tschötschel, 2015). Moreover, going for degree/credit mobility abroad gives international and Danish students exposure and intercultural competences which is a great resource when they returned home due to the international experiences and skills gained (Mosneaga & Winther, 2012; Abdulai et al., 2021).

**Literature Review**

Since the focus of the study is on the impact(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic on mobility decisions of international and domestic students in Denmark, we have explained two relevant concepts — internationalization and de-internationalization as they relate to migration and mobility in the context of higher education (HE).

On one hand, internationalization is “the inclusion of an international or intercultural dimension into the functioning and services of higher education or postsecondary education” (Knight, 2008: 1). Due to the potential benefits of students’ mobility, countries such as the USA, UK, Canada, China, and Australia have developed national strategies to attract talented foreign students into their host universities (Wit, 2020).
In Denmark, the first phase of the action plan for the IoHE programs was put in place in 2013. The internationalization strategy was aimed at increasing the number of Danish students studying abroad, and as well as increasing cooperation on joint degrees with international institutions (OECD, 2016).

On the other hand, de-internationalization involves “any voluntary or forced actions that reduce a (...) [university’s] engagement in or exposure to current cross-border activities” (Benito & Welch, 1997: 9). Essentially, insufficient market research and sudden changes in the socio-political contexts are the two generic causes of university de-internationalization (Becker, 2009). Globally, low student enrolment, staff immobility, lack of adaptability, and funding issues are the main causes of de-internationalization among universities (Mills, 2009).

It could be argued that lack of adaptability, funding issues, and changes in the socio-political contexts are the main causes of subtle de-internationalization. As a result, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science is to cut 1,000–1,200 student places in English-language university, engineering programs, and other programs where a large proportion of the students leave the country without contributing to the Danish labor market (Rasmussen, 2018). With regard to the increasing cost of educating international students, the expense of paying the state educational grant (SU) to EU and EEA students is likely to increase to 570 million kroner from 449 million (Hamilton, 2021). This is presumably seen as a major drain to the national purse.

In this study, we argued that the COVID-19 pandemic has de-internationalized many HEIs across the globe. This is because both internal and international students’ mobility decisions have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In view of this, the pandemic can be described as a critical mobility turn to almost every aspect of life in many countries around the world (Mok et al., 2020; Voldere et al., 2021).

For instance, a study involving 805 completed and usable surveys from persons working in higher education institutions from 38 countries in Europe revealed that the mobility decisions of international (73%) and domestic (48%) students have been adversely affected amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (Rumbley, 2020). Taking a step further, another study with 2,945 respondents regarding the adherences to governmental COVID-19 measures among Danish students indicated 60% of the students lacking concern and compliance, and 68% on the other hand, abides by the governmental measures. Governmental communication that appeals to emotions of students could enhance the following of the COVID-19 measures (Berg-Beckhoff et al., 2021).

Besides, other studies considered the pandemic and the associated protocols to have direct or indirect effects on internal and external mobility decisions of students resulting in uncertainties, loneliness, and depressions among some of them (Oxlund et al., 2020; Cao et al., 2020; Johanne, 2021; Pineault, 2021). Moreover, educational authorities and students are said to have been confronted with the new realities of remote teaching and learning, deferral, and cancellation of courses, as well as uncertainty about future employment prospects owing to the COVID-19 pandemic (Farnell et al., 2021; Glatz, 2020; Khan & Pela, 2021; Said, 2021).

**Theorizing Discursive Institutionalism and Critical Mobility**

In this section of the study, we have analyzed the mobility decisions of the study participants through the lenses of discursive institutionalism and critical mobility theories.
Discursive institutionalism (DI) “is an umbrella concept for the vast range of works in political science that take account of the substantive content of ideas and the interactive processes by which ideas are conveyed and exchanged through discourse” (Schmidt, 2010: 3). The term became popular in the 1990s due to the role of ideas in the formation and transformation of institutions (Hall, 1993; Hay, 2001). Discursive clout emanates from the capacity of sentient agents with good ideas to use discourse effectually in terms of constructing a discursive coalition for reform against deep-rooted interests in the coordinative policy sphere or to inform and orient the public in the communicative sphere (Schmidt, 2009). We argued that, to curtail further spread of the COVID-19 virus, restrictions/protocols were coordinated, and communicated to the public. These restrictions have impacted the mobility decisions of international and domestic students and affected teaching and learning in Denmark and other countries in the world.

Again, policies, programs, and philosophies are inclined to encompass cognitive and normative ideas. Indeed, these ideas are interwoven and often detachable only for the purposes of analysis. Cognitive ideas explain “what is and what to do” while normative ideas clarify “what is good or bad about what is” relative to “what one ought to do” (Schmidt, 2008: 4). Thus, cognitive ideas explain an existing situation (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) and what recommendations and political action to guide and lessen its impacts on the society — the general mobility of people. On the other hand, normative ideas give clarity to the pros and cons of a situation with primacy to what ought to be done to improving a dire situation geared towards meeting the wishes and ideals of the public.

Besides, cognitive ideas offer the recipes, guidelines, and maps for political action and serve to justify the policies and programs by speaking to their interest-based logic and necessity (Schmidt, 2008). To be persuasive in cognitive terms, policy ideas and the discourses used to defend them should be able to establish (1) the policy program’s relevance; (2) the policy program’s applicability; and (3) the policy program’s apparent consistency (Schmidt, 2006). We could therefore situate the COVID-19 protocols and guidelines as cognitive in nature, while the discourses of the pandemic — in terms of how it facilitates and/or stalls international and domestic students’ mobility decisions — as normative issues.

The strength of discursive institutionalism lies in its dynamic view of change in which ideas and discourse serve to overcome obstacles, which the older “new institutionalisms” perceived challenging. However, it has been critiqued based on Schmidt’s accepting discourse and its effects for the study of institutions breed a model of explanation of institutional change not correctly tackling some central questions about the relations between power, politics, and discourse that are necessary to make change endogenous to her model (Panizza & Miorelli, 2013).

Despite the stated critique, the adoption of discursive institutionalism is still appropriate for our study. This is because the activated COVID-19 guidelines and protocols have had impacts on the mobility decisions of international and domestic students in terms of disrupting educational migration and internship, limiting the interactions between students due to the switching into online classes.

Critical mobility on the other hand seeks to situate mobility in a multi-dimensional and complex web. The word “mobility” “implies a capacity to move freely and easily, based as it is on the Latin word mobilitas which refers to both rapidity and changeableness” (Kahn & Misiaszek, 2019: 1). Indeed, contemporary mobility should be understood from the social logics with a comparison of a “view from above” and a “view from the ground” (Büscher et al., 2011). Globalization, which is inseparable from critical mobility, should be
conceptualized as a series of adapting and co-evolving global systems each characterized by unpredictability, irreversibility, and co-evolution (Urry, 2005; Cresswell, 2010).

Cresswell (2010) argues for a more finely developed politics of mobility that takes into serious consideration of both levels of mobility and immobility in terms of motive force, speed, rhythm, route, experience, and friction as the cardinal points to the understanding of mobilities. Similarly, movements of all forms including international students’ mobility should be given more credence by researchers, policy makers, and political actors (Urry, 2011).

Indeed, the dominant perspective on internationalized higher education does present educational mobility as a comparatively straightforward matter without many encumbrances such as border closure necessitated by pandemics, migratory, and/or legal regimes (Larsen, 2016). Internationalization is therefore seen as the “expansion of the spatiality of the university beyond borders through mobilities of students, scholars, knowledge, programs, and providers” (Urry, 2007: 10).

Additionally, the existence of a common policy framework for higher education globally has enhanced the pursuit by universities of collaborative activity internationally by tacitly focusing on student employability and increased usage of learning technology as driving factors for the marketization of higher education (Barnett, 2016). Again, the burgeoning globalization and the growing role of multinational educational companies that offer educational services to their employees, customers, or clients led to the deterritorialization of higher education and the mobility of international and domestic students (Mundy, 2005).

Besides, critical mobility can and should be properly conceived by viewing mobility in six dimensions including the modern travel, today’s dependent store world, developing the mobility turns, systems dependence, and the fragility of the systems as well as the personalization of system dependence (Urry, 2007). To this end, the strength of critical mobility paradigm lies in its quest to understand mobility from all forms and shapes: in terms of the need to extend the dialogue as to how and why systems and institutions could be facilitating at the same time intervening factors in various forms of mobility (Cresswell, 2014).

In terms of critique, its complexity-thinking leads to relativism, subject to the performative contradiction, and that their claims are vague (Cilliers, 1998). Relative to its application, critical mobility could help us to understand the global order as a complex world, unpredictable and irreversible, disorderly but not anarchic (Urry, 2007), how systems, rules and regulations, actor and agency are central in shaping the discourse of critical mobility turns (Söderström et al., 2013). Based on this, the concept of the critical mobility will help us investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global mobility decisions of international and local students in Denmark.

**Methodology and Research Design**

The aim of this paper is to investigate the mobility decisions of international and domestic students in Denmark amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, 12 participants from Aalborg University were included in the study. Aalborg University was selected because it has a pool of international and Danish students and staff members. Hermeneutic phenomenology was used to construct meaning and accomplish a sense of understanding through data interpretation (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). This makes understanding and interpretation to be bound together with interpretation as an evolving process (Annells, 1996). The concept of hermeneutic phenomenology is detailed under the analytic approach.
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Accessing Study Participants

To access the study participants, we sent e-mails to the study participants providing comprehensive descriptions of the rationale of the study. Aalborg University was also duly notified about the research before the study participants were contacted for interviews. We used purposive sampling to obtain the participants. Purposive sampling is utilized when the researcher selects the participants based on their own judgment. Thus, only participants who could give relevant information were selected (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2007). In terms of inclusion and exclusion criteria, we interviewed only those willing and ready to give us relevant information on the subject matter. The interview questions sought to explore information on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the lives of the participants. Table 1 shows the background information of the participants.

Interviewing Techniques and Interviews

We used a semi-structured interview guide. It was used because of its descriptive answers and opportunity for flexibility (Bryman, 2016). We probed on issues such as how the COVID-19 pandemic impacts on their mobility decisions, socialization, and integration, teaching, and learning as well as future employability prospects. Some specific questions asked were as follows: In your view, what are some of the general ways that the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the mobility decisions of international and domestic students in Denmark? To what extent has the pandemic impacted on teaching and learning at higher education in Denmark? In what ways has the pandemic impacted on your socialization and integration into Denmark?

The interviews lasted between 1 and 1 h 30 min. Interviews were conducted via Zoom meetings and recorded, and we transcribed the interviews ourselves verbatim to avoid possible misrepresentations. All the interviews were conducted in English language.

Table 1  Background information of participants

| Participants | Gender | Designation     | Country of origin |
|--------------|--------|----------------|-------------------|
| AK           | F      | IS             | Germany           |
| AL           | M      | IS             | France            |
| HA           | F      | IS             | India             |
| CF           | M      | IS             | Italy             |
| TB           | M      | DS             | Denmark           |
| L            | M      | DS             | Denmark           |
| LL           | M      | DS             | Denmark           |
| NH           | F      | DS             | Denmark           |
| AZ           | F      | C/U SSM        | Denmark           |
| LJ           | F      | C/USSM         | UK                |
| PC           | M      | C/USSM         | Italy             |
| ZA           | M      | PER            | Ghana             |

Source: Field Survey (2021)

IS International students, DS Domestic students, C/U SSM College/university scientific staff members, PER Private educational researcher
To achieve data quality and validity, member checking and peer briefing were used since a phenomenological approach is qualitatively driven. We forwarded parts of the refined data to all the participants to validate their standpoints (Bryman, 2016). Their clarifications were duly considered to reinforce the accuracy of the outcome of our study. For peer briefing, an external researcher also evaluated our interview transcripts, generated themes, and findings from the study (Bryman, 2016). Afterwards, we incorporated the suggestions of the external researcher into our paper to further improve its validity and trustworthiness.

Analytic Approach

We employed hermeneutic phenomenology approach because it gives credence to human experiences as it is lived by persons (Manen, 1997). Its focus is towards unraveling details and obviously minor pieces within experience often taken for granted. It enables the researcher(s) to interpret, construct meanings, and accomplish a sense of understanding as lived and experienced by people (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991).

By deploying hermeneutic phenomenology, interpretation is considered important to the process of understanding the lived experiences of people (Laverty, 2003), since it is an interpretative process focusing on bringing understanding and revelation of phenomena or people’s lived experiences through language (Annells, 1996).

Furthermore, all our study participants have had their mobility decisions directly or indirectly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. They have had to adapt to virtual teaching and learning at Aalborg University amidst the pandemic, and they have had their socialization/integration to imbibe intercultural competences affected by the COVID-19 safety protocols. Clearly, they have certain lived experiences to share with our readers and us. In this regard, we used the hermeneutic phenomenology to analyze, understand, and interpret the transcribed interview data to bring to light and reflect upon the lived meaning of our study participants’ basic experiences because language is the medium through which understanding is created, and understanding happens by interpreting data (Gadamer, 1998).

In terms of methodological soundness, hermeneutic phenomenology research is interpretive in nature, focused on the significances of certain experiences and how they are charted as well as their aggregate effects on individual and society as a whole (Barclay, 1992). Additionally, this interpretive development is made up of categorical statements or philosophies framed with the purpose of guiding interpretation and the assumptions that encourage the individuals who make the elucidations (Ibid).

Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenology enabled us to give value-laden meanings and connotations to the lived experiences of international and domestic students relative to their mobility decisions amidst the COVID-19 pandemic through text interpretation. Taking due cognizance of phenomenology as our research design, the COVID-19 pandemic as a major mobility decision variable, the hermeneutic phenomenology therefore fits and satisfies our data analysis monumentally.

After going through our transcribed interviews, we identified certain categories; we synthesized the categories further to arrive at the repeated categories, and finally settled on three main themes to guide our analysis. These three themes are as follows: The COVID-19 Pandemic and its Impact on Students’ Quests for Degree/Credit Mobility, Teaching and Learning at Higher Education Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic, and Socialization/Integration at Higher Education Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic. This is presented in the analytic diagram below.
These three themes are connected to our research questions as explained below. Students mostly migrate for degree/credit mobility and internship purposes and to gain intercultural competences as well. Again, students consider the mode of teaching and learning in their host university before embarking on their academic journey. However, with teaching and learning switched to online — which is a turn off for some students — and in some cases university’s closure, places of socialization shutdown or with highly restricted access, the COVID-19 pandemic has therefore become a key predictor of the students’ mobility decisions as imbedded in our research questions. Thus, the way teaching and learning is done during the corona crisis, the level of restrictions at places of socialization influences students’ mobility decisions for either degree or internship purposes (Fig. 1).

Findings and Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

The summary of findings of the impact(s) of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mobility decisions of international and domestic students in Denmark is presented as follows. Only one international student (AK) and one domestic student (NH) secured internships abroad amidst the pandemic. However, some other study participants could not. Instead, some of the study participants opted for another semester of classroom teaching and learning (credit mobility) within Denmark due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, all the study participants reportedly missed the physical environment and interactions as well as the intercultural competences and skills that come with a normal university setting. Whereas the international students were apprehensive about future job opportunities, the local students were quite optimistic about future job opportunities. By and large, the study participants admitted to some degree of challenges relative to their studies, employment prospect, and integration within the society and university environment as shown in the summary findings below and in-depth analysis thereafter (Table 2).

The above summarized findings (including the study participants’ lived experiences) are discussed in-depth in the below three themes.

Fig. 1 Analytical diagram. Researchers’ own design
Table 2  Summary of the study participants’ lived experiences

| Main themes                                      | General experiences from the interview data | IS  | DS  | All participants or some experienced it |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----|-----|----------------------------------------|
| Quest for degree/credit mobility                | *Inability to secure desired internship    | +   | +   | Some                                   |
|                                                 | *Mental debasement caused by failed Internship | +   | −   | Some                                   |
|                                                 | *International migration cancelled         | +   | +   | Some                                   |
|                                                 | *Anxiety owing to cancelled trips          | +   | −   | One                                    |
|                                                 | *International mobility disrupted          | +   | +   | Some                                   |
|                                                 | *Nervousness of employment prospects       | +   | −   | Some                                   |
|                                                 | *Distrust in COVID-19 vaccines             | −   | +   | One                                    |
| Teaching and learning amidst COVID              | *Frustrations of online classes            | +   | +   | All                                    |
|                                                 | *Less interaction with lecturers and college students | +   | +   | All                                    |
|                                                 | *Depression from virtual classes           | +   | +   | Some                                   |
|                                                 | *Demotivation of online classes            | +   | −   | Some                                   |
|                                                 | *High quality of physical classes          | −   | +   | One                                    |
|                                                 | *Better concentration for online classes   | −   | +   | One                                    |
|                                                 | *Quick adaptation to online classes        | −   | +   | Some                                   |
|                                                 | *Mental health issues                      | +   | +   | Some                                   |
| Integration/socialization amidst COVID-19       | *Less traveling                            | +   | −   | Some                                   |
|                                                 | *Less bonding                              | +   | −   | Some                                   |
|                                                 | *Less integration/socialization            | +   | +   | Some                                   |
|                                                 | *Re-emergence of PTSD                      | −   | +   | One                                    |
|                                                 | *Mental health issues                      | +   | +   | Some                                   |

*Minus (−) denotes experience not lived by the study participants, *plus (+) means experience lived by the study participants, *DS stands for domestic students, *IS stands for international students
The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact on Students’ Quests for Degree/Credit Mobility

As the world is facing an unprecedented health crisis, so are the imposed restrictions put in place by authorities worldwide. The dual restrictions from Denmark and other countries have impacted the study participants’ quest for degree or credit mobility home and abroad. As the curtain raiser, we interrogate some of the general ways the COVID-19 pandemic influenced or is influencing the mobility decisions of the study participants. In addition, we did a critical analysis — beyond the face value of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mere mobility decisions — to reflect on other possible repercussions, such as anxiety, depression, and other related mental health issues partly necessitated by virtual classes and less social interaction due to the COVID-19-activated protocols. In this respect, some of the views articulated by the study participants were as follows:

… I intended to do my internship in an African country. However, the opportunities were really limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic… Companies do not take interns right now because it is quite difficult as many countries in the continent have strict restrictions about letting people enter their countries. I, therefore, decided to go back to Frankfurt for my internship (AK, international student).

Relative to the same question, another study participant, HA from India, positioned her mobility to Denmark amidst the COVID-19 pandemic within this context:

It was quite difficult because there was no direct flight. The COVID-19 restrictions make it challenging to find a flight first to come to Denmark (HA, international student).

The standpoint coherently communicated by the above study participants revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic generally impacted their mobility decisions as international students. For example, AK planned to do her internship with an international organization situated in Africa. However, the COVID-19 protocols between Africa and Europe are reportedly stringent, but a bit relaxed between Denmark and Germany as of the time of the interview. This made her to substitute a German-based organization, in place of an African organization. The flexible COVID-19 restrictions between Denmark and Germany could be due to the establishment of the freedom of movement as enshrined in EU charter (Favell, 2008), as well as purposeful coordinative and communicative discourses between the two countries (Schmidt, 2009) in a bid to fight the pandemic.

To explain further, participant AK’s intended migration to Africa was cancelled. Her desire to travel to Africa for an internship was to gain exposure and charter a productive career path like most skilled migrants do, by working with an international organization, which is in tandem with her area of study. Indeed, her inability to secure an internship in Africa due to the COVID-19 pandemic could brew possible unemployment issues and its accompanying anxiety, depression, and less hope for her future career plan. The combined effects of all these remnants of the pandemic could lead to mental health problems now, or in the future. In fact, a study from China confirmed lot of college students being impacted by the COVID-19-instigated anxiety (Cao et al., 2020) due to future employment issues it might birth (Cornine, 2020).

Furthermore, participant AK’s migratory plans echo Andrian Favell’s take in eurostars and eurocities, where people have a well-thought-out set of preferences and travel abroad so that their career paths would be developed, which otherwise could have been throttled...
in their country of origin (Favell, 2008). Nonetheless, she opted for an alternative destination besides Africa by going back to her city — Frankfurt — for internship. This, however, contravenes Favell’s point of view.

In connection with AK’s expressions, participant HA from India indicated finding a direct flight to Denmark problematic due to the global COVID-19 travel restrictions. This view affirms the IMO (2021) report, which stated that about 114,148 travel restrictions were instituted, and most airlines shutdown during the various waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. As airplanes were grounded, in a bid to prevent the spread of the virus to an unimaginable level, global mobility of people, including international students, was heavily affected. Her views also resonate with Gammeltoft-Hansen, Achiume, and Spijkerboer’s position on travel restrictions amidst the pandemic. These travel restrictions stimulated a substantial number of airplanes being grounded resulting to more than 70% reduction in air traffic (Gammeltoft-Hansen et al., 2020).

The grounding of airplanes affected the mental wellbeing of international students who had wished to leave their host countries during the lockdown due to the continuous depression and loneliness they encounter. The same anxiety gripped international students who had to abandon their studies due to the pandemic after securing admission. Indeed, the mental effects of the halted traveling are quite tremendous. Additionally, international students’ anxieties were further exacerbated by the long distance to their country and had no opportunity to go home, since there are no airplanes (Johanne, 2021).

The grounding of the airplanes could be subsumed under critical mobility, where people concurrently celebrate open borders and global mobility at the same time emphasizing on a “hegemonic politics of security” to curb the virus spread (Genova, 2013). Again, the stringent Africa-Europe COVID-19 protocols and grounding of airplanes are cognitive ideas under discursive institutionalism, where policymakers examined the problems to be resolved (in this case, the COVID-19 pandemic), and to offer suitable policy alternatives (such as grounding airplanes) to those problems (Campbell, 2004; Mehta, 2011).

Within the same contextual probe, interviewee LL, a Danish student, stated:

I did not plan on doing degree/credit mobility... But I think it is because of the COVID-19 pandemic. I just thought ok it is not going to be possible. So, I decided not to go abroad, and the COVID-19 pandemic impacted my decision (LL, domestic student).

In Aalborg University, students are required to do internship with organizations or a semester study in a different department of AAU or another university anywhere in the world during their 9th semester (that is first semester of their second-year study). However, the uncertainties regarding the COVID-19 pandemic have made participant LL not to seek for internship or study abroad but rather resorted to stay in Denmark for his 9th semester. He, however, revealed that taking degree or credit mobility abroad could add an immerse exposure, intercultural skills, knowledge, and competence to one as a student. But to avoid further uncertainty relative to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is safer to stay within for credit mobility in another university in Denmark. In this regard, a study demonstrated a significant influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on international higher education, particularly student’s mobility, due to the travel restriction and closed campuses, especially from major destination countries such as the USA and the UK (Mok et al., 2020). In furtherance to this, participant TB narrated:

I would have liked to do internship abroad but I do not think it is realistic now. Especially, with the way the vaccine rollout has been delayed due to the issues with the
AstraZeneca’s blood clot issues. Also, it is hard meeting the supply commitments that they have made. Personally, I do not want the AstraZeneca vaccine based on the side-effect issues. I do not think it is realistic or a good time to do an international internship (TB, domestic student).

Inferring from the above, we could argue that participant TB ruled out taking an internship abroad mainly because of the cacophony of the efficacy of the vaccines on one hand, and the rollout on the other hand. The Danish health authorities became the first country to stop using the “AstraZeneca” vaccine due to its possible link to rare blood clot. The decision pushed back the vaccine calendar in Denmark for several weeks (Gronholt-pedersen & Skydsgaard, 2021). In another revelation, the Danish vaccine rollout got pushed back for an additional 4 weeks as another vaccine, “Johnson & Johnson” was ruled out, as it could potentially cause adverse effects to the public (Authority, 2021).

These revelations legitimized the interviewee position — the unwillingness to stick his neck out of Denmark until he gets vaccinated and yet not willing to undertake the vaccination at the time of the interview. This scenario is not far from critical mobility postulations as well as communicative and coordinative discursive institutionalism — taking a firm decision at the individual level not to travel abroad until being vaccinated. Yet he is not willing to take the risk without assurance of the efficacy of the approved vaccines, coupled with the back and forth of the state vaccines rollout and communications as indicated (Addie, 2015; Schmidt, 2008). To contextualize the above to the theoretical consideration of discursive institutionalism, withdrawing “AstraZeneca” and “Johnson & Johnson” constructs a discursive coalition for reform against deep-rooted interests in the coordinative policy sphere or to inform and orient the public in the communicative sphere (Schmidt, 2009).

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have made the Danish government to discourage all unnecessary travels to almost all European countries and the rest of the world marked as “Orange” (Ministy of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2021). This revelation confirms the uncertainty that participant TB has experienced. To him, taking the vaccine will be the only alternative to do an internship abroad. Besides, after more than a year of costly shutdown and closed borders, the concept of vaccine passport is becoming a reality in Denmark, as the Danish government has rolled out its own form of certification to ease future international travels (Sundhed.dk, 2021). The opportunity to show proof of vaccination could be a turning point in the pandemic, as EU leaders have backed the idea of an EU vaccine passport. The purpose is to ensure the ability to travel across borders “without discrimination,” which eventually could help resume degree/credit mobility abroad for students such as TB (BBC & Rory, 2021).

Meanwhile, other students seeking degree/credit mobility abroad could have difficulties even if there is an option for vaccine pass. For instance, a domestic student, NH, has secured an internship in Bangladesh; however, the country is listed as “RED.” Therefore, per the Danish government’s advice against all travel to countries such Bangladesh, NH’s widest dream of having the internship physically could be truncated (Ministy of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2021). The increased numbers of the COVID-19 cases have caused a delay on her internship, as she stated:

… We talked about me starting online if things did not work out because they are having a very bad third wave of the COVID-19 in Bangladesh right now. Hopefully, the situation will be normalized by the time I am due to start. We even talked about shifting the starting date to October, but they are sure that it is going to happen (NH, domestic student).
Indeed, this would impact her mobility decision to be physically present at the beginning of her internship and could even be delayed further if measures put in place by the Bangladesh government are not deemed adequate from the Danish travel guide. Despite the restriction, the hope is that she will be able to conduct her internship remotely and eventually join in October 2021, as later is more feasible according to the company at hand. Many other students in the same boat as NH have caused organizations and companies to assess their ability and to adopt other means to host interns in today’s COVID-19 environment. Therefore, virtual programs have been provided to engage interns while allowing them to stay in their original countries (Sirva, 2020). These, however, have the potential of taking away the physical contacts and intercultural competences associated with pre-COVID-19 internships as well as degree/credit mobility for students such as NH.

Like degree/credit mobility, many graduates who had planned to begin their professional lives in the job market had their hopes of employability in an uncertainty (Khan & Pela, 2021), due to the widespread shock to the labor market occasioned by the pandemic (OECD, 2021). In terms of how the COVID-19 pandemic could impact on employability prospects, study participant AL expressed as:

…It is already complicated to get a job when you are an international student. Moreover, during the coronavirus pandemic, restaurants and bars were closed. And that is where some international students do their part-time jobs (AL, international student).

As argued, before the pandemic, job search is already a challenging task for foreign students in their host countries including Denmark. With the pandemic, the precarious conditions of internationals searching for student jobs are expected to exacerbate, as many places as possible of work are either closed or not working to full capacity. In support of this, it has been projected that the COVID-19 pandemic may have a serious impact on the careers of immediate university graduates in terms of facing the challenges of the global recession and the possible lack of jobs therein (Sahu, 2020). The combined effect of the pandemic is some level of anxiety among the university community. This anxiety may lead to some negative effects on the learning and psychological health of students as well as uncertainty about future employment prospects.

Teaching and Learning at Higher Education Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Education plays a critical role in human capital development, a reason most students migrate. To firm our discussion with theoretical underpinning of human capital, education increases the level of cognitive stock of economically productive human competence, which is a product of intrinsic abilities and investment in human beings leading to increased productivity and efficiency of workers as well (Almendarez, 2016).

Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped and created the most significant disruption in the way education is delivered. More than 220 million students worldwide have been affected, leaving educational institutions and policymakers with unprecedented challenges, such as deploying remote learning (Farnell et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the largest online movement in the history of education and transformed how teaching took place, as universities had to shift to digital strategies rapidly (Said, 2021).

Indeed, the restrictions imposed by the Danish Government shifted all higher education to emergency remote teaching. The views expressed and to be analyzed bring home the critical mobility persuasions to bear. In this regard, critical mobility is said
to involve the capacity to provide critical viewpoints on the nature of society through a means that downplays the mobilities (i.e., COVID-19 pandemic and state restrictions on teaching and learning). In the same vein, critical mobilities seek to probe the limits of the mobilities approach itself and productive encounters with other ways of thinking. In this respect, stakeholders (state, educational authorities, and students) thinking and acting with the new reality (Söderström et al., 2013).

In view of that, we deemed it relevant to unearth how the pandemic affected or is affecting teaching and learning at the universities, its impact on the future job competences of international students, and possible apprehension/anxiety/loneliness necessitated by the “zoom university” the educational regime is witnessing. In this regard, participant AK recounted the impacts of the pandemic on teaching and learning as such:

…. The second semester was conducted online … And it was quite frustrating having virtual classes every day. It was a big challenge for me to be at home and to look at my screen all the time and not having physical interactions with professors and colleague students (AK, international student).

Like the afore-referenced participant’s viewpoint on teaching and learning, an Indian international student retorted that:

I am usually a good student in class when I get to interact with my teachers in class, and online classes are kind of demotivating, because there is no environment around you that process you to concentrate on your studies. So, that is how the COVID-19, and the restrictions affected my studies (HA, international student).

Using theory as a point of departure for critical analysis of the participants’ lived experiences, the universities’ switching to virtual classes in a bid to keep education alive, and to curb the spread of the virus could be contextualize within the realm of discursive institutionalism. Besides the virtual classes as a cognitive idea played, a key role is taming the human-to-human and/or human-to-surface spread of the virus (Schmidt, 2006).

Now, inferring from our interview data, the submissions of the study participants sort to highlight issues of frustrations, disappointments, and dissatisfaction of having to attend all second semester lectures online. For them, a normal university lecture ought to be physical, where students-lectures and students-students relationship occur without any veil. However, with the birth of the COVID-19 pandemic, students must sit at home, following lectures — basically attending “zoom university” — while missing the essentials of socialization happening in a normal university lecture situation. For them, the impacts of online classes transcend the borders of affecting quality education, but derail efforts to socialize face to face with Danish and international students as well as with the lecturers. The resultant effects of these include loneliness, anxiety, and depression that ultimately affects their mental health in one way or the other. Clearly, online classes affected the participants in multifold.

With these, we argued that the above study participants’ lived experiences connect well with a study report which indicated that many international students at the University of Copenhagen have struggled with isolation, loneliness, and anxiety during the lockdown in Denmark (Oxlund et al., 2020). The isolation is further exacerbated by having to attend classes online. Furthermore, class sessions are often recorded; some professors might not require students to turn on their cameras out of respect for privacy thereby making interactions exceedingly difficult (Glatz, 2020). This further underscores the loneliness and depression of international students.
Additionally, Glatz (2020) contends that the absence of human interface outside the screen is enough to make one begin to doubt their social skills since the Zoom platform cannot expedite the same level of participation for many courses. In the case of participant HA, she did not get the desired hours in the lab but had to rely on simulation labs, which is not a blue-chip replacement for physical labs. The lack of laboratory practice, she feared might hamper her job prospect after graduation: another layer indicating how “zoom university” is causing anxiety among students.

Within the domestic students’ context, the imposition of emergency remote teaching did have a negative impact on the quality of learning, as participant TB postulated:

I did one day online classes where I was feeling under the weather and decided to join the class at home. Participating online that day cemented my decision to partake in classes physically because the quality of education in the two are different. And there was no doubt in my mind that participating in the physical classroom provided a lot more high-quality education basically (TB, domestic student).

From participant TB’s viewpoint, we can argue that his debut online classes cemented his decision to be in a physical classroom as the high-quality teaching outcome is different between the two. The physical interaction with other students and the possibility of carrying on a discussion did impact his learning outcome. On the contrary, Zoom meetings’ “breakout rooms” did cause a tremendous impact on his learning as most other classmates turned off their webcams and muted their microphones during the “breakout rooms” discussion. Additionally, the virtual teaching and learning impacted the study participant’s mobility decision greatly. For instance, TB moving from home to attend lectures physically implies that the different qualities physical and online learning environments offer had influenced TB’s mobility decision within Denmark as seen in his lived experience. Moreover, the participant considered attending physical class as the best window for him to understand the lectures delivered, yet, at the time of the interview, that option was not on the table for the participant. There was a total lockdown; thus, teaching and learning and any other activity from the university had to migrate from physical to virtual learning platforms. This was a challenging situation to the participant, and almost every other student at the time. This is because there was no opportunity to attend normal lectures, and no option either to attend social gathering within the university and the host society. A study shows that more than 6 out of 10 students have experienced a decrease in learning and activity, while many also missed the social activities associated with taking an education as participant TB recounted (Ministry of Education and Research, 2021). Besides the shift to online classes, the missed social interaction with other classmates has impacted TB negatively, as his ideal ambition was to do project work with others, which could not be materialized (TB, domestic student). On the other hand, the sudden shift to emergency remote teaching did not impact the quality of learning for participant LL as he indicated:

I think I am one of the few people who may prefer online classes. I feel that I can concentrate better through online classes. This is because there are not many people around me making it easier to listen better to the teacher (LL, domestic student).

Participant LL had quite the opposite experience than participant TB had, as the shift to online classes improved his concentration and learning. From the above discussed data, the comfort LL had in virtual classes made him less mobile to the university and other social gatherings in the society. Moreover, the data suggests that LL would have preferred to sit at home and follow lectures online without having to travel to Aalborg every day. Mind you, without the COVID-19 pandemic, all lectures at the university would have been conducted...
physically. Considering this, students would have no option than to come for lectures at the university. Clearly, LL’s mobility decision had been impacted by the switch to online lectures at Aalborg University due to the COVID-19 safety protocols. To corroborate this, the comfort of working from home and the reduced noise from people around him have caused an increase in learning and concentration during class. Similarly, the positive flexibility and comfort of learning from online classes did also have a positive impact on participant NH, as she stated:

…this semester lectures are online of course it is not the best solution to have it online for some, but I actually think it worked out really well and then to see all the positive things about online teaching and I am really positive about it (NH, domestic student).

Another participant, L, easily adopted to the online classes but still missed the dynamics in physical lectures as he revealed:

In attending physical lectures there is a different kind of dynamics. I feel like I have the tendency to take up a lot of space during the class because I like to talk a lot and that dynamics is enhanced when you are in an online space where you are only relating to other people through your voice for example. Then that voice takes off the whole space and it becomes difficult to engage in an actual conversation (L, domestic student).

Mostly, all the participants agree on missing the physical interaction of being with fellow students, the fruitful conversation after class or during lunch break. The face-to-face interaction while reflecting on the theoretical material from the previous lectures and discussions with teachers after class has been a missed element during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the drastic change to emergency remote teaching, teachers could not communicate properly to the students about the assignment in the course. The lack of physical teaching and learning with the associated benefits of face-to-face interactions, gaining contextual knowledge, intercultural competence, among others could as well be linked to critical mobility perspectives and communicative discourse underpinnings. The mobility turns amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, that is restrictions on teaching and learning to safe life and the economy leads to the missed opportunities that come with the normal teaching and learning. Undoubtedly, the lack of effective communication could also be attributed to the emergency remote teaching and learning (Schmidt, 2008).

The lack of effective communication had a great negative impact on the students, as a lot of these individuals were left with anxiety, frustration, and much misunderstanding, as participant L asserted. Moreover, he expressed a lack of efficient communication from the university regarding protocol and regulation. In similar regard, participant TB felt that the university was great at keeping the students informed in short terms, but the communication could be more straightforward. Arguably, the information from the university kept participant TB in uncertainty. This is because, the information disseminated gave hope of eventually going back physically for the spring semester. Instead of making a clear statement that the whole semester would be conducted online, the university kept doubt among students in the same bandwagon as TB. In quite the opposite manner, both NH and LL argue that the University did their best to communicate clearly.

From the theoretical standpoint, we could therefore state that the COVID-19 pandemic impact on teaching and learning from the participant’s viewpoints and experiences of coordination/communication from the university and the absence from the physical teaching and social interaction amidst the emergency remote teaching and learning could be linked to the discursive institutionalism and critical mobility (Söderström et al., 2013; Schmidt, 2008).
The safety protocols deployed to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 disease resulted in both direct and indirect consequences on the individual and societies. For instance, before the pandemic, teaching, learning, and socialization/integration within the higher educational institutions were more like identical twins. The two went hand in hand. But, with the COVID-19 pandemic, this could not entirely be the case. We, therefore, sort to establish how the pandemic impacted the socialization and/or integration as well as the mobility decisions of the international students into the Danish society and its culture at large.

Owing to the lockdown imposed in Denmark, a respondent narrated as such:

... I did not get to explore or travel around much... I did not get to interact with many people and interacting and activities are important for integration. So I do not think that I got fully integrated over here (HA, international student).

To add more flesh, participant HA narrated as such:

I genuinely feel because of the COVID-19 restrictions, I did not get to bond with my classmates and the one-to-one interactions with teachers were also limited... I do not know my teachers, how I will decide my mentor for my master thesis. It restricted a lot in my studies (HA, international student).

In furtherance to the above point of view, participant AL who holds Danish and French citizenship (whom we prejudged would integrate easily) indicated his regrets of not being able to integrate into the Danish culture due to the COVID-19 activated restrictions. He bemoaned that:

...As a Danish citizen from abroad, I would really like to get more into the culture and the language and to meet new people, with whom I can speak the language with at the university and outside. Because one could not go back to the university physically, for sure it limited the possibility to meet some new people and to speak the languages and then integrate as international student who wants to get some more knowledge regarding the Danish society (AL, international student).

As seen in the lived experiences of the participants, their socialization and eventual integration into the Danish culture have been hugely affected since places of socialization, such as the university, the bars, clubs, gyms, and other recreation, were closed. And to most international students, a pull factor into Denmark is to possibly integrate, secure job, and reside in Denmark afterwards due to the great opportunities that abound here. However, the restrictions are making this dream difficult to realize leading to anxiety and less hope for the future.

Moreover, the Danish Language Centers in Aalborg — Sprogcenter Aalborg and Elsk Aalborg International — help in the socialization and integration of international students in Denmark. Regrettably, both were closed and switched to virtual lectures during the time of writing this research project. For the foreign students from Europe, their inability to move freely cast a disturbing situation and left them depressed and lonely since most of them do not see themselves as immigrants in Denmark but rather Europeans who have right to flexibility and mobility (Favell, 2008).

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 restrictions have stolen this freedom of mobility from them. Accordingly, international students are chiefly impacted by the shutdown since they lacked a social network in Copenhagen; they characteristically have a social network...
that comprises mostly international students. During the lockdown, this unstable network became even more defenseless leading to some foreign students at the Copenhagen University battling with isolation, loneliness, and anxiety during lockdown in Denmark (Oxlund et al., 2020). In sync with our interview data, both participant CF and AK revealed they have more international friends than Danish.

To this end, mobility and socialization/integration are intertwined. Thus, international students migrate to the host universities and communities with their cultural variables — practices, behaviors, beliefs, values, world views, among others. Socialization among international students, domestic students, and the host country nationals could create an avenue for intercultural interaction, learning, and meaning making. However, with the COVID-19 restrictions, the integration/socialization of internationals in Denmark was affected and as well as their mobility decisions. From the forgone discussions, the desire to move and integrate into the Danish culture is high among the participants. However, the institutional restrictions — lockdown and social distancing — imposed are making mobility and integration a mirage, nearly impossible, to say the least. The above perspectives could be linked well with critical mobility theory due to the uncertainty regarding moving forward even if one craves the need to progress in terms of mobility and socialization (Heidegger, 2002). Thus, systems and institutions could be both facilitating and intervening factors in various forms of global mobilities (Sheller & Urry, 2016; Cresswell, 2014). In this regard, certain places of socialization could have been opened to facilitate the integration of international students with strict adherence with the COVID-19 pandemic protocols.

Furthermore, the restrictions put in place also impacted the Danish student’s socialization/integration in many different layers. In this regard, and to concretize the narrations, a study participant, L, revealed that:

…When I move to Aalborg, I missed out a lot of how you say enjoying the city you know going out to cafes we did that a little bit but not as much as we could have hoped for (L, domestic student).

To contextualize this, we can argue that, due to the restrictions put in place by the Danish Government, participant LL was not able to get the whole experience of Aalborg. Though he is a native of Denmark, he is not originally from Aalborg as he narrated from the interview session and his golden ambition in addition to coming for the master’s degree education was to get accustomed to Aalborg society and culture. However, the imposed restrictions and policies impacted on all sectors — business, society, and industry including his free mobility (Federspiel, 2020). In almost identical position, another study participant, LL, postulated:

So, I think that is kind of like a missed opportunity to get to know new people, because of course, it is not the same as to chat and then meet up in person for drink or something (LL, domestic student).

The imposed restriction from the above revelation did have a negative impact on the social life of the participant and the general student community as they could not physically meet new acquaintances or visit public places. Clearly, the inability to socialize as desired by LL and L had impacted their mobility decisions to acquire new cultural and social capital through socialization. To corroborate this, a study revealed that since the inception of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated measures and restriction, students, and the general society by far have not been able to have a normal life — physically meeting family and friends, attending cultural events and festivals, among others. To be measured, it has been explained that the cultural and creative sectors (CCS) of every economy particularly
Europe have been hit hard by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (Voldere et al., 2021). Participant NH equally a Danish Student echoed the following:

I am getting kind of sick of it but that is because the rest of the society is also closed because if I could go to just the library, I think it would be fine but right now I feel very limited to my own apartment and so I think it is all combined and that is kind of bad (NH, domestic student).

From the participant’s viewpoint and employing hermeneutic phenomenology as a tool to understand the life as lived and words explained, we could argue without much reservation that the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in the Danish society had an impact on her mobility decision, as she was limited to her apartment and not able to go into public sittings or the library as a part of her daily life. Thus, the closure of library had limited her mobility choices. In fact, the study participant condition to be candid is the replica situation of many Danish students in Denmark. Furthermore, the restriction put in place on mobility has caused an increased impact on the mental health of participant L as stated:

Basically, mental health is something that has been more central to my life during the COVID-19 pandemic. I have doubts about dealing with mental health before in my life but being isolated within your home and away from other people kind of re-focuses certain aspects of mental health problems that could be whether depression or anxiety. I think I have suffered a little bit of PTSD, in my life (L, domestic student).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an overarching impact on participant L’s mental well-being. The public health measures to mitigate the spread of the virus, such as isolation, social distancing, and closure of educational institutes and entertainment venues, were critical elements of the Danish strategy. However, as participant L stated, the restrictive measures adopted have unquestionably affected the mental health of him and individuals who could be in the same predicament (Pineault, 2021).

Bringing the theories into considerations, we can, as a matter of a stone throw, see from the views expressed by our study participants that the COVID-19 pandemic and the layers it added into the Danish students and by extension the society mobility decisions can best be linked or placed in a box of critical mobility and discursive institutionalism. Imperatively, the actions taken to save human life and to save the Danish health system from being overstretched have in the same vein put untold strain on the mobility decision and general lifestyle of the Danish students and the academic community — the facilitation actions from the state becomes the conundrum for Danish students and the public generally (Söderström et al., 2013; Schmidt, 2008). To sum up, we can argue that the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic due to the nationwide restrictions have had some impacts on the mental wellbeing and mobility decision of some international and Danish students.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The study adds to literature in the field of global mobility studies amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, with emphasis on international and Danish students in various ways. For instance, Abdulai and Roosalu (2020) address the push and pull factors influencing the mobility decisions and integration of international students in Estonia, and this study examines the mobility decisions and the integration of international and local students amidst the COVID-19
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pandemic. Again, contrary to our expectation, we discovered that there has been more student intake in 2020 and 2021 academic years for higher education.

Last but not the least, whereas a study conducted by Abdulai et al. (2021) uncovers that international graduates bring diversity into their host country’s learning environment which promotes teaching, learning, and tolerance of other cultures in Estonia and Denmark, an aspect of our study relative to the above rather explores how the COVID-19 pandemic derails the international and domestic students’ intercultural competences due to the state protocols to combating the pandemic.

That not withstanding, this study established that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the mobility decisions of the study participants. In fact, these impacts spanned far and wide in terms of their mobility decision, future employability prospects, learning, and the socialization. It also revealed that these impacts could linger for a long time due to the uncertainties concerning the overall protective/immunity efficacy of the “AstraZeneca” and “Johnson & Johnson” vaccines allegedly dropped by some countries. The combined effects of the above problems resulted in the study participants experiencing anxiety, depression, and other related mental health issues. Conclusively, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the study participants in different shapes, forms, and magnitude. Owing to that, the study puts forward certain recommendations to assuage the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the study participants so that life coexists with the pandemic until a lasting solution is found.

(I) Political leadership should coordinate sincerely with key sectors (both public and private) before rolling out the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. With this, exemptions could be granted students to facilitate their educational mobility in Denmark.

(II) There should be better coordinative discourse between states so that travelers do not need to do multiple testing. In this regard, inter-governmentalism or diplomatic relations should be given priority.

(III) Vaccinations should be done without nationalist undertones, for nationalism would only derail the global efforts towards combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

(IV) Universities should be opened with strict compliance with the COVID-19 pandemic protocol especially, for technical courses and laboratory-oriented programs.

(V) Hybrid form of teaching and research collaboration should be emphasized.

(VI) Virtual-employment forums should be organized to connect students with potential employers since the study participants are already apprehensive, less hopeful, and anxious about their future employability.

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