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**Monika Schatz**

## **EDUCATION AS FINLAND'S HOTTEST EXPORT?**

**A Multi-Faceted Case Study  
on Finnish National Education Export Policies**

To be presented, with the permission of the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences of the University of Helsinki, for public discussion in the Auditorium XII, Fabianinkatu 33, on Saturday May 28th 2016, at 12 noon

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University of Helsinki, Faculty of Behavioural Sciences

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**Abstract**

This doctoral dissertation is a multi-faceted case study producing qualitative insights into Finland's education export policies. Drawing on education, anthropology, and critical intercultural studies, the dissertation is embedded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. The major contribution of this research is a critical approach that enhances understanding of Finland's newly emerging education export sector.

The dissertation consists of a research summary and three original refereed studies (Schatz, 2015 and Schatz, et al., 2015, and Schatz, 2016). Conceptually and empirically, the research responds to the following research questions:

- RQ1: What is the context for the emergence of Finnish education export?
- RQ2: What are the motives and objectives of Finnish education export policies?
- RQ3: What is the Finnish education export product?
- RQ4: How do Finnish higher education institutions perceive their role as education exporters?
- RQ5: What kinds of ideologies underpin Finnish education export policies?

The scope of the research concentrates on the Finnish education export context. In focus are two Finnish education export policy documents, published by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture in 2010 and 2013. The Finnish national education brand and empirical data gathered through questionnaires serve as supporting research data. The applied data analysis methods include Anderson's associative network memory model and Mayring's qualitative content analysis. Research literature on education export in other contexts is used to conceptually grasp the developments in Finland and to highlight differences and similarities between Finland and the international education export sector.

Taken together, the findings suggest that Finland's education export ambitions are embedded in international tendencies towards the commodification of education. It is demonstrated that current Finnish education export policies are closely intertwined with public discourses on PISA rankings, Finland's national education brand, and structural changes in the Finnish higher education land-

scape. The data reveals a large gap between the education export policy goals and their implementation.

Based on the findings, several challenges relating to the Finnish education export product and the role of Finnish higher education institutions as education exporters are highlighted. The dissertation problematizes the sustainability of Finland's education export sector and emphasizes the need for a critical debate on education export policy and practice.

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*Keywords:* Education export, Finnish education, education policy dynamics, education branding, commodification of education



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## List of original publications

### **Research Article I:**

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### **Research Article III:**

Schatz, M. (2016). Engines without Fuel? Empirical Findings on Finnish Higher Education Institutions as Education Exporters. *Policy Futures in Education*, 14(3),392-408



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## List of Abbreviations

CIMO – Center for International Mobility, Finland

CBR – Country Brand Report

EU – European Union

EEA – European Economic Area

HEI – Higher Education Institution

MOE – Finnish Ministry of Education (until 2011)

MOEC – Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Prologue: Education as Finland's hottest export product

Finland is a Nordic welfare state with an estimated population of 5.5 million. High rankings and exceptional results in the OECD PISA studies have made Finland famous for its educational system, and since the early 2000s, the country has been praised as a “superpower of education” (BBC, 2007).

Since the recent global paradigm shift in the governance of education towards business and marketing (cf. Baker & Wiseman, 2005; Martens et al., 2014; van der Wende, 2007), internationally competitive education is increasingly considered an asset for governments. Consequently, governments have started to invest in education branding, and marketing their educational systems (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). Also in Finland, national interest in education branding is on the rise.

In 2008, former Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb appointed a Country Brand Delegation, with the aim of creating a national Finnish brand image. The Country Brand Delegation identified education as one of the key assets of Finnish society (CBR, 2010), and recommended that Finland capitalize on its internationally-competitive education system and disseminate Finnish education across the world (Chapter “Lessons from Finland”, CBR, 2010, pp.181-252).

In 2009, occurring around the same time as the Country Brand Delegation, the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Culture set up a working group to create an education export policy for Finland. The outcome was published in Finnish, Swedish and English as “Finnish education export strategy: summary of the strategic lines and measures” (MOE, 2010). Being the first of its kind, the education export strategy did not provide guidelines on how education should be exported, what precisely it would consist of, or to whom it should be exported. Instead, Finnish Higher education institutions were declared the “operators” and “engines” of education export and given the freedom and responsibility for future initiatives.

Timely, the government made amendments to the constitutional University Act in 2008, followed by the similar Act for Universities of Applied Sciences in 2009, which provided higher education institutions with more autonomy, in terms of gaining revenue and profiling the institutions on the educational market (Aarrevaara et al., 2009; Välimaa, 2014). Although Finland has resisted adopting market-oriented values in its educational system (Sahlberg, 2007, 2015), neo-liberal terminology has increasingly shaped policy discourses on higher education (e.g., Aarrevaara et al., 2009; Komulainen et al., 2011; Välimaa, 2004). However, education export (koulutusvienti) is a new phenomenon for Finland

and to my knowledge only fairly researched (Cai et al. 2011). The declared aspiration of the ministries' strategy was:

Finland's strengths in the education field must be utilized and education must be developed into successful export articles for Finland. Measures must be taken to maintain and enhance the international competitiveness of the Finnish education system. The aim is that Finland will be one of the world's leading education-based economies resting on the quality of the education system. By 2015 the proportion of education and knowledge exports will have grown significantly in overall exports. (MOE, 2010, p.5)

Over five years down the line, the goals of the strategy seem overly ambitious, as Finland is still far from being a renowned education exporter. Yet, several recent developments in the Finnish education and economic sectors make education export seem more topical than ever. Since the decline in sales of Nokia, the former figurehead of the Finnish economy, Finnish exports have dropped significantly. The current government announced significant funding cuts in the education sector. A new income stream, from a prosperous education export sector, would thus be warmly welcomed.

But what kind of education export are we talking about? The term is not univocal, and contrary to the image of the export of physical goods across national borders, the export of education must be understood less geographical. While I will discuss the term in more detail later on, for now it needs to be clarified that education export, in the Finnish context, encompasses

- 1) Selling educational equipment to other countries
- 2) Selling educational knowledge to other countries
- 3) Selling Finnish education know-how/programs/degrees to other countries (to non-Finns both outside and inside of Finland)

This means "export" can also happen inside of Finland geographically and is not always a cargo of goods or a specific product. For example, a group of Chinese teachers visiting Finnish schools would be considered an education export activity, because the idea behind it is that educational expertise will leave the country. Another form of export are incoming foreign degree students (who are also considered to take the Finnish education back with them).

Indeed, the positive reputation of Finnish education attracted a steadily growing number of international students studying in Finland (Center for International Mobility [CIMO], 2012). A second working group on education export, set up in 2013, evaluated the challenges and opportunities of "Finnish education on the global market". The working group argued that international students create the

largest revenue for the world's leading education export industries (MOEC, 2013), and thus urged the government to introduce tuition fees for students from outside the European Union (EU) and the European Economic Area (EEA). Indeed, the proposal to introduce tuition fees for non-EU and non-EEA students is currently under consideration.

However, what is actually happening in the Finnish education export sector? What are Finland's motives, objectives, and strategies as an education exporter? In addition, what, exactly, is the export product?

Throughout this article-based dissertation, I argue that Finland is a unique case of an education exporter. The Finnish education export sector is not easily comparable to that of other education exporters, for the following reasons:

- 1) Finland has no history of education export (i.e., through colonial history)
- 2) Finland aims to capitalize on its internationally-acclaimed success in PISA, which means that Finnish education export is based on basic education, unlike other countries that focus on the export of higher education
- 3) The Finnish constitution promises free education, which (to date) prohibits charging tuition fees, thus making the export of commercial education a controversial concept in society.
- 4) In contrast to the dominant education exporters, which operate in English, Finnish education is primarily delivered in Finnish
- 5) The Finnish government declared education a part of Finland's national brand, making Finnish education export a government-driven initiative rather than an outcome of existing business practices.

Consequently, Finnish education export does not benefit much from the experience of other education exporters, and has no concrete example to follow. The variety of Finnish educational export "products" is large and incoherent, including educational tourism, training packages, educational technology, policy counseling, teacher exchanges, involvement in school projects and universities abroad, and joint programs. Some export activities are based on initiatives of individual actors; some are institutionally based, while some others are coordinated across institutions. Two national umbrella organizations, Future Learning Finland<sup>1</sup> and Team Finland<sup>2</sup>, were created to stimulate educational exports. Their objective was to connect Finnish higher education institutions with the private sector, embassies, and external consulting agencies. Both networks, however, kept rather loose ties among the members and understand themselves as providing contacts rather than real national coordination.

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<sup>1</sup> Homepage: <http://www.futurelearningfinland.fi>

<sup>2</sup> Homepage: <http://team.finland.fi/etusivu>

Based on this broad variety of stakeholders and practices, it is hard to grasp a concrete understanding of what is going on in Finnish education export. Educational research has not yet paid attention to this new phenomenon. While there have been a few studies on education export in the university context (Cai et al., 2012), up to this point there are no broader conceptualizations about education export as a new policy. In this doctoral dissertation I address this gap by framing Finland's education export within global education policy trends as well as the local Finnish context.

This contextualization allows me to then present three studies (Articles I-III), which take a critical phenomenological approach towards Finland's education policies (Article I), Finnish education branding (Article II), and Higher education institutions as education exporters (Article III). The studies are case studies, which aim at raising awareness for key actors and ideologies behind Finland's recent education export strategies. In summary, the research seeks to shed light on current practices in order to open up new avenues for further research.

## **1.2 Overview of dissertation structure**

As stated above, the overarching objective of my research is to provide a better understanding of Finnish education export policies. Based on the format of this article-based dissertation, I chose to address this objective within three different studies (Research Articles I-III). Each study addresses a different research question and uses different types of data, and thus the applied methodology differs accordingly. They can be read as independent case studies. Taken together, they complement each other providing different facets of the case of Finnish education export policy.

This introduction chapter briefly presented the research problem and serves as an orientation guide for the reader. It positions the research in academic disciplines and provides short definitions of key concepts, which will be further elaborated throughout the dissertation.

Chapter 2 introduces the research design. Here I elaborate on my philosophical framework and its methodological implications. Following a self-reflective approach, I decided to include my personal positioning towards the research topic. The aim of this personal display is to increase transparency of my agency as a researcher and to avoid ambiguity about the motives driving this research. This shall help the reader to understand the rationale behind the data collection process and data choices. The actual study objectives and the research questions are presented in the following section. The chapter closes with a description of the case study design.

Chapter 3 continues to introduce the research by opening up data and analysis. The types of data and methods of analysis are discussed here to provide a

more holistic understanding of the overall case study. The presentation follows the order of the three research articles included in this dissertation. A more case specific elaboration on data and applied methods is included in each research article, in Chapter 7.

The theoretical research framework has the agenda of discussing the dissertation's key concepts and contextualizing all three articles in research literature. It, therefore, takes the most space in this dissertation and is divided into three parts. First, Chapter 4 outlines the theoretical foundations of education as a commodity. The chapter reviews the connections between marketing and education in the research literature and lays the groundwork for a general conceptualization of education export. Second, Chapter 5 provides insight into the local research context in Finland. It summarizes international perceptions of the Finnish education system and connects it to Finnish education export policies. Third, in Chapter 6, I combine the reviewed literature from the previous chapters into a theoretical research framework, which I call the star-figured model. The model highlights my theoretical understanding of Finland education export policies and serves as a contextual base for the individual research articles and the case study as a whole.

Chapter 7 presents the three peer-refereed research articles. The articles are published in different journals and are to be read as individual case studies with their own research questions, study design, and discussions of results. Therefore, I decided to insert an intermission after each article that connects to the dissertation's research objectives. These intermissions summarize the major contributions of the respective article to the research questions stated in the introduction.

A critical discussion of findings and their implications is part of each research article. But to deepen the discussion in regard to the overall dissertation, Chapter 8 highlights the relevance and further implications of the combined research findings.

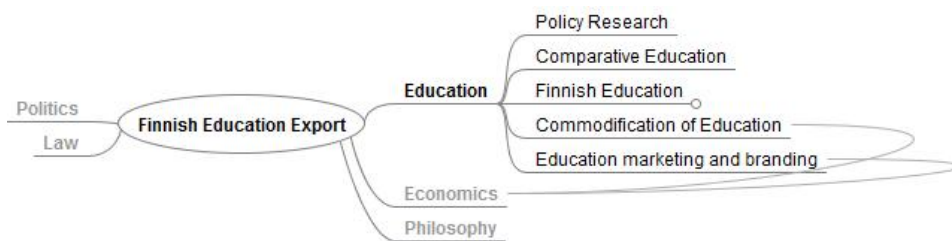
The final chapter, Chapter 9, is a short epilogue that connects to the initial overture by pointing out the relationship between this dissertation and topical issues in the Finnish education sector.

### **1.3 Positioning of this dissertation in research**

My PhD research is inspired by a multiple academic disciplines. This section displays where to locate it among various streams of research. Formally, this dissertation is to be handed in to the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Helsinki. The research articles have been published in the *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, and *Policy Futures in Education*. All three of these journals invite interdisciplinary perspectives, but publish predominantly educational research.

This situates my study mainly in educational research. As the title suggests, a main emphasis is on education policies and this dissertation’s major contributions are for Finnish education policy research.

However, the research draws on a variety of academic disciplines and is meant to be of interdisciplinary interest. By interdisciplinarity, I refer broadly to “any form of dialogue or interactions between two or more disciplines” (Moran, 2000, p.16). The interdisciplinary approach is based on two arguments. First, my own research background is that of a humanist. Based on my research identity, the methodological framework draws on anthropology, sociology, and critical intercultural studies, which affects the choice of methods and the data analysis. Secondly, the concept of education export in itself indicates that it can be conceptualized from an educational or an economic perspective. Even within a predominantly educational approach, the theoretical base needs to connect these separated academic approaches.



**Figure 1.** Research perspectives on Finnish education export

Figure 1 displays the different research disciplines that are connected to Finnish education export. While already aiming at an interdisciplinary approach, many possible research angles have been left out. The black font highlights the perspectives with are mainly incorporated into this research, while the grey branches of politics, law, philosophy and economics are only touched upon occasionally.

Thus, both the methodological and theoretical chapters entangle various academic disciplines with each other. I use a literature review to establish the contexts in which the Finnish education export policies are meaningful. In order to understand what makes these policies “Finnish”, I first explore connections and divergences from a global context (Chapter 4) and then continue to explain them from a local political perspective (Chapter 5). I thereby emphasize that the policies I am interested in cannot be separated from wider discourses on education, marketization, and policy transfers. In addition, the discourses consolidated, or challenged, in the policies are constructed outside of the documents themselves. I traced these discourses and their interfaces through the literature by starting

from what I identified to be the key concepts of this research. A risk of interdisciplinary research is that concepts used in everyday language might have different connotations to different readers. To provide a common ground, the following list displays my understanding of possibly ambiguous concepts, which are used repeatedly in this thesis:

**Education borrowing and lending:** the transfer of degrees, educational practices, services, and materials from one country to another.

**Education export:** an intentional business transaction concerning degrees, educational practices, services, and materials from one country to another.

**Country Brand:** A brand designed to increase a nation's global competitiveness. While in Finland the term "Country Brand" is used, the more common form in literature is "nation brand". Both terms are used in this dissertation, interchangeably, for the same practices.

**Discourse:** Expression of ideas in speech or writing, embedded in a communicative and ideological context.

**Globalization:** Structural and ideological changes towards worldwide connections in economics, labor, and communications.

**Ideology:** A set of value statements, which explicitly or implicitly affects discourse.

**Knowledge economy:** The conceptualization of knowledge, education, and technological advancements in terms of capital and economic benefit.

**Neo-liberalism in education:** The trend of introducing market-based values to education systems, such as accountability, competitiveness, and performativity.

**Policy:** A set of principles or directions issued by a governing institution.

**Research:** A creative, transparent investigation of data with the aim of advancing knowledge.

## 2 Research Design

### 2.1 Qualitative paradigm as philosophical foundation

Educational science is a wide area of research, which can be conducted from different angles. Both qualitative and quantitative paradigms are commonly used as research foundations. This dissertation is anchored in the qualitative research paradigm, which has a strong impact on how the research is designed, conducted, and what criteria for evaluating its quality are applied. Therefore, I find it important to present in detail why I have chosen this paradigm and how it impacted my research.

Creswell (2013) suggests choosing the research paradigm according to five criteria: 1) the researcher's worldview, 2) experience and training, 3) psychological attributes, 4) name of the problem, and 5) audience for the study. To me, the first two, worldview, experience and training, are intertwined and have been decisive for my choice. During my undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate education I have been immersed in qualitative research methodology, and interpretivist epistemology and postmodern philosophy. I agree with Creswell (2013) who argues that the chosen research paradigm affects research ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetoric and methodology (p. 5). Leaning onto those levels, the following provides an overview of my understanding of the qualitative paradigm and how it has shaped my research perspective.

On an ontological level, I embrace the idea that reality is perceived differently by different people, that there can be multiple interpretations to the same phenomena. Many qualitative researchers thus prefer to use the concept of "realities", to highlight that there is not only one correct interpretation. Interpretations, meanings, and realities are socially constructed by people and thus they are personal and contextual.

If I had to put a label on my ontological worldview and research perspective, I would perhaps identify myself with what Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) classify as qualitative purists:

Qualitative purists (also called constructivists and interpretivists) reject what they call positivism. They argue for the superiority of constructivism, idealism, relativism, humanism, hermeneutics, and, sometimes, postmodernism (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Schwandt, 2000; Smith, 1983, 1984). These purists contend that multiple-constructed realities abound, that time- and context-free generalizations are neither desirable nor possible, that research is value-bound, that it is impossible to differentiate fully causes and effects, that logic flows from specific to general (e.g., explanations are generated inductively

from the data), and that knower and known cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality. (p. 14)

I have indeed been influenced by constructivist research, critical theory and hermeneutics. At the same time, I do not claim “superiority” for my approach as I do also recon the advantages of measures and positivist investigations. I would argue that am adopting the position of a “soft” relativist who does not entirely reject positivism, but adopts a constructivist framework because it helps me to make sense of the phenomena I am interested in.

This affects the overall relationship between researcher, research, and the conceptualization of knowledge. On this epistemological level, my interpretivist stance is that the researcher is inseparable from the subject or object of interest. This challenges the assumption that a researcher can decouple herself from her own beliefs and practices for the sake of “pure” scientific inquiry. Even in quantitative settings, the researcher’s disposition affects what and how research is conducted and published. Interpretivist researchers acknowledge and emphasize that their subjective dispositions shape both research and its outcomes. By involving the researcher in the study, human interest becomes acknowledged and integrated. Consequently, research from within an interpretivist framework is concerned less with finding objective truth. Objectivity becomes relative and hard to measure when considering that perspectives are subjective, thereby acknowledging the possibility of multiple interpretations. Instead, the aim is to focus on meaning, and reflect upon different perspectives, in order to provide deeper understanding.

This involvement of the researcher has also implications on the axiological level of the study. Whereas in quantitative research, the values of the researcher are kept out of the study to avoid bias, the qualitative approach assumes that the researcher’s values are influencing the results and their presentation. As Creswell (2013) outlines, “the qualitative investigator admits the value-laden nature of the study and actively reports his or her values and biases, as well as the value nature gathered from the field” (p. 6). Following this approach empowers the researcher to have a voice and to include his or her experience in the research. Validity, in that case, however, often becomes a matter of empathy or trustworthiness. This is most commonly regarded as the major disadvantage of a qualitative approach, yet qualitative researches have proven that research can be conducted both personal and with scientific rigor. Engaging with the researcher’s subjectivity can make the research more honest, comprehensible and thus traceable and valid. By opening up findings to re-interpretation and negotiation, the researcher can triangulate interpretations, and further contribute to a greater depth of understanding, or, in Geertz’s (1983) terms, “thickness” of description.

As a consequence, many researchers also chose to reflect the choice of paradigm on a rhetorical level (e.g. Creswell, 2013; Ellis, 2004). There are differ-

ences in terms of research vocabulary, writing style and research format. In qualitative research, “meaning”, “perception” and “understanding” are central, and concepts and their definitions evolve during the study (Creswell 2013:7). While quantitative research advocates the writing style of impersonal and formal reporting, the qualitative researcher seeks to write engaging, personal, and reflective (ibid.). I deliberately chose the latter. As common in qualitative research, my voice and agency as a researcher is present throughout the study by the use of the pronoun “I”. I am paying special attention to my role as a researcher by highlighting the process behind this dissertation.

The three published articles are the visible end-product of a personal journey, which I believe cannot be isolated from the results. Therefore I chose a format that includes the research articles in the research summary (instead of attaching them afterwards), with the aim to highlight how one study led to another. Furthermore, I include an honest self-reflection on my personal research dispositions in the subsequent chapter (Chapter 2.3). Finally, the choice of research data and methods will be embedded in a presentation of the underlying research process. Neuman (2006) argues that qualitative research process is nonlinear: “Rather than moving in a straight line, a nonlinear research path makes successive passes through steps, sometimes moving backward and sideways before moving on.” (p. 152) This was the case with this dissertation as well, and to achieve more integrity I will also display some of the difficulties I encountered in the research design.

Finally, the research paradigm should be reflected in the research methodology. To me, the boundaries between both are permeable, because research paradigm and methodology have a reciprocal impact on my ontological and epistemological assumptions. The methodology is embedded in a constructivist perspective. Inspired by the philosophical works of Jacques Derrida and Ludwig Wittgenstein, I share the constructivist assumption that language creates meaning. Derrida stresses the instability of those meanings, due to their intertextuality. To Wittgenstein, on the other hand, meanings are relational and recognizable through shared characteristics, and thus stabilized and regulated in use. Taking the argument further, Michel Foucault stressed that language constitutes and reproduces the social order and power relations. This anchors my research approach in a postmodern, constructivist approach towards language and culture, as promoted by critical discourse analysts (cf. Barker & Galasinski, 2008; Blackledge, 2009; Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2011). For both, any form of written or spoken conversation is a socially constructed discourse.

As Taylor (1997; 2004) argued, there is an important distinction to make between discourse analysis as a method and discourse analysis as a methodology. Here, I am adopting discourse analysis as a methodology in a broad sense (cf. Barker & Galasinski, 2008; Codd, 1988; Taylor, 1997; Taylor 2004). The term

“discourse” highlights the notion of language being socially constructed and refers here broadly to any form of written or spoken language.

The theoretical assumptions behind the concept of discourse align to my understanding of education export policy, the focus of this research. Education policy documents are not just plain texts, but a form of discourse. They are co-created by a multiplicity of actors in a specific contextual setting. They are thus embedded in a multiplicity of social, political, and historical discourses (e.g., Ball, 1994; Trowler, 2003). They have an outspoken political agenda, which they aim to project, maintain, and reinforce. However, not all ideological assumptions that shape policies might be visible at first sight, because just like other discourses, they are contextual and embedded in other “hidden” discourses on power, agency, and ideology.

In my use of the term ideology, I follow linguist Holliday (2013), who defines ideology as, “a system of ideas which supports a particular set of interests” (p. 172). While some of these ideologies are explicit, others remain invisible or “left out”. In this way certain societal discourses are confirmed while others are challenged. Holliday (2013) argues that the aim of critical research should be to make these ideologies visible. While Holliday (2013) proposes this in the context of culture, I have argued elsewhere that this is relevant for the context of education as well (Schatz & Niemi, 2015). Education policies carry norms and values and are thus ideological by nature. Rather than just carrying them, policies also implement change and make their inherent ideologies part of the structure of society.

Using discourse analysis as a methodology implies that the same sensitivity towards ideology should be applied to policy studies, in general, and to this dissertation, in particular. My research responds to this aspiration through the fifth research objective, which aims at revealing ideologies behind Finland’s education export policies and their implications.

In summary, discourse analysis as methodology offers the following important theoretical insights for this dissertation:

- 1) Finnish education export policies (as discourse) are dialogical and constructed in social interaction. They represent the outcomes of various other discourses. This means they are contextual and include “hidden” voices which are not easy to trace.
- 2) The formulation of Finnish education export policies represents a purposeful selection of language options. Through this selective use of language, the policy documents formulate, reproduce and reinforce ideologies, identities and power relations.

As a consequence, in this study I do not take the Finnish education export policy documents at face value. Instead, my research questions seek to explore the poli-

cy discourses by contextualizing the Finnish education export policy as much as possible. Looking at discourses in a larger context will provide a deeper understanding of the Finnish education export policies. Thereby the methodology aligns to the ontological and epistemological research perspectives and supports the overall aim of this dissertation.

The practical advantages of discourse analysis as a methodology have been outlined by Taylor (1997) as follows:

This approach is particularly useful for critical policy analysis because it can take account of policy making at all levels, allows for conceptualisation of the state, and highlights the political nature of policy making. In addition, it is a dynamic framework which emphasises culture as well as practice. (p. 25)

Combining the theoretical and practical aspects, I use discourse analysis both as a theoretical perspective and as a broad methodological framework in this dissertation. I however do not use it as a method. This is an important distinction which I would like to elaborate further. When it comes to choosing research methods, the impact of methodology is disputed. Some researchers argue that each research paradigm comes with a certain set of methods which create the toolbox for the researcher. This makes sense because, as outlined in this chapter, the methodology affects the type of scientific inquiry from the very start to the final presentation. The suitability of analytical methods is bound to the subject/object of inquiry and the type of research questions asked. Over many generations of research, the qualitative paradigm has established its own methodological toolbox. This toolbox commonly includes qualitative interviews, ethnography, focus groups, action research, and discourse analysis (here as an analytical tool). It would thus appear to be a natural choice for me to use discourse analysis both as a methodology and as data analysis method.

However, more and more researchers challenge the idea that methodology naturally dictates methods. For example Ellis (2006), who promotes herself the method of auto-ethnography, acknowledges that “qualitative research falls roughly along a continuum ranging from an orientation akin to positivist science to one similar to art and literature.” (p. 27). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argue that this continuum should be reflected in applied research methods as well. They advocate a mixed method research model, in which methodology constitutes a philosophical framework, which can be used as a base for the research without limiting it to certain techniques.

When I started this research, I was used to apply the qualitative methodological toolbox and only little familiar with other research methods. I did consider the use of discourse analysis as method as well, but it turned out that it didn't work well with the data. In the end, I chose a mixed-method approach, that anal-

yses discourses in a broad, methodological perspective (by looking at policy documents and the discourses about them), but not by applying discourse analysis (i.e. critical linguistic text analysis as promoted by Gee 2011). Outlining my case study design in Chapter 2.4, I will demonstrate that this was not a random decision but in fact the most suitable solution based on my own research data and the research questions.

## **2.2 Reflections on researcher's position, research process and data collection**

This is a personal story on research ambitions, data collection, encountered difficulties, and the prevalence of pragmatism. As I touched upon earlier, the Achilles' heel of adopting a qualitative framework is the researcher's own bias. Researchers start from a particular ideological position, and then select data that supports this view, or interpret the data according to their personal ideologies. This accusation has been countered with the argument that research is never free of value statements and a priori concepts. Yet, the only way to fully address this limitation is to acknowledge my own subjectivity and ideologies.

Following this rationale, I will use this section to display my predispositions and the reasons involved in formulating my research questions. Using a self-reflective narrative, I aim to increase the transparency and credibility of the research design.

My relationship to Finnish education export is partly that of an outsider, and partly that of an insider. I am an outsider because I was born, raised, and educated in Germany. In 2008, I came to Finland as an Erasmus exchange student. I stayed for a complete Master's Degree at the University of Helsinki, and then continued with doctoral studies. Being an international student in Finland makes me one of the "customers" of Finnish education export, and, thus, I am also partly an insider. I have witnessed and accompanied many visitors who came to the university to learn about the Finnish miracle, and while working for international coordinators in various departments, I have been involved in marketing and promoting Finland as a study destination for foreigners. I am thankful for those experiences. Being a researcher at the Department of Teacher Education and being an international student both convinced me that there are great innovations in Finnish education and school practices, which I would like to see in every school around the world. Education export could be a way to make this happen by spreading good practices. As Cowen (2000) remarks,

after all, that is what comparative education is about—learning things of practical value from the study of foreign educational systems, is it not? Therefore, bits and pieces of foreign educational systems have to be bor-

rowable, transferable, co-optable. Our professional ideology says so.  
(p.130)

What I admire about the Finnish education system is that it has, by and large, resisted current international trends of competition in education, accountability, and standardization. Thus, when I first heard of foreign teachers having to pay large sums of money to gain insights into the Finnish school system, I was perplexed. Since the Finnish success in PISA, numerous publications are available that provide knowledge into the Finnish education policies. Moreover, according to my values, successful education policies should not be turned into a luxury item, but be made available for the benefit of children, worldwide.

Perhaps this is a naïve point of view, but it is the starting point of my critical perspectives towards the Finnish education export policies. I find that turning education into a business is undermining the foundation of what makes Finnish education so unique, namely, that it has refrained from commodification, thus far. In the small amount of research available on the export of Finnish education, I did not find any presenting this as an issue. I decided, therefore, to investigate Finnish education export, critically, for market-based ideologies. I want to raise a controversy about the ethical implications of education export, and whether it could/should perhaps be done in a different way. My criticality aims to remind of the social responsibility of educational researchers, policy makers, and exporters. Finnish education export is still a novice sector, and much can be affected at this stage.

I would like my research to be part of the complex process of education export policy by giving voices to certain actors and ideologies, which often remain hidden. In this dissertation, I present three articles, in which, however, the engagement with actors remained only at a conceptual level. The data used in the articles consists of policy documents (Research Article I), Finland's Country Brand report (Research Article II) and a questionnaire. This might seem counter-intuitive to the previously philosophical framework, because qualitative research is often more interested in human experience and thus works with qualitative methods, such as participant observation, interviews or auto-ethnography.

The reason is, as I outlined earlier, that I did not follow a linear research path. Often, research reports such as a dissertation cover up the detours and instead present only the final research design. This provides more consistency and readability, and makes the researcher less vulnerable. Yet, it is exactly that vulnerability that makes qualitative research transparent and ethical (cf. Ellis, 2005). Therefore, and to be consistent with the research philosophy, I decided to open up a bit more of the data collection and difficulties I encountered with the data.

Indeed, I began this research strictly using the qualitative methodological toolbox. I started my doctoral research in 2012 with an ethnography at the Education Export Unit at the Palmenia Center for Continuing Education in Helsinki.

Palmenia is connected to the University of Helsinki, yet as a separate institute it is allowed to make profit from education exports and other independent activities. Introduced as a researcher, I took part as an observer in a visit of headmasters and teachers from Shanghai (SMEC Chinese Education Delegation Course). The visit lasted September 2 to 23, 2012, and was jointly organized by the Education Export Unit in Palmenia, Helsinki, and EduCluster, a similar organization in Jyväskylä. The visit consisted of daily lectures and workshops on different aspects of the Finnish education system, teacher education and teaching practices, school visits, and reflection and discussion sessions. During breaks and field trips I had time to engage with the visitors as well as the organizing staff members from the education export units in Helsinki and Jyväskylä. I made daily fieldwork notes, and participated in the activities actively by supporting the members of Education Export unit. I developed a feedback form that was distributed to the visitors from Shanghai, and conducted an intercultural training session for the education export unit in Helsinki, based on the observations during the SMEC visit. My research was therefore an action research.

However, it soon became obvious that I would encounter difficulties with the data I gathered. At that time, the education export units perceived competition for projects, customers, and funds to be very fierce. As the former Director of Palmenia, Pirjo Hiidenmaa, put it, “Everyone is knocking on the same doors” (Hiidenmaa, 2015, research interview), both within Finland and across global competitors. I had to sign non-disclosure agreements that restricted me from using any information related to customers, product design, strategies, and possible problems. The data I gathered was perceived as sensitive and confidential.

This made the fieldwork very exciting for me as a researcher, but soon I realized that I got myself into a dilemma: on the one hand, I wanted to conduct my research ethically, stick to the agreements, and respect the concerns of my interview partners. On the other hand, I wanted to conduct my research ethically, in the sense that I could also apply critically, rather than only “promoting” the practices I witnessed. It made me furious to see how my research would be suffocated by having to submit to business strategies. I realized that I wouldn't be able to combine this sensitive fieldwork neither with the practical publishing requirements of an article-based dissertation, nor with my own standards of criticality.

I kept conducting interviews with different actors (e.g. education exporters at universities and in the private sector) and decision makers (representatives from the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Government's Education Export working group, as well as CIMO) in the Finnish education export landscape, to

gather a deeper understanding of the scene and to find a new research angle<sup>3</sup>. Over the course of this data collection it became clear that my experience in Palmenia were not an exception; in fact, most interview participants required confidentiality agreements before they shared their insights with me.

Encountering these difficulties in the field fundamentally altered my research plan. Firstly, it made me furious to witness firsthand how critical research is suffocated by having to submit to business strategies. This made me question, even more, the perception of Finnish education as a business. As a consequence, I had to reflect even more upon the ideology behind my research and my own position and power as a researcher. I want to raise questions and critical awareness for education export practices and the lack of research investigating them. Yet, I agree with Cowen (2000) again who warned that,

In such a conversation it is important to avoid a messianic tone. Even to imply that I know with clarity what should be done, that I have firm “solutions” to our pressing little “problems”, would not only be foolish; it would also be untrue. (p. 333)

I may not be able to offer solutions, but as a researcher I have the power raise questions. Consequently, this research ideology inspired me to focus on the conceptualization of education export and the commodification of education, including critical perspectives. As a whole, my dissertation seeks to raise attention in educational research for education export as business, and urges for a research based conversation to be had about its future directions.

Secondly, I realized that maintaining my freedom for criticism was more important to me, as a researcher, than to have unique data. I decided to focus instead on data which is publicly accessible, so that my analysis would not be bound by any conflict of interest. In the end, my experiences of “failure” with grand scale ethnographic research designs also helped me to focus on pragmatic research choices and set my goals more realistically.

Thirdly, I gained a very valuable insight: I had somehow taken it for granted that Finnish education export is a particular case in a larger context of global education import and export. The data collection process, especially the interviews, helped me to realize what actually makes education export in Finland different, and it pushed me to investigate this further. I learned that what is missing, for me as a researcher, and the practitioners, is some conceptual groundwork which helps to contextualize this peculiar phenomenon. I then decided to put my focus on the actual education export policy documents. This is when I adjusted

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<sup>3</sup> These interviews include 12 recorded semi-structured expert interviews, as well as two recorded focus groups, conducted between 2012-2013 by the researcher.

my research objectives to their current form, formulated clear research questions and started to explore Finnish education export as a case.

### **2.3 Study Objectives and Research Questions**

My doctoral research explores policies and practices of Finnish education export, and aims at providing a more contextualized understanding of current practices. However, claiming to present a holistic image of Finnish education export would be presumptuous and out of the scope of this thesis. Since education export is a new phenomenon in Finland, much groundwork in research has yet to be done, and I have previously outlined what inspired this interest. My original contribution is a multi-faceted case study which draws a connection between Finland's education export policies, the Finnish education brand and higher education institutions. The focus lies on the entanglement between education and economics, which is addressed in each study from within a critical perspective. The intention of this critical research approach is to raise awareness for ideologies within education export and their ethical implications.

Derived from this overall purpose, the following broad research objectives can be formulated:

1. Develop a contextualization of Finnish education export policies
2. Identify motives and aims of Finnish education export policies
3. Clarify what constitutes the Finnish education export product
4. Investigate how the Finnish education export strategies are implemented
5. Reveal education export ideologies and discuss their implications

These objectives constitute the threads that interweave throughout this dissertation, and are all pulled together in the discussion. As displayed in Table 1, each objective has been reformulated into a more concrete research question, which corresponds with the objective. The research questions are answered conceptually and empirically, both in this dissertation introduction and through the presented research publications. The table also indicates the part of the dissertation that addresses the respective research objective and research question.

Research objective:	Research question:	Dissertation unit:
1. Develop a contextualization of Finnish education export policies	→ What is the context for the emergence of Finnish education export?	→ <b>Chapters 4, 5, &amp; 6</b> of this dissertation
2. Identify motives and objectives of Finnish education export policies	→ What are the motives and objectives of Finnish education export policies?	→ <b>Research Article I:</b> Towards one of the leading education based economies? - Investigating Aims, Strategies and Practices of Finland's Education Export Landscape" ( <i>Journal of Studies in International Education</i> )
3. Clarify what constitutes the Finnish education export product	→ What is the Finnish education export product?	↗ ↘ <b>Research article II:</b> From Pisa to National Branding: Exploring Finnish Education® ( <i>Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education</i> )
4. Investigate how the Finnish education export strategies are implemented	→ How do Finnish higher education institutions perceive their role as education exporters?	→ <b>Research article III:</b> Engines without Fuel? - Empirical Findings on the Role of Finnish Higher Education Institutions as Education Exporters (accepted in <i>Policy Futures in Education</i> )
5. Reveal education export ideologies and discuss their ethical implications	→ What kinds of ideologies underpin Finnish education export policies?	→ <b>Chapters 4, 5, 7, 8</b> of this dissertation & <b>Research articles I-III</b>

**Table 1:** Overview of research objectives and research questions

The first research objective, *to develop a contextualization of Finnish education export policies* (RO1), addresses the need to conceptualize Finnish education export. The corresponding research question is, therefore: *what is the context for the emergence of Finnish education export?*. As already hinted at in the overture, there is a lack of research on Finnish education export itself. However, it can be discussed in the context of research literature on education export in other countries and with the established field of Finnish education policy research. I address the research objective by discussing theoretical foundations of education as a commodity, as well as international trends of marketization of education, and the history and practices of education export.

From this global approach, I shift my attention towards the Finnish research context and discuss the Finnish education system, the fame it has attracted through the OECD's PISA studies and hence how it inspired education export policies. In Chapter 6, the literature review is pulled together into a theoretical research framework that corresponds with the research question RQ1, by providing the means to contextualize Finnish education export. This also serves as a foundation for the research questions that follow.

The second research objective is *to identify motives and objectives of Finnish education export policies* (RO2). The objective has been formulated based on the research problem that was sketched out in the overture, namely that the Finnish education export is unique in several regards and thus not necessarily comparable to what is commonly regarded as the education export sector. The equivalent research question is: *what are the motives and objectives of Finnish education export policies?* (RQ2). The research question is addressed in the article Schatz (2015): "Towards one of the leading education based economies? - Investigating Aims, Strategies and Practices of Finland's Education Export Landscape", which was published in the *Journal of Studies in International Education*. The original article is included in this dissertation, as Research Article I, in Chapter 7.

In order to answer RQ2, I compared the education export strategies issued by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture in 2010 and 2013. With the help of qualitative content analysis, I explore the aims, strategies, motives and objectives of these documents. The analysis puts forward new insights into how to define education export, in the Finnish context. It also illustrates the shift in policy dynamics and a change from the export of basic education towards the export of higher education. During the analysis, two findings are considered as especially important for the structure of this dissertation. First, the government's policies do not define the Finnish education export product, but rather rely on the marketability of the Finnish education brand. This finding will be followed up in Research Article II. Second, the education export policies urge Finnish higher education institutions to become the operators of the Finnish education export sector. This places the focus on higher education institutions as education

export practitioners. Their role as education export practitioners is addressed in the fourth research objective and presented in Research Article II.

The third objective of this dissertation, to *clarify what constitutes the Finnish education export product* (RO3), is addressed by research question *What is the Finnish education export product?* (RQ3), and it is derived directly from the previous research on motives and objectives of Finnish education export. As outlined above, the first research article presents an in-depth analysis of the policy documents, and thus also provides answers to RQ3 from the perspective of the policy documents. However, as the findings reveal, the Finnish education export product is based upon the education brand. This draws a connection between education export policies and the Finnish national education brand, which, as outlined in the Overture, was created by the Finnish Country Brand delegation in 2008. To follow up on this, I decided to continue answering RQ3 by investigating how Finnish education is presented in the Country Brand Report. Together with my colleagues, Ana Popovic and Fred Dervin, I analyzed the report for distinctive features of the Finnish education brand. Both marketing insights and a critical intercultural perspective are used to discuss the brand. This article has been published in 2015 as Schatz, M., Popovic, A, Dervin, F.: "From PISA to National Branding: Exploring Finnish Education®" in *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*. It is included in this dissertation in Chapter 7, as Research Article II.

The fourth research objective is to *investigate how the Finnish education export strategies are implemented* (RO4). The aim of this objective is to shift focus from policy to implementation. As highlighted in Research Article I, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture declared Finland's higher education institutions as the "engines" (MOE 2010) of education export. Therefore, I decided to I shift the focus to the actors of education export and investigate the question: *how do Finnish higher education institutions perceive their role as education exporters?* (RQ4). This fourth research question adds an empirical perspective to the previous conceptual objectives. In order to respond to the research question, I sent a questionnaire to international offices from universities and universities of applied sciences, across Finland. The received data challenges the Ministry's education export policy discourse from the practitioner's point of view. It also serves as a case study for policy implementation processes in Finland. The research has been accepted in the journal of *Policy Futures in Education*, as Schatz (2016), "Engines without Fuel? - Empirical Findings on the Role of Finnish Higher Education Institutions as Education Exporters". The article is included as Research Article III in Chapter 7.

Taken together, the theoretical framework and the three research articles address different facets of the Finnish education export policies, thus addressing the overall aim of this thesis to provide new insights into this newly emerging field. The fifth research objective, *reveal education export ideologies, and dis-*

*cuss their ethical implications* (RO5) is an overarching goal. It is based on my understanding of critical research, on which I elaborated in Chapter 2.1. The question: *what kinds of ideologies underpin Finnish education export policies?* (RQ5) indirectly served as my main motivation for conducting this research and thus already touched upon in the research design chapter. It is further directly addressed in the theoretical research model (Chapter 6), and in each of the research articles (Chapter 7). Special attention is also paid to ideologies and their implications in the closing discussion in Chapter 8.

## **2.4 Creating a multi-faceted case study of Finland's education export policies**

I have previously outlined five research objectives and five consecutive research questions, which all connect to the overarching aim of providing a better understanding of Finland's education export policies. This approach can be formulated as a case study. A case study, following Yin's (2015) definition, is an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in its context. "The case" can be an object, an event, a group of people, or any other research interest. According to Yin (2014), an important feature of a case study is that it "relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulation fashion" (p. 17). In a case study, multiple data is used to explore the same phenomenon from different angles. In this thesis, the defined unit of analysis, "the case", are Finland's national education export policies.

Yin argues further that case studies are more powerful and convincing when they are designed as multiple case studies. A multiple case study refers to a research design in which the research is replicated in different contexts to argue for one case (Yin, 2014, p. 58). My approach is slightly different: I use the article-based dissertation format to combining three individual case studies (the research article I-III). But those are not replications of the same case study design. Instead, they differ in design and data and are complementary to each other. Taken together, the three articles forward different facets of the same case, the education export policies. Therefore I chose the term of a multi-faceted case study.

Case studies can fit both in the qualitative as well as in the quantitative research paradigm and often use a mixed methods approach (Yin 2014; Yin & Heald, 1997). Depending on the data of the case study, the applied data analysis methods vary also within the study itself. The major rationale behind mixing methods in a case study is that the different research methods complement each other and can enrich the results through data triangulation (Neuman, 2006; Sale et. al., 2002). Mixed methods research has been criticized to favor quantitative research by using qualitative research as supplementary evidence. However,

Creswell and colleagues (2006) have argued that this is not necessary the case and advocate the advantages of qualitative research in mixed method approaches.

Throughout this study I aim to stay close to the interpretive foundation of qualitative research. I will therefore follow what Mason (2006) coined a “qualitatively-driven mixed methods research”. In practice, that means that I do keep my qualitative research framework, but I chose data analysis methods based on their suitability for answering the respective research question. This approach is following the advice of established mixed methods researchers who argue that “pragmatism” should be what determines the most suitable application of data analysis methods (Clark & Creswell, 2008; Creswell et. al., 2006; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Morgan, 2007)

In order to make my umbrella case study a compelling one, I triangulated the research objectives within the three research articles. The following overview displays the types of data I gathered during the research process, and their correspondence to the five research objectives (RO 1: Develop a contextualization of Finnish education export policies; RO 2: Identify motives and aims of Finnish education export policies, RO 3: Clarify what constitutes the Finnish education export product, RO 4: Investigate how the Finnish education export strategies are implemented, RO 5: Reveal education export ideologies and discuss their implications).

Data	Research Objectives				
	RO 1:	RO 2:	RO 3:	RO 4:	RO 5:
Policy documents	✓	✓	✓	–	✓
Country Brand Report	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Questionnaire	✓	–	✓	✓	✓

✓ supports the objective  
 – does not support the objective

**Table 2:** Data in correlation to research objectives

As Table 2 illustrates, the combination of policy documents, country brand and questionnaires provided a complementary solution in which each of the research objectives is addressed by at least two types of data.

The complementary aspect is further enhanced through a consecutive research design, demonstrated in Table 3. In the first research article, “Towards one of the leading education based economies? - Investigating Aims, Strategies

and Practices of Finland’s Education Export Landscape”, the two education export policies (2010, 2013) serve as the key data. The second research article, "From PISA to National Branding: Exploring Finnish Education®", the policy documents provide supportive data, while the major emphasis lies on the Finnish Country Brand report. Both policy documents and the Country Brand Report serve as background for the third article, “Engines without Fuel? - Empirical Findings on the Role of Finnish Higher Education Institutions as Education Exporters”, which relies on data that was retrieved from the questionnaires.

Data	Research Article I	Research Article II	Research Article III
Policy Documents	✓	✓	✓
Country Brand Report	–	✓	✓
Questionnaire	–	–	✓

✓ data included  
 – data not included

**Table 3:** Data usage in research articles

This intertwinings are discussed in the intermission chapters between the articles. In Chapter 8, findings of all three studies are triangulated with each other and with theoretical findings from the literature review.

## 3 Presentation of research data and methods of analysis

### 3.1 Case study 1: Policy documents and qualitative content analysis

In order to identify the motives and objectives of Finnish education export policies (RO2) and the education export product (RO 3), I began to look at the education export policy documents themselves. As mentioned earlier, there are two education export policies, which are both analyzed in this study. In the research article “Towards one of the leading education based economies? Investigating Aims, Strategies and Practices of Finland’s Education Export Landscape” (see Chapter 7), I compare the contents and scope of both education export strategies.

The first policy document “Finnish Education Export Strategy: Summary of the Strategic Lines and Measures”, is published by the Ministry of Education and Culture and is based on the Decision-in-Principle of the Government of Finland of April 24, 2010. It is the result of a working group, which had been founded in June 2009, to decide on a Finnish education export strategy (MOE, 2010, p.3). The outcome is a booklet of 15 pages, which has been published in Finnish, English, and Swedish. Based on my own language preference, I decided to work with the English version.

The booklet is divided into eight chapters, which are indicated by slogans related to Finnish education export:

- (a) A well-working home market is a precondition for exports;
- (b) Exportation of educational know-how will strengthen other export fields;
- (c) Networking brings added value;
- (d) Goal-orientation is an important element in internationalization;
- (e) Productivisation is a precondition for international marketing;
- (f) Only quality will bring success;
- (g) A cluster will speed up exportation;
- (h) Higher education institutions as engines of educational exportation.

The document further includes a survey of Finland’s strengths and opportunities as an education exporter, and sets goals for the education export sector until 2015.

Similar to the first strategy, the second document, “Suomi kansainvälisille koulutusmarkkinoille [transl. *International education markets and Finland*]”, is also the result of a working group set up by the Ministry of Education and Culture. It was published in November 2013 in Finnish, with a Swedish and English

abstract. Like the previous document, this is publicly available, online. The 38 pages consist of chapters providing

- (a) an action plan to boost Finland's education exports,
- (b) future directions,
- (c) the current situation of education export in Finland,
- (d) an international comparison of education export in other countries,
- (e) challenges of education export,
- (f) attachments.

The advantage of using these documents as research data is that they are the founding documents for Finnish education export, on a national level. They represent the governments' approach towards education export and shed light on national goals and incentives. Hence, they also indicate the actions that will be supported in the future, and hint at what needs further development. As data, they are transparent, in the sense that they are publicly available and the research analysis can be repeated. Furthermore, being rather short documents, it was manageable to deeply engage with the texts.

As discussed in the methodology, I regard policy documents as discourses, which means that they are not neutral. They are formulated in a political setting and are influenced by agendas, which might not be immediately evident. I took this into account by conducting the analysis methodically and by addressing the issue of ideology (cf. Research Article I). Not being a native Finnish speaker, I had to work around the challenges of the Finnish language of the second policy document. I solved this issue by creating a translation into English, which I had checked by a native Finnish speaker. Since I refrained engaging in linguistic discourse analysis, my Finnish reading abilities turned out to be sufficient and the language did not form an obstacle for the analysis.

To identify motives and objectives of the policies, I chose Mayring's (2000, 2003) qualitative content analysis as a data analysis method. Since I have already stated my interest in discourses, another likely choice of method could have been critical discourse analysis. I chose not to apply it here because rigorous critical discourse analysis requires a micro-linguistic approach, which is only applicable to a small corpus of text. As the focus here is to provide a summary and comparison of both documents as a whole, qualitative content analysis was more feasible in this case. In addition, since content analysis did not require close linguistic emergence with the text, I didn't need to be a mothertongue speaker of Finnish.

On the one hand, Mayring's method has the benefit of traditional content analysis, namely producing summarized results. On the other hand, it seeks to comply with the interpretive framework by including qualitative analysis. As is characteristic of qualitative content analysis, the researcher makes the process of

categorization visible to the reader. In this paper, I strictly followed Mayring's (2003) suggestions of nine research phases:

1. determination of the material;
2. analysis of the situation in which the text originated;
3. the formal characterization of the material;
4. determination of the direction of the analysis;
5. theoretically informed differentiation of questions to be answered;
6. selection of the analytical techniques (summary, explication, structuring);
7. definition of the unit of analysis;
8. analysis of the material (summary, explication, structuring);
9. interpretation.

Phase 8, the actual analysis and summary, can be approached in two ways. The first model Mayring (2000) suggests is inductive category development, in which codes and categories are created while working with the data with the aim of summarizing the information. The second form of analysis is deductive category development, which starts from a developed and defined coding agenda, derived from the research question (Mayring, 2000, pp. 11-14). In this article, I had already established a research agenda, namely to investigate the policies in reference to the research questions RQ2 "What are the motives and objectives of Finnish education export policies?" and RQ3 "What is the Finnish education export product?" of this dissertation. This made it obvious to choose the deductive form of analysis, starting with "motives", "aims", and "product" as coding frames. Under each of these frames, a separate coding system was developed, by grouping statements of a similar content. While forming these groups, my aim was to stay as close to the original text as possible, and thus worked with quotations, directly, rather than paraphrasing the text. One issue I encountered in this process was that, in practice, the distinction between deductive and inductive grouping eroded slightly, as it seemed to me that the sub-groups were formed rather inductively than deductively.

### **3.2 Case study 2: Finland's Country Brand and Anderson's Associative Network model**

In the second research article, "From PISA to national branding: exploring Finnish education®", I keep exploring the Finnish education export product (RO 3). Together with my colleagues Fred Dervin (University of Helsinki, Finland) and Ana Popovic (University of Niš, Serbia), I look at how Finnish education is presented in Finland's Country Brand Report (CBR). The first education export

working group and the delegation that created the education brand were appointed simultaneously, and both are public documents which explicitly support the development of the Finnish education export sector. Taking this into consideration, the Country Brand Report clearly complements the education policies and, therefore, I considered it to provide significant research data.

Similar to the data provided by the education export policies, Finland's Country Brand Report is a written text that represents "official" guidelines, meaning that the Government of Finland is involved in its creation. In 2008, Alexander Stubb appointed a delegation to formulate the Finnish national brand. However, in contrast to the policy documents, the national branding project aimed to include several representatives of Finnish society. The main sponsors of the project were the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Finnish Tourist Board, the advertising agency SEK & Grey and Finnfacts (an independent media service unit that mediates between international media, and Finnish industry and business) (CBR, 2010, p. 331). The appointed brand delegation consisted of 23 Finnish citizens from different professional backgrounds, including Finnish businesses, universities, artists, and a midwife. The crafting of the brand was supervised by Simon Anholt, who had consulted with many governments in their nation branding campaigns (cf. Anholt, 2006, 2008).

The delegation published its Country Brand Report in November 2010, under the full title: "Mission for Finland. How Finland will solve the world's most wicked problems. Consider it solved!" (CBR, 2010). The document is publicly available, online<sup>4</sup>, in Finnish, Swedish and English. For this research, I have been working with the English version. Over 365 pages, the document describes Finland's current national brand and future opportunities, both for Finnish readers and external investors (CBR, 2010). Besides functionality and nature, the delegation identified education as a key element of Finland's brand. As research data, I focused exclusively on the constructed education brand (Chapter "Finland gives you a lesson", pp. 188–253).

The advantage of using the Country Brand Report as research data is that it is publicly available and its analysis can be discussed openly, as with the policy documents. Another advantage is that its incentives and target audience are clearly stated in the introduction of the brand itself. The goals of the education brand are formulated clearly, both in terms of long and short-term benefits for the Finnish nation, in terms of revenue, status, and quality of education, and the international community. Thus, it was easy to analyze the Country Brand as a specific text genre.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.maakuva.fi](http://www.maakuva.fi) and [www.team.finland.fi](http://www.team.finland.fi)

However, the length of the chosen excerpt makes it a large corpus of text to work with, running the risk of losing detail in the summarization and elicitation process. This was taken into account by the choice of methodology. It was further helpful that I worked on this data with my co-authors Ana Popovic and Fred Dervin. Among the three of us, we carefully cross-checked our textual understanding and data analysis. One limitation is that it is hard to estimate the actual implementation of the national education brand. Although the desired goals are stated in the document, its impact will only show in the future. The CBR was widely disseminated in public institutions, as well as being quite visible online. It also has an impact on the allocation of project funds. It was not possible for me to determine the extent of actions taken to implement the brand, and in the Finnish case, the implementation of the national brand was estimated to take until 2030. With this in mind, this case study uses the Country Brand Report as a background document, describing a future vision and government's ambitions rather than providing a representation of realities.

To analyze the document, together with my colleagues I combined the methods of content analysis and Anderson's associative network memory model.

The content analysis was chosen as a first step of analysis to familiarize us with the data, the 365-page Finnish Country Brand report. Similar to the previously applied form of content analysis, the three of us familiarized ourselves with the data through several readings and highlighting of keywords and key phrases in relation to education, which we then discussed together. In order to get a grasp of the brand, we based our analysis on Anderson's associative network memory model, a method that is widely applied in marketing research (Pappu & Quester, 2010). Pappu and Quester (2010) promote this method to identify the brand elements that become memorable.

The concept is based on cognitive science, according to which brands are memorized through a system of "nodes", a collection of information or concepts. The probability of remembering these nodes is increased the more connected the "nodes" are to each other and the more associative networks they form in the brain. In marketing, this theory is used to build strong brands by presenting attributes that are related to the brand and connect or relate to existing nodes in people's memory. The brand's distinguishing features are those attributes which are most referred to in the promotional materials. In this article, we used this model both as a background theory to understand the construction of the brand, and as an analytical tool to filter out the most common associations that the Country Brand delegation assigned to Finnish education. We collected and compared promotional attributes and associations in each statement about Finnish education. Based on the commonalities among these attributes, we were able to summarize the brand's key elements into three major content themes: "high quality performance", "Finland's success story", and "global relevance" (Schatz et al., 2015, p.6).

We chose the associative network model because our data was a promotional document and we wanted to include marketing research perspectives in this article. For this paper, it was very useful to learn about the cognitive foundations on which brands operate and are constructed, and this also deepened my understanding of other promotional education export documents. I would, however, argue that what we did in practice – comparing attributes and associations to understand how Finnish education is presented in the brand document – was very close to traditional content analysis. Therefore, I have to admit that I would perhaps not use the model again as an analytical tool.

### **3.3 Case study 3: Qualitative questionnaire and qualitative content analysis**

The fourth research objective of this dissertation is to investigate how Finnish education export policies are implemented. The analysis of the education export policies in the first research article forwarded that Finnish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were declared to be the driving forces of the sector. I decided to address the implementation level by asking how education export practitioners in Finnish Higher Education institutions perceive their role as education export “engines”.

In order to gather perceptions of a larger number of participants, I chose to design a qualitative questionnaire. A qualitative questionnaire is pragmatic compromise between the aim to gather opinions and feelings (qualitative interest) and a representative amount of data (quantitative interest).

As outlined earlier, my approach is qualitatively driven, which is why for me the major advantage of using a questionnaire was to obtain original, empirical data that brings people back into the research. I wanted to give voices to administrative staff in international offices of universities, who practice education export, and forward their opinions and perceptions of the education export policy. The target group was selected carefully, as I only wanted to include participants who were a) informed about education export policies, and b) involved in their implementation at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Furthermore, my criteria specified that the participants should be from different types of HEIs (universities, universities of applied sciences, and special universities) from different parts of Finland. To identify the participants, I took part at the KV Kevätpäivät 2015 (May 6 to May 7, 2015), a spring forum for international affairs in higher education, organized by CIMO. This event is recommended for staff at international offices at HEIs, and includes keynotes and workshops on internationalization issues in Finland and the Nordic countries. In this conference, representatives of the Ministry of Education and Culture, parliament members and CIMO

discussed education export and its consequences and future opportunities for higher education institutions. I had the opportunity to take part at the event and introduce my research to an audience of approximately 200 participants.

In the period following the conference, I used the conference participant list to select those participants who were fulfilling the above-mentioned criteria. With the help of university websites, I identified 163 potential participants, in total. I contacted them personally by email, in which I once more introduced the research and provided a link to an online questionnaire. In this way, I ensured that all responses fulfilled my research criteria, while ensuring the anonymity of participants. This was important to me, as I had already come to understand, from conversations at the conference that the administrative staff's opinions often do not represent the official strategy of their institution. The option of answering anonymously may have helped to increase the level of honesty within the responses. However, the option to leave contact details was also provided, in case the participants were interested in follow-up interviews or the results of the study.

The questionnaire was designed online for practical reasons, using Google docs. Assuming that people would be reluctant to fill in a long questionnaire, pro bono, it consisted of only five questions (four compulsory research questions and one for optional comments). To make the questionnaire more attractive, the design was purposefully colorful and without any university logos, which helped to avoid an overly formal impression. Since the aim of the questionnaire was to collect personal opinions, the questions were open-ended and included personal signifiers in each question ("according to your opinion", "do you think", "to your knowledge", "if you had", "do you have"). It included a working definition of education export as "intentional business transactions concerning educational practices, services and materials between two countries, both inside of Finland and abroad", to ensure that there was no confusion in terminology. The questions were formulated in English:

- Q1: To your knowledge, in what type of education export activities is your institution involved?
- Q2: What, according to your opinion, should be the role of Finnish higher education institutions in education export?
- Q3: How important do you think education export is for your own institution?
- Q4: If you had a magic wand, what would be the one thing you would do to boost Finnish education export?

Knowing that all participants use English frequently in their work, I assumed that there would be no language issues. However, I also offered the option to respond to the questionnaire in Finnish and Swedish. Altogether, I received 29

filled-out questionnaires, of which one was in Swedish and three in Finnish. For the analysis, I translated the Finnish and Swedish responses and had them double-checked by native speakers.

The data exceeded my expectations, as I received long replies that were rich in terms of information and variety. It needs to be highlighted that I am aware that the 29 participants represent neither Finnish HEIs, nor the opinions of international offices at Finnish HEIs. I also acknowledge that the sample is too small to argue for results that are quantitatively valid. Having only a short questionnaire, the amount of data is limited also for a qualitative study, because the responses are after all, shaped by, and limited to, the pre-defined questions. Originally, I considered using a combination of the questionnaires and interviews. However, when I received the responses, I realized that they yielded many insights, which were especially significant in relation to the close circle of respondents.<sup>5</sup> I decided, therefore, to focus on the questionnaire data exclusively, and in greater detail. Rather than adding a completely different type of data set, I decided that it would be more powerful to analyze the questionnaire data in relation to the previously analyzed documents, and to leave qualitative interviews for future research.

Due to the positive experience with Mayring's qualitative content analysis during the first article, I chose to use it again in this case study. Similar to the data in the first article, language issues had to be taken into consideration, as the responses were in English, Finnish and Swedish. Remembering my difficulties with the deductive category development, I decided not to shape the analysis with pre-set categories. I strictly followed the inductive approach, meaning that I created codes and categories while working with the data. Based on commonalities and incongruities within the participants' responses, I formed groups of statements from which I then formed categories and subcategories. The coding process was conducted as described above, and repeated for each of the questionnaire's questions.

In retrospect, I found that this form of qualitative content analysis produced categories that were easy to work with and which were comfortable to present in the form of "quick results". The analysis process was easy to trace, as I had carefully documented each of the steps (although this transparency did not show in the final publication due to space issues and journal policies). The method turned out to be an appropriate tool to answer the respective research questions. Gaining deeper insights into the actual text formulations via critical discourse would, however, be an interesting task for future research.

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<sup>5</sup> In Research Article III, both data and my analysis are presented in more detail.

## 4 Conceptualizing education export: theoretical anchors and tensions

### 4.1 Problems in terminology

Education export is an ambiguous concept. Interestingly, up to the writing of this dissertation in 2015, education export has no entry in the English language Wikipedia, although it exists in the vocabulary of media, politicians, and researchers. The concept might appear self-explanatory, as the transfer of education from one country to another; however, it needs some further explanation and contextualization.

To begin with, the terminology, “education export”, as a compound of the concepts of “education” and “export”, invokes controversy. Both words are derived from Latin and their meaning remains quite close to their etymological origins (education: *educatio* [A breeding, a bringing up, a rearing], *educo* [I educate, I train]; export: *exportare* [to bring out]). Each of the concepts represents a different sector of society: while education is generally understood as a humanitarian, civic or private domain, export is a term coined by the business sector. The term education export is a merging of the two, which creates a tension that needs further elaboration.

According to my understanding, education facilitates learning, which is essential to human development and socialization. According to UNESCO homepage (2015),

Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights (...) Normative instruments of the United Nations and UNESCO lay down international legal obligations for the right to education. These instruments promote and develop the right of every person to enjoy access to education of good quality, without discrimination or exclusion.

Nevertheless, when education is considered a human right, the link to business terminology of import and export is dubious. Is it then even appropriate to think about education as a commodity, which can be bought and sold? Despite the ideal of education as a human right, reality witnesses stark differences in access to, and quality of, education, which maintains and perpetuates social inequality across the globe. As UNESCO (2015) recognizes, “Education is a powerful tool by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully as citizens.” Hence, those without access to quality education are disadvantaged, in economic and social terms.

This changes the discourse on education from the level of education as a human right, to education as an asset to thrive in society.

From the perspective of education as an asset, it is only a small step to think about education as an individual, societal, or national investment. This might seem to be a modern, neo-liberalist perspective, but historical research suggests otherwise.

## 4.2 Tracing the historic origins of education export

Long before the construction of modern nation states, teachers and students travelled far to pursue their educational goals. Thus, from a historical perspective, the transfer of educational knowledge across national boundaries is nothing new. Travelers across centuries observed, compared, and disseminated educational practices. The information available was, however, perpetuated by the industrial revolution, which significantly improved transportation conditions and the amount of travelling. The increasing reports on educational systems elsewhere, had already sparked interest in educational innovations in the early nineteenth century, which could be regarded as early research in comparative education (Phillips & Ochs, 2004a). Sprigade's (2004) research on historic travel accounts suggests that by the mid-1840s, a "large solid body of information" (p.50)<sup>6</sup>, about different educational practices, was available to educated Europeans. Gonon's (2004) research argues that those were more than mere travel notes, but intentional investigations: "Travels by educationalists were no longer cultural pilgrimages but educational tours and missions of exploration" (p.128). The scholarly interest in other's education systems led to the emergence of comparative education as an academic field in the twentieth century (Ochs & Phillips, 2004, p.7).

Tracing historical knowledge transfers, Sprigade (2004) offers the example of a Scottish educator who commented on the impact of French schooling practices to English primary schools: "The Frenchman who appears first to have become sensible of the superiority of this system, and of the advantage which France might derive from adopting it, was Monsieur de la Borde" (Pillans, 1820, p.494 in Sprigade, 2004, p.50). I would like to draw attention to the parenthesis in Pillans' (1820) sentence, in which he hints at the "advantage" which he thinks France is aware of. The nineteenth century was an era of competition, which also affected the domain of education policies (cf. Muthu, 2003). Gonon (2004) reports that many of the educational study trips during that time were commis-

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<sup>6</sup> Note: not only European phenomenon, as Meiji-reform in Japan demonstrates. But here I focus on European context

sioned by governments (Gonom, 2004). Consequently, it was not only curiosity that inspired these travelers.

In 1842, John Sinclair wrote in a letter to the English parliament on the educational system: “The example of other nations, in which great progress in elementary instruction has been made, though not always in the right direction, invites our imitation” (Sinclair, 1842, p.3, in Sprigade, 2004, p.37). This quote exemplifies how information about other educational practices impacted on local politics. It also hints at the underlying presumption of superiority of one system (or educational practice) above another. Sinclair (1842) argues for what is the root of educational policy borrowing and lending, namely that the superior practices from abroad should be “imitated” for the benefit of the society. What exactly is the perceived benefit of implementing “best practice” is contextual; but what is important for further discussion is that already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, having a competitive educational system was regarded as a national asset.

### **4.3 Education as a commodity: the market approach**

First, education builds human capital and enables workers to be more productive. Second, education increases countries’ capacity to innovate—an indispensable prerequisite for growth and competitiveness in today’s global knowledge economy (Guerría, 2007, in Spring, 2009, p. 57f).

This statement by OECD Secretary-General Gurría on education represents the widespread notion of education as a commodity. Here, I refer to the perspective that education is an asset or an investment that can be conceptualized on an individual, institutional, societal, national, and global level. Connecting education to the economic worth of an individual to society is a prominent discussion among economists. It can be dated back to Adam Smith, but flourished in the 1980s (Sahlberg, 2011). Conceptualizing education as a market is problematic, both from the perspective of economic research and education. Defining education as a market (in its very basic definition of exchanging goods), also requires the customer and product to be conceptualized, which, with respect to the educational market, is causing on-going debates in literature. (cf. Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Maringe, 2005; Naidoo, 2007; Umashankar, 2001).

For the individual, education is an investment for economic and social status, with a degree, skills, status, networks, or developing human capital (cf. Spring, 2009, pp. 16f, 55ff) possibly being regarded as the purchased product. On the level of institutions, as early as 1918, economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1918) declared “various universities are competitors for the traffic of merchantable instruction in much the same fashion as rival establishments in the

retail trade compete for customs” (Veblen, 1918, in Bok, 2009, p. 1). However, the discussion on what constitutes the commodity is also more complex for educational institutions. Paying students and their parents, future employers, funding organizations or society can be regarded as the “customers”, which alters what can be defined as the “exchange product”. The same observations and questions are transferable to conceptualization of education as a societal, national, or global investment.

In addition to the issue of defining educational products and consumers, research literature on education as a business is not homogenous because the research contexts are so different. On the one hand, one might refer to education business in the context of a tuition fee-based university, in the USA, which gains most of its revenue through college sports and connected franchises (e.g., Bok, 2003). On the other hand, one might look at a government-funded primary school in Europe (cf. Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). The differences of perceived markets and their representations (Diaz Ruiz, 2013) make it a complex research field.

Noteworthy for the discussion that follows, is that among all these different approaches, the entanglement of education and business seems to be taken for granted (Ball, 2012; Coate, Barnett & Williams, 2001; Gibbs, 2001; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Tjedvoll, 1998). As Steiner Khamsi (2004) argues, “the education sector is soaked in language and concepts borrowed from the economic sector (e.g. supply/demand, accountability, cost-effectiveness, etc.” (p.204). Some argue that the “semantics of globalization” (Schriewer 2000, p.330, quoted in Steiner-Khamsi 2004b, p. 4) have introduced a paradigm shift towards outcome-based education (cf. also Bok, 2009; Jongbloed, 2003; Jongbloed, Enders & Salerno, 2007; Murray & Klinger, 2014). Since the 1960s, organizations such as the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) provided comparable information on education performance. Their data has not only displayed differences in education policies and triggered changes on a national policy level (Martens, Knodel & Windzio, 2014), but also initiated an “era of international competition” (Wiseman & Baker, 2005, p.2) and “politics of league tables” (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, p.207). The competition is perpetuated by the growing mobility and migration of students, teachers, and researchers. Some critical scholars point out that the situation is further fueled and influenced by powerful international organizations such as the UN and the Worldbank, and other NGOs, which actively promote the dissemination of their ideals of “good performance” in education (for example, Altbach & Knight, 2007; Ball, 2008; Burde 2004; Jones, 2004; Sahlerg, 2011b; Spring 2009).

The result is a large-scale commodification of education (Bok, 2009; Martens et al., 2014; Simola et al., 2013) and a transfer of economic perspectives and market-driven principles towards education. Good performance of a national

educational system is equated with the citizens' wellbeing and the nation economic growth. Subsequently, governments take an active interest in what is often referred to as the "knowledge economy" (Cowen, 2000) or "era of international competition" (Pineda, 2010; Wiseman and Baker, 2005). Simola et al. (2013) summarize the development as follows:

Through international assessments such as PISA, the OECD creates global standards and standardized data, ranking scales, indicators and benchmarks (Lawn and Grek, 2012, pp.10–1, 69–70, 83–4; Martens, 2007, 49; Spring 2009, 62) and is emerging as a leading force in the neo-liberal movement, enacting ideologies of technocratic rationality and causing countries with diverse traditions and cultures to assimilate their educational practices to seemingly unassailable standards of technocratic rationality, economic competitiveness and market growth. (p. 613)

The result could be regarded as Hargreaves (2015) poignantly states, a "lemming race to the top". (Hargreaves in Sahlberg, 2015, p.xiii)

One the one hand, this raises interest in "lessons from elsewhere" (Cowen, 1996; Sahlberg, 2006, 2011, 2015; Spreen 2004b; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Countries that wish to improve their performance in international rankings look to foreign good educational practices in order to increase their own national competitiveness. On the other hand, "better" performing countries have realized the business opportunity and started to invest in education branding and marketing of their educational systems (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). This self-perpetuating market has created a "cargo-cult" (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, p.201) of educational transfers across national boundaries. As Carol Anne Spreen (2004a) starkly puts it, "this is a bandwagon that most governments do not want to miss jumping on" (p. 221).

Remaining with the metaphor of cargo, education is being imported and exported as a commodity. The summary above highlights the entanglement of education and economics. With this as a theoretical perspective, the terminology of education export is justified. In order to clarify the concept, I will look at contemporary education export practices, in the following section, in order to illustrate the meaning of the concept.

#### **4.4 The contemporary education export sector**

The previous section outlines how education is increasingly regarded as an exchangeable product, with a high international market value. Talking about import and export of education might seem an extreme way of picturing education

as a commodity, but it has been used for the commercialized exchange of educational services since the 1980s (Cai et al., 2012). However, the multiplicity of actors, aims, and contexts makes education export a difficult concept to define.

Australia, the USA, and the United Kingdom are regarded as the first active exporters of education, and still dominate the sector (Cai, Hölttä & Kivistö, 2012). In Australia, the education business has become the nation's largest service export. In the academic year 2009/2010, education exports constituted 36,1 percent of all service export and brought \$19.1 billion revenue, and it is a growing sector (Australian Government, 2011). Similarly, the USA has gained more than US\$20 billion through education export during the academic year 2009/2010 (Sánchez, 2011). England is the top earner among the three exporters, with £14.1 billion (~US\$21 billion) profit in 2008/2009 (British Government, 2011). These numbers indicate a constantly growing market, and illustrate that education export should be regarded as a "big business" (Coate, Barnett & Williams, 2001).

In the above-mentioned countries, education export is mainly understood as offering transnational higher education services, including international student recruitment, branch-campuses, distance-education programs, and international corporate courses (Lenn, 2002, p. 1). Most of this income is generated through tuition fees from foreign students, and thus a large portion of the export actually happens inside the country. This might seem counterintuitive to the nature of export, however, if education is seen a national good or asset, it is an export in the sense that customers/students purchase degrees, knowledge, and skills, which they take away with them (in most cases, back to their home-countries) after completing their education.

Based on the Australian context, Adams (2007) defines education export as,

an educational service approach based on a public-private partnership with market driven services that may provide a surplus to the institution, high quality educational and pastoral services to students, and export income to the nation, within a strong regulatory framework (p.410).

The definition seems to be applicable for all leading education export countries. What these have in common is that they charge tuition fees and provide internationally recognized degrees in a native English-speaking environment (Carrington, Meek & Wood, 2007). Many also profit from their colonial history, which enabled a long-standing tradition of educational marketing (in terms of promoting the idea of superiority of their educational system) and university branches abroad. However, a problem with Adam's (2007) definition is that education export is not limited to higher education services. While researching cross-national attraction of educational policies, Ochs and Phillips (2004, 2002a) have summarized six foci of attraction: guiding philosophy, goals, strategies, enabling

structures, processes (including curricula), and techniques (including pedagogy). The education export product range thus includes any form of transfer of educational policies and practices. Furthermore, education export can be stimulated by government initiatives or other active players in the public and private sector, but it is not confined to these.

Therefore, Adam's (2007) definition, which presumes that a strong regulatory framework is in place, is too narrow to encompass the different educational and economic settings. As it will be discussed later, Finland is one of the cases where Adam's (2007) definition does not apply. In order to have a working definition, I propose to broadly define education export as an intentional business transaction concerning educational practices, services, and materials from one country to another. This definition includes a wide range of actors and encompasses a wide range of possible education export products. However, it distinguishes education export from other forms of educational dissemination by declaring it an "intentional business transaction". The economic terminology is chosen on purpose to emphasize the previously-outlined business approach to education.

#### **4.5 Critique from comparative education research**

In contrast to the above-outlined literature, the concept of education export has evoked some criticism. In the eyes of comparative education researchers, the connotation of education as a business is problematic (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009, p. 30). The main criticisms, which I will elaborate on below, include over-simplification, terminological ambiguity and ethical concerns.

A major argument against education export is that of over-simplification. Many scholars object to the idea of putting education in a box and attempting to sell it. As Bray (bray in Ochs & Phillips 2004) cynically remarks, buying education can be equated to buying progress:

- Country A is an economic basket case (high level of unemployment and low level of economic growths) – this is largely the result of the educational system which is not producing workers with appropriate skills
- Country B is economically successful (low levels of unemployment and high levels of economic growth) – this is to a large result the result of its possessing a well-educated workforce.
- Therefore, if Country A adopts some of the features of the educational system of Country B it will improve the state of Country A's economy. (p. 7)

However, the academic discipline of comparative education is a hint that it might not be that simple. One of the founders of the field, Sir Michael Ernest Sadler, remarked in a lecture of 1900:

We cannot wander at pleasure among the educational systems of the world, like a child strolling through a garden, and pick off a flower from one bush and some leaves from another, and then expect that if we stick what we have gathered into the soil at home, we shall have a living plant. A national system of education is a living thing, the outcome of forgotten struggles and difficulties, and “of battles long ago.” It has in it some of the secret workings of national life. (Sadler in Higginson, quoted from Ochs & Phillips 2004, pp. 7-8)

The question of whether transferring educational models into a different society and culture is possible and/or feasible, is still an academic debate (Spring, 2009; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). There is an issue of feasibility, as what makes policies successful is often an issue of expert opinion rather than proven facts. As Heller Sahlgren (2015) warns:

it is important to note that observations of high- and low performing countries' characteristics, which are often used as evidence by pundits and policymakers, are not particularly useful. This is because this “best practice” approach tells us nothing about causality. It is impossible to know whether the feature someone chooses to emphasise has spurred, been irrelevant for, or even hindered a country's success. (p.9)

While there are many examples of international policy transfers, researchers have also pointed out that foreign policies or practices are always implemented within a certain political context and agenda, and are altered significantly during the internalization process (cf. Martens et al., 2014). The concept of education export does not pay justice to the complexity of the transfers.

This is perhaps the major reason why the term “education export” hardly appears in comparative education literature. Instead, many leading scholars in the field prefer to use the terms educational borrowing and lending (cf. edited works of Phillips & Ochs, 2004; Schriewer, 2009; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow, 2012). “Borrowing”, in this context, means the act of imitating successful practices from other contexts, while “lending” is understood as the act of imposing educational expertise on another context. Since this broad definition allows a wide array of scenarios, Ochs & Phillips (2004a) created a model displaying the continuum of education borrowing and lending (see Figure 2). The types of educational policy transfer range from voluntary education bor-

rowing influenced by foreign ideas (for example through travelling), to education lending imposed by an authoritarian regime (for example, through colonialization).

Imposed	Required under constraint	Negotiated under constraint	Borrowed purposefully	Introduced through influence
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Totalitarian/ authoritarian rule	Defeated/ occupied countries	Required by bilateral and multilateral agreements	Intentional copying of policy/practice observed elsewhere	General influence of educational ideas/methods

*Education lending* ----- *Education Borrowing*

**Figure 2:** Continuum of educational transfer. Author's adaptation of Ochs & Philipps 2004a, p. 9

What I have described previously as “education export” represents what Ochs and Phillips (2004a) would have phrased as “educational borrowing and lending in stage four (intentional copying of policy/practice observed elsewhere)” or perhaps, to some extent, “stage five (general influence of educational methods/ideas)”. In both stages, the borrower’s interest in a foreign education policy is voluntary (as opposed to the imposed lending).

While I agree with the critique that the term “education export” carries an oversimplified notion of the transfer of educational ideas, I still find the terminology of “education borrowing and lending” slightly misleading. To my understanding, something borrowed is to be returned to the lender. Although a major advantage of the term “education borrowing and lending” is that it contains the notion of bi-directional exchange, the connotation of education’s return does not seem to fit the given context. The illustrated continuum between borrowing and lending suggests that at the voluntary end of education borrowing, there is no lending activity (and vice versa). Indeed, much comparative education interested in voluntarily educational policy transfer focuses only on the borrower’s perspective, e.g., what are incentives for policy borrowing and how it is implemented.

In comparison, there is much less research paying attention to the lender’s perspective, which I believe is coherent with the chosen terminology. When investigating educational borrowing, more agency is attributed to the borrowers. Vice versa, when applying the term education export, the emphasis lies on the exporter’s agency while the “importers” perspective becomes less important. Neither of the terms pays justice to a more complex understanding of the dynamics between borrowers/importers and lenders/exporters. I am convinced that the exchange of ideas is fluent and multi-directional, which has been more carefully addressed by researchers within the education borrowing perspective. Since I am, however, more interested in the less-researched lenders’ perspective, I have deliberately chosen to stick to the concept of “education export”.

A second strong argument against the use of “education export” is based on ethical considerations. The critique is based on the assumption that the use of the term gives power to the neo-liberal ideology in which it is framed. Already in 1974, Martin Carnoy (1974) dismissed education export as “cultural imperialism” (p. 1). Along the same lines, critics argue that education export policies will lead to a uniformation of education, which puts non-Western countries under tutelage, as the exported education policies are all so-called “Western models”, thereby legitimizing the power and economic advantages of rich nations (Spring, 2009; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Indeed, one might argue that the leading education exporters are promoting not only the commodification of education, but also a certain set of values, alongside it.

Indeed, supporters of education export often refer to the need of educating global citizens and developing the “human capital” (Spring, 2009, pp. 16f, 55ff),

thereby indicating that superior education models should be spread throughout the globe to benefit humankind, equally. Within this paradigm, sharing successful educational recipes becomes an ethical imperative for well-performing countries, but it is also a form of neo-colonialization.

I agree with this criticism, as I find the notion of “superior” education practices very problematic. Defining success, or good practice, in education, is highly controversial; and in the context of education export, I think it is very important to ask who gets to export what, to whom, and for what purposes. If it is truly the case that one education system is better than others, I believe it is morally questionable to only share the practice with the highest paying customer. Quite the opposite, those who would profit most from those insides are probably those who cannot afford to pay. Therefore, from my own ethical standpoint, I would hope that whatever is regarded as good educational practice could be shared freely with others, for a greater good of humankind.

However, the economic dimension behind education exports is a fact. I agree with the critics that the term invokes a neo-liberal approach towards education transfers. However, while I do not wish to promote this mindset within this dissertation, I find it important to acknowledge the existing discourses. Education export is the term that is used in my research context, namely the Finnish education export policies. Hence, I am taking a discursive approach: I use the term education export because it is being used in my data. I acknowledge the theoretical framework in which it is embedded, and I am aware of its shortcomings. In the following sections, I will further contextualize its use in the Finnish setting, and I will return to the conceptual arguments after presenting my research results.

## 5 Local research context: Finland

### 5.1 Brief overview of the Finnish education system

The Finnish education system is divided into early childhood education (age 0-5), pre-primary education (age 6), basic education (age 7-16), upper secondary education, and higher education. Special needs education is included in regular schools, as much as possible.

Early childhood education takes place in kindergartens, daycare groups or private homes. Pre-primary education is voluntary, but almost all 6-year olds participate in pre-primary education (MOEC, 2012). Basic education is compulsory and encompasses both primary and lower secondary education. Upper secondary education lasts for three years and is divided into two tracks: a) general upper secondary schools, which ends with a Matriculation examination that enables enrolment into universities and polytechnics, and b) vocational institutions, which prepare for the entrance into the working market. The system allows students from both tracks to enter higher education. Higher education is divided into universities with traditional research orientation and polytechnics, or universities of applied sciences, which emphasize more profession-oriented skills (MOEC, 2012). While both types of institutions offer bachelor and master's degrees, postgraduate degrees (licentiate or doctorate degrees) are only available at universities.

This overview may serve as an orientation as to what basic and higher education actually means in the Finnish context. Education export activities are conducted on all levels. As discussed later, the Finnish education export policies actually shifted focus from the export of basic education to the higher education sector.

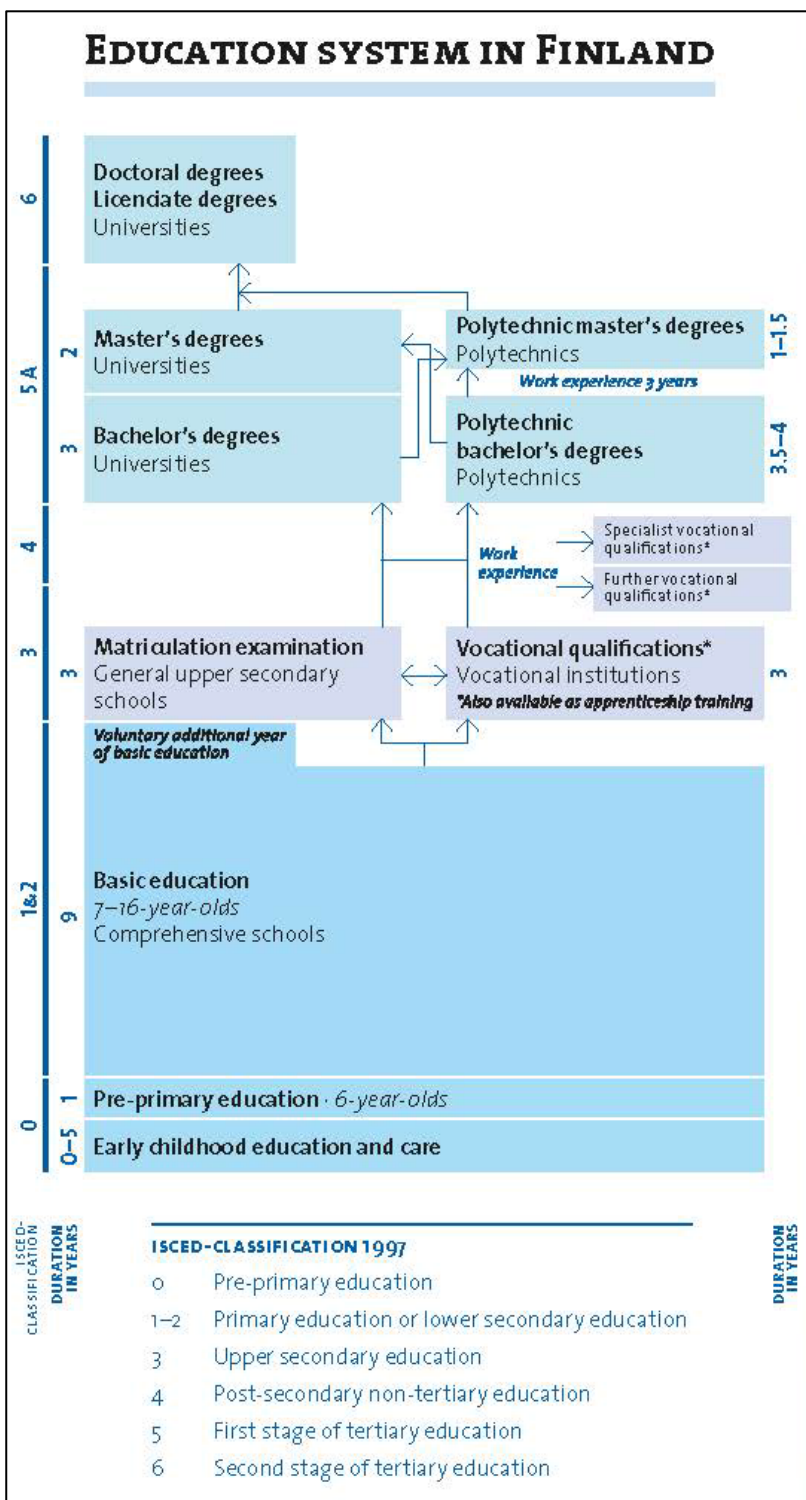


Figure 3: Overview of the Finnish school system, MOEC 2012, p. 3

## 5.2 PISA and the miracle of Finnish education

Since 2000, the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey aims to evaluate 15-year-old students' abilities in reading, mathematics, and science worldwide. The test is conducted every three years, and the number of participating countries has risen from 34 in PISA 2000 to 64 in PISA 2012 (<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/>). Although the PISA survey design, itself, has received multiple criticisms from educational research, it is acknowledged as "the most politically acknowledged studies in comparative education statistics" (Knodel et al., 2014, p.5)

Throughout the early 2000s, the survey results placed Finland among the best performing countries in the world. Together with Asian and English-speaking countries, Finland outperformed not only its Nordic neighbors, but also all other European countries (cf. Table 5). Finnish students scored highly in the respective tasks and displayed very little variation within the student body, thus indicating equity and overall quality of the Finnish school system (MOEC, 2009; Kivirauha & Ruoho, 2007; Reinikainen, 2012). However, in comparison to the other OECD countries, Finland invests only an average amount of expense per student and has one of the lowest instruction times (Reinikainen, 2012, p.14). This made the results even more remarkable and caused international interest in the Finnish system.

	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012
Mathematics	5	2	2	6	12
Science	4	1	1	2	5
Reading	1	1	2	3	6
Problem Solving		3			

**Table 4:** Overview of Finland's PISA rankings 2000-2012, adapted from OECD 2015

Especially since gaining the top results, repeatedly, in PISA 2000, PISA 2003 and PISA 2006, Finnish education has received international admiration and praise. The OECD declared Finland as a "top performer" not only in education, but also regarding child welfare and overall living standards (OECD, 2010; OECD Better Life Index, 2014). Foreign media presented Finland as a role model (e.g., "superpower of education", BBC, 2007), "the best country for education" (Newsweek, 2012, "The Finland Phenomenon" Documentary, Compton & Wagner, 2011).

Simultaneous to the growing popularity of the Finnish education system, Finnish educational research brought PISA into focus. Pasi Reinikainen (2013) remarks:

This success has been a great joy to educational practitioners and decision makers in Finland. It has been amazing how the Finnish education system, with only average monetary investments, a very small amount of homework and lesson hours and extremely light education evaluation (no inspection system) can reach such results high quality and equality in international comparisons. (p.3).

Finnish research described the results as a “miracle” (Dervin, 2013; Niemi 2012, p. 36; Niemi, Toom & Kallioniemi, 2012; Sahlberg 2015), indicating that to Finnish educational researchers, the success came as a positive surprise. It consequently fueled broad interest in research explaining the structural, historical, cultural, and societal factors behind Finnish educational success (e.g. Niemi et al., 2012; Heller-Sahlgren 2015, Sahlberg, 2006, 2011a, 2011b; Simola, 2005). The following provides a brief summary of the most common explanations provided by Finnish educational research literature:

### *1) Equality and equity within the school system*

Equality and equity are often emphasized as the ideological base of Finnish education policies (Kumpulainen & Lankkainen, 2012, p.70; Krzywacki et al., 2012, p.127; Niemi, 2012; Niemi et al., 2012b, p.274; Vahtivuori-Hönninen & Kynäslahti, 2012, p. 224; Vitikka et al., 2012, p.88; Sahlberg, 2006, p.279; Sahlberg, 2007; Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013), and these are regarded as the underpinnings of success.

The Finnish Ministry of Education (MOEC, 2012) emphasizes:

One of the basic principles of Finnish education is that all people must have equal access to high-quality education and training. The same opportunities to education should be available to all citizens irrespective of their ethnic origin, age, wealth or where they live. (p. 6).

Based on the ideal of equality and accessibility, education is free from primary to higher education, and the state subsidizes school meals and transportations (Niemi, 2012, p.22). Another basic principle is that all students have equal opportunities. In order to ensure social equality, Finland moved in 1968 from its former parallel streaming school system into a single, comprehensive education format. All students spend the nine years of compulsory education

together and there is no division between primary and lower secondary education. Each school is supported by a professional student care group, consisting of the principal, teachers, special needs teachers, social workers, and a nurse (Niemi, 2012, p.25), to ensure the students' wellbeing. Students with special needs are integrated into the same classes as other students. Support with learning difficulties is provided in form of a part-time system of special needs education up to two hours per day (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2012, p.284). It should be remarked that in Finland, around one fifth of all students are recognized as having special needs, a number which is much higher than in other countries (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2012, p.288). In recognition of the demand, every tenth teacher in the year 2002-2003 has been a special needs teacher (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2012, p.290).

Kivirauma and Ruoho (2012) claim that Finland thus "has the world record in terms of the quantity of special education" (p. 288). They further argue that the Finnish sensitivity towards learning difficulties, and the inclusive support system, are the keys to achieving equality in the classroom (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2012, p.285).

Indeed, PISA has revealed surprisingly little variation concerning student's social backgrounds, performance gaps within the student body and school environments. Therefore, one might argue that the Finnish comprehensive school system does promote educational equality (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2012, p. 284, 298; Niemi, 2012; Reinikainen, 2012;).

## 2) *Autonomy and Freedom*

Beginning in the 1980s, Finland initiated several reforms that decentralized education policy and administration (Niemi, 2012, p.22). Their objective was to provide municipalities and schools with more freedom and autonomy to implement educational policies.

With regards to funding, schools depend on the government, yet in practice, they have a large degree of autonomy (Vitikka et al., 201, p.85). Schools receive funding from the government based on the number of eligible pupils in their surroundings, and additional funding from the municipalities based on local needs. The municipalities were strengthened in their role as educational providers. As Vitikka, Krokfors and Hurmeranta (2012) observe, "being the primary educational provider, municipalities were given the right to freely determine how they wished to use state provided financial grants." (p. 85) The allocation of funding is thus not based on performance, and in collaboration with the municipalities, schools have a large impact on the allocation and use of funding (e.g. staff recruitment).

Besides financial leeway, schools, and teachers in particular, have much freedom in terms of teaching methods and content. The National Board of Education formulates a national core curriculum, to which all teaching has to align. Rather than being a strict set of rules, the core curriculum is rather a “pedagogical guiding document” (Vitikka et al., 2012, p. 88). It includes basic guidelines in terms of learning objectives, principles of learning environments and students’ welfare (MOEC, 2012). In accordance to those guidelines, municipalities are responsible for local administration and the creation of local curricula. Often these decisions are delegated to the schools themselves, because the local curricula need to be formulated based upon the educational practices of the respective schools. As Niemi (2012) remarks, “the curricula must be drawn up in such a way that they take into account the schools’ operating environments, local value choices and special resources.” (p. 29). Vitikka et al. (2012) thus argue that the Finnish national core curriculum does not represent a centralized approach:

In Finland, the national core curriculum is a framework for making local curricula. It determines a common structure and basic guidelines that the local curriculum makers, school officials and teachers, use in order to build a local, context driven curriculum. (...) This gives the core curriculum a dual role: on one hand, it is an administrative steering document, on the other a tool for teachers to develop their own pedagogical praxis. (p. 84).

Accordingly, the government does not interfere with practical teaching arrangements or schools’ decisions on dividing the student body, determining class size, or choosing teaching materials.

In practice, this leaves much autonomy and freedom to teachers. Teachers themselves determine the content of their classes, and are allowed to choose their teaching methods and materials freely. Since the curriculum reform of 1994, the practice of textbook assessments and school inspections was abolished (Vitikka et al., 2012, p. 85). Therefore, neither the teaching materials, nor the teachers, themselves, are controlled by the government. While there is no inspection system there is, however, an evaluation system, which aims to assess the “development of education”. (Niemi, 2012, p. 27, Simola et al., 2013, p. 622). The inspections compare educational outcomes with the core curriculum, but they are only sample-based (Niemi, 2012, p. 27) and thus do not rank schools’ performance. Kumpulainen and Lankkinen (2012) emphasize that these evaluations are “not exercised to control or sanction, but, rather, to develop education at all levels of the system, creating the best learning opportunities for every learner.” (p. 70). Based on the evaluations, schools receive feedback, but there are no further implications for the students or teachers (Niemi, 2012, p. 27; Vitikka et al., 2012, p. 94). Rather than being an inspection, the evaluations can

be considered as “diagnostic tools” (Vitikka et al., 2012, p. 94). The quality of teaching is supervised only by the school itself, meaning, in practice, by the principal. Therefore, common ways of quality assurance are annual development discussions within the schools (Kumpulainen & Lankinen, 2012, p. 74).

### 3) *Appreciation of teachers and trust in the educational system*

The learning environment is therefore safe and free from fear and anxiety often caused by failing in tests. External review of teachers' performance was abolished in early 1990s. Thus, as most Finnish teachers will tell you, they are free to focus on developing understanding, fostering an interest in learning and cultivating open trust-based relationships between teachers and students. (Sahlberg, 2006, p. 282)

The large autonomy of teachers and schools represents what many Finnish researchers describe as trust in the educational system and the professionalism of teachers (cf. Rinne et al., 2002; Sahlberg, 2006, p.279; Sahlberg, 2007; Simola, 2005; Toom & Husu, 2012). This can be attributed to the high value of education in Finnish society. Tracing this back to Finland's history, Toom and Husu (2012) remark: “This tradition dates back at least a century to a respect for learning and education as a core of Finnish culture and the statehood of a developing nation” (p. 46). Similarly, Sahlberg (2011c) argues:

What is important is that today's Finnish education policies are a result of three decades of systematic, mostly intentional, development that has created a culture of diversity, trust, and respect within Finnish society, in general, and within its education system, in particular. (p. 182).

The argument of “culture of trust” (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 156) is used by many Finnish researchers' to explain the previously-outlined autonomy of schools and teachers (see also Niemi, 2011; Simola, 2005; Sahlberg 2006, 2015). Indeed, according to a comparative study within the Nordic countries, Finnish parents are more satisfied with the schooling system and trust the teachers more than in other countries (Simola, 2005; pp. 458-9).

The trust in teachers comes along with a high social status of the profession, and their professional autonomy comes along with a recognized social responsibility. As Niemi (2012) emphasizes, “teachers open doors and windows to cultural enrichment and help people to understand other human beings and their cultural contexts. Teachers are key actors in promoting human rights, justice and democracy in a global world” (p. 30).

Connected to this social responsibility, the profession of teachers has a high social status in Finland (Toom & Husu, 2012, p. 40). Teachers have always been educated at university level, and since the Bologna process, Kindergarten teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree (180 ETCS), while all other teachers need to have a Master's degree (BA 180 + MA 120 = 300 ECTS) (Niemi, 2012, p. 29). Becoming a teacher is a highly popular career choice, and applicants for the teacher's degree programs highly outnumber the amount of available study places. In fact, the intake into the teacher education programs is only about 10 percent (Niemi, 2012; Sahlberg, 2015; Toom & Husu, 2012), which makes it harder in Finland to become a teacher than a lawyer or doctor. Consequently, tough selection criteria at universities ensure that only motivated and talented applicants get into the degree programs. All applicants for teaching studies are tested and individually interviewed before being admitted.

Teacher education encompasses the obligatory pedagogical studies (60 ETCS), which include practical training before placement in schools (Niemi, 2012, p.30). Yet, the teacher training is mostly research-oriented (Jyrhämä & Maarainen, 2012; Tirri, 2012), with the aim to enhance professional autonomy. Tirri (2012) highlights that the objective of Finnish teacher training is "to educate autonomous, professional teachers who build their practice on research-based knowledge and ethical values. The normative nature and context-dependency of teaching are acknowledged." (p. 64). As a result of university training, Finnish society considers teachers to be "professionals who are morally responsible for their work." (Niemi, 2012, p.36). Consequently, once in the schools, there is no further probation time or checking-up on the teachers (Niemi, 2012, p. 36). Nevertheless, teachers regularly participate in in-service training. Finnish teachers' professionalism has a great impact on the education system, as the PISA study shows.

In summary, the above provides some insight into the specifics of Finnish education and the educational practices behind the "miraculous" PISA rankings. However, it must be highlighted, that none of the aspects can be solely held responsible for the test results. The list is not exhaustive, and it is noteworthy that while the above-quoted scholars agree, in general, on the same characteristics of the Finnish system, there are differences. For example, while Niemi (2001) and Tirri (2012) emphasize the student-centered approach in Finnish teaching, as well as flexibility of teachers and the culture of innovation, Simola argues with a conservative, collectivist Finnish culture which maintains the traditional role of teachers as the authorities and the students as obedient (Simola, 2005, p. 465). But rather than looking for one explanation, Finland's success in the PISA studies must be attributed to a complex interplay between multiple factors. According to the Finnish PISA team, a group of researchers (Väljärvi et. al., 2002), who reported on the Finnish success to the OECD,

Finland's high achievement seems to be attributable to a whole network of interrelated factors, in which students' own areas of interest and leisure activities, the learning opportunities provided by schools, parental support and involvement as well as social and cultural contexts of learning and of the entire education system combine with each other. (p. 46).

This combination makes the Finnish education system unique, and may be the reason it has attracted so much interest from abroad.

### 5.3 Lessons from Finland?

The previous chapter revealed that the Finnish education system differs radically from that of many other countries. At the same time, the success in PISA, and its global media interest, turned Finland into a role model in education. As Sahlberg (2011c) observed, "the Finnish Way of educational change is interesting because it captures the story of an education system that has traversed from being mediocre in international standards in the 1980s to excellent in the 2000s." (p. 182). Finland became a "poster boy" (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 196; Waldow et al., 2014, p. 303) or an "educational utopia" (Waldow et al., 2014, p. 208) to the international audience, representing a model of excellence in education (e.g., Sahlberg, 2007, 2011b, 2011c; Waldow et al., 2014).

The media further fueled comparative educational research publications on Finland (cf. Hargreaves in Sahlberg, 2015, p. xvii; Waldow, 2010; Waldow et al., 2014). Perhaps the most prominent example is Pasi Sahlberg's (2011a, 2015) "Finnish Lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?", which became an international bestseller, and received the Grawemeyer Award in Education in 2013. The idea behind Finnish lessons is, as the author Sahlberg (2010, in Sahlberg 2011) claims elsewhere, that "Finland is not an unobtainable utopia; on the contrary, it contains a number of simple design principles that could be adapted by any jurisdiction" (p. 183).

Consequently, educators and policy makers from all over the world have started to visit Finland to gain first-hand insights into the practices behind the PISA-success and to "take home" some of the lessons. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, as well as pedagogical faculties at universities, and schools themselves, have been receiving a growing number of such pedagogical tourists. Herein lies the origin of Finland's education export policies.

For export purposes, branding and marketization of the PISA miracle is a necessity. It should be noted, however, that although much of the above-summarized research promotes Finnish education, there are also critical voices against the glorification of the Finnish education system. Having drawn an ideal-

istic picture of Finnish education earlier, it seems only fair to also acknowledge the existing criticality within Finnish educational research.

The first line of argument against the myths of Finland as a role model, lies in the acknowledgement that not everything is perfect in Finland. Classrooms are becoming increasingly heterogeneous, which pose new challenges for teachers (Toom & Husu, 2012, p. 41). And in terms of the previously-outlined equity between schools, possibly as a result of immigration and parents' free choice on schooling, there are signs that the differences between schools (especially in the Helsinki capital area) are growing significantly.

Kumpulainen and Lankkinen (2012), therefore, warn:

Recent assessment and follow-up studies have revealed growing differences in learning outcomes, student welfare services, children's and young people's psychosocial welfare and health care services. There are differences between genders, regions and population groups. Based on the research, it is evident that not all Finnish local authorities have sufficient resources or the political will to provide high-quality education, which puts students in an unequal position. (p. 77)

For example, throughout the PISA studies, schools of Finland's Swedish-speaking minority have performed less successfully, when compared to their Finnish-speaking counterparts, which raises questions about the acclaimed equality in education (Heller Sahlgren, 2015, p. 28). In addition, the demographic landscape in Finnish basic education schools is clearly becoming more complex. Increasing cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity among learners, makes it timely to re-examine educational equity and its realization in Finnish education.

Simultaneously, teacher education becomes more challenging. For example, Hahl et al. (2015) and Dervin (2012) criticize the lack of intercultural sensitivity in Finnish classroom materials and teacher education. Empirical studies conducted by Niemi (2002) and Tirri (2012) indicate a growing gap between the research-based training that prospective teachers receive at the universities, and the skills and experiences they need, in practice, when going to the schools. While schools, in theory, have much autonomy in creating their own curriculum, not all might be using their leeway in the same way (Niemi, 2002, p. 776). And finally, while praising the equality approach in the Finnish special needs system, one might question whether perhaps too much emphasis is placed on students with learning deficiencies, whereas talented students receive less support (Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013). Finland dropped significantly in the last round of PISA, and while Finland still ranks highly, all these critical observations have gained momentum in the discussion.

The second line of criticism is concerned with the PISA study, itself. Some argue that the study only tests specific types of knowledge in a particular age

group, and thus cannot be used to judge a countries' educational system, as a whole (Sahlberg, 2006, p. 267). Secondly, one might argue that Finland had a favorable starting position, as its core curriculum corresponds with the standardized learning objectives used by the OECD. Furthermore, the fact that Finland has been ethnically more homogenous than other EU countries might have had a positive impact on the results.

Thirdly, as Sahlberg (2012) argues, "sensitivity to the problems of transferring educational ideas from one place to another is essential" (pp.189-190). Chapter 4 in this dissertation has already highlighted some of the challenges concerning the export of educational policies. Simola (2005), for example, argues that the good education system is deeply embedded in Finnish culture and history, which makes it questionable whether the success in PISA rankings can really be bought.

Another aspect relevant to selling the PISA miracle is the slight decline of Finland in the PISA scores in 2009, followed by a more drastic drop in 2012. As Gabriel Heller Sahlgren (2015) observes "the Finnish education miracle has stalled and gone into reverse in recent years." (p. 5) If this is a continuous trend, as Heller Sahlgren (2015) proposes, basing Finland's education export solely on the "PISA miracle" is a dangerous gamble. He highlights that the acclaimed Finnish education reforms cannot have been responsible for the success in PISA, as there was simply too little time between policy implementation and perceived impact. In opposition to Sahlberg (2015), Heller Sahlgren (2015) argues that Finland's good PISA results from the early 2000s were reminiscent of the former traditional authoritarian teacher-centered education, and that the new reforms, introducing more child-centered practices, are actually to blame for the current decline in pupils' performance (Heller Sahlgren, 2015). If further research establishes this theory, frankly speaking, Finnish education export backed the wrong horse.

However, criticality does not sell. Education and policy makers coming on their "educational pilgrimages" (Sahlberg, 2006, p. 282) to Finland are looking for educational solutions, not problems. Whereas the Finnish basic education system has, to a large extent, remained distinguishable from international, market-based, education reforms (Sahlberg, 2006, 2015), I argue that the subsequent popularity has led to fully market-oriented education export policies.

The Finnish government decided to act upon the demand and aimed for avenues to profit from the opportunity. Finnish educational "know-how" was suddenly perceived as a product, in line with education export policies elsewhere (cf. Chapter 4). Finland's first ever education export policy document, "Finnish education export strategy: summary of the strategic lines and measures" (MOE, 2010), is introduced as follows:

Education export is part of the global service economy, and it is considered to be a sector which broadly combines different industries. Finland's strengths in education export and in the field of education itself are a competitive education system and a good reputation internationally. There is an evident demand for Finnish know-how on the international education market. Despite significant international interest in the Finnish education system, no ready-made products exist, or none have at least been identified yet. As a response to this interest, the Minister of Education and Science, Ms Henna Virkkunen, established a working group on 17 June 2009 to identify the bottlenecks and challenges of Finnish education export and outline the strategic lines and measures for it. (p.3)

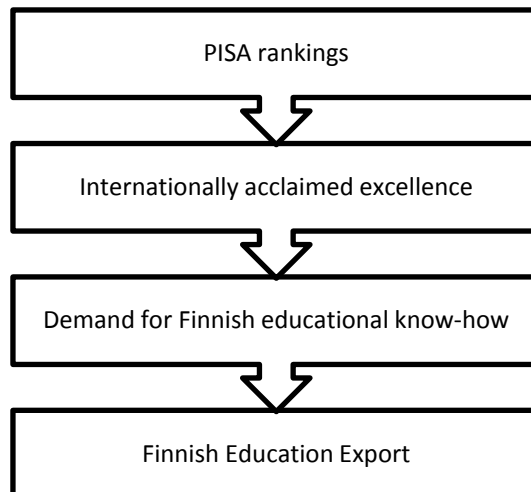
The aim of this education export strategy was to make Finland "one of the world's leading education-based economies" (MOE, 2010, p. 3).

## 6 Implications for the case of Finnish education export

### 6.1 Drawing a theoretical research model

It is clear that these transnational trends and tendencies do not simply shape the regional, national or local policies, but they rather collide and intertwine with “embedded policies” to be found in “local” spaces (national, provincial or local) where global policy agendas come up against existing practices and priorities. (Simola et al., 2013, pp. 612-613)

The objective of this chapter is to visualize how the reviewed literature forms the theoretical research framework, in which this study is embedded. The previous chapter outlined how the particular context of Finnish education, together with the successful PISA rankings, provide the basis from which the prospects of Finnish education exportation flourishes. It explains the demand for Finnish educational products, as well as the motive for Finland to consider education export as a lucrative business opportunity. In short, I am drawing a trajectory starting from the PISA study rankings, leading to internationally-acclaimed excellence of Finnish education, to international demand for Finnish educational know-how, and resulting in Finnish education export:



**Figure 4:** Emergence of education export in Finland

Moreover, looking at the education system, in detail, reveals national peculiarities that distinguish Finland from other education exporters:

- 1) Education is for free. Based on the ideal of equality, Finnish education is free of charge, at all levels. While traditional education export, as reviewed in Chapter 4, gains most revenue from selling degrees, this does not apply to Finland.
- 2) The popularity of Finland's education is based on PISA, and thus concentrated on basic education. In contrast, other education exporters capitalize upon their internationally acclaimed higher education institutions.
- 3) Finland's education export policies were a reaction to the popularity of its educational system and the international pedagogical tourism. Yet, in contrast to traditional education export, there was no educational service ready to be sold. As clearly stated by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the export strategies were made before a real educational product was developed ("no ready-made products exist, or none have at least been identified yet" [MOE, 2010, p. 3]).

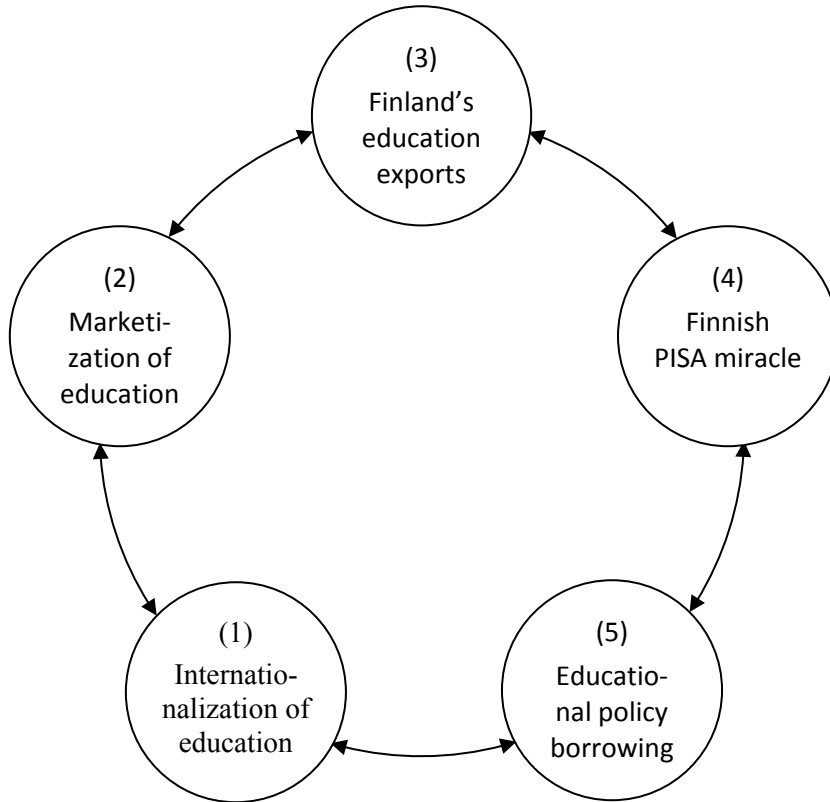
Based on these arguments, I argue that Finland's education export needs to be regarded as a unique case. Nevertheless, it did not emerge in a local vacuum. Instead, I propose that Finnish education export policies are deeply embedded in the global processes of internationalization and marketization of education.

In Chapter 5, I have drawn a line between research on globalization, commodification and marketization of education and education export. In the following sections, I will highlight the relationships between these theoretical anchors, in general, and Finland's education export, in particular.

The literature review indicates that the internationalization of education, education policy borrowing and the marketization of education are perpetuated by one another. My assumption is that also Finland's PISA miracle discourse, and education export, can be seen as a part of the same phenomenon.

Figure 4 places the key concepts in a circle. The arrows connecting one concept to another represent an *increase*. The arrows are bidirectional because the circle can be read both ways. Starting clockwise, increasing (1) internationalization of education has been recognized as a factor, which increases the (2) marketization of education. The growing amount of marketing practices in education increases education businesses, such as (3) Finland's education exports. The more Finland invests in education exports, the more the (4) Finnish PISA miracle, meaning the successes in PISA and role-model discourses, are promoted. At the same time, this promotion leads to an increasing interest and practice of (5)

educational policy borrowing, which, to conclude the circle, perpetuates the (1) internationalization of education.



**Figure 5:** Connecting key concepts

Reading the circle counterclockwise, I would argue that the (1) internationalization of education increases (5) educational policy borrowing. The spreading practice of educational policy borrowing raises interest and promotion in the (4) Finnish PISA miracle. This, as already shown earlier, increases (3) Finland's educational exports. The growing number of education export practices further fuels the (2) marketization of education. Finally, the outcome of increasing marketization, is another increase in the (1) internationalization of education.

The figure is depicted as a circle because there is, in my opinion, no clear starting point. The numbers serve here as an orientation for the reader, rather

than proposing a hierarchical order. I started the example with internationalization, but one could equally argue for other starting points. Each part of the circle is increasing – and at the same time increased – by others.

To complicate things, I am convinced that these key concepts also impact each other across the circle. For example, (1) internationalization of education could be regarded as the base for cross-border educational transfer, and is thus clearly linked to (4) Finland's education export. Further, the internationalization of education is not only the origin of the PISA study, but it also fuels the discourses on the (4) Finnish PISA miracle. Hence, not only does the (1) internationalization of education increase (2) marketization and (5) education policy borrowing, but it also has an impact – and is simultaneously impacted – by (4) Finland's education exports and the (3) Finnish PISA miracle discourses.

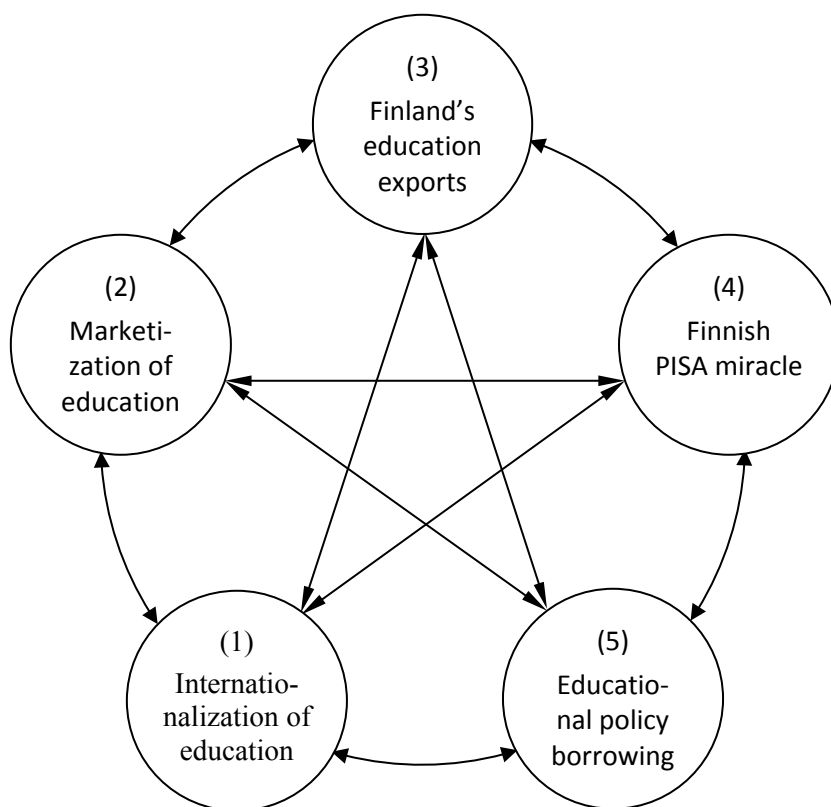
The same logic of interrelatedness applies to the other key concepts. I have previously established the relationship between (2) marketization of education to (1) internationalization of education and (3) Finland's education export. But the (3) marketization of education also affects the (4) Finnish PISA miracle by providing the necessary tools and discourses. Similarly, the perception of an international marketplace of education, which puts best practices on offer, results in an increase of (5) educational policy borrowing.

Education export (3) has already been connected to (2) marketization and the (4) Finnish PISA miracle in the circle. Additionally, the more educational practices that are imported and exported, the more international education becomes, the more global a perspective education has, thus connecting (3) Finland's education export to (1) internationalization of education. On a practical level, (3) Finland's education export leads to educational import, thus is clearly linked to (5) educational policy borrowing.

The (4) Finnish PISA miracle discourses not only thrive in the context of (2) marketization of education, they are also contributing to it by offering role-model solutions. At the same time, the PISA miracle discourses created awareness of Finnish education practices and thus have contributed to the (1) internationalization of education. Thus, the concept of the (4) PISA Finnish miracle is related to (1) internationalization of education, (2) marketization of education, (3) Finland's education export, and (5) educational policy borrowing.

The latter, (5) educational borrowing, has an already-established relationship with (4) the Finnish PISA miracle discourses and (1) internationalization of education. It also serves as a context and amplifier of (3) educational exports. Finally, current practices of educational policy borrowing further fuel the (2) marketization of education.

By connecting all the concepts with each other, a star figure emerges:



**Figure 6:** Star-figure research framework

## 6.2 Linking framework with research context

The star-figure model represents the theoretical framework that I adopted, which was inspired by the literature review for this dissertation. My claim is not that this figure is comprehensive; on the contrary, I am aware that the selection of “key concepts” is a personal choice and the relationships between these concepts is far more complex than the star-figure would suggest. The choices I made in this visualization display my underlying ideologies and perceptions. I would, therefore, like to emphasize that this illustration is not intended to be an explanatory model, neither concerning Finnish education export, nor global education policies. The aim of the model is to reveal the way I mapped existing research literature and global key concepts around the particular Finnish focus of this

study. It is important to remember, as Alfred Korzybski famously demonstrated, that the map is not the territory (Korzybski, 1933 [1994]). It serves as a tool to orientate oneself in the territory, but it does not constitute the territory itself. Similarly, the star-figure helps to orientate one amid the concepts I used and the way in which they influenced my thinking about Finland's education export and my research approach.

The most important implications of the theoretical research framework are:

1. Finnish education export can be considered as a particular local response to the PISA study rankings, the internationally acclaimed excellence of Finnish education and the increasing international demand for Finnish educational know-how (Figure 4). However, it is also deeply embedded in the global context of internationalization and marketization of education (Figure 6).
2. The internationalization of education, marketization of education, practices of education policy borrowing, the Finnish PISA miracle discourse and Finnish education export are not only related concepts, they impact each other in a perpetuating manner, shifting education towards market-based principles and neo-liberal politics.
3. Researching Finnish education export thus provides two avenues: gaining an understanding of newly-emerging education policies in the local context, while also providing a national case study for already-existing global education policy developments. It follows that the research needs to take into consideration both local and global perspectives.

This framework constitutes the perspective and the boundaries of what I consider to be "the case" of Finland's education export policies. Within this framework, I conducted three studies that all explore the local Finnish education export landscape from different angles. Incorporating the connections drawn through this theoretical base, the following chapter presents these studies in their published article format.



## **7 Original refereed articles and their major contributions**

## 7.1 Research Article I

TOWARDS ONE OF THE LEADING  
EDUCATION BASED ECONOMIES?  
INVESTIGATING AIMS, STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES  
OF FINLAND'S EDUCATION EXPORT LANDSCAPE

Monika Schatz

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The article (pp. 78 - 93) is included in the original dissertation. For this electronic version, original publications have been removed. The article is available online at Sage Journals, doi: [10.1177/1028315315572897](https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315315572897)

## 7.2 Intermission: Article I and its contributions to the dissertations' research questions

The original research article provides an overview of the Finnish education export sector and discusses current challenges and opportunities. A particular emphasis was placed on investigating how motives, objectives, and implementation strategies for education export were presented in the two education export policy documents, published by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture in 2011 and 2013. In this chapter, I review the contributions of the research article to the research objectives and research questions stated in the introduction of this dissertation.

The first sections of the article present a conceptual framework for Finnish education export and thus contribute to the first research objective, *to develop a contextualization of Finnish education export policies* (RO1). This conceptualization is based on the theoretical framework, which has been presented in more detail within Chapters 4-5. The data analysis presented in Research Article I supports the previous analysis and answers to the research question RQ1: *What is the context for the emergence of Finnish education export?*

I proposed that the article predominantly answers research question RQ2: *What are the motives and aims of Finnish education export policies?* Indeed, based on the comparison of the two education export policy documents I have argued that there is a puzzling contrast between the two documents in terms of motives, objectives and implementation strategies. The first education export strategy ("Finnish Education Export Strategy: Summary of the Strategic Lines and Measures") was drafted with the aim of capitalizing on the positive Finnish education brand created by PISA. Thus, contrary to education export elsewhere, it relied on the reputation of Finnish basic education and a perceived international interest in Finland's educational system, in general. The strategy's aim is that Finland would become one of the world's largest education export economies (Schatz, 2015). The motives for education export, according to the content analysis of the document, were 1) a perceived international *demand* for Finnish education on the market, 2) the good *reputation* of Finnish education, and 3) Finland's *strength* of having the world's best education system. The second policy document ("International Education Markets and Finland) expands on these motives to include 4) the expected *profits* attainable through education exports, and 5) perceived *threats* to the competitiveness of the Finnish national economy. In contrast to the previous strategy, the formulated aim is less ambitious in scope and focuses on turning Finland's education export into a profitable business.

From the policy perspective, the article also responds to the third research question, *What is the Finnish education export product?* (RQ3). The policy analysis reveals that, in fact, the Finnish education export product is only vaguely referred to as educational know-how or educational solutions (Schatz, 2015).

The more recent publication, from 2013, urges the increase in revenue from education exports through the introduction of tuition fees for Non-EU/EEA students. This would mean that, in future, the Finnish education export product could possibly be degrees, similar to other successful education exporting countries. However, until this proposal is realized, the national export product mainly exists in the form of the Finnish education brand. The following research article follows up on this link and takes a closer look at the Finnish education brand.

In order to give this dissertation a critical voice, I also raised the objective *to reveal education export ideologies and discuss their implications* (RO5) within each research article. In “Towards one of the leading education based economies? Investigating Aims, Strategies and Practices of Finland’s Education Export Landscape”, I argue that the policy changes indicate a new Finnish internationalization policy, which aligns to the global trends of commodification and marketization of education. The aims of the policies – profit and competitiveness – reveal a market-oriented ideology, which assumes that good educational practice can be bought and sold (cf. Chapters 4-5 in this dissertation). Yet, it has also been demonstrated that capitalizing on Finnish education is opposed by structural and legislative challenges. This alludes to the dichotomy between Finnish education philosophy, on the one hand, and business mentality on the other hand. I will address this issue, and its implications, in more detail, with consideration of results from the other research articles, in the discussion chapter.



## 7.3 Research Article II

FROM PISA TO NATIONAL BRANDING:  
EXPLORING FINNISH EDUCATION®

Monika Schatz, Ana Popovic & Fred Dervin

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*Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*  
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(Online first publication 27 July 2015)

The article (pp. 98 - 115) is included in the original dissertation. For this electronic version, original publications have been removed. The article is available online at Taylor & Francis, doi:10.1080/01596306.2015.1066311

## 7.4 Intermission: Article II and its contributions to the dissertations' research questions

In this article, I have demonstrated, together with my colleagues Ana Popovic and Fred Dervin, how the success in the OECD PISA studies inspired Finland's educational brand. We have nicknamed the brand as Finnish education® in order to emphasize its deep roots in marketing. The aim of the brand is to strengthen the reputation of the Finnish education system, and to establish it as a desirable export product.

Therefore, analyzing the Finnish educational brand provides an additional response to research question RQ3 *What is the Finnish education export product?* We argued that the Finnish education brand consists of three major themes: 1) high-quality performance, 2) Finland's success story, and 3) global relevance (Schatz et al., 2015). We argued that, for the sake of marketing, Finnish education is presented as "the best in the world", and that its product value consists of its superiority above other educational systems. Based on the findings from this research article, the Finnish education export product is a discursive construction, which, in the context of the previously discussed research on education in Finland, seems highly idealized and exploited (cf. Chapter 5 in this dissertation).

While discussing these findings, the research article profoundly engages with the fifth research objective, to *reveal education export ideologies and discuss their implications* (RO5). As we have revealed, the Finnish education brand explicitly promotes a missionary approach, implying that Finnish education needs to be spread – or exported – to the rest of the world for the sake of peace, equality and global justice. This approach ignores the education export critique raised by comparative education research (see Chapter 4.6 in this dissertation) and resonates with Steiner-Khamsi's (2004c) warning that education export patronizes non-Western countries. While there is, in my opinion, nothing wrong with spreading good educational practices, I find it problematic that the brand relies on "Finnishness" as a trade quality, rather than on educational research. This is because, via this country-of-origin brand method, national imaginaries and stereotypes are evoked and instrumentalized. Furthermore, as is exposed in the article, idealized "Finnishness" comes at the cost of diminishing others. One visible implication of the education brand, as argued in the article, is a discursive change in how Finland and the Finnish education export is received. The branding document thus fulfilled its purpose, however, from a critical research perspective it is questionable whether the constructed export product is sustainable and morally grounded.

## 7.5 Research Article III

ENGINES WITHOUT FUEL? - EMPIRICAL FINDINGS  
ON THE ROLE OF FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS  
AS EDUCATION EXPORTERS

Monika Schatz

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*Policy Futures in Education* 2016, Vol. 14(3), 392 - 408

The article (pp. 118 - 139) is included in the original dissertation. For this electronic version, original publications have been removed. The article is available online Sage Publications, doi: 1478210316633950

## 7.6 Intermission: Article III and its contributions to the dissertations' research questions

I suggested in the first research article, “Towards one of the leading education based economies? Investigating Aims, Strategies and Practices of Finland’s Education Export Landscape”, that the way the presentation of education export changed within the policy documents mirrors problems with the implementation of the initial strategy. The changes in motives and aims indicate that education export did not flourish as expected in the first strategy. In this third research article, I have developed this argument further by giving voices to the actors who are supposed to implement the education export policies, namely Finnish higher education institutions (HEIs). I have expanded the argument to HEIs, because the original education export policy from 2010 declares HEIs to be the “engines” and “operators” of Finnish education export.

Consequently, this dissertation’s research objective RO4, to *investigate how the Finnish education export strategies are implemented* required a consideration of the HEI context. The interfaces between Finnish education export and the higher education export have been outlined in the article. The article’s research question *how do Finnish higher education institutions perceive their role as education exporters?* (RQ4) inspired a case study with HEI staff at international offices.

Using a questionnaire, I aimed to collect opinions from HEI staff, in an attempt to provide insight into the official education export ambitions, while also working with their practical implementation. With 29 responses, I was able to demonstrate that education export in HEIs is very heterogeneous. The respondents showed a variety of opinions and only a few of those were aligned with the Ministry’s education policy. Only a minority of participants perceived the current education export as important. Most expressed that it is still at an early developmental stage. While according to the Ministry’s education export strategy, HEIs should take an active responsibility as education export operators; the responses indicate that, in fact, HEIs take a rather passive approach towards education export. The participants brought up challenges such as problems of cooperation, marketing, product development, and attitudes.

Triangulated with the data analysis from the previous studies, the findings of the questionnaire further support a critical stance towards the education export policies. The first education export strategy from 2010 was apparently impractical to implement within its target period. In contrast, the strategy of 2013, which seemed to reflect a change in mindset and goals, seems more aligned with the realities faced by the international offices. The questionnaire findings also problematized the ambiguity of the education export product, which corresponds with the identified challenges of sustainability and applicability of the Finnish educational brand, in Research Article II.

## 8 Relevance and further implications of research findings

### 8.1 Connecting the dots

In the previous chapter, I presented the findings from the research questions, with the help of the research articles. In this section, I will summarize the outcomes by offering simplified answers to the initial research questions. The aim of this exercise is to combine the different facets of the case study and to capture the essence of this research in common terms.

**RQ1: What is the context for the emergence of Finnish education export?**

The emergence of Finnish education export is inspired by a perceived international demand for Finnish educational solutions, based on Finland's success in PISA. At the same time, it is aligned with global trends towards commodification and marketization of education.

**RQ2: What are the motives and objectives of Finnish education export policies?**

The motive is to make a profit from the Finnish education system and to strengthen Finland's economy and international competitiveness.

**RQ3: What is the Finnish education export product?**

A Finnish national education brand has been created to increase the market value of Finnish education, but there is, in fact, no clearly defined education export product.

**RQ4: How do Finnish higher education institutions perceive their role as education exporters?**

Rather than seeing themselves as initiators, most Finnish higher education institutions take a passive approach towards education export.

**RQ5: What kinds of ideologies underpin Finnish education export policies?**

Underpinning ideologies are that Finnish education is superior to other educational systems and, therefore, that the world is in need of Finnish educational exports.

From a research perspective, these statements are meaningless without the research context from which they emerged. However, too often, research remains

in an exclusive academic bubble. By emphasizing complexity and intertextuality, researchers avoid really opening up their findings. I anticipate that these deliberately formulated statements may or may not appeal, but in either case they will have an impact on research and policy-making. In the following sections, I will highlight the importance of these findings and deepen the discussion on their implications for Finnish education export.

## **8.2 Problems of the Finnish education export sector**

The research has not only proposed push-and pull-factors for Finnish education export, but also problematized existing challenges. The aims and objectives of the original education export strategy (MOE, 2010) to become a global leader in education export, may have been overly-ambitious. Nevertheless, in the past five years since its creation as a national initiative, education export has not brought any significant revenue to the Finnish economy. It seems to me, that in order to change this pattern and to turn current export practices into a flourishing education export sector, the challenges highlighted in this research need to be recognized and addressed.

A major issue I problematized is the lack of a clearly-defined education export product. I have demonstrated in the three articles that this is problematic in several ways. The initial reliance on Finland's top performance in PISA as a justification or export product is shortsighted. The good OECD rankings are based on a multiplicity of factors, and do not reveal successful educational practices by themselves. Furthermore, comparative education research has challenged the practicality of exporting an entire education environment. For example, transferring a curriculum is problematic when acknowledging that it is contextual:

A national curriculum in its essence is a means of social and cultural reproduction (Lundgren, 2006), and as such cannot be taken out of the national context it is applied to. Each country has its own cultural identity, value system and educational content that are deemed valuable, even irreplaceable. (Vitikka et al, 2012, p. 93)

In addition, Finland did not perform as well as it did in the early 2000s, and it cannot be taken for granted that Finland will automatically stay on top of the rankings. Some observers have even suggested that education policy makes became too confident through PISA, and, as a result, Finland is already slipping from the top (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 194ff). Demographic changes in Finnish society, through increasing immigration and recent funding cuts in the education sector, also need to be considered.

One could argue that Finland is not selling specific education export products, but rather a broad array of customer-tailored solutions. From this perspective, one could define the product as “educational expertise”. However, this is problematic as well, because who are the educational experts? The second education export strategy has shifted the responsibility to higher education institutions. While these institutions may employ highly-trained researchers and educators, however, as was demonstrated in the third article, these employees don’t necessarily have the sales or marketing skills, or the ambition, to export Finnish education,. Moreover, if education export is based on individual education solutions, it consumes time and effort which higher education institutions prefer to invest in their core activities, especially if the incentives to create these export businesses are not significant enough.

As suggested by the policy document, to achieve a large-scale export sector, tuition fees would need to be implemented. Yet again, this is not only problematic in terms of the Finnish legislation, but it is also a risky prediction. Current studies indicate that most Finnish higher education institutions would be overwhelmed, with the consequences of having to compete for their customers (Cai et al., 2012; Schatz, 2016.).

In my opinion, the biggest challenge is the lack of a large-scale market research. If Finland really wants to become one of the world’s leading education exporters, there needs to be a marketable product around which the export sector can be established. The perceived demand and curiosity for Finnish education can be used to attract customer, but it cannot constitute the business.

My research also indicates a large gap between policy and education export practitioners at higher education institutions. This gap might be at the heart of the challenges highlighted above. If the goal remains to create a profitable national education export sector, it would seem necessary to close this gap by increasing cooperation and coordination, as suggested by my research participants (Research Article III). This would also require current practices to be evaluated and that the next education export policy would have to be negotiated accordingly. I would hope that this outline of the challenges might be able to contribute to such future negotiations, and thus have a constructive impact on the future of Finnish education export.

### **8.3 The paradox of Finnish education for sale**

In the theoretical chapters of this dissertation, I have emphasized that Finland is as yet resisting neo-liberal education policy trends. As Simola et al. (2013) argue,

Although being the winner of PISA, Finland is the country, whose educational practices are running in many areas counter to the vast main stream mantra of accountability. Rather than being the gloss scarp of the OECD, Finland is in this respect a kind of model case against it succeeding in spite of that in the international race for benchmarking by avoiding to play the same game by the same rules (p. 613).

Sahlberg (2011, 2015), Simola (2013), Meyer and Benavot (2013), Varjo et al. (2013), Silander & Välijärvi (2013) have coined this as the “Finland paradox”. As Sahlberg (2007) summarizes,

It is helpful to realize that the Finnish education system has remained quite unreceptive to the influence of what is often categorized as the global education reform movement (Rinne et al., 2002; Sahlberg, 2007, 2011c, 2015) that has emerged since the 1980s and has increasingly become adopted as an official agenda in many parts of the world. (p. 150).

Consequently, Sahlberg (2007) promotes the idea of a Finnish way, and an education model that offers an alternative against the trends of commodification, competition, accountability, and marketization of education. The findings of Research Article III indicate that this philosophy of genuine education reforms, that are child-centered rather than profit-oriented, is part of the education brand that is desired by the Finnish government (cf. Chapter 7).

However, Finland’s education export does not fit into this picture. I find this to be another Finnish paradox: On the one hand, the success of Finnish education lies in being different and abstaining from these neo-liberal trends. On the other hand, education export tries to capitalize on this by turning Finnish education into a lucrative business.

One might argue that education export is still in its emergent phase and thus has not so much impact on the general direction of Finnish education policies. However, Sahlberg (2006) has noted already that, “signs are growing that the Finnish education system will soon be expected to devote increasing attention to efficiency and productivity.” (p. 168). The introduction of tuition fees, as promoted by the education export strategy in 2013, would be a major change towards commodification and marketization. Education export is thus not the only indicator of change. As I have argued earlier, policies are adapting to changes in society, but, at the same time, they are also promoters of change. Therefore, my major claim here is that the Finnish education export policies are not only establishing the connotation of education as an export product, but also the expression of an already existing change in Finnish society towards the marketization of education.

So far, this second Finnish paradox between export policy and education philosophy has been a blind spot within educational research. It is a paradox, however, that is not sustainable in a long run. It is, therefore, crucial that critical reflections on the education export policies are becoming part of the educational debate. On the one hand, if education export becomes a large-scale business in Finland, the whole education system is likely to be impacted by the aim of turning it into a competitive product, which would mean education policies, in general, would be subjected to profit orientation. On the other hand, if Finland insists on promoting what is currently considered to be “the Finnish way”, the current objectives and practices of education export cannot be sustained. In either scenario, the future direction of Finnish education could be affected by raising awareness among researchers and policy makers for this paradox and its possible implications. The questions that need to be raised in this context are: is there really a Finnish way? Should there be one in future? And if yes, how could it be achieved? Consequently, these questions will contribute to theoretical conceptualizations of Finnish education and to future education policies.

#### **8.4 Education export and ethics**

Policies are ideological, and these ideologies have ethical implications, which deserve our attention. As I already highlighted in the methodological framework, ideological and ethical discussions are a personal matter and I am presenting my own dilemmas here. Rather than providing answers, I problematize questions, which, in my opinion, should spark a debate among educational researchers, policy makers and education export practitioners. In the following section, I raise two major concerns with Finland’s current education export policy. Those concerns were already touched on in the research articles, but should be framed specifically in the context of ethics.

The first fundamental question, which needs to be discussed, is whether Finnish education exports might have unwanted side effects on general Finnish education policies. As argued in the chapter above, creating an education export sector might nurture the commodification of education on all levels. It diminishes the right of “free and equal education for all” to “free education for Finnish citizens”. Equality remains to be negotiated once good education is only available to those who can afford it. This problem is not exclusively linked to education export, but to marketization of education in general. In the context of increasing competition among Finnish schools, Kivirauma and Ruoho (2007) remarked:

Only the future will tell whether a neo-liberal policy, highlighting rivalry in the EU and the role of the best students in education, can over-

shadow the indisputable pieces of evidence concerning the Finnish “good practices of school policy” found in several international comparisons. From a democratic civil society point of view, the situation does not look promising. The ethos of our time is exclusive, not inclusive. The problem we are facing at present is not only the power of the market, but more importantly the missing counter-power, as the Nobel Prize-winning author Günter Grass recently wrote (Grass 2005). (p. 299)

I agree with Kivirauma and Ruoho (2007) that the power of the market seems to be growing, and that the Finnish education export policies seem to support this growth. A counter power could, however, be established through critical research, which is why I so strongly advocate to start a debate on the implications of education export for Finland.

The second debate, which I believe is important to engage in, is that of ethical implications of Finland’s education export into other countries. Here I refer to the critics of education export who warn of neo-colonial attitudes among education exporters, as was discussed in the theoretical chapters of this dissertation. Although Finland does not have a colonial history, it doesn’t mean that these issues should not be addressed. As I have demonstrated by analyzing the Finnish education brand (Research Article II), the foundation for the export policies is the idea of superiority of Finnish education, above others. This idea, itself, should be challenged. But even if taken at face value, the conclusions drawn for education export are problematic. On the one hand, there is a humanist discourse, which justifies education export by the need to improve the level of education across the globe. One might argue that this resembles colonial ideology of the white man’s burden, which has been criticized since the works of early enlightenment philosophers (cf. Muthu, 2003). In a post-colonial frame, exporting education to improve humanity can be regarded as patronizing. The consequence, however, should not be to fall into the trap of equally patronizing, romanticized images of the noble savage in the global south who is better off with poor education. The argument essentially leads to questions of whether education can be exported as part of developmental aid. This argument, and the embedded discussion on social responsibility, cannot be followed through in this dissertation.

Despite the post-colonial criticism, I do believe that good educational practices should be spread and be made available to all children. However, the ideal of developmental aid is not reflected in an education export policy that sells to the highest bidder. Therefore, the question that remains to be raised is: What is the purpose of Finland’s desire to export education? If Finland exports education to gain revenue and turn education into a profitable business, arguments of being a “super power in education” (cf. BBC, 2007) should be soundly framed in market research and product development, rather than in neo-colonial terminology.

## 8.5 Research reliability and validity

Research reliability and validity are fundamental to scientific inquiry, yet are often problematic, especially in qualitative research. In this dissertation, one might ask what the three articles represent. My aim was to provide a case study which critically reflects on Finland's education export policies, from different perspectives. Yet, those perspectives perhaps provide little peeks into a huge, expanding phenomenon.

It has been argued that reliability and validity are not sensible criteria in qualitative research (e.g., Ellis, 2004; Golafshani, 2003; Gothóni, 2005). From a constructivist perspective, which is relative, it does not make sense for an interpretation to be generalizable; instead, the value of research lies in creating meaning and understanding. I am, however, using the terms reliability and validity, because I agree with others who argue that, although qualitative research cannot be "measured", these concepts carry relevance in terms of credibility and trustworthiness (Carspecken, 1996; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Mayring, 2000).

These issues concerning credibility, objectivity, and bias were already touched on in the methodology section. From the position of skepticism, bias is present throughout the study starting from research design, data selection, methods, analysis, and the overall presentation of findings. My approach, to avoid that bias becoming a limitation to the research quality, was to make it visible. The dissertation is, perhaps, vulnerable because I put myself into the research and displayed my starting points as well as the personal decisions behind the research design, data collection, and analysis. Yet, through this exposure of research subjectivity, I aimed at a transparent presentation. This transparency will allow other researchers to take the same steps I have taken, and I believe that they would be able to come to the same results. From that outlook, the conclusions are consistent and reliable.

To enhance the validity of my research, I have chosen data that is easily accessible. All the documents that I analyzed are publicly available and the analysis can be iterated. In the case of the questionnaire, all responses are saved, digitally, and can be made accessible. The policy documents are from 2010 and 2013 the Country Brand Report was published 2010, and the questionnaire was designed in 2015. This makes all data topical, easily verified and further contextualized by future research. I have displayed all steps of the analysis in the research studies, and scientific rigor was cross-checked through peer-review. In the case of the questionnaire, I conducted a pilot study and made efforts to ensure that the study participants were professionals with knowledge on the topic of education export. Since it is a qualitative questionnaire design, however, it does not fulfill the validity criteria of construct validity. Afterall, the aim of the study, was not to make a representative large-scale survey but to forward individual perceptions. My approach to validity of this research is qualitative by

nature and based on incorporating honesty and self-evaluation of data, methods, and results.

## **8.6 Retrospective evaluation of the limitations and emerging research avenues**

My research is blinkered by my own perspective, which may result in various limitations; therefore, I have chosen to emphasize this stance on many occasions explicitly. The literature selection, and thus the theoretical framework and design of this research are bound to the concepts I started with. A different research approach might have led to different findings about the same topic. This is why I have aimed to make my research choices as transparent as possible.

In addition, there are several major limitations, which I believe are not bound to the research perspective but the aims, structure and scope of this dissertation. A limitation I see undermining the article-based dissertation format is that each research article is rather short. The discussion in each has to remain superficial, and data that can be taken into account is limited. In addition, the articles need to be adjusted according to the reviewers and editor's expectations. In retrospect, I might have reformulated parts, but once published, there is no turning back. The result is a compilation that, perhaps, offers a less homogenous picture than it could have, had it been presented in a manuscript format, because the education export sector developed and my own perspective evolved during the research process. The presented case study is, therefore, a compromise; and the facets that are included are much less than what is left out.

From this, it follows that the analysis I have conducted has remained mostly on a conceptual level. The data I chose did not really provide insights into current practices of education export. While I have summarized some of those in the research articles, it would have been very interesting to examine them in more detail. This would provide a better understanding of how the ministry's policies and the education brand are put into action. I have explained in the previous chapter on my research positioning (Chapter 2.2), that this is a bit more challenging to research, as the data might be sensitive. However, qualitative investigations, such as action research, would be needed to explore existing practices and to address problematic issues. I urge for qualitative studies with qualitative data, because this perspective on education export is lacking, not only in the Finnish context, but also on the global level. While the conceptual critique can be seen as an important starting point, the next step would be to conduct research through which I can contribute on a practical level.

The context bound case study design could be improved by continuing the research towards a more comparative perspective, for example within the Nordic countries. In order to make more conclusions at a larger scale, perhaps a case

survey design (Yin & Head, 1975) or a multiple replicative case study (Yin, 2014) would be promising continuation. As touched upon in Chapter 4, practices that are considered education exports vary greatly across contexts. While perhaps education export practices are best explored in higher education context, export in basic education and in the private sector has received considerably less attention. I believe that this would make it easier for future research to conceptualize education export better and perhaps lead to different terminology of educational exports.

Another interesting future research avenue would be to take a closer look at the actors of Finnish education export. I have neglected this aspect by referring in a collective manner to “the government”, “the ministry”, “the higher education institutions”, etc. The agencies, driving forces and people behind these could be revisited more carefully. This would enhance the level of historical and socio-political understanding of the education export policies. A current research interest among Finnish education policy researchers is to conceptualize the process of policy making in Finland (cf. Kauko, 2013, 2014; Kauko & Varjo, 2008; Simola et al., 2013). Education export could also be investigated more from this perspective. In Research Article II, I have hinted at the gap between higher education institutions and the ministry’s policy. Taking the research further, the education export policy implementation – or the lack, thereof – could be regarded as an illustrative case of higher education policy dynamics in Finland, and thus contribute to new theoretical insights.

Similarly, contexts such as “the global”, “the local”, “Finland”, could be deconstructed, for example, by examining organizational networks and the flow of investments. Ball (2008) has demonstrated, on many occasions, how corporate networks undermine education policy. Moreover, investigation of these networks, such as the umbrella organization “Team Finland”, might provide a more detailed contextualization than the one I offered here.

The star-figure model, in which I provide a visual representation of my theoretical framework, needs to be tested, renegotiated, and developed further. I have attempted to include the global perspective, because, as Cowen (1996) argues,

reading the global is crucial. The global economy, it has been suggested, is a powerful stimulant of educational change. Currently, indeed, it is moot how far and for how long the traditional ability of the nation-state to determine its own educational policies will continue (for example, in Europe). (p. 166)

However, the question is: what does “global” really mean? And what, in consequence, does “Finnish” mean? In my theoretical framework, I have not really problematized this issue, nor discussed the applicability of the model. In retrospect, the aim to develop a theoretical framework, which pays proper attention to

both global and local perspectives, might seem overly ambitious. Yet, regarding it as a preliminary starting point, my star model could contribute to a future framework of Finnish education export.

## 9 Epilogue: Casting a spotlight

Finland is an example of a nation that has developed from a remote agrarian/industrial state in the 1950s to a model knowledge economy, using education as the key to economic and social development. (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 147)

As I have shown with this research, Sahlberg's observation from 2007 has to be considered with caution. Finland's education policies are currently at crossroads. Researchers criticize that the education system has not evolved since the early 2000s. For example in recent works, Sahlberg (2015), himself, criticizes that, "Finnish education authorities have invested more time in thinking about how to turn Finland's global educational fame into a profitable business rather than building real international partnerships that might have been helping in shaping a much needed vision." (p. 196). Also Kivirauma and Ruoho (2007) worry about the increase of neo-liberal practices in Finland and summarize: "These new outlines of school policy are thought to be unavoidable in the environment of global competition, and no alternatives are seen, even though the result of this new policy might lead to increasing inequality" (p. 298).

Since the government's proposal, in May 2015, to drastically cut education funds (Prime Minister's Office Finland, 2015) the debate about what is essential to the Finnish education system has become an issue of public concern. In June 2015, 2000 protesters gathered in Helsinki to demonstrate against the education cuts (Yle News, 2015a). In October 2015, the OECD Secretary-General, Angel Gurría, warned the Finnish parliament of the consequences of extensive cuts (Yle News, 2015b). In December 2015, the universities organized a strike against cuts in higher education, as well (Finland Times, 2015).

In light of these recent events, reviewing Finland's education export policies is highly relevant. The goals set for the year 2015, as foreseen by the first education export strategy, have not been reached. Depending on the choices of the current government concerning education export, both Finnish primary education and the higher education sector will be affected. Moreover, it may have an impact on Finland's economy and the international perception of Finland as a role model in education. Therefore, it is a topical question of which direction to take in future. Hence, I suggest casting a spotlight on opportunities and challenges of education export in Finland. Rather than leaving the responsibility to politically-bound working groups, educational researchers need to take an interest in the issues I have highlighted in this dissertation.

I agree with Simola (2005) who observes that "comparative educational studies are often turned into a political tool for creating educational policy or a mode

of governance, rather than remaining in the research realm of intellectual inquiry.” (Simola, 2005, p. 456). In his work, Simola defends the conduction of carrying out research for the genuine interest of knowledge, per se. But perhaps it should be questioned whether a genuinely neutral research perspective is even desirable. In retrospect, I may have been guilty of turning research into a “political tool” in this dissertation. This is because knowledge is powerful, and in my opinion, a researcher should take responsibility for the research undertaken, and its outcomes. Rather than aiming only for intellectual inquiry, I whole-heartedly agree with Cowen (1996) who demands:

Clearly, at the same time, a comparative education concerned with hot topics such as policies for assessment and evaluation, for effective and efficient schooling, and for the improvement of teacher education or university systems, will continue. But it is of major importance that academic comparative education re-reads the kosmos and broadens its research agenda and recaptures its concern with culturalist analyses, with the historical dimensions in its tradition and with an emancipatory critique of policy (Burns & Welch, 1992) and not merely with policy advice. (p. 167)

Following this, my hope is that this research provides an emancipatory critique that sparks debates on the multiple dimensions of Finland’s education export policies. Casting a spotlight on the question of how we can improve Finnish education export policies, now, might help to turn education into Finland’s hottest export, in future.

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