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THE LANDSCAPE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALIZATION IN FINLAND

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The paper contributes to the defining of peculiarities of higher education internationalization in Finland. The issue was revealed from different angles, namely, teaching methodologies, research practices, and external engagement.

The key areas of the internationalisation strategy (2015) have been described in five objectives, namely, international higher education community, increasing quality and attractiveness, exporting knowledge, supporting a multicultural society and global responsibility. A new international higher education and research policy for Finland (2017-2025), titled "Better together for a better world" has been analysed withing the crucial recommendations on implementation of policies to promote internationalization. The forum's paper "Vision for strengthening the international dimension of Finnish higher education and research by 2035" was analysed. It was stated that the "Vision" viewed Finland as the socialty, economically and politically developed country with a strong focus on sustainable development challenges and cooperation. The options proposed by the Finnish National Agency for Education to fund internationalisation of higher education have been investigated. The options contained different possibilities to be involved into EDUFI traineeships, Scholarship Programmes for Doctoral-level studies and research in Finland, Creative Europe (2021–2027), Finnish language and culture studies in universities outside Finland and Civil Servant Exchange Programme. All the mentioned options stimulate higher education internationalisation via cooperation with different stakeholders.

After studied official papers and literature sources it could be concluded that higher education internationalisation in Finland is an integral component of the mission for all Finnish higher education institutions. Minisrty of Education and Culture and Finnish National Agency for Education supports, coordinate and monitor the internationalisation process within the country.

Key words: internationalisation at home, internationalisation of curriculum, higher education reformation, Finland.



Стаття робить внесок у визначення особливостей інтернаціоналізації вищої освіти у Фінляндії. Питання розкрито з різних аспектів, а саме: методології викладання, дослідницьких практик та зовнішньої взаємодії.

Ключові напрямки стратегії інтернаціоналізації (2015) були описані у п'яти цілях, а саме: міжнародна спільнота вищої освіти, підвищення якості та привабливості, експорт знань, підтримка мультикультурного суспільства та глобальна відповідальність. Нова міжнародна політика Фінляндії у сфері вищої освіти та досліджень (2017-2025) під назвою "Краще разом для кращого світу" була проаналізована в рамках рекомендацій щодо впровадження політики сприяння інтернаціоналізації. Проаналізовано документ форуму "Бачення посилення міжнародного виміру фінської вищої освіти та досліджень до 2035 року". Було зазначено, що "Бачення" розглядає Фінляндію як соціально, економічно і політично розвинену країну з сильним акцентом на виклики сталого розвитку та співробітництво. Досліджено варіанти, запропоновані Національним агентством освіти Фінляндії для фінансування інтернаціоналізації вищої освіти. Варіанти містять різні можливості участі у стажуваннях EDUFI, стипендіальних програмах для навчання та досліджень на рівні докторантури у Фінляндії, "Креативна Європа" (2021-2027), вивчення фінської мови та культури в університетах за межами Фінляндії та Програмі обміну державними службовцями. Усі згадані варіанти стимулюють інтернаціоналізацію вищої освіти через співпрацю з різними зацікавленими сторонами.

Вивчивши офіційні документи та літературні джерела, можна зробити висновок, що інтернаціоналізація вищої освіти у Фінляндії є невід'ємною складовою місією всіх фінських закладів вищої освіти. Міністерство освіти і культури та Національне агентство освіти Фінляндії підтримують, координують і моніторять процес інтернаціоналізації в країні.

Ключові слова: інтернаціоналізація вдома, інтернаціоналізація курикулуму, реформування вищої освіти, Фінляндія.

Introduction. Higher education institutions collaborate with other universities globally to enhance its international dimension. Educational institutions have historically been known for sharing information, presenting research results, and exchanging students and faculty members to gain worldwide experience and expertise. Knight (2004) argues that social, cultural, political, economic, and intellectual factors influence countries' decisions to internationalize higher education. Understanding and respecting foreign languages and cultures, as well as finding common ground with diverse nationalities and ethnic groups, are important for social and cultural reasons. Political motivations include foreign and security policy concerns, promoting peace and understanding, and building national and regional identities. Internationalisation of higher education promotes economic growth, competitiveness, skilled labor, and benefits through international cooperation. Academics feel that internationalisation enhances teaching and research quality and



raises standards (OECD, 2023).

Chinese researcher Lin Jiang (2022) proposes six points of focus for future internationalisation of higher education. They are the following: advocacy, review, archive, cooperation, policy and help. Each country's government is responsible for policy implementation and monitoring. The justifications for internationalization of higher education are conventionally categorized into four groups that push governments to take action. They are the following:

1. Social and cultural justifications, which seek to build national identities, improve intercultural understanding in higher education institutions, and raise cross-cultural understanding across nations.
2. Political justifications that highlight the nation's foreign policy stance, national security, bolstering regional and national identity, providing aid to underdeveloped nations, and promoting international harmony and understanding.
3. Economic justifications that focus on securing competitiveness, promoting economic growth, and maintaining stable labor markets. International operations of higher education institutions are intended to generate financial profit.
4. Academic justifications for higher education internationalisation, which are supported by both national and private authorities. The primary goals are to highlight the global scope of research and instruction, extend the reach of higher education, uphold the standing and reputation of specific universities, improve quality, and heighten relevance (Pekkola, Kivistö, & Nokkala, 2014).

Governments recognise higher education as a service industry, and national policies see internationalization as a way to boost the industry's growth and profitability. This movement has aided in the creation of internationalization strategies and is mostly motivated by competitive and larger economic imperatives (Robson, & Wihlborg, 2019).

In Finland the higher education system consists of universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS). The mission of universities is described in the Universities Act (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009). It is the following: to promote independent academic research as well as academic education, to provide research-based higher education and to educate students to serve their country and humanity at large. Universities offer bachelor's, master's and doctoral (PhD) level programmes. The mission of UASs, defined in the Universities of Applied Sciences Act, is to provide higher education for professional expert tasks based on the requirements of the world of work and its development. In addition, UASs should carry out applied research, development and innovation activities that serve education in UASs and promote industry, business and regional development. UASs offer professionally oriented bachelor's and master's level programmes (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014).

Throughout the last decade, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture directs Finnish higher education institutions to internationalise their activities through several programmes. The Ministry of Education and Culture seeks to establish an ideal higher education community that generates internationally competitive competence in Finnish higher education. Higher education institutions are recommended to



include these ideas into their objectives, develop their own internationalisation strategy, and promote international partnership. The University Act 558/2009 established universities as independent legal entities, similar to public businesses or foundations. The university's management and decision-making systems were changed. It provided colleges with greater economic and administrative freedom, but also increased financial accountability (Crawford & Bethell, 2012).

Literature review. The internationalisation process in Finland has been explained from a variety of angles. T. Saarinen (2012) described language issue as one of the drivers of higher education internationalisation in Finland. The researcher presented a case of Finnish study programmes in English and their strong influence on the globalization development in higher education.

Another driver of internationalisation is the number of international students. The researchers S. Jokila and K. Filippou (2023) studied the international students' experience of training at Finnish universities during the pandemic. The study highlighted the inequality in the international students' attitudes towards student and staff mobility.

Weimer (2020) and Sierra-Huedo et al. (2022) investigated internationalisation at home based on the mobility aspect. The author stressed on the need of non-mobile staff and students to gain intercultural and international competencies being at home. Vellamo et al. (2022) tried to highlight internationalisation as an educational policy driver. The authors find out that the narrative of collaboration seemed to be rather weak, while the rhetoric of rivalry was prevalent. Internationalisation of curriculum is one more aspect of higher education internationalization in Finland.

Renfors (2021) conducted a qualitative research on the mentioned topic with the involved academics. The author concluded that the instructors possess the capacity to integrate insights from prospective professional practices and inclusive curriculum materials into their teaching sessions. However, they encounter deficiencies in the requisite skills, resources, and tools essential for adapting their pedagogical approaches to align with the demands of a culturally diverse global teaching and learning.

Methods. The research endeavors to transcend mere depiction of the internationalisation phenomenon and prioritizes critical analysis, subjective interpretation, and knowledge construction. Hence, the qualitative research methodology was selected. Based on their importance for the justifications outlining Finland's policies on the internationalisation of higher education, the official papers used for the qualitative content analysis were chosen. The chosen documents revealed educational, scientific and external backgrounds of Finnish higher education internationalisation development.

This **paper aims** to explore higher education sector in Finland in the context of internationalisation from different angles, namely, teaching methodologies, research practices, and external engagement.

Results. The concept of international cooperation was initially introduced in the 1987–1992 Higher Education Plan, which sought to strengthen Finland's institutions' ties to global networks. The primary means of cross-border cooperation prior to the EU was the Nordic exchange program Nordplus. There have been



increased demands for internationalisation since Finland joined the EU and after the Bologna statement. Numerous European programs, including Erasmus (higher education program), COMETT II (vocational education and training program), and other EU research initiatives, had been extended to Finland. After the release of the five-year development plan, internationalisation became a regular feature of higher education policy (de Wit & Deca, 2020).

Finnish higher education institutions are now more closely aligned with European and international higher education policies, owing to economic, social, and political changes. Over the past decade, Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences have experienced notable transformations in their internationalization endeavors. A pivotal catalyst for these shifts is the alteration of domestic funding mechanisms, which now prioritize international competitive funding, program alterations, student attractiveness, and scholarly publications within both higher education sectors. In recent times, the government has underscored the allocation of resources to align with objectives related to scale, excellence, and internationalisation, serving as fundamental components of the funding framework for institutions in both sectors. These assertions are corroborated within the performance agreements established between higher education institutions and the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (Hansen, Aarrevaara, Geschwind, & Stensaker, 2020).

Within universities, engaging with international counterparts stands as a crucial prerequisite for securing international funding. Research teams frequently function as integral members of global consortia, thereby establishing publication avenues within an international framework. While universities of applied sciences are not estranged from this trend, they tend to prioritize regional elements more prominently than universities. The imperatives and parameters of internationalization are contingent upon these regional considerations (Aarrevaara et al., 2022).

The internationalization strategy outlined for Finnish higher education institutions (Ministry of Education, 2009) hinges on both domestic and international evaluations of higher education performance and quality. This strategy positions internationalization of higher education institutions as pivotal for enhancing societal competitiveness. It is integrated with broader initiatives targeting the Finnish higher education sector overall, incorporating changes implemented throughout the 2010s (Aarrevaara et al., 2022).

The key substantive areas of the internationalisation strategy are described in five objectives. These a truly international higher education community, increasing quality and attractiveness, exporting knowledge, supporting a multicultural society and global responsibility (Ministry of Education, 2009).

In 2017 a steering group advising the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture released a proposal for a new international higher education and research policy for Finland (2017-2025), titled "Better together for a better world" (Academic Cooperation Association, 2017). The following overall goals are named in the strategy:

- Greater international attraction through focusing on the latest science and leading edge research
- Finland is the home of high-quality education



- Momentum for sharing knowledge, expertise and educational innovations
- A warm welcome to Finland
- The Finnish message is heard internationally
- Team Finland knowledge network
- Greater involvement of Finnish experts living abroad and alumni educated in Finland (European Commission, 2023).

The Ministry of Education and Culture has established a forum aimed at enhancing the global dimension of Finnish higher education and research. Collaborating with stakeholders, this forum has developed a vision to steer various entities, including higher education institutions and agencies under the Ministry's jurisdiction, toward key themes identified within the vision. These themes include the promotion of academic freedom in science, research, and teaching; bolstering Finland's competitiveness; fostering a culturally and linguistically diverse society; advancing sustainable development; and embracing a collaborative national approach as a fundamental aspect of promoting international endeavors (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022a). As a result of the last forum's work the "Vision for strengthening the international dimension of Finnish higher education and research by 2035" was adopted (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022b). The "Vision" presupposes Finland as the country which is a society guided by values and principles; a competitive economy that attracts talent; a responsible and receptive nation; an agent in resolving sustainable development challenges; and a country that builds on cooperation.

Discussion. Supporting a multicultural society in the strategic internationalisation of higher education institutions means that higher education institutions are actively engaged in the development of a multicultural higher education community and civil society. Tasks and measures related to multiculturalism that exchange and degree students from immigrant backgrounds and foreign exchange and degree students arriving in Finland, teachers, researchers and other foreign higher education staff the higher education community and to support internationalisation at home (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009). Global responsibility as an internationalisation objective for higher education institutions means that they use their research and expertise to solve global problems and to help developing countries solve their own problems. strengthening the knowledge base of developing countries. Universities will operate on an ethical and sustainable basis and support students' capacity to operate in a global environment and to understand the global implications of their own actions (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009).

In 2018, the Ministry of Education and Culture established the Forum for International Policies in Higher Education and Research with a two-year mandate. Its purpose is to oversee and advance the execution of the international higher education and research policy for Finland (2017-2025). The Forum makes the following recommendations (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön, 2020) to ensure the implementation of policies to promote internationalisation:

- link higher education, research and innovation;



- organise cross-administrative cooperation to make knowledge exports more flexible and to increase their volume and impact. as simply as possible and in such a way that the feedback and experiences of universities, research institutes and other actors are heard and taken into account.
- the internationalisation of the education and research sector should be seen as one of the main means of promoting labour and skills migration.
- design and implement a national and cross-governmental community welcome package for students and teaching and research staff coming to Finland.
- grant a permanent residence permit in Finland to students who have completed a degree, either directly or through a streamlined procedure.
- international country image communication in higher education and research should use a cross-sectoral approach, hashtag: #finlandworks and strengthen the messages on higher education and research in the Finland Toolbox.
- strengthen links between Finnish actors and Team Finland Knowledge network.
- higher education institutions and research institutes build a reciprocal alumni relation with international researchers/staff and students from the beginning of their studies and maintain this relationship also during their studies, or employment, the relationship should be established from the beginning of studies and after the end of studies or employment.
- finland will use education and science diplomacy in its efforts to use of academic and scientific research and education policy to help it become a bigger player in the international community.
- universities and research institutions strengthen teaching, research and active participation in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). active social interaction.
- increase the share of Finnish development cooperation funding allocated to education, research and innovation and capacity building in developing countries.
- establish a permanent national funding programme focused on global responsibility, including the development of higher education institutions and the development of capacity in developing countries. A a permanent funding programme that complements HEIs' own scholarship schemes.
- internationalisation and its development will continue to be included in the programme. A new policy on internationalisation and its further development should be developed and supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture and higher education institutions and other actors in the Ministerial sector and the research institutions of other ministries.
- every student in higher education has sections in their studies, each student should have sections in their studies that build international competence.
- incorporate needs-based teaching of native languages and create opportunities for international staff and researchers to study home languages.
- international graduate students complete their studies with the help of international students, as a rule, complete the internship part of their studies in



Finland and all international students' contacts with working life in Finland are promoted.

- the work of the Forum in monitoring and promotion of internationalisation policies is supported; development of internationalisation policies will continue to monitor the implementation of national and international documents, reports and recommendations on promoting internationalisation and to develop practices as a whole through the digital platform and events.

The external engagement is one of the key elements of the internationalisation of higher education in Finland. One of the external stakeholders is the Team Finland. The Team Finland (Team Finland, 2023) network offers companies a seamless service chain, including financing and advisory services. For businesses looking to internationalize, the network provides customized service packages based on the services offered by network actors. Over eighty local teams represent the Team Finland network overseas. The Finnish government, government-funded organizations, and other key players representing Finland in the specific area are gathered by each local team. Within Finland, the 18 local teams in the upcoming counties make up a significant portion of the Team Finland network.

Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) as a learning organisation which supports the implementation of internationalisation in education and research highlighted the issue of online learning as one of the tools for internationalisation. According to EDUFI, online learning for internationalising higher education has the added value of the possibility of increasing the number of students for three main reasons. They are the following:

- E-learning presents fewer barriers, including financial and temporal constraints, thus enhancing the equity and accessibility of internationalising higher education.
- Online courses have the capacity to engage students intrigued by the subject matter but who may not seek physical mobility or intercultural experiences.
- Through the recruitment of students from various academic institutions, online learning enables universities to deliver courses on subjects that might not have been viable otherwise due to insufficient demand (Rogler, Lehtomäki & Lampinen, 2023).

FinCEED, which stands for the Finnish Centre of Expertise in Education and Development, serves to mobilize Finnish education sector expertise for the benefit of developing nations and multilateral entities. Requests for expertise may range from short-term or long-term assignments and missions to international placements or policy assistance within bilateral and multilateral development collaborations. The Center's emphasis lies in providing support for initiatives related to systemic and policy-level enhancements, particularly in domains such as teacher training, curriculum development in primary and secondary education, assessment and evaluation, and digital learning (FinCEED, 2023).

Finnish National Agency for Education proposes several options of funding for internationalisation of higher education. They are the following:

EDUFI traineeships. These traineeships last from 3 to 6 months and available for students in higher education and recently graduated higher education students in



Finland (Finnish National Agency for Higher Education, 2023a).

Scholarship Programmes for Doctoral-level studies and research in Finland. EDUFI provides scholarships for doctoral-level students from abroad to come to Finland. These scholarship programmes facilitate the internationalization of research by fostering connections and promoting academic mobility between higher education institutions in Finland and overseas (Finnish National Agency for Higher Education, 2023b).

Creative Europe (2021–2027). It is the European Union's funding initiative designed to provide organizations and professionals in the cultural, creative, and audiovisual fields with opportunities for European collaboration and the enhancement of their endeavors. The program consists of three components: the Culture and Media sub-programs, along with the Cross-sectoral strand. Within these sections, entities from these sectors, as well as the news media, are eligible to apply for funding during the yearly application cycles (Finnish National Agency for Higher Education, 2023c).

Finnish language and culture studies in universities outside Finland. This initiative is proposed as support for universities, support for teachers, support for students and support for post-graduate students and researchers (Finnish National Agency for Higher Education, 2023d).

Civil Servant Exchange Programme. It facilitates the internationalisation and professional growth of government officials through brief placements in foreign countries within their respective administrative domains. Applicants are expected to secure placement with a host organization either through their personal connections or through the networks of their employer (Finnish National Agency for Higher Education, 2023e).

Conclusion. Internationalization constitutes an integral component of the mission for all Finnish higher education institutions. This assertion is reinforced by the incentivization integrated within the evaluation processes of both the ministry and the institutions themselves. The institution's drive towards internationalisation is not consistently mirrored in internal mechanisms. Instead, the management articulates internationalisation as a collective responsibility across the academic units and governmental bodies. Consequently, we can indicate that internationalisation is now embedded as an intrinsic aspect within Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences, rather than being treated as a distinct function.

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