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A comparative study analyzing the most distinctive characteristics of the Finnish and U.S. universities, and principles of accessibility present within these higher education systems

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A comparative study analyzing the most distinctive characteristics of the Finnish and U.S. universities, and principles of accessibility present within these higher education systems. In order to explore the aforementioned phenomena profoundly, seventeen Finnish, American, and/or other experts (professors, policymakers, international scholars) with significant long term experience of one (or both) of these countries' educational systems were interviewed. In addition to these seventeen interviews, key policy documents from both countries were examined, and the findings of the interviews and document analysis are presented. The following research questions were formulated and utilized in order to ascertain answers relating to the challenges, problems, similarities and differences within, and between the respective HE systems:

1. What are the most distinctive aspects of the Finnish Higher Education system according to policy documents and educational experts?
2. What are the most distinctive aspects of U.S. Higher Education according to policy documents and educational experts?
3. How does accessibility manifest itself in Finnish Higher Education and U.S. Higher Education from the perspectives of educational experts?
4. How do the principles of accessibility manifest themselves in Finnish Higher Education policy when compared to U.S. Higher Education policy according to policy documents?

The first two questions explore the distinctive characteristics of each system, while the latter two seek answers vis-à-vis the two HE systems concerning a specific phenomenon: accessibility. While these research questions permit discovery, they also directed the research in order to ensure that the specific type of data required by the researcher, i.e., data on the respective higher education systems as depicted by relevant documents and the educational experts was attained.

This research report begins with a research context, describing the respective HE systems, while the subsequent theoretical framework discusses the theoretical perspectives on the roles and tasks of higher education, in addition to its place in society with a focus on neoliberal ideals, and the diverse approaches adopted by HE institutions. The research methods and methodology adopted and utilized in this research comprise of a qualitative content analysis, heavily influenced by a hermeneutical approach.

The research findings indicate that the most distinctive characteristics identified concerning the Finnish HE system are: self-directed learning, free education, homogeneity, and emerging competition; while the most distinctive characteristics identified regarding the U.S. HE system are decentralization, large size, and diversity. Concerning accessibility, this research indicated that the fundamental differences between the two HE systems originate from their historical and societal differences, and the impact of these differences can easily be perceived with regards to accessibility. Finland seems to have achieved what many countries would like to achieve in terms of accessibility. On the other hand, despite noteworthy efforts undertaken within and by the U.S. HE system aimed at increasing accessibility, the U.S. is still facing problems with regards to accessibility.

In conclusion, the researcher believes that this master’s thesis paves the way for further research in the field, and that its findings are beneficial for those who wish to deepen their understanding of these two HE systems, in addition to issues relating to accessibility.

Asiasanat/Keywords accessibility, comparative research, content analysis, equity, Finnish higher education, hermeneutics, higher education, U.S. higher education
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### Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>American College Testing</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARWU</td>
<td>Academic Rankings of World University</td>
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<td>BEOG</td>
<td>Basic Education Opportunity Grants</td>
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<td>EEA</td>
<td>European Economic Area</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FFELP</td>
<td>Federal Family Education Loan Program</td>
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<td>FSEOG</td>
<td>Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant</td>
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<td>G.I.</td>
<td>Government Issue</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>HEA</td>
<td>Higher Education Act</td>
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<td>HEGIS</td>
<td>Higher Education General Information Survey</td>
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<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
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<td>HEOA</td>
<td>The Higher Education Opportunity Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPEDS</td>
<td>Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System</td>
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<td>NCAA</td>
<td>The National Collegiate Athletic Association</td>
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<td>NDEA</td>
<td>The National Defense Education Act</td>
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<td>NDSL</td>
<td>National Defense Student Loan Program</td>
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<td>PISA</td>
<td>Program for International Student Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROTC</td>
<td>Reserve Officers’ Training Corps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEOG</td>
<td>Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEACH</td>
<td>Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>THE</td>
<td>Times Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>VA</td>
<td>Department of Veterans Affairs</td>
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<td>WWII</td>
<td>World War II</td>
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1 Introduction

In this qualitative study, the unique characteristics of Finnish higher education (HE) system and its American counterpart, as well as the accessibility of each HE system are examined from the perspectives of education experts and policy documents from both countries.

The initial objective of this thesis was to discover the similarities and the differences between two very different HE systems, namely the Finnish and American systems. The process initially started when I was bewildered by the new and different study environment that was offered by Finland. HE in Finland was nothing like I used to experience in my home country, Turkey. This contrast between the two systems made me aware of the different concepts and approaches that exist within the HE systems and sparked an interest to focus on the HE systems as part of my studies. The preliminary research eventually led me to explore the HE in the United States, for several reasons: First, the U.S. had more higher education institutions (HEIs) than many other countries in the world. There are 7,234 HEIs in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Second, the U.S. HEIs were consistently dominating the top places in various well regarded University Rankings.

Inherently, this notion of “success” sparked my curiosity. However, not until I looked into the system profoundly had I witnessed the contemporary problems the system was facing. The U.S. HE was so massive that the numbers did not mean much. And the U.S. HE was so diverse that generalizations did not make sense. And above all, I witnessed that the system was struggling with various problems such as the low enrollment rates of low-income students and lack of encouraging their success (Eckel & King, 2007). As a result of studying in a state-supported free education system in Finland, such issues in the U.S. HE became more evident to me. Meantime, the problems of Finnish HE institutions were becoming clearer as a result of studying the U.S. HE institutions. For example, it was important to acknowledge that Finnish HEIs are performing poorly according to the rankings compared to the U.S. counterparts (Times Higher Education World Rankings, 2015).

Firstly, over the course of my research, I eventually realized that the two HE systems differed from each other in numerous ways, and comparing them as a whole would have been extremely challenging, if not impossible. Therefore, I narrowed down my research to find a focus point that allows me to make a healthy comparison between the respective HE systems.
At that time, in September 2015, the U.S. Department of Education introduced the College Scorecard, a website that operates as a tool for students that sorts schools based on different variables (e.g., colleges’ graduation rates and salary after attending) and allows users to have access to federal data for more than seven thousand U.S. HEIs (Zhou, 2015). One of the main purposes of College Scorecard is defined as “to help colleges and universities measure, benchmark, and improve across shared principles of access, affordability, and outcomes” ("For Public Feedback: A College Ratings Framework | U.S. Department of Education", 2015). Consequently, I drew the conclusion that the “accessibility, affordability, and outcomes” was a good starting point to compare the Finnish and the American HE systems.

Secondly, as I moved forward with these three phenomena, in particular with the latter two, I once again became conscious of the fundamental differences in two systems. For instance, affordability is one of the biggest issues in the U.S. HE whereas it is almost not an issue whatsoever in Finland since it is completely free to attend a HEI. It was evident that the main reason for this difference is that the two respective countries have two different approaches to the social and economic structure. Finland belongs the Nordic countries, which are the main exemplars of the social democratic approach and the U.S., even though regarded as a mixed economy, is recurrently considered as a capitalist system (Pontusson, 2011; Hacker & Pierson, 2016). Hence, the comparison of affordability in HE between the two countries would unlikely produce comparable results. Additionally, “outcomes” often correlated with different outputs in two countries. In connection with the College Scorecard, the term outcomes often refers to the graduation rates, former students’ earnings, graduates’ student debt, and borrowers’ repayment rates in the U.S. (Clark, 2014; The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2015). On the other hand, these aforementioned phenomena, barring graduation rates, often do not pass the threshold to be defined as a major problem in Finnish HE. Ergo, this study will mostly focus on the accessibility in HE in the two countries. Affordability and outcomes will be discussed to some extent, however, not as deeply or profoundly as the accessibility.

The last but not the least, as my research on the topic deepened, I realized that the implementation of accessibility in Finnish HE is profoundly affected by the Internationalization of Finnish HE. For instance, when the new Bologna degree structure was introduced, Finnish universities seized the opportunity to thoughtfully broaden the range of study options available within the HEIs “by permitting students to choose between completing their studies with a bachelor degree or continuing to the masters’ level” (Davies, Weko, Kim, &
Thulstrup, 2009, p. 17). Consequently, I discussed the impacts of these approaches in Finnish HE concerning accessibility in order to draw a more robust comparison.

The following research questions have been used to explore the similarities and differences in addition to the challenges and uniqueness in two economically and culturally different HE systems.

1. What are the most distinctive aspects of the Finnish Higher Education systems according to policy documents and educational experts?
2. What are the most distinctive aspects of U.S. Higher Education according to policy documents and educational experts?
3. How does accessibility manifest itself in Finnish Higher Education and U.S. Higher Education from the perspectives of educational experts?
4. How do the principles of accessibility manifest themselves in Finnish Higher Education policy when compared to U.S. Higher Education policy according to policy documents?

The more I became involved in my research, the more I came to a realization that this thesis would provide a captivating and challenging opportunity for me as a prospective researcher, and would contribute to scientific knowledge; because, although plentiful research had been conducted on the United States HE, Finnish HE, and accessibility separately, a few of them compared the U.S. HE with Finnish HE, and, none of them, as to my knowledge, have examined the phenomena from the perspective of accessibility.

I will begin my thesis by deliberating on the aims of the research, in which the Finnish, and U.S. HE systems are compared. I will explain the scope of this research, and elaborate on the specific research perspective that was chosen for this research. Later, I will discuss the research questions that guide the research.

In chapter 3, I will present the theoretical framework, where I will discuss the role and tasks of HE. I will then touch upon neoliberalism and the marketization of HE, and discuss how HE has been affected by these two forces.

In chapter 4, I will describe the research context and elaborate on the two HE systems, Finnish and the American, by giving a descriptive analysis of both, particularly from the perspective of accessibility.
Chapter 5 introduces the research methodology, while the research methods will also be explained in this chapter.

In chapter 6, I will elaborate on the data collection methods utilized for this research, where I will provide a detailed explanation concerning the interviews conducted, and the documents selected.

Chapter 7 articulates the data analysis component of the research. In this chapter, a detailed description of the analysis phases will be provided explaining how the analysis was conducted with regards to the distinctive characteristics of the HE systems and accessibility on the basis of the interviews, and later on, documents regarding the distinctive characteristics of the HE systems and accessibility.

In Chapter 8, the results of the research will be presented in two sub-chapters. Firstly, the Finnish part and then the U.S. part. A detailed analysis of the policy documents as well as educational experts' perspective on the Finnish HE will be provided, and subsequently the distinctive characteristics of the Finnish HE system will be elaborated upon. In the second part of this section, a detailed analysis of the policy documents as well as educational experts' perspective on the U.S. HE system will be provided, and the distinctive characteristics of the U.S. HE system will subsequently be elaborated upon. Moreover, accessibility in the two HE systems will be explained and illustrated. Firstly, accessibility in Finnish HE, and how this accessibility manifests itself in Finnish HE policy will be articulated, and then the same analysis will be completed with regards to the U.S. HE system. Finally, a comparison of the accessibility of the two systems will be provided.

In Chapter 9, issues related to the reliability and validity of the research will be discussed, and examples and explanations will be given in order to justify the approaches adopted throughout the research.

This research finishes with chapter 10, where the results of the research will be discussed.
2 Aims of the Research

This qualitative study aims to conduct a rigorous research through which the most significant features of Finnish and American HE systems are discovered, and light is shed on how the principle of accessibility is manifested in the two respective systems. To achieve this goal the aims of this comparative research can be divided into two separate categories: The first aim of the study is to focus on the distinctive characteristics of each system, while the second aim provides a comparison concerning the principles of accessibility regarding both systems. This analysis is based on educational experts’ perspectives as well as on an examination of key policy documents from the two countries.

To serve the research’s purposes, the unique features of each system are highlighted with the hope of providing an explanation concerning the functioning of the system they are attributed to. Since the unique features of each system provide valuable insights of how the systems work and what is considered important in those systems, this study aims to provide a clear description of the distinctive characteristics of both HE systems, in order to illustrate similarities and differences between the systems, while simultaneously focusing principally on accessibility.

2.1 The Research Questions

Fossey, Harvey, Mcdermott, and Davidson (2002) state that a robust research needs a meticulous and organized approach to collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data, in addition to the accurate reporting of findings (p. 37). Due to the sheer scale of the topic (Higher Education), it was essential to formulate interesting and accurate research questions. These questions also had to be developed in such a way as to bolster the study and guide the researcher along the way. As Agee (2009) pointed out, a question steers the researcher to explore “what is happening in a particular situation with a particular person or group” (p. 434). Thus, being the most crucial element in carrying out the research from its very conception, four research questions that are at the center of this study were formulated in order to investigate the research topic in-depth.

The notion of studying the particular HE systems from a narrowed focus enabled the researcher to formulate research questions which would explore the answers to the challenges
and problems, while simultaneously exploring the similarities and differences in the respective HE systems. After the initial drafts and concepts were explored, four research questions covering the two categories (i.e., unique features of each system and accessibility of the systems) were formulated.

While the research questions permit discovery, they also steer the research in order to attain the specific kind of data that the researcher needs to gather, i.e., data on the respective HE systems as described by the educational experts and relevant documents. Additionally, while the first two questions explore the distinctive characteristics of each system, the latter two seek answers vis-à-vis the two HE systems concerning a specific phenomenon, accessibility.

The urge to explore the distinctive characteristics of the respective systems (as opposed to drawing a comparison of similar aspects present in both systems) stems from the vast differences between the two systems. It would have been unfair to concentrate on finding, and subsequently comparing, similar aspects from the two systems due to the extreme dissimilarity of the Finnish and American HE systems. However, the fact that the research questions focus on discovering the most distinctive characteristics of the systems, within the systems themselves, aims to do justice to each of them, rather than comparing them.

Since the accessibility of the two HE systems was of paramount importance regarding the research, it was also envisioned that the discovery and illustration of the unique features of the systems would give background to the comparison of accessibility in these systems. In other words, if one looks at the systems’ unique features, he or she can see the motives behind the systems, along with understanding the driving forces. Therefore, the unique features of the systems provide a nexus for those who wish to assess the accessibility of the systems.

The focus of the research questions enabled the researcher to develop themes for the interviews in order to gather relevant information that would help to understand the interviewees’ perspectives on the topic. These answers led the researcher to interpret data that is deeply affected by social and economic issues in both HE systems. Therefore, hermeneutics, such terms as meaning, understanding, and interpretation became important.
3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical part of this thesis will discuss the definition of HE and its roles, aims, tasks, and functions in society. The theoretical framework will focus on the theme “The role of HE in different societies,” while, at the same time, looking to neoliberalism and its effects on HE in general. In this chapter, the role of HEIs and contemporary changes will be discussed, principally based on the comprehensive study of Altbach (2008), Kuhnen (1978), Brennan et al. (2004), and Baum and McPherson (2011).

3.1 Universities and Their Roles in the Society

Universities have regularly been viewed as key organizations in processes of social change and development. The most important role they have been designated is the production of exceedingly skilled labor and research output to meet perceived financial requirements (Brennan, King, & Lebeau, 2004). Traditionally, teaching and research have been the most predominant functions of universities. In teaching activity, universities equip students with the professional training for senior high-tier jobs and provide them with the essential education for the development of their personalities. By conducting research, universities are meant to expand the theoretical knowledge and its application to practical problems. However, “The traditional university restricted itself mainly to a close circle of professors and students from the upper strata of society and lived in relative isolation” (Kuhnen, 1978, p. 78). The professors had the privilege to do research, which was mostly determined by the professors’ personal interests and their contacts among each other, and this circle of research produced the elite members of a community (nation), and society had to adjust themselves to the elite (p. 79).

Over the last decades, HE has become a central governmental agenda, providing sources of new knowledge and skilled personnel, and HEIs are considered valuable national assets that address important policy priorities (Boulton, 2009, para. 4). Additionally, HEIs have become a huge source of revenue for countries as they attract international students, talents, and the best minds. However, in many societies, the most crucial role of HEIs is to work as an engine for social mobility. As education generally determines one’s health and well-being, HEIs are becoming more and more important in one’s life. Faust (2010) asserts that learning is perpetually critical to social orders and economies since the world we live in is progressively flowing capital, individuals, and the communication technologies. Beginning from the
1990s, or even prior, the prevailing discourse highlighted the universities’ places as superior players in a global system (a system that is progressively driven by knowledge, information, and ideas). All the more critically, knowledge is substituting other resources “as the main driver of economic growth, and education has increasingly become the foundation for individual prosperity and social mobility” (2010, para. 1).

Correspondingly, Altbach (2008, pp. 5-13) defines the role of HEIs, most notably universities, and their place in society, while presenting the challenges and problems faced in HE systems: First and foremost, the core roles of universities are teaching and research; however, the characteristics of teaching, such as teaching professional skills, general education or technical skills, may vary from one country to another. Likewise, as research can take many forms and have different purposes (e.g., the focus on discovery or interpretation of texts), the core of research varies from one place to another (such as applied research, or pure research). Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that, even though it has been over one thousand years since their establishment in Europe, the priority of HEIs is still on educating people while providing them with the necessary knowledge and skills needed for their professions, in addition to scientific discovery.

Secondly, Altbach (2008) claims that universities have been at the center of many societal changes, playing crucial roles in their countries by fostering development and national identity. He provides the following example in order to support this claim: Humboldt’s reformed University of Berlin and the imperial universities founded in Japan after Meiji Restoration (1868) have been intended to contribute to Germany’s and Japan’s national restorations. Equivalently, the public ‘land grant’ universities in the U.S. have been “designed to contribute in terms of teaching, research and service to the development of the USA following the end of the Civil War in 1865. In these cases, universities were integral contributors to national development” (p. 6). Similarly, Brennan, King, and Lebeau (2004) assert that:

Political roles clearly interact with the social roles of universities, not least in respect of the part played in elite reproduction. A pre-condition of social transformation may be the provision of educational opportunities for previously disadvantaged groups to achieve elite or middle class positions. (p. 35)

With regards to the academic roles of HEIs; from the very beginning, universities have built up a long-term association with the economy, as well as catering for the practical needs of society, by providing specialized training, and profession related education for a variety of
professions (e.g., doctors, lawyers, psychologists, engineers, and so on). While HEIs’ contributions to the economy are valuable, their contributions to “knowledge” are invaluable. As Altbach reminds us, “Even in the age of the internet, universities are repositories and organizers of knowledge. Academic libraries have traditionally been centers for preserving and organizing the cultural and intellectual heritage of a society” (ibid. p. 6). Thus, it is safe to assume that HEIs, (most notably universities), are one of the main players in the organizing of knowledge. Moreover, by allowing people access to knowledge, universities not only help with the preservation and dissemination of knowledge but also build the intellectual life of a society. HEIs in many countries, are the core institutions of creativity, as scholars, for example, not only teach and conduct research but also “involve themselves in the intellectual life of society as commentators, experts or analysts” (Altbach 2008, p. 6).

Furthermore, HEIs are seen as being the benchmark of the accumulation of scientific knowledge and expertise from all around the world. HEIs are the main sources of distribution for global scholarship and science, as they are the central bridge that canalsizes the knowledge of the international scientific community to the local communities. Thus, a HEI is not only a national player, but also part of a bigger picture concerning humanity in its entirety.

3.2 Higher Education: Public Good or Private Good?

One of the main debates revolving around HE is whether it is a public good (“one which adds value to society by educating its people, who will then be productive citizens”) or a private good (“one which mainly benefits individuals, who earn more money and enjoy other advantages as a result of their education”) (Bloom et al., 2006, p. 294). Shaw (2010) notes that economists do not simply consider something that is “good for public” as a public good. For them, a public good is something that “benefits many people, including those who do not pay for it” (p. 241).

Economic analysis of the role of government in allocating the resources lies in the center of “public good,” which is explained by Baum and McPherson (2011) with two essential characteristics: (1) Non-excludability: It is not possible to exclude non-payers from consuming the good, and (2) Non-rivalry in consumption: Additional people consuming the good do not diminish the benefit to others” (para. 3). For a long period of time, HE is considered as a public good because, through teaching and research, it serves both individuals and the society at the same. On the other hand, the global tendency among governments “to introduce
different forms of privatization into public education systems and to privatize sections of public education,” challenges the aforementioned idea since the privatization of HE is contradicting the main characteristics of public service education (Kaipeng & Juan, 2011, p. 581). As noted in Kocaqi (2015, pp. 432 - 433), many researchers concur that basic and secondary education is public good; however, scholarly perspectives on HE are different. Numerous researchers do not consider it as a public good but consider it as a private good. Politically, however, European Union considers HE as public good and obligation of state and United Nation (UN), basing it on criteria of legitimacy, yet researchers seem to be partitioned into two sections: One that considers the HE as a public good and the others consider it as a private good.

Baum and McPherson (2011, para. 6) claim that HE cannot be “pure public good” because it is possible to exclude people who do not pay. They (ibid.) further elaborate that what society calls HE a public good implies that there are positive externalities, meaning that it is not only the students who benefit from the HE since the society benefits when more people attend to university. Surely, this notion has its own limitations because there are countries that offer free education to their citizens, as in Finland, where it is not possible, or highly improbable, to exclude citizens who do not pay from HE. Thus, the understanding of “public good” may vary from one society to another. However, it could be argued that in almost every society, people with a university degree earn more than those without, which could be attributed to its concept as a private good.

With the developing commercialization of HE, the values of the marketplace have invaded the campus. One of the fundamental parts is the change in the society’s attitude toward HE. Altbach (2001, pp. 2-5) notes that the public sees the HE as a "private good," which is benefiting the individuals who study or do research, rather than a public good. In this view, it appears to be advocated that the buyers ought to pay for this service as they would for any other service. The arrangement of knowledge turns out to be simply one more commercial transaction. The state, which is the main provider of public funds, is progressively unwilling or unable to give the resources required for an extending HE sector. HEIs are expected to produce a greater amount of their funding (ibid, p. 3).

Correspondingly, Morgan, as cited in Kocaqi (2015, p. 433), states that:

Under the influence of neo-liberalism, educational institutions have been undergoing re-organization, with the private sector assuming an increasingly important role. This trend has also
been driven by pressures on public finances and an accompanying economic austerity. This has been accentuated by the 2008 global financial crisis, through the rising costs of public goods to the state, while the tendency towards lower tax regimes has been a long-term trend.

Shaw (2010, p. 247) asserts that the benefits of HE for those who can afford it are large enough that private good aspect of HE overruns the public good aspect since the financial rewards after graduation are evident. Furthermore, Altbach (2008, p. 10) articulates that if HE is a private good, then students who benefit from it should bear the costs. However, if HE is a public good, then society shall share the responsibility and bear the costs collectively. This is, undoubtedly, an argument that has its roots in philosophy, economy, ideology, and politics:

The private sector in higher education is, almost by definition, a private good, that is, students are charged for a specific higher education program that they hope will contribute to their career and advancement. With few exceptions, private institutions have neither the commitment nor the ability to participate in research or service roles. They can seldom build the facilities needed for advanced research, they rarely offer advanced degrees in the sciences or other fields that require expensive facilities, and they are largely uninterested in the cultural and social roles of higher education. (Altbach, 2008, p. 11.)

Therefore, on one side we have the U.S. HE system that, more or less, represents the “private good,” while on the other side, we have the Finnish HE system that, more or less, represents the “public good.” On the other hand, Baum and McPherson (2011, para. 9) conclude that the benefits of HE are not all public and not all private (hence, HE is neither public nor private good). They (ibid.) suggest that the debate should be on how much of the cost of HE should be borne by students and how much the society should subsidy the cost of HE rather than whether HE is public good or private good.

### 3.3 Neoliberal Influences on Higher Education

By their very nature, since the 12th century, universities have played a crucial and very composite role in societies. However, their role and societal expectations of them have been changing, as is evident by the global expansion in the number of private universities.

Many new tendencies are appearing and they are often clustered under the heading of neoliberalism. Fish (2009, para. 3) describes neoliberalism as “a pejorative way of referring to
a set of economic/political policies based on a strong faith in the beneficent effects of free markets.” When the slow, but steady withdrawal of the state from funding of the public universities occurs, the only solution for public universities to “survive” is to generate their own income from other sources, such as tuition fees, consulting, commercial enterprise, and research (Altbach, 2008, p. 11). Thus, as Fish (2009) argues, over the course of decades, “privatization has meant that the broad traditional purposes of the university – most of which do not readily produce income – have to some extent been de-emphasized while potentially income-generating activities have become more central” (p. 11).

Privatization, in most cases, resulted in the marketization of HE, hence the functions of HEIs are closely tied to market forces. Knowledge which generates little income has become less valuable, while some disciplines that are viewed as generating little revenue have even been abandoned. When revenues are scarce, competition has increased among HEIs “to lure students, attract profitable research projects and generate prestige” (Altbach, 2008, p. 11). More prestige means more income. Thus, as Sadlak, Cai, and Ali (2009, p. 101) argue, the growing belief among societies is that university ranking tables actually measure the quality of HEIs leading the HEIs to pay more attention to the rankings. Bearing in mind that the new ties are formed and that the financiers have a say, all these aforementioned challenges have created market driven HEIs which can be financially independent (from the government). According to Altbach (2008),

Marketization trends are often in conflict with higher education’s goal of providing equity and the chance to obtain skills and better employment to underserved populations. Access and equity require that, through scholarships or other programs, higher education be made affordable for segments of the population that have traditionally been unable to afford expensive higher education. Increasingly complex goals require larger and more sophisticated academic institutions. (p. 11)

In conclusion, HEIs all around the world have been a major player from both national and global perspectives. In addition to teaching and research missions, HEIs have catered for and provided for the practical needs of society. Their strong ties to the national economy, their roles in social mobility, their crucial position in the preservation of, and dissemination of knowledge, and their role at the center of intellectuality has made HEIs one of the most important components of a nation. However, the increasing impacts of marketization have forced HEIs to adopt new ways to “survive,” forcing them to prioritize income generating goods, services, and even research. Evidently, this has affected both arguments (HE as a
public good and HE as a private good), and resulted in a significant decline in the public
good argument, as Altbach (2008) points out that “in recent years, private-good advocates
have prevailed to a significant degree” (p. 10).
4 Research Context

This chapter focuses on providing an overview of the HE systems in Finland and the U.S., with respect to the research questions and the aims of this study. It is highly improbable that these two systems of HE could be explained in a single chapter. However, as the focus of this study mainly concerns the unique features of HE systems and the accessibility of HE in the two countries, issues related to HE systems in this chapter will be focused on special features, accessibility, and related phenomena.

4.1 Finnish Higher Education

Participation rates in tertiary education in Finland are amongst the highest of all OECD member countries (OECD, 2009, p. 31). Finland has universities which are evenly spread throughout the country, enabling people, even in remote areas of the country, to have access to a virtually indistinguishable standard of HE quality. As the OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education Finland (2009, p. 33) observe, this homogeneity appears to be one of the most important reasons for accessibility levels regarding HE in Finland. The wide geographical distribution of university education and the strong expansion of the polytechnic sector have markedly increased the accessibility of tertiary education.

At the time the OECD published its report on HE, which highlighted Finland’s success concerning participation in HE in 2009, there were 21 Universities (20 under the auspice of the Ministry of Education) and 27 polytechnics (25 under the auspice of the Ministry of Education) in Finland serving a population of 5.5 million people (Aarrevaara & Dobson, 2016, p. 59). As of 2016, there are a total of 14 universities and 24 polytechnics in Finland ("OKM - Universities and University Networks", 2016; "UAS education", 2016). Among these 14 universities, Aalto University and Tampere University of Technology are “foundation universities,” referring to their status as independent legal foundations which are subject to private, instead of public law, and the remaining 12 universities are public corporations, and are subject to public law.

It could be argued that having only 14 universities and 27 polytechnics seems to be a much smaller number. However, as Mäntymaa (2016) points out, in Finland’s case numbers can be deceptive, as from the time the Universities Act 558/2009 became effective in 2009, there
has been a systematic endeavor undertaken in Finland to reduce the numbers of HEIs, as policymakers believe that there are too many HEIs relative to the Finnish population.

4.1.1 The Structure of Higher Education in Finland

The Finnish HE system is regarded as being a dual structured system since it consists of both universities and polytechnics. As can be seen from figure 1 below, Universities grant Bachelor’s, Master’s, postgraduate Licentiate and Doctorate degrees, while polytechnics offer polytechnic Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees (it is important to note that most of the programs in Finnish universities require graduating with a Master’s degree, and the selection process for the Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees are mostly not separated.) However, for those who would like to pursue a master’s degree in another university and/or in another department, or for the international applicants, there is an application process for master’s programs. Candidates will be admitted if they meet the requirements for the master’s programs of their choice.

As Hopkins (2010) notes, admission to Finnish HEIs, especially to universities, is highly competitive. The Official Statistics of Finland 2014 revealed that there were 1.27 million students in the Finnish education system in that same year, with nearly 300 thousand of them enrolled in HEIs. Of those 300 thousand, nearly half (138,700) of the students were enrolled in Polytechnics. During the same year, around 32 thousand students took the matriculation exam with the aim of enrolling in a program at universities or polytechnics, with statistics showing that 87% of those 32 thousand applied to further studies right after their graduation, “but only every third continued their studies in the following autumn” ("Statistics Finland - Students and qualifications of educational institutions 2014," 2015).

Hopkins (2010) emphasizes the main difference concerning admission to U.S. and Finnish HEIs, as being that in Finland, students apply directly to specialized programs, whereas in the U.S. they apply to major subjects at the end of their sophomore year. Thus, the Finnish matriculation examination, the purpose of which is to ascertain whether students have acquired sufficient knowledge and skill sets as required by the high school curriculum (Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta, 2016), and HEI entrance exams play a vital role in deciding pre-admission, whether the candidate is a good fit for the major/field that he or she would like to study.
Admission to a Finnish HEI is not easy, however, university education seems to pay for itself as “employment and wage data reveal that Finnish tertiary graduates have opportunities to make productive use of their capacities, and are well rewarded for their schooling” (Davies et al., 2009, p. 18).
4.1.2 Relevant Legislation

It could be stated that in relation to Finnish education, the notions of “equity” and “accessibility” most often go hand in hand. Efforts to provide equal rights to education have been taken since the very commencement of educational reforms in Finland. Initially, utmost importance was placed on providing access to basic education (which it could be argued is part of achieving equality and excellence in education in Finland), and then access to HE followed with the HE reforms, which will be covered in more detail in the following chapters.

In relation to the concept of accessibility in basic education, Antikainen (2010) points out that a Nordic group of researchers stressed “the significance of the principle of equity and the status of the comprehensive school system” (p. 130). Lie, Linnakyla, and Roe (2003) underline that Nordic education policy focuses on providing equal access to education, and abolishing the barriers to learning for all students, especially those from an underprivileged background. Accordingly, access to HE is derived from the same basic principles. As the Finnish National Board of Education states on its website, tuition-free education, the wide institutional network, financial aid and flexible pathways to HE secure equal access to HE in Finland.

In order to maintain the incentives of HE, the structure of Finnish HE is constantly evolving. In Finland, Parliament authorizes legislation concerning education, and determines the general course of education and research policy, with the guidelines relating to HE in Finland being determined by the “Universities Act” law. The Universities Act, which is passed by parliament, is a binding law that universities are governed by. Correspondingly, there is a Polytechnics Act, which polytechnics are governed by, while furthermore, a separate decree is in force for each field of study (European Commission, 2010, p. 3). Up until 2009, the Universities Act 645/1997, commonly referred as Universities Act 1997, and then the Universities Act, 715/2004 served as the laws that define the role of the universities in Finland.

In order to illustrate the changes that have occurred in relation to Finnish HE, pre-millennium and in the current era, a comparison of the 1997 and the 2009 Acts is provided in the following chapters.

*Universities Act of 1997*

A total of twenty universities were referred to in the 1997 Act, with the mission of universities stated as being “to promote free research and scientific and artistic education, to provide
higher education based on research, and to educate students to serve their country and humanity. In carrying out their mission, the universities shall interact with the surrounding society and promote the societal impact of research findings and artistic activities” (Universities Act, 1997). In order to provide a greater understanding concerning the scope and content of the 1997 act, a summary of the chapters and the subchapters of the act are provided as Table 1, in Appendix IV.

**Universities act of 2009**

In 2009, a new law replaced the Universities Act of 1997, when Finnish parliament passed the Universities Bill on the 16th of June. The Universities Act 558/2009, referred to a total of sixteen universities, as opposed to the twenty referred to in the previous legislation. The difference in the number of universities was related to changes enacted regarding the network of universities and institutions for higher education in the Universities Act of 2009. Under this Act, with the aim of increasing efficiency and performance, the universities of Joensuu and Kuopio were merged to become the University of Eastern Finland, and the University of Technology Helsinki, Helsinki School of Economics, and University of Art and Design merged and began operating as Aalto University. (A summary of the chapters and the subchapters of the act are provided as Table 2, in Appendix IV.)

The main reasoning behind this university reform, as related by the European Commission (2010), was to provide Finnish universities with the same opportunities to compete with the best international universities. In order to achieve this aim, universities were provided with economic, and administrative aids in order to strengthen research and education quality, in addition increasing their impact in participating in international cooperation.

The main alterations between the two Acts relate to (but are not limited to): the number of universities, the autonomy of universities, the role of the universities in the internationalization of HE, the legal status of universities, and the roles of research and teaching in the universities. The 2009 act places utmost importance on the autonomy of Finnish HEIs, while also expanding on sources of funding for universities, in addition to underpinning cooperation with international HEIs.

The Universities Act 2009 provided an increase in the autonomy of universities. With this reformed act, universities received independent legal status as public corporations, or as
foundations under private law (2009, p. 2), while Universities also became extremely autonomous concerning the organization of their instruction and academic year ("The Finnish National Board of Education - Higher Education", 2016). For example, in the performance negotiations between the HEIs and the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, it was determined that student intake and enrollment for the programs, as well as curricula and instruction, would be decided by the HEIs (Universities Act, 2009, p. 3). The Ministry of Education and Culture states that the ministry “prepares university matters within the government remit and ensures appropriate administration and steering of university administration” ("Ministry of Education and Culture - Administration and Finance," 2009). However, autonomy is given to HE institutions providing that the HEIs operate within the national studies framework. Since the 1990s, the accentuation of governance reform in Finnish HE has been on building up another structure of the government and university relationship based on its national framework, as it is evident in the Act of 2009. In the new arrangement, the universities are expected to be more proactive by exercising maximal institutional self-governance (autonomy). However, the government is still able to oversee and direct the HEIs via legislation and policymaking. Although the Finnish Ministry of Education still remains imperative, its control over universities has changed from the methods of direct authoritative intervention to legislations, funding negotiations, and assessment (Höltä & Cai, 2012, p. 15).

As the differences between the Act of 1997 and the Act of 2009 illustrate, the Finnish HE system is undergoing continuous structural development in order to meet the need of society, and the State. As the “Strategy for the Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009–2015” (2009) points out, the internalization and restructuring of Finnish HE is one of the most important agendas in Finnish HE, while it could be argued that the main motivations behind these developments are in order to boost international competitiveness and to improve the quality of research and teaching in Finnish HEIs.

4.2 United States Higher Education

The HE system in the U.S. is an extremely diverse system consisting of multiple layers (Cahalan, 2013, p. 3). The system is also highly decentralized, allowing HEIs to have a great deal of independence, as unlike in many countries the federal government in the U.S. has a finite function in administering education, and the majority of roles related to the admin-
istation of education belong to governments of individual States, local and institutional authorities, and non-governmental organizations (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This decentralization and the vastness of the system are some of the main reasons behind the diversity of the U.S. HE system.

The structural foundations of U.S. HE institutions were borrowed from British undergraduate college and German research university (Eckel & King, 2007, p. 1035). However, the very essence of its character is shaped to a great extent by three dominant philosophical beliefs. Eckel and King (2007) define these dominant notions as: (1) the Jeffersonian ideals of limited government and freedom of expression, (2) capitalism and the belief in the rationality of markets, and (3) widespread commitment to equal opportunity and social mobility (p. 1035).

Furthermore, as the report, Widening Participation in Higher Education in the United States of America (2013), reminds us, in addition to the presence of State and local differences, historical conditions of oppression, cultural and economic segregation have also played a major role, and have had a profound influence on U.S. HE (p. 14). Consequently, the differences between individual states, in terms of demographics, socioeconomic and sociocultural structures as well as the vastness of the country, seem to have played a vital role in shaping the U.S. HE system, while participation rates in HE also changed dramatically once the federal government (a uniting force) decided to take action for increasing the participation rates following World War II (WWII).

Today, there are approximately 7,200 accredited HEIs in the U.S. which have an agreement with the federal government allowing their students to be eligible for Federal aid (Cahalan, 2013, p. 3). Of this 7,200 institutions, nearly 2,700 are colleges, and non-degree and technical institutions, with the remaining 4,500 being degree-granting HEIs (U.S. Department of Education, 2008; Cahalan, 2013, p.3). Approximately 1,600 HEIs grant associate degrees, and 2,400 grant bachelor’s (or higher) degrees. Doctoral degrees, however, are only granted by approximately 400 institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). However, it should be noted that it is extremely difficult to categorize HEIs in the U.S., (even those of the same “type”), as the system is highly stratified, and institutions vary greatly. For example, there are vast differences among the 400 institutions that grant research doctorate degrees: 108 of
them are referred to as “major research universities” and thus differ from the remainder (Cahalan, 2013, p. 14). Additionally, one can also argue that those 108 HEIs vary within themselves, which is, once more, an indicator pointing towards the diversity of HEIs in the U.S.

Although there is a vast stratification among HEIs, it is clear that the majority of students are enrolled in public universities and colleges. These public HEIs play a vital role in the U.S. HE system for several reasons. First and foremost, the majority of tertiary enrollments (75%) are in public institutions, such as two-year community colleges, four-year baccalaureate and master’s-conferring state schools, and doctoral degree–granting research universities (American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2015, p. 2). The remainder are shared between private non-profit institutions (15%), and private for-profit institutions (10%) (Cahalan, 2013, p. 14). Secondly, public research universities are significant employers: in 2012, 1.1 million faculty and staff were employed by research universities across the country, which places them among the top five largest employers in 24 states (American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2015, p. 3). Thirdly, public research universities play a vital role in advancing the cultural vitality of states, helping to produce strong communities that enrich their regions (ibid., p. 3).

4.2.1 The structure of Higher Education in United States

Before attending a HEI in the U.S., one usually attends (homeschooled kids being an exception) primary and secondary school lasting a total of twelve years, from the 1st grade until the 12th grade. Early childhood education is not as common in the U.S. as in other OECD countries, particularly Europe, with statistics indicating that on average 55% of pupils attend an early childhood institution in the U.S., whereas the average attendance in Europe is 84% (OECD, 2012, p. 3).

After primary (elementary) school, students attend secondary school. Secondary school consists of two programs, named respectively, middle school (or junior high school), and high school. Upon completion of 12th grade, and upon obtaining a high school diploma (or a certificate), students can then attend a HEI. The researcher’s illustration below (figure 2) represents the structure of the U.S. HE system.
As can be seen from figure 2 above, the first level at the U.S. HE level is the undergraduate level, where one can either study at a four-year university (college) which grants a bachelor’s degree diploma upon graduation, or at a two-year community college which grants certificate, diploma or associate degrees upon graduation. There are transfer options available for community college graduates, or those who wish to continue their studies at a university. As mentioned earlier, Hopkins (2010) states that the choosing of their academic disciplines (majors) in sophomore year by those pursuing a bachelor’s degree in the US, emphasizes one of the main differences concerning admission to U.S. and Finnish HEIs, as in the U.S, students apply to major subjects at the end of their sophomore year, whereas in Finland students apply directly to specialized programs.
After graduation in the US, students can continue their studies in graduate schools, which grant advanced academic degrees such as master’s and Ph.D.’s. Unlike many countries in Europe, where a master’s degree is a prerequisite for admission to doctoral studies, students in the U.S. can pursue a doctoral degree with only a bachelor’s degree. However, the necessity of a master’s degree varies between programs, and thus it is difficult to make a generalization.

In 2014, 20,663,464 students were enrolled in institutions participating in Title IV programs (programs where students are entitled to federal student grants and loans), with almost 15 million of these students enrolled in public institutions, with the rest enrolled in private institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Expectedly, there is no single criteria used for admissions in the U.S. HE system, as admissions vary from school to school, however, one can identify several common criteria, such as GPA, test scores [American College Testing (ACT) and SAT], extracurricular activities, and general admission essays, that are used.

What sets U.S. universities apart from their counterparts, particularly those in Europe in terms of undergraduate admissions, is the presence of athletic scholarships. That is, a specific scholarship given to individuals to attend colleges based on their ability to play a sport. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) alone had almost half a million student-athletes who participated in intercollegiate athletics in 2011-12 (Brown, 2016). However, it is important to note that there is simply not enough data available concerning the academic success of these student-athletes, as the NCAA does not share its raw data, while there is no tracking of such records maintained by The U.S. Department of Education (Ganim, 2014).

4.2.2 Relevant Legislation

As previously mentioned, Eckel and King (2007, p. 1037) state that one of the dominant philosophical foundations of U.S. HE are the Jeffersonian ideals, which are “limited government and freedom of expression, states, religious communities, and individuals established and maintain a range of higher education institutions and continue to protect these institutions from the levels of government control” (p. 1037). The government’s effect on HE is limited, and HEIs are mostly controlled by local governments. Thus, states are responsible for the governance of public HEIs, not the federal government (p. 1037), however, due to the differences among the 50 states, the states’ control on HE varies. The authors (ibid.) note that some HEIs enjoy a vast amount of autonomy, such as the University of California and
the University of Michigan, whereas others are strictly governed by local governments. The
differences are vast and vary across states; however, this is not surprising for those who
study, or are knowledgeable about the U.S. HE system.

One can argue that the HE system in the U.S. has never been affected more than it had been
affected during the post-war era. During the mid-1940s and early 1950s the federal govern-
ment paid great attention to HE and its role in society. Firstly, the federal government passed
the “Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944” known as the G.I. Bill, which is according to
Stanley (2003) the biggest direct scholarship program aimed at HE in U.S. history. The bill
specifically aimed to provide a wide range of benefits for veterans returning from WWII.
The federal government pledged to cover the college education expenses of the returning
veterans, and the veterans (colloquially referred to as G.I.s) took this opportunity, and en-
rollment rates in U.S. HE increased tremendously (Hunt & Tierney 2006). It is important to
note that the G.I. Bill was not the first of its kind in the U.S. The first act of this kind was
the 1919 Wisconsin Bonus Act, a state legislation that became effective after WW1 in the
State of Wisconsin. This legislation provided veterans with up to $30 per month to support
the cost of further education, and was the first example of a government policy linking mil-
itary service to an educational award (Cervantes et al., 2005, pp. 7-8).

Secondly, by direct order of the head of the federal government, President Harry S. Truman,
a commission (President’s Commission on Higher Education) was assembled to evaluate
HE in the U.S. This commission published a report, Higher Education for American Democ-

racy, which was colloquially known as the “Truman Report.” This report stressed the role of
American HE, its accessibility and equality, as well as its future and many other vital issues
regarding the HE system (President's Commission on Higher Education, 1947). Hutcheson
(2007, p. 109) notes that the Commission's work underlined the change that was needed in
the U.S. HE system with respect to admissions and teaching. It was the Commission’s sugg-
estion that the federal government’s role must be highlighted regarding HE and that the
government should provide comprehensive financial assistance in order to improve accessi-
bility (Gilbert & Heller, 2010, p. 2). The authors (ibid.) argue that improving the conditions
of accessibility were also related to the commission’s agenda of providing equal opportuni-
ties for all students to access public education, regardless of their “race, creed, sex, or na-
tional origin” (p. 2). Even though not all the recommendations of this report were imple-
mented, it is obvious that the report has had a significant effect on U.S. HE.
After nearly three generations, U.S. HE is today more accessible by those who seek to attain HE, when compared to the 1950s. For example, enrollment rates in U.S. HE were 1.5 million in 1940 and 2.7 million in 1950 (Hunt & Tierney, 2006, p. 1), compared with 20.4 million in 2016 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). In 2012, the U.S. had the 5th largest educational attainment statistics in the world (after Canada, Israel, Japan, and the Russian Federation) with 43% of 25-64 year-olds in the country having attained a tertiary level education degree (OECD, 2014). However, the tertiary education attainment rate in the U.S. is increasing slower than in many other countries. For instance, while the attainment rate in the country increased by only 7% since 2000, the average increase in OECD countries was 11%. To put this in perspective, in the year 2000, the U.S. had the second highest adult attainment rates in the world, after Canada (OECD, 2014).

The G.I. Bill and the implementation of the recommendations of the Truman Report, are early examples of the federal government’s impact on the post-war U.S. HE system, however, they were not the only ones. The Higher Education Act of 1965, and the subsequent Educational Opportunity Grant program (Pell Grants) facilitated the evaluation of the system, which increased accessibility rates immensely.

*Higher Education Act of 1965*

Even though the U.S. HE system is decentralized, and the role of the Federal Government is limited (Eckel and King, 2007, p. 1037), Cervantes et al. (2005, pp. 1-5) argue that the federal government has been a major influence in HE policy for a very long time. They (ibid.) support their argument with the examples of “Seminary Land Grants,” “the land grants of the Morrill Act of 1862,” “the founding of a federal Bureau of Education,” and a “second Morrill Act in 1890” (p. 5). The most recent, and perhaps the most related act with respect to accessibility is the Higher Education Act, a federal law governing the administration of key components of the HE system, which was first signed in 1965 (Baum, Kurose, & McPherson, 2013, p. 19).

The initial purpose of the Higher Education Act (HEA) was to solidify and expand the involvement of the government in HE policy (Zimmer, 2014). The HEA contained provisions concerning the following key aspects: scholarships, financial aids, library enhancements, and work study ("Higher Education Act · The Legislation", 2016). However, the HEA was not a “one-time” legislation, as Congress has amended the Act (known as ‘reauthorizations’)
several times since its introduction. The results of these reauthorizations have varied; sometimes resulting in small changes, whereas at other times a significant restructuring of programs was in question: for example, when creating the Basic Education Opportunity Grant (Pell Grant) in 1972 (Cervantes et al., 2005, p. 2).

The HEA of 1965 consists of eight chapters (Title 1 to Title VIII). Table 3 in Appendix IV presents the chapters and subchapters of the HEA of 1965, in order to provide an overview of the Act.

Title IV, student assistance (Title regarding the grants and loans), is perhaps the most significant chapter of the HEA, as according to Cervantes et al. (2005, p. 2), the essentials of the student aid programs began under Title IV, and helped 46% of undergraduate students to pay for HE in 2003-2004. The HEA of 1965 established and/or continued the following grant programs: Educational Opportunity Grant [later renamed as the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant program (SEOG)], TRIO (consisting of three programs: Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services), Guaranteed Student Loan program [the antecedent to the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP)], the federal work-study program, the National Defense Student Loan Program (NDSL) (later referred to as the Perkins program) (Cervantes et al., 2005, pp. 22-27).

Among these programs, one major grant program that is still in effect today is the Educational Opportunity Grant, which later became known as the “Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant” program, or FSEOG, which is also sometimes referred to as the SEOG. The U.S. Ministry of Education (2016) notes that the program provides “need-based grants to low income undergraduate students” to support their tertiary education. Moreover, according to the Ministry:

Students can receive these grants at any one of approximately 3,800 participating postsecondary institutions. When making FSEOG awards, the institution must give priority to those students with “exceptional need” (those with the lowest Expected Family Contributions, or EFCs, at the institution) and those who are also Federal Pell Grant recipients. ("Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG) Program", 2016.)

In addition to FSEOG, the Pell Grants, created in 1972, which are now the largest grant program in the country, is also worth mentioning. The Pell Program administers (need-based) grants for low-income students in tertiary education, in order to increase accessibility
to tertiary education. The Pell Grants are not loans; hence there is no requirement that they be repaid, with the amount of the grant awarded to a student dependent on a student’s “financial need, costs to attend school, status as a full-time or part-time student, and plans to attend school for a full academic year or less” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

In conclusion, HE in the U.S. has been a major force behind the country’s economic and technological development. Ever since the foundations of the US, HE has been deeply valued. The U.S.HE system is extremely large, and diverse and the involvement of the federal government is limited. However, efforts to increase the accessibility of the U.S HE system have been made by the federal government, e.g., Land Grants in the 19th Century, and the G.I. Bill and HEA of 1965 in the 20th Century. Although there is a proportional decline in HE attainment in the country, attainment rates are increasing, however, not as rapidly as desired.
5 Research Methodology and Methods

The research methodology utilized for this study will be introduced in this chapter. Firstly, the aims of the research will be discussed, and definitions concerning different types of research will be presented. Subsequently, the reason behind choosing a certain methodology, and the methodology that is selected for this study will be explained. Finally, the methods and research techniques, which have been applied to this research in order to answer the following research questions, will be illustrated in detail.

1. What are the most distinctive aspects of the Finnish Higher Education systems according to policy documents and educational experts?
2. What are the most distinctive aspects of U.S. Higher Education according to policy documents and educational experts?
3. How does accessibility manifest itself in Finnish Higher Education and U.S. Higher Education from the perspectives of educational experts?
4. How do the principles of accessibility manifest themselves in Finnish Higher Education policy when compared to U.S. Higher Education policy according to policy documents?

5.1 Main Assumptions

Kothari (2004, p. 1) briefly describes research as the search for knowledge, and states that the main objective of research is to discover answers to the (research) questions through the application of scientific procedures. Similarly, Creswell (2012, p. 3) indicates that research is a process of closely related activities to gather and analyze information in order to increase our knowledge of a subject, or issue. Creswell also states that research comprises of three steps:

1. Posing a question
2. Collecting data to answer the question
3. Presenting an answer to the question (2012, p. 3)

By applying these steps, a researcher is expected to produce results that provide answers to the research questions. Creswell (2012) states that these results are “adding to our knowledge,” insofar as when people compile results they acquire a deeper understanding of the problems being researched. Creswell depicts this as: “In this way, researchers are much
like bricklayers who build a wall brick by brick, continually adding to the wall, and in the process, creating a stronger structure” (2012, p. 4). Thus, it could be argued, that one fundamental purpose of research is to add to the collaborative knowledge of humankind.

Kumar (2008) identifies four broad purposes of research:

1. To gain familiarity with a phenomenon or to achieve new insights into it.
2. To portray accurately the characteristics of a particular individual situation or a group.
3. To determine the frequency with which something occurs or with which it is associated with something else.
4. To test a hypothesis of a casual [sic] relationship between variables. (p. 3)

The purposes of research can be reached by utilizing a number of different sets of methods, and it is up to researcher to decide on which application of these various methods would best serve his or her purposes. Among the various types of research that could be applied to this study [viz., descriptive, analytical, applied, fundamental, quantitative, qualitative, conceptual, empirical, experimental, non-experimental (Kumar, 2008, pp. 6-10)], qualitative research was deemed to fit both the researcher’s perspective and provide answers to his chosen research questions. However, before elaborating on the method that has been utilized in this study, the research paradigm shall be explained.

Kuhn (1962) describes a research paradigm as “the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed” (p. 45). That is, a paradigm represents a worldview that defines the nature of the "world," and the researcher’s place in it, and defines the range of possible relationships to that world, and its parts for the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 7). Since, it is a framework that is led by a set of basic beliefs relating to the world, and the way in which it should be understood, Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 108) argue that researchers have research paradigms, and that these paradigms are based on their ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions. The next sub-chapter will try to shed light on definitions of ontology and epistemology as well as the relationship between them, and the methodological assumptions.
5.2 Ontology and Epistemology

Defined as “the study of being” by Crotty (2003, p. 10), ontology is concerned with the “nature of existence,” “what kind of world we are investigating?” and “structure of reality as such.” According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), ontological assumptions are assumptions that are responding to the question(s) “what is the nature of reality?” and “what is there that can be known about it?” while, Hudson and Ozanne (1988) define ontology as the “nature of reality” (p. 509). In other words, as Scotland (2012) points out, ontological assumptions are concerned with ‘what is’ (p. 9).

Epistemology, however, can be briefly defined as the nature and forms of knowledge (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 7), and epistemological assumptions concern responding to the question of how knowledge can be created, acquired, and communicated (Scotland, 2012, p. 9). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994) epistemological questions are concerned with the nature of the relationship between the researcher (i.e., “knower”), and what can be known (p. 108). Considering that HE is a system of decisions, and practices built by people within a certain context, and influenced by certain beliefs concerning its purposes, aims, and values, it (HE) can have similar features as well as different ones, based on the assumptions surrounding why and how people learn and should be educated, and what kind of institutions should be constructed for them.

Given epistemological questions concern the nature of knowledge, and ontological questions concern with the nature of reality, there are a number of different paradigms that can be applied to research. However, Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 105) argue that there are some paradigms which are competing for “acceptance as the paradigm of choice in informing and guiding inquiry” and that four paradigms in particular are common in research process: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism (1994, pp. 105-117). Since every paradigm is rooted in its own ontological and epistemological assumptions, and cannot be empirically proven to be right or wrong, different paradigms encompass diverse ontological and epistemological views (Scotland, 2012). Thus, a researcher has varying conjectures of reality and knowledge constructing his or her research approach, and according to Scotland (2012, pp. 9-12), this research approach is mirrored in the researcher’s methodology and methods. Knowledge concerning universities in this research is based on what was written by policymakers as well as interviews with educational experts in both countries.
Methodology, as defined by Crotty (1998), is “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes” (p. 3). In other words, methodology is concerned with the “why,” “what,” “from where,” “when,” and “how” of the data collection, and analysis process. Guba and Lincoln (1994) states that methodology is concerned with the researcher’s quest of exploring whatever he or she believes can be ‘known’ (p. 108). Methodology is tightly associated with ontological and epistemological assumptions, and once researchers establish their grounds, with respect to ontological and epistemological assumptions, they can choose the research methodology, and methods to apply to their research. Scotland (2012, p. 10) states that it is not possible to conduct any kind of research without fully committing to ontological and epistemological positions, and that the researcher's ontological, epistemological, and methodological positions can be found in their research methods. Grix (2004, p. 64) reaffirms this stating that the same phenomenon can be approached variously based on the differences in researchers’ ontological and epistemological positions.

As previously mentioned, Guba and Lincoln (1994, pp. 105-117) asserts that the four major paradigms and perspectives in scientific research are positivism, post positivism, critical theory and constructivism. Since this research aims to provide comprehensive, and pertinent answers to the research questions of understanding accessibility, and the unique features of the HE systems, and the knowledge (main information) utilized for this study is based on conclusions, and personal views (interviewees and policy documents), it was concluded that of these four paradigms, a constructivist research framework was adopted as being the most relevant, and most suitable framework for this research.

5.3 Constructivism

Mayer (1996), as cited in Liu and Matthews (2005), states that constructivism emerged as the leading metaphor of human learning by the 1980s and 1990s as interest waned in behaviorist and information-processing perspectives (p. 387). Mayer further argues that the information-processing model in constructivist interpretation involves “an active search for understanding in which incoming experience is reorganized and integrated with existing knowledge” (p. 156). Thus, constructivism places emphasis on the active participation, and the intense recognition attributed to the social nature of learning (Liu & Matthews, 2005, p. 386). Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that constructivist ontology is “relativist,” signifying
that realities are constructed based on experiences, and are therefore subjective (p. 111). In constructivism the researcher and the object are intertwined, and the actual findings are created as the research advances (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 11).

As Creswell (2003, p. 9) argues, constructivists, usually, do not begin their research with a theory, instead they develop a theory or form meanings. Ergo, this research began by asking questions, aimed at discovering the essential components of the HE systems, and later during the course of the research patterns of inquiry were developed. Fischer (2010) argues that constructivist paradigm adopts a relativist ontology, that is, there are more than one (multiple) realities, as "reality is the result of a subjective interpretation of the world" (p. 141). As Guba and Lincoln (1994) point out “the variable and personal (“intramental”) nature of social constructions suggests that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents” (p. 111). Thus, this research firstly required data to be collected from people (either in person or through documents), while secondly, it required an interpretive approach in order to discover the respondents’ social, cultural and historical views and experiences on the subject.

5.4 Methodology

Guba and Lincoln (1994, pp. 109-112) maintain that different paradigms require different methodologies, and that the methodology for constructivist paradigm is hermeneutical and dialectical. Since the social constructions’ nature is defined as “variable and personal”, Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that “these varying constructions are interpreted using conventional hermeneutical techniques, and are compared and contrasted through a dialectical interchange” (p. 111). Therefore, the ultimate goal is to draw out a “consensus construction” which is more cognizant and improved. It is however important at this moment to bear in mind, that not only are the researcher’s consensuses constructed, but also his or her ethical construction is expected to be more informed, and improved.

Based on the aforementioned principles and guides, prior to the methodology the researcher had to consider his ontological position, in order to decide whether a qualitative or quantitative methodology should be applied for this particular study. As this research and its ontological and epistemological assumptions are based on the meanings people give to education and education systems in their countries, once the ontological issues were examined, it was clear that this research should utilize a qualitative approach. Among the many reasons for
deciding on utilizing a qualitative methodology for this research were the research questions and research aims, since they dealt with the perception and meanings of policymakers, and educational experts. Additionally, Mack, Woodsong, Macquee, Guest, and Namey’s (2005) argument on qualitative research and Schutz’s criticism for quantitative research played a vital role in choosing the qualitative methodology. The former argues that qualitative research provides a complex textual description of people’s experience within the given research problem, while the latter states that (as cited in Bryman, 2015) "quantitative researchers fail to distinguish people and social institutions from 'the world of nature.'”

Although this research aims to discover the distinctive characteristics of two respected HE systems, as well as examining and comparing the accessibility of the two systems, the aim is not to quantify the amount of “uniqueness” or the percentage of “accessibility” in both systems; instead the aim is to discover the unique features of the systems, as well as the principles of accessibility from the perspective of educational experts and policy papers. Therefore, it was of the utmost importance that the correct research methods are selected.

5.5 Hermeneutics

This study aims to discover and understand the unique features, and the manifestation of accessibility in Finnish and American HE systems by interpreting and describing data, instead of explaining or predicting the research phenomenon. The study deals with meanings people give to HE and its features. In order to explain the reasons for choosing hermeneutics as the research methodology, hermeneutics will be introduced in this section.

In the most general sense, hermeneutics is a set of interpretive approaches to science instead of a single, completely united scientific philosophy (Patterson & Williams, 2002), and generally speaking, this method refers to “interpretation” as theory and practice. Derived from the Greek word “hermeneuein,” meaning “to understand” or “to interpret” hermeneutic philosophy was first developed by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) (Patton, 2002, p. 114), and originated in the 17th century as a pursuit for interpreting biblical texts. (Patterson & Williams, 2002, p. 102). The issue of interpretation was the main focus of Schleiermacher, and later of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) who, according to Patton (2002), had applied hermeneutic philosophy to human science research, as well as other German philosophers (pp. 113-115). Hermeneutics forms, or re-forms relations of meaning between important parts of the context and the overall context (Terwee, 1990, pp. 3-6).
Although constructivism is acknowledged as the epistemological paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 105-117), the core methodology, hermeneutics, is often criticized by those who claim that research and results conducted through a hermeneutic method are not repeatable, or cannot be proven right or wrong (Poutanen, 2010, p. 92).

On the other hand, Patterson and Williams (2002) note that:

Hermeneutics is not a call for anti-science, "anything goes," or simply a matter of conjecture and guess. Rather, when properly conducted, it is an empirical enterprise characterized by critical and "meaningful" thought beginning with a particular perspective (the forestructure of understanding) progressing through a rigorous and systematic cyclical analysis (the hermeneutic circle) in which interpretations are evaluated and modified on the basis of the data that is then presented as evidence of the warrants for conclusions. (p. 36)

Furthermore, it is important to note that within the scope of qualitative research methods, due to the close link between the words “hermeneutics” and “phenomenology,” these two words can sometimes be/is used interchangeable (Byrne, 1998, p. 3). One should bear in mind that there is no universal definition of either terms, however, there is a fundamental difference in the philosophical beliefs of hermeneutic philosophers, and phenomenologists; as hermeneutics focus on interpretation, whereas phenomenologists focus on the “lived experience of persons eliciting commonalities and shared meanings” (Byrne, 1998, p. 3).

This research was based on a hermeneutic analysis of a variety of texts (documents) and the views of educational experts used to discover the research questions from various perspectives. As a constructivist paradigm and hermeneutical approach are utilized in this research, the results derived cannot be “the absolute truth,” nor should the research be expected to be fully objective. However, the researcher does not deny that there is a connection between the reality and meaning made of it (HEIs in the two countries), and he has established a reliable research process to describe as truthfully as possible the meanings given by many sources. Therefore, the data sources (in this case, the interviewees and the documents) are chosen from a variety of experts and documents. Although educational experts were chosen based on their different backgrounds and experiences, the majority of experts are involved (to varying extents), in HE in either Finland, the U.S., or both.

Since a hermeneutical approach underlines contextually, consequently the researcher must also acknowledge his own involvement, experiences and opinions, and how these were reflected on the data collection and analysis phase. Laverty (2003) exemplifies this process in
hermeneutical research by stating that “data can include the researcher’s personal reflections on the topic, information gathered from research participants, and depictions of the experience from outside the context of the research project itself” (p. 18). Therefore, the researcher in this research is thoroughly involved with the process of data collection as well as analysis and interpretation.

Hermeneutic analysis enables the researcher to elicit an in-depth understanding of meanings of, (for example in this research’s case), the views of educational experts on various phenomena. Since the nature of hermeneutics lies on subjectivity, results reflect also the researcher’s own position. That is, no matter how much the researcher wants to eliminate subjectivity by choosing to examine a variety of texts, subjectivity is undeniably present. Since hermeneutics acknowledges researcher’s position, and this research adopts the constructivist idea of knowledge construction paradigm, hermeneutics serves as an epistemological foundation for this research. This does not mean, however, that the researcher does not base his/her conclusions on the data. On the contrary, he/she tries to be as truthful as possible to his/her sources and describes the research process transparently.
6 Data Collection

The aim of this study was to gain as comprehensive as possible an understanding of how the certain features and the principles of accessibility manifest themselves in Finnish HE and its U.S. counterpart. For this reason, several data collection methods have been utilized in this qualitative research. In addition to interviewing international, Finnish, and American educational experts, scholars, professors and policymakers, data was also gathered from key documents.

There are an abundance of qualitative data collection methods available to researchers, however, in addition to text reviews, and open ended questions, the three most common methods according to Mack et al. (2005, p.2) are: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. Each method is suitable for gathering a particular kind of data:

- Participant observation is appropriate for collecting data on naturally occurring behaviors in their usual contexts.
- In-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individuals’ personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored.
- Focus groups are effective in eliciting data on the cultural norms of a group and in generating broad overviews of issues of concern to the cultural groups or subgroups represented. (Mack et al., 2005, p. 2.)

From these three, in-depth interviews provide an opportunity for the researcher to discover the perspectives of participants. Thus, one can gain insights on “how people interpret and order the world” (Mack et al., 2005, p. 39). Therefore, for this study, using in-depth interviews to collect data from the participants and interpretation was considered as the most suitable method, since the research questions concerning this research relate to, and focus on educational experts’ perspectives on the respective HE systems, the researcher deemed that in-depth interviews were the best method to adopt in order to obtain the most significant data from the participants. (Detailed information regarding the interviews will be provided in the next chapter.) In addition, texts and policy documents were analyzed and interpreted to get a holistic picture of the researched phenomena.

In order to conduct these in-depth interviews, a semi-structured interview with open-ended question was designed. As Mack et al. (2005, p. 39) state, open-ended questions allow participants to respond freely in their own words, and responses are generally more complex
than a basic “yes” or “no” answer. It was crucial for this research to elicit detailed and thorough answers, and responses from the interviewees in their own words, since the chosen method for this research, hermeneutics, is based on the interpretation of text.

The first step undertaken upon completion of the data collection process was the verbatim transcription and a preliminary analysis of the interviews. A precise analysis was not completed until after the documents were selected. Therefore, this preliminary analysis was crucial as it provided a “primer” perspective regarding the research topic. After this “primer” process was completed, relevant policy documents related to the topics of the research were analyzed. To sum up, the data collection and the process after data has been collected was as follows: Holding Interviews -> Transcription of interviews -> Preliminary analysis of the interviews -> Choosing and analyzing the relevant policy documents -> Thorough final analysis of interviews and documents -> Conclusion.

The following sections provide a more in-depth description concerning the data collection, and analysis processes.

6.1 Interviews

Patterson and Williams (2002) point out that “when conducting an interview from a hermeneutic perspective, the researcher must adopt the role of ‘self as instrument’, participating in an emergent discourse” (p. 42). Consequently, during the interviews which were undertaken for this research, the researcher positioned himself as a tool in order to gather the most significant data from the interviewees.

A total of seventeen interviews were conducted with educational experts from various backgrounds and disciplines, representing a vast amount of knowledge of both Finnish and American HE. The main factor taken into consideration when selecting the interviewees was their knowledge and experience concerning the Finnish and American HE systems. Since the participants are holding (or have held in the past) important positions in Finnish and American HEIs, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, and multinational companies that operate in the field of education, anonymity was promised in order to gather their true ideas and insights on the topic. On average, interviews lasted for approximately one hour, with the shortest interview lasting approximately forty-five minutes, and the longest interview approximately two hours. All interviews were recorded, stored, and transcribed verbatim.
It is important to note, that participants interviewed for this research possess knowledge and experience of both the Finnish and the U.S. systems. Although naturally some participants have more insights concerning one particular system (and vice versa), their experience of, and knowledge of both systems allowed the researcher to simultaneously gather information on both systems.

Every interview has a structure, and the paramount importance of an interview is the way its structure is negotiated (Patterson and Williams, 2002). In the case of research, such as this study, in which open-ended questions were formulated for interviews, they (ibid., 2002) claim that there are two extremes that are palpable concerning open-ended questions: Firstly, the interviewees are asked a standard set of questions in the same order and answers are recorded without additional questioning, and secondly, the interviewees are asked a single pre-planned question, and the following questions are asked spontaneously according to the interviewee’s answers.

In this research, however, the aforementioned ‘extremes’ were merged into one in order to gather data as holistically as possible: A semi-structured questionnaire with pre-formulated questions was designed, and interviewees were asked a standard set of questions but not necessarily in the same order. As pointed out by Harrell and Bradley (2009), the interviewer uses his or her judgment vis-à-vis the order of the questions, however, questions are standardized, and supplementary questions may be asked to ensure that the correct material was covered. Furthermore, Edwards and Holland (2013) state that a typical semi-structured interview has a list of questions or series of subjects which the researcher desires to cover in the interview, however, how and when the questions are put and how the interviewee can respond is flexible.

Since there was no obligation to follow the questionnaire word by word, the interviewees were asked additional questions during the conversation to better understand the interviewees’ perspective on the Finnish and the U.S. HE systems. This approach is also identified by Patterson & Williams (2002) as “developing an appropriate balance” between a strictly framed conversation and jumping randomly from one topic to another with the respondent. The questions asked of the participants (see the Appendix II) ranged from “What is the goal of Finnish higher education? To what extent do you agree or disagree with that goal?” and “Do you see any similarities between American and Finnish higher education systems?” to “What do you consider the biggest differences?”
Before the actual interviews were held, six preliminary test interviews were conducted in two phases, in order to test and refine the questions for the actual interviews. In the first phase, three master’s degree students from a Finnish University were interviewed. As Creswell (2013) indicates, questions change throughout the research process in order to reflect an increased understanding of the problem (p. 52). Consequently, according to the participants’ interpretation of the questions and their reflections, some of the interview questions were removed, and some new questions were added. Afterward, in the second phase, three interviews were undertaken with three Ph.D. students from the faculty of education at the same Finnish University. During these three 'second phase' interviews, two of the original questions, with which the participants had problems with understanding were replaced with one simplified question. The final version of the questionnaire was then created. (See the Appendix II) These six preliminary interviews are not included in the data analysis of this research.

All the interviews have taken place in 2015, and, as previously mentioned, interviewees were chosen on the basis of their thorough understanding of both Finnish and U.S. HE, therefore, interview invitations were sent to educators and experts in education faculties in both countries, and to experts at the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. Profiles of the interviewees (also can be found in Appendix III) that have participated in this research are as follows:

Interviewee 1: Professor of Education. Specialized in Global Education. Served as an educational consultant for several organizations and countries.

Interviewee 2: Senior Lecturer in Education. Educated in England. University lecturer in Finland for the last 30 years.

Interviewee 3: CEO of one of the biggest technology institutes in Finland. Educated in Switzerland and Finland. Ph.D. in Physics. A former research professor in Finland for 15 years.

Interviewee 4: Professor in Education in Finland. The academic leader of the two international programs. Studied in humanities and social sciences. Her research interests are intercultural education and cultural studies.

Interviewee 5: National policymaker in the education field in Finland. Educated in Finland. Ph.D. in teacher’s intercultural learning.
Interviewee 6: Researcher in the Education field in Finland. Educated in India and Finland.

Interviewee 7: A researcher in the Education field in Finland. Educated in France and Finland.

Interviewee 8: Researcher in Finland. Educated in Germany, the U.S., Mexico, and Finland. Ph.D. in international business management.

Interviewee 9: Researcher in the Education field in Finland. Ph.D. in Education. Educated in Finland. Before her university career, she worked as a primary school teacher.

Interviewee 10: Researcher in the Education field in Finland. She is a human rights expert with long experience in the NGO sector. Her research interests include inclusion and education export.

Interviewee 11: An American senior researcher in the Education field in Finland who has been living in Finland for a long time. Educated in the U.S. His research interests are Higher Education, Internationalization Policy; Knowledge, Society Discourses; Policy Analysis.

Interviewee 12: A policymaker in Finland who works in Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.

Interviewee 13: Researcher in Finland. Educated in Finland and the U.S.

Interviewee 14: An American senior researcher in a U.S. University whose research interests are International Higher Education, Higher Education, Comparative Education.

Interviewee 15: An American professor who has been teaching in Finland for more than five years.

Interviewee 16: An international scholar who has been teaching and conducting research in Finland and in the U.S.

Interviewee 17: An American professor who works in the area of global citizenship education. His research interests include (but not limited to) Education in Nordic countries, Higher Education, Sustainable Development.

Of the seventeen interviews, one of them was held via telephone, while the remaining sixteen were held face-to-face. Even though there are more Finnish interviewees than the others,
from the perspective of the research questions, the data collected from the interviews was comprehensive enough to achieve the aims of the study.

6.2 Documents

For this research, the selection of documents for analysis was done after the interviews had already been conducted (in order to ensure that the most relevant documents were chosen). However, it is important to note that, as Bowen (2009) states, researchers typically review prior literature as part of their studies and add to that data in their work. Therefore, many of the documents had already been reviewed by the researcher as part of his other studies. In this case, this knowledge acquired prior to the interviews helped the researcher understand themes that were emerging from the interviews. Deciding which documents were to be analyzed was crucial for the study, therefore, it was deemed essential to wait until a preliminary analysis of the interviews was conducted, since key themes were likely to emerge in the early stages of the interviews.

After all seventeen interviews with eleven educational experts from Finland, and six experts from the U.S. had been carefully conducted and transcribed verbatim, many primary key themes came into view. During the interviews, it was discovered that participants were mostly canvassing the same phenomena, issues, and concerns when discussing the U.S. and Finnish HE systems.

Initially, document selection began with some initial ideas related to the research problems. The focus questions and the descriptions of the problem then enabled the researcher to explore more, and above all, to interpret more. The searching and the sorting of the documents with respect to the research problem(s) led to a careful examination of the literature. The document data was complemented by the suggestions made by the interviewees and eventually concluded with the analysis of, and interpretation of the documents.

The process of analyzing the documents (policy documents, reports and so on) helped to establish a broader and more systematic picture when clarifying the characteristics of Finnish and American HE and aspects of accessibility. The documents that were studied for this research are as follows:

OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education - FINLAND (2009)

OECD: Education Policy Outlook Finland (2013)


European Union (EU):

Efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditure on tertiary education in the EU Annex: Country Fiche Finland (2010)

U.S. Department of Education:

Higher Education: Gaps in Access and Persistence Study (2012)

The World Bank:

Policy development and reform principles of basic and secondary education in Finland since 1968 (2006)

President’s Commission on Higher Education: Higher education for American democracy (1947)

The Pell Institute:

7 Data analysis

In this qualitative study, a qualitative content analysis, influenced heavily by a hermeneutical approach has been utilized in order to uncover the essences of the phenomena that were explored throughout this study. The hermeneutical position, enclosed within constructivist theory, seeks answers to reveal the meaning of the text “as the interaction between the pre-conceptions of the reader and the intentions of the text producer” (Bikner-Ahsbahs, Knipping, & Presmeg, 2015, p. 366). Thus, in this analysis, by adopting a hermeneutical position, coding and labeling processes are conducted in order to discover the distinctive characteristics of the Finnish and American HE systems, and aspects of accessibility. A detailed explanation of this data analysis process is provided in the following chapter.

7.1 Analysis of the Interviews Regarding the Distinctive Characteristics of the Higher Education Systems

To analyze the data from the interviews that were held for this research, hermeneutic content analysis has been utilized by interpreting the notions behind the keywords, or paragraphs or themes in the interview texts. Direct quotations have been used to support the conclusions, with the intention of bringing the reader of the report into the reality of the situation that was studied.

Three basic procedures have been followed for the analysis of this study: Firstly, looking for distinctive characteristics, and relevant concepts and ideas related to accessibility in the two HE systems. Secondly, collecting examples of these concepts and ideas, and lastly, analyzing these concepts and ideas in order to come up with the results. Since there are no standardized procedures to follow for analyzing the interviews, this analysis began with reading the transcripts of all the interviews. All seventeen transcripts of the interviews were quickly browsed through as a whole, with notes taken concerning the researcher's first impressions. Some examples of these notes which were written on the paper by the researcher regarding the most distinctive characteristics of the Finnish HE are as follows:

“The same idea that has been with the basic education that it was kind of against the inequality and against poverty in the 70s.”

“Once you get to program level, then you get a very narrow perception of what is happening in Finnish higher education, and it’s very inward looking and resistant to global pressures.”
“They (Finnish HEIs) are doing things in a different way. Not in a way the others do.”

After this step, all interview transcripts were read very carefully word by word, and following this careful examination, the coding took place. Gibbs and Taylor (2010) define coding process as:

The process of combing the data for themes, ideas and categories and then marking similar passages of text with a code label so that they can easily be retrieved at a later stage for further comparison and analysis. Coding the data makes it easier to search the data, to make comparisons and to identify any patterns that require further investigation (para. 1).

Strauss (1987) indicates that any researcher who wishes to become proficient at doing qualitative analysis must learn to code well and efficiently, since the excellence of the research rests in large part on the excellence of the coding. As part of the coding process in this study, all relevant pieces with respect to the research aims, e.g., words, phrases, sentences or sections in the transcripts were labeled. Some of these labels were related to actions, some of them concerned perspectives, and the remainder consisted of any other notions that were considered relevant. A few examples of the coding process can be seen in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Examples of the codes that emerged during the coding process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Codes:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homogeneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student backgrounds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When an idea or a comment is repeated in several places or by different interviewees, it was regarded as being relevant to the coding. For example, the following sentences related to the free education system (which is one of the codes of the analysis) are repeated by different interviewees throughout the interviews.
“What has been working very well is the free education system.” (Interviewee 1)

“Free of charge. It’s equal because it’s accessible to almost everybody.” (Interviewee 8)

“Free education is a very important aspect here.” (Interviewee 4)

“Education is free. And, in theory at least, it’s accessible for everyone.” (Interviewee 9)

“It’s free. [It] gives everybody fairly equal chances to attain higher education degrees.” (Interviewee 13)

“It has been very important for the development of the whole country and economy that we have tuition-free education provided in all parts of the country.” (Interviewee 12)

Moreover, in addition to the aforementioned situation (when a code is repeated in several places or by different interviewees), a notion is also labeled as a code in three cases. These three cases are explained and exemplified below.

1. A code was created when an interviewee brought up a notion that was surprising. An example of this can be seen in the following statement which was pointed out by Interviewee 11:

   I think they (Finnish policymakers) have actually given away much of what makes the system special 30 years ago. I think they’ve given it away without uncritically examining the features of the system. And now ironically they’re trying to repeat the conditions they had 30 years ago without realizing that overly course of thirty years they dumped these features that make them distinct.

2. A code was created when an interviewee explicitly stated that it was important. The following example, which was pointed out by Interviewee 9 illustrates this. “I was reading a book about the Finnish basic education and curriculum development. [At one point] it says ‘There is no use to be a teacher if you don’t love people.’ I think it’s well said and very very important.”

3. A code was created when what the interviewee relates is mentioned in previously published reports (scientific articles, or in a theory or concept, and so on.). The following statement exhibits this. “The dual nature of the system [universities and polytechnics] is, of course, noteworthy. It has been very important for the development of the whole country and economy that we have tuition-free education provided in all parts of the country” (Interviewee 12, 2015).
During the coding process, being unbiased and staying close to the data (i.e., transcripts) was of the utmost importance. Once the coding was complete, there were numerous phenomena coded, and hundreds of codes emerged. Subsequently, the most important part of the analysis was to then decide which codes were the most significant ones. During this process, not all the codes that were initially created were used, only codes that were considered significant were kept and grouped together, and some of the initial codes were abandoned. For example, out of hundreds of codes, the ones that are related to “accessibility” were put aside for a separate examination. All the codes that are related to significant aspects of the Finnish and the U.S. HE systems and the accessibility were then studied amongst themselves. Codes which were considered significant were the ones that were; repeated the most, brought up in an interview when the original question did not specifically ask about it, underlined the most, and above all, where there was a unanimous consensus amongst interviewees. Furthermore, a separate list of the unique features of the Finnish and American HE systems was compiled. After this point, the creation of the categories took place. A Category, which is a combination of two or more codes, was created after going through all the codes that were created during the previous step (as mentioned, there were more than a hundred codes created during the initial phase.), reading them again, and combining two or more codes. In order to illustrate this process clearly, four examples of category creation are provided below.

1. Some of the codes related in Table 5 below led to the creation of the category “homogeneity.”

Table 5: Codes which led to the creation of the “Homogeneity” category in Finnish HE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Codes:</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Almost the same quality (in every university)</td>
<td>No pressure to get admission into certain universities</td>
<td>Education is valued in all professions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education is valued in all areas</td>
<td>Non-authoritarian</td>
<td>Almost no hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same quality of education</td>
<td>No elite institutions</td>
<td>HEIs are evenly distributed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Category:

Homogeneity

2. Some of the codes related in Table 6 below led to the creation of the category “self-directed learning.”

Table 6: Codes which led to the creation of the “Self-directed” category in Finnish HE

The Codes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Too much flexibility</th>
<th>Less control over students</th>
<th>Freedom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-evaluation</td>
<td>Internal Motivation</td>
<td>Self-regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less evaluation</td>
<td>Not worried about losing</td>
<td>No pressure to graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>government grants</td>
<td>on time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Category:

Self-directed Learning

3. Some of the codes related in Table 7 below led to the creation of the category “equity.”
Table 7: Codes which led to the creation of the “Equity” category in Finnish HE

The Codes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical</th>
<th>Equal opportunities</th>
<th>Grant system</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No stigmatization</td>
<td>No segregation</td>
<td>Socio-economic similarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same quality Education</td>
<td>No “legacy” students</td>
<td>Free from economic background</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

↓

The Category:

Equity

4. Some of the codes related in Table 8 below led to the creation of the category “Diversity.”

Table 8: Codes which led to the creation of the “Diversity” category in the U.S. HE

The Codes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uneven universities</th>
<th>Irregularity among the HEIs</th>
<th>Various entry standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality varies</td>
<td>Diverse student body</td>
<td>Harbor both IVY League and Community Colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different student backgrounds</td>
<td>Decentralized</td>
<td>Different Curricula</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

↓

The Category:

Diversity
A variety of varied categories were created: Some concerning objects, some related to processes, some about differences, and so on. The categories were labeled, and a decision was made as to which categories were the most significant concerning this study. Categories identified as describing the unique features of the respective institutions were kept, while simultaneously relationships and connections between categories were investigated, with the remaining categories being discarded. The categories that were kept on completion of this process can be seen below in Table 9.

Table 9: Categories concerning answers to research questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diversity (American HE)</th>
<th>Accessibility (Finnish HE)</th>
<th>Self-Directed learning (Finnish HE)</th>
<th>Homogeneity (Finnish HE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emerging Competition (Finnish HE)</td>
<td>Free Education (Finnish HE)</td>
<td>Decentralization (American HE)</td>
<td>Large Size (American HE)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis resulted that the most important categories were accessibility, self-directed learning, free education, homogeneity, and emerging competition in Finnish HE; and decentralization, large size, and diversity (of institutions and of students) in the U.S. HE.

7.2 Analysis of the Interviews Regarding Accessibility

Since one of the main concerns of this research is accessibility in Finnish HE and its American counterpart, the analysis of accessibility in the aforementioned systems is of the utmost importance. Therefore, it was deemed appropriate to have a subchapter wherein the analysis process relating to accessibility is explained in depth.

The analysis began with the thorough examination of the unprocessed data (i.e., transcripts), while subsequently important information related to accessibility was clustered in accordance with the research questions, and the aims of the study. Themes that were considered relevant to the phenomenon began to emerge at this juncture, and were immediately saved
for a more careful examination. Once the preliminary creation of sub-categories was com-
pleted the process of combining the numerous categories began. Since the aims of this re-
search are in examining how accessibility manifests itself in the Finnish and the U.S. HE
systems, the analysis took place under two separate headings: (1) Accessibility in Finnish
HE, and (2) Accessibility in the U.S. HE.

Continuing from the previous accessibility category, findings, and other relevant data related
to each HE system were placed under either country, i.e., sub-categories that emerged during
the analysis relating to accessibility in Finnish HE were placed under Finnish HE, and codes
relating to the U.S. HE system were placed under the U.S. HE. Examples of the aforemen-
tioned method are provided in Table 10 and Table 11 below.

Table 10: The sub-categories that emerged with respect to Accessibility in Finnish HE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equality</th>
<th>Equity</th>
<th>Regional accessibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult Education</td>
<td>Affordable</td>
<td>Expansion of the HE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free</td>
<td>The value of the education</td>
<td>Student financing system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: The sub-categories that emerged with respect to Accessibility in the U.S. HE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical considerations</th>
<th>Socio-economic gaps between the applicants</th>
<th>Strong Community College System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost of education</td>
<td>Segregation</td>
<td>Inheriting the parent’s education level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good grant systems for the international students</td>
<td>Many efforts by Policymakers to increase the accessibility</td>
<td>Increased attainment rate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since accessibility itself was a category from the very beginning, as well as being the main concern of this study, the codes that were formed in the accessibility category were then organized into sub-categories under Finnish HE and U.S. HE. Once the analysis was completed, the sub-categories related to accessibility were evaluated, in order to discover which sub-categories were the most significant ones in terms of accessibility. A ranking scale from 0 to 10 (0 for no importance, 10 for extremely important) was used in order to discover the most significant codes.

A total of four criteria were used in grading the sub-categories, and all sub-categories were graded based on all four criteria. The four criteria are as follows:

1. Arrived at a consensus
2. Repeated throughout an interview
3. Brought up by the interviewee when the original question did not ask about it
4. Underlined as an important fact

For example, if a notion, a statement, or a fact was pointed out by almost all the interviewees (arrived at a consensus) that sub-category was ranked highly. For example, the code “affordable” in Finnish HE was given 10/10 for the first criterion since almost every participant stated that they think Finnish HE is affordable.

7.3 Analysis of the Documents Regarding Distinctive Characteristics of the Higher Education Systems

Bowen (2009) states that document analysis is the systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating printed and electronic documents. Patterson and Williams (2002) note that there are three key issues that a researcher should consider when choosing the particular methodological approach:

- The nature of the specific questions motivating the research (i.e., the research goals);
- Assumptions about the nature of the phenomenon being studied;
- Judgments about the relative importance of different research goals in combination with the relative significance of different threats to validity (2002, p. 38).

Once the research aim and the research questions were defined, it was decided that a hermeneutical approach was the best approach to analyzing the documents for this study for two
main reasons: Firstly, the documents needed to be interpreted in order to understand what are the distinctive characteristics of each system, while secondly, the information required, that is, the distinctive characteristics of each system, was not openly discussed in the documents. Therefore, the researcher had to interpret and understand the meaning of the text in order to discover the distinctive characteristics of each system.

As Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic (2014) insightfully state, a hermeneutics philosophy establishes a ground to a substantial theoretical foundation for grasping and explaining the literature review process. That is, hermeneutics allows a methodology for literature reviews by equipping the researcher with the necessary principles to grasp the texts. Since the process of document analysis contains abundant elements for identifying and interpreting the texts, a broad understanding of the texts should be developed by the researcher in order to illustrate the situation. During this process, the more the researcher engaged with the subject(s) and the texts, the more the relevancy of the texts became obvious.

### 7.4 Analysis of the Documents Regarding the Accessibility

The research questions of this research were:

1. What are the most distinctive aspects of the Finnish Higher Education systems according to policy documents and educational experts?
2. What are the most distinctive aspects of U.S. Higher Education according to policy documents and educational experts?
4. How do the principles of accessibility manifest themselves in Finnish Higher Education policy when compared to U.S. Higher Education policy according to policy documents?

Since this research aimed to find answers to these research questions, the documents to be analyzed were divided into two categories: documents related to accessibility of the said systems, and documents related to significant characteristics of the said systems. Analysis of the documents regarding the distinctive characteristics of the Finnish and the U.S. HE systems have been listed in the previous chapter. However, accessibility has been the focus
point of this study since the very beginning, therefore, somewhere between the initial pre-
liminary analysis and the in-depth analysis of the interviews, documents related to accessi-
bility were added. However, even though these documents were different and distinct to
those related to the significant features of Finnish and the U.S. HE systems, the same her-
meneutics point of view was utilized in order to discover the related information.
8 Results of the Research

This chapter will discuss the results of this research based on the analysis of the data. Firstly, the education experts’ perspectives on the respective HE systems will be illustrated, and subsequently, the characteristics of the Finnish and U.S. HE systems (respectively) will be presented on the basis of interviews and documents except for the sections 8.1.1 (Challenges of the Finnish Higher Education according to Policymakers and Academics) and 8.2.1 (Educationalists’ views on the advantages and disadvantages of competition), which are reporting only the perspectives of the educational experts on aspects and issues, as an overview, regarding the universities in Finnish and American HE systems.

8.1 Finnish Higher Education

In this chapter the results of this research with respect to Finnish HE will be presented.

8.1.1 Challenges of the Finnish Higher Education According to Policymakers and Academics

There was a unanimous agreement amongst participants that the Finnish HE system is a good system, however, facing with a number of challenges. According to the interviewees, these challenges include, but are not limited to: Freedom that is given to students, a lack of external pressures on students to excel, a focus on competing rather than serving society (due to the increasing effects of neoliberal politics), funding, and a clear need for stronger and better-resourced units, especially relating to research.

Some aspects which contribute to the uniqueness of the system can also be considered responsible for the generation of additional problems. For example, the freedom provided to students is considered as one of the unique features of the Finnish HE; however, this was also mentioned as one of the main reasons engendering students to feel comfortable with a sub-par or mediocre performance in relation to their studies (see 8.1.2 Self-Directed Learning as a Distinctive Characteristic of Finnish Higher Education). Interviewee 15 states that academics in Finland are very flexible, and are trying to “make their students very comfortable.” Although this freedom sounds exquisite (at least in principle), Interviewee 10 argues that “it is hard to ignore the fact that students often misuse the freedom.”
Another issue that is seen as being problematic with regards to Finnish HE is the issue of funding. This issue is exemplified by the respondents as being a crucial problem, and was considered among the most serious obstacles in Finnish HE. It appears that constant changes in funding criteria make financial planning very problematic (For more details, see: 8.1.3 Free Education as a Typical Feature of Finnish Higher Education). In addition to the above mentioned issues, emerging competition is considered as being one of the biggest problems in Finnish HE, since arguably it is the result of numerous changes in Finnish HE (See: 8.1.5 Emerging Competition as a Current Threat in Finnish Higher Education).

Overall, this study concludes that the Finnish HE system is working well, but not as well as it could have been. Both educators and policymakers state that they (educators and policymakers) are attempting to increase the quality of the system in their own way. However, it is also worth mentioning that almost all participants, especially those that hold or have held administrative positions in universities, stated that there is a gap in perceptions between academics and policymakers as academics and policymakers have different perspectives on the aims and the roles of Finnish HE. In order to expound the differences between these two parties more accurately, henceforward “the perspective of academics” will be referred to as “faculty level,” while “the perspective of policymakers,” (who seem to foresee a different future for Finnish HE when compared with the academics), will be referred to as “policy level.”

Interviewee 2 underlines these differences in perspectives by stating that “The main problem is that there isn’t a shared vision about the goals of Finnish HE --neither in a domestic context nor in a global context.” Interviewee 4 notes that “The policymakers for one reason or another are desperate for Finnish HE to be a part of a bigger global picture. That is the policy. However, it’s the policy at the top but not at the university level.” That is, the policymakers and the academics (faculty) have different perceptions on the goals of Finnish HE.

The main difference between the two levels (policymakers and the academics) seems to be the neoliberal approaches which have entered into force upon Finland’s adoption of the Bologna Process. Undoubtedly, Finnish policymakers want Finnish universities to be a part of the global picture. This study concludes that policymakers in Finland want to participate in global markets, since they believe this is what needs to be done in today’s globalized world in order to survive as a nation state. Ergo, as oppose to faculty level, the aim at the policy level is to make Finnish universities more internationalized and more competitive.
The differences in perspectives between faculty level and policy level are giving rise to the divergence between policymakers and academics. Interviewee 10 argues that the lack of a shared vision between the faculty and the policymakers results in an absence of engagement from academics with regards to competition in and internationalization of Finnish HE. Similarly, when discussing the differences of perspectives, Interviewee 7 stated that “You get the commitment for the goals of Finnish HE by some people. You also get acknowledgment but not the commitment [for the goals of Finnish HE] by some people. Moreover, you get acknowledgment but rejection by some people.” Furthermore, interviewee 8 claims that because of the lack of a shared vision, there are academics in Finnish HE without any awareness of what it means to be competitive and how the internationalism functions in HEIs.

Dissonance among academics and policymakers in Finland may be noteworthy; however, there is one fact that was agreed upon by both parties: Finnish HE is changing. Interviewee 1 claims that it has been difficult for Finland to transform an entirely different conception of higher education to something that follows neoliberal ideas. Interviewee 1 further notes that this transformation began in the 1990’s, however, it has been happening very slowly.

Evidently, neoliberal ideas have affected Finnish HE in many ways. It appears that during the process of internationalization, Finnish HE acquired new “habits,” while abandoning traditional ones. One of the most striking examples of the above transformation of HE in Finland is emerging competition. Interviewee 10 notes that “cooperation instead of competition” had been traditionally emphasized in (and among) the Finnish HEIs, and the philosophy of HE in Finland had been similar to the philosophy of Finnish basic education. That is, providing equal opportunities to students, and schools for the provision of a high-quality education. However, examples of competitiveness seem to have surfaced slowly throughout the years, and became evident with the introduction of the Universities Act of 2009.

The impacts of neoliberal policies manifest themselves in many aspects of Finnish HE. As previously mentioned, numerous studies concluded that equity has always been the ideology behind the Finnish education, both in primary and tertiary level. However, the focus in ideology has been changing for some time, and the effects of these changes can be seen in Finnish HE. According to Interviewee 7, changing into an entirely different paradigm has been very painful since equity has been deeply rooted in the thinking of Finnish educators. Even though many education experts argued that the system is still promoting equity very
strongly, they also indicated that many symptoms of neoliberal ideas can be seen throughout the system.

The faculty salaries, for example, which had been almost the same for the same profession level, are now decided after “negotiating” with the “boss,” mainly the immediate head (the closest superior in the chain). Interviewee 1 states that “In the same position we are not paid the same salary as we used to.” Interviewee 4 indicates that salary negotiations have become quite common --and very strange especially for those who worked in the old times’ system. “I personally found very difficult to get used to these ideas that people in same level jobs are not paid in the same way” (Interviewee 1). However, it is important to note that, the interviewees stated that this kind of symptoms came to Finland much later when compared to other Western countries.

According to the participants, one of the reasons behind this “delay” of symptoms is the trust in educators, and academics in Finland, which helped to slow down the propagation of neoliberal ideas in Finnish HE. Some interviewees argued that, in Finland, it was taken somewhat for granted that academics are doing good work, and do not need any financial aid (or some other instruments like bonuses or higher salaries) to encourage “better” work.

8.1.2 Self-Directed Learning as a Distinctive Characteristic of Finnish Higher Education

The analysis of the policy documents and the interviews conducted for this study indicate that Finnish HE has a handful of distinctive features that set it apart from many HE systems. According to the research analysis, the most distinctive characteristics of Finnish HE can be surmised as follows:

- Self-Directed Learning
- Free Education
- Homogeneity
- Emerging Competition in Finnish HE

In this section and the following sections, the above-mentioned characteristics will be respectively explained and elaborated upon, within the context of Finnish HE. It is important to note that accessibility is one of the characteristics; however, it will be discussed later separately.
As Hammond and Collins assert (1991, p. 10), learning is never merely about grasping knowledge, and developing necessary skills. If learners do not educate themselves to direct their own learning, they will be educated only to a certain extent, and the limits of what they can achieve will be mitigated. Knowles (1975) describes self-directed learning as follows:

A process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes. (p. 18)

Finnish education experts (particularly the academics) that were interviewed with regards to this research consider self-directed learning as a very distinctive characteristic of Finnish HE. Students in Finnish HEIs are expected to conduct their studies, and research with little assistance from their teachers. Students are expected to be self-directed learners who take the initiative in their studies. Interviewee 14 states that "The teachers are only present to guide them through, supervise them and provide help when needed or asked for." Interviewee 7 notes that "There is no constant control or monitoring of the students during their studies." According to Interviewee 1, in Finnish HEIs, the same philosophy is adopted in teaching students: Giving guidelines, headlines, topics, and bullet points for the students to do their work. This process is implemented to Finnish students, and internalized by them, from the very early stage of their studies. Interviewee 6 asserts that "They [Finnish students] get used to it little by little starting from kindergarten."

Surely, self-directed learning does not only delegate a student to conduct research on his or her own, it also demonstrates that students learn to evaluate themselves. As cited in Silén and Uhlin (2008, p. 472), Silén (2001) asserts that assessing "what students have learned?", or "is their learning relevant and profound?" are the most challenging questions regarding students' assuming responsibility for their learning. However, this does not seem to be a big issue at the HE level in Finland, since Finnish students learn to "reflect what they have been doing as an individual" throughout their educational life (Interviewee 3). Interviewee 1 indicates that the teacher is responsible for supervision and ensuring that learning takes place, which sometimes requires interference, and in particular, the drawing of conclusions. Interviewee 2 asserts that it is the teacher's responsibility "to ensure the learning is happening, however, educators should not be too controlling."
According to the Finnish education experts, if students get used to being constantly controlled and assessed, they do well as long as somebody is controlling and assessing them. Hence, they claim that it does not promote internal motivation. "Somebody is there all the time patting on your shoulder. I believe that one needs encouragement, yes, but excessive evaluation from somebody outside makes you do well or teaches you well when somebody is always controlling you" (Interviewee 10). Consequently, the perception in Finland is that students should independently pursue excellence without being controlled, and being an independent student who can also assess himself, or herself in an HEI in Finland is, in most cases customary.

Finnish education experts who have participated in this study note that Finnish students, in the majority of cases, show no signs of discomfort in being self-directed learners while studying for their degrees. However, students being comfortable is seen as the leading cause of a far-reaching problem in Finnish HE: Students not being pushed to excel in their studies.

Thus far the analysis of this research on the matter indicated that, in Finland, the flexibility of programs and a stress-free study environment for students are considered unique assets for Finnish HE. However, it is also concluded that flexibility is giving rise to a critical problem in Finnish HE: There is no pressure to achieve excellence. Lack of external pressures (e.g., students study for free, thus they have no obligation to finish their studies and find a job as soon as possible to pay the loan debt back) causes the syndrome of being fine with being average students. "There’s no pressure in Finnish HE system for students to be excellent. You can be excellent, and of course, it’s very much welcomed if you are excellent, but you do not have to" (Interviewee 7).

Even though the Finnish educators consider self-directed learning as being an important asset of Finnish HE, they expressed their concerns relating to the aforementioned features culminating in a major problem. According to the participants, when compared to the best higher education systems in the world, Finnish HE does not stand out as the best, or of being among the best--an argument that is also affirmed by the results of the international HE rankings.

Some participants argued that the best and brightest Finnish students might leave the country to attend a renowned university abroad, simply because students have more opportunities and higher chances to achieve their dreams there. "The more prestigious an institution is the more students want to attend there. We can't deny this fact" (Interviewee 15). Interviewee 8
notes that "Not only the prestige of a university but also the study environment in that institution is the reason behind the brain drain." In 2005, the country background report indicated that “brain drain” is one of the severest threats facing the internationalization policy in Finland. The report (2005) notes that:

The worst threat for a systematic internationalization policy will probably be a failure on the part of the authorities to recognize the competitive position in which tertiary education finds itself and complaisance. The threat is twofold: first, Finland will not be able to attract enough foreign students and researchers; second, its own students and researchers will go abroad to study and work. (p. 84)

It could be argued that there is almost no external motivating factor for Finns to excel in their studies. Nothing but their own ambition or interest (or their ethical approach to the profession they would exercise) would trigger the urge to excel in their studies. Interviewee 13 states that:

As a student, you are kind of left alone. In general, in universities, the guidelines are very flexible, so you know that you can come back a month later and say “Well you know I didn’t do my work, can I do it now?”

Interviewee 5 claims that this freedom given to students is the most significant aspect of Finnish HE that is not working as intended. Interviewee 14 asserts that "I think students enjoy a little bit too much degree of freedom in universities in Finland."

Finnish students can study for years without losing their grants, and they feel no pressure from their parents to finish school sooner, nor to excel in their studies. According to Interviewee 7:

Choosing courses, taking exams, retaking them, being present at lectures, and not being present... I feel teachers are very flexible here in Finland. They are trying to make their students feel very comfortable and I think students at the undergraduate level are not pushed to be the very best among their peers.

On the bright side, the numbers indicate that the majority of students in Finnish HE are competent and good enough to qualify for a university degree, which is definitely a source of pride. According to Davies, Weko, Lillemor, and Thulstrup (2009), referring to the
OECD’s Education at a Glance report, the aggregate ratio of graduates to entrants (in Finland) is 75%, higher than the average rate of 70% for all OECD member states. On the other hand, in Finnish HE, settling for being “good enough” leads to the diminishing of the best and brightest students. Interviewee 4 notes that “One should ask what does happen to the talented and more intelligent students in the Finnish HE as it seems that there is almost no special attention devoted to them.” Most of the experts that were interviewed expressed their concerns that students with high potential would either adapt their skills to the average level of their classrooms or target more prestigious universities around the world for their graduate studies.

To be fair, the lack of pressure to excel in their studies or the institutions' (relatively low) rankings are not the only factors behind the risk of losing the best and brightest students to other countries. The socioeconomic conditions of the country (e.g., the welfare state) requires more when compared to other systems. According to Interviewee 7, an aging society combined with the tempting offers for successful young people with degrees who can compete all over the world, carry a great risk for Finland to lose its best and brightest students: "You can go to, say, Oxford or Stanford, but if you stay, you'll be faced with footing the bill for an increasing amount of people out of the labor market by the shrinking of the amount of people inside the labor market." Interviewee 17 argues that "One has to have some other reasons than money to stay. I think Finland will lose a lot of people who just don’t want to pay the tax man."

Moreover, Finnish HEIs seem to be less attractive for those talented and successful people who are not Finnish citizens. In the OECD report on tertiary education (2009), it was stated that:

While talented, young Finnish researchers may be willing to accept the long path towards more permanent employment in a higher education institution, this will be a much less attractive adventure for a talented foreigner who often may prefer to take safer employment in another country. (p. 66)

Other than independent study environment and tuition-free institutions, "customary" master's degrees seem to be the main cause of students not aiming to be the very best. In most cases, students at Finnish universities are admitted to study for a master’s degree at the same time they are admitted to a Bachelor’s degree ("Higher Education System in Finland", 2016). In terms of self-directed learning, students at master’s degree level are at least as independent
as those at bachelor’s degrees. However, master’s degree in Finland is mainly seen as a customary degree. The main reason behind this is the fact that many professions require a minimum of a master’s degree. However, granting a student the right to study a master’s degree for free (even when a student does not want to pursue a master’s degree but pursues it anyway since it is necessary to get a good job in Finland) seems like a waste of resources, which otherwise could be allocated for others who are eager to pursue a master's degree. Interviewee 13 states that “In a way, I’d like to be stricter. I don’t think everybody should study to have a master’s degree. Only those who can tell they are motivated and get good grades, and have good ideas, should continue their master’s.”

In conclusion, a talented student who is excellent will have access to higher education in Finland and will be provided the same opportunities as an average student. This is a remarkable feature of the Finnish HE system in terms of accessibility and equal opportunities. However, this topic also needs attention, since, ultimately, talented students might choose to go on and pursue superior opportunities at a more prestigious university in another country. The other option is that the best and brightest adapt to the others' level, and accept the role of being a “good enough” student. With regards to this study, this is one of the most important issues expressed in Finnish HE.

8.1.3 Free Education as a Typical Feature of Finnish Higher Education

It is important to note that, until recently, HE in Finland has been free for anyone regardless of their nationality. However, starting from August 2017, the Finnish Government has decided to introduce a tuition fee (for Bachelor's and Master's degree programs offered in a language other than Finnish or Swedish) for those who hold citizenship from countries outside of the EU/EEA (European Economic Area) area. No tuition fees will be charged for doctoral level studies, or degree programs offered in Finnish or Swedish. ("Tuition fees in Finland", 2016). Simply put, the conditions will not be changed for those hailing from the EU and the EEA area.

In Finland, for its citizens, education is free at all levels of education, starting from pre-primary to higher education, with the exception of adult education (the only form of education that may require payment) (OKM, 2016). This free education is mostly provided by state funding --a fact through which Finland stands out among the OECD member countries. For example, the OECD average expenditure on educational institutions is 83.6%, whereas
Finland's expenditure is 97.6% (OECD, 2013, p. 16). Consequently, as the statistics indicate, private funding is minimal, and nearly all institutions are funded by public sources.

Education is not only free but also education related goods and services are mostly subsidized by the government. On their website, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (2016) outlines the funding of Finnish education as follows:

In pre-primary and basic education the textbooks, daily meal and transportation for students living further away from the school are free for the parents. At secondary level and in higher education the students themselves or their parents purchase their own books. At secondary level the students have the right to a free meal and in higher education meals are subsidised by the state (2016).

Another statistic where Finland stands out, is that nearly 14% of public expenditure on HE is devoted to student financial aid (OECD, 2014). That is, not only is education free, but students are also directly supported by the government regarding their living expenses. The numbers indicate that, in terms of student support, Finland spends far more than the average of OECD member countries. As stated in the OECD report on Tertiary Education Finland (2009), “about 18% of total spending on tertiary education consists of student, which is nearly double OECD average” (p. 80).

Figure 3. Expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP, by level of education, 2010

Universities in Finland are built on the freedom of education, research, and autonomy, while universities are owned by the state, and financed through the state budget. This funding is based on a performance management process, which is, “the targets set for institutional activities and the resources needed for their implementation are determined in negotiations between the Ministry of Education and each university” (European Commission, 2010, p. 5). According to the Universities Act 2009, the law that is regulating Finnish universities, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the university concludes “a fixed term agreement on the quantitative and qualitative targets of pivotal relevance to education and science policy and on the monitoring and evaluation of their implementation” (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009, p. 27). That is, the ministry of education and the university agree on the resources -mainly funds- needed for the targets that are set for/with the university (OECD, 2013). Even though universities in Finland are mostly state funded, the law (Universities Act 2009) states that they are also allowed to find external funding.

Correspondingly, Polytechnics are funded by the State and local authorities. The OECD’s Education Policy Outlook (2013) notes that unit costs per student, as well as projects and performances of the polytechnics are the basis of the funding that is provided by the government. Also, like universities, they have other sources of funding. Overall, HEIs are similarly financed, mostly from the state budget.

The Finnish government has been providing free education for its citizen due to the general opinion in Finland (and most probably in the other Nordic countries) that a good level of education benefits everyone in the society. Interviewee 12 argues that

*The most distinctive elements of the [Finnish] HE system are that there are no tuition fees. That’s the fundamental difference between many other places. I don’t say it’s necessarily better or worse but I think it’s a definite distinction which isn’t always understood sufficiently.*

Interviewee 4 states that *“Because there are no fees, tuition system doesn’t get in between like in some countries where you get into universities if you pay whether you are good or not.”*

Surely, education in Finland is not really free. The ideology behind the Welfare State, collaborating for the greater good, is the reason behind free education. Basically, a high amount of taxes enables free education, and the Finnish educational experts are well aware of this fact that HE is provided free of charge because of the high taxes that are collected. However,
most of the Finnish educators that have been interviewed seem to support a system that provides free education to all citizens, despite the fact that they are paying high taxes. Almost none of them seemed to have any problem with it. In fact, Interviewee 8 states that tuition-free education provided in all parts of the country has been very important for the development of the whole country, and the Finnish economy. Interviewee 14 argues that “I think Finnish people have agreed for a long time that the key to being able to self-sufficient in the world as a nation state is in education.”

This notion, along with the others, seems to be one of the main reasons that the education is so highly perceived and respected in Finland. Interviewee 4 points out that:

_I think Finnish people have seen the education pays off. If you get as many people as you can from different parts of the society inside education, get them through as many as possible, for as little money as possible, you do better and if you don’t do that you’ll do worse. (...) If you scratch the surface, what you’ll find out in the system that many people realize that the world is a tough place and to make it, especially as a nation state, you got to be able to do something really well. And education is one thing in general, with now a lot of emerging exceptions, Finland does pretty well._

However, there are some problems with regards to free education. “The almost free education for almost everyone” seems quite promising for a HE system, and Finnish HE does still provide free education for majority of students. However, this free education does not refer to a system that has no financial problems, on the contrary, it seems that one of the main issues prevalent in Finnish HE is the funding system.

In theory, according to the Finnish Ministry of Education (2016), universities and the Ministry of Education and Culture, “sets operational and qualitative targets for the university. They also determine the necessary resources every four years and agree on how these targets are to be monitored and evaluated.” Basically, as the aforementioned statistics indicated, the state is funding the universities, nonetheless, since the Universities Act 2009 became effective, universities are also expected to raise external funding. In reality, funding of Finnish universities programs is contingent on the number of the students that have graduated from those programs each year. Interviewee 11 states that “Nowadays, it’s terribly difficult to make budgets because you don’t know whether students are going to graduate within certain years. And you get the funding very much depending on the people getting degrees.”
Interviewee 5 states that “In the past, the faculties funded [by the state] according to how many students entered the programs, which obviously made easier to make a budget.” Interviewee 3 argues that “Back then you knew how many students are coming to the program and it was easy to make the budget about the costs and examples, and so on.” The participant further elaborates that “The funding that faculties get is a very complicated equation and it changes faster than it should be.”

In conclusion, education in Finland is free, as Finns believe that a high quality education is beneficial for the country. The Finnish government allocates substantial funds in order to provide free education for its citizens, and universities are mostly funded by the State. The educational experts seem to be supportive of free education despite the fact that the free education is “free” due to the revenue collected from taxpayers. However, the present funding system, presented by the Ministry of Education and Culture, is regarded as being problematic as: firstly, the guidelines are changing fast, and secondly, universities’ core revenue is based on the number of graduating students each year, thus, it is hard to predict how much core revenue can be expected.

8.1.4 Homogeneity Describes Finnish Higher Education System

According to education experts, and policy documents that were examined, homogeneity is another of the most distinctive characteristics of Finnish HE. In this chapter, the homogeneity of Finnish HE is discussed in two levels: (1) The homogeneous distribution of HEIs all across the country, (2) the homogeneous quality of education provided in the HEIs. As the Country Background report for Finland (2005, pp. 77 - 82) asserts, HEIs of almost the same quality are spread around Finland, and they are working in unison. Analysis of this study affirms that Finnish universities provide similar education quality, and moreover, the name of the university on a diploma makes little difference. Essentially, Finnish HE, in general, is very uniform.

The foundations of a homogeneous Finnish HE were established in the early stages of the post-war era. It is not by coincidence that equity, and accessibility issues were also addressed along the same timeline as homogeneity. As there is a strong link between equity and accessibility; there is also a link between these two issues and homogeneity (although not as strong as the link between the first two.) Therefore, as the Finnish Ministry of Education's report (2005, p. 18) indicates, the expansion of the HE system with a strong emphasis on regional
policy began in the 1950s, when demands were made for greater regional supply and equality in university admissions, due to the change in Finland's economic structure, as well as high demand for a trained labor force, and a general increase in living standards.

According to the OECD report on Finnish Higher Education (2009, p. 53), in the 1960s and 1970s, numerous significant decisions on expansion and installation were made. Similarly, Interviewee 17 emphasizes that in the 1960s the regional importance of higher education was emphasized. Basically, between the 1950s and 1980s, one of the main agendas of Finnish HE was to expand the institutions in different regions, in order to provide opportunities for HE in the various districts. From the mid-1970s to the beginning of the 1980s, policymakers planned to create equality of opportunity with respect to HE. Concordantly, universities responded to these policy makers plans positively. (OECD, 2009, p. 53). This expansion of the universities came to an end in the early 1990s, with the foundation of the new polytechnics (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 18).

In the Universities Act 2009, the mission of universities is described as follows:

To promote free research and academic and artistic education, to provide higher education based on research, and to educate students to serve their country and humanity. In carrying out their mission, the universities must promote lifelong learning, interact with the surrounding society and promote the impact of research findings and artistic activities on society. (p. 2)

Consequently, attempts that have been made during the last five-six decades to make Finnish HE more homogenous seem to have yielded positive results. While acknowledging that there are some differences among Finnish HEIs, these differences seem to have little impact on the quality of the education provided, as educational quality appears to be similar in every HEI in the country. Interviewee 6 underlines that "[In Finland] it's not like in countries where there are average universities that no one wants to attend and great universities that everyone wants to enroll." In that sense, in Finland, there are no big gaps between the institutions (and those institutions are evenly spread throughout the country).

However, according to most of the participants, Aalto University (which was described by a participant as “the university that is following the footsteps of American HE”) is one exception to this, since Aalto University stands in a unique place among Finnish HEIs, it represents the many undergoing changes which the system is facing. (See: 8.1.5 Emerging Competition as a Current Threat in Finnish Higher Education.)
Regarded as one of the two foundation universities, Aalto University (along with Tampere University of Technology), is part of the foundation model which “promotes the development of education and research” and “gives the University good prerequisites to succeed amid growing international competition” (Ayres, 2014). Additionally, Aalto University is regarded by many of this research respondents as a university that follows the “American HE” in relation to fundraising, competitiveness, advertising and marketing the university.

Interview 1 argues that, historically, there has been a microscopic difference between HEIs in Finland; however, since its establishment in 2010, Aalto University has evolved into a university that is very different from the others, by embracing the U.S. HEI model. Interviewee 15 states that Aalto University has boosted the competitive environment in Finland, and affected the way universities have been funded. “They are now expected to find revenue in other sources other than from government.” Surely, one must not ignore the fact that Aalto University was established through the University Act of 2009, and in that Act, more autonomy is given to the universities in Finland.

Moreover, although Aalto University boosted competition among Finnish Universities, which gave rise to the differences among the universities, almost every participant of this research asserted that Finnish HE is still based on the principles of equity, and there are no significant differences between institutions. One of the most important indicators relating to similar quality of institutions is that one's salary is not based on the university he or she graduated from. In fact, according to the interviewees, the university degree itself is considered valuable in Finland, regardless of the university. Interviewee 1 asserts that there is a high respect, and a high demand for HE since almost all services are provided by professional people who have attended HEIs (either vocational schools or universities). Likewise, Interviewee 10 states that "There’s a higher education for every kind of service even how futile it is like in other nations."

Although accessibility is not quite the same in all universities in Finland, Interviewee 16 argues that "If you have graduated from a university, the university's name has almost no value on the degree. People would not attach importance to which university you’re graduated." Interviewee 14 claims that:

*It doesn’t make a big difference if you study in Oulu or Jyvaskylä or University of Eastern Finland. Maybe there are small differences yes, but not too many. That means that salary*
expectations are similar. That means you do not have to pressure to be part of a certain university or graduating from a certain university in order to occupy a certain position in the industry.

Lastly, Interviewee 9 marks that "The good level of performance of the whole HE system can be seen in many international evaluations." In addition to the participants, reports on the country's HE system acknowledge that the Finnish system is based on uniform quality. The OECD report on Finnish HE (2009) indicates that the progress that has been made in the regional development in Finland is "rightly at the forefront of European endeavors in this domain" (p. 57). According to the Finnish Ministry of Education (2005), for every 100,000 residents, there is one HEI: fifty-three municipalities have a university or a campus, and eighty-eight municipalities have a polytechnic or a campus (p. 86). Essentially, the Finnish HE system covers the entire country with its homogenous institutions.

8.1.5 Emerging Competition as a Current Threat in Finnish Higher Education

As was mentioned in the previous section (8.1.1 Challenges of the Finnish Higher Education According to Policymakers and Academics), two different perspectives can be distinguished about Finnish HE: The perspectives of Finnish policymakers and the perspectives of academics. According to the academics, the Finnish HE system is losing its unique aspects (e.g., collaboration instead of competition, focus on teaching instead of publishing, the funding methods) in order to become more competitive and higher ranked among HEIs worldwide. Participants (both policymakers and academics), OECD reports (2009, 2013), and the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture report (2015), indicate that the Finnish education system is built upon the principles of equity and accessibility. The participants of this research stated that educators in Finland believe in cooperation rather than competition, while also asserting that, to some extent, competition and evaluation are beneficial, and valuable since they might increase educational quality, and promote a desire to improve.

Even though some advantages of competitiveness are well acknowledged by the participants, the disadvantages are emphasized more. Arguably, very different factors have played a vital role in changing the characteristics of Finnish HE, such as internationalization, ranking systems, the idea of being part of a bigger society (European Union), and of course the Bologna Process. Policies regarding competitiveness are formed and determined at policymaker level, while faculty level actors are concerned about some of these changes since Finnish HE was
not planned to be a part of the global systems until recently. The OECD report on Finnish HE (2009) notes that: “Before 1990, for geopolitical reasons, Finland was rather introverted, both politically and educationally, as was evidenced by university strategic reviews in the 1993 period. This has demonstrably changed attitudinally, instrumentally and in international visibility” (p. 61).

Interviewee 11 indicates, "the ideology behind the entire HE system is changing", while similarly, interviewee 7 notes that:

[In] Earlier days, the purpose of higher education and purpose of universities was to learn and understand the complex issues as we [academics] needed time to reflect and develop our understanding and knowledge. However, nowadays, it is more like doing this [reflect and develop our understanding] as fast as we can, publish it as quickly and as many as we can.

Similarly, Interviewee 9 asserts that until recently a “publish or perish” mentality was unlikely to be seen in HEIs in Finland. As a result, participants expressed their worries regarding changes that are engendered by the desire to have a more competitive HE system. Some claimed that competition in Finnish HE has engendered problems such as quantifying measures, and imparting value to numbers and figures, instead of the teaching itself. Also, according to some university professors, government policies put pressure on them by forcing them to focus on matters such as efficiency, productivity, and motivating students to graduate quickly, instead of gaining a profound understanding of the real issues. Some of the participants affirmed that too much focus on producing papers lowers the standards of research. Furthermore, some faculty members argue that the focus of HE in Finland has shifted from “service to society” to “attractiveness of Finnish HE.” OECD reports also provide a similar observation, as according to the OECD report on Finnish HE (2009), "The primary strategic objectives for the Finnish system based on the general proposition of the improvement of the international competitiveness and regional accessibility of HE" (p. 14). Similarly, the European Commission (2010) report states that the Finnish HE system “is being developed as an internationally competitive entity capable of responding flexibly to national and regional needs” (p. 3).

One of the prime examples of the aim of being internationally competitive can be seen in the “Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009–2015.” In this report, the five goals of Finnish HE are cited as follows: (1) A genuinely
international higher education community, (2) Increasing quality and attractiveness, (3) Export of expertise, (4) Supporting a multicultural society, and (5) Global responsibility (pp. 9-11). Although these five goals seem to be emphasized equally in the report, most of the academics who took part in this research argue that lately the main focuses of Finnish HE have been on exporting Finnish expertise (at a profit) and climbing higher in the rankings.

In line with Finnish HE policies with respect to internationalization and competitiveness, Finnish HEIs aim to climb the global HE rankings, since these rankings play a vital role in attracting international students, in addition to raising global fame of the HE system, as well as securing external funds (Yudkevich, Altbach & Rumbley, 2015, p. 412). The OECD report on Tertiary Education, Finland (2009) states that:

As Finns are keenly aware, they have a small state heavily dependent upon their human resources, whose continued flourishing depends upon continued innovation. The challenges faced today – and Finland’s capacity to meet them – are different to those of decades past. For example, a national inwardly focused system of research is not adequate within a context of European funding, global rankings, and international flows of researchers and we acknowledge Finland’s recognition of this. (p. 114)

That being said, it is plausible that the policies in Finnish HE work in parallel with the desire to boast Finnish HE in international rankings, especially as evidence shows that higher rankings draw international attention. Undoubtedly, this is evident for the Finns, since Finland has gained a remarkable recognition for its basic education system, ever since the announcements of the first Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results. Since then, critics and international scholars have often praised the Finnish basic education system, however, the Finnish HE system does not seem to be receiving the same attention and/or praise from critics and international scholars. This lack of acknowledgment, or, absence of praise by the world, led this research to seek answers to the following question: What are the effects of the phenomenal Finnish basic education on Finnish HE?

When asked about the effects of Finnish basic education on Finnish HE, interviewees indicated that it is the other way around: HE is affecting basic education, simply because, structurally speaking, everybody of importance in the Finnish basic education system has received their training in the HE system. Furthermore, it was also stated that Finnish basic education is unique in preparing pupils for HE by providing the same pedagogical competencies behind the Finnish HE (i.e., group work, self-regulation, self-motivation). Further-
more, it can be argued that Finnish basic education is phenomenal because of the homogeneity. That is, there are almost no bad schools and the differences between students are minimal.

It was argued that basic education is crucial in determining what universities can or cannot achieve. Considering that Finnish basic education is very successful, then, one could ask “If basic education determines what universities can achieve, why then is the Finnish HE system not considered as being as successful as the Finnish basic education system by authorities, both inside and outside of Finland, since the primary source of students in Finnish HE come from Finnish basic education?”

This lack of recognition and/or comparatively poor results in global rankings of Finnish HE (especially compared to Finnish basic education) is surely something that the policymakers wish to overcome. However, it is also important to note that the rules of the game are different at HE level. For instance, the methodologies used for ranking universities are very different from those used in assessing 15-year-old pupils (PISA). Many widely recognized ranking systems take various criteria into consideration when ranking universities, such as; student/faculty ratio, ratio of international students, publications, citation numbers, the ratio of international faculty, and so on. For example, THE World Rankings (2016) groups its performance indicators into five areas:

- Teaching (the learning environment)
- Research (volume, income and reputation)
- Citations (research influence)
- International outlook (staff, students and research)
- Industry income (knowledge transfer)

Evidently, HE rankings are very different when compared with what basic education rankings are assessing. For example, PISA is assessing “reading, mathematical and scientific literacy in terms of general competencies, that is, how well students can apply the knowledge and skills they have learned at school to real-life challenges” (“About PISA”, 2016), therefore, one can argue that if THE World Rankings or QS World University Rankings had used a similar methodology as PISA (that is, randomly selecting university students from the same majors from all around the world, and assessing their skills and knowledge to see “how well
students can apply the knowledge and skills they have learned at school to real-life challenges”) maybe different universities would have held the top positions in the rankings. However, the methodology of assessing HEIs is different, hence the notion of success.

Finnish policy, as stated in “Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009–2015”, and acknowledged by the OECD report on Tertiary Education (2009) in addition to the interviewees of this research, is targeted on, being more competitive, more international, and more recognized. However, the majority of the participants of this study argue that competitiveness brings some inconveniences. The first concern that was raised during the interviews regarding the emerging competitiveness in Finnish HE was the decline in the quality of the teaching standards.

Some argued that in the past there was more emphasis on “what people really learn in the classroom,” and there was more time to evaluate the aforementioned notion. However, lately, changes in Finnish HE seem to steer towards focusing on producing more papers. Interviewee 14 stated that:

_Everybody talks about quality and excellence but I don’t think that a university can be of good quality or excellent if academics’ priority is to publish. Simply there is neither time nor encouragement for us to transfer the knowledge to the students as we used to do._

In 2009, the OECD report on Finnish HE remarked that one of the priorities in Finnish HE regarding the role of HEIs is “Quality enhancement of teaching and research, and an anchoring of each into local needs, without sacrificing the international competitiveness and quality levels needed in a global environment” (p. 54). It can be argued that, according to the academics, international competitiveness requires sacrifices relating to teaching and research quality. On the other hand, while participants agreed upon the emerging of competition in Finnish HE, most of them still believe that even now quality is prioritized over competition. However, there are some concerns that in the not too distant future, this feature of Finnish universities will be disregarded.

It could be argued that Finnish policymakers are aware of what it takes to be ranked higher in the rankings. In fact, this awareness might shed light on the dissidence between academics and policymakers. Policymakers seem to believe that Finnish HE must compete with other well regarded HE systems from around the world, and in order to do so, the system needs to be evolved. On the other hand, academics believe that the system should not relinquish its
unique features in order to compete with other HE systems, and should return to its foundation as in the 1990s. As Interviewee 4 states “There are actors in [Finnish] HE that are very interested competing to the extent they can with other higher education systems.” It was, later on, indicated that one could find decision-makers who are very interested in a comparison of the system as a whole.

In conclusion, policymakers and faculty members seem to have different perspectives towards competition. Analysis of this study indicates that the competition between Finnish universities, and universities worldwide is considered necessary in order to improve the quality of higher education in Finland by the policymakers. However, academics are concerned about the possible negative outcomes of the emerging competition in Finnish HE.

8.2 U.S. Higher Education

This section will provide the results of the research with respect to U.S. HE system. It should be noted that, as mentioned previously (8. Results of the research), the next subchapter 8.2.1 (Educationalist’ Views on the Advantages and Disadvantages of Competition) is reporting only the perspectives of educational experts that have been interviewed. However, the other sub-chapters (i.e., 8.2.2, 8.2.3, and 8.2.4) are based both on interviews and documents.

8.2.1 Educationalists’ Views on the Advantages and Disadvantages of Competition

It was the shared opinion of all the participants that the HE system in the U.S. is, in terms of complexity, immense, or as Interviewee 14 referred to it, “kind of nightmare.” The U.S. system is so large and so diverse that, while one can find numerous examples of world class research, nevertheless, for every one of those examples a dozen poor programs can be found (Interviewee 16). Almost every interviewed participant argued that generalizations concerning the system as a whole should be avoided, and generalizations should only be made if they are in relation to particular HE sub-sectors, institutions, programs or individuals. Essentially, the interviewees note that the system as a whole cannot be evaluated (with a few exceptions), and that one needs to scale down from the “level of system” to individual institutions, in order to assess the success or the failure of the system.

Despite the stratification of the system, participants underline that the U.S. HE system as a whole is very impressive in terms of scientific research and productivity. Even though such
praises are mainly directed toward the top ranked universities that are known throughout the world, the general agreement is that the institutions, from top to bottom, regardless of their level in the U.S. HE system, endeavor to do their best in order to thrive. The motivation for HEIs to thrive however, seems to be mostly attributed to the “money driven market” where the “better” HEIs receive better financial and human resources. Interviewee 10 states that “There are a couple of ideas that make the U.S. unique in terms of a certain kind of university, that is, the notion of a university that is linked tightly to its community. Of course, this occurs in many societies; in Britain and even in Finland to a lesser extent.” Interviewee 16 notes that “In the U.S. one can really find particular groups, like the Ivy League or Land Grant Universities, which are closely tied to a specific logic that a particular type of person goes there.” Consequently, as some participants argued, a good level of broad institutional diversity makes it very difficult to interrupt the system as a whole, which ensures that the U.S. HE system is, to some extent, immune to external interruptions, namely the political steering.

Many participants regarded the U.S. HE system as being a very competitive system, where both institutions, and individuals are constantly competing with one another. It is important to note that, almost every participant, regardless of their country of citizenship, argued that American society as a whole is more preoccupied by the idea of “being better than many other countries.” Interviewee 17 states that:

Systematically, American institutions are very much focused on the level of quality. Not only the U.S., but the entire world is now preoccupied with creating measures like PISA or University Rankings that allow us to make statements like “Finland has the best comprehensive education system! The U.S. has the best universities!” For some policymakers and bureaucrats maybe it’s kind of interesting for dialogues, but, generally I think there has been such an infatuation with those, that it has now become problematic.

While none of the interviewees deny that competitiveness can be found in many other HE systems throughout the world, they claim that the nature of the competitive environment is more deeply rooted in the U.S. HE than in many other countries. Interviewee 14 notes that “I’d say the reasons for the competitiveness in the U.S. HE stem from the economic system and the cultural assumptions, and that this competitiveness cannot be attributed to the HE system itself.” The participants argue that the U.S. has got so caught up with competition and the idea of “being better,” that the public has got to the point of making comparisons of everything, and more exclusively (in this context), comparisons of schools.
On the other hand, even though the participants considered excessive competitiveness as being a negative trait, while some argued that it is counterproductive, they also underline that this competitiveness has been working in favor of the U.S. HE system with regards to recruiting the best students, and academics. Interviewee 8 notes that “When competitiveness is applied well, like in the case of elite American Universities, it leads to constant improvement.” The participants stated that the most prestigious universities in the world are in the U.S. (with the exception of two universities in England; the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge), and that this prestige allows them to accumulate the very best minds in the world. Interviewee 11 states that:

They [elite U.S. HEIs] have exceptional brand recognition that allows them to get top students, top researchers and professors. Then, of course they get a good reputation, resulting in good students making applications to their university. Good professors also want to conduct research at their university, mainly because of the funding opportunities, and so the positive cycle goes on and on.

Interviewee 15 states that “I think top American universities are way ahead of the game because they have these huge endowments, tons of money being pumped into them from all different kinds of sources, which they allocate for better research, equipment, advertising, and so on.” Interviewee 11 notes that “The good universities are very selective concerning admission, hence students have to be exceptionally good to be admitted. It is much easier to sustain great quality in students rather than creating it.”

Surely, it was no easy feat to create world class universities. Participants state that the U.S. has been very “cunning” for a very long time in order to attract talented people from all around the world. As Interviewee 5 notes “While Europe and other HE systems had no desire to do so, the U.S. was already aiming to attract international students,” while interviewee 7 also notes that “The U.S. has spent an enormous amount of time and energy to attract good students and faculty.” Interviewee 13 argued that “The country [USA] was giving grants to attract good students when Europe had no intention to do so. They have used the potential from people from all over the world.” Some participants claimed that European countries realized the importance of attracting good students much later than the U.S., and that the main reason behind the revolutionary Bologna Process was to be able to compete with the U.S. universities, while keeping the “great minds” in Europe. In the end, the reason for some of the U.S. HEIs being the most prestigious institutions in the world can
be summed up as the accumulations of the key combinations of capital, economics and human resources.

In conclusion, the educational experts that have participated in this research regard the U.S. HE as a system that is impossible to generalize. However, they agree that as a whole the system is impressive with regards to research productivity. Furthermore, the experts believe that the HE system is very well protected against possible interruptions, simply because it consists of many layers, and each kind of HEI is serving society in a unique way. Moreover, experts regard the U.S. HE system as being extremely competitive; even though this competitiveness has many negative aspects, experts claim that it is one of the main reasons behind the success of certain U.S. institutions. Many great minds (both students and faculty) are attracted to the most prestigious U.S. universities, simply because of the opportunities provided by those institutions. Moreover, educational experts argue that the U.S. HE system has been very successful in gathering the best minds from all over the world for a very long time: a fact that, after a long time, Europe seems to have recently realized.

8.2.2 Decentralization as a Distinctive Characteristic of U.S. Higher Education

As the analysis of the policy documents, and the interviews conducted for this study indicate, the U.S. HE has a great number of distinctive features that set it apart from many HE systems. According to the data analysis of the most distinctive characteristics of the U.S. HE can be surmised as follows:

Decentralization

Large Size

Student Diversity

In this section and the following sections, the above-mentioned characteristics will be respectively explained and elaborated upon, within the context of the U.S. HE.

One of the crucial differences in the U.S. HE system, when compared to many HE systems, is the decentralization of its system. That is, the federal government plays a relatively small role in relation to the entire system, and most of the institutions are governed by local authorities (Eckel & King, 2006). The U.S. Department of Education (2008) states that:
Higher education institutions in the United States are organized and licensed or chartered as non-profit or for-profit corporations, regardless of whether they are public or private. These corporate entities are governed by boards of trustees, who are citizens appointed by a governor or legislature (public institutions) or elected by the board itself (private institutions). Institutions thus established may be single campus institutions, multi-campus institutions or systems comprising several independent institutions. (International Affairs Office, 2008, p. 1.)

The major role in the administration of HEIs is played by the states, and considering that there are fifty states that are vastly autonomous and dissimilar to one another, HE in each state is governed differently from the others. For example, in some states a board is responsible for HEIs, while in others, a board acts like an advisor and has no significant authority over HEIs. In other states, a state agency is present between the HEIs and the government of the state, which is charged with the implementation of that state’s policies (Eckel & King, 2006). Michigan is the only state without a state-wide entity, with the exception of the Governor, and legislature, which controls and steers HE policy, while remaining forty-nine states have either a governing board (responsible for authorizing any new programs or reviewing existing academic programs with a very limited role in personnel and institutional operations), or state-wide coordination (“performed by individual institutional governing boards”) (Lingenfelter 2006, pp. 1-3).

The federal government, however, is most visible with regards to the financing of HE. It spends roughly $165 billion on HE annually, in the form of grants, loans, and tax credits, while, at the same time, states spend approximately $74 billion in direct appropriations (Selingo, 2015). Thus, the federal government has a large stake in terms of financial support; however, the state governments have considerably more authority over HE policies within their states.

Apart from financial support, one of the most crucial roles of the federal government is to collect data and provide information on HE, since the decentralized nature of the system makes it very hard for states to obtain comprehensive data from other states. There are several initiatives established by the federal government aimed at providing the public, and educationalists with accurate and comprehensive data, with one such initiative being the College Scorecard, “designed to provide students, families, and their advisers with a truer picture on college cost and value, and includes the most reliable national data on the earnings of former college graduates and new data on student debt” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015a, p. 3). Apart from providing information to the public, the Scorecard has a technical
site for policymakers, researchers and such, who are “interested in delving more deeply into institutional performance” (ibid., p. 3). There are a number of other sources provided by the federal government aimed at providing information about HE in the US, ranging from statistics, to comprehensive websites such as the “public data listing in machine readable format” which can be found on the Department of Education’s website. Finally, it is important to note that the U.S. government provides comprehensive statistics and data on HE, and upon delving into the U.S. Department of Education resources.

In addition to collecting data and providing information, the most predominant role of the federal government is “funding research and setting research priorities” (Lingenfelter, p. 3). No doubt that earlier it was very hard for the federal government to set research priorities, when it had little authority on the institutions; and consequently, up until the middle of 20th Century, it had indeed played a minor role on determining these priorities. However, after WWII, the federal government stepped in to expand its support for education (“Federal Role in Education”, 2016). During the Cold War, the first comprehensive education legislation, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), was passed in 1958 “in response to the Soviet launch of Sputnik” (“Federal Role in Education”, 2016). The U.S. Department of Education (2016) articulates the role of the Act as follows:

To help ensure that highly trained individuals would be available to help America compete with the Soviet Union in scientific and technical fields, the NDEA included support for loans to college students, the improvement of science, mathematics, and foreign language instruction in elementary and secondary schools, graduate fellowships, foreign language and area studies, and vocational-technical training.

King and Eckel (2006) note that “In order for institutions to participate in these financial aid programs, they must comply with a wide range of federal reporting requirements on topics ranging from teacher preparation to gender equity in intercollegiate athletics” (p. 1038). Based on the federal government’s support of HEIs, and the importance of this support as revenue for the HEIs, one can argue that the federal government has increased its ability to influence HEIs in numerous ways (ibid. p. 1038).

Despite the efforts of the federal government, and states to subsidize HE to some extent, HE in the U.S. is extremely expensive. When costs (direct and indirect) are considered, the total cost for an individual to obtain a HE degree/qualification in the US, is according to the OECD (2012) in excess of $116,000 (OECD, 2012, p. 4). Direct costs (e.g., tuition fees) in
the U.S. are the highest among OECD countries: while the OECD average is around $11,000, the U.S. average is $61,000, indicating that expenses relating to pursuing HE in the U.S. are the highest among OECD member countries (OECD, 2014, p. 2). As Ehrenberg, (2007), points out, there are, of course, many reasons behind the costliness of U.S. HE, such as the need to increase educational quality, which may result in reducing class sizes, and/or costs associated with acquiring expensive equipment (p. 12).

Furthermore, cultural and structural reasons play a vital role in the relation to the expensiveness of a HE system. As mentioned previously, it is impossible to think about an education system outside, or apart, from the culture it is operated in. As the report, Rising Cost of Higher Education (2012), indicates; the academic culture of HE in the U.S. constantly focuses on improving educational quality (Davis Educational Foundation, 2012, p. 1), while the essence of academic culture in the U.S. is not “tuition fees should be lower,” but, “we have to do better.” Every institution is competing with each other, and society and policymakers seem to be preoccupied by this. However, when diving into the core of the system, where the central power (e.g., the federal government) is weak and the institutions are autonomous, it is hard to impose the idea of “lower tuition fees,” as, in most cases, it would result in a decrease in education quality within the HEIs, due to cultural and structural heritages.

Finnish professors who participated in this research seem to be underlining the cultural differences between Finland and the U.S. when comparing free education in Finland with tuition fees in the U.S. Most interviewees emphasized the cultural and economic differences between the two countries, and ended up stressing the difficulty of establishing a central system in the U.S. such as that present in Finland. Interviewees stated that the U.S. has no desire to establish a system such as the one in Finland. In fact, the majority of interviewees, including policymakers, stated that Finland is making its universities more autonomous than ever, not as much so as those in the U.S., but certainly seeing the U.S. system as an example. One Finnish policymaker stated that:

"At some state level [between Finland and the U.S.] there are similarities in structures and aims and goals, and we have learned a lot from the U.S. system. Institutional autonomy, principles for funding, internalization, and competition are among those things that we have learned, in addition to the tenure track system."
Some interviewees argued that a comparable level of quality in HEIs cannot be achieved without the influence of a strong binding power (e.g., the government) on HE policy. Therefore, decentralization is indirectly affecting the costs of HE, since every institution in the U.S. is trying to become better than its counterpart within the same system. Interviewee 15 indicates that:

*I’m not saying that lack of federal authority [on HEIs] is the only reason, in fact, it is very hard to build a system of comparable/similar institutions, like in Finland, with or without a government authority (...) But I am also inclined to think that the lack of a central authority is one of the reasons behind the differences in educational quality among the HEIs [in US].*

Additionally, it is important to note that, the American interviewees, who are working in American HEIs, and are thus very familiar with the regulations and structures, stated that decentralization, in general, emphasizes democracy, and HE is not an exception to this rule. Thus, the HE system has been emphasizing democracy since the very beginning by being governed mostly by their states (the very public they are serving for).

In conclusion, decentralization is considered to be one of the most typical aspects of U.S. HE by participants and policy documents. The U.S. HEIs are governed, in most cases, by state governments, instead of the federal government: thus there are literally thousands of different institutions involved in setting policies, establishing academic programs, deciding on funding levels, and so on. However, the federal government is a key player in financing HE since its spending on HE, is more than double that of equivalent state spending on HE. Moreover, the federal government has a vast influence on the system, which became effective following WWII, when it started to expand its support to HE. These efforts however, to subsidize HE have not been effective in terms of reducing the costs of HE, as the U.S. HE system is the most expensive system among OECD countries in which to pursue a degree. Decentralization of the system is not solely culpable, as there are multiple reasons for this high expense, including institutional competition, the desire to increase educational quality, and cultural and economic structures. Additionally, decentralization is seen by the U.S. experts as being an indicator (and supporter) of democracy in the U.S. HE system.

### 8.2.3 Large Size as a Typical Feature of U.S. Higher Education

Almost every resource relating to U.S. HE (including the participants of this research) such as the reports on HE systems by entities such as the OECD (2009, 2013), the World Bank
(2014) and the Pell Institute (2013), agree that the U.S. HE system is colossal. The U.S. system consists of more than seven thousand Postsecondary Title IV institutions (which offer programs where students are entitled to federal student grants and loans), of which nearly three thousand are 4-year colleges (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2014), making it the second largest HE system in the world, after China, and followed by India (Raghunadhan, 2009, p. 40).

There are numerous HEIs operating under a variety of categories in the U.S., however, according to Eckel and King (2006), these degree granting institutions can all be categorized into four main groups: Two-year community colleges, public four-year colleges, private not-for-profit institutions, and, for-profit institutions. The vastness of the system, like many other distinguishing features of the U.S. HE system, has not been achieved overnight. In fact, over the last fifty years, there has been a steady increase in the total number of degree-granting institutions.

Table 12: Number of degree granting institutions in the US

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<tr>
<td>2-year colleges</td>
<td>1274</td>
<td>1418</td>
<td>1732</td>
<td>2263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year colleges</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>2141</td>
<td>2540</td>
<td>3110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 2 Years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3231</td>
<td>3559</td>
<td>4182</td>
<td>7416</td>
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In the academic year of 1980-1981, there were 3,231 degree-granting institutions in the U.S; 1,274 of which were 2-year colleges, while the remaining 1,957 were 4-year colleges (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The same statistics indicate that ten years later, in 1990-1991, the number of HEIs had increased to 3,559 (1,418, 2-year and 2,141, 4-year), while ten years later, in 2000-2001, there were a total of
4,182 (1,732 2-year, 2450 4-year) degree granting HEIs. In 2012-13, there were total of 7,416 Title IV HEIs (programs where students are entitled to federal student grants and loans) in the U.S. (3,110 were 4-year, 2,263 were 2-year, and the remaining 2,043 were institutions offering programs lasting less than 2-years (Ginder & Kelly-Reid, 2013, p. 3).

As the numbers indicate, the U.S. HE system has literally thousands of institutions. However, it is important to note that the popularity of the U.S. HE system stems from a couple of hundred institutions, at best; as while the U.S. system contains some of the best renowned HEIs in the world, others are relatively unknown. For example, in THE world university rankings (2015) there are nearly 150 U.S. HEIs represented in the list of the top 800 universities, which when compared to other countries, is a staggering number, and in terms of success, very impressive. To have one hundred and fifty good HEIs that are well known throughout the world is no doubt a magnificent achievement, as comparatively speaking, no other HE systems can claim to come even remotely close to this success. However, considering that this one hundred and fifty universities represent only a small percentage of the total three thousand 4-year U.S. HEIs, then it is plausible to question the success of the rest of the HEIs. Interviewee 16 argues that:

The [U.S] system is massive. I don’t think anyone in the U.S. can name more than a thousand colleges. But everyone knows Harvard, Stanford, MIT, and Yale and so on and so forth because they are great universities: They have thousands of successful students, renowned professors, cutting-edge research... What about Pace University? The University of Oregon? Some state universities that no one even knows exist?

According to some of the interviewees, having thousands of HEIs is good, to some extent, as for one, it allows people to attend a HEI, which has positive implications regarding economic growth and quality of life. However, some participants argue that having too many institutions which differ greatly from each other, is also problematic. First of all, some participants note that there are numerous institutions that have quite low graduation rates. Interviewee 14 states that “Elite universities are pretty much good at everything (...) also, their students’ dropout rates are significantly lower than the others.” This statement is backed up by graduation figures obtained from the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (2016), who relate that graduation rates for 4-year HEIs, which have open admission policies (almost non-selective for admitted students) based on students graduating within six years, was a lowly 36%, whereas the selective (acceptance rate was less than 25%) 4-year HEIs graduated
on average, 89% of applicants. The corresponding graduation rates (within 6 years) for public institutions was 58% (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

In addition to low graduation rates, interviewees also note that many students in the U.S. are taking loans to cover their tuition and expenses, resulting in huge student debt. Interviewee 17 states that “Many students take student loans and end up paying them for years.” Interviewee 18 notes that “It is very unlikely that you can find a job that will earn you enough money to pay your student loan back in a short time,” while interviewee 3 argues that “Student loans must be extremely high by now.” In fact, in 2015, 7 out of every 10 students who graduated from a non-profit college (public or private) had student loan debt, and average student debt was approximately 30 thousand Dollars, while according to the Federal Reserve, total student loan debt is in excess of $1.1 trillion (The Institute for College Access & Success, 2016, p.1; The Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2015).

In conclusion, the U.S. is one of the largest and most renowned HE systems in the world consisting of over 7000 HEIs. Some interviewees argue that with a system so vast, and with such variety among institutions, one should question whether the system actually needs that many HEIs. With such a huge gap between institutional quality, and selectivity, not every HEI can be of similar quality, however, over 100 U.S. HEIs constantly dominate the world rankings, attracting thousands of international, and domestic students each year. The vastness of the system, and the high number of institutions also results in huge student intake, which in turn results in a huge amount of student debt, as there are too many students who have to take out student loans in order to pay for their college education. Student loan debt in the U.S. is being estimated to be in excess of $1.1 trillion in 2015.

8.2.4 Diversity Describes U.S. Higher Education

With respect to diversity in the U.S. HE system, there are two predominant groups: One group being the diversity of institutions (which is discussed in the previous sections) with the other group being students. Student numbers in U.S. HEIs are rapidly rising in terms of both size and diversity, as over the course of twenty years, enrollment rates have increased exponentially. Between 1993 and 2003, enrollment rates increased by 18%, and between 2003 and 2013, enrollment rates increased from 16.9 million to 20.4 million, which is roughly equal to a 20 percent increase (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, para 3.) What makes this number even more noteworthy is that enrollment rates have increased despite the
increase in the cost of attending a HEI in the US, as during this ten-year period between the academic years of 2003-2004 and 2013-2014, the cost of attending an undergraduate institution increased by 25 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, para 1).

Statistics indicate that students in U.S. HEIs are diverse with regards to age, race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. According to Interviewee 17, there is no other country in the world where a classroom is as multicultural as in the U.S. Interviewee 5 states that “There are huge differences between European countries, (with the exception of the United Kingdom), and the U.S. with respect to diversity. We [Europe] are much more homogeneous.” Interviewee 14 argues that “more diversity brings more ideas, and ideas are what matters most in HE.” According to Interviewee 1, U.S. policymakers have been trying very hard to achieve student diversity in their HEIs.

For instance, in 2014, based on ethnicity, the percent of U.S. citizen undergraduate students were as follows: 66% of undergraduate students at four-year private nonprofit institutions were White, while Black students accounted for 13%, 11% of students were of Hispanic origin, while 6% identified as being Asian. In public four-year institutions, White students accounted for 61% of the total number of students, Black students 12%, Hispanic 16%, and 7% were of Asian ethnicity. American Indian and Alaskan Native, or students with dual, or multiple ethnicities were also represented, albeit in smaller percentages, ranging from 1% to 6% in the same year.

As revealed by the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), The U.S. Department of Education suggests that during approximately thirty years, from 1976 to 2008, enrollment rates for each racial/ethnic group have increased. The fastest growth has been seen in Asian/Pacific Islanders and Hispanic enrollments, both groups which increased approximately six fold, with the former increasing from 169.000 to 1.118.000, and the latter from 353.000 to 2.103.000. During the same period (1976 - 2008), American Indian/Alaska Native enrollment more than doubled (from 70,000 to 176,000), and Black enrollment increased by 4%, from 943.000 to 2.269.000 (10 percent to 14 percent). Lastly, White enrollment also increased (7.740.000 to 10.339.000); however, it displayed the slowest increase of all the racial/ethnic groups. Importantly, during the 1976 to 2008 period, overall enrollment by White students, fell from 82% to 63% but still the enrollment rates of White students was by far the highest one.
Figure 4: The percent of U.S. citizen undergraduate students in 2014, based on identified ethnicity.


Not only has racial/ethnical diversity been increasing in the U.S.HE system, gender diversity has also been increasing. Interviewee 10 argues that:

"Traditionally in Finland women actively participated in education. I think more women in 1950 graduated from the university than men, and you can see in the U.S. that maybe during the last fifty years or so women have also actively participated in U.S. HE."

Although both male and female enrollment rates have increased at undergraduate level, since 1976 the percentage of females was higher than the males in (US National Center for Education Statistics, 2010, p. 124).
Figure 5: Total number and total percentage distribution of undergraduate fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by race/ethnicity between 1976–2008

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9,418,970</td>
<td>10,469,088</td>
<td>11,959,106</td>
<td>13,155,393</td>
<td>14,480,364</td>
<td>14,963,964</td>
<td>16,345,738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>7,740,465</td>
<td>8,480,661</td>
<td>9,272,630</td>
<td>8,983,455</td>
<td>9,664,641</td>
<td>9,828,594</td>
<td>10,339,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>943,355</td>
<td>1,018,840</td>
<td>1,147,220</td>
<td>1,546,893</td>
<td>1,839,043</td>
<td>1,955,356</td>
<td>2,269,284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>352,893</td>
<td>433,075</td>
<td>724,561</td>
<td>1,351,025</td>
<td>1,579,783</td>
<td>1,733,555</td>
<td>2,103,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>169,291</td>
<td>248,711</td>
<td>500,486</td>
<td>845,545</td>
<td>922,749</td>
<td>971,353</td>
<td>1,117,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>69,729</td>
<td>77,900</td>
<td>95,474</td>
<td>138,506</td>
<td>157,821</td>
<td>160,404</td>
<td>175,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresident alien</td>
<td>143,217</td>
<td>209,901</td>
<td>218,735</td>
<td>287,969</td>
<td>317,327</td>
<td>314,702</td>
<td>360,297</td>
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The greatest difference in enrollment rates since the 1970s has been seen in the enrollment of Black female students. In 1976, the ratio of Black females compared to males enrolled in undergraduate institutions was, 54% to 46, while in 2008, the ratio of Black females had increased to 64% to 36% Black males (ibid. p. 124). This trend in gender diversity is not only present in Black people, but also in American Indian/Alaska Native gender enrolment percentages. Enrollment rates of American Indian/Alaska Native males and females were almost equal in 1976; however, by 2008, the female enrollment rate had increased to 60 percent. Additionally, enrolment rates for Hispanic females (46% to 58%) and White females (48% to 56%) also increased, while finally, Asian/Pacific Islander females jumped to 54% in 2008, despite being below 50% in 1976 (ibid. p. 124).

Moreover, diversity in students’ socioeconomic situations is conspicuous in the U.S. HE system. Even though the number of students enrolled in HE has increased over the last decades, there is still a discernable “pattern” in the characteristics of students who choose to, and are selected to enroll in HEIs. Notably, students coming from a family with a high socioeconomic status are more likely to obtain a HE degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015, p. 1). For example, in 2012, only 50% of students who were high school sophomores in 2002 and coming from a family with low socioeconomic status, had obtained a HE degree by 2012. The same status for students from a family with middle socioeconomic
status was 60 percent, and, for students from a family with high socioeconomic status, it was 77 percent (ibid. pp. 2-7).

Figure 6: Percentage differences between female and male undergraduate students between 1976 and 2008.

Figure 7: The percentage of 2002 high school sophomores who earned a bachelor’s degree or higher by 2012, by socioeconomic status (SES) and 2006 college enrollment status.


In addition to socioeconomic status, the OECD (2014) reports that parents’ education level is also an indicator in students’ enrollment in tertiary education. For example, while a small proportion of adults (30%) in the U.S. obtain a higher level of education than their parents, the same statistics in Finland was 55 percent (OECD, 2014, p. 2). Furthermore, the OECD average for adults whose parents do not hold a tertiary education degree obtaining a HE degree is 20%, while the same statistics is 13% in the U.S. (ibid. p. 3).

Last but not least, student diversity in the U.S. also presents itself in nontraditional students. As cited in Brock (2010), Choy (2002), Horn (1996), Kim (2002) and Taniguchi and Kaufman (2005), the U.S. Department of Education (2015) defines nontraditional student as follows:

Researchers generally consider nontraditional students to have the following characteristics: (1) being independent for financial aid purposes, (2) having one or more dependents, (3) being a single caregiver, (4) not having a traditional high school diploma, (5) delaying postsecondary enrollment, (6) attending school part time, and (7) being employed full time” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 1).
Since 1995, at least 70% of all undergraduate students possessed at least one the aforementioned characteristics of nontraditional students. This number was roughly 72% of all undergraduates in 2011-2012 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015b, pp. 1-2). Aside from the 26.2% students (in 2011-2012) who possessed zero nontraditional characteristics, 18.7% possessed one of the characteristics of nontraditional students, 31.3% possessed two or three characteristics of nontraditional students, while 23.8% possessed four or more characteristics of nontraditional students in 2011-2012 (ibid. p. 6). According to Hess (2017, para. 3), the share of all students who are over age 25 is projected to increase another twenty-three percent by 2019, hence the importance of nontraditional students in the U.S. HE.

The table 13: Proportion of nontraditional students in U.S.HEIs over selected years.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of nontraditional characteristics¹</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two to three</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four or more</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
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In conclusion, the U.S. is extremely diverse in terms of students. Race/ethnicity wise, the predominance of Whites from decades past is decreasing, with participation rates of Black, Hispanic, Asian, American/Alaskan Native, and bi/multi-ethnic students increasing. Also, there are now more females enrolled in HEIs than males. The socioeconomic situation of parents is still a dominant factor concerning the attainment rates of their kids, with the U.S. being below the OECD average in terms of obtaining a higher education level than their parents. Nontraditional student rates are high in the U.S., with seven out of every ten students possessing at least one the characteristics of nontraditional students. All these indicators combined show that student diversity in U.S. HE is very conspicuous and aside from the impacts of the socioeconomic situation of parents on the enrollment rates of their kids, this diversity is increasing the wellbeing of society.
8.3 Accessibility in Finnish HE

In this chapter and the following chapter, based on an analysis of the documents and the interviewees, accessibility and how its principles manifest themselves in Finnish HE and in U.S. HE will be discussed.

In the analysis of accessibility in Finnish HE, four categories emerged: The emphasis on equity, freedom from socioeconomic status, status of immigrants, and accessibility as a Finnish strength.

8.3.1 Emphasis on Equity

Education is one of the most valuable, if not the most valuable aspect in determining how a person lives his, or her adult life. Improved education often means a better life, increased opportunities, and better health (UNESCO, 2016). Education is undoubtedly a fundamental human right, and plays a vital role in the exercising of other human rights, in addition to promoting personal freedom, and giving rise to substantial development benefits (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015). Furthermore, the OECD’s Equity and Quality in Education report (2012) states that the highest performing education systems are those that combine equity with quality (p. 3). It could be argued that an inclusive, equitable education system which makes education available to all, is the prominent component required in establishing a society based on the principles of equity.

According to the OECD report on tertiary education (2009), Finland’s decades-long endeavor seems to have reached its completion. The report (2009) states that “Finland is widely regarded as one of the most advanced countries in the world regarding equality of opportunity” (p. 32). It could be contested that providing equal educational opportunities for almost every citizen is one of the most important reasons behind the equality of opportunity in Finland. Finland’s socio-economic stability bolsters this argument, since educational failure often results in long-term socio-economic costs (OECD, 2012, p. 3), simply because citizens who lack the necessary skills to thoroughly participate in society generate higher costs for welfare systems. Thus, in order to prevent additional costs and strains on the public budget (e.g., public health, social support), social failure should be reduced (OECD, 2012). the Equity and Quality in Education (2012) report states that, “poorly educated people limit economies’ capacity to produce, grow and innovate” (OECD, 2012, p. 3), hence, increasing
access to quality education, and decreasing school failure rates should be one of the primary goals of a country’s education agenda.

Finnish policymakers realized the importance of an inclusive education system in the 1960s, and the biggest educational reform after World War II which revolutionized basic education began in Finland (Antikainen & Luukkainen, 2010). This reform, has had and still has a profound impact on educational development in Finland. Aho, Pitkanen, and Sahlberg (2006) note that “the central goal of comprehensive school reform was to strengthen educational and social equality. Most of all, policymakers sought to attain regional and social equality” (p. 63).

Years of planning and implementation seem to have worked in Finland, since almost all Finnish educators interviewed for this research agree that equity is seen as a unique distinction of Finnish HE. Interviewee 4 argues that the ideology behind Finnish education has been equity, and it has been deeply rooted in the thinking of Finnish people. Also, Interviewee 13 states that “We are definitely very proud of the system based on equal opportunities, and of the financial aid scheme for students which together make it possible for everybody to make use of the higher education system in the country.” Moreover, Interviewee 3 notes that the education system in Finland has been geared towards equality since the 1960s, ensuring that everybody would have the same chances regardless of his/her cultural capital, and parents’ social inheritance.

It seems that upon the commencement of the substantial education reforms which took place in the 1960s, Finland recognized that higher education is a tool which must be made available to everyone. Henceforth, amongst the radical actions that the country took in order to revolutionize its education system, equity was perhaps the most important aspect that was placed at the center of the revolution. Furthermore, post-war educational reform in Finland not only put great effort into not only achieving equal opportunities in basic education, but also for those who desired to continue their education after secondary school. It is argued in OECD report (2009, pp. 31-39) that as equity had been placed in the midst of educational reform in the country, HEIs became significantly easier to access.
8.3.2 Free from One’s Socioeconomic Status

Accessibility of HE in Finland is independent of one’s socio-economic situation. Interviewee 1 indicated that “if you’re capable enough, your accessibility to HE doesn’t depend on your financial position.” There is no doubt that accessibility is seen by the interviewees as being the most crucial element of Finnish HE. Interviewee 12 argues that the tuition free system is a result of the nature of Finnish society, and the way in which the Finnish post-secondary system has developed, that is, with a focus on equity, and access to HE.

Finnish universities differ from other countries where HE involves the payment of tuition fees. According to Interviewee 6 (2015), Finnish basic education endeavors to provide quality students to Finnish HEIs, and those students that are deemed good enough to be admitted to an HEI are never deprived of HE due to financial reasons. Similarly, it was stated in the OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education (2009), that the student support system of Finland is one of the most generous among OECD countries (p. 31). The same report concludes that “those who want to study may do so without being deterred by their inability to finance their studies” (p. 31). Evidently, Finns consider HE as a right that should be accessible to every citizen.

The lack of tuition fees, and public financial support (government grants) allow citizens to attend HEIs. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture’s development plan for Education and Research 2003-2008 states that “everyone should have equal right to education and training according to their abilities and special needs and to personal development irrespective of their financial means” (p. 31). OECD report (2009) asserts that the student financing system in Finland is "a mature set of policies, subject to incremental modifications” (p. 32). Furthermore, none of the participants interviewed for this research expressed any form of concern relating to the accessibility of HE in Finland. Concordantly, Davies et al., (2009) conclude that neither policymakers nor representatives of HEIs in Finland showed discomfort or expressed concern about the accessibility in HE in Finland (p. 32).

8.3.3 Accessibility as a Finnish Strength

Clearly, the comprehensive education system in Finland is one of the main factors behind social equity. An examination of the PISA results indicates that socio-economic background
has little effect on student's performance (OECD, 2009, pp. 32-34). The HE system in Finland is also built upon the same principles. Interviewee 12 argues that one of the most distinct feature of Finnish HE is the uniform quality of the system. The interviewee further elaborates that "In international comparison, the most distinctive feature is the good level of performance of the whole HE system."

Another strength of the Finnish HE system is that the access to HE is not limited to young people. "Open universities," part of the Finnish adult education system, offer a wide variety of courses (mostly in Finnish and Swedish) to everyone, irrespective of age, or background (CIMO, 2016). The opportunities provided to adults enable them to engage in post-secondary studies, and the number of students registered in open university courses is impressive (Davies et al., 2009, p. 33). It is important to note that Open Universities cannot grant degrees, however, if the student later enrolls in an HEI, courses and credits from Open University courses can be transferred, and included towards the attainment of a degree. Davies et al., (2009, p. 33) conclude that open university may ultimately work in favor of equality in Finland.

Thus far, the data analysis has indicated that access to Finnish HE is open, in most cases, irrespective of one's financial situation, background, or age, and additionally is regardless of one's gender. Finland has the largest share of women holding a HE degree when compared to men (49% of women and 35% of men) among the OECD countries (The Economist, 2016). Similarly, the OECD (2009) report on Equity and Access to HE, indicates that for more than two decades women have been the more representative gender in Finnish HE, while Kyrö (2011) indicates that women are in the majority at all levels of education, with the exception of basic education.

Finland has also been very successful at increasing geographical accessibility to HE, which has been mostly realized by the establishment of University of Applied Sciences across the nation. This issue, however, is further elaborated on in section 8.1.4 Homogeneity Describes Finnish Higher Education System.

8.3.4 Immigration and Foreign Students

Despite the achievements regarding accessibility in Finnish HE, there is, as always, room for improvement. Most notably, regulations for immigrant, and foreign students seems to
require attention. In 2009, the OECD report on Finnish HE asserted that "the Finnish ambition to strengthen the international activities and to take part in international competition, networking and pooling of resources in education and research will lead to increased mobility and more immigrant and foreign students." (p. 37) The numbers indicate that international students in Finnish HE have been increasing constantly during the last decade. In 2005, there were 8955 international students on different educational level whereas, in 2015, 20255 international students attended a higher education institution in Finland. While in 2004 the international students consisted of 5.6% of the overall number of students, the percent of international students increased to 13.7% in 2014 (Centre for International Mobility, 2015).

Consequently, in order to meet this demand, some major preparations are required on a national and institutional level. One can argue that Finland has always been a very homogenous culture and society. However, recently, there has been a shift in classrooms, institutions, and society towards being more multicultural; hence particular attention should be devoted to this issue. Davies et al. (2009) assert that in order to meet the requirements, a change in culture and attitude will probably be needed. Moreover, some additional revisions such as curricula, admission procedures, housing, social and financial support and employment conditions for immigrant and foreign students are required (pp. 37-66). Interviewee 2 states that “especially in recent times, with the surge of immigrants into the country, Finland is trying to keep up with the current flow of immigrants and foreign students, and I think we should be more attentive to this issue.”

In conclusion, it seems that both educationalists, and international reports acknowledge that Finnish HEIs have very high accessibility for those who want to pursue their studies in HE regardless of the socio-economic background. However, there is still room for improvement, especially concerning issues related to immigration, and foreign students.

8.4 Accessibility in U.S. Higher Education

Equal opportunity for all lies at the core of U.S. constitutional commitments/principles (The Pell Institute, 2015, p. 5). It is clear that the U.S. Department of Education priorities equal access to education since it clearly states on its website that: “Our mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.” When examined in more detail, the Department of Education (2016, para. 2) articulates its mission as follows:
- Establishing policies on federal financial aid for education, and distributing as well as monitoring those funds.
- Collecting data on America's schools and disseminating research.
- Focusing national attention on key educational issues.
- Prohibiting discrimination and ensuring equal access to education.

It now seems that ensuring equal access to education is not the core commitment, but part of the overall responsibility of the U.S. government. As The Pell Institute (2015) points out, the very first official mission of the U.S. Department of Education was simply “to ensure equal access to education,” which was revised in 2005 by the Bush Administration in order to express academic success, and global competitiveness (p. 5).

Therefore, it is safe to assume that for U.S. policymakers and society, from top to bottom, achieving high accessibility rates and ensuring equal access to HE is very important. Interviewee 17 states that “The ED [Department of Education] puts significant importance on accessibility.” Interviewee 8 argues that “The federal government is trying very hard to increase the access rates.” Furthermore, Interviewee 14 notes that “I wouldn’t know about individual institutions, but I can tell that the President of the U.S., hence the government, underlines the importance of accessibility.”

Evidently, increased accessibility to HE is beneficial for everyone; both the State and society, for several reasons. Firstly, education is widely acknowledged as being one of the most crucial elements in determining opportunities for employment and salaries. Secondly, the HE system operates as an engine for social mobility, providing opportunities for those who strive to ameliorate their socioeconomic status (Cahalan, 2013, p. 7). Finally, HE attainment positively correlates with health factors and civic engagement outcomes (The Pell Institute, 2015, p. 5).

As mentioned beforehand, education, notably HE, operates as an engine for social mobility, which is a very positive trait when it works in one’s favor. As the report on the Future of Higher Education (2006) states: “For close to a century now, access to higher education has been a principal—some would say the principal—means of achieving social mobility” (The Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006, p. 12). However, paradoxically, it must also be noted that HE attainment correlates with the socioeconomic level of families. Surely, it must be acknowledged that accessibility itself is not a
negative trait; however, accessibility alone does not guarantee equal attainment. For instance, students whose socioeconomic status are lower than the average might need to work at part-time jobs in order to continue their education, and there is almost no guarantee that they will be exempt from financial struggles. If, as Calahan (2013) points out, the same trend continues to exist in the U.S., students from low-income families would receive increasingly few HE degrees. Therefore, from presidents to policymakers and faculty, there is a consensus that HE attainment should not be depend on one’s family income and educational level of parents (The Pell Institute, 2015, p. 44).

On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that because of the massiveness of U.S. HE system, it is very hard to improve the system as a whole. Interviewee 2 states that “The U.S. should definitely improve its accessibility levels but we also need to take into consideration that they are dealing with a much larger system than us [Finland].” Interviewee 9 argues that:

> It’s very easy to start thinking in cliché terms, saying that ‘U.S. HE is not as accessible’, and that ‘it’s infinitely more elitist than it is here in Finland,’ but that would be unfair considering their education system and the individual’s perception on taxes.

According to Interviewee 15, however, the system needs to be improved but there is no magic formula and everyone needs to share responsibility. Similarly, the Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education (2006) notes that:

We may still have more than our share of the world’s best universities. But a lot of other countries have followed our lead, and they are now educating more of their citizens to more advanced levels than we are. Worse, they are passing us by at a time when education is more important to our collective prosperity than ever. (p. 10)

Indeed, enrollment rates in U.S. HE are not increasing as rapidly as in many other countries. As mentioned earlier, OECD (2014, para. 3) statistics indicate that enrollment rates in the U.S. increased by only 7% (between 2000 and 2012) while the average increase in OECD countries was 11%.
8.4.1 Efforts Aimed at Increasing Accessibility of Higher Education

In order to address the aforementioned long term problems of the U.S. HE system, such as the correlation between one’s educational attainment rate, and the income and educational level of parents, in March 2007, the Department of Education specified five areas that would be focused on in order to attempt to resolve the problem:

1. Alignment: high schools must have more rigorous coursework aligned to college and work
2. Access: adult students must be better served
3. Affordability: financial aid must be simplified and need-based grants increased
4. Cost: colleges must become more cost-effective
5. Transparency: there must be greater transparency about learner outcomes so parents and students can make informed choices about higher education. ("Affordability, Accessibility and Accountability in Higher Education", 2008, p. 5).

After WWII in particular, many programs were established in order to support students, and increase the accessibility of HE. For example, the Higher Education Act (HEA) has been regulating need-based grants for tertiary education since its first authorizations in 1965. Forty-three years after it was first establishment, “The Higher Education Opportunity Act (Public Law 110-315) (HEOA) was enacted on August 14, 2008, and reauthorizes the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA)” ("Higher Education Opportunity Act - 2008", 2016, para. 1). Cahalan (2013) notes that, “As part of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA), the first U.S. need-based grants for postsecondary education, the Basic Education Opportunity Grants (BEOG) were established as well as Direct Student Loan programs” (p. 19). It should be noted that BEOG was later renamed as the Pell Grants.

The original legislation of 1965 was stated as providing equal access to tertiary education for disadvantaged students who are academically qualified (p. 32). In 1968, U.S. Congress reauthorized the Act, and added three new programs, “Special Services for the Disadvantaged,” “Upward Bound,” and “Talent Search,” which were later referred to as the TRIO programs (Gladieux, 1995, para. 13). In 1968, the Act was again reauthorized, and “rounded out the principal programs and the basic charter of today's federal student aid system” (Ibid, para. 15). Over the course of reauthorizations of the HEA, in addition to the first three programs, over time five more programs were added to the TRIO programs. Today, the TRIO programs comprise of eight programs aimed at supporting and aiding low-income students,
1st generation students, and students with disabilities, from secondary school to tertiary programs ("Federal TRIO Programs", 2016, p. 1).

The eight programs are as follows: (1) Educational Opportunity Centers, (2) Ronald E. McNair Post baccalaureate Achievement, (3) Student Support Services, (4) Talent Search, (5) Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs Staff, (6) Upward Bound, (7) Upward Bound Math-Science, (8) Veterans Upward Bound ("Higher Education Opportunity Act - 2008", 2016, para. 1). Not all of the aforementioned eight programs are aimed at providing financial aid. For example, “(the) Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs Staff” and “Talent Search” are support services which inform individuals about the availability of financial services, encourage them to complete their education, or train TRIO program staff in order to provide students with better assistance. Additionally, not all of the TRIO programs are tertiary education programs. Talent Search, Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math Science are middle school and high school programs (Cahalan, 2013, p. 32), while programs specifically aimed at assisting students once they are in college consist of; Student Support Services, Child Care Access Means Parents in School, and the McNair program. (p. 32). However, the HEOA is not only targeting the needs of individuals, institutional aids for HEIs is also present, with most of this aid serving minority, and low-income students (p. 33).

In the report of Widening Participation in Higher Education in the United States of America, Cahalan (2013) states that there are many other financial aid and loan programs for students, e.g., “Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants (FSEOG), Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH), and Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grants. The government also offers scholarships for military service, or to members of military personnel, while there are also Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Education Benefit” (p. 33).

Regardless of all the aforementioned grants, loans and support, efforts aimed at making HE more accessible still seem to not be enough, as there is still a very strong correlation between (A) family income and college attendance, and (B) parents’ educational levels and children's access to HE. Irrespective of the efforts by the federal government and the states, HE is still very expensive in the U.S., and all of the programs and loans fall short in meeting the requirements of compensating for HE attainment, as American students and their families have to spend more, and more for the expense of attending HEIs.
8.4.2 The Role of Higher Education funding in Relation to Accessibility

In 1980, the government and the states shared a peak allocation of 60% of revenue sources for financing HE, while in 2010 they shared a low of 34% (Cahalan, 2013, p. 19). The OECD reports that 28% of HE expenditures in the U.S. comes from public sources, while 62% comes from private ones (OECD, 2012, p. 8). In other OECD countries this share is quite the opposite, with 70% of HE expenditure coming from public sources, and only 30% coming from private sources (p. 8). However, the real problem is the high percentage of expenditure on HE that is coming directly from households, with this percentage being 45% in the U.S. However, there are other countries in which there is a higher percentage of expenditures on HE coming directly from households: Chile (68.1%), Japan (50.7%), Korea (49.2%) and the United Kingdom (58.1%). The OECD report (2012) indicates that “the heavy reliance on private spending for higher education in these countries raises salient questions about the extent to which this may limit access to higher education, as well as the robustness of their student aid systems” (p. 8).

The Pell Institute (2015) reports that in 2013 students from low-income families were eight times less likely to receive a bachelor’s degree (9%) than those from the highest-income families (77%). The difference was six times in 1970. Thus, there is an increase in the positive correlation between obtaining a bachelor’s degree and family income (The Pell Institute, 2015, p. 30). Subsequently, a smaller gap can be achieved by decreasing the percentage of expenditures on HE coming directly from households.

All that being said, efforts to increase accessibility of HE fall short for a number of reasons; however, the most flagrant reason, together with the expensiveness of HE, is the inability of grants to cover the costs of attendance. In 1970, in constant dollars, average tuition and fees cost close to $10,000, whereas in 2012-2013, they were roughly $20,000. Moreover, in 1975, the maximum Pell Grant (the highest Pell Grant award allowed by federal law) covered almost 70% of the average costs, whereas in 2012, the maximum amount of Pell Grant covered only 27%, lowest percentage since 1970 (The Pell Institute, 2015, p. 18).

In conclusion, there is a considerable amount of effort directed at raising the accessibility of HE in the U.S., with the majority of this effort being planned and executed by the federal government. However, individual states and the HEIs themselves, are also spending time and implementation for this purpose. The federal government underlines the importance of education and its impact on social mobility, thus encouraging its citizens to attend a tertiary
education institution. Nevertheless, there is a strong positive correlation between the family’s socioeconomic situation and HE attainment in the country. Efforts to increase accessibility in HE, while noteworthy, however, are not enough to reduce the HE attainment gap between students from families with high socioeconomic level and ones from families with low socioeconomic levels.

### 8.5 A Comparison of Accessibility Between the Finnish Higher Education System and the U.S. Higher Education System

It is difficult to find a suitable criterion that would yield fruitful results when comparing two systems and countries with very little in common, such as Finland and the U.S. Finland, a member of the EU, located in the far north of continental Europe, is a small homogeneous country of 5.5 million, which was ruled by Sweden for a number of centuries, and later by Russia for more than a century. The country’s basic education system is very well regarded, and Finland is considered by many, along with the other Nordic countries, as being one of the safest, and most prosperous countries in the world. The U.S., however, is an enormous country, and a global superpower that has led the world throughout the last century, in addition to having one of the most multicultural societies in the world.

However, below, some of the most visible differences of accessibility will be singled out by the researcher. The following aspects define and distinguish the HE systems of the two countries: Finland has less than 50 HEIs, whereas the U.S. has more than 7000. Finland’s HEIs are very homogenous and of equal quality, whereas HEIs in the U.S. vary tremendously in terms of quality, and size. While Finnish institutions operate under a strong central authority, the Ministry of Education, U.S. institutions are vastly autonomous and the federal government (though much more involved now, than fifty years ago) has a limited influence over them. Finnish HEIs, like in many other OECD countries, are mostly financed by the State, and local governments, whereas their U.S. counterparts are mostly dependent on private revenue sources. Finland has a couple of universities that are well known outside of its borders, while the U.S. has the most (both in terms of numbers and quality) renowned universities in the world.

Thus, it is very hard to find a focus point, through which to compare the two HE systems with each other. Comparisons of the percentages of people who obtained a HE degree would not make sense, as the numbers themselves do not mean much when comparing two highly
dissimilar systems. Of the distinctive characteristics of the Finnish HE system (e.g., accessibility, homogeneity, free education, self-directed learning) and the U.S. HE system (e.g., decentralization, large size, diversity) accessibility is an indicator that could be analyzed within the two systems, as regardless of how big or small a system is, or how many universities a country has, the ratio of people who obtain a HE degree is seen as being a reliable indicator of evaluating accessibility.

Throughout this research, the historical conditions of the two countries, their socioeconomic differences, the countries’ approach to HE, and the emphasizing of different aspects of the HE (e.g., the distinctive characteristics) system are expounded. For example, one gains a lot of insight from misalignment; that is, something which one system considers very important, which the other does not. For instance, by knowing that “large size” is considered as being a very distinctive characteristics of U.S. HE, which is not the case in Finnish HE, one can make numerous relevant, rational conclusions regarding the nature of the systems. Furthermore, diversity is seen as being a very important aspect of U.S. HE, whereas in Finland homogeneity of the universities is one of the most important aspects: Which again gives a valuable insight into how these systems are approaching issues placed in front of them. Therefore, before comparing the accessibility of the two HE systems, or even describing it in the respective countries, a detailed analysis of their distinctive characteristics is presented in this study. Only after that, is accessibility examined and the results shared.

Secondly, accessibility stands in a unique place in both HE systems. It is unique in Finnish HE as almost the entire system is built upon the principles of accessibility. The main approach is that everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic situation, should be able to obtain a HE degree; hence free higher education, in addition to government grants for every student throughout their tertiary education. It seems that the HE system, in terms of accessibility, is working quite well in Finland and that its praises are well deserved. Moreover, it must be noted that, the entire education system in Finland is developed to guarantee attainability of degrees (e.g., tuition free system, government grants), which is very successful and deserves high praise.

Accessibility is also important in the U.S. as it seems that since the end of WWII, the federal government has placed it at the center of its attention. Constant efforts to make the U.S. HE system more accessible are noteworthy. However, the system is yet to achieve the desired levels of accessibility, and it seems that it is going to take much more time, and will require
much more effort. The fundamental differences between the two principles of accessibility, lie in the fundamental differences between the societies of the two respective countries. Finnish people, just like their parents, collectively, are eager to pay high taxes in order to ensure free education for the next generation. American people, however, have been living in a different society for generations, where competitiveness and individualism have been deemed as being some of the most important characteristics of that society (Omi, 2012). Thus, the comparison of accessibility in the two systems cannot be reduced to just numbers, and requires a scrutinizing of many reasons and their histories.

It is no coincidence that the two countries paid paramount attention to their HE system during the cold-war era. The U.S. government, wanting to establish its scientific leadership in the world, invested in the HEIs, whereas Finnish government chose to invest in HE in order to be able to survive as a nation state. Both countries triumphed: The former establishing world class institutions with the latter establishing a system that provides education at as high a level as possible to as many people as possible. Not until the Internationalization of Finnish HE and the Bologna Process, has Finland displayed any desire to compete with other countries, most notably in HE. However, once the Internationalization of HE began, the Finnish government have encouraged a change in HEIs, encouraging them to become more competitive, giving them more autonomy, while aiming to attract more international students and scholars. The U.S. universities, however, have been competitive, autonomous, and internationally attractive for a very long time, and despite the best efforts of Europe to establish a similar system (albeit not as excessive as in the U.S.) in order to keep its best students and attract international students from other countries, the U.S. is still number one with respect to the aforementioned features. (For example, Britain, historically known with its high quality of HEIs, comes second after U.S.)

Even though the two systems are different and one cannot simply compare accessibility with only numbers, it is a fact that Finland has managed to achieve what the U.S. has been pursuing for its HE system for a very long time with regards to equity in all its forms. That is, in Finland, HE attainment is independent of a person’s socioeconomic status, while in the U.S., the main issue relating to accessibility is that one’s socioeconomic situation is a very important indicator of HE attainment. The U.S. government, through the U.S. Department of Education, is making great efforts to eliminate this problem, by subsidizing HE in the country with direct grants and loans for students, and support to institutions. However, all these efforts fall short, due to the diversity of the institutions and the expensiveness of the
HEIs. For example, community colleges, which stand in a unique place in terms of accessibility, provide affordable HE; four-year institutions, whether private or public, are very expensive, and are thus very difficult for families with low socioeconomic status to afford.

Moreover, the accessibility of the HE system for minorities and underrepresented groups in the U.S. is another issue that the U.S. wishes to address. These decades-long endeavors seem to be working (albeit not as significantly, or as quickly as desired), as there is no doubt that they have certainly improved the accessibility rates of minorities, and underrepresented groups. Finland, on the other hand, being a homogenous country, has not encountered the same problems on such a large-scale as the U.S. However, due to increasing multiculturalism in the country, combined with the recent migration flow in Europe, it is highly possible that soon Finland will encounter the same issues. The increasing expression of a “multicultural society” in Finnish government officials and policymaker’s discourses could be attributed to the change awaiting Finnish society in the future.

It is clear that the two countries can learn from one another in terms of the overall concept of accessibility. For the U.S., it is truly unacceptable and unfortunate that so many talented young people, who would otherwise excel at their studies cannot attend university, simply because they cannot afford it. Government subsidies, grants and loans are apparently not enough, as even though the system has relatively cheaper state universities, it is still too expensive for many to afford them. Some universities do provide need-based scholarships, which is great, but these are merely a “drop in the ocean.” From the perspective of providing equal opportunities to everyone in a society regardless of their socioeconomic status, the U.S. could learn a lot from analyzing the Finnish HE system.

On the other hand, even though Finland seems to be doing extremely well in terms of accessibility, Finland could gain from studying the U.S. HE system with respect to inclusion of minorities and adopting multiculturalism, since these will most likely be issues Finnish HE will face in the long term. Likewise, due to the desire and effort to make its HEIs more competitive and globally more attractive, Finland needs to study if its HEIs can be intellectually elite, without being financially elite. Finland has a lot to learn about fostering the high excellence of its institutions while at the same time continuing the commitment to its own roots of equality in education. Considering the Finnish social historical context, this needs to be dealt with extremely carefully in order to succeed. However, as it is evident throughout
its history, Finland has a remarkable capability of implementing excellent educational reforms, hence the country might achieve the system to which they are aiming.
9 Reliability and Validity

In this chapter the reliability and validity (hence, trustworthiness) of this research will be discussed. Firstly, reliability and validity will be defined, while subsequently the reliability and validity of the results of this study will be briefly examined. The study will also be examined from an ethical perspective, finishing with a discussion regarding the ethical considerations of this study.

9.1 Reliability

In general, qualitative research has been subjected to criticism with regards to the validity and reliability of its research results (Mays & Pope, 1995, p.109). Joppe (2000, p. 1), as cited in Golafshani (2003), describes reliability as:

The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable.

Validity and reliability in this qualitative research are vindicated by the epistemological starting point and the utilization of a hermeneutic analysis method. That is, the researcher’s pre-understanding of the topic, combined with data and hermeneutical spiral provides a grounding for the trustworthiness and evaluation of this study.

However, it is also essential to acknowledge that this research is subject to the researcher’s bias. As Mays and Pope (1995) note, “the basic strategy to ensure rigor in qualitative research is systematic and self-conscious research design, data collection, interpretation, and communication” (p. 109). Thus, by acknowledging his involvement, views, and experiences within, and during this research, the researcher underlines the contextuality of the hermeneutical approach. As there is no denying that the aforementioned aspects influence the researcher’s interpretation of the research topic, the researcher in this research is not aiming to establish a “definite truth,” regarding the unique characteristics and accessibility of the HE systems. Instead, he is aiming to illustrate one truth on the basis of his own interpretation of the topic.

One of the most crucial steps of this study was the selection of the documents to analyze. The documents were selected based on the research questions and the descriptions of the
As mentioned before, the researcher began document selection after the interviews had already been conducted for ensuring that the most relevant documents were selected. Therefore, the researcher acquired an understanding of the themes that had been emerging during the interviews.

In order to attain reliable results, the selection of the experienced interviewees was crucial. Therefore, interviewees were selected based on their knowledge of both HE systems (Finnish and American). Naturally, Finnish interviewees provided greater insights on the Finnish HE system, while the American interviewees provided greater insights on the U.S. HE system. However, as the interviewees were scholars who have been working in HEIs in one of the respective countries, the broad competencies, experiences and knowledge provided by the interviewees allowed the researcher to draw comprehensive conclusions on the topic.

Moreover, the honesty of the interviewees was of paramount importance. By providing interviewees with anonymity, the researcher believes that he was able to gather truthful insights from the interviewees.

9.2 Validity

Leung, (2015) defines validity as being “the appropriateness of the data tools, and the entire process in qualitative research” (p. 325). In addition to issues concerning reliability, the validity of the findings is also taken into serious consideration by qualitative researchers.

In order to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity, the “Triangulation” method is applied to this research. This method, Mays & Pope (1995) explain, is an approach to data collection “in which evidence is deliberately sought from a wide range of different, independent sources and often by different means (for instance, comparing oral testimony with written records)” (p. 110). Denzin (1970) illustrated four forms of triangulation; data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theoretical, and methodological triangulation (pp. 301-305). Of these four forms, data triangulation, (where data is gathered from a variety of different sources), was utilized in this study as a means of checking, and increasing the validity of the research.
Similar to choosing interviewees from different countries with diverse backgrounds, documents utilized in this research were also selected from a variety of sources. Various organizations were chosen as the source of key documents, and policy papers of both countries were carefully scrutinized. Thus, the knowledge the researcher required was source driven.

Ultimately, the data collected, from both the interviewees and the documents, provided the necessary information required by the researcher. However, it is important to note that, the data the researcher studied is only a small fraction of the data available, and thus, the researcher only investigated a small segment of the HE systems. Nevertheless, the researcher believes that this has not necessarily been an obstacle in preventing him from attempting to understand the HE systems in question.

9.3 Ethical Considerations

At the commencement of this research, and before any interviews were conducted, the researcher endeavored to ensure that all of the interviewees were aware of the breadth of the research, the status of the researcher, and the researchers aims and goals concerning the research. All interviewees were provided with a confidentiality agreement, signed by the researcher and interviewees, which promised interviewees anonymity (see the Appendix I). None of the interviewees’ names were recorded in transcripts, and if an interviewee mentioned his, or her name, or any other information that could possibly jeopardize their anonymity during the interview, that section of the transcript was omitted from the verbatim transcription.

Each interviewee was informed of their position in the interview order (Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, and so on), and the number of planned interviewees was also shared with them. Moreover, any information not recorded throughout the interviews was not utilized for this research. Each interviewee was also asked to verify any minor changes (e.g. correction of grammatical mistakes) when direct quotations were used for the research.
10 Conclusion

When this research first commenced, before any research questions were formulated, the researcher’s aim was to conduct a comprehensive study through which the most significant characteristics of the Finnish and the U.S universities are identified, and the accessibility of HE systems is discussed. It is important to note that, this research has its limitations because of the analysis (hence, the findings) of the data is based on the investigation of the phenomena from a chosen perspective and based on specific seventeen interviews and some of the key policy documents. Still, the combined data of documents and interviews provided quite a large source of information. Besides, since scientific research on these phenomena is highly scarce, this research was designed and conducted to ensure that the data would be relevant, and that the results would be beneficial for the scientific community.

The aims of the research required an ambitious research process, since there were two main aims, albeit intertwined, which differed from one another. The first aim of discovering the distinctive aspects of the systems, required a wide orientation and observation of the two HE systems. The second aim of providing a comparison concerning elements of accessibility, demanded a thorough understanding of both countries, since the educational systems of both countries are tightly linked to the historical, and philosophical backgrounds of the two countries. Moreover, as it is mentioned in Theoretical Framework of this study, there are different approaches to the role of the universities in society, and it is conspicuous that their roles are heavily affected by the aforementioned backgrounds in these two countries.

The four main research questions related to the aims of the study were as follows:

1. What are the most distinctive aspects of the Finnish Higher Education systems according to policy documents and educational experts?
2. What are the most distinctive aspects of U.S. Higher Education according to policy documents and educational experts?
4. How do the principles of accessibility manifest themselves in Finnish Higher Education policy when compared to U.S. Higher Education policy according to policy documents?
Given the huge scope of the research aims, comprehensive data had to be collected and carefully analyzed. In order to properly analyze the data, a data analysis system was developed and applied systematically to all data: Data from the interviews regarding the distinctive characteristics of the HE systems, data from the interviews regarding the accessibility of the HE systems, data from the key documents regarding the distinctive characteristics of the HE systems, and data from the documents regarding the accessibility of the HE systems.

After the completion of the analysis, there were several distinctive characteristics which were identified for each of the HE systems in question. It is important to note that there were a number of other distinctive characteristics discovered throughout the data analysis process. In fact, based on the data analyzed, this research could have named a lot more characteristics for each system. However, as the very aim of the research questions was to seek for the most characteristic aspects of each system, a total of seven of the most distinctive characteristics were identified.

Concerning the Finnish HE system; self-directed learning, free education, homogeneity, and emerging competition were the most distinctive characteristics identified. Of these characteristics, emerging competition represents the neoliberal changes facing the system (and, likely, will be increasing in the future). It is, however, important to note that the notion of competitiveness has arrived to Finland much later than most of the western countries, and that the competition is only emerging (whereas in the U.S. it has been heavily emphasized for a very long time.) Regarding the U.S. HE system; decentralization, (large) size, and diversity were the most distinctive characteristics identified.

As mentioned several times throughout this research, the fundamental differences between the two HE systems originate from the historical and societal differences between the two countries. Certainly, it is much easier to find differences between the Finnish and U.S. HE systems than it is to find similarities. However, the researcher asserted that if this research focused on the differences between the two HE systems, the results would be obvious, and that very little additional scientific knowledge would be generated. In fact, the researcher’s objective in identifying the unique characteristics of the systems was for the systems to reveal how and why they are designed, and whom they are principally serving. In this sense, discovering that Finnish HE emphasizes equity while the U.S. HE system emphasizes decentralization (hence, institutional diversity) revealed crucial information concerning the HE systems and the societies they are representing.
Firstly, it was clear that Finnish society considers all levels of education as a public good. That is, education benefits many people, even those who do not bear the costs. Although education is primarily benefiting the individual as it provides him or her a better future, it also creates a better society by helping people to be better citizens. Therefore, education, albeit providing benefits for individuals, is actually a public good that ameliorates the lives of others, regardless who pays for it. Finnish argument on all levels of education, including HE, is that if private education were to be the only form of education, then those who cannot afford it would never obtain it. This would be unacceptable by Finnish standards because the quality of society would not be sustainable when the number of people who receives education is not enough to satisfy the needs of the society.

Secondly, in the U.S., it is not yet too clear whether the education is a public good or a private good. As outlined in the theoretical framework of this research, there are different approaches to the topic. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the primary and secondary education are considered a public good in the country, while the debate on HE, whether it is a public or a private good, is still ongoing. However, the fact that the federal government and the states spend billions of dollars on education each year with taxpayers’ money, clearly indicates that education is also a public good. The problem is that the quantity of the funding and subsidizes is not enough for HE since individuals have to pay for their university degrees.

Accessibility, on the other hand, tells a different story. First and foremost, for anyone who is familiar with the basics of the Finnish education system, it is clear that the Finnish HE system has been fostering accessibility for a very long time and has achieved a high level of access to HE. However, it was surprising for the researcher to find out that the U.S. HE system as well has been trying to foster accessibility in HE for decades, and while policy papers acknowledge this, few non-U.S. academics were aware of these attempts. Although this research does not represent all academics in and outside of the U.S., it was obvious that participants were more interested in the results than the process. Nevertheless, accessibility has been a serious issue in the U.S. (as one needs to pay for his or her studies) and it seems that it will continue to be a core issue of the system, at least, in the short and medium terms.

Evidently, the success of Finnish HE with regards to accessibility has mostly derived from the historical and sociocultural background of the country. The public opinion that education is a public good and must be reached by everyone makes it easier for Finnish people to accept
the idea of paying taxes for all levels of education for the public good. (This is not the case in the U.S.) However, it should be noted that, although the fundamental principles remain the same, there is a shift in Finnish HE which was expressed by the majority of the interviewees. That is, the system is evolving along a similar path to the U.S. one in terms of institutional autonomy and competitiveness. However, it is safe to say, at least at this point, that accessibility will carry importance and will remain as the biggest success story of Finnish HE for the long term.

The U.S. federal government, which is trying very hard to increase access rates to HE by subsidizing students, giving grants and loans, and creating special programs, has yet to achieve the same level of access rates as in Finland, and, most probably, will not achieve this within the next several years. Decentralization, diversity, and freedom of institutions have carried so much importance for U.S. society and its policymakers that it is very hard to establish a centralized system, as in Finland, and to begin to finance these institutions. It is evident in the historical background of U.S., especially visible during the cold war era after WWII, that any kind of “excessive” steps taken in order to make the system more centralized will easily be marked as communist or at the very least socialist propaganda, and would be considered a threat to democracy. Therefore, replicating the Finnish system (or the Finnish way of doing) in U.S. system is simply not possible.

That being said, Finnish HE, either intentionally or due to marketization and privatization, is taking several steps in order to become more competitive, or as some of the interviewees inferred, become more “American.” Surely, at least at this point, it would be very audacious to claim that the Finnish HE system will be similar to the U.S. HE system, as historical, philosophical, and cultural traits would not permit this to happen. Nevertheless, as almost every interviewee underlined, the system has gone through so many changes over the last thirty years that no one could predict where it will stop, or indeed, if it will stop.

On the bright side, the differences between the two HE systems, and their diverse successful traits, allows each system to learn from the other. Evidently, the U.S. HE has been trying to increase its access rates for minorities and underrepresented groups for decades, while Finland, as a relatively homogenous country that has recently met with increasing multiculturalism, has little experience on the matter. Given this situation, the success of accessibility in Finnish HE can be studied by the U.S., while at the same time, Finland can look to the US system to explore the inclusion of minorities and the adoption of multiculturalism.
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Appendices

Appendix I

Confidentiality

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim to allow a more detailed analysis of the data. However, the anonymity of the interviewees will be protected throughout and after the research. Any information related to your identity will not be collected or retained, and the records of this study will be kept confidential. Research records will be kept in an encrypted file and the audio tape will be coded and secured in a password protected electronic storage device. No one but the researcher himself will have access to the audio recordings. An additional consent, in written form, will be asked from the interviewees if the supervisor of the researcher wants to listen to the recordings. Also note, should you sign this form, you will be giving your consent to any minor changes (e.g. correction of grammatical mistakes) made in direct quotations used for the research.

Thank you for your participation,

Gökhan Depo
Appendix II

Interview Questionnaire

1. How do you perceive Finnish higher education in general?

2. What are the most distinctive characteristics of Finnish higher education?

3. Which of the aspects of Finnish HE do you think are working and which are not working as intended?

4. What is the goal of Finnish higher education? To what extent do you agree or disagree with that goal?

5. How does Finnish basic education system affect Finnish higher education? What are the specific connections that could be named?

6. How do you perceive the U.S. higher education in general?

7. What are the reasons that make U.S. universities hold the top places in the world? How did they manage to have one of the most prestigious universities in the world?

8. Do you see any similarities between American and Finnish higher education systems? What do you consider the biggest differences?

9. What are the unique aspects/resources that work towards the success of each system?

10. In your opinion, what aspects of the U.S. higher education system can be adopted to improve higher education in Finland?

11. In your opinion, is there anything that U.S. can adopt from Finnish higher education and Finland can adopt from U.S. higher education?

12. What do you think is the role or value of engagement, ethics, and excellence in Finnish and US higher education systems?
Appendix III

Interviewees

Interviewee 1: Emerita Professor of Education. Specialized in Global Education. Worked as an educational consultant for several organizations and countries.

Interviewee 2: Senior Lecturer in Education. Educated in England. University lecturer in Finland for the last 30 years.

Interviewee 3: CEO of one of the biggest technology institutes in Finland. Educated in Switzerland and Finland. Ph.D. in Physics. A former research professor in Finland for 15 years.

Interviewee 4: Professor in Education in Finland. The academic leader of the two international programs. Studied in humanities and social sciences. Her research interests are intercultural education and cultural studies.

Interviewee 5: National policymaker in the education field in Finland. Educated in Finland. Ph.D. in teacher’s intercultural learning.

Interviewee 6: Researcher in the Education field in Finland. Educated in India and Finland.

Interviewee 7: A researcher in the Education field in Finland. Educated in France and Finland.

Interviewee 8: Researcher in Finland. Educated in Germany, the U.S., Mexico, and Finland. Ph.D. in international business management.

Interviewee 9: Researcher in the Education field in Finland. Ph.D. in Education. Educated in Finland. Before her university career, she worked as a primary school teacher. She has been in the faculty of education for the last 20 years.

Interviewee 10: Researcher in the Education field in Finland. She is a human rights expert with long experience in the NGO sector. Her research interests include inclusion and education export.

Interviewee 11: An American senior researcher in the Education field in Finland who has been living in Finland for a long time. Educated in the U.S., his research interests are Higher Education Internationalization Policy; Knowledge, Society Discourses; Policy Analysis.
Interviewee 12: A policymaker in Finland who works in Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.

Interviewee 13: Researcher in Finland with over ten years of experience in Finnish universities. Educated in Finland and the U.S.

Interviewee 14: An American senior researcher in a U.S. University whose research interests are International Higher Education, Higher Education, Comparative Education.

Interviewee 15: An American professor who has been teaching in Finland for more than five years.

Interviewee 16: An international scholar who has been teaching and conducting research in Finland and in the U.S.

Interviewee 17: An American professor who works in the area of global citizenship education. His research interests are included (but not limited to) Education in Nordic countries, Higher Education, Sustainable Development.
### Appendix IV

Universities Acts and Higher Education Act

Table 1: Summary of the Finnish Universities act of 1997

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<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>Organisation (Chancellor, University Senate and its tasks, Composition of the University Senate, Rector and vice-rectors, Organisation of Teaching, Research and services, Administration of University units).</td>
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<td>Chapter 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
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<td>Chapter 7</td>
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<td>Further provisions (Electoral college, University training schools, University funds, Student union and student nation, University standing orders and regulations, Decision-making, Further provisions, Implementation).</td>
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Table 2: Summary of the Finnish Universities act of 2009

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<td>Chapter 3.</td>
<td>Organisation (Organs of a public university, Board of the public university, Composition of the board of a public university, Term of office of the board of a public university; resignation and dismissal of a member, Rector of a public university, Election of the rector of a public university, Representation of a public university, Duty of care imposed on the leadership of a public university, Accountability of a board member and the rector of a public uni-</td>
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</table>
Chapter 4 Personnel and language of administration (University personnel, Employment relations of the personnel, Duties, appointment and title of professor, Liability under criminal law, Language proficiency requirements and administrative language).

Chapter 5 Students [Admission, Eligibility for studies leading to a university degree, Accessibility and prerequisites for admission, Access to information relating to admission, Acceptance of a study place, Academic year and enrolment, Normative duration of studies for lower and higher university degrees Right to study, Right to safe learning environment, Extension of right to study, Forfeiture of right to study, (Revocation of right to study, Access to information relating to revocation of the right to study, Return of the right to study, Drug testing), Assessment and recognition of study attainments, Disciplinary action (Procedure in a matter regarding revocation of the right to study and disciplinary action, Handling of sensitive material), Student union, Student nations)].

Chapter 6 University steering and financing (Objective-setting, Criteria for the allocation of government funding, Funding of expenses shared by universities, Monitoring and reporting, Discontinuation of payments, Return of paid financing, Interest and interest for late payment, Offsetting of payments, Appeal concerning a funding decision, Implementation).

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Source: The Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), Public Law 89-329