

# **The Evaluation of Internationalization Strategies of Finnish Universities: A Case Study of Two Universities in Finland**

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*The research examined the actual internationalization strategies of Finnish universities today. The research utilized two universities out of fourteen in Finland as cases. Three internationalization strategies were identified. However, the internationalization strategies of these Finnish universities towards the recruitment and retention of international degree students are not yet well developed, lack any unique attributes and are mainly geared towards getting funding from the State. This strategy can be described as “non-focused push-strategy”, whereby existing academic programmes are pushed to non-selected markets with the principle “something for everybody”. Instead of current internationalization strategies, the authors propose a strategy focusing on specific academic programs based on local and Finnish business needs, as well as on the demands of selected students and markets.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The most international universities in the world are those that attract both scholars and students globally and collaborate with leading departments no matter where they are located (Bothwell, 2016). There has been concerted effort by both governments and universities in many countries towards internationalization. The Finnish Government through the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) and the European Research and Education programmes and related funding played a key role in the development of internationalization of higher education and research in Finland.

A significant step was taken in 2008 when the Ministry introduced the idea of creating a more comprehensive Finnish higher education (FHE) internationalization strategy (MoEC, 2009). The strategy was prepared in consultation with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and it consisted of 33 measures, which are itemized into five themes (MoEC, 2009). The focus of the strategic document is to increase the number of international degree-seeking students and enhance international student mobility and exchange. It is noteworthy that the indicators used by the Ministry for funding of universities incorporates many items related to internationalization such as uptake of student mobility, number of international staff, output of master's and doctoral degrees by international students, international research funding and international research publications. In November 2011, the joint working group of the MoEC and Finnish universities proposed a funding model for universities and this became an Act in April 2012. Behind the funding model, which became effective 2013, was Vision 2020 for Finnish Universities.

Today, Finland is among the countries in Europe with the highest number of English-taught programmes in higher education (HE) (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). English is the only language used in international settings at the universities in Finland except the Swedish speaking universities. Today, there are about 200 master's degree programmes and 23 doctoral programmes in 21 different fields in Finnish universities (Studyinfo, 2017). One of the funding criteria used by the Ministry in its operational and quantitative targets is the number of studies completed in international study programmes taught in English. However, most university's key policy documents and internal information are not available in English on their websites as stipulated in their internationalization strategies. This view is collaborated by Pennanen (2016).

Most international students outside Europe came to Finland because of free tuition. International students see Finland as a high-tech country in the field of science and engineering due to the reputation of Nokia and Finnish pulp and paper industries at that time. There has been a significant increase in the number of international degree students studying in FHE over the last few years. However, the number has started decreasing since 2016 due to the announcement of the introduction of tuition fee in 2015. Tuition fee was introduced in autumn 2017 and the number of students that seek admission to Finland decreased significantly.

The need for this research emanated from the announcement made by the Finnish Minister of Education and Culture that the public could participate in the formulation of an international policy approach for higher education and research through a joint online think tank. The purpose is to lend support to efforts of a steering group appointed by the Minister and come up with new ideas, new targets and new solutions for internationalization. In addition, one of the two case universities (University A) is trying to enhance the internationalization of its students through fundraising campaign. These renewed interests shown by both the government and universities towards internationalization coupled with the fact that Finland will introduce tuition fees for non-EU/EEA students formed part of the motivation for this study.

Apart from the MoEC, there is an emergence of research work on internationalization of FHE in the last ten years (Poutanen, 2013; Saarinen, 2012). However, none of the research work has focused on internationalization strategy with regards to international degree student recruitment. Based on this objective, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What are the internationalization strategies of Finnish universities with respect to international degree students?
2. What are published strategies and strategies in reality/practice concerning internationalization of the case-universities?

The proposition of the research is that universities should continuously search for appropriate strategy to meet the expectations and needs of the students and thus gain a competitive advantage. This study is limited to international master's degree programmes/students.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The concept of internationalization of higher education has had a lot of review because of the vagueness of the term (Bartell, 2003; Arun & Van de Water, 1992). However, the definition of Jane Knight is one of the acceptable definitions in the research community after some amendments (Knight, 2004). Other research areas of higher education internationalization are approaches, models and strategies (Ayoubi & Massoud, 2007; Zha, 2003; de Wit, 2002), and different studies of the HE sector in different region of the world (Vardhan, 2015; Chen & Huang, 2013; Liu & Dai, 2012; Alamri, 2011; Ghasempoor, Liaghatdar & Jafari, 2011; Mahani & Molki, 2011; Mitra, 2010; Jowi, 2009; Ogachi, 2009), just to mention a few.

In Europe, internationalization became a process and strategic between 1950 and 1970 but a stronger strategic approach to internationalization of HE was stimulated in the 1980's by European programmes for cooperation and exchange in education and research (de Wit & Merckx, 2012). Hence, the history of internationalization of HE in Finland cannot be complete without the mention of the active role played by

the European commission and the Finnish government even though there has been international mobility of Nordic students prior to 1992 when Erasmus became available in Finland (Laitinen, 2015, Garam 2003).

Although, language barrier was perceived as a stumbling block in the attraction of foreign students to Finland, English-taught courses were introduced to cater for the needs of the exchange students by the Finnish universities with the MoEC providing funds to the institutions (Garam, 2003). The establishment of the Centre for International Mobility and Cooperation (CIMO) in 1991 is a good testimonial to the importance the Finnish government placed on internationalization of its HE. The objectives of CIMO are developing education and life-long learning as well as promoting international mobility and cooperation.

Today, the internationalization policies of Finnish universities and Finland have grown beyond dependence on European policies as many parts of FHE system have adopted policies and initiatives on a more global perspective. To the best of our knowledge, there are not too many publications in English language on internationalization strategy of higher education in Finland, apart from publications by the government and its agencies and in some cases, the universities.

These works examined different aspects of HE internationalization (Pennanen, 2016; Cheikh, 2015; Chand, 2014; Söderqvist, 2001). Cai & Kivistö (2013) examined the government and other stakeholders' roles in implementing tuition fee policies based on international experience, while Tossavainen (2009) investigated the challenges of the execution of institutional internationalization strategies in engineering education, suggested a model and used HEIs in Finland as a case study to highlight the pedagogical approach in international activities. Other studies included the comparison of universities and internationalization of university education in Finland and other countries (Aarrevaara, 2007; Dobson & Hölttä, 2001).

Henry Mintzberg (1987) argued that it is really hard to get strategy right. Therefore, he developed five different approaches to (or definitions of) strategy, which he called the 5 Ps of Strategy. Each of the 5 Ps represents different approach to strategy: Plan, Ploy, Pattern, Position and Perspective. Strategy requires a firm or any institution to decide what it should do and what it must not do in order to attain its goals. According to Porter (1996), strategy is about making choices. It is about performing different activities from competitors' or doing similar activities in different ways. It involves making tough managerial choices among numerous good alternatives (David, 2011).

## **DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

Empirical data utilized in this research work was both qualitative and quantitative, drawn from both primary and secondary sources. The study involved two of the fourteen Finnish universities with a view to look at things from different perspectives and enhance the validity of the result. A case study can be considered a robust research method particularly when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required (Zainal, 2007) and it has become relevant when issues related to education are being considered (Yazan, 2015).

For the purpose of the study, the two universities are renamed as University A and University B. The study takes a closer look at Finnish universities internationalization strategies as being presently practiced by the universities and find out whether it meets the needs and aspirations of the international students. The study treated higher education at the institutional level, therefore the interviews and student's pre-screening questionnaire used as part of this study were limited to the universities' administrators and the students. The study does not intend to compare the two universities because universities are different in their missions and visions.

Four top administrators and twelve non-EU/EEA students took part in the interview, apart from forty-three students from the universities' core disciplines took part in the pre-screening survey. Four of the students interviewed were PhD students, who just completed their master's programmes in the two universities. The choice of the past students (i.e. PhD students) was to have an informed opinion on some of the issues and ascertain the level of progress made by the universities on some pressing issues related to internationalization.

Three main strategies were adopted in the analyses of the interviews. They are content analysis, critical discourse analysis, and deriving categories from these two analyses. The research was guided by Knight (2004) and Maringe’s (2010) approaches to internationalization. The main researcher, Olatunde Jogunola, as a former international student and an alumnus of one of the two universities used as case study, tried as much as possible to be objective and not allow his status as an ex-international student or his linkage with one of the universities affects the interpretation of the results.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Internationalization means different things to different people, institutions and government and it has always been guided by principles linked to local context and purpose (Knight, 2011). There is no standalone internationalization strategy for the two universities but it is incorporated into the overall university strategy.

In University A and University B Strategic Plan (2016–2020) documents in English, internationalization was mentioned once and two times respectively:

“to encourage internationalization by providing opportunities for studies abroad and by better integrating international students.” (University A)

“the internationality of our education is highlighted by our engaging English degree programmes and by including studies that support internationalization.....We provide our employees with the necessary orientation and create opportunities for career development, internationalization and for achieving success in work.” (University B)

These two universities strategic documents are summarized in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**SUMMARY OF THE STRATEGIC PLANS OF THE TWO UNIVERSITIES USED AS CASES**

Strategic plan	University A	University B
Period of plan	2015 – 2020	2016 - 2020
Main Strategic goals	Research; Education; Co-operation & interaction; and Sustainable structures.	Research; Education; Social well-being & the economy; and Community well-being.
Profiling areas (research)	Minority research; Molecular process & material technology and Drug development & diagnostics	Bio-future; Digital futures; Cultural memory & social change; Children, young people & learning; Drug development & diagnostics; and Sea & marine studies.
Stakeholders involved in preparation of plan	Students and staffs	Students and staffs
Internationalization	International recruitment of researchers and students; International mobility among researchers, teachers, personnel & students; Strategic partnership (especially with Nordic countries).	International recruitment of researchers and students; International mobility; Transnational education; International networks; Placement of international students in working life.
Stated international targets	No international target in the plan.	No international target in the plan.

In the strategic plans of the two universities investigated, there was no detailed internationalization strategy, no stated international targets nor key performance indicators even though the universities

followed the indicators proposed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Therefore, the internationalization strategy of the two universities with regards to the recruitment of international master's degree students are not yet well developed, lacked any unique attribute and appeared to be centered on the quest to make up the numbers and get money from the government.

### International Student Recruitment

One of the propositions made in the document concerns the improvement of the relationship between the number of accepted students and the number that enrolled. To this end, the statistics related to this issue was considered from 2012 – 2016 in Tables 2 and 3.

**TABLE 2**  
**STATISTICS ON RECRUITMENT OF INTERNATIONAL DEGREE STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY A**

International Master's degree programme	Students that accepted their study places				
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Peace, mediation and conflict research	29	18	11	11	10
Chemical engineering	10	15	8	6	12
International human rights law	18	13	15	9	3
Biomedical imaging	10	12	9	10	7
Computer science	11	8	8	13	11
Digital and mobile business	12	8	7	11	9
Embedded computing	7	2	11	5	1
Information and knowledge management	-	-	18	12	11
Software engineering	15	16	14	14	7
Total	112	92	101	91	71
Total number of students admitted	213	160	183	183	178
% of students that accepted study places to those students admitted	53	58	55	50	40
% of students enrolled to those that accepted their study places	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

NA = not available

From Table 2, there was a wide gap between the number of admitted students and those that accepted their study places at University A. In effect, the university was not the first-choice destination of most admitted students. The university has not yet bridged the gap between the number of accepted students and those that enrolled as proposed in the strategic plan for international activities. This issue was even made complicated by the fact that the number of students that enrolled for each programme was not made available by the relevant department. However, the university is upgrading its recording keeping system. *According to some of the interviewed students*, international students prefer to go to universities in Sweden instead of University A partly because Swedish Universities have better facilities, rankings and Sweden has a reputation as a leading European country in English studies. They feel that, learning and adapting to life in Sweden is much easier compared to Finland. In addition, the official working language of many Swedish companies is English.

**TABLE 3**  
**STATISTICS ON RECRUITMENT OF INTERNATIONAL DEGREE**  
**STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY B**

International Master's degree programme	Students that enrolled for the programmes				
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Learning, learning environments and educational systems	13(16)	19(20)	18(19)	14(16)	NA(14)
Law and information society	8(9)	13(15)	13(14)	10(10)	NA(14)
Embedded computing	13(15)	15(22)	13(18)	9(11)	NA(13)
Food development	–	–	12(13)	5(7)	NA(8)
Information security and cryptography	–	19(19)	20(26)	21(25)	NA(24)
Molecular biotechnology and diagnostics	–	–	–	4(4)	NA(9)
Biomedical imaging	11(13)	13(13)	9(11)	7(8)	NA(13)
Drug discovery and development	–	–	–	13(15)	NA(13)
Future studies	13(14)	13(14)	18(20)	14(18)	NA(19)
Global innovation management	15(18)	24(30)	18(24)	14(16)	NA(27)
East Asian studies	13(14)	11(12)	16(16)	9(11)	NA(10)
Global IT management*	19(23)	23(26)	21(23)	16(16)	–
Management of information technology*	9(10)	16(16)	14(14)	10(10)	–
Bioinformatics	16(20)	14(17)	8(9)	12(16)	NA(12)
Molecular system biology	–	–	4(4)	4(5)	NA(6)
Pathway in popular culture studies	–	–	8(9)	6(6)	NA(2)
Baltic sea region studies	9(9)	8(8)	11(11)	5(5)	NA(6)
European heritage, digital media and Information society	10(11)	–	6(6)	–	NA(4)
Finnish and its related languages	6(6)	9(9)	2(3)	5(5)	NA(3)
Astronomy and space physics	5(6)	4(4)	0(0)	2(2)	NA(6)
Material science	–	–	–	1(2)	NA(6)
<b>Total</b>	<b>204(237)</b>	<b>226(257)</b>	<b>220(256)</b>	<b>195(224)</b>	<b>(233)</b>
Total number of students admitted	270	306	357	350	362
% of students that accepted their study places to those admitted	88	84	72	64	64
% of students enrolled to those that accepted their study places	86	88	86	87	–

Data in brackets are the students that accepted their study places; \* = multiple degree programme; NA = data not available as at the time of data collection

University B had a much better enrolled-to-accepted students' ratio. The average number of years for students to finish the master's programmes is put at 2.5 years. But, the universities did not have data on the number of international students that dropped out of their programmes and those that graduated within the stipulated two-year master's programme. These data are important for decision making process and organizational change.

### **Formulation, Evaluation and Implementation of Internationalization Strategy**

The four universities' administrators were interviewed and representation of the student union were involved in strategy formulation process. The strategic planning process was always initiated from the top (e.g. the rectors of the two universities). The internationalization strategic planning process is more of a top-down approach, even though the administrators claimed that it is both bottom-up and top-down approaches. There was better alignment between the strategies of the different faculties with that of the whole university.

The MoEC does not have any significant input in the formulation of the independent universities' strategies, but the universities follow in practice the Ministry's guidelines when some operational

decisions like the number of international programmes each university wants to have, the minimum size of each master's programme, strategic alliances and so on, are to be decided. The university strategy is always reviewed along with the internationalization strategy. But, the administrators were not specific with the time intervals between reviews and what drives the re-evaluation of the strategy. The researchers believed that the quest for more funds, lack of competent manpower in some of their profiling areas, better ranking and lately more customers (i.e. students) are some of the factors responsible for the review of their internationalization strategies.

For the successful measurement of the implementation process of the internationalization strategy, the two universities still followed key performance indicators on internationalization put in place by the MoEC, which is based on quantity. They are amount of master's and doctoral degrees awarded to international students, number of international teaching and research personnel, students and staff mobility in and out of Finland, etc. The Ministry follows internationalization by using these measures to collect data and allocate State funds to the universities.

Presently, there was less evidence of successful implementation of the internationalization strategy with regards to international student recruitment and retention. Most of the student recruitment targets were not met and the ratio of foreign staff to local staff was still low. Thus, the universities have been slow to evolve a comprehensive strategy towards internationalizing their institutions. It is heart-warming that the universities are considering using quality-oriented parameters for the measurement of their internationalization strategies based on the European priorities for HEIs.

### **Profile Areas**

The two universities' strategies are embedded in their education, research and other core activities. Internationalization is a must for today's university because there is no way to do quality research without having international recruitment. According to one of the administrators, there are more international PhD students compared to local students and the choice of the profile areas directs where the university hope to recruit people. Sometimes ago, the MoEC advised the universities to concentrate on their core competencies with a view to compete favourably on the global stage. However, the universities are in a dilemma with regards to concentrating on their core competencies.

Firstly, they want to serve their immediate environment and at the same time compete favourably for students globally. University A is in a weak position when it comes to profiling and internationalization. For example, it was established for the Swedish-speaking population in Finland. Its task is to provide educational services to this group and it must have enough broadness in fulfilling this mission. Likewise, University B was created for the Finnish speaking people of its region and the university will like to provide all the services, including manpower for the industries operating in that region. Sometimes, inability of the universities to reach a common consensus on one hand and the rivalry among the municipalities caused by local needs on the other hand are some of the salient factors militating against the universities not creating distinctive international profiles for themselves. In effect, these challenges make the universities less competitive globally.

One of the arguments put forward against creating distinct profiles was that most Finns do not like to relocate from one region to another in search of job. Therefore, University B must offer engineering education to provide manpower needed by the industries in its region and not leave the engineering education at the mercy of other regions, whose graduates would not like to work there. It is the belief of the researchers that the two sides can find a common ground because creating distinct profiles will make more resources available for their international activities and their internationalization strategies more sustainable.

At the faculty level, the administrators believed that there was no direct relationship between profiling areas and internationalization but in a way, they support concentrating on their areas of core competencies, especially in the field of humanities. For example, Russian language is no longer offered as a core subject in University B but German, while Russian goes to another university in Eastern Finland. Furthermore, the nine programmes in Table 2 have been realigned and reduced to six at University A. The

first 4 programmes were retained, while the last 5 programmes were combined to produce two new ones ‘Information Technology’ and ‘Governance of Digitalisation’, starting autumn 2017.

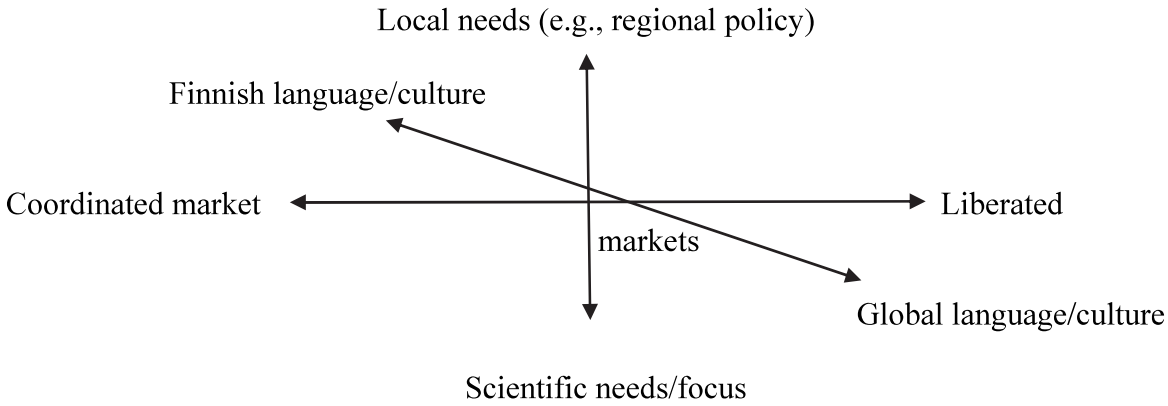
For University B, there would be 13 master’s degree programmes, starting autumn 2017. It includes the first 11 programmes in Table 3 and 2 new courses, Gender Studies, and Digital Health and Life Sciences (DHLS). Bioinformatics had been embedded in DHLS as one of the 4 study tracks. Molecular System Biology had been scrapped and there would be no student intake for the last 6 programmes for autumn 2017. Master’s in Gender studies is a joint programme with another university. The reduction and realignment of the two universities’ master’s programmes could be interpreted as a way of re-focusing their internationalization strategies.

**Introduction of Tuition Fee**

All the international students interviewed revealed that they came to Finland primarily because of the free tuition offered. Other attractions are high education standard in some disciplines, existence of joint degree master’s programmes, collaboration between Finnish university and home university or family ties. Some of them got to know about Finland through information from friends or relatives who happen to be alumni of Finnish or Swedish universities. A lot of seminars/workshops were held when the Finnish parliament were considering the introduction of tuition fee. For example, University B invited people from EU countries, including UK to tap from their experience and expertise on recruitment of international students. It was agreed that if there was going to be a price tag on education, the university should concentrate on certain areas to have viable programmes. However, a student, who was part of the review process, believed that the major concerns raised in 2013 still exist today.

The introduction of tuition fee for non-EU/EEA students presents both new challenges and opportunities for Finnish universities because most of the applicants are from outside Europe and competition is tough globally. As it is now, a lot of things must change because the old way of doing things will not work. Presently, there are three sets of opposing forces that limit the recruitment and retention of international student into Finnish universities (see Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1  
OPPOSING FORCES LIMITING THE ATTRACTION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN FINLAND**



These are differences in economic and political institutions, competition between Finnish culture and global culture/uniqueness of Finnish language and the need to cater for local (regional) demands versus internationalization. Finnish system tends towards coordinated market economies and the other variety of capitalism, liberal market economies (Hall & Soskice, 2001), has all the ingredients to make competition for international students easier. The non-integration of the students has been partly linked to the



competition between the Finnish culture and the global culture and this is complicated more by the uniqueness of Finnish language.

Some of the students believed that the regime of free tuition would not be sustainable on the long run at some points in time. Both students and administrators agreed that the introduction of tuition fee will reduce the number of applicants to Finnish universities and it has already done that, considering the number of applicants for 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 academics sessions. The same scenario also happened in Sweden (Myklebust, 2017).

### **Challenges in Attracting and Retaining International Students**

The university administrators agreed that visibility and reputation of Finnish universities, language issues, legislation against offering bachelor's programmes in English without offering same programmes in Finnish language and marketing of their programmes are some of the challenges limiting the attraction of international degree students. In addition, the non-EU/EEA students believed that the policy makers/university administrators should solve the issues of appropriate pricing, non-availability of part-time jobs and take the issue of internship/job placement seriously if they intend to attract and retain international students. This is well enumerated by one of the students interviewed:

My worry is charging the appropriate price. I think the tuition fee being proposed compare to other part of the world is too high. For example, if you look at UK and the length of study, it is difficult to justify the amount being proposed.... I will rather go to the UK and pay £12,000 for one-year master's programme instead of paying 10,000 Euro each year for a two-year master's programme in Finland. In UK, the universities are better ranked and international students have better opportunities of getting part-time job during their studies and professional job after their programmes.

Prior to the introduction of tuition fee, the universities did not see the need to market their programmes aggressively because the students would come to them and explore their programmes. In fact, the slow institutional response to change and challenges is somehow connected to the presence of free-tuition in the universities. Presently, the international students that come to Finland are from the working and middle-class families. The tuition paying students from these social groups must support their education through part-time jobs.

Cantu (2013) asserted that scholarships, social implications, financial aid, availability and possibility of part-time jobs, low crime rate, family, friends, and so on are factors that attract international students to host country. According to the interviewed students especially outside the Western world, the case universities did not show enough commitment to the integration of the international students as proposed in their strategies. For example, the students complained of not feeling that warm community atmosphere inside the classroom, within the campus and around them. This was attributed to the lack of openness of the Finnish society and language barrier.

Apart from scholarship provided for talented students, the other way of attracting students from non-EU countries is the availability of part-time job. Presently, the universities have international office and coordinating office for student support services such as internship, job placement, counselling, and recruitment services. According to the students, these services do not benefit them due to the so-called language barrier. It is the satisfaction these students get from their educational experience that would make them sell Finnish universities to other students from their countries. When going abroad for study, young people seek information and advice from people who have been to their destination country (Garam, 2003).

Also, the universities did not develop staff and other resources in line with recruitment of international students. The number of foreign staffs in the universities is still low and many international students expect to be taught by international Faculty. For example, some of the respondents believed that it is almost impossible to see a foreigner as Dean of Faculty or in management position in Finnish universities.

### **University's Ties with Industry**

The administrators interviewed mentioned that the universities have continuous collaboration with industry in terms of research and teaching as part of their courses/programmes. For example, some students, especially those in science disciplines do project works for companies during their master's theses. However, there is no collaboration in terms of internship or job placement. One of the administrators asserted:

“In all Finnish universities, the whole idea of job placement is immaterial compared to our international competitors. This is a big disadvantage for us. Honestly, the Finnish society is still not open for person who does not speak Finnish. So, getting internship, summer job or job placement is still very difficult.”

Also, the student respondents buttressed the fact that even if these services are available, they do not benefit them. Their perception is that it is not possible to earn both living cost and tuition fee in Finland now, unlike UK or Australia. One either earns tuition fee or living cost. It will take 5 – 7 years for the universities to figure out the solutions to all challenges due to its domino effect.

### **Relevance of the Curriculum/Programme**

The universities are making a lot of efforts in ensuring the relevance of their curricula/programmes. The basic idea is to have universities' education based on the latest research. Also, the student feedback system is centralized and the universities continuously collect responses from the students on all their courses. However, according to the students interviewed, their opinions are not sampled on issues related to internationalization or relevance of their programmes.

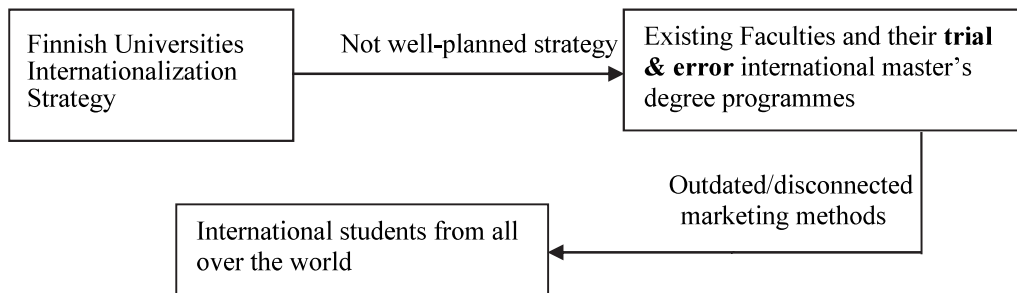
A Faculty head disclosed that he gets feedback from the industry and their alumni, who have strong work life experience, on the things to put in place to make the curriculum better in terms of relevance, but these feedbacks are not systematically collected and organized. Nevertheless, one of the administrators disagreed with him on the relevance of the industry.

“If our curricula are relevant today, it does not mean that they will be relevant after 25 years. In science and engineering fields, I believe that the best curriculum today is the fundamental understanding of things (concepts) and not directly the applications; you learn the application but one should teach the fundamental tools. It is up to the teachers and professors.”

A majority of the students disclosed that their feedback were never implemented in subsequent courses of the programmes. Therefore, they do not see themselves as stakeholders in the university. However, two of the students confirmed to the researcher that part of their feedbacks was implemented in the following year courses.

In conclusion, the existing fundamental internationalization strategy for the two universities is the non-focused push internationalization strategy or the so-called “something for everybody” strategy. For the past ten years, this has been the strategy used by the Faculties of the universities to roll out most of the international master's programmes. In most cases, there have been very few thought-out international masters' programmes by the Faculties. Some programmes died at infancy, some survived for few years and those that survived till today did so via trial and error process. This method is peculiar to almost all Finnish universities. The non-focused push strategy is depicted in Figure 2.

**FIGURE 2**  
**THE NON-FOCUSED PUSH INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGY**



The consequences of this strategy are:

1. No alignment between international master's degree programmes and the needs of local industry/international organisation (e.g. business enterprises, municipalities, hospitals, etc.).
2. No synergy between universities and industry/municipalities in terms of programmes, job placement, internship and so on.
3. Poor job opportunities for international students in Finland.
4. Unsatisfied students/underutilized talents

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The State of Finland and Finnish university administrators should begin to see students as clients and therefore evolve aggressive marketing strategy to compete for them in the higher education's global market. For Finland to have some significant part of the international student market, there should be synergy between the universities and government through its Ministries of Education & Culture, Foreign Affairs, Science & Technology, Employment and Immigration.

The universities must study their major markets outside EU to know the social needs, have knowledge of their institutional positioning, have an open view on how programmes are designed and marketed to targeted students and take risks. However, programmes like future studies, gender studies or peace, mediation and conflict research will be difficult to market in these countries because the focus on societal changes and social responsibility are not that much there, even though these studies might give tools to get some kind of positive social change there. As tuition fee is introduced, cost analysis of programmes should be done and those that are difficult to market and get students should be scrapped to avoid wastage of resources.

The universities should seek the advice of its alumni and existing students from countries of their major markets on which programmes are marketable in their countries and how best to sell such programmes. In addition, some of their international alumni could be employed in their international offices or they could get staff from some of the countries of their major markets to assist them with the marketing of their products. As discussed earlier, universities must consider the reality of today's applicants by making their presence felt in the social media. The universities can seek the assistance of their existing international students so that they can devote few hours of their time on social media platform such as Facebook, Twitter to market their programmes. However, this is only possible if the students are satisfied with both academic and non-academic aspects of their educational experience.

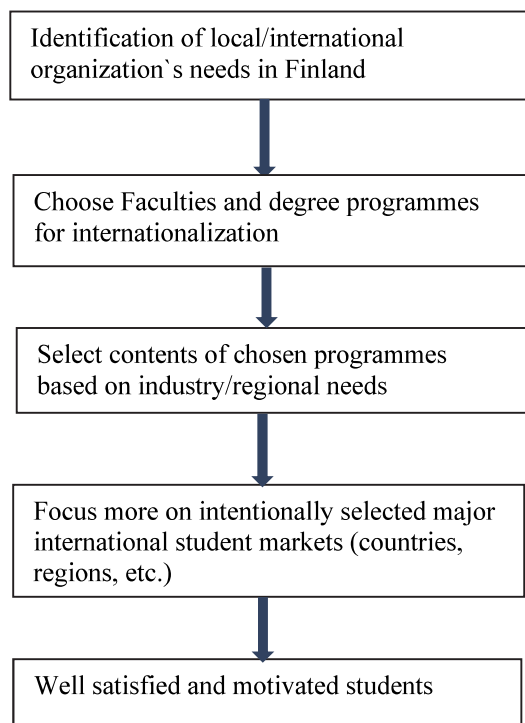
Services such as financial aid/scholarships, work-study programmes and legal aid particularly for student visas and immigration requirements can be combined with student support services such as internship, job placement, counselling, and recruitment services. For a university with many international degree programmes, a high-ranking university officer, not less than the status of a Dean, should be

appointed to oversee these services. The person should be a bridge builder, who will design programmes that interconnect staff and students from different backgrounds and disciplines at the university.

The universities can make internship part of the two-year master's programmes, especially for their non-science disciplines so that the students can gain the needed work life experience. Furthermore, the universities can cooperate with their municipalities and the industry in their domain with regards to job placement and availability of part-time jobs for the international students. For example, they can discuss with the industries in their domain and City Councils so that they can have some quota for internship/job placement.

Finally, researchers of this study recommend "a market-focused/industry-driven (i.e. pull)" internationalization strategy (see Figure 3) for universities in Finland, where there will be collaboration between the universities, the industry and the municipalities.

**FIGURE 3**  
**THE MARKET-FOCUSED/INDUSTRY-DRIVEN INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGY**



This strategy will likely result to:

1. Job opportunities that meets the needs of Finnish firms for international students.
2. Improved competitiveness of Finnish universities, which will lead to better ranking, good brand and high international profile.
3. Better synergy between the industry, municipalities and universities.
4. More international students coming to Finland.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

The study might seem inherently limited by the fact that samples and opinions of respondents only from two out of fourteen universities were examined and the sample size is small. In addition, students of some of the international master's degree programmes in English did not take part in the interviews. Relevant information such as number of students that dropped out of their studies and the number of

students that graduated each year from the programmes was not available. In one case, there was no access to information concerning the number of enrolled students. In addition, the main researcher did not consider documents in Finnish language. Therefore, the findings of the research may seem inadequate as it may reduce the validity of the conclusions.

On the other hand, researchers with practical knowledge and experience in other Finnish universities claim that the internationalization strategies of Finnish universities are not much different in practice.

The use of only two universities would limit the dilution of information and provide deeper understanding of the research themes. The use of two universities is not representative in number but it represents how the themes of the research are being viewed by top administrators and international students. Furthermore, the study only investigated the internationalization strategies with regards to recruitment and retention of international students.

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