OIKARINEN, ANTTI

FACTORS INFLUENCING INTERNATIONAL DEGREE STUDENTS' STUDY DESTINATION CHOICE – A MICRO-LEVEL RESEARCH ON UNIVERSITY OF OULU

Master's Thesis in Education

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
Intercultural Teacher Education

2016
Title
Factors influencing international degree students' study destination choice – a micro-level research on University of Oulu

Abstract
International mobility of higher education is increasing on a global scale. In Finland, the number of international degree students and programs aimed for them has been steadily increasing since the beginning of the previous decade, and the country is looking to get its share of the international education market. Finland’s decision to introduce tuition fees for non-EU/EEA students starting in 2017 is likely to have an unpredictable effect on the diversity and structure of the international student body in Finnish universities.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the driving factors behind international degree students' study destination choice process. The research begins with an overview of definitions for international students and by looking at international degree students in context of Finland and University of Oulu. The theoretical framework for the research is based on Mazzarol & Soutar’s (2002) push-pull theory, which argues that the students' study destination decision is driven by three levels of push-pull factors: 1) the push factors of the country of origin, which influences the student's choice to study internationally rather than locally, 2) the pull factors related to the host country, which include features specific to the country that the student chooses to study in and 3) the pull factors of the institution, which are the attractive features connected to a specific institution. This micro-level research applies the push-pull theory in the context of Finland and University of Oulu.

The research investigates international degree students' study destination choice process on two different levels. First, the factors driving the student's decision to study internationally rather than locally, are investigated. The second aim of the research is to find out the reasons why international degree students choose to study in Finland over other prospective study destinations, and why they choose to study in University of Oulu over other higher education institutions in Finland.

The data for this qualitative research was gathered through semi-structured interviews with eight past or present international degree students studying in University of Oulu. The interview structure was constructed upon push-pull factors that existing research on the field has constructed. The transcribed interviews were analyzed using content analysis methods. The push-pull factors influencing the students' study destination decision were then categorized under themes constructed by existing push-pull research, and the most influential factors connected specifically to Finland and University of Oulu were reported and assessed.

Pull factors specific to Finland included reputation of Finland in a specific, which was mentioned mostly by education students, the students’ desire to experience a different lifestyle and the tuition-free education. In context of University of Oulu, degree programs where the language of instruction is English and reputation of Oulu in a specific field, such as the legacy of Nokia in the field of wireless communication, were seen as attractive pull factors.

Many of the students mentioned being introduced to University of Oulu through personal recommendations from students who had studied in the University in the past. This indicates the need for University of Oulu to provide a positive study experience for international students. The end of the research suggests measures that University of Oulu can take to build a network of positive learning experiences, which according to this particular research is one of the most important thing to make sure Oulu will be an attractive study destination international degree students in the future.

Keywords
Higher education, international higher education, study destination choice process
### Table of Contents

1  INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................... 1  
   1.1 Foreword and motivation for the research .......................................................................... 1  
   1.2 Structure of the research and research questions ........................................................... 3  

2  MOBILITY OF INTERNATIONAL DEGREE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION ................................................................. 5  
   2.1 Attempts at measuring international higher education mobility ....................................... 6  
      2.1.1 Project Atlas ........................................................................................................ 6  
      2.1.2 Eurodata ........................................................................................................... 7  
   2.2 International degree students in Finland (inbound) ......................................................... 9  
   2.3 International degree students in University of Oulu .................................................. 9  
   2.4 The IMP report – an interview with the Chair of the Evaluation Team, Gordon Roberts ......................................................................................................................... 10  

3  THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ............................................................................................ 14  
   3.1 Literature review on study choice behavior ............................................................... 14  
   3.2 The push-pull model ..................................................................................................... 16  
   3.3 Differentiating migration and mobility ........................................................................ 17  
   3.4 International student mobility research and flows ..................................................... 18  
   3.5 Push-pull model in international student mobility research .................................... 18  
   3.6 Push factors of the country of origin .......................................................................... 19  
   3.7 Pull factors of the destination country .......................................................................... 20  
   3.8 Pull factors of the institution ...................................................................................... 21  
   3.9 Critiques of push-pull in student mobility research .................................................. 23  

4  METHODOLOGY ..................................................................................................................... 26  
   4.1 Content analysis .......................................................................................................... 26  
   4.2 Data collection ............................................................................................................. 28  
   4.3 Sample group ............................................................................................................. 29
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Foreword and motivation for the research

International mobility of higher education students is increasing globally. The number of internationally mobile students worldwide in 1990 was 1.3 million, 5 million in 2014 (ICEF Monitor, 2015) and has been estimated to be 7 million in 2020 (Altbach et. al, 2009). In the context of Finnish universities, the amount of international students has increased significantly since the beginning of the previous decade. For example, the amount of international degree students in Finland has increased from approximately 6 000 students (2000) to 20 000 degree students (2013) (Hartio, 2014). In addition to the degree students, who study in approximately 470 degree programs targeted for international students (Study in Finland, 206), Finland also hosts around 10 000 exchange students (Hartio, 2014).

International students are an important part for developing a higher education institution's personality (Hegarty, 2014) and they are seen as an important factor for developing university students' global competency (Pandit, 2007). International students are also important for research-based higher education institutions in terms of academic innovation. As an example, Chellaraj et. al (2008) found out how a 10% increase in the amount of international graduate students resulted in a 4.5% increase in patent applications. The ideas of brain gain and brain drain are very much in play when talking about international students, as countries such as China, Korea and Taiwan have made attempts at keeping their brightest students in domestic universities (Douglass & Edelstein, 2009).

In addition to increasing academic innovation, globally speaking, international degree students are significant contributors for universities' financial well-being (Hegarty, 2014). Having been a tuition-free destination for all students in the past, Finland is looking for its share of the international education market. Starting from the Fall of 2017, non-EU/EEA degree students studying in English-taught bachelor's and master's programs in Finland will have to be prepared to pay a minimum fee of 1 500 EUR per study year. This is only the minimum fee set in the new university legislation – the actual annual amount is estimated to be
between 5,000 – 20,000 EUR (Study in Finland, 2016). In 2006, Denmark introduced a similar tuition fee structure where fees were only applied for students coming from non-EU/EEA countries. This lead to a drastic decrease in the amount of students coming from non-EU/EEA countries, but on the other hand the number of students coming from European countries increased (CIMO, 2014). In Sweden, the amount of non-EU degree students crashed in 2011 after the introduction of tuition fees, but started slowly increasing in 2014, partly due to new recruiting campaigns that higher education institutions started in 2011 (ICEF Monitor, 2015). It is difficult to say how the introduction of these fees will ultimately affect the overall amount of international degree students in Finland, but as the number of non-EU/EEA degree students in Finland is quite high, the change will surely affect the cultural diversity in Finnish higher education institutions.

During my studies in the Intercultural Teacher Education in University of Oulu, I have been fortunate to experience working with students and staff from various backgrounds. In addition to this, my exchange semester in South Korea contributed to my understanding of different academic views and increased my interest in the internationalization of higher education. It can be said that on a personal level I have experienced the importance of international students for academic innovation and global competency from both sides.

Ever since the discussion about introducing tuition fees for international degree students started, some of my study colleagues who had arrived to University of Oulu from outside of the European Union breathed a sigh of relief, as they considered themselves lucky to have started their studies before the tuition fees. Some of my fellow students mentioned how being able to study a tuition-degree was one of the most attractive reasons why they chose to study in Finland and in University of Oulu. These discussions were the main inspiration for this research, as I became interested in other factors, in addition to tuition-free education, that would be attractive for international degree students.

As the reasons for studying in Finland and in University of Oulu were quite varied based on the stories told by my study colleagues, I decided to embark upon a research journey that is looking to investigate international students' choice of study destination processes on three different levels: 1) why students choose to study internationally rather than locally are examined, 2) what are the factors influencing the choice of destination country, and 3) what are the factors in play when choosing the specific institution? It
should be noted that this thesis concentrates on international degree students and exchange students are outside of the scope of this particular research. The definitions of the different student cohorts and the justifications for the exclusion of the exchange students will be discussed later.

1.2 Structure of the research and research questions

This qualitative research begins by examining the different definitions and measurements connected to international higher education students and their mobility. After the definitions and the scope of the research have been established, the role of international degree students for Finland and for the University of Oulu is investigated. Next, the theoretical framework and existing research connected to international degree students' study destination choice is presented.

After providing the theoretical framework for the research, the methodological approach and the empirical part of the research connected to Finland and the University of Oulu will be presented and discussed. The empirical data for the research is collected through semi-structured interviews with eight past or present degree students in University of Oulu. The interview data is processed based on content analysis methodology. Finally, the findings of the micro-level research are discussed and compared to the theoretical framework and existing research, after which the deviations and similarities between the theoretical framework and the micro-level research are assessed.

The main research questions in this research are:

1. Which factors drive international degree students' study destination choice and why do they choose to study internationally rather than locally?

2. Why are international degree students choosing to study in University of Oulu instead of other universities in Finland?

The secondary objective for the research is to see which tools University of Oulu uses to attract prospective international degree students and whether they are in line with the actual factors that influence the students' study destination choice. This will be investigated by inquiring the interviewees about their main sources of information about University of Oulu. Ideally University of Oulu can benefit from the findings of this
research and use them to develop or adjust their marketing tools, strategies and viewpoints towards prospective international degree students.
2 MOBILITY OF INTERNATIONAL DEGREE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Given the increasing amount of internationally mobile students, governments and HE institutions, predominately in the global north, are drafting policies to try to prepare for the changing environment and benefit from the higher education market. However, as the definition of an international student can vary drastically and therefore it can be difficult to compile accurate data on internationally mobile students. Criteria used for defining an international student include citizenship and the location where the previous level of education was completed (Rumbley, 2012). The UNESCO Institute for Statistics, OECD and EUROSTAT all use these attributes in their data gathering methods. The term foreign student – which is defined according to the students' citizenship – is also used. When data on international students is not available, data on foreign students is used by the three aforementioned institutions. Therefore it can be argued that international students are a subset of foreign students (OECD 2013).

Using foreign nationality as a defining factor for the status of an international student might have been a meaningful distinction in the past when international mobility was a rare phenomenon. However, in the current phase of globalization, especially since the beginning of the 21st century, it has been more common that students attend and finish their secondary education in a country where they are not citizens. After these students attend higher education in the same country, they can be seen as international students due to their non-citizenship status. For these reasons, country of prior education and country of prior/permanent residence have been used as more defining features when gathering data on international students in the past 15 years (Teichler, Ferencz, et. al, 2011).

There are also different types of higher education student mobility that have to be mentioned. Student mobility can be distinguished into two categories: credit mobility (exchange students and program mobility, such as Erasmus) and degree mobility, where the aim for the student is to complete their whole degree internationally (King, Findlay & Ahrens, 2010). As mentioned in the introduction, exchange students are outside of the scope of this research. In other words, when talking about international students, this thesis focuses specifically on international degree students.
When reviewing the increase in student mobility, the overall higher education enrollment rate around the world must be taken into account. According to Bruneforth (2010), the global higher education enrollment has risen by more than 400% since the 1970's. The overall increase in the number of higher education students means that there are more students overall that can be internationally mobile in the first place – and therefore can have an effect on the statistics concerning international mobility. However, when comparing this number to the increase in international student mobility, which has risen by 350% during the same time period, it can be seen that the mobility rate has not quite kept up with the total enrollment rate (Rumbley et. al, 2012).

2.1 Attempts at measuring international higher education mobility

It is clear that it is difficult to compile relevant and accurate data on international student mobility, due to the different means and scopes of data gathering on national level. The extent of degrees and qualifications also contribute to the data compiling process (Banks & Bhandari, 2012). However, there are attempts at overcoming this ongoing challenge on a more global level so that data gathered from different countries and organizations could be compared and measured. Two attempts at collecting relevant data on international students from various countries, the ongoing Project Atlas and Eurodata, are discussed below.

2.1.1 Project Atlas

One attempt at gathering trustworthy and up-to-date data is Project Atlas, which is a partnership of public and private national level higher education data collection agencies (Banks & Bhandari, 2012). Launched in 2001, the Project currently consists of 29 members. Countries and organizations taking part in the project are listed in Appendix 1.

The aim of Project Atlas is to address the need for global migration data, which, as discussed previously in this chapter, has been lacking and inconsistent. Many countries have national data collection organizations, but the results from different countries and organizations have varying timelines, data definitions and scope. Project Atlas' objective is to fill this gap which exists in the mobility field. On the Project website (Institute of International Education, 2016a), international higher education students that the Project is focused on, are defined as follows:
Students who undertake all or part of their higher education experience in a country other than their home country OR students who travel across a national boundary to a country other than their home country to undertake all or part of their higher education experience

By the Project's definition, any amount of time of a student's higher education experience spent abroad renders the student an international student (Banks & Bhandari, 2012). In other words, Project Atlas gathers information on both degree and non-degree students, latter of which is also known as credit mobility or temporary mobility.

2.1.2 Eurodata

Made by Academic Cooperation Association with the support of the European Commission and published in 2006, the Eurodata research has two objectives, first of which is to see what data is being compiled on international, national and program levels. The research focuses on 32 European countries, of which 25 were EU members when the research was published (Bulgaria and Romania joined the European Union in 2007). One of the main findings of the research was that only 10 out of the 32 countries gathered data on genuine mobility, which is defined as students who move across country borders for the purpose of study. This means that most of the countries attempted to measure mobility by looking at the number of foreign nationals studying in the higher education institutions – a definition of whose weaknesses are discussed in the beginning of this chapter. Eurodata also criticizes the European Commission's Education and Training agenda for the year 2010, first published in 2002, which suggests measuring European Union's mobility through foreign nationality, by saying it will only lead to measuring what we can – not what is needed. In many countries there was also a deficiency in differentiating levels and various types of mobility, such as collecting and presenting data on temporary mobility separately from degree mobility (Kelo, Teichler & Bernd, 2006).

The second objective of the Eurodata research is to identify the main trends in the international student mobility into and out of the 32 European countries. The authors of the research do come to a conclusion that due to the different data collection methods and the availability or the lack of data in different countries results rather blurry patterns. Eurodata research does mention that Finland in comparison with other countries does have extensive data gathering methods when it comes to measuring student mobility. Relevant data for the research was found from three Finnish organizations. Statistics
Finland (Tilastokeskus), who provides information on foreign students, who are categorized according to their citizenship. CIMO's (Centre for International Mobility) statistics focus on inwards, credit mobile students (identified by nationality and country of origin) and outwards-mobile students (identified by the destination country). Finally, the Social Insurance Institution's (SII, Kansaneläkelaitos) data consists on student financial aid receivers, both foreign nationals who are studying in Finland and Finnish nationals who are studying abroad (Kelo et al. 2006, p. 217). The research does mention that works needs to be done in order to distinguish short-term, credit mobile students from degree students (Kelo et al. 2006, 221).

Published a decade ago, Eurodata research shows the difficulties and the absence of coherent student mobility measurement tools between different countries. In 2011, a research was published (Teichler et al. 2011) that can be seen as a sequel for the original Eurodata research. As a matter of fact, the project name for the study was initially Eurodata II and the structure of the research is quite similar to the original Eurodata research, as the research also focuses on the same 32 European countries and gives detailed case examples on certain countries' data gathering methods. In the research Teichler et al. (2011) establish how data available on genuine student mobility almost tripled from 2002 to 2007, and how using country of prior education and country of prior residence are being used more as the defining qualities for internationally mobile student, compared to the traditional, yet faulty, definition of nationality of students. The research emphasizes the importance of accurate data collection on student mobility, and that student mobility should be analyzed on different levels by clearly differentiating degree mobility from temporary mobility. It was suggested that data should be presented on four academic cycles (sub-bachelor, bachelor, master and PhD), increasing the usage of country of prior education and residence as the defining features for genuinely mobile students and investigating the mobility phenomenon through student surveys (Teichler et al. 2011).
2.2 International degree students in Finland (inbound)

The next three sub-chapters will take a deeper look into international degree students in context of Finland and University of Oulu, respectively.

The number of international students in Finland has been rising steadily in recent years. According to the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO), in 2004 the number of international degree students in Finnish higher education institutions was 8,955, whereas in 2014 the number was 20,255. The proportion of international students compared to all students in higher education has also grown, as in 2014 one in every 15 higher education students was from abroad (CIMO, 2015).

Finnish higher education institutions in total provide 470 degree programs where the lectures, books and tests are in English (Study in Finland, 2016). The Study Programmes Database maintained by CIMO and Finnish higher education institutions provides information on the study programs in English. Table 1 demonstrates the amount of international degree programs and how they are distributed among universities and polytechnic institutions (universities of applied sciences). The database has 83 bachelor programs, 326 master programs and 61 doctorate programs, which brings the total number of English degree programs to 470. 123 of these programs are in universities of applied sciences and 347 in universities.

It also has to be mentioned that it is quite rare to have international bachelor's programs in Finnish universities – the vast majority of international bachelor's programs are organized by universities of applied sciences. Since introducing the higher level applied sciences degree in 2005, which according to the Bologna process is equivalent to a master's degree, universities of applied sciences have also started offering international master's programs (IMP's) in English. However, universities of applied sciences do not offer programs that are equivalent to universities' doctorate programs (Study in Finland, 2016).

2.3 International degree students in University of Oulu

According to the Study Programmes Database, University of Oulu has 19 degree programs in English. This number includes 18 master's programs and one doctorate program. University of Oulu also has three non-degree programs in English.
University of Oulu's reporting portal SISU provides information and statistics on the University. As stated on the SISU web portal's main page, the aim of it is to provide accurate financial, personnel and educational information. The main purpose of SISU is to provide information so that decisions are based on facts. Some examples of student statistics one can find in the portal include credits completed per faculty and degree, graduation potential of students and key performance indicators (SISU, 2016).

The statistics on completed degrees has the option to toggle between degrees completed by Finnish citizens and those completed by other nationalities. It is not possible to view records of students based on where they have completed their previous level of education, which is – in addition to the student's nationality – one of the more widely used criteria when defining international students, used for example by OECD and EUROSTAT. SISU also uses the wording *ulkomaalainen opiskelija*, foreign students instead of *kansainvälinen opiskelija*, international student (SISU, 2016).

Appendix 2 depicts the number of foreign students that have graduated from University of Oulu between 2012 and 2016. To point out the division in the number of students per degree type, the number of Master's degrees completed by international students is notably higher (481 degrees from all faculties) than the number of Bachelor's degrees, doctorate degrees and specialist degrees completed during this time period (43, 134 and 8 respectively).

### 2.4 The IMP report – an interview with the Chair of the Evaluation Team, Gordon Roberts

One of the most comprehensive documents related to international degree students in Oulu is the International Master's Programs at the University of Oulu – Internal Evaluation Report 2011/2012 (IMP report, in short) (Roberts, Iinatti et al. 2012). The aim of the report was to evaluate the quality of International Master's Programs (IMP's) at University of Oulu and to offer tools for developing them further. The report was the first internal evaluation of the University's IMP's. The report consists of five themes: program design, quality of implementation, roles and responsibilities, graduate prospects and student counseling. These themes are investigated through interviews of academic directors and coordinators of IMP's, a web questionnaire sent to three teachers and five students of IMP's, review of materials submitted by the IMP's that they saw relevant to
their program such as degree structures, personal study plans and flyers, and statistics analysis using the University of Oulu databases.

An interview with the Chair of the Evaluation Team that wrote the IMP report, Gordon Roberts, was scheduled, in order to help the researcher investigate the role of international degree students in University of Oulu. When asked about the advantages and disadvantages of University of Oulu compared to other universities in Finland and to find out why students would prefer Oulu over other Finnish universities, Roberts says that two main things rose up during the evaluation process:

If you had an IMP that was different from anything else in Finland, then of course the student would come to Oulu. If the student narrows down Finland as a possibility and the University of Oulu is the only institution in Finland that offered something like this, then they would come.

Roberts continues by stressing that the reputation of Oulu is not a factor that would attract international degree students to come to Oulu. If other universities in Finland saw that University of Oulu had an IMP that was working well and they would adapt the program model to their institution, IMP students would be likely to choose to study in universities in Helsinki, Jyväskylä or Tampere. The evaluation process showed that program uniqueness is the main attraction for University of Oulu – when it comes to the attractiveness of the city, Oulu would not be on top of many prospective students' list:

For example, Turku is really attractive because it is a city with lots of universities and it has a cultural and historic connection. It's easy to get to Stockholm. Helsinki is the capital city. Oulu needs to be able to offer something that's different from everything else. Once it has been narrowed down to Finland, then you've got to have something which is unique. You can't be doing the same because then you can't compete.

When looking at Finland on a global scale and when asked about the challenges that graduate programs in Finland and Oulu are facing, Roberts says that they do not have the same prestige that other global competitors have:

If you have a degree from a high prestige university, that gives a signal for future employers. If you have two people who apply for a job and one of them comes from University of Oulu and one comes from the London School of Economics, the future
employer is going to notice the London School of Economics much more easily than University of Oulu.

It is not only students who are not considered by the signal that a prestigious university gives, as some parents are also willing to invest to get their child in a respected institution:

Some parents are prepared to pay in order to get that signal without any reference to how good or bad the teaching is in the two universities. In University of Oulu in some IMPs the quality of teaching is absolutely excellent but it does not have the international prestige. (...) Finnish universities do not have the prestige that other global competitors have so they have to get the prestige or have some other marketing point in order for the students and their parents to get a degree from a Finnish university.

Indeed, during the IMP evaluation process the evaluation team found how parents can be influential in the study destination decision making process also in ways that are not connected to the academic prestige of the institution:

Parents are not only worried about the expense, they worry about safety. Why do American universities have campuses that are guarded? Because it gives a signal to parents of prospective students that this is a safe place to be in. (...) So they do look for a safe place. There is a view that Finland and Oulu are safe places to be in so they do not need to worry about what is going to happen to their child. (...) But it is not necessarily expected that you can get a similar answer from students because they view themselves being independent adults.

Roberts reminds how students might not be willing to say that parents might have had a great influence in their study destination. This is something that has to be kept in mind when researching students' study destination choice, as it can be something that the students themselves might feel like omitting from the conversation.

While discussing the state of internationality in University of Oulu, Mr. Roberts touches on the importance of exchange students and mentions two important factors connected to exchange students.

They are extremely important for a variety of reason. They are potential future IMP students. When those students who come to Oulu as exchange have a positive experience, they might be coming back. (...) Another thing is the kind of intellectual chemistry that happens when you get people who come from different learning and research backgrounds. It becomes a
breeding ground for thinking differently. That is extremely important when we are talking about innovating science.

It is clear that exchange students have both concrete and immaterial importance for University of Oulu through these two reasons. Roberts also mentions how they have an important role when it comes to university funding:

The Ministry of Education sees exchange students as being very important and it's a part of the funding model of the universities. Every exchange student that comes to University of Oulu scores funding points for the University.

When asked to give an overview of how University of Oulu sees exchange students, Roberts gives a lengthy answer which gives an idea of how complex the subject is.

There is no common view on exchange students, as there are some individuals who are very aware of their importance and then there are those who think exchange students are in a way just academic tourists who might hinder the so-called normal functioning of the University. (...) There is a massive variation in the understanding of the importance and the significance.

The interview with Mr. Roberts is important for understanding the complex dimension of the significance international students for a Finnish university. Although exchange students are outside the scope of this particular research, they have to be mentioned as they are an important group for University of Oulu, a group of prospective degree students for the institution. The interview with Mr. Roberts gives an idea of concrete measures on how University of Oulu can increase their pull value. Exchange students are prospective degree students, but only if their exchange experience has been positive. This experience is affected by University staff that the students interact on a daily basis, which is why communication between different staff levels and members is extremely important if University of Oulu looks to convert exchange students into international master's program students.

Now that the definitions for international students have been discussed and the presence of international degree students in Finland and in University of Oulu has been reviewed, the theoretical framework for this particular research will be discussed in the next chapter.
3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter is devoted to the theoretical framework of the research, which is presented on three different levels. First, the study destination choice as a phenomenon is examined on a general level and literature on the field is reviewed. Next, the reasons and factors that affect mobility are reviewed in terms of migration research and the difference between migration and mobility is established. Finally these two dimensions – the factors affecting study destination choice on a country and institution specific level, and the factors leading to mobility – are investigated together to see which factors influence international students' study destination choice.

3.1 Literature review on study choice behavior

In order to examine the factors that attract international degree students to specific countries or institutions, it is important to understand study destination choice behavior on a general level. Research regarding students' study destination choice behavior can be divided into three different model groups: the economic models, the sociological models and the combined models (Mubaira & Fatoki, 2012). The economic models focus on the decision-making process of the students and their families. The presumption of the model is that the student chooses to study in a specific institution if the benefits of attending the said institution outweigh the benefits of not attending the institution (Fard & Wagner, 2009). The economic choice models are criticized for ignoring social factors in the choice process (Mubaira & Fatoki, 2012). The sociological models examine the role of social and individual factors, such as parental encouragement and academic performances, and their interrelationships. The limitation of these models is that they only consider social factors as affecting the study destination choice process (Mubaira & Fatoki, 2012).

There are multiple differing combined models and one notable version was developed by Chapman (1986), who divided the choice behavior process into five steps. The first step of the process is called the pre-search behavior. During the pre-search period the student is influenced by factors such as family circumstance, lifestyle and personal value, which do not necessarily have an immediate effect on the study destination decision but more on the direction of the next step, the search behavior process. During this step, the student actively searches information on the available institutions with the help of family, alumni and acquaintances. Student contacts prospective institutions, asking for information
brochures and catalogs, which has naturally nowadays been mostly replaced by email, social media and universities’ online marketing materials used for attracting prospective students. This step is one of the most complex steps in the model, as the student has to create a “list” of institution alternatives and analyze the said alternatives’ features (Chapman, 1986).

During the third step, the application process, the student applies to a number of institutions, even though he/she might not have a clear idea of the funding required for the said institution. The student might, however, have an idea which institutions he/she is likely to be admitted into. The fourth step of the behavior process is called the choice decision, in which the student has to choose an institution from all those universities he or she was admitted into. At this point, it can be presumed that the student already has all relevant information on the institutions he/she has been admitted into. The final, fifth step, of the choice behavior process is the matriculation decision, where the student has to decide when and where they will start their studies. The choice of institution can also change during this step. For example, if the student was chosen from a wait list of a prestigious institution after already having chosen to study in a “second choice” institution, they have to make the decision on where they will start their studies (Chapman, 1986).

Chapman’s model focuses on institutional factors, whereas another combined model introduced by Hanson & Litten (1982) look at the reasons connected to both the institution and the individual student. Hanson & Litten describe five steps that influence the study destination choice process: having aspirations towards studying in a university, starting the search process, gathering information, sending applications and enrolling to the institution (Mubaira & Fatoki, 2012).

Vrontis, Tharassou and Malenthiou's (2007) combined based model expands on previous choice models with a five-step choice process: recognition of the institution, searching information on the institutions, evaluation of alternative institutions, purchase and consumption, which is affected by financial factors of the student, and finally the post-consumption evaluation.

It has to be noted that these models are not focused on the international dimension, and that they have been mainly used in researching domestic students' study destination choice behavior process (Mubaira & Fatoki, 2012). There are various views and theories
that try to specifically explain international students' study destination choice. The factors that influence the study destination choice include but are not limited to:

- Cost and quality of higher education programs
- The value of the degree or professional credential for future careers
- Availability of certain areas of specialization
- Access to the education system and country (including, but not limited to, obtaining visas for entry)
- Historical, linguistic and geographic links between the home and destination country (Banks & Bhandari, 2012)

This provides us with a broad overview of some the factors involved, but before making generalizations on the subject, we should take a look at theories that have been constructed based on migration research in general.

### 3.2 The push-pull model

The push-pull model is one of most commonly acknowledged theoretical concepts in migration research that can be used to determine the size and directions of migration flows (Portes and Böröcz, 1989). The model was refined by Everett Lee in his work A Theory Of Migration (1966). Lee recognized that there are four main factors in the act of migration:

1. Factors associated with the area of origin
2. Factors associated with the area of destination
3. Intervening obstacles
4. Personal factors

Lee explains how in every area there are factors that attract people to it and other factors that repel them. Some factors are found attractive by all people, while others affect different people in different ways, and for some, they might find themselves indifferent towards the factors. As an example, a good climate and employment opportunities are factors that are most of the time found attractive by everyone. A good school system, however, is seen as a positive factor for a parent with young children while a house-owner with no children can see it as a negative factor because of high real estate taxes. At the
same time a single male without taxable property is indifferent to the situation (Lee, 1966, 50).

The positive and negative factors in both the area of origin and destination are therefore differently defined for every migrant. According to Lee, the act of migration cannot be decided only by a simple calculus of the positive and negative factors. There are also intervening obstacles, such as distance, immigration laws, economic challenges and housing issues that affect the decision to migrate. For some migrants, these obstacles might be minor, whereas for others they might be too much to overcome, ultimately rendering the plans to migrate obsolete. Lee also notes how there are more or less constant personal factors, such as transition stages in an individual's life cycle that might affect the decision to migrate (Lee, 1966, 51).

At this time Lee's migration theory is a 50 year old theory that looks at migration as a phenomenon rather than evaluating migration policies and the challenges they may present. The theory has been criticized for being a polarizing generalization on how a person either migrates or not, based on the sum of push and pull factors (Muñiz-Solari et al. 2010). Even though the theory is rather old, it has been used in migration research in more recent times too. For example, Europol has used the model in their human trafficking research fairly recently in 2011 (Europol, 2011).

3.3 Differentiating migration and mobility

Migration as a phenomenon is a broad and evolving concept and it is difficult to make a clear distinction between migration and mobility. According to UNDP (2010) there are a plethora of reasons for migration that can be seen as regular migration (education, labor, tourism), involuntary migration (human trafficking, asylum seekers) and undocumented migration (smuggling, trafficking, undocumented labor migration). Migration and mobility can also happen within borders. It also has to be remembered that the push-pull theory is only one of many tools that can be used for analyzing migration and mobility as broad phenomena. For this research, the premise is that students have mobilized themselves voluntarily and that the movement happens across borders.
3.4 International student mobility research and flows

When it comes to international students' study destination choice research, especially ones using the push-pull model as their framework, the focus is often on the educational, economic and political dimensions in either the sending or the destination country, rather than focusing on social and cultural factors (Li & Bray, 2007). Most research focusing on factors driving international students' study destination choice are conducted in developed countries (Padlee, Kamaruddin & Baharun, 2010). Even though international students have an increasing amount of destination choices around the world, the overall flow continues to be from less developed countries to more developed environments, when measuring gross tertiary enrollment ratios, gross national income per capita and Human Development Index (Banks & Bhandari, 2012). Historically the United States, United Kingdom, France and Germany in particular have been, and still continue to be attractive destinations for international students. However, partly due to globalization and other vehicles that have increased mobility on a global level, other countries such as China have increased the overall amount of higher education opportunities for both domestic and international students (Wildavsky, 2010; Banks & Bhandari, 2012).

Countries that were previously mainly seen as sending countries have also established plans to attract and increase the amount of international students. Banks and Bhandari mentioned in 2012 how Malaysia is working to attract 200 000 international students by 2020, Jordan aims to grow the number to 100 000 by 2020, China is looking to attract 300 000 international students by 2020 and Japan has set their ambitions high, aiming to be a host for one million international students by 2025 (Banks & Bhandari, 2012). In 2013 the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture set the goal of having 60 000 international students in Finland (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013). It has to be mentioned that many of these country-specific aims do not mention whether they are looking to attract degree or credit mobile students.

3.5 Push-pull model in international student mobility research

As this particular research is focusing on the factors connected to Finland and University of Oulu, it is also important to investigate country and institution specific micro-research that has been conducted on degree student mobility. This chapter gives an overview of the micro-level research and studies which worked as an inspiration for the thesis.
framework. Later on, the section also looks into international student mobility research and studies that have used the push-pull model.

Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) studied international students in a research that consists of four previously carried out country studies: Indonesia and Taiwan (Mazzarol et al. 1997), India (Mazzarol et al. 2001a) and China (Mazzarol et al. 2001b). The total amount of international students involved in this research was 2,485, which in addition to graduate and post-graduate students included those bound for secondary school, vocational school, training programs and English language courses.

In their research, which is often cited in the field of international education (Foster, 2014), Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) identified three distinct phases in international students' decision process. Stage one involves the student deciding whether he or she wants to study internationally and not locally. In this stage, the push factors within the student's local environment are at their strongest. In stage two, the student must decide which country they are going to study in. This is where the pull factors of the country come into play. The final stage is about deciding the institution where the student will end up studying in. Various pull factors can also be seen in the final stage of the decision-making progress, but these factors are partly different from the ones that were in play in the second stage, the country selection stage.

The following sub-chapters provide examples connected to these three steps and expands the research connected to each theme. An overview of the factors can be examined on Appendix 3.

3.6 Push factors of the country of origin

The first stage of international students' study destination choice, according to Mazzarol & Soutar (2002), is the stage when the student, due to the push factors of the country, decides to study outside of their native country or the current country of residence. The findings of the research established four important factors that influenced the students' decision to study abroad. First, the higher quality of an international program compared to a local program was seen as a consistent push factor. Secondly, if the student found it difficult to gain entry to a local program, he or she was more likely to consider studying internationally. Thirdly, if the student was interested in grasping a better understanding
of the “West” and fourthly, if they were planning to migrate from their country after finishing their studies, they were driven towards studying internationally. The significant conclusion drawn by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) was that these four factors were seen important regardless of the destination country.

Shimauchi (2014) focuses on the reasons why East Asian students want to study in English-medium degree programs (EMDP) in Japan and South Korea instead of studying in a local institution. The students’ decision was often driven by the negative perspective of their national institutions, which is also the first of the four factors identified by Mazzarol & Soutar (2002).

The push factors for Mazzarol & Soutar’s theory (2002) were extracted from four country specific studies (Mazzarol et al.1997; Mazzarol et al. 2001a and Mazzarol et al. 2001b). Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) mention that the same four pull factors were important for all of the countries, which might explain the relative shortage of country-specific push factors mentioned in the research. Indeed, the two other steps, pull factors of the destination country and pull factors of the institution, have been given more focus in the existing micro-level research, as can be seen from the next two sub-chapters.

### 3.7 Pull factors of the destination country

This section discusses the pull factors that are connected to the destination country, which is second of the three stages as introduced by Mazzarol & Soutar (2002).

In their 1997 research, focusing on reasons why prospective international students would not want to study in Australia, Mazzarol, Kemp and Savery had a sample group of Taiwanese and Indonesian 780 students, out of which 64% were interested in studying abroad. The sample group had a rather large age scale with the age of the subjects varying from 15 to 56, but the results did not show any notable difference between people in different age groups (Mazzarol et al. 1997).

When it comes to country-tied pull factors that influenced the students study destination choice the research identified the following factors: safety and crime rate, cost of education, availability of scholarships or employment, ease of visa processing, value of money, historical or other links between destination country (Australia) and home country, Geographic distance between home country and destination country (Australia),
lifestyle of host country, climate in host country, recognition of qualifications by home country, family and friends advice and immigration (staying in host country after finishing studies).

Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) describe six categories that can be as the driving factors when choosing the destination country:

1. Knowledge and awareness of the host country in the student's home country

2. Personal recommendations from parents, relatives and friends

3. Cost issues which were broken down into two categories: financial costs, such as cost of education, living costs, travel expenses, availability of part-time jobs; and social costs, such as crime, safety and racial discrimination

4. Environment – lifestyle in the host country and both the study climate and the actual climate of the host country

5. Geographic proximity – how the host country is located compared to the student's country

6. Social links, such as family or relative living in the destination country, or if the student has family or friends who have studied in the host country.

### 3.8 Pull factors of the institution

From the viewpoint of higher education institutions, the importance of understanding the behavior of international students on a cross-national level is important (Cubillo, Sanchez & Cervino, 2006). Factors influencing the choice of a higher education institution has been studied quite extensively. However, these studies are rarely focused purely on international students (Padlee et al. 2010), but there are some examples where the sample group has consisted of international students.

Binsardi & Ekwulogo (2003) presented a survey to 62 international students studying in the United Kingdom. The study, which when compared to many other studies in the international education field, can also be seen as a more of a marketing research. It looked into the reasons why the students chose to study not only in a specific institution but also in the United Kingdom in general, which is characteristic in the study of international
students. In terms of institution-specific pull factors, the international students mentioned scholarships, good facilities, such as computers, libraries and alumni networks and student services as factors that would increase an institution's attractiveness. The study also showed the importance of marketing strategies within the prospective students' countries. Things such as promotion via alumni, friends and families, and approaching the local universities and colleges already within the students' country of origin were seen as factors that would influence the study destination choice. It has to be mentioned that this study was carried out almost a decade ago which can be seen in the results: only 17% of the respondents mentioned websites as an important channel for promoting higher education institutions and studying abroad.

Even more recent market-focused research shows that the role of websites when choosing the study destination country is not an important factor. In his research, which collected data from 189 American university students through an online survey, Kavakas (2013) mentions how the role of sites and web advertisement focusing on country-specific higher education promotion such as goabroad.com are not a significant factor for prospective international students. Interestingly enough, the same research mentions how the website of a specific program was more of a significant factor over websites that promote the whole country's education.

In their aforementioned research, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) also identified pull factors that could be specifically tied to an institution. In their publication, they presented a survey where 879 students studying at Australian colleges and universities were asked whether certain factors influenced their institution of choice. The sample group consisted of both international and Australian students. Mazzarol and Soutar found out that when compared to domestic students, international students gave more emphasis on the quality and reputation of the institution, the recognition of the institution's qualifications in their home country, the international strategic alliances the institution had, the quality of the staff, the reputation of alumni and the international community the institution had.

Based on past literature (Padlee et al. 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) and studies carried out mainly in a Malaysian context, Migin, Falahat & Khatibi (2015) draw together five main factors connected to the international students' choice of institution: cost of education, academic reputation, location, program and facilities. These factors are called institutional characteristics, which can be further broken down into financial institutional
characteristics (cost of education) and non-financial institutional characteristics (academic reputation, location, program and facilities). The first of the two groups, financial institutional characteristics, already gives an idea of its contents. Cost issues, as already discussed in the previous sub-chapter, can be divided further into cost of living and cost of education, but in the context of the institution the cost of the degree and education is one of the main factors when choosing the institution (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Padlee et al. 2010).

When it comes to non-financial institutional characteristics, the academic reputation of the institution is very much an influential factor when choosing the university or college. When researching Indonesian students' study destination processes, Kusumawati, Yanamandram and Perera (2010) found out that the reputation of the institution is the second most important factor, only exceeded by the cost issues. After graduating from a respected university, students feel like they are more likely to obtain a well-paid job (Migin et al. 2015).

The location of the institution is connected to the pull factors of the country. Geographical proximity of the study institution has been found to be an influential factor for both international students (Kusumawati et al. 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) as well as local students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Next on the list of non-financial institutional characteristics is the program that prospective international students would like to attend. Program offerings (Nagaraj, Munisamy et al. 2008), content and structure (Wagner & Fard, 2009), quality (Hassan & Sheriff, 2006) and international recognition (Maringe & Carter, 2007) are all influential factors that are connected to the choice of the institution based on the programs they offer.

The final of the five characteristics that Migin et al. (2015) list is facilities. Student feel more pull towards an institution that has a high standard of facilities, such as well-equipped libraries, IT equipment, laboratories and accommodation (Padlee et al. 2010).

### 3.9 Critiques of push-pull in student mobility research

Much of the research focused on international student mobility has a background in the push-pull model, but critique towards the model does exist. Souto-Outero, Huisman et al. (2013) argue that the model puts emphasis on the students' motivation to study abroad
and that it does not take into account the fears and apprehension of students that can have an impact on their decision to study internationally. Souto-Outero et al. (2013) argue that the country of origin can also have pull factors, such as the student's financial situation, that can work as a barrier for studying abroad.

Li & Bray (2007) remind how the push-pull model is a valuable mechanism for explaining international mobility, it has limitations. Push-pull factors are external forces and the model does not take personal characteristics of the actors, such as academic ability, gender, socio-economic status, age and motivation into account. Li & Bray also mention how similar push-pull factors have different effects on different individuals. In addition, they expand their critical views towards the model by adding the argument that Souto-Outero et al. (2013) also presented; the international study destination can also have push factors (for example high fees, restrictive policies on foreign students and tight immigration policies) that can repel the student from studying in the destination, just as the country of origin can have pull factors (such as staying close to parents and family, the relevance of domestic education and the internationalization of domestic institutions) that can make studying in a local institution attractive for the student. The positive forces at home and negative factors in an international destination are called reverse push-pull factors (Li & Bray, 2007).

Lack of focus on an individual's personality and the fact that both sides have both push and pull reasons seem to be the two main points of criticism towards the push-pull model. Li & Bray (2007) argue that the article conducted by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) is relevant for the push-pull model in international higher education research, as the research focused on micro-level elements of cross-border mobility, such as accessibility and migrants' intentions. When the push-pull categories are refined from these micro-level elements, including the reverse push-pull factors, a wider understanding of cross-border mobility is achieved compared to a research that only looks at external push-pull conditions of source and destination countries.

Higher students' study destination choice behavior research is often focused on developed countries, such as Australia, Germany and United Kingdom (Mubaira & Fatoki, 2012). It has to be remembered that findings of a micro-level push-pull research carried out in developed countries might not be applicable to developing countries due to differences in political-legal and economic environments (Mubaira & Fatoki, 2012).
Despite its shortcomings, the push-pull model is a good tool for micro-level student mobility research. Therefore the framework for this particular research is constructed according to Mazzarol and Soutar’s (2002) push-pull steps, after the methodology and the data collection methods for this research have been presented.
4 METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the methodology of this qualitative research, as well as the data collection methods and the sample group of the research. The interview structure and its relationship to the theoretical framework are also presented in this chapter alongside the data analysis process.

4.1 Content analysis

The analysis method of the data in this qualitative study is based on content analysis, which in turn is related to grounded theory (Metsämuuronen, 2006). However, in grounded theory the researcher initiates the research mainly based on the theory and literature, whereas in content analysis the research is highly guided by the conditions predetermined by the research data. In other words, the researcher must be thoroughly familiar with his or her own data. In addition to focusing on the concepts formed by the data itself, in content analysis the researcher must be familiar with the main theoretical concepts that have been constructed by previous researches and literature (Metsämuuronen, 2006; Syrjalainen, 1994).

Syrjalainen (1994) provides an overview of the different stages of content analysis as follows:

1) Getting familiar with the research material, including the data, and theoretical concepts constructed by existing research and literature

2) Reasoning, theorizing and internalizing the research material

3) Broadly categorizing the material into key themes and concepts

4) Clarifying the aim of the research and the key concepts

5) Defining the frequency of occurrence of key phenomena and exceptions, constructing new categories and themes

6) Cross-validation. Supporting and questioning the categories based on the research material (comparable to the theoretical sample in Grounded Theory)

7) Conclusion and interpretation
These steps are reviewed and discussed later on (sub-chapter 4.4) in the context of this particular research. The data gathering and analysis processes of this research is articulated on the background of theory and then tested in the empirical world (Brinkmann, 2014). In other words, as sub-chapters 4.2 and 4.4 show, the research was strongly guided by Mazzarol & Soutar's push-pull theory (2002) in terms of data gathering and analysis processes, and the theory is tested on micro-level in context of Finland and University of Oulu.
4.2 Data collection

The main data for this research was gathered through eight semi-structured interviews. The aim of the research was introduced to the interviewees and they were encouraged to share their experiences as freely as they wanted. The interviewees were advised to focus on sharing their experiences before their arrival in Finland. The interviews were audio recorded with a smart phone and back-up recorded with a laptop. Each interview lasted around 25-40 minutes and they were carried out in a quiet room at the University of Oulu. The interviewees were given a run-through of the research and they were asked to sign a consent form to participate in the research.

The interview frame and the questions were constructed based on previous literature presented in sections 3.4-3.6 and the three push-pull stages introduced by Mazzarol & Soutar (2002):

1) Push factors. Questions focused on the reasons why the student decided not to study in their native country or the country where they completed their previous stage of educations, such as:

- Could you tell me where you completed your previous stage of education?
- Why did you choose to not study in your native country/country where you completed your previous stage of education?
- Were there similar degrees available in your native country/country where you completed your previous stage of education?

2) Pull factors of the country. Questions focused on the reason why the student chose to study in a Finnish higher education institution over other countries, such as:

- Did you consider studying in other foreign universities before deciding to apply for a university in Finland?
- Did the cost of living in Finland have an effect on your decision?
- What is the value of a degree from Finland compared to degrees from other countries?
3) Pull factors of the institution. Questions related to why the student chose to study in University of Oulu instead of other universities in Finland, such as:

- Did you apply to other universities in Finland?
- Did other Finnish universities have degree programs available that were similar the one you ended up studying in University of Oulu?
- Where did you find information about University of Oulu?

The original interview structure and length was piloted with one student. The length of the pilot interview was quite short and the structure was more organized. In other words, the questions for the pilot interviewee were presented quite strictly in accordance to the levels constructed by Mazzarol & Soutar's push-pull theory (2002), starting with the push factors and finishing with the institution-specific pull factors. In later interviews the interview structure was more open. For example, if the interviewees wanted to start the interview with the reasons for choosing to study in University of Oulu, they were given the freedom to do that, instead of the researcher steering the conversation to the push factors. The overview of the push-pull factors (Appendix 3) was used as a guideline during the interviews.

4.3 Sample group

The sample group consisted of eight past or present international degree students studying in University of Oulu. The interviewees were recruited through word of mouth and with the help of a sign that read “International students wanted for an interview” that the researcher walked with in the main hall of University of Oulu. The aim was to get interviews from students representing different faculties, majors and nationalities.

In this section there will be a description of the sample group's nationalities, major subjects and degree levels. In order to respect the identities of the interviewees, these descriptions will be presented separately from each. For example, when comparing different nationalities' views towards rankings, the nationalities of students are mentioned alongside the interview quote. In these cases other distinguishing features, such as the student's degree program or gender, are not mentioned, so that the possibility of creating detailed interviewee profiles is minimized.
Six nationalities were represented in the interviews: China, South Korea, France, Spain, Pakistan (two interviewees) and Japan (two interviewees). The sample group consists of five male and three female students. Five interviewees were from the Faculty of Education, two from the Faculty of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering and one from the Faculty of Science. Two interviewees were studying a dual degree (Bachelor and Master) and five were studying in a Master's program. One of the interviewees had completed their Master's degree in Oulu and at the time of the interview was in a PhD program in University of Oulu.

As for the interviewees' degree programs, two interviewees were studying a dual degree (Bachelor and Master) in the Intercultural Teacher Education program, one student in Learning and Educational Technology Master's program, two students in the Wireless Communication Master's program, one student in Biology Master's program and two students in the Education and Globalization Master's program.

The time that the interviewees had studied in the University also varied. The group consisted of one 1st year student, three 2nd year students, one 3rd year student, one 5th year students and two interviewees who had already graduated from their programs.

The sample group of the research was very focused and it was thus easier to investigate the reasons for studying internationally on a personal level. This is important in cases where the aim is to gain a better understanding of the reasons for mobility (Li & Bray, 2007) compared to a case where the research would have focused only on external influences, such as the conditions laid upon by the source country or the destination country.

### 4.4 Data processing and analysis

The audio files from the interviews were transferred to a computer where they were transcribed using Express Scribe transcription software. After transcribing the interviews to a raw text format, the text files were imported into NVivo qualitative data analysis software for the actual analysis. As per Syrjäläinen's (1994) seven steps of content analysis, the first step in the analysis process was to read the interviews multiple times and make notes during the reading process. NVivo software enables the user to highlight and categorize transcribed interviews into different themes, a feature which became very
helpful during the first step of the content analysis path. Mazzarol & Soutar's three-step push-pull model (2002), described in the theoretical framework chapter, was used as the backbone for the first step of the analysis, as it was also used when making the interview framework. After familiarizing with the interview data, relevant information and references were roughly gathered under three themes – or nodes, as they are called in NVivo – that were presented by Mazzarol & Soutar (2002): push factors of the country of origin, pull factors of the destination country and pull factors of the institution.

These three themes were then further broken down into the actual factors that influenced the students' study destination choice. The factors were contested and possible contradictions were pointed out, if they occurred in the data. This part of the process is also known as cross-validation (Syrjäläinen, 1994). For example, if one student thought living expenses were a major factor for them and another stated that financial factors did not play a significant part when they were choosing their study destination, both of these occurrences were recorded in NVivo. In other words, the factors could have had either a negative or a positive influence on the study destination choice process. The frequency of occurrence of each factor was recorded and new categories were created based on both the frequency of occurrence and the cross-validation processes.

Content analysis as a methodology requires knowledge of not only the research material but also of past literature in the research theme. Therefore, to increase the validity of the categorization, Syrjäläinen's steps of content analysis (1994) were used together with the already constructed factors introduced in Mazzarol & Soutar's (2002) three step push-pull theory, and other micro-level research that have utilized the push-pull framework.
5 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter reports the relevant findings from the data and strives to compile the influential factors into relevant themes. The findings are reported in three main groups: push factors of the students' country of origin, pull factors of Finland and pull factors of University of Oulu. The factors connected to each push-pull stage are then presented and commented under separate sub-chapters.

5.1 Push factors of the country of origin

Most of the students expressed there were factors that contributed to the urge of not studying a degree in their country of origin. These factors are presented below in their own relevant sub-themes.

5.1.1 Desire for a change of environment

Three students expressed that they chose to study abroad because they were looking for a change of environment. One of the interviewees expressed seeing an opportunity to study internationally as a way to escape from their work life:

I also would like to get out of the uh environment in China... because I worked for so many years I want to be totally diverted into academic... pure academic life. To read papers, to be meditate with some basic things. And I think yeah, it’s good to give myself a big environment change.

A student from Korea described how negative experiences coming from their country's competitive academic environment drove their decision to apply for a degree program abroad:

Having gone through all the educational system in Korea it was too much too much for me to bear in terms of academic pressure (…) By the end of my bachelor's degree I couldn't have any idea about my life and I just thought that it was because of this academic highly academic oriented curriculum. (…) I know I need to study more but I don't want to study in Korea.

One student thought studying abroad is a way of learning to see the world from a new perspective:
To learn more and to see what the world is like you have to get out of your country. Or you have to get out of your home. (...) going to location that you can say is more advanced. You can say it's more facilities, more opportunities. These are basically the reasons I was forced to migrate from my country.

5.1.2 Availability of education in the country of origin

One of the interviewees mentioned the cost of higher education in their country of residence as a contributing push factor for searching degrees abroad. The student was originally from Pakistan but had stayed most of his life in Saudi Arabia. He had however completed the 11th and 12th grades and his bachelor's degree in Pakistan, as at that time higher education was not available to foreigners living in Saudi Arabia. Recalling his experiences after finishing his bachelor's degree in Pakistan:

After one year I got the job in Saudi Arabia and I moved back to Saudi Arabia. So yeah. So that's basically because I wanted to do.... pursue my higher education for sure. But like I was not willing to move back to Pakistan. So like because I was working in Saudi Arabia and if I had like reasonable options I would have chosen that but since higher education in Saudi Arabia is still expensive and it was not much that like well-known so I had to choose somewhere else outside the Middle East and outside South Asia.

It has to be mentioned that even after a thorough content analysis process, the number of significant factors that can be described as push factors was quite low. There are two explanations that contributed to these results. First, as the interviewees were already studying in University of Oulu, the premise for the interviews was to examine why the students chose to study in Finland and in University of Oulu. The research questions were also constructed so that the focus of the research would be towards Finland and University of Oulu.

The second explanation contributing to the low number of push factors is also connected to the sample group. Research on international students sometimes focuses on students that are described as prospective international students. Examples of such studies include Mazzarol et al. (1997), who interviewed 780 prospective international students and the reasons why they would not choose to study in Australia, and Kavakas (2013) who studied...
American university students' international study destination choice behavior, before choosing to leave abroad for studying.

This thesis, however, did not include students that could have been seen as prospective international students, as all of the interviewees were already accepted in, studying or had finished their studies in University of Oulu. It can only be speculated, but if similar interview questions were presented to students who had been exchange students in University of Oulu, but not yet enrolled in, therefore being prospective international degree students for the University of Oulu, perhaps more factors that could be described as push or reverse pull factors connected to their country of origin could occur.

5.2 Pull factors of Finland

This chapter summarizes the themes that appeared to be the pull factors connected to Finland. The distinction between pull factors of Finland and pull factors of the institution appear to be quite overlapping and some of the quotes might have information that could also fall under the institution's pull factors category.

5.2.1 Reputation in a specialized field

A number of interviewees mentioned that the reputation Finland has in their field of study was a contributing factor for choosing to study in Finland. This was particularly evident in students who studied education in University of Oulu. A student from Japan told about their strong interest in Finnish education which strongly directed the student to apply for a University in Finland without even considering studying in other countries:

I decided to come here because first I'm interested in Finnish education system. (…) I held interest in Finnish education so my destination was Finland. I don't have any other possibility or choice. (…). So studying in this field in Finland is very specific for me.

For another education student, the decision was similarly affected by the reputation of Finnish education:

Well the reputation of quality and the system of education in Finland is quite… very well known in Japan where I come from. And so I first thought about North Europe… northern Europe and Finland in my mind.
Yet another student majoring in education mentioned how the good reputation of Finnish education was important for them when choosing Finland over other countries:

Actually many Chinese students they spend their family they spend like a hundreds thousands of RMB to go oversea study in UK and American colleges. But they neglect the fact that Finland might be a good destination as well. And also for the education field I watched a video from Ken Robinson. He is an educator, he mentioned the education innovation and he mentioned North of the achievement that Finland have done. So before I come to Finland I have this vague expectation that Finland is a different place a different pedagogic ideas and I really would like to know more.

One student had already been living in Finland for a while before deciding to study in a Finnish university. The student was not interested in studying education before coming to Finland, but got interested in the field after a work practice in a Finnish school:

Well like I didn't have any particular thing to become a teacher before I came to Finland. So I would've never imagine going to study to become a teacher in Spain. and it was because I was here so interest in becoming a teacher started when I was here. And I started seeing how education was like in Finland and that's why I felt the need to become a teacher. (...) Concept and perception of education that there is in Finland regarding Spain. because in Spain it's like the lowest thing you can do and you can even become a teacher if you have failed like your high school. In Finland it's like totally opposite. You can feel it on the people and at the university also.

Students studying in other fields also expressed how Finland's reputation in their specific field of study had an effect in their decision-making process. A PhD student who had previously been an exchange student and later on a master's students in University of Oulu had experienced differences that actuated their decision to study their subject in Finland instead of their country of origin:

It was different because in a I think it's mostly because of cultural differences. In France biology is seen in a lot as a theory topic so the emphasis is put to lot into theory, mathematics and things like that. (...) Finnish school of thinking in biology is different. (...) I discovered that during my exchange here.
This student's experiences show how the pull factors of a country and the pull factors of the institution can have an overlapping effect on the study destination decision. In addition to having actual experience on attending an exchange program – thus being familiar with the contents of the program that University of Oulu offers – the student also reasons that the philosophy in their field of study differs from what they had experienced in their country of origin. It could be even possible that both pull factor categories overlapped with push factors, as the student could have been “pushed” away by the overly theoretical approach in biology in France. This, however, remains under speculation as the student did not give any further evidence of such push factors.

5.2.2 Lifestyle

The interviewees were asked whether they had taken into consideration the differences in lifestyles between their country of origin and Finland. This was a clear point of consideration for a student from Spain, as he knew he would stay in Finland and in Oulu for five years:

That definitely effects people. It can be more difficult here than in my home country so those aspects affect when I chose to study because I needed think about like OK, do I want to give up summer in Spain to be here or the weather. So I think those aspects affected the decision.

Outside of differences in the literal climate (weather), a student from Japan thought about differences in society and how people interact with each other:

Society is very different but humanity is like similar. It's very close to Japanese people. There are a lot of common point between Japanese people and Finnish people and that makes me very comfortable. But one of the differences between two countries is like independence. and I feel that Finnish people have very strong independence. people have their own strong independence about their life, work, their study. In Japan we have independence but we are more focused on the community or like family, more like group.

It must be mentioned that these two students were distinct from most of the other respondents, as they had already stayed in Finland before starting their studies in University of Oulu, therefore having experiences on the lifestyle in Finland. When asking
whether they knew about the differences in the way of life in Finland, the student from Japan confirms that staying in Finland before starting studies already made them familiar with the lifestyle:

Last year I stayed in Rovaniemi for three months and I feel like I talked with other Finnish people and I feel that I found that they have more independence than Japanese people.

A student who had stayed in Finland previously as an exchange student confirms that their prior experience was what made them aware of the differences in lifestyle:

It also actually played a big role. Because the standards of life in Finland are really high. It's comfortable, peaceful, quiet, safe, there's no... I never like bumped into big problem of any kind that would be really stressful. Like opposed to France. (…) This comes from my personal experience and I was not really aware of it before coming to Finland.

This raises the question whether the lifestyle was a considerable factor for students who had not visited stayed in Finland before starting their studies. A student from Pakistan says differences in lifestyle did not come to their mind while making their decision to study in Finland:

Yeah at the moment when I applied these things were not in my mind but when I came here, yeah it was totally different. The climate is totally different, the weather is different, the way people interact is totally different obviously. (…) But obviously at the moment these things were not in my mind when I applied.

A student from Korea says that they did not consider differences in lifestyle when applying:

No... no idea. I'm a very simple person so I didn't think that much. OK, Finland up there could be cold, but let's see what comes about. could be an experience for me. Yeah.

Based on these interviews, a conclusion can be made the differences in lifestyle was a not a major point of consideration for those students who had not visited Finland before applying for their degree program. This might stem from the fact that some students did not know what to expect from the Finnish lifestyle, or that they did not have interest in investigating it beforehand. The students whose decision was affected by the differences in the way of life had already stayed in Finland for more than a short trip.
5.2.3 Financial factors and tuition

All interviewees mentioned that financial factors – both academic and non-academic – had a major impact on their decision. Students had made calculations and tables that estimated the amount of money they would have to possess in order to complete their education. A Korean student expresses how their financial situation was very important when making the decision:

Because it's a practical matter I thought about. There was a web page where they give you all the information about approximately how much you need a month to live and yeah, I compared my bank account balance and decided I can do it.

Many students thought that living expenses in Finland can be quite high. Therefore they had estimated the amount of money they need to cover the living expenses. A student from Pakistan told the following:

I Googled a lot about the expenses. I have to because I can only rely on my family and all the savings. I have to rely on my own savings. So that's why I calculated the per month cost for me. Housing and food and stuff like that. Transportation and these kinds of things.

As the two previous comments show, internet was the main resource for estimating the living costs. However, one student who had not stayed in Finland got information from their friend who was a degree student in Oulu. The friend turned out to be a more reliable source than if the student would have solely relied on information found on the internet:
Main source was my friend. He told me like OK, the minimum cost per month is like 350 euros. Maximum can go up to 400 euros. But I mean yeah, you don't get all the prices on the internet because the price fluctuates and it changes.

A Muslim student told how living expenses and how they are constructed can be different for their community:

I'm Muslim and we don't drink so it's saves a lot of money for us haha. For living, for us food is quite expensive because we have to have such meat, we can't eat all meat from market, we have to buy from a shop where we get our halal meat. So it's more expensive than the one we get from the market.

A student from Pakistan had also estimated their expenses had found out that although Finland can be an expensive place to live in, students are given a chance to live an affordable life:

When you estimate the budget you have to look at everything. Yeah, Finland is a bit expensive place for living but if you can find a student apartment like PSOAS, student housing, and if you find some kind of part time job or job, then you can also focus on your studies and you can also work. So at the end of the day it's affordable.

A student from France had two possible destinations for finishing their master's. Ultimately the decision was made by the living expenses:

I didn't choose the program in Norway because I applied for half of the program because of the cost of living, which is really really prohibiting there. There were no tuition fees in the Norwegian university.

One interviewee who had stayed in Finland already had an idea of the living expenses. The student was the only one who got support from the Finnish government for their studies:

I have like Finnish social security so I don't have to pay... I mean the only cost is the loan that I'm getting.

A student from Japan told that even though Finland was an expensive country to live in, free education evens it out quite quickly:

Living expenses? So living here is really expensive but studying here is... now it is free. Next year there will be fees maybe. But yes of course it is the big motivation to apply here.
When calculating the academic and non-academic expenses, another student from Japan made an interesting connection between the sum of tuition and living expenses and compared it to studying in their own country:

In terms of cost of living, it might be quite expensive compared to... maybe other Asian countries. For example in Japan I have my parents' house where I can live for free. (...) But coming here and living on my own can cost quite lot. But tuition doesn't exist at the moment for me, so if I went to universities in Japan, it would probably cost around the same price as much as I spend living here for a year.

The interview in question was the research's pilot interview that was used to test the interview structure. In the pilot interview, the questions considering living expenses and tuition costs were separate, but due to this connection the student drew between the two financial points of consideration, the interview questions were modified for investigating whether students had thought about how paying tuition on top of relatively high living expenses would affect their decision. None of the interviewees had to pay tuition for their studies, but as tuition fees will be introduced for non-EU/EEA students starting in Fall of 2017, investigating the change cannot be dismissed.

5.2.4 Work opportunities

In the interview the students were asked whether they were considering staying in the destination country after graduating and possibly look for a job in the said country. A student from China expressed how Finland was an attractive country to settle in after finishing the degree:

I also make my plan to study Finnish and after graduation to work in some kindergarten or some Chinese-Finnish company. Already when applying I feel that if I work hard maybe I can stay here. I could have an easier life without controlling too much of the education fees and have medical care for myself or my children in the future. That is easier than what would happen in china. So for these reasons I wish I can stay here.

Even before coming to Finland, a student from Japan was determined to stay in the country after graduating and had researched the possibilities and the requirements needed to do so:

Yes of course. That it is why I'm studying Finnish. Because I want to find a job here. Hopefully in the educational field. That would be better.
For some students, thinking about a job or a career was not an influential factor and the focus was more on the studies. When asking whether they thought whether the international study experience would be more helpful in the country of origin or whether the student would like to stay in Finland after finishing their studies, a student from Pakistan replied:

At the moment when I decided, it was more about master degree, not so much focus on job. Apart from studies, if you have time you can maybe look for a part time job for managing your expenses. But obviously when you look for a job and a stable income yeah definitely. Wherever you can find and what are the prospects of that, it makes a difference.

5.2.5 Accessibility, visa issuance

Mazzarol et al. (1997) argued that ease of visa processing is a factor that can have an effect on students’ study destination choice. There were different opinions and experiences considering the accessibility of Finland when it comes to things such as visas and other paperwork. When asked whether paperwork had an effect on the student's study destination choice process, a student from France told:

In a way it was easier than I thought it would be. Again, as a European citizen I don't have to ask for any residence permit or anything like that. I just have to say I want to stay here.

Based on their personal experiences, a student from Spain confirms that the process is quite straightforward for European citizens compared to non-EU students:

Well for me it was kind of easy because I'm from EU and I moved here permanently so it was not easy not as difficult for example as other friends I have. Actually, they are now leaving because they haven't found jobs here. So outside of EU I think it's more complicated.

As suspected by this student, accessing Finland was not an easy task for some students outside of EU. A student from Pakistan thought there were some difficult obstacles when it comes to processing and applying for all the necessary paperwork:

For Pakistan there's no embassy of Finland. which is challenging because you have to go to neighboring countries. In order to get you first have to apply for the visa. Then you have to buy the ticket. You have to get appointment and you don't get
appointment easily. You have to apply months before the appointment.

The obstacle of not having a Finnish embassy can be seen mainly as the obstacle laid out by the country of origin, in this case Pakistan. When asked about the issue from another Pakistani student who lived in Saudi Arabia:

I mean that was pretty smooth. (…) I was working in Saudi Arabia so I applied directly from there. (…) So we had like I applied in one day and just got the decision in one week. I was quite astonished because in Pakistan we don't have the Finnish embassy. So the people have to go to Nepal or India or Iran to get their visa and to get the appointment.

A student from China had thought about studying in Norway and Germany but the process for applying would have been challenging and time consuming for the latter:

Beside applying to universities in Finland I also applied to university in Norway and universities like in Germany. It is also English taught and tuition free but for Chinese students we need to go through IPS verification. To go to Germany, I feel it’s quite complicated and takes long time.

A student from Japan thought gathering the required paperwork was a bit confusing yet manageable:

For me it was not so challenging. Yeah some of the application was confusing but... I can't remember... Not so confusing.

All in all the questions about paperwork and visa issuance resulted into a mixed bag of answers. It is difficult to make a definite conclusion based on the interview data, as only one of the students had found out that applying for a German university would have been challenging due to paperwork, making them look for other options. To find out whether these practicalities are big factor for students looking for an international study destination, it would be wiser to ask it from a group of students who have not made their study destination decision yet. Even if for some interviewees applying for the visa and other paperwork was a difficult task, it was not an insurmountable obstacle as all of them are or have been studying in Finland.
5.3 Pull factors of University of Oulu

Finally, this chapter describes the pull factors that were judged to be relevant to University of Oulu. Just as the case was between push factors of the country of origin and pull factors of Finland, some of the factors connected to University of Oulu are overlapping with the factors connected to Finland.

5.3.1 Degree and language of instruction

After making the decision to study in Finland, many interviewees mentioned how they chose to study in University of Oulu because of a certain degree that was only available in University of Oulu. It was already mentioned that many students studying education were particularly interested in Finnish education. However, there are not that many degree programs in education that are instructed in English, which drove many of the education students to choose Oulu as their study institution in Finland.

When asked whether it was important that the degree program would be in English, a Japanese student majoring in education responded:

Yes. If the program was only in Finnish, I couldn't attend any classes of course.

An education student from Spain had this to say about the role of language in their decision:

Yeah because I don't have to speak Finnish. I mean it was a mix of everything that it was teacher education and in English. And also the scope of the program.

For a student from Korea, language was one of the most important factors when they started the search for possible higher education programs:

If they didn't offer any English programs.... well that was one of the key search terms for my search. Like English master's degree program, Europe, education. Because I don't... I love languages but I think I got too lazy to learn another language this time of my life. (…) If they hadn't offered any English programs, maybe the chances are very slim. Finnish language is really hard for me.

In addition to importance of program language, the student thought that the contents of the program had unique features that set University of Oulu apart from other universities both outside and within Finland:
Germany and Finland those two were my options. I also wanted to study education. There were some programs that are not really my cup of tea in Germany like just education specifically but this program in Oulu it attempts to combine education and literal sociology and so you can think about education in the context of the world.

A student majoring in wireless communication had considered studying in other Finnish universities. The final choice was partly driven by the contents of the programs in University of Oulu;

Well I had three Universities, Oulu, Aalto and Tampere. But then I had to decide which type of stuff I want to study. Which is more related. Then you know University of Oulu suited me, I thought that was best for me. It was the most suited between the three so that's why.

One student was interested in studying a master's degree in education, but they did not have any previous academic experience in the field. The student found out that most universities did not have programs that would accept students without bachelor's background in education, which limited their options:

I looked for other universities but I don't have the bachelor degree in education, so not so many universities offer international program about education which can apply who don't have background of education. So I sent email to all of the universities and I got email reply from some universities. I had two options: here in Oulu University and Lapland University and I chose Oulu university.

It can be established that language played a big role when deciding where in Finland the students decided to study, but the interviews did not give a clear-cut answer on the role of the uniqueness of the programs in Oulu. As these examples show, for some students, particularly the ones studying education, University of Oulu offered unique master's programs that had two distinct features: language and non-requirement of previous academic experience in the field. However, apart from the student studying wireless communication, students studying in other faculties did not base their study destination choice decision purely on the uniqueness of the programs that University of Oulu has. Interestingly enough, this is quite polarizing from the information that surfaced from the interview with Gordon Roberts and the IMP report, as they stressed how having unique
program offerings are extremely important, if University of Oulu wants to attract international degree students.

5.3.2 Reputation and rankings

As discussed in the previous sub-chapter, the reputation of specific areas of specialization that were seen as unique for Finland, such as education, was seen as an influential factor for many students. The importance of reputation can be seen on an institutional level from an interview with a student of wireless communication:

Maybe the legacy of Nokia was the one that was thumping my decision to come here. (…) University of Oulu is known for its CWC, wireless communication. In fact in 1996 the first GSM message was released from University of Oulu. You are the pioneers of Nokia who are the pioneers of telecommunication.

The other student of the wireless communication was also attracted by the reputation of the field at the University of Oulu:

One of my friend was studying here one year before me. (…) He got in and said like they have this university has a very good program in wireless communication engineering and if you want to pursue master's degree in engineering they offer like big thesis and internship and like that. (…) CWC especially in University of Oulu, they are very well known in wireless communication department.

As already mentioned, students studying in the faculty of education also saw reputation in their field as an important feature when choosing their study destination abroad, but that reputation was seen as a feature that set Finland apart from other countries. The reputation of wireless communication has to be mentioned as it was seen by two students as the distinct reason that set University of Oulu apart from other universities in Finland.

The interviewees gave quite inconsistent responses when it comes to the role of university rankings. When asked whether they looked at University of Oulu's ranking before applying, a student of education from Spain responded:

Not really. I mean I'm against all kinds of rankings so because those are just numbers and I think they don't really show the reality. You can have great teachers in really low ranked universities because of money issues and maybe you have really
high institutions who some there are crap. I don't believe so much in ranks.

A student from Japan was along the same lines when asked about the importance of rankings:

For me not so much. I haven't check this University before. (...) It did not have a huge impact on my choice.

A student from Pakistan spoke quite openly about their views towards rankings and whether they had any influence on their choice:

I don't believe in the concept of ranking because wherever you study if you do well, you can do anything you want. Rankings are also sometimes, you can say biased or their factors... they are based on factors that don't affect an individual student. Maybe it will affect as a whole university but for an individual like... I don't care about the rankings.

A student from China told about a comment said by their parents:

Actually my family suggested that why not to pick the master degree in China, because in international rankings University of Oulu is really lagging behind that of in China. So why would you spend so much money, although its tuition free but you still spend lots of living expenses.

A student from Pakistan said they had considered rankings and looked at the position of University of Oulu in the very beginning before choosing the institution or the country to study the degree in:

That was I think if not the first one of the main things i looked for in the very beginning. OK, I'm going to apply to this university but what is the ranking of this university. It was quite reasonable for me. I mean... that was pretty OK for me. I did look at it. It was around 263 at that time, I’m not sure what it is right now.

The notion that the institution would not have to be among the highest top universities was also mentioned by a student from France:

Not a big factor but of course something that I considered. I would not have stayed here if the university would be in the last or not so well ranked. Also checking on the reputation that the university has. It was of course a factor because there’s no point of having an international degree if it doesn't open any doors for me.
A student from Korea mentions how they thought about the sum of two factors: rankings and the availability of suitable programs:

In Google I typed in master's degree in education, Europe and then I went through all the rankings of universities. (...) I did look at the rankings. Oulu was not there in the first 100 but there were many American universities and well, I thought about Helsinki, but they didn't seem to have like education combined programs in Helsinki.

A student from Japan had already decided that they wanted to study and work in Finland. When asked about the influence of rankings:

I did consider rankings. I didn't take a look at the ranking website but I researched about universities in Finland. And I think that time I got the impression that all the universities in Finland are very equal level. Maybe when I'm getting a job it doesn't matter which university I graduate from considering getting a job in Finland, in the field of education. So I decided, well, either if it's Helsinki or Oulu, it doesn't make much difference. Well, the overall level of education is good already, so the position didn't really matter to me.

5.3.3 Personal recommendations and experiences

People, such as friends, parents, teachers and admission officers, who might influence the students' study destination choice are called significant others (Padlee et al. 2010; Migin et al. 2015). Some students had become aware of the possibilities in University of Oulu or a specific program from a friend or an acquaintance. One student mentioned hearing about a specific program when staying in Finland before making the decision to study in University of Oulu:

First information was the teacher of the primary school that I used to visit in Rovaniemi. She graduated here from teacher education of Oulu University before. She recommended me to apply here. Then I searched about more details about this university.

The importance of recommendations from friends or acquaintances did not only limit to the students becoming aware of the programs at University of Oulu. For one student, the recommendation of a friend who had studied in the University previously was the nudge towards applying to studying in Oulu:

One of my friends was studying here one year before me. He came one year earlier than me so but he was in another program.
He got in and told me this university has a very good program in wireless communication engineering and if you want to pursue master's degree in engineering, they offer like big thesis and internship.

These two students gave an implication on how the idea of studying in University of Oulu was directly influenced by their friends or acquaintances. One of the students participating in the research had been an exchange student as well as a master's program student in University of Oulu. In the interview the student focused on their experiences during their master's program and had this to say:

When I was an exchange student all the classes I had were taught in English. But when I moved to my master's, I was a bit in a turning point of the biology department so I was the last one to go through the program offered at that time. (...) So actually in that program most of the courses were in Finnish but they adapted it specially for me so that it would be in English. So it was lots of books to read and things like that. Of course in the beginning it worried me because most of the things were in Finnish, but I got assured that everything would be adapted to me in English. So it was challenging in the beginning but in the end it was OK.

The student explains how the language of instruction during their exchange was English, which partly influenced their decision to continue towards the master's studies in University of Oulu. The student also mentions how the master's program was tailored so that the student could attend the program, even though majority of the contents were in Finnish. In the interview with Mr. Gordon Roberts it became evident how it is important to give exchange students a positive exchange experience, as they are prospective degree students for the University. The sample group for this research included only one student who had been an exchange student in University of Oulu in the past, but this student had indeed made their decision to become a master's student based on their positive exchange experience. The student had also been happy with their master's level studies which encouraged them to apply for a PhD program. Even though it is difficult to make a reliable conclusion based on only one student's experiences, it should be noted how the positive studying experience is an influential factor on all levels all the way from being an exchange student to studying in a PhD program. In other words, not only is it important to provide a positive experience for exchange students, but also for master's students, as they are prospective doctoral students for the institution.
In the interview with Gordon Roberts, it became evident that the student's parents play a great role when it comes to the study destination choice process. Roberts gives an interesting point connected to truthfulness of students, which was observed during the IMP evaluation process. Students want to see themselves as independent adults and therefore they might omit information on the role of their parents' concerns. As the interview structure was quite open, the role of parents was not discussed in detail with the interviewees. In hindsight, it could have been justifiable to ask more detailed questions about the role of the students' parents in the choice process and whether the safety concerns were a significant factor when choosing the study destination – something that the students might not disclose without asking in detail.
5.4 Other findings/factors

This section will look into factors that were not specifically unique for any single stage of the three-step push-pull model, or some of the factors that were overlapping on two or more steps. Any relevant information and findings that could not be labeled into any of the aforementioned categories will also be looked at in this section.

5.4.1 Reputation and achievement of the staff members

The IMP evaluation and the interview with Gordon Roberts demonstrated the importance of academic networking for universities. In University of Oulu, the faculties that had recruited highly-respected, published professionals as lecturers and researchers had the best performing international master's programs. Roberts mentions how students in some master's programs had chosen to study in the said program mainly because they had a teacher or a lecturer who was the cream of the cream in their said academic field. Highly prolific academics are also likely to build networks with other respected academics in other universities and this word of mouth can be carried further into the ears of prospective international degree students, contributing to the academic prestige of the faculty and the institution.

When the interviewees of this research were asked whether they had considered the reputation or the achievement of the staff members when looking for their international study destination, or when choosing between Oulu and other institutions in Finland, the responses were scarce. A student studying wireless communication did mention looking at the publications from the faculty in Oulu:

I read quite several forums online and saw there like the publications stuff like area of research. (...) An important thing for me was to see what kind of publication do they have and what kind of expertise do they have in this university.

When asked whether they had search information about the staff in University of Oulu before applying, one student had problems finding relevant information on the number of professors on the faculty's website. The student also mentioned whether that would have an effect in hindsight:

There's seem to be some sort of problem in my program in terms of professors because there's only one professor. (...) I think
there's a lack of faculty members here. Things like this were not really written like in great detail on the website. I thought that maybe there are great professors that encourage discussion so maybe I can be well guided in terms of my academic pursuit. But there's none.

The student implicated how the shortage of professors was not mentioned on the University website which is understandable, as it is not an attractive circumstance for any higher education institution.

5.4.2 University of Oulu and master's programs' websites

The students were asked where they looked for information about University of Oulu. In addition to the sources that were already mentioned earlier, such as recommendations from friends and acquaintances and visiting sites such as Study in Finland, all students relied on internet search engines and the official website of University of Oulu when looking for information about academic and non-academic life in Oulu and in Finland. All interviewees said to have frequented the University web pages before making the final decision considering their study destination. One student said both the main site and the specific program page were important sources of information that had an effect on their study destination choice:

On the website I can find most of the information. They are correspondent to what I expect out of this program. It's exactly as they are described on their websites, including the program description and the professor's information. I can see the manager work in University of Oulu is neat and organized.

Another student also mentions how the website of the program and University of Oulu were important resources for them:

I went to the website. I went to see what happened in research and what courses they teach. (...) I found some links there, I remember. There were some courses link, what they teach, what is the curriculum following. So yeah definitely, it was an important resource.

One student mentioned how the way the program was presented on its webpage had a positive impact on the study destination decision. The student also stressed the importance of prompt email replies which also contributed to the decision:
Actually the website was very impressive and I was excited, because it's not just serious academic web page, but also like more fun and it had little videos. Also it has little bit like more formal question. The coordinator of the master's program sent me an email and it's very detailed and it was written in a really kind way. It makes me more excited to join this program. I don’t want to say bad things about one other university in Finland, but their reply was one month later from my email so it was not approachable.

The following quote was already discussed in the previous chapter but it does give implications on how it is important for the University and the program websites to have up-to-date and honest information:

I think there's a lack of faculty members here. Things like this were not really written like in great detail on the website. I thought that maybe there are great professors that encourage discussion so maybe I can be well guided in terms of my academic pursuit. But there's none.

This student was studying in the same faculty as the student who had mentioned being impressed by the neat and organized administration that could be seen through the University's and the program's websites. The students, however, studied in different master's programs, which gives an implication that the quality and the information provided on individual programs' websites can vary even within the same faculty.

5.4.3 Value of the degree

Past research has shown that prospective students take the value of the degree or professional credentials for future career into account when choosing the specific degree program. The interviewees were asked whether the degree and skills they would gain from their studies were influential factors for them, and whether a degree from a Finnish university would give them an advantage or a disadvantage in the job market when compared to a domestic degree. There were answers that were connected both to studying internationally in the first place and what specific programs could offer for the students.

A student from Japan had given the question a thought before making their study destination choice:

If I am applying for the job, for example in some consulting company in the field of education, or maybe governmental job
positions, then maybe the experience abroad might be seen more valuable compared to going to national universities in Japan.

One student discussed how degrees from different countries can be seen differently and mentions how forged degrees can be a problem:

Of course it would make difference compared to if degree was back in my own country. Degrees from European countries are well recognized. There have been some issues about forged degrees back from my own country. For example if I wanted to move to Europe or Canada or US or Australia, they wouldn't trust it right away if I had a degree from my own country. But Finland is like a European country and like they would trust it right away. That's why it would make a big difference if had the degree from my own country.

A student from France had thought about the value of the degree for future career and also the value of the experience of studying abroad as a tool for personal growth:

Actually I thought about it a lot. It's because since I'm at the university really early on I really felt the passion for academia. I feel like it's something I want to do. And it's so that academia is an international vocation. I knew that if I would just stay stuck in France, I would only knew things from French point of view, without getting in touch with outside things. I know that on my diploma I would also have it reflected on my CV because I would have my degree from France. So yeah, I thought that it was a big advantage for me to get like a full degree, not just exchange but full degree abroad, because that should bring me much more value in my CV. Also personally because I got to see things really really differently.

A student from Japan had also thought about the value of the degree for their future career on a country-specific level:

Yes, it is absolutely valuable for my future. I would like to work in an educational institution so it will give me more opportunities to work in this field. I'm not thinking so concretely about this not specific institution but generally it will work.

One student mentioned the importance of a specific program and what it would offer for their future:

Well that's why I chose this program over any other education specific degree, after which you can just maybe be a researcher. Some of the German universities offered those programs but I didn't want to be a researcher. I wanted to be a field worker in an NGO. Still I have only a vague idea of what I want to do and
where I want be. But I think this program, if I study hard enough, equips me with knowledge, maybe some second-hand experience from lectures or NGO workers and guest speakers.

When asked about if they thought about the value of the degree for their future career, a student from Spain said it did not make a difference in their study destination choice:

I really don't care so much. I just want to learn and become a teacher so I wasn't really thinking like hmm, if I have a degree from Finland it would be more worthy than a degree from Spain. So the image is not so important for me, just me becoming a good teacher.

It is difficult to make a distinction on whether it was more meaningful for the interviewees to gain a degree or a skill set from an institution outside of their own country or whether the specific skills from a specific chosen program were more important for them. The reason for this was perhaps connected to uncertainty about the future, as when they were deciding their master's degree destination, not all students had definite plans whether they saw themselves working in their country of origin or in Finland or some other country.

5.4.4 Tuition fees

The interviewees were asked about the importance of financial factors linked to studying internationally and in Finland. As seen in section 5.2.3, most students thought that the tuition free higher education offered in Finland was attractive for them, but for some students the financial seesaw was easily tilted to the other side by the relatively high living expenses. In the end of the interviews the students were asked to share their thoughts on tuition and whether they would be willing to attend again if there was a tuition fee for the same program that they were studying or had studied in University of Oulu. The students were also asked to think about the value of the specific degree they were studying in University of Oulu, and to give an estimate how much they would have been prepared to pay for the degree. Because of these reasons the tuition fee issue is discussed here instead of in the chapter focusing on the pull factors of Finland. The answers and the discussions that ensued were quite varied.

When asked whether they would have chosen to study in Finland if there were tuition fees involved, one student was quite open to express how they would have looked elsewhere:

To be honest no. (...) I would have chosen countries where they speak English probably. Because if you think logically, if I really
spend the money why don't I spend the money on the place where it's less difficult for me. (...) I would've chosen some other option. I mean, if the tuition is almost as same as other countries I would've chosen them. Those countries which are more developed and they have more stable economy, like Germany.

Another student gave quite a similar answer when discussing tuition. On top of the language issue, they also described challenges related to finding a job and how master's level education is a big investment for any student:

Well if there would be a tuition then maybe I wouldn't come over here, to be honest with you. There are a few reasons for that. First of all, there is a language barrier. No matter how hard you try, there is a language barrier between people. You can definitely see that you are not part of the university. You can feel that. (...) Secondly master's level is an investment. You go for studies but you also look for some part time job because it's an expensive place. For that you have to have Finnish skills. So for international students, if you invest so much money, around 10 000 euros or something like that, whenever the person is investing 10 000 euros he will also have to think what you can get from that place. It's very difficult to get a part time job or even a job in Oulu. there are no alternatives.

The student also mentioned how having tuition fees would change the way the degree would have to be funded. That change would be a big hit especially for students whose families' economic background is not that high:

You people are lucky. You are supported by the government but people like us, we are not supported by anyone. We are supported by parents who have saved their money all their lives. They are not supported by their government. (...) Some students might come from a rich family, but majority is from middle class or lower middle class. They have to balance, work loans from here and there to come over here to study and pay back those loans. (...) If there's a fee, there's a lot of pressure. It would really change my view if I had to pay before coming here.

Another student was asked about the importance of a tuition-free degree program:

I am really thankful for that. I feel so pitiful for the students coming next year, because I heard there's going to be a tuition fee for them, for about like 10 000-15 000 euros. I cannot afford it, unless you're rich enough. (...) I'm talking about like non-EU students. That was one of the reasons why I chose Finland over other countries and also the fact that the program also offered me what I wanted to learn.
It has to be mentioned that these three students were students coming from non-European Union countries. Non-EU students start paying tuition fees from 2017 and these students had clearly thought how that would have influenced their decision. Only two of the eight interviewees were EU citizens. When asked whether they would had considered paying tuition for their studies, a French student commented:

Well, if it would've been beforehand, I don't think I would've come if I would have had to pay. I would have to look for another country. (...) I think about 1000 euros would've been doable but like an actual full tuition like 10 000, it would've been clearly a no.

A student from Spain had this to add to the discussion:

Economically I don't think I could afford to pay much more so but I don't know, do you want me to say like an amount? Well, if you compare the quality here to Spain, in Spain you are paying 1000-2000 per year, then it should be at least like 10000 euros because it's much better than Spain. But I don't the prices of the universities, because in the States it's expensive and then in other countries it's less so I don't know. I think education should be free anyway so I don't agree with tuition fees. But I cannot give you a number I would be ready to pay.

The difference between EU and non-EU students is interesting. The EU students had thought about a four-figure fee as the possible tuition fee but the non-EU students went straight into the deep end, straight away thinking about fees that would be over 10 000 euros per year. It is difficult to make certain conclusions about such a small sample of answers, but it would seem that the smaller figure, for example 1000-2000 euros proposed by the student in the previous quote, could be tolerable even for students coming from European countries. It raises the question whether EU students will start paying their part of the tuition sum in the future, as in the tuition fee structure introduced in 2017 the new flow of funds will be coming only from the non-EU students. It will be interesting to see which way the tuition structure will move towards in the near future in Finland.

However, even though the sample group of this particular research is limited and in the aforementioned examples the non-EU students were in general less willing to consider paying high tuition fees compared to EU students paying lower fees, the results are not as polarizing as they could be. When asking how much they would be willing to pay to study in the same program if there would have been tuition fees during their application process, a student from Japan had thought about the sum of living costs and tuition:
I think I would come. If the contents and the situation, I mean overall lessons and everything would be the same. In terms of price range... that's very difficult. I didn't know much it costs to live here in the beginning. I estimated around ten thousand euros per year. and it ended up slightly more than that. So if the living cost plus tuition end up doubling the price that's costing me at the moment, I would still probably come here for five years. But if the price goes higher than that, maybe twenty thousand euros, then I would probably have to consider other options.

Another student from Japan had this to add to the discussion about tuition:

Hmm, for me, I need to calculate the Japanese yen, let me take a pen and paper. OK, so 100 000 euros for two years would be OK. That would not include the living cost. A fund or a scholarship would be helpful.

A two-year degree student from China took living expenses into account when estimating how much they would be willing to pay. They also took into consideration how much a master's degree would cost in the United Kingdom:

If I decide to come to Finland with the tuition charge, it should not be more than 3000 euro for one semester. That is the most. (...) If people want to study in UK it's just one years of master degree and the living cost and the study would amount to around 350 000 RMB. But you can finish the degree in one year and in the UK you can easily to apply to 30 universities because they make money by education. For Finland we need to concern the degree which takes two years. Living expenses of the average citizen in two years would be 100 000 RMB and the tuition fee should be lower than 250 000 RMB, divided by two it is 125 000 RMB and if we divided by seven which is the exchange rate. That is around 18 000 euros for a two-year degree tuition.

Commenting further on the tuition and how Finland is different from countries such as the United Kingdom, the student added:

It costs one years of expense in UK and students need to spend two years instead of one year. Actually you should really concentrate your budget, which is why Finland can be a preferable place to go. The reason I chose Finland. (...) I feel free education is something different that Finland can provide. It also means Finland is not playing the game that Swedish and UK universities are playing. I feel Finland has their own style and I really appreciate that. But if now Finland wants to join these games they need to campaign well and they need to have their marketing strategies ready.
The introduction of tuition fees for non-EU/EEA students is likely to mold the national diversity of incoming degree students in Finland and in University of Oulu, as the recent examples from Denmark and Sweden, where similar tuition fee structures were introduced recently, have shown. It is, however, difficult to predict how the overall amount of international degree students will change. In Denmark, the number of students coming from European Union countries increased while the number of non-EU/EEA students decreased (CIMO, 2014). Similar trends were noticed in Sweden, who in 2014 managed to change the direction as the amount of incoming non-EU/EEA students started to increase due to new marketing campaigns (ICEF Monitor, 2015). This displays how Finnish universities have to start thinking about their marketing campaigns in order to ensure the flow of incoming degree students from non-EU/EEA countries.
6 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND ETHICAL ISSUES

When conducting qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to establish his or her own position and bias. This chapter discusses issue connected potential biases and investigates the measures taken towards improving the reliability and the trustworthiness of the research.

In terms of content analysis, it is a typical presumption that the informants, in this case the interviewees, are expressing their opinions and stories truthfully (Metsämuuronen, 2006). The veracity of the interview data, however, has to be questioned and analyzed. As mentioned earlier, Mr. Roberts mentioned how students' parents have a great influence in terms of choosing a safe study destination. This did not become evident in the interviews and it could be speculated whether the interviewees withheld information on the influence of their parents, something that Mr. Roberts mentioned is often disclosed by students who want to consider themselves being independent adults.

It is also important to justify the interview questions so that they do not maneuver the answers or the outcome towards a bias of the researcher (Metsämuuronen, 2006). With this particular research, it has to be mentioned that the groups and the themes of the outcome were influenced and molded by previous micro-level research on push-pull factors. Using existing literature and studies as the basis for the groups and themes, as well as the interview framework, the findings were analyzed and discussed on a micro-level in the context of University of Oulu, improving the trustworthiness of the research compared to a situation where the themes and group would have been constructed from scratch. It also has to be remembered that generalizations are difficult to make when working with a limited sample size. However, for a master's level research, the focused sample group enabled the researcher to view the subject from a closer point of view.

Ethical issues were addressed by describing the aim of the research for the interviewees. The interviewees were asked to read and sign a consent form (Appendix 4) that had detailed information on how and where the interview data would be used. The students were able to decide or limit the amount of personal information that were used in the research. For example, if a student did not want their nationality or major subject to be mentioned in the research, they were given an option to withhold the said information. In order to protect the identity of the interviewees, the findings are reported in a way which
will minimize the possibility of identification of the interviewees. It was also expressed to the interviewees that they can stop the interview at any point, and that they could contact the researcher if they felt like having said something to not be included in the research. Going back to the source – a phase called member checking – is one of the best ways for establishing credibility. In member checking the researcher goes back to the source to ensure that the analysis of the interviews is in accordance to the information provided during the interview (Cresswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking involves traps, such as the informants changing valid information that is uncomfortable for them (Carlson, 2010). These traps are more present especially if the member checking is done carelessly. Due to time restraints, the researcher did not actively contact the study participants after the interviews or during the analyzing process. The students, however, were asked before the interview whether they would like to read the thesis before it was published. Some of the students were interested in reading the thesis, but they did not express the need for thorough member checking the thesis before publishing.

In the beginning of the research process, the idea was to focus on students that were studying in the Faculty of Education in University of Oulu. As the findings show, students studying in the Faculty of Education had a common reason for studying in Finland that on different levels affected their study destination choice – the reputation of the Finnish education system. On personal level, for the researcher, this had already become quite evident after spending five years in the faculty and having multiple conversations with international degree students studying in the faculty. These can be seen as reasons that affected the researcher bias.

It proved challenging to find interviewees for the research from other faculties outside of the Faculty of Education. However, in the end it proved to be worth the extra effort, as the things that students studying in different fields found significant were quite different from the ones mentioned by the education students. It can be said that interviewing students outside of the Faculty of Education enabled the researcher to investigate the subject outside the box and broaden the preconceptions formed by mostly interacting with students of a single faculty. It would have been better to have a more even representation of students from different faculties, as the number students from Faculty of Education (five) outnumbered students from other faculties (three).
7 DISCUSSION

Finally, this chapter discusses the importance of micro-level, institution-specific research. Even though the actual findings of the empirical research were presented in the previous chapter, some implications of the research for University of Oulu are also examined in this chapter.

The article by Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) is such an often-quoted piece of research work in the field of international student mobility (Foster, 2014) because it was one of the first pieces of research that investigated the push-pull factors on a micro-level, taking things such as personal reasons and reverse push-pull factors into account (Li & Bray, 2007). This implies that the reasons for mobilizing into a certain destination, or from a certain country of origin, is best to be examined on a country, or even better, on an institutional level, to get a deeper understanding of the unique factors that are in play with the certain institution or destination country. Even though this research had a fairly focused sample group of eight students, it was enough to gain a look into the influential factors that are connected to Finnish higher education and on an even more focused level to see the why students chose to study in University of Oulu.

Most of the findings were something that past research had already discovered in other country-specific or institutional contexts, such as the importance of English degree programs and the eagerness to experience a different academic and non-academic environment. However, this research proves that Mazzarol & Soutar's (2002) push-pull theory works well investigating factors that are specific to a certain country or institution. The most important factors in context of Finland and University of Oulu are summarized in sub-chapter 7.1. The Internal Evaluation Report 2011/2012 that can be seen as the cornerstone of evaluating the master's programs in University of Oulu was a valuable piece of information for this thesis, but it focused mainly on comparing and evaluating the actual program and their contents. The interview with Gordon Roberts provided a good look into the wider reasons why students chose to study in Finland and in Oulu and when combined with the interview findings, the thesis work gave a better understanding of the reasons connected to University of Oulu itself, compared to investigating the push-pull factors on a wider country-specific level.
7.1 Overview of the findings

The interview structure was constructed on top of an existing theoretical framework and the findings were grouped according to themes found in existing literature. However, during the analysis process it became evident how some factors were more influential on micro-level than others in context of Finland and University of Oulu. The micro-level factors and themes are discussed in this sub-chapter.

Push factors of the country of origin were not as evident in this research as in existing literature. As already discussed earlier, there are two reasons for this: 1) the interviewees were already students in University of Oulu and not prospective students, as was often the case in existing research and 2) the focus of this particular research was on the factors that drove the students’ decision towards Finland and University of Oulu.

There were specific factors that pulled the students specifically towards Finland, such as the reputation of Finland in a specific field. This was a driving factor especially for students studying education. Students who had not been in Finland before did not think about the differences in lifestyle before applying, but those students who had visited the country in the past thought the Finnish lifestyle, in terms of climate and human communication, had a positive effect on their decision.

Financial factors played a major part for all interviewees. The overall notion was that Finland is an expensive country, and that if there would be high tuition fees on top of the living expenses, many students would have considered studying elsewhere. Questions regarding work opportunities had varying responses. Some students were only focused on their studies, whereas a few interviewees had a clear idea that they would like to stay in Finland and find a job.

For some students, Finland was not an easily accessible or convenient destination, as getting a visa was a challenge for them, although not a surpassable one. This could also be seen as a pull factor of the destination country, as the obstacles for applying a visa were placed by the country of origin and not Finland. Only one student mentioned that they applied to Finland rather than Germany, as the paperwork for Germany would have been complicated to sort out. For students coming from EU countries the application process was straightforward.
Finnish universities have approximately 470 degree programs where the language of instruction is English (Study in Finland, 2016). English programs were clearly an attractive feature for all interviewees and they would not have considered studying in the program if it had been in Finnish. Having English as the language of instruction is a pull feature that can be attributed to both Finland and University of Oulu, as some students filtered their study destination searches by country and language of instruction. For one student, the decision was driven by the fact that the program did require previous academic experience in the field of study, which is usual requirement in master's level programs. Surprisingly enough, students did not clearly mention that they chose to study in University of Oulu due to the uniqueness of the program they were attending, which was stated as being an important pull factor for University of Oulu by Gordon Roberts.

Students studying wireless communication mentioned that reputation of Oulu, which derived from the legacy of Nokia, was a major factor that set University of Oulu apart from other Finnish universities. Most interviewees looked at the ranking position of University of Oulu, but the mid-table ranking position of the University was not a major factor that influenced the university choice process either positively or negatively.

For many students, University of Oulu was first introduced by personal recommendations, which ultimately led to them studying in the University. One student, who had been an exchange student in Oulu, mentioned how the positive exchange experience was very much an influential factor for choosing to study a degree in University of Oulu. In addition to personal recommendations, the students mentioned university and program websites being valuable sources of information. These three sources of information can be seen as the most important channels for University of Oulu when it comes to attracting prospective degree students.

7.2 Implications for University of Oulu and future research

It is understandably easier for universities to measure students' experiences through quantitative methods such as online surveys, as interviewing each student individually before, during and after studies requires a lot of resources. This research, however, proved how micro-level qualitative research is a good way to find out factors that are in play on an institution-specific level. Studying the strengths and areas in need of development have to be assessed on both country and institution-specific levels, as the flow structure of
incoming international degree students will be influenced by the tuition fees introduced in 2017. Finding a common vision for Finland and giving universities the responsibility to assess their own strengths and weaknesses could be a good structure for the near future. This would help Finland decide their overall vision for attracting international degree students, and at the same time it would enable universities to market their own areas of specialization.

Indeed, Finnish higher education institutions must think about their marketing strategies, as tuition free education has been one of the most important trump cards for attracting prospective international degree students. Even though this particular research showed that some students would be ready to pay quite high tuition fees to attend a degree program in the institution, University of Oulu should not trust that the number of international degree student applicants will stay the same after the tuition fees are introduced. It is quite safe to say that introducing the tuition fees for non-EU students will have an effect on the incoming degree student flows in terms of nationality of the students. In 2013, 40% of degree students studying in Finland were from Asia, 40% from Europe and 14% from Africa (The Centre for International Mobility, 2013). In a 2014 interview, Tuomo Suhonen, a researcher for VATT Institute for Economic Research, predicted how introducing tuition fees could lower the amount of degree student applicants from less developed countries. On the other hand, Suhonen mentions how relatively high tuition fees could signify a high quality of education for prospective students from wealthy countries and those students who could afford to fund an expensive degree (Hartio, 2014). As EU students do not have to pay tuition fees, it is interesting to see whether overall percentage of students coming from EU countries grows compared to the share of students coming from non-EU countries.

The experiences from Sweden and Denmark, where similar tuition structure changes were introduced recently, were discussed in the introduction of this research. In Denmark, the number of international degree students coming from non-EU/EEA countries dropped after the tuition fee was introduced, but at the same time the number of students coming from EU countries increased, molding the diversity of incoming international students (CIMO, 2014). Sweden managed to reverse the change in number of incoming non-EU/EEA students, as the number of incoming students started increasing in 2014 (ICEF Monitor, 2015). However, reviving the flow of incoming students takes time, let alone getting back to the same number of students that studied in the country before the
introduction of tuition fees. Vitalizing the flow of incoming degree students coming from non-EU/EEA countries does not occur without making changes to the country's marketing strategies and vision. It has also to be remembered, as it became evident in the interview with Gordon Roberts, that less-known institutions or university cities such as University of Oulu are already in a difficult position, as they have to compete with better known institutions and university cities such as Helsinki. It can be speculated that even if the flow of incoming degree students is revitalized on a county-specific level, the student flows will be centralized towards larger cities even more than currently is the case.

Only time will tell how the nationality structure of international degree students in the University of Oulu will change. It is, however, extremely important for University of Oulu to provide positive study experiences international degree students, as the quality of the experience affects the prospects of the student in terms of whether they are willing to study further or work as a researcher in the University. As reflected in the interviews, the study experiences also affect whether the student would recommend the program or the University for their acquaintances or friends, who can be seen as prospective degree student candidates in the future. In other words, it is important to build a network of positive experiences for all international students, as their recommendation can either make or break a prospective degree students' choice to study at the University of Oulu.

Many IMP's in University of Oulu have feedback discussions with international degree students towards the end of their studies (Roberts et al. 2012). Having these discussions is vital for assessing the students' experiences, but reporting the findings from the feedback discussions has to be uniform for all faculties and IMP's if the experiences are to be assessed equally. Uniform feedback assessment will help the University to see the strengths and the areas in need of development in context of all international degree students, not just within faculties or individual degree programs.

Some interviewees mentioned how they would not choose to study in their program if there would be tuition fees involved, justifying their statement based on their negative or lackluster experiences connected to both academic and non-academic issues. The importance of providing a positive experience on a non-academic level is also important. This can be seen in the interviews with students who thought the language and the cultural barrier in Oulu was so significant that if they would have known about it beforehand, they would have not been willing to apply for their program had there been tuition fees. It is
not possible to give a specific solution for breaking these barriers based on this study, but it is clear that University of Oulu has to help the students by making sure cooperation between Finnish and international students is not only cosmetic and to make sure they feel like they are genuinely a part of the community.

Based on this study, it can be argued that University of Oulu needs to provide a positive experience for current students and that the future alumni are important when it comes to attracting prospective degree students. The case is different, however, for students coming from developed countries or from less wealthy backgrounds, as they might not have sufficient funds for studying in the University's degree programs even if they would like to do so. For programs, such as Master's degree in Education and Globalization at the Faculty of Education, this can be seen as a major hit, as having students from various backgrounds is one of the most important cornerstones for the program. University of Oulu should find a balance between attracting students from wealthy backgrounds, while also making it possible for students from less privileged backgrounds to apply for the international programs, if the University wants retain the diversity of its student population. This can be done by introducing scholarships or grants for talented students who are otherwise unable to attend the programs.

It is challenging for Finland to stay as an attractive destination for international students coming from non-EU countries, and it has to be remembered that the universities in Finland also compete among themselves, due to the upcoming tuition fees and the general worldwide competition in international higher education. The IMP report and the interview with Mr. Roberts suggested that it is vital for University of Oulu to have unique program offerings to be able to compete with other Finnish universities. Even though this was not particularly evident in the findings of this research, it was quite clear that program offering is an important factor for international degree students, alongside having qualified staff and publications and a decent university ranking position. In addition to building a network of positive study experiences, University of Oulu has to make a decision to develop all these qualities to stand out in the crowd of Finnish higher education institutions. Whether the University decides to focus specifically on one of these qualities, such as hiring highly respected staff and researchers, is something that has to be decided according to the University vision and direction, which is ultimately dependent on the leadership of the University. The leaders and the decision-makers of University of Oulu are to be put in a test, as the vision and the direction they choose to
lead the University in the near future will also have a major impact on the future of international degree students in University of Oulu.
8 REFERENCES


Centre for International Mobility (CIMO). (2014). *Facts express. What do we know about the economic impact of international higher education students?* (4B ed.). Helsinki: Centre for International Mobility (CIMO).


Fard, K., & Wagner, P. Y. (2009). *Influencing malaysian students’ intention to study at a higher education institution*. (Unpublished Faculty of Business and Accountancy, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.


OECD (2013). *Education indicators in focus.* (05)


SISU Database (2016). Web portal focusing on statistics concerning University of Oulu. [https://sisu.oulu.fi/](https://sisu.oulu.fi/) (accessible within University of Oulu’s network)


Wagner, K., & Fard, P. Y. (2009). Factors influencing malaysian students’ intention to study at a higher educational institution. 1--12.

# 9 APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/affiliate</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Australian Education International (AEI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, Higher Education Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>China Scholarship Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Centre for International Mobility (CIMO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>CampusFrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Association of Indian Universities (AIU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Education in Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (ANUIES)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>New Zealand Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Fundación Universidad.es</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Swedish Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>Center for Higher Education Data and Statistics, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>British Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Institute of International Education (IIE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANIE</td>
<td>African Network for Internationalization of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIHE</td>
<td>Center for International Higher Education, Boston College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAU</td>
<td>International Association of Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TECO - NY</td>
<td>Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UIS</td>
<td>UNESCO Institute for Statistics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix 1:** Project Atlas partners (Institute of International Education, 2016b)
Appendix 2: The number of degrees completed by foreign nationals in University of Oulu, 2012-2016 (SISU database, 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Art</th>
<th>Business Administration</th>
<th>Economics</th>
<th>Engineering</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
<th>Natural Sciences</th>
<th>Pharmacy</th>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3. An overview of the push-pull factors influencing international degree students’ study destination choice.
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW

You have been asked to participate in a research conducted by Antti Ollarien from the Faculty of Education, University of Oulu. The research focuses on factors driving international students' study destination choice abroad. The results of this research will be used in the researcher’s Masters thesis.

Please read the following information and feel free to ask any questions before deciding whether to participate in the research.

- This interview is voluntary. You have the right to decline to answer any question. You are also free to stop the interview at any time or for any reason.

- The interview will take approximately 20-30 minutes.

- You will not be compensated for the interview, unless otherwise agreed with the researcher.

- The information you tell in this interview is confidential and will only be used for this research.

- Any personal information you provide during this interview will not be the focus of the research. You can tell the researcher at any time if you do not want some information to be used for the research.

- You will retain your anonymity and the researcher will make sure that the information you tell during this interview can not be linked to you personally.

- This interview will be audio recorded. The interview will not be recorded without your permission, and you have the right to ask the recording to be stopped. The data will be stored in a secure location. Only the research has access to the data.

- You have the right to contact the researcher after the interview has finished and ask part or all of the interview not to be used for the research.

[ ] I give permission for this interview to be audio recorded.

[ ] I give permission for the following information to be used in the final publication

[ ] My nationality[ ] My major subject[ ] Direct quotes from the interview

Name of subject: __________________________ Signature: __________________________ Date: ____________

Researcher: __________________________ Signature: __________________________ Date: ____________

You can contact the researcher by email: (email address)

Appendix 4: Consent form for participating in the research, read and signed by the interviewees.