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'Integration is not a one-way process': students negotiating meanings of integration and internationalization at home (IaH) in Finnish higher education

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ABSTRACT

Internationalization at home (IaH) policies in higher education institutions (HEIs) are rarely negotiated with and by students. Therefore, students' takes on such policies could be missed opportunities for HEIs. This qualitative study investigates international and local students' negotiations and meaning-making of integration and IaH as stated by institutional policies. The data consist of online forum entries and reports from small group discussions between 40 students in English medium master's programs in Finland (Europe). The key concepts of ideology and imaginary serve as entries into data analysis, which consists of enunciative discourse analysis. The findings indicate a perceived hierarchy of mutual but not equal integration between university staff, local and international students. Furthermore, the categories of 'international as guests' and 'local students as hosts' are challenged by the participants. Local students are considered as 'guests with more privilege' and international students as 'guests with less opportunities'. The responsibility to achieve IaH goals is perceived to be unequally distributed among these actors. Practical implications include reconsidering the categories of 'international' and 'local' students and how IaH policies could share the responsibilities to achieve their goals more equally among students and staff.

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1. Introduction

On the global scene of internationalization of HEIs, countries such as Australia, the UK and the US have been among the major receivers of international students (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.). The economic-political influence and dominance of these countries as well as the fact that English is their official language represent strong pull factors for international students. Some smaller countries, whose official language(s) or economic-political features might not be equally attractive for students, are looking for other ways to compete for international talent. The case of Finland is particularly

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interesting as a small EU country of around 5.5 million people that attracts international students partially through the reputation of its education (Dervin, 2013; Schatz, 2016), and the wide array of educational programs offered in English alongside its two official languages (Finnish and Swedish). In addition, the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland (OKM) has developed policies of internationalization, stating that students graduating from Finnish HEIs ‘should have the ability and willingness to be involved in international, multicultural environments ...’ (OKM, 2017, p. 3), which relates to internationalization at home (IaH).

In the aforementioned Finnish policies, IaH strategies are meant to support students’ institutional and overall integration in the wider society. The concept of *integration* rather than similar words such as *adaptation* or *acculturation* seems to be more commonly used in these policies. For this reason, the present study utilizes the concept of *integration*, problematizing the definitions used by institutions and different theorists.

The strategy of attracting international students by HEIs is strongly linked with the concept of IaH within the Finnish context. IaH was proposed in 1998 by Nilsson (2003) as a necessity to develop intentional intercultural learning between domestic and international students locally. He stressed that the internationalization process should embrace all students and not only those who can afford to study or work abroad. As such, the IaH and ‘integration’ goals of HEIs are closely linked as they both aim to allow contacts between local and international students and achieve ‘institutional integration’. In Finland, the goals of IaH and integration are both part of the internationalization policies of the OKM. Although the concepts of IaH and integration are present in the strategic goals of most universities, their meanings and connotations are rarely presented, discussed or negotiated with students in HEIs. Thus, a lingering question arising has to do with how students make sense of such institutional policies of integration and IaH.

The present study is based on multiple data sets collected amongst international and local students at a Finnish university. We explore the views of the students through the lens of the concept of *imaginaries*, which we understand, based on Taylor’s definition (2002), as the way participants assume, envisage and picture how they integrate with others inside or outside the university. In addition, we examine the institutional definition of integration and internationalization goals through the concept of *ideology*, based on Althusser (1971), as we consider these policies to be a material representation of the institutional ideologies. Looking at the internationalization processes in HEIs through imaginaries is not new in the global literature (see, e.g., Dervin, 2008), but we consider this study to add to the already existing body of literature by confronting *imaginaries* with *ideologies* in HE.

The following research questions guide the article:

- (1) How do students negotiate the institutional ideologies of integration and internationalization at home goals?
- (2) How do students (co-)construct the categories of ‘international’ and ‘local’ students? What imaginaries do they use to do so?

2. Positioning the study: integration and IaH – what, who and how?

2.1. Approaching the concept of ‘integration’ and the categories of ‘international’ and ‘local’ students

A prominent model used in global cross-cultural psychology is the acculturation strategies formulated by Berry (2005). This model proposes four strategies of adaptation: *Separation*, *Assimilation*, *Marginalization* and *Integration*. The latter strategy is the most recommended one, hinting at immigrants’ decision to keep their ‘heritage culture’ while having contact with people from other cultures. Berry (2005) defines integration quite similarly to the way the Commission of the European Communities (2003), which Finland joined in 1995, envisages it: ‘a two-way process’ between immigrants and the local community (Berry, 2005, p. 698). Bhatia and Ram (2009) criticize this model because it offers a (illusionary) universal and linear adaptation for all kinds of immigrants leading to ‘successful adaptation’ to the host culture. The scholars called for a shift to conceptualize the phenomenon of acculturation as ‘an individual process to a more broad, contextual and political phenomenon’ (2009, p. 141). Other researchers have criticized this model for being restricted to a bidimensional and functionalist approach to adaptation, while disregarding it as a process that is negotiated and (re-)created with the new host society (Ngo, 2008).

This connection between the academic world and policies from supra-national organizations such as the EU and the OECD, facilitates the spread of these concepts and models across HEIs in different countries (Lähdesmäki et al., 2020). Dervin (2013) suggests that the processes of integration and assimilation do not just depend on individuals’ actions since these phenomena are also political and unstable. Therefore, at times, individuals in HE might be influenced by IaH goals and institutional definitions of integration while, at other times, they might decide to integrate in a different way depending on the circumstances and people around them.

Institutions develop integration strategies and responsibilities for local and international students in different ways. According to Ahmed (2012, p. 4), in the Canadian context of HEIs, ‘responsibility for diversity and equality are unevenly distributed’ among members of organizations according to their categories such as *ethnicity*. In the Finnish institution serving as a background to this article, the students attending English medium programs are often categorized either as ‘Finnish’ (a synonym for ‘local’) or ‘international’ students. This categorization might be visible in the institutional policies and in ways students might perceive integration in comparison to similar or different ‘others’ in terms of cultural backgrounds, nationalities or statuses as *international* or *local* students. We also consider that IaH is linked partially with the cultural, national and educational diversities of the students and the categories of local or international assigned to them by HEIs and supra-national institutions such as UNESCO. As such, the latter refers to international students as hav[ing] ‘crossed a national or territorial border for the purpose of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin’ (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.). The categories assigned to the students such as local or international students form part of the diversity of members in an institution although these categories do not always describe accurately the diverse experiences and backgrounds of the students. Diversity frequently takes the form of hospitality (Ahmed, 2012), which is further discussed in the following section.

2.2. Institutional thought and hospitality

In order to unravel the concept of hospitality, first it serves to pause to consider how the relationships between ‘a student’ and ‘teacher’ are understood by institutions. For example, a ‘teacher’ is defined as a professional who is involved in the planning, organizing and conducting of group activities to develop students’ learning (OECD, 2018). This definition functions in part as a background for the relationships between the teachers (professionals with academic rank – hosts) and students (learners without academic rank – guests). We could then assume that teachers need to offer hospitality to new students to support their integration. Derrida’s (2000) concept of *genuine hospitality* is useful here to make sense of this idea. It implies that the host needs to concede power to the guest, which leads to a change in the position from being the host to being a ‘hostage’. For the philosopher, there are insecurities in both the host and guest about who should adapt to whom or if the guest prevails over the host’s requirements. Furthermore, Derrida (2005, p. 5) argues that ‘pure hospitality consists of welcoming whoever arrives before imposing any conditions on him ... be it a name or an identity “paper”. But it supposes also that one address him, singularly ... even to ask him his name, while keeping this question from becoming a “condition”’.

When organizations welcome a specific group of people by addressing them explicitly, the institution is positioned as the host and the welcomed individual as the guest (e.g., international students, visiting scholars, Ahmed, 2012). It implies that those who are not addressed or are addressed vaguely by the organizations might also take the role of the host as they embody the category of individuals who represent the institution (e.g., local students). For Ahmed (2012), organizations welcome the ones who embody diversity, such as international students, under conditions such as becoming integrated or by allowing the institutions to celebrate their own diversity. Ahmed borrows Derrida’s (2000) concept of ‘conditional hospitality’ to refer to this. We argue that the condition of being ‘integrated’ in HE is understood by students and staff in different ways based not only on their positions as guests or hosts, but on multiple factors that influence the relationships between Finnish students–international students and staff–students.

In order to achieve successful integration, the receiving society, organizations and the state play a role in immigrants’ integration, for example, in the way they define integration and other aspects of internationalization (Unterreiner & Weinar, 2014). Nevertheless, at times, organizations consider the institutional policies that facilitate relationships among diverse students as an accomplished task without actions making them a reality (Ahmed, 2012). For Ahmed, the term *institutional thought* corresponds to routines and norms in the organizations that allow their members to act in accordance with that thought. This is why, for instance, a study by Dervin et al. (2020) investigated the engagement between international and local students, recommending that HEIs should be transparent with students about the practices contributing to the (mis-)encounters among these two groups of students and that institutions should create spaces for international students, institutional representatives and local students to discuss such practices, allowing them to find new ways of rethinking global and intercultural issues. These spaces could lead to routinary actions in HE which could become part of the institutional thought proposed by Ahmed (2012). Based on an analysis of

institutional ideologies, students' takes on them as well as their imaginaries about the idea of integration, this article also contributes to such endeavors.

3. Conceptual tools: imaginaries and ideologies

The conceptual tool of the imaginary is useful to understand students' discourses about internationalization because it does not limit or define their views solely within existing concepts, categories and models of internationalization. The concept of imaginaries has been used for identifying new ways of approaching internationalization in previous research (Dervin, 2008; Dervin et al., 2020). We also use the concept of ideology to describe the way internationalization goals in HEIs are established e.g., written discourses about what internationalization is and how it is achieved. In what follows, we compare these two concepts, and we also establish links between them.

Dervin (2016) made a clear comparison and created connections between the different approaches to the *imaginary* and its use to study internationalization. He highlights that one of the constants in the use of the imaginary in the literature is that individuals interact with others based on the way they reason and 'imagine' the nature of their interactions. In this study, we take elements from different definitions of the *imaginary* that will help us confront, identify and understand students' imaginaries about internationalization in HEIs. We argue that imaginaries are one of the links that form the chain of factors that affect a given institutional thought in relation to IaH goals.

According to Dervin (2016), many scholars start the discussion about the concept of imaginary by pointing out that sociality is formed by reason but also by imagination. One of the most well-known definitions of the (social) *imaginary* was proposed by Castoriadis who stated that 'every society posits a "view of itself" which is at the same time a "view of the world", including the other societies it may know and that this view is part of its "truth" or its "reflected reality"' (1987, p. 39). For the theorist, a member of a given society creates their imagined role in the society they live in and the imagined societies they consider as 'truth'. Castoriadis (1987) also claimed that the role individuals play in the formation, conservation and transformation of social institutions is to reflect on what the social is and to form links based on symbolic relationships within a given imaginary.

For Taylor (2002, p. 106) social imaginaries are 'the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations'. For him, social imaginaries can be equally initiated top-down through academic theorists and bottom-up by changes in human practices. In the context of HEIs, when students' imaginaries enter in contact with institutional discourses of integration and IaH, this might lead to new routine actions in the interactions among them and with the institution.

We agree with Dervin (2016), who pointed out that one of the most useful definitions of the imaginaries was proposed by Salazar (2012, p. 864), which are 'socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with people's personal imaginings and are used as meaning-making and world shaping devices'. As Dervin (2016) argues, imaginaries are built, expressed and (co-)constructed between individuals, which makes them stable during a period until they are negotiated and built again with the same and/or other individuals. In this study, students (co-)construct their imaginaries when they

express and negotiate them in written or verbal communication while interacting around the meanings of integration. Furthermore, the participants in this study (re-)construct their imaginaries of integration when engaging with institutional ideologies about internationalization.

In the article, we make use of the concept of ideologies to problematize how organizations prescribe how students should integrate with others in HEIs. Ideological ‘orders’ from supra-national organizations and HEIs on internationalization also have an impact on their positions. For this study, we define ideology as ‘a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’ (Althusser, 1971, p. 213). For Althusser (1971), ideologies represent illusions which do not correspond to reality but aim to represent the imagined reality of individuals – ideologies thus have a material representation. We argue that the institutional policies of integration and internationalization goals correspond to the material representation of HEIs’ ideologies and ‘urge’ members of their communities to believe in and reinforce specific understandings, beliefs and agendas about a given topic, while helping to disseminate them.

4. The study

This is a qualitative case study as it explores the discourses of a specific group of students who participated in a confined context (Zhou & Creswell, 2012) at a Finnish university, within English medium international master’s programs. The participants took part in an introductory course dealing with themes such as *integration in higher education*, *academic culture* and *ethical principles of studying and career planning*. One of the authors was an instructor on the course.

4.1. The data and research participants

The data include three sources: (1) student task entries in an online forum discussing definitions of ‘integration in HEIs’ (2) individual reports of small group discussions (3) reflections on the discussions and concept of integration. The participants consisted of 20 international and 20 local students, who self-identified as such, from international master’s programs. Allowing the students to self-identify urged participants to categorize themselves within the established dichotomy of local (Finnish) or international student used in Finland and in other contexts. Furthermore, it also gave them the freedom to identify themselves outside of these two institutional categories. For us researchers, this provided us with an opportunity to find if/how students fit or (co-)construct categories related to issues of integration.

The first task (T1) set for the students was an online asynchronous forum where, after reading a definition of *integration*, created by the UK Council for International Student Affairs (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014), they negotiated their understanding of the concept in the forms of written posts. This definition is based in part on Berry’s concept of integration (2005), which has been also utilized by the Ministry of Education in Finland to guide internationalization strategies of Finnish HEIs. As the UK Council document (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014) was created for students, we felt it was more suitable to use as a basis of discussion for the participants of this study. We are aware that students’

posts in T1 might have been influenced by the audience of the forum, who were students and the instructor, as some of them might have opted to agree with the institutional definition of integration as well as with the views of their peers to create some sort of balance and tolerance. Nevertheless, the posts that fully agree with or repeat the institutional ideologies are not chosen as a point of analysis for the present study as they do not offer new voices and/or renegotiated views about ‘integration’. The second task (T2) was an individual report of online group discussions among five students about the university’s IaH goals. Individual and group response formats represent a good way to collect data about delicate policy-related topics (Wutich et al., 2010). In the reports, students introduced and problematized their peers’ and their own views about these goals, implying negotiations of similar, contrasting and/or new imaginaries. Participants had the freedom to give voice only to the (negotiated) views they wanted to put forward. Task 3 (T3) entails a reflection on the discussions among students in the workshops and the concept of integration. For all tasks, there were no length requirements. Table 1 provides basic information about the three different data sets used and imaginaries identified in the data and discussed in the analysis.

4.2. Method and data analysis

The participants were divided into two groups according to their self-identification as international or as local students. First, we analyzed the three sets of data separately

Table 1. Data, tasks and imaginaries identified.

Data	Number of students who voiced the imaginaries in each data set	Type of data	Imaginaries
Task 1 (T1)	Imaginary 1 = 11 students Imaginary 2 = 3 students	Fragment of the definition of integration adopted in these workshops and shown to the students: ‘... integration entails intermixing; personal adaptation; synthesising, mutual adjustment and change; and a sense of belonging ...’	Imaginary 1 Hierarchy of mutual but not equal integration Imaginary 2 Half international and half domestic student
Task 2 (T2)	Imaginary 1 = 22 students Imaginary 2 = 8 students	University’s goals of integration and IaH: ‘Common learning outcomes for all students: The student works in international operating environments and is capable of international and intercultural communication in his/her work and in its development. Promoting internationalization: We will support international students’ integration into Finnish society by expanding our range of Finnish-language courses, helping them build contacts with potential employers ... In order to promote the integration of international students into the university community, special attention should be paid to facilitating the joint study of Finnish and international students.’	Imaginary 1 Imaginary 2
Task 3 (T3)	Imaginary 1 = 16 students Imaginary 2 = 5 students	Reflection of the workshops and assignments related to IaH in HEIs: ‘What would you suggest should be the definition and elements of student ‘integration’ in the university?’	Imaginary 1 Imaginary 2

through qualitative coding, consisting of reading and examining the data in multiple cycles to extract themes (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Secondly, we selected only the themes that had to do with the negotiation of the institutional policies and the (co-)construction of the categories of international and local students. We excluded those that fully agreed with the definition of integration, IaH goals and student categories presented by the institutions from the analysis. Thirdly, we applied enunciative pragmatics to analyze the themes independently in the different sets of data, enabling us to find contradictions and omissions in the discussions among the students and in their individual reports. Enunciative pragmatics adds value to the analysis of discourse because it considers how actors are positioned or brought into play through the markers of enunciation or *utterance* (Angermüller, 2011). An *utterance* is defined as the way an actor manifests in the text explicitly or implicitly in a specific context and time (Ducrot, 1984). The context of enunciation is only accessible when we deal with the formal markers in the text (Benveniste, 1971). Furthermore, the absence of such elements corresponds to a discursive strategy that can be taken into consideration (Jia & Dervin, 2022). For Ducrot (1984), an utterance is made up of various speakers (*énonciateurs*) and one author (*locuteur*). For the analysis of the data, enunciative pragmatics is useful because it allows us to identify the way the students (*locuteurs*) position themselves in relation to the voices of their peers and the institution (*énonciateurs*) through the use of indexical words.

5. Results

We have identified two themes: *Hierarchy of mutual but not equal integration* and *Half international and half local students*. Students had similar but also different imaginaries about the institutional ideologies of integration and internationalization. We do not intend to suggest that these themes are shared by all students as several students agreed fully with the institutional ideologies. Nevertheless, these imaginaries problematize the institutional ideologies and bring new perspectives to the process of integration and IaH.

5.1. Hierarchy of mutual but not equal integration

The students' discussions during the first task exposed an imaginary about the concept of 'integration' that differs from the definition the students read. While some of the students (*locuteurs*) agreed totally with the institutional ideologies (*énonciateur*), other participants were unsure of the statement that integration involves 'mutual adjustment and change', which is fairly similar to Berry's (2005) definition. The students (local students abbreviated as LS, international students as IS) who wrote the two excerpts below (T1) shared an imaginary that described a hierarchical approach to integration in HEIs.

Excerpt 1

IS6 post: *Integration in higher education is not only the 'new' person that has to integrate into an existing community. A society changes whenever there is a new element and that is a natural process ... a community needs to be open for some change ...*

Excerpt 2

IS1 reply to IS6: *In my opinion you have pointed out important issue that integration is not a one way process. It is important that 'receiving' society also needs to adapt and try to understand challenges of new members of community.*

IS6 expressed agreement with the institutional ideology of 'mutual adjustment' between the 'new' and the implicit 'old' members of the community. Nevertheless, this participant pointed out that the 'new' person is obligated (*has*) to achieve the objectives of the institutional ideologies about integration if they want to be welcomed, which we understand as conditional hospitality, referring back to Derrida (2000). The institution becomes the host and the 'new person' of the society the guest. On the other hand, the *community* is only required to achieve a minimum of integration (*some change*), implying a hierarchy of mutual integration where the community needs to '*adapt*' less than the newcomers. Participant IS1 in excerpt 2 enunciated the voice of the institution through the statement utterance *integration is not a one-way process*, which paraphrases Berry's (2005) definition of integration as a 'two-way process'. Although, IS1 stated that newcomers and the '*receiving*' society are expected to integrate, for the latter it is accepted if it only makes an attempt (*try*) to comprehend the process of integration of the newcomers. In sum, the international participants IS6 and IS1 agreed or paraphrased the ideology of the institution of integration as *mutual adjustment*, but they pointed out the power hierarchies among these two *imaginary* actors (*the 'new'* and *the 'receiving' society*). This first entry into the hierarchy of mutual but not equal integration, based partly on institutional ideologies and imaginaries put forward by the students, is first mentioned in T1 and then re-appears in T2.

Some local students in T2 pointed out that the internationalization goals give less responsibility to local students to achieve such goals:

Excerpt 3

LS2: *For the goal 'promoting internationalisation' ... the focus seems to be on the international perspective ... it is vital also to Finnish students to be ready to interact in a foreign language and have a level of understanding and openness to foreign cultures ...*

For LS2, '*promoting internationalisation*' is mostly targeting international students through the focus *on the international perspective*. For this participant, *promoting internationalisation* must address *Finnish students'* responsibility to develop *foreign language* skills and the willingness to *interact* with their international peers. These local students' responsibilities therefore could be more balanced in relation to those of the international students on the university's IaH plans, who are expected to learn the local language and develop contacts with locals. Nevertheless, local students only need to be *ready* for the moment when they enter in contact with international students because they do not look for *interact* (-ion). LS2 points out that his imaginary is one (hierarchy) of mutual responsibilities for international and local students to achieve internationalization (at home), although the latter has a less active role in achieving these goals.

Let us analyze a fragment from the IaH goals used in T2 to understand better the reaction of some local students towards their role in the institutional ideologies:

Excerpt 4

In order to promote the integration of international students into the university community, special attention should be paid to facilitating the joint study of Finnish and international students.

This institutional goal fuels the hierarchy of mutual but not equal integration by only addressing the ‘*integration of international students*’ and not the integration of ‘*Finnish*’ (local) students in HEIs. Readers might understand that these local students are already integrated (hosts) or that only international students as ‘*guests*’ need to oblige to the rules of their hosts. This is a contradiction between these IaH goals (T2) with the institutional definition of integration (T1) based on ‘*mutual adjustment and change*’ and ‘*intermixing*’ (see [Table 1](#)) and where local and international students need to work towards its achievement.

The missing information in T2 on why or how local students could integrate might cause a rejection of this IaH goal:

Excerpt 5

LS12: As I have done my previous degrees in Finnish universities and as being a domestic student, this feels little too mandatory to ‘integrate’ at same time when I have other online lectures that are mandatory for my basic and intermediate studies.

For LS12 having studied in HE in Finland and being a *domestic student* means (*feels*) for them that they are already integrated into their current university and program. The goal of integration seems redundant for this and possibly other participants in similar circumstances. As Dervin (2013) pointed out, the integration process is a political and complex phenomenon as students and staff need to reflect and understand while being influenced by the organizational ideologies and the context of their institution. If the institutional ideologies do not provide the reasons, guidance, time and space for the students to change their imaginaries about integration and internationalization, they might have negative reactions towards achieving these IaH goals.

For some participants in T2 it is necessary to specify the roles of all the actors involved in achieving the IaH goals and how they are positioned in the hierarchy of mutual but not equal integration.

Excerpt 6

IS19: In conclusion, it is very important to note that Integration in Higher Education for International students is everyone’s responsibility – domestic and international students, teaching and administrative staff as well as senior management.

Excerpt 7

LS4: it isn’t impossible, neither easy. I believe they are on point and helpful [integration and other internationalisation goals], but university must pay a big role, as the ‘team leader’. University staff should be involved and find ways to put into practice these goals.

For IS19 the responsibility to integrate is not only of the students as the participant calls for sharing this responsibility with other members of the organization that are not mentioned in the internationalization goals (*teaching, administrative staff and senior management*). Furthermore, for LS4 university staff need to be added in the

Excerpt 8

IS1: *I am an international student, however I have studied my BA in Finland.*

IS1 uses the conjunction *however* to indicate that her previous experiences in Finland challenge the ideological categorization of who is an international student. The imaginary that goes beyond the ideological dichotomic categorization of international and local student starts forming by the student calling for a recognition of locality through the participant's studies in this Nordic country.

Other international participants also challenged the categorization of 'international students' in T2 because they arrived in Finland years before they enrolled in HE and they might have been educated more in the Finnish system than in their country of origin:

Excerpt 9

IS4: *I am half international, half domestic. I have been living in Finland for 13 years now, but I am not a Finn.*

This participant does not want to be identified totally as *international* because she does not meet the ideological definition of the *student who crossed national borders for the purpose of education* (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.). IS4 does not meet either the institutional imaginary that a *domestic* student must be a *Finn*. For participants IS1 and IS4, these categories do not represent fully their international or local educational background and the way they embody locality in the university. These blurry imaginaries of the two students about who is an international or a local student might influence how they feel as guests or hosts in this university and how they need to achieve the ideological integration as 'mutual adjustment' and university goals. A clear hybrid imaginary of the student who can be international and local at the same time is voiced by IS4 in this excerpt.

The ideological image that a local student must be Finnish can be found in the institutional IaH goals in T2 as the word used to refer to the local students is *Finnish* (see excerpt 4). Nevertheless, some students challenge this imaginary, and they identify themselves as local students:

Excerpt 10

LS15: *I am in X (city of studies), and consider myself a domestic student, since I live here (since 2008). My only education degree earned here is my Bachelors.*

LS15 points out with the utterance *I ... consider myself a domestic student* that the institution or other students might not consider her as a local student because she was born abroad. LS15 uses her years living and studying in Finland for more than a decade (*since 2008*) to justify her imaginary as *a domestic* student. This imaginary might give her confidence to not be considered a 'guest' with less privileges (as an international student) than local students. The hybrid imaginary of local-international in her identification becomes evident.

On the other hand, some local students challenge the institutional identification as local (Finnish) students in T2 by identifying themselves in describing their international student experiences:

Excerpt 11

Task 2, LS6: *I am a Finnish student who studied my Bachelor's studied abroad.*

LS6 wants his international study experience to be recognized by the institution. Nevertheless, as Ahmed (2012) pointed out, members of the categories that embody the essence of the university and who do not represent 'diversity', are categorized as hosts (local students). For some students with a Finnish passport and an international educational background it might be difficult to fit in the institutional category of local (Finnish) students. The imaginary of LS6 is a self-identification that involves locality and internationality through experiences of studying abroad. In addition, for students like LS6 their international experiences and the support they might need to integrate in HE might be more difficult to obtain if their internationality is not brought up in the institution. As Derrida (2005) pointed out, it might be beneficial to not impose any conditions on the students to fit the category of either local or international students to celebrate the diversity of students.

6. Discussion and conclusion

IaH seems to focus exclusively on the development of intentional intercultural learning between domestic and international students (Nilsson, 2003; Lundgren et al., 2019). Nevertheless, this study found that in the hierarchy of mutual but not equal integration, students imagined that the institutional policies should point out the highest responsibility of the staff to facilitate mutual integration and IaH of *all* students. The inclusion of the staff in the IaH goals might urge them to look for routine actions that could turn institutional ideologies into *institutional thought* as Ahmed (2012) suggests. Furthermore, the institutional policies about IaH might benefit by addressing how the higher education institutes could also internationalize internally. This means integrating internationalization into the curriculum and allowing students to utilize different languages in readings and assignments. For Simpson and Dervin (2019), HEIs might benefit by creating routine opportunities for students and staff to discuss institutional ideologies and their own imaginaries about integration and IaH. This could allow them to find how students and staff believe that they fit together and how they imagine their responsibilities to achieve their goals of IaH, which might help them develop their policies further.

This study has also identified that some of the participants challenge the ideological categories of 'international' and 'local' student provided by supra-national organizations such as UNESCO as well as by their peers' imaginaries. They call for a recognition of their international, and at the same time, local backgrounds. We agree that these categories are necessary for administrative purposes. Nevertheless, we argue that acknowledging the diverse educational backgrounds of the students might help institutions not only to recognize the diversity of international students as Ahmed (2012) pointed out, but also to celebrate the diversity of so-called local students. In addition, the previous experiences of the international students studying in Finland could also be embraced to make them feel part of what the students called 'the receiving society'.

6.1. Methodological limitations

We are aware that the self-identification of the participants in this study as *local* or *international students* might influence the comparison of the findings with previous research about the integration of students and IaH in higher education which made use of, e.g., categorizations provided by institutions. Furthermore, the imaginaries described in this study cannot be generalized to all the participants as many of them agreed with the institutional ideologies and categories. Finally, the nature of this case study might not be comparable in other HEI contexts, in Finland and elsewhere.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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