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# Increasing Universities' Tuition Fee Revenues from International Undergraduate Students

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Marc Ledermann

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Increasing Universities' Tuition Fee Revenues from International Undergraduate  
Students

by

Marc Ledermann

MBA, Les Roches Switzerland in partnership with IMCA, UK, 2001

SHA Diploma, Les Roches Switzerland, 1996

Federal Banking Diploma, Swiss Commercial School Bern, 1992

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2018

## Abstract

Universities are losing expected tuition revenues due to attrition of international undergraduate students. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies that university leaders use to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. The participants in this study were 3 former leaders of the European division of Laureate International Universities, a global university group with university locations in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Cyprus. The conceptual framework of this study was institutional theory as part of the change management of universities. Data collection included semistructured interviews of 3 former leaders of the European division of Laureate International Universities and a review of background and demographic information. Data analysis revealed 5 themes: business strategies, leadership, politics and governmental practice, social mobility, and attrition. These themes aligned with the institutional theory and change management conceptual framework. Recommendations for action include further research in the application of university business models to adopt or enhance a process for retaining international undergraduate students. The results of this study may contribute to social change by indicating how universities can be financially sustainable by providing international students access to an international education. University leaders may implement some of my recommendations and suggested strategies to avoid losing expected tuition revenues due to attrition of international undergraduate students. International undergraduate students may enroll in better prepared universities and therefore, succeed in completing and graduating from their selected studies.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	iv
Section 1: Foundation of the Study.....	1
Background of the Problem .....	1
Problem Statement .....	2
Purpose Statement.....	2
Nature of the Study .....	3
Research Question .....	4
Interview Questions .....	4
Conceptual Framework.....	5
Operational Definitions.....	6
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....	7
Assumptions.....	7
Limitations .....	8
Delimitations.....	9
Significance of the Study .....	10
Contribution to Business Practice.....	10
Implications for Social Change.....	11
A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature.....	11
Introduction.....	11
Context of Literature Review.....	13
W. R. Scott's Institutional Theory .....	14

Market- Versus Resource-Based Views .....	16
History.....	21
Market-Based View .....	24
Resource-Based View.....	27
Summary.....	37
Transition .....	38
Section 2: The Project.....	40
Purpose Statement.....	40
Role of the Researcher .....	41
Participants.....	43
Research Method and Design .....	44
Research Method .....	44
Research Design.....	45
Population and Sampling .....	46
Ethical Research.....	48
Data Collection Instruments .....	50
Data Collection Technique .....	52
Data Organization Technique .....	53
Data Analysis .....	54
Reliability and Validity.....	56
Reliability.....	56
Validity .....	57

Transition and Summary.....	60
Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change.....	61
Introduction.....	61
Presentation of the Findings.....	62
Emergent Theme 1: Business Strategies.....	70
Emergent Theme 2: Leadership.....	75
Emergent Theme 3: Politics and Governmental Policies.....	78
Emergent Theme 4: Social Mobility.....	82
Emergent Theme 5: Attrition.....	84
Applications to Professional Practice.....	87
Implications for Social Change.....	88
Recommendations for Action.....	89
Recommendations for Further Research.....	92
Reflections.....	93
Conclusion.....	94
References.....	97
Appendix A: Interview Questions.....	114
Appendix B: Interview Protocol.....	115



List of Tables

Table 1. Literature Review Source Count..... 12

## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The focus of this section is on the challenges of increasing universities' tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. A general context and background for exploring this challenge will precede the problem statement and the research purpose. The nature of the study precedes the specific research question. The interview questions and the conceptual framework align with the research theory and the overall research question. I investigate the design foundations by examining the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. I discuss the significance of the study in terms of both social change and business practice prior to the literature review. The section ends with a brief transition into Section 2, which includes further details on the research project.

### **Background of the Problem**

University leaders in the current era face substantial business-related challenges. As undergraduate students everywhere are becoming more mobile, competition for students increases, as do associated costs, as students' potential options increase (de Wit, Ferencz, & Rumbley, 2013; Wilkins, 2016a, 2016b). As graduates exit universities and enter employment, they face a globalized world that requires greater intercultural competencies to compete successfully for employment after graduation (Messelink, Van Maele, & Spencer-Oatey, 2015). University leaders can address both problems by initiating or expanding international programs. However, generating tuition fee revenues from those programs continues to pose a challenge at many universities.

Universities have always been places of active globalization that have allure for students, qualified personnel, and partnerships with organizations worldwide (see, for

example, Altbach & de Wit, 2015). The development of international relationships between universities resumed after the Second World War and the Cold War, when the intention was to indicate solidarity among countries (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). The evolution of transnational higher education has steadily increased student mobility and become a basis for the exchange of cultures, sympathy, and understanding (Wilkins, 2016a, 2016b). This approach reflects the drastic increase in international enrollments starting in the mid-1980s, for which many universities did not adequately prepare and thus experienced subsequent tuition fee revenue losses (Anayah & Kuk, 2015).

### **Problem Statement**

International undergraduate students are enrolling at universities in high numbers without being ready for the cultural integration challenges (Truong, Museus & McGuire, 2016). Global international student growth doubled from 2005 to 2012 to more than 4.5 million students, with 50% of the new enrollments being undergraduate students (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2016). The general business problem is that some universities are not able to integrate international undergraduate students (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2014), which leads to the attrition of international undergraduate students and the derivative loss of tuition fee revenues. The specific business problem is that some university leaders lack strategies to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that university leaders use to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate

students. The targeted population were three former leaders of the European division of Laureate International Universities, which used to be the largest global university group with university locations in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Cyprus. The group owned several universities in Europe and had developed strategies to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by enabling university leaders to develop strategies to increase tuition fees from international undergraduate students and provide students access to an international higher education.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used a qualitative methodology for this study. For a qualitative research method, there is no exclusively correct or wrong answer, and researchers explore the outcome continually (Yin, 2014). Qualitative methodology mainly is suitable for developing a deeper understanding of a phenomenon and to gain new insights, whereas quantitative research is useful for comparing relationships and differences among variables (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). I explored new knowledge to address the open-ended research question, and therefore, a qualitative research method was appropriate. Neither quantitative nor mixed-methods methodologies were appropriate, as according to Venkatesh et al. (2013), with these methods, the researcher needs to examine data from specific variables to test hypotheses.

For this study, I used a case study design, which included multiple data and information sources such as interviews with relevant participants and an extensive review of relevant documents. Case study research was specifically appropriate, as it includes

research questions beginning with *what* for a specific decision and with *how* implementation occurs (Yin, 2014). The case study design consists of a social phenomenon and therefore was more appropriate than ethnography, as my case study did not include ethnographic or participant observation data. Phenomenological and ethnographic designs would not have fulfilled the study requirements of the research for my specific business problem of identifying and implementing strategies to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. The case study design was more appropriate than historical studies and grounded theory, as the focus for my case study was on recent events and not on developing theories.

### **Research Question**

RQ: What strategies do university leaders use to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What are your main motivations to further increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?
2. What strategies do you use to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?
3. What are the challenges of implementing the strategies for increasing tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?
4. What has been the evaluation and decision process of selecting strategies to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?

5. How do you measure the success of the strategies, and within which time frames, for increasing tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?
6. What are the key value propositions for international undergraduate students to enroll in your university and therefore to increase tuition fee revenues?
7. What additional information can you share regarding your strategies to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?

### **Conceptual Framework**

I based the conceptual framework of this study on institutional theory as part of the necessary change management of universities to address the challenges of increasing tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. There is no single definition of the institutional theory; however, Scott (2004) developed this theory of organizational and institutional change to address changing market and social conditions. Scott is one of the most cited researchers of the institutional theory, and Scott's institutional theory builds on three pillars: regulative, normative, and culture-cognitive. The regulative issue is indicative of process rule setting, whereas normative is about norms and values, and culture-cognitive is about cultural systems and beliefs (Scott, 2004). The institutional theory could facilitate understanding of the institutional and organizational strategies and changes that university leaders employ for increasing tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students (Wilkins & Huisman, 2015). The rationale for selecting the framework was the balance between the three pillars and to allow an evaluation of the change management necessary from a holistic institutional

review. The institutional theory was appropriate to evaluate and explore possible solutions as part of the qualitative case study.

### **Operational Definitions**

Many of the terms used in this literature review and study are standard, with descriptions and definitions in the dictionary or in the literature review. Although the proposed study was not quantitative, and strict operational definitions are not necessary in qualitative research, I used this section to define several key constructs used in this study. The key constructs for this study were competencies, institutions, market, resource- and market-based views, tuition fee revenues, and strategies.

*Competencies:* Competencies are a part of the resource-based view (RBV) and are expressions of individual, company-specific potentials of success that leaders can leverage to reach institutional goals (Morris, Webb, Fu, & Singhal, 2013).

*Institutions:* Scott (2004) defined institutions as organizations that evolve standards and norms to serve an institutional culture that fulfills social or market needs. Institutions are flexible in response to changing environmental conditions (Cornelissen, Durand, Fiss, Lammers, & Vaara, 2015).

*Market:* A market is a factor pertaining to the demand for international study programs, such as features of the student market and the student demands, expectations, and values for these services (Kratz & Netz, 2016).

*Resource- and market-based views:* Resource- and market-based views include current programs, holdings, and accumulated social and financial capital of institutions

that can affect strategies for increasing international undergraduate student tuition fee revenues (Ozkaya, Droge, Hult, Calantone, & Ozkaya, 2015).

*Tuition fee revenues:* This revenue is the amount of money a university receives during a specific period, including discounts and scholarships (Alstete, 2014). Tuition fee revenue is the gross income generated by a university before accounting for expenses and costs (Alstete, 2014).

*Strategies:* Strategies are anything in the set of programs, reforms, adjustments, and plans made to increase student tuition fee revenues by institutional actors (Lindsay & Antoniou, 2016).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Doctoral research papers can include assumptions that are not necessary validated but assumed correct (Foss & Hallberg, 2014). This study included four assumptions. The adoption of assumptions represents a form of academic hedging in which researchers test hypotheses that are subject to literature or experimentation to remove or reduce subjectivity. The first assumption was that accurate data were obtainable from interviewing institutional officials on their efforts to generate international undergraduate student tuition fee revenues. The second assumption was that the respondents would be cooperative and seek to share the most pertinent aspects of their experience in the spirit of furthering research in their discipline. The third assumption was that there were no conflicts of interest in the interviewer–interviewee relationship that would have prevented disclosure of all relevant information. The fourth assumption was that universities are



facing an increasingly competitive environment in the market and the interviews will be contributing to the common scientific knowledge about all fields, including academic leadership administration.

### **Limitations**

Limitations include possible factors in a study, such as place, time, and conditions, that a researcher is not able to change (Foss & Hallberg, 2014). For this study I used a qualitative methodology. Although this case study design possesses several advantages described above that led to its selection, it also has several limitations. Limitations are those characteristics of a study design that tend to structurally influence the development of conclusions or findings. The study included seven main limitations. The first limitation was the absence of standard metrics that left open the possibility that the preexisting beliefs and interpretations of mine or of other parties may have guided the assessment of the data. The first limitation also meant that the process of controlling the data and evaluating the effect of incidental factors on the results was difficult and may have become obscured. The second limitation of the case study method is the absence of definitive, generalizable conclusions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The case study is more useful for exploring a topic deeply, generating hypotheses, and identifying areas that will prove heuristic for further research of multiple methodologies. The third limitation was a criticism all case study authors must overcome, which is the perception of a lack of rigor associated with case study designs (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The fourth limitation was that it is important that combinations of inconclusive evidence do not affect preexisting biases. The fifth limitation organizing the data systematically, as

many case studies have a large and potentially unmanageable amount of data. The sixth limitation was that interviewees' responses may have shaped by well-known memory biases and distortions, despite their best effort to provide a veridical account of events (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). It is not possible to avoid every possible memory bias in a case study that involves using any recollected data. Instead, researchers must carefully consider what potential biases are likely to affect recall under the conditions faced by the interviewee. However, memory for an extended period will also be subject to random perturbations, for example, by misinformation that occurs between the time of the formation of the memory trace and the recall for the interviewer. This misinformation can take many shapes, such as hearing a colleague recount inaccurate recollections or data or confusing one's experience with someone else's, also known as cryptomnesia. In nomothetic research, the researcher cancels out many such random errors in memory or the researcher corrects by the absence of those same random errors, or different random errors, in other participants' data. The seventh limitation was that a case study design is more vulnerable to unreliable results due to the ability for single outliers and distortions in the data to have a more pronounced effect through the intensive analysis of a limited sample.

### **Delimitations**

Researchers can control delimitations and therefore delineate the framework of a doctoral study (Foss & Hallberg, 2014). At the outset, delimitations comprise those structural issues in which researchers have set unilateral boundaries to any given research study (Baltimore County Public Schools, 2017). There were two main delimitations in

this study. The first delimitation was that the study transpired within a limited temporal and regional scope due to the limited resources available to procure a sample. It is arguably of indeterminate validity to generalize case study results outside the time and regions within which data collection takes place. However, some methodologists point out that the truth found makes up for the lack of generalization (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The second delimitation was that instead of generalizable conclusions, the case study design involves prioritizing the parameter establishment of future research objectives (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). It is important that researchers interpret results and tentative study conclusions in this light. The results and the tentative study conclusions should be regarded as a provisional foundation for future research, which may well yield different conclusions, especially pertaining to a changing competitive environment.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Strategies such as developing international branch campuses could provide an international university education in students' home countries and therefore expand the market and growth potential of a university's tuition fee revenues (Wilkins, 2016a). In addition, university leaders may compensate for the loss of tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate student attrition by developing new tuition fee revenue streams through international expansion strategies, which could provide a significant contribution to a university's financial position (Wilkins, 2016a). The results of this study may provide university leaders with knowledge and data to develop an appropriate

strategy to contribute to improving higher education business practices to increase tuition fee revenues.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Access to a better education changes individual lives, families, and societies. Mandela (2003) noted, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (para. 13). The results of this study may support university leaders through strategies for improving student education. Improved student education may contribute to the improvement of educational systems in countries and societies (Kosior, Barth, Gremm, Mainka, & Stock, 2015). The results of this study may indicate how universities can be financially sustainable by providing international students access to an international education. An improved level of education may lead to higher levels of prosperity for students, their families, and their communities (Lien & Wang, 2012).

## **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

### **Introduction**

The literature review included an overview of relevant literature from both academic and professional sources. I included in the literature review the relevant context surrounding international student tuition fee revenues; an introduction to the institutional theory, which provided a framework for understanding the functions of the academic organization; and an exploration of the distinctions between institutions’ market-based views (MBVs) and RBVs. The literature review includes an in-depth exploration of the MBV, followed by the competence orientation, which pertained to the RBV. Following this, I explore the history of academic institutions’ role in globalization and applied the

literature related to MBV and RBV and, in turn, to the research problem. I close with a summary of the main points and consensus regarding the problem to emerge from the review before I transition to a description of the original research conducted to extend knowledge in this domain.

In the literature review, peer-reviewed articles came from sources published in databases found on the Walden Library website and Google Scholar, including SAGE Journals, Wiley, and EBSCOhost. Approximately 90% of the sources derived from Google Scholar, with the other 10% sourced from the specialized databases. The literature review contained articles from peer-reviewed journals, reports, and discussion papers. Of the 121 sources cited in this literature review, 106 were peer-reviewed academic articles, and 99 of the peer-reviewed academic articles (93%) had publication dates between 2014 and 2018. Table 1 includes a summary of the citations used in this literature review. The strategy for searching the literature included a search for the following keywords in different combinations: *university*, *international students*, *higher education*, and *international education*.

Table 1

*Literature Review Source Count*

Literature type	Current sources (1-5Y)	Older sources (+5Y)	Total sources	%
Peer-reviewed journals	99	7	106	88%
Other sources	8	7	15	12%
Total	107	14	121	
%	88%	12%		

## **Context of Literature Review**

Leaders in universities all over the world evolved and expanded the internationalization of studies by developing lasting collaborations with other universities at an increasing rate after the end of World War II. Such partnerships only began after World War II and the Cold War. Since the late 1990s, international student mobility has increased considerably, and higher education has become a globalized product (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). Altbach and de Wit (2015) highlighted concerns of how the increasing conflicts between countries, religions, and cultures might affect academic partnerships and international student mobility. According to Altbach and de Wit (2015), the involvement of politics in higher education institutions increases the risk of negatively affecting the future of international collaboration. Nevertheless, higher education student and faculty exchanges have become a globalized product, serve to create a global understanding of foreign cultures (Altbach & de Wit, 2015), and offer a valuable method to raise universities' tuition fee revenues to avoid financial pressure (Alstete, 2014; Stein & Andreotti, 2016). From 2005 to 2012, international undergraduate student growth doubled globally (OECD, 2016). Leaders of institutions compete to recruit the best talent, and international student growth has increased more rapidly in the United States than in other countries, partly due to the perceived value of a U.S. degree from students in developing countries (de Wit et al., 2013). International experience can provide a competitive advantage when returning to the local job market, especially if the university degree is from an accredited U.S. university (de Wit et al., 2013).

A more consistent and globalized education system has advantages, but also comes with unforeseen challenges. One of the main challenges is that international undergraduate students are failing to complete their programs. Many universities are not sufficiently able to accommodate the requirements of the international undergraduate student cohort regarding the issue of studying abroad, particularly when academic and social integration are necessary (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2014). Attrition of international undergraduate students results in a loss of tuition fee revenues, which puts financial pressure back on the institutions and leads to a situation where leaders in several schools may feel discouraged from finding solutions for integrating international undergraduate students due to the lack of workable and effective strategies (Bhuiyan, 2016). The following review includes a brief exploration of this problem as it relates to Scott's institutional theory, as well as a more thorough exploration of the customer value-based theory discussed by Wernerfelt (1984) and others. This literature review serves the purpose of learning which topics to discuss to obtain a detailed answer to the research question.

### **W. R. Scott's Institutional Theory**

Universities have a financial sustainability responsibility, especially if privately funded, just as other organizations do, and students serve as customers in this environment. Researchers use institutional theory to explain core guidelines and the purposes they serve. The current definition of institutional theory comes from Scott (2004). Organizational leaders must help their organizations to evolve to suit changing market and social conditions (Scott, 2004). The issue of changing market and social

conditions is a factor that university systems need to adhere to, as the university leaders are responsible for educating the future workforce. Therefore, the university leaders addressing the changing market and social conditions involves acknowledging future trends and skills required for graduates to be successful. As the graduates become more successful, they create a new set of standards that become more prevalent as their results indicate their success. More universities emulate and adopt these standards, which then become the norm. The new norm can lead to further challenges as university leaders attempt to appeal to consumers outside of the home organization culture. For example, international university branch campuses create new benchmarks as they increase in number worldwide and conform to the institutional standards of the environment in which they are located. Students, accustomed to the prior institutional norms, may find it difficult to adjust to the setting of their chosen school. Institutional theory may help provide a framework in which the successful schools can evaluate the problem and suggest solutions (Wilkins & Huisman, 2015).

Scott (2004) authored his interdisciplinary work at a time of dynamization in the field of organizational theory. Scott's systemization follows a historical order. Until 1981, Scott arranged various content-related trends with their respective views on institutions into rational, natural, and open systems, starting with an introduction of organizations as the object of research and highlighting the significance of organizations: "Organizations are a prominent, if not the dominant, characteristic of modern societies" (Scott, 2004, p. 4). Classifications of institutions are often inaccurate, as a connection exists between the institutions and the environment as a social system, and the institutions



are subject to a wide range of influences and dependencies. Scott contended that an additional categorization of organizations as open systems was necessary. Scott classified organizations as systems open to their environment (p. 98).

The importance of organizational research demonstrated the relationship between institutions and the environment due to a growing interdisciplinary nature in the field since the beginning of the 1950s. Scott initially introduced institutions as complex, loosely linked, and autonomously acting social systems from an open perspective. The setting of an organization is vital as an institution subsists on interdependent exchange with another entity, drawing information from the environment, and the acceptance and submission of MBV and RBV resources. Scott, therefore does not consider an organization and its environment as separate from each other but interlinked. This line of reasoning depicts the connection to both MBV and RBV. Internal resources and the consideration of environmental conditions based on Scott's explanations of organizations are substantial. Some scholars described the shielding from economical coherences as well as the trend of game theory or rational choice approaches as particularly criticized. The guiding principle of new institutionalism is the assumption that an institution is far less dependent on culturally neutral efficiency considerations than on an institutionalized environment that represents specific cultural values (Scott, 2004).

### **Market- Versus Resource-Based Views**

The strategies relating to science and popular science have been the subject of intense discussions. To be successful, university leaders need to gain a competitive edge over competitors. A venture's strategy is to generate such a competitive advantage

(Hinterhuber, 1996). Economic literature refers to these strategies as a sophisticated package of measures for the attainability of objectives (Hinterhuber, 1996). Current literature on strategic research addresses the fundamental strategy schools of the MBV and the RBV, which belongs to the category for an accepted division in the contributions of management-related books. Both directions, the market-oriented approach by Porter (1980) and the resource-based approach by Wernerfelt (1984), represent the most influential tendencies within the strategic management theory and require elucidation.

**Market orientation within the meaning of market-based views.** The term market orientation serves as a hypernym for the demand on most research to adjust the strategic orientation to both business rivals and customers. The exclusive customer focus also refers to marketing orientation (Ozkaya et al., 2015). In this context, orientation signifies the orientation of corporate objectives toward customer satisfaction or the alignment of the performance spectrum based on the proposition of business rivals. Within the scope of the discussion of strategic corporate concepts, the construct of market orientation equates to the MBV. The MBV subsumes all strategic approaches used to view the corporate strategy predominantly through external environmental factors. In so doing, Ozkaya et al. (20015) assign an elemental task to the market analysis.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Porter's (1980) approach obtained its scientific foundation and depicted a milestone in the literature on strategic management. Porter included a synthesis of the industrial-economic thought pattern and subsequently shifted the emphasis of strategic deliberations in science and corporate practice to a broader orientation toward the market and the environment, which ultimately found its results in

the MBV. The structure-conduct-performance hypothesis of the industrial economy has indicated the need to analyze competition and sector structures with the evidence of competitive strategies. Competitive strategies are significant for acquiring durable competitive benefits. Porter (1980) described five external corporate competitive forces in his competition analysis: purchaser, supplier, competitors, potential new competitors, and products. Porter (1980) focused his strategy recommendations on mainly two competitive advantages: cost leadership and distinction. From those two competitive advantages, Porter derived three generic competitive strategies: sector-wide cost leadership, distinction (often about quality), and focus of one of the two mentioned strategies on well-defined segments (designated geographical units or customer categories). Because of Porter (1980), organizational leaders must focus on one of the three generic strategies, as the application of multiple generic strategies can result in a company experiencing complexities emanating from competing demands. The employed approach would inevitably result in substandard organizational performance.

**Competence orientation and resources.** Originally developed as an antithesis to the market-based approach, different rudiments, theories, and models have moved into scientific and practice-oriented discussions since the 1990s, which assigned a particularly important role to the present competencies in an organization in the case of strategic development (Hinterhuber, 1996). Within an organization's competencies, leaders express individual company-specific potentials of success, thereby being essentially responsible for creating competitive advantages. Accordingly, an organization's competencies tend to generate competitive advantages (Hinterhuber, 1996). Competence

orientation occurs on the level of corporate strategies under the construct of the RBV, which contrasts the externally oriented MBV with its outside-in perspective of the industrial economy with the inside-out perspective. Consequently, corporate success primarily results from internal competitive forces. Instead of searching for a favored product–market combination and adopting the required competencies, leaders develop the market in the RBV based on already existing competencies. Thus, the company leaders' focus is on where the company stands rather than on where the leaders want the company to be, as the RBV's strategic advantages mainly derive from the existence of interorganizational and company-specific resources (Wernerfelt, 1984). The RBV represents the fundamental hypothesis that the origin of higher-than-average profits is in the resources the leaders of those companies have at their command. For the competitive standing of an enterprise, these resources are of vital importance. At the core of the RBV are the strategically relevant identification and development of in-house resources and organizational prowess (Hinterhuber, 1996). An organization's resources and heterogeneity obtain an elemental relevance in favor of their competitive position.

The classification into tangible, intangible, and human resources by Grant (2002) has received general acceptance in the literature. Tangible resources are physical resources that represent parts of fixed and current assets (i.e., properties, buildings, machinery, and supplies). Intangible resources subsume a company's nontangible assets and include, for instance, product image, company reputation, brand value, corporate culture, innovative capability, patents, and technical expertise. The nontechnical abilities knowledge management and staff motivation belong to human resources. To obtain a

long-term competitive advantage, only strategically relevant resources are of significance. Therefore, a resource should be valuable or sustainable, scarce, unlimited, and not substitutable (Grant, 2002).

Competence refers to the action of companies using available resources (Morris et al., 2013). Competencies provide information on whether an organization can deem a benefit useful and exploit the existing potential. Core competencies describe a specific form of competencies whereby the processes, organization, and integrative aspects of the business units create competitive advantages (Morris et al., 2013). Various researchers have referenced core competencies in numerous fields, and the RBV subsequently gained in importance. Morris et al. (2013) aligned the definition of core competencies with technological expertise and laid the definitional focus on service creation and on customer value. Morris et al. (2013) defined core competencies as a theoretically intricate construct that constitute the interaction of competencies. They serve as the foundations for competitive advantage in a specified business unit, as they possess the ability to convert a strategic business potential into customer value.

The secret to an organization's success is not in the success produced but in the unique combination of the abilities and core competencies that enable leaders of organizations to produce successful products. Researcher encourage to view an organization as a portfolio of resources and abilities that leaders can combine in several ways, but not as a collection of products or branches of business within the RBV. Organizations compete not only with the final products but also with the core products and core competencies (Lin & Wu, 2014).

## History

Universities have been places of active globalization that serve to attract students, qualified personnel, and partnerships with other organizations worldwide (e.g., Altbach & de Wit, 2015). International relations between universities developed after World War II and the Cold War with the intention of signaling solidarity among countries (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). The evolution of TNE has steadily increased student mobility and created a basis for the exchange of cultures, sympathy, and understanding (Wilkins, 2016a, 2016b). The evolution of higher education appears in the drastic increase in international enrollments over since the mid-1980s, for which some institutional leaders did not adequately prepare and thus experienced subsequent losses (Anayah & Kuk, 2015). Some institutional leaders targeted and planned strategically to enroll international students. However, others failed to prepare adequately. Enrollment growth started in the mid-1980s by Chinese students, which created cultural and language challenges. Due to lower tuition fee levels and the option to transfer after 2 years to a different college, the growth mainly affected community colleges (Anayah & Kuk, 2015).

As international higher education turned into a more complex concept for university stakeholders, the need for a clarified definition arose. Haigh (2014) defined eight layers of internationalization of higher education: (a) recruitment of international undergraduate students, (b) education of international undergraduate students, (c) international growth of an institution through recruitment of international staff, (d) compliance with standards set by international accreditation agencies, (e) internationalization of the syllabus for local learners, (f) education for global citizenship,

(g) connected e-learning, and (h) education for planetary consciousness. These layers may provide a foundation for developing modern higher education concepts to avoid financial issues (Haigh, 2014). Most successful university leaders must work with all eight areas and develop solutions to address the changing higher educational landscape.

The requirement for suitable definitions of international higher education resulted in investigations of different international university types. Knight (2015a) examined three different models of global institutions and defined their characteristics. The classic model links universities with one or more international partnerships and faculties, international exchanges, and articulations. The second model illustrates the latest generation of satellite international branch campuses or representation offices, and the third model depicts internationally cofounded, autonomous universities among two or more business associates (Knight, 2015a). Any established institution requires both mobility of TNE and student mobility to remain successful and avoid financial pressure (Wilkins, 2016b). One way of achieving TNE mobility is to establish international university branch campuses. The involvement of leading experts in this field is mandatory for a successful setup of an international university branch campus (Yuan, Liu, Luo, & Yan, 2016). An important factor when establishing an international university branch campus is that the stakeholders have a high perception based on the home country's reputation and brand identity (Yuan et al., 2016). The research also showed that the leaders of the international branch campus should develop a local brand identity to address local stakeholder requirements. One way of developing a sustainable

brand identity is to involve local key opinion leaders to build and strengthen the local brand recognition and value (Yuan et al., 2016).

The internationalization of higher education led to alterations and more competitiveness on various levels. New internal and external challenges, benefits, and risks emerged from these factors (Knight, 2014). In the early years, the competition was among English-speaking countries and providers. More recently, further development of new destinations for international education has unfolded, including India, China, Malaysia, and Middle Eastern countries. Students and graduates in a globalized market will go where the future jobs will be (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012). Mazzarol and Soutar (2012) highlighted the most frequent difficulties that leaders of international higher education institutions have had to face in their growth since 2001 through a focus on six main areas of evolution: (a) tensions between universities, (b) the necessity of generating new educational programs, (c) increasing higher education costs, (d) the importance of alliances, (e) the significance of new business models, and (f) interest in securing enhanced positions in the international market. Altbach and de Wit (2015) recognized how political and military involvement can have a negative impact on the evolution of intercontinental higher education by surveying historical backgrounds.

Changes in visa requirements or governments can influence student mobility from or to certain countries significantly and quickly (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). Such external difficulties equally influence the increase or decrease of student mobility (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). Although private higher education has benefitted from global growth for many years, important private share values of private universities simultaneously



declined. The decline enhanced the risk of a loss of global growth and caused several social issues (Levy, 2013). Levy (2013) noted that the diminution of social distinctiveness of groups that have fueled private growth and the demographic changes have affected the private education sector. Levy (2013) also indicated that government policy was also a factor, as was the expansion of the public sector of higher education and the competitive partial privatization within public higher education. The outcomes of the processes of internationalizing an institution vary based on the conditions institutional leaders must face in their home countries (Knight, 2014).

### **Market-Based View**

The main purpose for a student to study abroad is to seek international experience for personal, academic, and professional growth. A positive experience for an international student results in positive feedback, on which a university's reputation and a country's reputation is dependent (Ahmad, 2015; Khodabandelou, Karimi, & Ehsani, 2015; Oliveira & Soares, 2016). An institution's competitive advantage is relative to the satisfaction of its students (Ahmad, 2015; Woodall, Hiller, & Resnick, 2014), although some researchers noted that customer orientation is not sufficient to remain competitive in the international student market (Potts, 2015). Student mobility generally depends on the growth of middle-class families who can afford to send their children to study abroad and the density of migrants in a county, as foreign student emigration to a country is proportional to the level of education of students already enrolled at a specific university (Beine, Noel, & Ragot, 2014). Helping students to understand the benefits of international experiences will encourage them to study abroad (Potts, 2015).

Understanding the benefits of international experiences is a particular concern, as outcomes can bring many benefits from the experiences gained learning abroad to the early stages of a career. Potts (2015) noted that interpersonal and communication skills, teamwork skills, and problem solving, as well as analytical skills, support this premise.

Factors that push students to choose a foreign institution in the first place include reputation, quality of education, similarity to degree programs in the home country, reputation compared to homeland universities, prestige of foreign degrees, and value of the degrees in the employment market (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2015). International education and work placement ensure an increase in personal growth, self-efficacy, maturity, and intercultural confidence (Messelink et al., 2015). Lim (2015) gave additional examples of key transferable skills that students can obtain when they enroll in higher education but noted only 50% of graduates acquire critical thinking skills. The development of these and other skills are valuable for the workforce (Messelink et al., 2015). Students with an international background receive, on average, better job offers and starting pay, as study abroad experience receives favorable consideration among employers (Kratz & Netz, 2016).

International mobility affects not only international undergraduate students but also the development of high-level employers, as they can obtain specific skills by working with international undergraduate students (Potts, 2015). Difficulties international undergraduate students experience are personal in terms of academic and social integration. Being able to understand and predict complications is vital for working with and integrating students. Rienties and Tempelaar (2014) discussed the issue based on an

example in the Netherlands, where students are familiar with teacher-centric approaches and stricter class and formality systems and are, therefore, more likely to experience hardships integrating into an international environment. Asian students suffer less than European undergraduates do when studying abroad, given the same language barriers (Sakurai, Parpala, Pyhältö, & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2016). Overreliance on stereotypes, however, presumably leads to failure. Crede and Borrego (2014) advised that university leaders should engage with student issues on an individual level. Based on my own 15 years of experience within international higher education, it is my view that the stereotype approach has become less appropriate. Thus, it may be fair to note that young students start to travel earlier and experience international exchanges via social media.

A common obstacle among international students is various forms of racism. Racism can have a major emotional effect on international undergraduates and lead to unpleasant behavioral changes. Universities whose leaders do not actively integrate international students successfully can be at risk of experiencing an increase in the levels of on-campus racism. Such an increase would result in harmful feedback for an institution and a decrease in student enrollments (Truong et al., 2016).

Students' first concerns are often about the attributes of an institution's country, rather than the institution itself. Factors influencing destination choices include the cost of living or expenses, safety, excitement, academic environment, tuition costs, and geographic proximity to the home country (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2015; Haussen & Uebelmesser, 2016). Country of origin of overseas institutions and delivery mode of curricula are both important factors concerning perceived risks in international higher

education. Bashaab, Sweeney, and Soutara (2015) defined three risk types based on online or distance learning. According to Bashaab et al., online or distance learning are the most hazardous form of international higher education compared to physically attending a university in a good country of origin, which students perceived to be the safest. The risk factors in online or distance learning include financial risks, social risks, and performance risks. Based on my own experience of the online student cohort and given that online or distance learning is becoming increasingly popular, implementing hybrid options such as improvements in available technology may address some of these risks.

### **Resource-Based View**

A university's need to globalize stems from the requirement to retain a competitive advantage over its opponents (Kotake, 2016). A university's reputation has a direct link to the internationalization of education, as the reputation represents a crucial factor in the pursuit of a leading position in the intercontinental market (Nguyen, Yu, Melewar, & Hemsley-Brown, 2016). Due to the internationalization of universities and their educational programs, the quantity of enrolled students has increased, most visibly in Asian countries, and even at British universities (Warwick, 2014). Based upon personal experience, I understand the importance and challenges of managing a global reputation. The involvement of social media in reputational management is heavily reliant upon sharing content and careful brand management, particularly because news can spread quickly and influence institutional reputations either positively or negatively.

To handle the growth in student mobility, institutional leaders should introduce new strategies and implement them. Scott (2004) addressed the constant back and forth activity between an increase in student mobility and an increase in student attrition to evaluate educational strategies based on the factors affecting transnational education. Warwick (2014) suggested managing universities like enterprises; applying company-typical, clear performance measurements; and avoiding strategy failure. In many universities, the key challenge is not the lack of strategy, but the plan on how to implement and manage the strategy. University leadership teams may not have sufficient experience in management because the focus in their career has largely been in the academic field rather than in institutional management. Important policy and practice areas such as finance, marketing, operations, technology, and human resources therefore tend not to be within the natural leadership experience of individuals in these professions.

A possible section or extension of a strategy could be the deliberate educational offer of supporting skills development, which usually only evolves through international study experiences. The contribution of such an uncommon course could prevent financial pressure and add to a university's reputation (Messelink et al., 2015). For the successful execution of an international strategy plan, the recruitment of global personnel is inevitable (Cai & Hall, 2015). Hiring global personnel should involve not just faculty, but also leadership and management experts, but one of the challenges associated with the practice of hiring global personnel is the offer of increased compensation packages, which represents a substantial additional employment cost.

Collins (2015) elaborated on the value of international accreditation in recruiting new faculty members. International accreditation is valuable to an organization that already has a type of transnational education, even though it involves an increase in administration work. Developing modern societies will lead to a higher demand for TNE within key English-speaking societies such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia (Chen, 2015). Student interaction with other international students also provides benefits to the student population in the form of improved critical thinking, language acquisition, and intercultural skills (Glass & Westmont, 2014).

Due to the global growth of universities, the market, and student mobility, the need for universities to expand and modify transnational education arose (Stafford & Taylor, 2016). According to Healey (2015b), the global growth of universities, the market and the student mobility should help with overcoming challenges and take away the financial pressure from universities (Healey, 2015b; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016; Tierney & Lanford, 2015). Providing definitions of developed TNE departments has become increasingly difficult with the diversification of transnational education. Healey (2015c) and Chen (2015) divided transnational education into distance learning, international branch campuses, franchises, and validations. Bannier (2016) broke down transnational education into online, distance, collaborative, and branch campuses. Hou, Montgomery, and McDowell (2014) explored the mobility of TNE in China and ranked TNE into programmed articulation, international branch campuses, franchises, and twinning degrees. Transnational education can be a valuable asset to an institution. Bannier (2016) analyzed insufficiencies when developing an international branch and demonstrated how

an international branch often lacks appropriate implementation of such strategies due to deficient resources, management experience, or human resources in general.

Sidhu and Christie (2014, 2015) conducted case studies of a branch campus and found it necessary to adapt to local conditions and needs, rather than to install a copy of the home campus. Healey and Michael (2015) explored a similar series of cases in a Chinese context. Other major risks when exporting academic programs include the unintended reduction of academic quality, a lack of involvement of senior leadership in constituted partnerships with foreign universities, or the differing conditions and mentalities between countries involved in an international partnership (Hou et al., 2014; Stafford & Taylor, 2016).

The most commonly chosen foundations of transnational education enhancements are international branch campuses, franchise degrees, and international education hubs (Caruana & Montgomery, 2015; Healey, 2015a; Kosior et al., 2015). In the early development of international expansions, the franchise degree agreements emerged as having some substantial advantages (Healey, 2015a), as establishing franchise degrees is easier, faster, and less financially risky than establishing international branch campuses. Nevertheless, my experience has shown that this option requires strong governance and clear guidelines for the definition of this partnership because the franchise varies substantially from the original home campus. Varying models of international education hubs, including student hubs, talent hubs, and knowledge or innovation hubs, provide a more focused, attractive environment for students that supports the quality of future graduates. The idea, design, and application of education make this prototypical

establishment successful (Caruana et al., 2015; Koch, 2014). Establishing knowledge cities is a practical way to sustain an environment's conversion toward a more knowledge-based economy and offers an easy route of domiciling industry, innovation, academic infrastructure, and research in an area, which attracts international partners, as has been done in the Middle Eastern region (Kosior et al., 2015).

A university's legacy is a key prerequisite for setting up a new branch in a different country and substantially influences both global expansion and the adherence of international branches (Lien & Wang, 2012). In return, international university branch campuses affect the home university's enrollment, tuition fees, and brand recognition. Branch campuses provide a more accessible option to high-quality academic programs, which together with the social benefit, results in increased sales, well-educated workforces, and fewer brain drains (Lien & Wang, 2012). For the successful development of an international university branch, university leaders should implement certain key competencies and factors, including motivations, objectives, management, and academic compendiums of universities frequently reviewed (Healey & Michael, 2015; Kinser & Lane, 2014). Healey and Michael (2015) introduced adaptation to local conditions, excellent academic quality, and good cooperation between companies and countries as requirements for the setting-up procedure in China. According to Healey and Michael (2015), creating a partnership with a local university provides valuable involvement in the local community and simplifies the adaptation to local stakeholders, especially in China, where local authorities and partners must have a strong involvement



in the management process via, for example, representation on local leadership teams and boards of directors.

Further examples of teaming include sharing academic governance, adapting course content to local students, and the divided leadership position. These examples served as role models for an exemplary, successful implementation of an international university branch campus expansion. Lewis (2016) recognized student enrollment as another important prerequisite and explained how a market- and marketing-informed approach to the development phase of an international university branch campus can serve as valuable support for the enrollment of students. In 2016, Lewis noted there were more than 235 international university branch campuses and, as the investments involved in opening these campuses are high, so is pressure to ensure increased student recruitment. Students may gain an impression of the institution in the main country, but they might be ignorant of how the international university branch campus differentiates from the home campus.

Finding a proper balance between both quality and identity expectations from home institutions and the demands of local host countries is a crucial yet challenging mission for international university branch campuses. The analysis of such a balancing act takes place in three dimensions: curriculum (offering identical versus local curriculum), staffing (recruiting local academic staff versus sending own international staff), and research (Shams & Huisman, 2014).

Building on the above, the investigative focus of international university branch campuses includes four macroenvironmental key factors: existence of a market,

adherence to supranational institutions, harmonization of national legislation, convergence of home and host cultures as manifested by the local population in a country, and the penetration of technology (Lindsay & Antoniou, 2016). Employing international academic leaders maintains the quality of an institution, but often leads to high expenses that could damage the financial sustainability of an international university branch campus (Shams & Huisman, 2014). Salt and Wood (2014) focused on the importance of high-quality human resources. As university leaders continue to grow and expand their institutions internationally, cost and operating efficiency strategies have become necessary for the preservation of transnational branches and have required leaders to acquire a new set of skills (de Waal & Kerklaan, 2015). A selection of skilled, quality employees must receive proper training and motivation, both financially and psychologically, so that they may take on important international assignments, deal with management challenges, and meet the expectation of local partners (Healey, 2015b; Salt & Wood, 2014).

Most challenges concerning the deployment of an international university branch campus are largely ethical issues, such as the deficiency of academic freedom or civil liberties in host nations. Disregarding these may lead to reputational damage, financial losses, and unattainable legitimacy. Flexible, fast-learning leaders capable of introducing organizational change have the best chances for being successful (Wilkins, 2015). Conducting detailed risk assessments as an essential factor in developing international university branch campuses allows leaders to cope with difficulties rapidly and efficiently (Girdzijauskaitė & Radzevičienė, 2014). The evolving challenges of financial pressure

result in demand for strategic reorientation toward a concentrated avoidance of financial distress. With the necessity to remain ahead of the competition, the desire to be financially self-sufficient grows (de Waal & Kerklaan, 2015). As universities continue to grow and expand internationally, cost and operating efficiency strategies have become necessary to preserve transnational branches (Alstete, 2014; de Waal & Kerklaan, 2015). University leaders must also remain innovative and adapt quickly to new trends. This involves the incorporation of new technologies, new work requirements, and changing local market conditions (Alstete, 2014). Current students also require additional digital skills and therefore require a different and more advanced approach to technology and learning methodology.

The general concept for solving this situation has always been deploying educational services in exchange for payment (Alstete, 2014). Over time, university leaders have had to become more innovative with creating new streams of income to accomplish financial targets without violating a university's ethical performance (Pashby, 2016). University leaders must therefore acquire new management skills and remain at the forefront of their industry (de Waal & Kerklaan, 2015). Carnoy, Froumin, Loyalka, and Tilak (2014) offered a solution to this dilemma through a portrayal of growth among university students in Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. With a focus on specific programs, the according governments support elite universities over volume-based universities to achieve a higher mobility of international students, which contributes to increased tuition fee revenues. University leaders consequently show an

increasing interest in international undergraduate student enrollment, as it offers an opportunity to increase tuition fee revenues (Cantwell, 2015).

Possible ways to increase the density of international undergraduate students include a raise in average tuition fees, increasing online programs, and geographic expansion (Alstete, 2014). Attracting international undergraduate students requires institutional leaders to adapt to the students' needs and offer support services to integrate the students into their new environments, which include housing, caregiving, security, safety, and sports (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Enrolled students expect the involvement of academic staff so that the staff can support them in their cultural and educational preparation and help with integrational issues (Cai & Hall, 2015). The challenge is finding appropriate skilled academic staff. One of the key findings by Cai and Hall (2015) was the lack of cultural preparation before the assignment. Academic staff may appreciate the various benefits of an international assignment but miss the support in professional development. In this study, I assessed whether university leaders need to prepare and develop the international academic staff for the international university branch campus in advance.

According to Wilkins and Huisman (2015), all students who are at least partially living abroad and participating in a home university program instead of studying on the domestic university premises were classified under transnational education. Asian countries have played an important role in the increase of international student mobility, providing both international students and locations for the international development of

international university branch campuses (Khodabandelou et al., 2015; Krechetnikov, Pestereva, & Rajović, 2016).

An increase in international university branch campuses and the mobility of students naturally follows a gain in competition among universities (Chee, Butt, Wilkins, & Ong, 2016). University leaders in developing countries often focus on niche areas of study or on lowering pricing compared to universities from developed countries (Chee et al., 2016). University leaders come up with innovative ideas such as courses that help develop important skills for future job opportunities to remain ahead of the competition (Messeling et al., 2015). To maintain high student enrollment, universities need to have the latest technologies, be up-to-date with research, offer larger scholarships, and have a high acceptance rate simultaneously (Leih & Teece, 2016). In many cases, university leaders are not able to support their students not only in educational matters but also in social, intercultural, and psychological issues (Jin & Cortazzi, 2016). Conventional concepts may fail and lead to increased attrition (Beer & Lawson, 2015). Student attrition is an expensive issue, as it equates to a loss of tuition fee revenues. For Beer & Lawson (2015), student attrition rates are between 30 and 50% in the United States, and over 20% in Australia; therefore, the inability to retain students in higher education is a significant issue. Reasons for this outcome include students failing to complete their studies through, for example, mental health issues, disability, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. Creating a sense of belonging among students in the institution is a potential strategy for avoiding attrition and can involve using recommended initiatives such as developing

positive student–faculty relationships, offering a well-resourced counseling center, and providing diversity and difference (Beer & Lawson, 2015).

Bhuian (2016) clarified that universities are not capable of meeting their full potential if they fail to focus on the customer value perception sufficiently. Not meeting their full potential results in a low-quality service, which leads to decreased student enrollments and therefore financial challenges. I propose to counteract this challenge by focusing on the expectations of prospective students. Although university leaders primary focus has been on developing of branch campuses, it is worthwhile considering that internationalizing programs at home campuses have shown greater benefits than studying abroad for developing global, international, and intercultural competencies, according to some studies (Bhuian, 2016).

### **Summary**

The successful establishment of an international university depends primarily on a university's model and the concepts its leaders use to gain a leading position in the international market. Although Scott's (2004) institutional theory provided a basic understanding of institutional organizations and evaluating changes in transnational education, the customer-value-based theory explained the significance of student mobility through two different approaches to the development of strategic concepts. The MBV is suitable for assessing the expectations of students and to explain which factors influence international undergraduate students' decision to go abroad. The RBV is appropriate for describing how university leaders conceive concepts with the intention of avoiding financial pressure through an increase in international undergraduate student mobility and

which factors they consider when developing strategies. Developing international university branch campuses can contribute to the process of internationalizing an organization successfully. Alternatives to international university branch campuses are franchising degrees and international student hubs. The education of international personnel is also important for the internationalizing process, as it contributes to increasing student mobility through which the mitigation of financial pressures is possible.

### **Transition**

The goal of Section 1 was to set the foundation of the proposed qualitative case study. The literature review was a response to the research question from different angles and included scholarly knowledge and information focused on Scott's (2004) institutional theory. The outcome of the literature review was scholarly information on how institutional leaders develop their organization and structures, as well as evaluate changes in transnational education. Section 1 also included a discussion on the customer-value-based theory, which had as its focus the significance of student mobility through two different approaches to the development of strategic concepts. Section 2 includes the role of the researcher, population, sampling method, participants, research method, and research design, followed by the importance of conducting ethical research. Section 2 also includes details about the data collection and analysis techniques and the required standard to ensure reliability and validity. Section 3 includes the research findings and recommendation for professional implementation for a potential social change. Section 3

concludes with a proposal for future research, some reflections, and a conclusion to the doctoral study.



## Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes a description of the research project that involved an attempt to address gaps in knowledge about potential strategies for academic leaders to address the business problem of increasing tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. Following a reiteration of the study's purpose, I discuss my role as the researcher in the study including how I approached the study and identified steps to mitigate any personal bias that may exist. The next section includes the characteristics of the participants. An outline of the specific research method precedes the specifics of the research design, the population from which participants came, and the sampling method chosen. Ethical issues invoked by the research and characteristics of the study designed to ensure it meets normative standards for ethical research also appear in Section 2. This section also includes the specifics of the instruments chosen to collect data, followed by techniques for applying those instruments. My approach to organizing and analyzing the data appear in the two subsections following that, and methods for ensuring and assessing reliability and validity of the data are next. I finish the section with a summary of the research proposal and a transition to Section 3.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that university leaders use to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. The targeted population included three former leaders of the European division of Laureate International Universities, which was the largest global university group. The group owned several universities in Europe and had developed strategies to increase

tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by enabling university leaders to develop strategies to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students and to provide students access to an international higher education.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the primary researcher of the study, I selected the research topic based on its relevance to my professional experience and interest in the management of international universities. My role as researcher was to select the research method and design, select the participants, and act as the principal of the data gathering process. I maintained a strong personal interest in this subject, have worked in the largest university network in the world for more than 15 years, and have specifically been in leadership roles to transform universities into growth organizations, mainly through internationalization. The internationalization happened primarily by increasing the number of international students and opening international branch campuses and partnerships abroad (see also Johnes & Ruggiero, 2016). The transformation has not always been easy and involved various challenges. In this study I explored ways to create additional contributions with best practices for similar cases.

Adopting ethical safeguards to ensure the protection of participants was of paramount consideration. I was not in any current professional relationship with the selected participants. Such an approach helped to avoid any conflict of interest in the researcher–participant relationship (National Science Foundation, 2016) and met the

guideline of maintaining boundaries between practice and research as per the *Belmont Report* protocol (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979).

To some degree, a personal lens for interpreting an interview was impossible to avoid. Nevertheless, I mitigated bias by having identified possible biases and by having performed the following actions and behaviors. Researchers establish relationships with participants but may be unaware of their own working assumptions and perceptions. To the greatest extent possible, I tried to minimize or mitigate these biases by having become aware of the personal biases and assumptions I brought to the process of asking questions and interpreting answers. Asking questions and interpreting answers is desirable as a strategy for increasing the generalizability and validity of research. The specific methods I used were cataloging my assumptions and perceptions regarding the participants and having used a Popperian disconfirmation strategy of deliberately searching for evidence in the data to test the hypothesis that these assumptions and perceptions are incorrect.

As the researcher, I adhered to and maintained responsibility for ensuring the confidentiality promised to participants in terms of securing their personal information and only sharing the information in publications in an aggregated and anonymized format, as promised to participants in the disclosures provided prior and subsequent to data collection. Thus, study participation and publication posed only nominal or minimal risks to participants, and the expected contribution to knowledge gained by having conducted the study and having met the guideline of balancing risks and benefits in the *Belmont Report* more than compensate for the risk (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Human Research Protection, 1979).

I selected a semistructured interview protocol as the main research method due to the versatility of the method and its ability to generate a large amount of data from experienced participants for a case study approach. Due to the subject, an experiment would have been impractical, and surveys would have generated less rich data than experienced participants provided based on their experience. Potential downsides of the research strategy included being prone to biases of the participants or gaps in their experience. However, within the interview technique, there were multiple options for approaching the collaborative process between researcher and participant: traditional (question and answer) interviews, narrative approaches, and biographical-interpretive methods (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). The semistructured format selected was suitable for having blended prepared questions with narratives of particularly notable experiences with international academic programs driven by the participants' choice.

### **Participants**

The study included three participants who have worked for many years for the European division of the largest global university group. One of the participants was for several years the CEO of the European organization of the university group I was working for; the other two participants have worked as business development directors and as regional admissions directors for the group's various universities in Europe. One has overseen recruiting students within Europe, while the other has overseen recruiting students in Greater China to enroll in Europe. Given the importance of China, this participant's experience was relevant, and a comparison to the data from the participant in charge of Europe revealed differences. The characteristics of these three individuals

aligned with my research question. The citations derived from similarities with respect to experiences, varied perspectives on higher education administration, and a heavy focus on issues of enrollment and tuition fee revenues.

These experienced professionals were aware of the pressures on universities to internationalize and of various strategies for staying competitive in a global market. All the participants have worked on improving services that are critical to researchers in the field. The inclusion of a participant with regional experience in China also reflected a growing area of interest in the literature (e.g., Hou et al., 2014).

I worked with the participants in my former professional roles. All the participants were no longer in any professional relationship with me, but due to our connection and previous working experience, access to the participants was convenient. In addition, having known the participants from my previous working relationships ensured the best possible and most relevant knowledge available. Each participant was fully aware of the data collection process and each agreed in advance to participate in the study according to the requirements outlined by Patton (2015).

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

This study included qualitative methodologies. In qualitative research, finding a single truth is not the goal; rather, researchers explore outcomes on an ongoing basis (Yin, 2014). I have based my research questions on the *what*, *how*, and *why* of the phenomenon and not on correlations between a dependent and an independent variable, which is the focus in quantitative methods (Yin, 2014). This methodology is valuable for

developing a deeper understanding and gaining new insights as opposed to quantitative research, which is useful for comparing relationships and differences among well-specified and quantified but potentially narrow variables (Venkatesh et al., 2013). A qualitative study has theory creation as its purpose, and evaluating existing theory is not necessary (Yin, 2014). I explored new knowledge to address the specific open-ended research question; therefore, a qualitative research method was appropriate. Neither quantitative nor mixed-methods methodologies were appropriate, as I did not seek to examine data from specific variables to test hypotheses, as explained by Venkatesh et al. (2013).

### **Research Design**

A multiple case study with semistructured interviews was suitable for the research design. For this study, I used a case study design, which included multiple data and information sources such as interviews with relevant participants and an extensive review of relevant documents. Case study design is specifically appropriate for researching certain decisions or strategy implementations and their results within an organization (Yin, 2014). The case study design consists of a social phenomenon and therefore was more appropriate than ethnography (Yin, 2014), as my case study did not depend on ethnographic or participant observation data. Phenomenological and ethnographic designs did not fulfill the study requirements of the research regarding my specific business problem of identifying and implementing strategies to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. The case study design was more

appropriate than historical studies, and the focus of grounded theory is on recent events and not on developing theories.

Ensuring that the data collected reaches the saturation point is an important consideration (Morse, Lowery, & Steury, 2014). The properties of saturation in a set are richness, fullness, completions, a resulting theory that makes sense, and an absence of gaps. It is important to continue to collect data to identify or exhaust key themes. Particularly when using a convenience sample, saturation will generally take place more slowly, as samples that are not cohesive and representative are likely to contain gaps, pockets, or reflect less experience, which will take longer for the researcher and participants to uncover, identify, and explore. A case study may fail to achieve saturation of the research question or area due to the limited sample size. Saturation is an elusive concept, as stopping when no new information or themes emerge does not provide a clear guideline on whether the sample size is sufficient or regarding the cost–benefit trade-offs of recruiting additional participants (Morse et al., 2014). To achieve data saturation, I used a member-checking strategy in which all interview participants reviewed the abridgment of their interview for endorsement. This strategy allows researchers to gather information through a member-checking process until no new information emerges (Morse et al., 2014).

### **Population and Sampling**

The data collection methods concerned three participants who have worked for many years for the European division of the largest global university group: Laureate International Universities. The sampling methodology for this study was purposive, as

individuals with the high level of experience required for my research design were rare and gaining access to their time was challenging. Purposive sampling also included elements of convenience, as the individuals whom I gained access to are not selected randomly, but had experience related to my own professional experience. To minimize partiality, I was not in a working or employee relationship with the participants. The interviews took place mainly by Skype calls due to the different locations of the participants. The methods to communicate with participants included an introductory e-mail to inform them about the background, purpose, and procedures of the study, a step in recruitment explained by Yin (2014).

The primary driver of the participant selection in a case study is that the targeted participants will further illuminate the inquiry question under the study (Patton, 2015). All the selected leaders had the senior leadership experience to ensure constructive and credible interviews. The three participants have worked for many years for the European division of the largest global university group: Laureate International Universities. I selected two universities of the group based in the same country in Europe with a similar program portfolio and accreditation status. The selection of these two specialist universities was relevant, as they were comparable and had a long tradition of enrolling international students from around the world. The strategy and the success of Laureate International Universities relied upon international student mobility, and therefore the selected population choice was appropriate and relevant. Each participant has successfully contributed to and implemented the strategy of international student mobility within the group. The professional experience of the participants served as a valuable



source of specialized knowledge. I also gathered archival documents and other company information as secondary data to add additional and valuable information regarding the respective organization; using secondary data is a process explained by Yin (2014). I interviewed participants until data saturation occurred. I was able to determine data saturation by noting the point at which no new information emerged or no new topics arose. Data saturation occurs when researchers have gathered enough information to replicate a study, when further coding is no longer applicable, and when further data gathering and analysis create no new information (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

### **Ethical Research**

Researchers have a responsibility and commitment to pursue knowledge and truth and to remain sensitive to the ethical issues surrounding human interactions to uphold the highest ethical standards (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2014). Before contacting any potential participants, I sought approval of my study from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Throughout this study, I respected and maintained the high level of ethical standards according to the *Belmont Report* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Human Research Protection, 1979). The selection of the research participants ensured the participants had relevant experience and, as previously described, that there were not any bias or conflict of interest. I did not have any current professional relationship with the selected participants.

The participant selection process conformed to the requirements of the university's IRB principles and to research etiquette identified in the *Belmont Report*. In

terms of age, the participants were at least 18 years old, had a minimum of 10 years working experience in higher education, and had represented more than one university. If at any point during the interviews, a participant expressed an unwillingness to continue with the research, the participant could withdraw with no penalty. I have not attempted to persuade participants to continue to provide data. If a participant expressed reluctance to answer a specific question or to continue speaking about a particular subject, I ensured the participant that it was not necessary to continue answering that question or to speak about that matter and the participant could have continued to participate in the remainder of the interview without any consequence. Participants confirmed their participation and their permission to use the data by signing consent letters (Check, Wolf, Dame, & Beskow, 2014). The participants received clear and complete information by e-mail to have validated me as doctoral research candidate of the Walden University Doctor of Business Administration program. I followed the ethical standards strictly with regard to participant letters and throughout the qualitative case study as explained by Check et al. (2014). Participation in the study and the data-gathering process was voluntary, and the participants could withdraw any time during the process according to the requirements outlined by Check et al. (2014). In addition, the consent letter clearly indicated that no participants received incentives as explained by Patton (2015). The primary incentive for the participants should have been the opportunity to contribute to the knowledge of the field and toward the knowledge of subsequent generations. Also, participants may have enjoyed the opportunity to reflect upon their life's work and to have a meaningful conversation with an interested colleague.

The risks of participation in interviews were minimal, although it was important to consider potential reputational damage from the research should participants have shared anything potentially controversial. Therefore, I took the utmost care to ensure the confidentiality of the data by having used encryption and physical security measures as appropriate to limit access to confidential data to only the participants and me. I store the data securely for 5 years to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

The study has not included any students. Revealing the participants' exact affiliations could potentially affect the participants' institutions. For this reason, the specific locations and affiliations of the participants during the experiences they have related remained anonymous in the published research. Any references to the participants in the interview benefited from confidentiality and was subject to a redaction process for any open-access transcripts. After 5 years, I delete and destroy the research protocol according to the IRB requirements of Walden University. All the research was in full compliance of Walden University's IRB according to the IRB approval number: 02-07-18-0409014.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Data collection begun with interviews and reviewing details included in the available material, such as websites, social media sources, and public information on the selected universities and peers. The interviews were semistructured. I had developed the questions around the research question of what strategies university leaders used to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. I was the primary instrument for the data collection for this study. According to Yin (2014), there are six

possible information and data channels: physical artifacts, direct observations, archival records, documents, interviews, and participant observations. Semistructured interviews create conditions whereby participants can respond to open-ended questions and therefore provide a maximum level of information and additional explanations. Semistructured interviews are specifically appropriate for verbal expansion where detailed answers and possible follow-up questions valuable to the research question (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I provided seven open-ended questions. Marshall and Rossman (2016) recommended conducting interviews because interviews allow for further research in the according research area and create availability for questions regarding the interpretation of strategies and results. Participants might also feel more open to discussing and exploring their thoughts and knowledge (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Interview questions are a helpful way to make sure the interview will stay focused on the research question and therefore ensure the reliability and validity of the study.

To evaluate the reliability and validity further, participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts of their answers and raise any concerns regarding information not recorded correctly or accurately. In addition, I neutralized the information within the transcripts to avoid identifying the participants. As recommended by Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014), I conducted member checking and reviewed the information with the participants to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. The participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts and my understanding as part of the member-checking process. It was important to have achieved the agreement of the participants on the transcripts to increase the credibility of the data. The study involved gathering

additional material and data by having reviewed the websites and public social media of all universities of the Laureate group, those at which the participants have ever worked for.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Using multiple data collection sources ensured a valuable and transparent case study, as the multiple sources support data triangulation and corroborating the results of each source to strengthen the credibility and confirmability of the study (Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, & Casey, 2015). I used interviews, as interviews are a common channel for collecting data in a case study, as they include the understanding of a human subject as explained by Yin (2014). Data collection involved interviews with clear, open-ended interview questions. The open-ended questions supported a high level of conversations and the contribution of new information. Answers were subject to the methodological protocol. Due to the remote location of the participants, interviews took place by video conferencing (Skype). The interviews were semistructured to avoid an interview lasting several hours, but to allow in-depth information gathering in a short time (Yin, 2014). Due to the limited availability of expert participants for case study, there was not a pilot study for this research. Consequentially, I recorded the interviews after having received approval from the participants. In addition, I gathered background and demographic information for each participant at the beginning of the interviews. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), the face-to-face interview is the most accrued way of gathering information. As participants were not available to meet in person, Skype video calls replaced participants' physical presence as much as possible. The interviews were

interactive and allowed participants to explore their experience and knowledge around the interview questions. The interviews lasted up to 60 minutes each. All interviews were subject to the relevant protocol concerning recording. Transcripts remain stored in a safe place for a minimum of 5 years. A pilot study of qualitative studies is not necessary by the Walden University IRB, and therefore, I have not conducted a pilot study. Data collection procedures were part of the interview protocol (see Appendix B), transcripts, and analysis.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Organizing data is an important element of any qualitative research study. To obtain the results, researchers categorize the data gathered from interviews into codes and group the data in themes (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Developing and applying an effective data management system ensures the integrity of transcribed interviews, audio records, and backup files of the interviews as part of the data storage process (Yin, 2014). I preserved the data collected from the participants' Skype interviews on a hard drive. I also cataloged interviews based on participant and date. Further cataloging took place as part of the data analysis. All data remain securely stored for 5 years. The identity of the participants remained confidential, and only I have access to participant data. Participant details were anonymous because of the use of a coding exercise. The researcher transcribed the answers, and storage occurred via NVivo 11 software, with various common themes related to the research question. NVivo 11 was a valuable software used to collect participants' interview protocols and any other information from collected documents. According to Yin (2014), the use of software is highly recommended, as

researchers can log all interview protocols, recorded materials, and notes in one database; categorize the specific topics; and reduce the risk of compromising any information. This process shall be completed within 24 hours (Patton, 2015). I created themes to having analyzed and evaluated the answers according to differences and similarities. All participants had an opportunity to member-check their responses by reviewing and agreeing to the information, transcripts, and relevant references of the additional material.

### **Data Analysis**

I reviewed interview transcripts carefully and evaluated each statement for its relevance to the research question. All pertinent items were to be subject to a permanent record, with each unique statement listed. From this list, I evaluated the units for relatedness, and clusters were subsequently developed. I described each of the clusters and provided examples from the transcript. I then reflected on the descriptions to having gained an understanding of the structure of the knowledge transmitted by the participants. I undertook the process separately for each participant, searched for congruencies and disparities among each participant's themes, and attempted to form a coherent description of the field. After data collection, I aimed to contact each participant to member-check the data analysis and conclusions. This process gave participants the opportunity to correct any misunderstandings and improve the reliability and validity of the research (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). The process for member checking included the following steps (Patton, 2015):

- A comparison of observations with the actual interviews.
- A comparison of the private comments with their possible public views.

- Consistency within the various participants.
- A comparison of the various views and perspectives of different stakeholders.
- A review of the interviews with various other information sources that can provide evidence to corroborate what interview respondents report.

I organized the same methodology with the additional material gathered from sources such as websites and social media. I also categorized additional information along the lines of the related themes in the member-checking process to have ensured accuracy and the correct interpretation of the additional material and data.

I undertook the analysis with the support of the software NVivo 11. The software was a valuable support to analyze possible related themes within transcripts and according to a research question (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). During the interviews, I took field notes, which allowed me to triangulate the information and data to strengthen the research results further and to have avoided any researcher bias. I also worked with Excel to provide easier data entry to NVivo 11 and to conduct a narrative analysis first. The analysis involved employing NVivo 11 as a collection and collation tool, which provided me with the data relevant to the research question.

One of the focuses during the analysis was to compare the data to the literature review. The evaluation included three categories: (a) in agreement with the literature, (b) not in agreement with literature, and (c) partly in agreement, but inconsistent with, the literature. Methodological triangulation allows a complete and extensive analysis of the data (Wilson, 2014). With the support of NVivo 11, the data analysis process had a focus,



and I could identify themes and compare them to the literature and conceptual framework.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity have a strong connection (Patton, 2015). It is important and relevant to ensure consistency and accuracy throughout any research study to validate the quality of the research results. To reinforce the reliability and validity of the research study further, the researcher shall use a database to track and organize the various sources of evidence (de Massis & Kotlar, 2014). Following the four criteria of dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability can ensure reliability and validity in qualitative research (Houghton et al., 2015).

#### **Reliability**

Reliability is an important consideration for qualitative studies, and I aimed to produce knowledge that will have ongoing usefulness and applicability and is not only relevant to the individuals involved in the research in their narrow context. In qualitative studies, auditability and dependability are the same as reliability in quantitative studies (de Massis & Kotlar, 2014). Reliability ensures consistency within the study over time and within various studies, methods, and researchers (Houghton et al., 2015). Researchers at Statistics Solutions (2017) described reliability as being similar to dependability, as it serves to increase the trustworthiness of data collection and analysis systems. I employed several techniques to enhance the reliability of the data analysis. As recommended by Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014), I conducted member checking and reviewed the information with the participants to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. The

participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts and my understanding as part of the member-checking process. I considered it important to having achieved the agreement of the participants on my transcripts, which increased the credibility of the data gathered from the additional material.

### **Validity**

Validity in qualitative research has several dimensions: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and data saturation (Patton, 2015). One of the ways to ensure validity is to achieve data saturation. Five strategies to achieve validity are as follows:

- Member checking: Participants have the possibility to review, comment, and approve the interview transcripts before publishing (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016).
- Clarification of researcher bias: Full transparency of research bias occurs during data collection (Cope, 2014).
- Negative case analysis: Any information which can be negative in addition to positive considerations (Cope, 2014).
- Methodological triangulation: Comparison and cross-checking regarding the consistency of data and the information gathered from the same qualitative method but from different data sources at different times (Patton, 2015).
- Peer debriefing: As part of Walden University's academic quality governance, the study will undergo review by the chair and the second committee member as part of MyDR.

**Credibility.** Credibility refers to the truth, value, or trustworthiness of the data.

Enhancing credibility requires a commitment to ethical standards, as ethical compromises can affect the trustworthiness of the researcher and data. For this reason, ethical adequacy benefits from top priority in this human subject research. However, improving credibility requires several other facets, such as carefully recording data and rigorously rechecking analyses. Ensuring credibility involves reviewing and evaluating if the research outcome of the researcher is in congruence with the perception of the source of data (Houghton et al., 2015). According to Fusch and Ness (2015), the most valuable approaches to obtain credibility and validity include triangulation and member checking. I applied both approaches in my study to ensure full credibility and validity. Researchers can achieve triangulation by reviewing the same phenomenon from various perspectives, which will support the validity of a study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Member checking, which some consider validation by participants, is the process of obtaining structured feedback from participants to reduce the risk of any data misunderstandings by researchers (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014).

**Transferability.** Transferability is another aspect of validity and refers to the utility of the analyses to persons and situations outside of the research context. Reliability affects the process of transferability because of the inclusion of a broad set of participants that creates a set of relevant but key themes that emerge, rather than just those that are unique to specific individuals' experiences. It is essential to ensure transferability by sufficiently indicating the context of the study with a detailed description of the research methods, populations, events, and activities to ensure the reader can consider the

interpretations correctly (2013; Yin, 2014). The responsibility to achieve transferability remains with the individual who is transferring the data in a qualitative research (Patton, 2015).

**Confirmability.** Confirmability is the facet of validity that refers to research conclusions that reflect the experience of the participants, rather than any preexisting beliefs or biases of the researcher (Anney, 2014). For this reason, I adopted triangulation methods when undertaking data analysis. This process places a check on biases and requires the researcher to examine the raw data carefully and allow the structure of the knowledge it contains to emerge. It is also worthwhile to examine my own assumptions and beliefs about the research question and to having stated them in my analysis so that the reader and I can consider any effect of these interpretive lenses. Providing detailed methodological descriptions also allows users of the research to assess their own subjective sense of the confirmability of data emerging from the methods used.

Data saturation also has an effect on validity, as data sets that have not reached the point of saturation may contain critical gaps (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In the case study method, saturation across participants is not possible, as this limits the number of participants. Instead, I aimed to ensure saturation within each participant by having used multiple open-ended questions to probe their knowledge of the research area and to ensure I captured all relevant information for future analysis. A sample size of three participants with strong experience allowed data saturation to occur through methodological triangulation; therefore, I ensured the credibility of the study results.

Researchers can realize data saturation if the participants are proven experts and knowledgeable enough to answer to the research question (Anney, 2014).

### **Transition and Summary**

The aim of this study was to extend qualitative research further in university administration processes. The global market for international students is constantly changing and evolving, as competitive markets attract new players and strategies. The open-ended interview techniques adapted for this research may have served as a useful model for researchers with an interest in this field to track the changes as they evolve over time and to disseminate knowledge and best practices for increasing tuition fees. Section 3 included an examination of the potential for knowledge generated by this research to transform professional practice, implement positive social change, and present the findings of my study.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that university leaders use to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. For this study I used multiple data collection sources to ensure a valuable and transparent case study, as multiple sources support data triangulation and corroborating the results of each source to strengthen the credibility and confirmability of the study (Houghton et al., 2015). Data collection involved interviews with clear, open-ended interview questions. All answers were subject to the methodological protocol. Due to the remote location of the participants, interviews took place by video conferencing (Skype) and were semistructured. The three participants worked for many years for Laureate International Universities. I selected two universities of the group based in the same country in Europe. The selection of these two specialist universities was relevant, as they were comparable and have a long tradition of enrolling international students from around the world. I used methodological triangulation including interviews, publicly available company information, and a detailed literature review. To achieve saturation, I assured that there was enough information to replicate the study, when the ability to obtain additional new information was assured and when further coding was no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness 2015). I reviewed the interview transcripts carefully and evaluated each statement for its relevance to the research question. I identified clusters and I focused on five core emerging topics: (a) business strategies, (b) leadership, (c) politics and governmental policies, (d) social mobility, and (e) attrition.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The primary research question of this study was: What strategies do university leaders use to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students? The conceptual framework of this study was the institutional theory as part of the necessary change management of universities to address the challenges of increasing tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. There is no single definition of the institutional theory; however, Scott (2004) developed this theory of organizational and institutional change to address changing market and social conditions. The data collection methods concerned three participants who have worked for many years for the European division of the largest global university group: Laureate International Universities. For the presentation of the findings I substantially combined the analysis of the literature review and the interviews with the three selected participants. Before I specifically start with focusing on the answers of the participants, I provide some additional context of the learning from the various literature and overarching conversations with the participants. All participants provided similar information that during the last twenty years—with all of them having at least 10 years of leadership experience in international higher education—the environment for international universities has changed substantially. The increase of competition among private and public universities and the interest of investors in higher education has challenged many university leaders to develop stronger growth strategies to compete for enrolling international undergraduate students. All of the participants have made a career based on the increased opportunities within private higher education and understand the

need for internationalizing the universities. As the number of international universities—and hence, the competition—has increased over the last 20 years, all participants highlighted that the government started to become stricter on regulations. I had to focus the presentation of the findings heavily on the changing government regulations and support. During the last 20 years higher education experienced an increased prevalence for universities in undertaking global marketization programs (Altbach & de Witt, 2015). John and Fanghanel (2015) argued that what resulted is the encroachment of a range of practices into the sector of higher education that are derived via nontraditional sources. This perspective was supported via an increased recognition of liberal ideologies that actively encouraged universities to enroll international undergraduate students to the sector to increase their tuition fee revenues. This is based on a belief that the higher education sector is increasingly free from a range of state-led intervention processes (John & Fanghanel, 2015). This latter perspective, however, is one that can easily be challenged through an assessment of peripheral state policy, regulation, and legislation that have a direct impact on the business capabilities of higher education institutions around the globe that are partaking in the global marketization of higher education. The result that emerges from this narrative is that there is an increased ability of international undergraduate students to access and benefit from a higher education system that is increasingly open to global migration of international undergraduate students (John & Fanghanel 2015). The outcome falls in line with the works of Manrai (2016), who suggested that the current system of higher education marketing preferences are in line with the active experimentation of a wave of divergent marketing strategies that are intent



on improving the overall process of internationalisation in higher education. Webb, Holford, Jarvis, Milana and Waller (2015) believed that this process goes hand in hand with processes of networking and is geared towards realising a critical mass of research that can improve on higher education-related innovation and, as a result, have a positive impact upon peripheral labour market sectors via integration. For Wilkins (2016a), the same evolutionary process has led universities to realise the existence of a number of challenges that are borne out of an evolving business environment that is based on the increased mobility of international undergraduate students. The increased level of market competition results in further operational and business costs (Wilkins, 2016a). Chetty (2015) emphasised that all states possess sovereignty, but they are increasingly delegating and devolving their decision-making authority to regional bodies as part of a coalition-led approach to state system integration. The consequence of this process sees states and jurisdictions being subject to deterritorialisation so that common trade and related activities can be developed as part of a mutually beneficial global or regional system of governance. According to my own belief, it is here where the mandate for the European Union exists and takes shape. This was a core issue of this study, which focused on three potential case studies of universities with branches in Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the wider European region. The study focused on the increasing marketization and hybridisation of higher education within the chosen geographic region. It is also a focal region that I utilised to develop and fully respond to the question of identifying and assessing the strategies that higher education leaders employ when seeking to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students.

Based on this research question, I sought to assess further the secondary impact of globalisation via the related outcomes that are found in processes of regionalisation. Of note, there are a number of similar dynamics regarding political, economic, fiscal, financial, and social convergence and integration that correlate with the increasing number of universities internationally and that are mandated to encourage increased forms of political convergence in those states and jurisdictions that are active in this same sector (Chetty, 2015).

In order to undertake a qualitative research study, I noted that there was no specific model that could be used that offered a level of exclusivity to the development of an objective set of responses or findings (Yin, 2014). This is a research methodology. Therefore, I used the qualitative approach as a process for gaining a greater understanding of the phenomena that exists within a range of research areas and that is largely focused on accessing and gaining a range of new insights to a particular area of inquiry (Yin, 2014). What resulted from this approach is akin to one that offers for the quantitative research process being sufficiently useful that it can assist with the comparison of relationships and differences that are identified as part of the research process. To achieve this outcome, I undertook a case study research approach that was geared towards addressing the research question as well as furthering the possibility that a wealth of peripheral findings could be identified (Yin, 2014). To achieve this same outcome, the employment of a case study approach is largely based upon the impact of social phenomena and, as such, is more appropriate than a research process that is based upon ethnography (Yin, 2014).

Building upon this methodological framework, I also made use of three key assumptions. The first of these is based upon a premise that the collection and collation of accurate data sets can be obtainable via a semistructured and human participant-based process that required the interviewing of selected experienced university leaders to generate substantial information regarding the issue of tuition fees from the international undergraduate student cohort. The second assumption was the possibility that respondents were likely to be cooperative in furthering the aims of the research and, in having done so, could share their perspectives and experiences with me as the researcher in a manner that was of mutual benefit. The fourth assumption was based upon a belief that the higher education sector is increasingly shaped by competition. This included the prospect that the advancement of knowledge now covers all fields and lines of inquiry, as well as allows for increased competition within university hierarchies and leadership systems. Indeed, much of what has been highlighted with this latter discussion was of relevance to the underlying issue of higher education being shaped by regional governmental bodies such as the European Union. During the interviews, all participants highlighted the strong impact of the political environment. I therefore included a review of the particular regulations in the European Union and as a result, I had to slightly adjust the structure of my presentation of the findings. I strongly believed that it is important that I enriched the outcome of the interviews with additional literature review context and information.

The core issue of marketisation and competition can be routinely regulated across the European space, to a point where it is possible to develop a cohesive higher

education. This process, it is asserted, is akin to the encroachment of an increased liberalism of higher education at the regional and global level, but has been a reason to the vast increase in international undergraduate students undertaking studies around the globe, as well as helping to redefine the content and basis for international undergraduate students but at the regional level (Altbach, 2015). The integrative systems that have been developed by the European Union since the early 1990s are largely dictated by an increased liberal trend that supported inter-state convergence and integration in a range of areas that included, but are not limited to, the political, economic, and social spheres in line with the original theories that had been advanced by Friedman (Chetty, 2015). Friedman is viewed as the father figure and chief architect of economic liberalism and it is this influence that has assisted in the creation of the conditions that have aided integration in a number of areas, including educational systems (Chetty, 2015). With this, it is of note that recent years have led to a process in which educational systems have increasingly being shaped by common state legislative policy actions that are mainly borne of the liberal political perspective (Chetty, 2015). For example, the European directive on education acts as the vehicle for the perpetuation of a hybridised European Union education system, with the functioning aspects of this legislation being mostly concerned with the evolution of state educational infrastructure from one that is borne out of a vertical policy approach to a horizontal one. What resulted, was the creation of a regulatory framework that assisted parallel policies in respect of the free movement of people and ideas across the European Union. The intention was the creation of an European Union that is shaped by holistic and overlapping convergence. Perry (2016)

argued that despite European Union convergence being fuelled by processes of globalisation, it is also of note that clear reference can be developed in respect of processes that have assisted learners to possess and make use of a range of individual choices as part of an European Union dividend. What has resulted from the above narrative sees increased convergence between the educational policies of all European Union member states and indicates that the European Union Commission's objective in creating a communal approach to all aspects of education, including the higher education sector, fall within the composite ten year plan which is intended to bind all signatory member states to the creation of a new knowledge society (Perry, 2016). With this, it is of note that the outcome of this particular policy provided the groundwork for the common European Union approach that shaped the educational practice towards a delivery system that can expose the education sector to forms of shared best practice and, in doing so, is able to raise standards within the European Union (Perry, 2016). A core requirement in achieving this aim was the adoption of a number of internationally applicable systems that are intended to manoeuvre past a number of domestic focused barriers that limited the possibility of best practice led integration and convergence within higher education. What occurred, was a process that sees domestic politicians now claiming credit for a wave of revolutionary changes to the education sector within the domestic setting and, arguably, one can build upon this premise by suggesting that given the binding criteria of the 2020 policy, domestic political agents have been provided with little choice to agree on changes to educational practice because member state governments have signed up to these policy platforms (Amann, 2015). Yet, European Union member states possess a

level of autonomy over the imposition of policies and practices that are considered to suit the domestic state, society, and culture. I learned that the educational policies that are employed within European Union member states are not as harmonised as one would initially think. This issue can be exposed via a discussion between the United Kingdom and Switzerland, which are divergent European Union state associates. From the above in respect of the formation of a common European Union education policy, it is of note that the Europe 2020 plan is intended to further develop a number of educational policies via creating and adopting service-level targets that formalise entry to higher education. A core aim of the European Union is to ensure that around two in five of the European Union youth cohort is aligned within higher education institutions by 2020 (Grek, 2014). Added to this it is also recognised that recent policy changes within the common educational policies that have been developed via the European Union.

Politics have also seen an increase in the base age for compulsory education, with the outcome being schooling ending at eighteen as a normative European Union educational criterion (Grek, 2014). It is important to note that the OECD (2016) recognised that there is an increased tendency for international undergraduate students to undertake studies at universities without being readied for the need to undertake cultural integration. This trend may impact more than four and a half million students worldwide and has led to around almost half of all enrolled students possessing an international identity (OECD, 2016), and is a process that is commensurate with the recent experience in the European Union where, there, around forty-five per cent of all learners possess an international status (Altbach, 2015). Given the above European Union based narrative,

the case study approach utilized the core components of the study to explore and identify a range of issues-based findings in respect of the processes that underpin, advance, and undermine the ability of university leaders to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students.

All selected participants answered the interview questions based on their own professional experience and knowledge. The participants had the opportunity to review the interview questions in advance as they were part of the consent letter, which they received a few days in advance of the interview. I could tell that the participants gave some thoughts and prepared themselves well for the interview. I could complete all interviews within 2 weeks including a shorter follow up conversations. All participants reviewed and verified my transcripts and data to ensure that I correctly recorded and understood their answers. I conducted a member-checking process, which did not lead to any further comments or information. The overall analysis of the interviews, literature review and additional publically available information, led to identify core themes. Consequentially, what emerged are issues within five core areas and themes. These comprised of the employment of business strategies, leadership, politics/governmental policy, social mobility, and attrition.

### **Emergent Theme 1: Business Strategies**

Strategies that are largely based upon the development of universities that now operate a number of international branch campuses. These evolutionary processes consider the delivery of education onto the international level and offers universities the possibility of allowing students the ability to study in their home country. This outcome,

for Wilkins and Huisman (2015), is indicative of a horizontal approach to business development that can help to expand core market bases and, as such, offers for a prospect in which it is possible to grow the potential of a university's business strategy via increased fee revenues (Wilkins & Huisman, 2015). According to participant 1 this process showed that it was successful for the Swiss universities, which opened branch campuses in Spain, China and United Kingdom. Participant 1 mentioned that this business strategy allows higher education institutional leaders to be compensated for the potential losses that arise out of any tuition fees that originate via higher attrition rates that result via students being unable to settle within their study locations and, as a result, return home. The adoption of international campuses can help to balance out those cultural and settlement issues and offer for the creation of additional revenue streams which, ultimately, lead to an increased contribution to a more business-orientated operation, but one that is based upon advancing the higher education institutions financial position in both individualist and holistic terms (Wilkins, 2016a). Lin and Wu (2014) argued that the secret to the success of any business-orientated organization lies in their ability to produce a unique combination of the combined abilities of its leadership. Participant 1 had experience in opening several international university branch campuses. Participant 1 and 2 highlighted that this process is furthered by the vital inclusion of competence since this perspective can enable business leaders of all organizations when seeking to produce a set of saleable and successful international university programs. Building upon this narrative it is of note that Lin and Wu (2014) also suggested that business-orientated organizations can compete with one another in a manner that sees the



final saleable products being correlated with competence. Based on the feedback of participant 1 and 2, it is of note that the university organization is an important issue to consider, given that it is possible to build upon a range of previous trends, both as a process for learning from failings, and in respect of developing a sustainable business operation and strategy. Indeed, from an university perspective one can also argue that a parallel issue of interdependence is essential to consider since, what emerges, is a practice and operational environment that seeks to further the sustainability of the employed business strategy and model, and offers for increased competence in respect of processes of market orientation to both the individual institution and the holistic sector (Ozkaya et al., 2015). Participant 2 also noted that when placed in the specific context of a global higher education setting, the research has to consider issues in respect of context, and in respect of a range of corporate objectives that are largely customer (student) focussed, but has also focussed upon ensuring student satisfaction and the alignment of performance-based practices as part of a global expansion of universities.

All the participants referred to the importance of focusing on student satisfaction as part of the development of a growth strategy. Given the above narrative, it is of note that Haigh (2014) argued that there is a need to consider a number of specific layers that are present within the question of internationalized higher education. The first of these is the issue of recruitment of international undergraduate students where, the employed business models now see a parallel process that uses a combination of the relocation of both campus and students. Secondly, the issue of relocation is one that is central to the utility of the home campus when considered against the practice of enticing international

undergraduate students to leave their home countries and relocate in order to advance their education within a different culture and society (Haigh, 2014). All participants, but specifically participant 2 and 3 mentioned that the outcome of these layers continues via the recognition that in order to attain to international growth at university level, it also requires an effective recruitment policy that compliments international undergraduate student cohorts with comparative international staff. Indeed, this same process also correlates with the works of Knight (2015a) who also argued that the need for institutional compliance is undertaken in respect of the aims and objectives of internationally accredited standards. Knight (2015a) also furthered a prospect that the process of internationalization, particularly in respect of the syllabus, is one that has a direct impact upon students. The result is a setting and sector that operates as a partner agency in advancing the function of education as a process for advancing global citizenship; as well as connected e-learning; and in respect of a process that sees education as a process for advancing planetary consciousness. According to participant 1, the outcome is the creation of a multi-faceted business strategy that, to be competent and effective, requires adherence and recognition of a large number of areas. In doing so, it offers the foundation of a flourishing and evolving system of higher education that is able to avoid the impact of fiscal and financial issues which could derail the overall global higher education (Haigh, 2014). It is for the above reasons that Knight (2015) had sought to examine this issue and, as a result, had sought to develop a classic model that is able to link universities in a setting that were able to partner disparate institutions in partnership. Participant 3 supported this concept based on his successful experience in developing

partnership among non-competing universities to act as feeders or exchange partner of international undergraduate students. According to participant 3 this concept allowed the partnering universities to position themselves as international and to provide the international undergraduate students the opportunity for an international experience as part of the competitive program offering.

A further model that Knight (2015a) developed was based upon the reality of the current global phenomenon of creating a range of satellite branch campuses, as per that highlighted earlier from participant 1 via a successful model of a Swiss university. Whilst the third model that Knight (2015a) advanced relies upon a description of internationally associated universities that remain separate in business terms. All participants mentioned the fact that to be successful in the global higher education it is arguable that universities need to establish core practices that not only encourage student mobility, but also provide a business growth potential for international university leaders to increase universities' tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. Wilkins (2016b) highlighted that the international undergraduate student mobility shall be done within a system that allows these same universities to remain successful and avoid the impact of exposure to global financial pressures.

**Link to conceptual framework.** The business strategy development includes all three pillars of the institutional theory. The development of the business strategy needs to be holistic to address changing market and social conditions and to conduct an institutional and organizational change management to implement necessary solutions to stay competitive (Scott, 2004). The danger of a strategy is that business tend to stick to

their strategy and not adapt according to changing market and competition (Browne, Scott, Mangematin, & Gibbons, 2018). All three participants highlighted the importance to place the student needs at the center of developing a business strategy and the according student-centered offering. Scott's institutional theory builds on three pillars: regulative, normative, and culture-cognitive, which all need to be considered and respected when developing business strategies as mentioned by the participants: a) branch campuses, b) international partnerships, c) online education, and d) student mobility. Porter (1980) classifies the business strategy development based on five external corporate competitive forces in his competition analysis: purchaser, supplier, competitors, potential new competitors, and products. The institutional theory includes the market- and the resource-based-view as part of the core of the business strategy, which all participants partly referred to. Both directions, the market-oriented approach by Porter (1980) and the resource-based approach by Wernerfelt (1984), represent the most influential tendencies within the strategic management theory and require elucidation.

### **Emergent Theme 2: Leadership**

Leadership was a central theme among all participants. According to all participants the focus of leadership must be on developing an effective business strategy concluded by asserting the need to ensure that financial issues are resolved sufficiently that these same universities are not exposed to a range of global fiscal pressures. Participants 1 mentioned that within this process it must be clear about the need to develop an effective system of leadership but one that also seeks to develop the systems that can help to improve upon international undergraduate student educational

experiences. The inclusion of this further issue is one that is akin to a parallel approach that can help to contribute to the overall improvement and enhancement of the delivery of higher education within those states, countries, and societies that are developing the global higher education sector (Kosior et al., 2015). Within this perspective, it is also of note that the higher education sector needs to possess a system that seeks the delivery of a range of sustainable financial packages that increases the responsibilities of university leaders. According to participant 1 this is of particular importance where universities accept private capital in a similar manner to the wider corporate market. Participant 1 also highlights that this process sees international undergraduate students being of little difference to customers that facilitate transactions within the market economy and is a factor that is highly likely to impact upon the leadership cultures of the higher education sector and which needs to be positively responded to if the business strategy is to be deployed effectively. The core issue of altering market and social conditions to suit the needs of the sector is one that can assist universities in advancing the aims and objectives that drive forward the business needs of universities and higher education in general. Based on my conversations with all participants, it might be fair to assess that higher education leadership teams are primarily responsible for providing an education system that not only benefits the wider society but does so via preparing the next generations of trained, qualified, and professional workers.

Wikins and Huisman (2015) also suggested that there is also a need to ensure that an increased number of universities can emulate, adopt, and practice these same sets of operational standards in a manner that sees the global market as a recognised form of best

practice standard which can be repeated elsewhere in the world. What emerges, is a process that is akin to a new practice norm and which can create a wealth of additional opportunities and challenges that result in higher education leadership teams appealing to their consumer cohort in a manner that coaxes them from divergent cultures and to invest in the home setting as opposed to undertaking higher education education within their own jurisdiction. For Wilkins and Huisman (2015) it is here where processes of institutional theory can be utilised as a way for assisting the development of a framework that adds success to the ventures that underpin the advancement of a global higher education (Wilkins & Huisman, 2015). Similarly, it is also asserted that international undergraduate students can also find these frameworks as being accessible, sufficient that they are willing to relocate to the campus in order to undertake higher education studies. Participant 3 also mentioned that without such a system it is arguable that these same international undergraduate students will fail in that endeavour and return home. Indeed, this is an issue that Webb et al. (2015) built upon and who have argued that the diminution of social distinctiveness of a number of disparate groups (as a result of the processes of globalisation) have helped to fuel the growth in the private financing of higher education, in line with the influx of private international capital that arised out of marketing and targeting of international undergraduate students.

**Link to conceptual framework.** Leadership is responsible to develop a strategy for a sustainable financial organization and to satisfy the various stakeholders (Wilkins & Huisman, 2015). All participants highlighted the importance a holistic approach for leadership when developing a strategy. Leadership is the driver of proving the directions

to the team and the organization on how challenges like the research question can be addressed: What strategies do university leaders use to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students? Leadership is no longer just a hierarchical structure, but requires an inclusion of the various stakeholders (Raelin, Kempster, Youngs, Carroll, & Jackson, 2018). The institutional theory could facilitate understanding of the institutional and organizational strategies and changes that university leaders employ for increasing tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students (Wilkins & Huisman, 2015). The rationale for selecting the framework is the balance between the three pillars (regulative, normative, and culture-cognitive) and to allow an evaluation of the change management necessary from a holistic institutional review. All participants mentioned that change management starts with leadership – leadership sets the culture of the organization.

### **Emergent Theme 3: Politics and Governmental Policies**

Altbach and de Wit (2015) argued that there was an increasing conflict at the heart of interstate relations that have an impact upon the possibility of an agreement between nations. It is assessed that, for example, religion and culture could have an impact upon the viability of academic partnerships and the need to bolster the employed business models that are used to attract international undergraduate students. Participant 2 highlighted that the utility of politics to the efficacy of higher education can have a mitigating impact upon the likelihood of increasing negative risk that impacts upon the future of international collaboration (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). This issue aside, it can also be argued that the practice of a higher education that attracts international

undergraduate students to home universities now comprises part of the globalized product of education and is a matter that is of benefit to political purse strings, as well as increased social diversity within the home countries (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). This is the case in the United Kingdom where current practices have been subject to the political argument for several years, primarily as a prelude to the ongoing Brexit debate. Recent estimates indicated that there are over 130'000 international students studying within the entirety of the United Kingdom (OECD, 2016). This influx of international students provides the universities within the United Kingdom with an injection of foreign capital that is in proportion to the current practice of these universities operating a globalised business model (OECD, 2016). Nevertheless, participant 2 mentioned the concern about the United Kingdom higher education sector being heavily regulated by governmental pressures regarding immigration and, as such, it is essential for international students to apply for university places whilst also complying with an application to enter the United Kingdom to study. The utilisation of a visa application process in tandem with the higher education application process is applicable to those international students that originate outside of the European Union and is overseen by the United Kingdom Visas & Immigration department.

According to participant 2 and 3, the result is a complex system that requires prospective international students applying for one of four visa types as part of a process that results in them being offered temporary residence in the United Kingdom whilst they are undertaking their international studies. These visa challenges have made it rather challenging for several years for the participants' university network to successfully built



and sustain an international university branch campus in the United Kingdom. Especially, one drawback of the four-staged immigration process is the existence of a prolonged visa application backlog that, in some cases, results in some international undergraduate students not receiving a completed education and this outcome can potentially have a detrimental impact upon the financial situation of universities. Participant 2 and 3 mentioned that the student visa system had been challenged by a number of issues that included, but are not limited to, fraudulent applications, poor systems management, and the existence of fake institutions. Yet, these state-led administrative failings undermined what, for John and Fanghanel (2015), comprised a process in which the United Kingdom higher education sector immerses itself in the globalised education market. According to participant 1, the resultant marketization process now sees university leaders proactively advertising its wares as a process for attracting international students, as well as universities creating a number of branch campuses abroad. This latter approach also mitigates weaknesses within the visa process but also occurs at a time when international student applications to universities within the United Kingdom have been falling (participant 2 and 3). Given the above case study in the United Kingdom, it is arguable that Altbach and de Wit (2015) correctly called the idea that it is possible for a range of political and military issues to impact upon the ability of universities to attract international students. This issue can serve to have a negative impact on the evolution of universities via being impacted by a number of changes to, for example, visa requirements or where the central government is in a prime position to influence the number of international students that can access universities outside of their home

countries (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). Such difficulties are considered external to university leaders and, as such, one can argue that these settings are at the whim of politics when developing a global marketing strategy that is determined to increase the number of international undergraduate students.

Webb et al. (2015) also indicated that government policy can also help expand the domestic universities via aiding the influx of international students. Such an outcome has a double benefit via offering inbound capital to both state and institution. For Knight (2014) the underpinning processes of internationalization within any global university is likely to remain fluid because of conditional issues that are of external nature, such as alterations in political policies, such as migration as in the case of the United Kingdom. All participants suggested that it is important for university leaders to develop a strong relationship with government and as well with the according embassies and consulates to foster open discussions and a solution focused conversation when challenges of visa or similar nature occur.

**Link to conceptual framework.** Politics and Governmental Policies are addressed by two pillars of the institutional theory. The regulative pillar focuses on the changing policies often applied for visa procedures and requirements. All participants talked about the difficulty of changing requirements and therefore, impacting negatively the student mobility. University leaders develop strategies to overcome these challenges by opening branch campuses and online programs to provide students access to an international education despite the visa restrictions (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). The culture-cognitive pillar includes the changes in values and movements in religious or

political relationships. As the political climate can swift based on election outcomes, it may impact the international partnerships among universities and the attractiveness for students to study in particular countries. European countries are interpreting the European entry visa requirements more and more unbalanced and mainly based on which political party is in power (Bonjour, Servent, & Thielemann, 2018). The institutional theory provides a conceptual framework to work with the challenges to develop strategies that university leaders employ for increasing tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students (Wilkins & Huisman, 2015).

#### **Emergent Theme 4: Social Mobility**

Wilkins (2016a; 2016b) argued that the evolution of what is referred to as transnational education (or the global higher education sector, as discussed elsewhere in this chapter) has been largely responsible for a steady increase in the numbers of international undergraduate students that have experienced social and economic mobility. This reality has helped to create a platform that aids the exchange of cultures, social and interpersonal sympathy, and of a greater understanding of cultural difference (Wilkins, 2016a, 2016b). As such, this same evolutionary process sees higher education experience a large increase in the numbers of international undergraduate students that have decided to enroll within universities that lie outside of the home country. In line with Anayah and Kuk (2015), participant 1 argued that this process has been part of a continuous evolutionary process since the 1980s and has resulted in a number of universities not being prepared for the experience of cultural difference on the university campuses.

Anayah and Kuk (2015) also argue that the growth rates in international student enrollment had been initiated by a wealthier Chinese population and initiated a program whereby students were able to develop and challenge a number of cultural and language issues that faced them. All participants highlighted the importance of Chinese students and the strong growth the opening of the Chinese market has provided to the universities enrolments. The core reason for the increase of Chinese students to the international market at that time was borne out of a relational rate of education that resided at a lower level of tuition fee when compared to the home setting (Anayah & Kuk, 2015). It is here where attrition becomes an issue and, from which sees these same universities losing revenue as a result of the attrition. According to participant 3 it is also arguable that a number of university leaders had actively targeted international undergraduate students and had undertaken a planning process that had aimed to enroll those international undergraduate students without undertaking a planning system that includes integration (Anayah & Kuk, 2015). It is because of this failure that attrition has increased international undergraduate students. According participant 3 the Chinese undergraduate students are most likely the first time outside of their home country and therefore, the challenges to adjust within the international university campus can be the main difficulty. Based on the experience of participant 3, it is recommended to prepare well for enrolling Chinese undergraduate students by appointing and hiring Chinese university team members who can assist the Chinese undergraduate students during the first semesters. This strategy has worked well for the university group, where the participants was part of the leadership team.

**Link to conceptual framework.** Social Mobility is strongly linked to two pillars of the institutional theory: (a) normative and, (b) culture-cognitive. Education is the strongest contributor of social change (Rapa, Diemer, & Bañales, 2018). The universities changed their norms and values by opening to international students and specifically when students are enrolled from different cultures like China. Many universities didn't prepare enough by adapting their norms and values to allow Chinese students to integrate well and be successful. This led to a higher attrition, which is part of the concerns mentioned with the research question. Universities focused on high growth market instead of first preparing well to the changing norms of values by enrolling international students. The second pillar – culture-cognitive – is the driver of the strong growth of Chinese students. The changing political and cultural value and system in China has allowed Chinese students to study abroad (Anayah & Kuk, 2015). The institutional theory as conceptual framework explores possible solutions as part of the qualitative case study.

#### **Emergent Theme 5: Attrition**

The previous section indicated that one of the core challenges that is being faced by the international universities is the reality that international undergraduate students are not completing their courses and returning home early. The justification for this outcome appears to be based upon a reality in which a number of international universities have been unable to accommodate the needs of these international undergraduate students via largely ignoring their specific needs which they face when undertaking studying away from the home country. This is a particular failing where there is a need to ensure academic or social integration within the university (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2014). It is

important to understand the nature of the attrition and how attrition is handled at the university (Beer & Lawson, 2018). Participant 1 mentioned that with this prospect, it is fair to assess that the attrition rates within the international undergraduate student further impacted the ability of the universities to increase or retain capital that is raised via the international undergraduate tuition fees. The results undermined the employed business model and sees university leaders facing increased financial pressures.

Participant 1, highlighted that universities measure their success of enrolling international students by evaluating the cost per enrollment. The cost per enrollment might be in some market a premium sales and marketing investment, which universities amortize over the total length of the student enrollment – ideally over the full length of the program to maximize the tuition fee potential of international undergraduate students. Indeed, for Bhuian (2016) this same reality could also see university leaders being discouraged from seeking to develop solutions that could mitigate the international undergraduate student attrition issue because it is seen as an ineffective strategy for reducing the attrition of international undergraduate students (Bhuian, 2016). At this point, it is worth remembering that international undergraduate student mobility largely depends upon the ability of middle-class families, such as those in China, that can afford for their children to undertake studies at universities outside of their home country (participant 2 and 3).

Participant 3 also noted that the prior discussion regarding the influx of international undergraduate students migrant to certain political entities, such as the United Kingdom, now sees the immigration of international undergraduate students to

such states as being in proportion to those that are both already enrolled and in respect of the number of international undergraduate students that have already left the home country (Beine et al., 2014). In such cases, the ability of university leaders to help ensure the successful transition of international undergraduate students is heavily reliant upon developing a system for understanding those benefits that arise out of the experience of undertaking international undergraduate studies abroad (Potts, 2015). According to participant 3, it is also arguable that when aiming to understand those same benefits it is feasible that the same outcomes could be used to realise a number of benefits to the individual international undergraduate student via the aforementioned relocation issue. Participant 2 and 3 mentioned that such a process can also have a knock-on effect in terms of latter social mobility and career prospects. Given the above narrative, Ahmad (2015) hold a perspective that there are a number of positive experiences that can be gained via undertaking international undergraduate studies. Here, it is argued by all participants that international undergraduate students can offer a university a response that is largely positive and which, as a result, can lead to the university's reputation being enhanced. Indeed, with this, Ahmad (2015) also asserted that it is feasible that a countrywide reputation can be considered as largely dependent upon the experiences of these same international undergraduate students. Participant 1 also confirmed that these same universities can also benefit from a system that offers competitive advantage where this is based upon student feedback and satisfaction rates (Ahmad, 2015). This is a process that the USA benefits from and is a reason as to why universities that are based

stateside greatly benefit from a strong enrolment numbers of international undergraduate students that originate from developing countries (Webb et al., 2015).

**Link to conceptual framework.** Attrition is the result of not including a holistic approach as suggested by the institutional theory when university leaders develop strategies to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students? According to the participants it is important to consider the full enrolment cycle of a student to avoid high attrition. A number of factors need to be considered. The resource- and market-based views support 360 reviews to prepare well for concerns, which might be raised by international students (Ozkaya et al., 2015). Attrition is the ultimate failure for the students and the universities and is jeopardizing the financial success of the universities. All participants mentioned that attrition is part of the evaluation of a successful enrolment strategy for universities to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. The institutional theory supports the university leaders as a conceptual framework to evaluate solutions to reduce attrition.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

There remains a perception that some universities are incapable of undertaking homogenisation practices that actively encourage the integration of international undergraduate students into the home university campus, with the outcome being a reduction in student learning achievements, increased student attrition rates, and a reduction of international undergraduate student tuition fee revenue (Kommers & Pham, 2016). This issue, for Kommers and Pham (2016), was borne out of a realisation that international undergraduate students who locate to third-party countries to undertake their



higher education studies are likely to struggle when aiming to settle into their new university environment. It is for this reason that the narrative contained within earlier sections of this paper indicated that there is a potential that a lack of credibility can be found within universities when seeking to develop a number of business strategies that are geared towards branding and rebranding universities as global business ventures to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Banks (2015) argued that the universities have always been a centre for encouraging active globalisation-led migration through the allure of unrivalled staff qualifications and expertise, and through research-led partnerships with third-party organisations that can be found at the bilateral and multilateral levels of global interaction. This perspective is furthered via advances in communication technologies and associated political views and, for John and Fanghanel (2015), what emerged is an increased ability for universities to take advantage of a number of globalisation-led cross-jurisdictional co-operation programs. At this juncture, it is of note that Campbell and Kean (2016) hold a perspective that sees globalisation comprising of an American-led process that, over time, has helped to harmonization a number of cultures, business systems, and technologies.

Campbell and Kean (2016) also indicated that there is a plethora of phenomenological issues that require defining when one discusses the concept of globalisation. For example, the process of a global phenomenon that has increased in speed since the 1990s and has led to further harmonisation of disparate cultures. Added to

this, Knight (2015b) also argued that the process has resulted in the unification and overlap of a number of political and economic systems. Yet, the concept of globalisation, as a label, remains as a generic term that has been utilised by a number of international commentators (Knight, 2015b). This approach is based upon the outcomes of a wide-ranging number of global events form part of international outcome that has resulted in an increase in inter-state interaction. The overall result of this trend leads to an improved level of cross-border co-operation and integration at the economic activity and output, as well as a merging of cultures (Knight, 2015b). One of my assumptions is that the higher education industry is just responding to the impact of mass migration on a global scale and creating space for international undergraduate students to access education systems that previously were unavailable. The results of these developments have led to increased competition among universities with the acquisition of international undergraduate student intakes being a central aspect of the strategy (John & Fanghanel 2015).

### **Recommendations for Action**

The above findings section indicated five core themes, business strategy, leadership, politics and government policies, attrition, and social mobility. These areas represent a number of core issues that pertain to the underlying issue when seeking to increase universities' tuition fee revenues from international undergraduates. I indicated that it could be feasible for a number of these same issues to overlap to a point whereby it would be possible to develop a holistic approach that could offer a collective solution. This could be resolved via developing a business strategy that sees reducing attrition and increasing student satisfaction being at the heart of the core business model for

international universities. Messelink et al. (2015) recognised that one possible solution could be the development of a deliberate strategy that places learning, as opposed to financing, at the heart of the model. Yet, whilst this approach could be considered strange to the normative business model (since profit is not the mainstay) the core issue should see an increased number of international undergraduate students because of the exponential increase in future applications, based upon reputation. Messelink et al. (2015) built upon this approach via offering a suggestion that an education first strategy, as highlighted above, could relieve long-term financial pressures; whilst also developing an international strategy that focuses upon accessing and recruiting the committed and excellent global team members (Cai & Hall, 2015). In this case, the need for hiring a number of experts that are based globally is indicative of a best practice model for advancing university leadership knowledge capabilities. Essentially, for Cai and Hall (2015), this approach is indicative of leadership in practice. In addition, it is also arguable that these same challenges are also associated with an increased remuneration package that also entices staff, whilst also increases bottom line Human Resources costs but, in fairness, it is this same process that is likely to continue to attract future generations of international undergraduate students. Healey (2015) highlighted that it cannot go unnoticed that the increase in the numbers of international universities acts as a tool for also increasing international undergraduate student mobility, whilst also removing the burden of financial pressures (Healey, 2015). It is for this reason that the evolution of transnational higher education systems has also seen the arrival of international university branch campuses onto the sector of the higher education environment. Such approaches

can be used to limit the cost of attrition, experts can be sourced locally, and governmental migration policies are circumvented (Caruana & Montgomery, 2015). Ultimately, when recommending a course of action for international universities, this research based on the interviews and the review of the additional material, I suggested the following approaches:

- The development of international university branch campuses abroad for mitigating governmental policy
- The employment of the brightest and best in field as a way of attracting new international undergraduate students
- The development of a combined business and cultural assimilation strategy that limits attrition
- The creation of best practice model for cultural assimilation within the home university campus
- Partnership development among universities within target jurisdictions, with the intention of developing parallel educational packages that include cross migratory programs

I plan to disseminate my recommendation for actions within my own organization, attend forums and workshops to share my new knowledge and research findings. As I am still working in education, I will also apply my newly gained information where appropriate.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

When developing a set of recommendations for further practice, this paper has sought to build upon the issues that have been raised within this paper. I am highlighting that that higher education remains undermined by external governmental policy. This issue can be considered as a failure within those aspiration-led settings that seek to expand beyond their borders and operate upon the global stage. To address this issue, it is recommended to undertake studies that could help square the circle, between state and governmental policy and the aspirations of international universities. With this, I suggested that future studies focus upon the following:

- Review the benefits to government of a system of international undergraduate student recruitment that benefits the national purse
- Assess the extent of higher education sector lobbying and its impact upon governmental policy
- Analyze the impact upon the public purse of three developed nations of international undergraduate students
- Undertake a cost-benefit analysis of the national higher education when developing a holistic international undergraduate student recruitment

By developing these areas of further research, the overarching issue of a coherent business model that can be used at the university leadership level that can be enhanced and adopted as a process for increasing the sector's voice within government. Indeed, it is my belief that such an undertaking could be used to enhance the esteem levels of the

sector, whilst also altering perceptions within government towards a more proactive policy that aims to entice international undergraduate students to the host country.

### **Reflections**

There are three issues that I considered to be of interest to a reflective process. These comprise of the research process, the development of a coherent narrative that expands upon the research process, and the culmination of the study towards a process that aims to enhance further the chosen subject area, namely the aim to increase universities' tuition fee revenues from international undergraduates. This process, overall, led me to conclude that these issues form part of a holistic issue that overlaps from one key area to another. It is for this reason, that there are links between the identified core themes: business strategy, attrition, social mobility, politics and government policies, and leadership and it is a core challenge responding to those issues. This was not something that I expected at the outset of this study. Indeed, this same outcome has also been an influencing factor in helping shape the recommendations for further studies, the reason being that there were issues that I wanted to discuss but were outside of the competence of this study. Indeed, it was also beneficial to see these same focal areas emerge towards the end of the writing and research process.

The methodology that was utilised for this study appeared to be the correct one and offered for a process in which emerging themes were identified earlier because of the methodology, as opposed to it. This was a reassuring issue since it allowed for a triangulation process to be utilised in respect of the ability to further analyse and identify issues of contention that lay at the heart of the research process. Overall, the exercise has

been a worthwhile one, not least because I have now identified areas of practice that I can utilise should I continue to undertake further research in this area. Indeed, one irony is that now I have undertaken a review of the international undergraduate student environment, it may be beneficial for me to partake in further studies within higher education.

### **Conclusion**

What results from the above narrative is a process that is geared towards advancing the globalised higher education system. This paper has identified that this is a process that allows university leaders to develop their strategies in a manner that is akin to private businesses that operate and market themselves globally (Campbell & Kean, 2016). Indeed, it is of note that Filho, Shiel and Do Paco (2015) also recognised that this is the reason as to why an increasingly large number of international universities have created international university branch campuses which operate in conjunction to a process of global branding. However, it is also arguable that an in-depth review of international university processes indicated that there are a number of corporate and business-related problems that can impinge the intentions of university management structures to deliver increased tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students and that, as such, the delivery of an effective global educational brand is countered by external (political) issues that are found at the centre of state policy. That said, it could be recognised that despite their global aspirations, the higher education sector is a people-orientated system and is one that relies upon the support of the government for its continued success. This places the higher education sector at the whim

of the government and I would highlight that it can result in these same universities having to mitigate for changes in governmental policy in order to fend off negative that arises of what is an external system of regulation. At the business end of the globalised higher education system, the creation of a number of outreach programs acts as a two-pronged system that can be used for extending the business franchise to an operation area that was hitherto unknown, but which can now be being increasingly routine. This approach to expansion is borne of an effective usage of business models and is largely intended to mitigate external threats to the employed business strategy. This new approach also reduces the potential for a reduction in attrition rates and can have a positive impact upon both the setting and public finances. This same approach also undermines the possibility that international undergraduate students directly benefit from a life-changing experience of studying within different countries. Therefore, it is essential that university leaders develop a policy that is balanced between the business, student, governmental needs and which also offers a sense of sustainability in respect of any long-term business plan which can survive alterations in governmental policy, as has been the case in the United Kingdom where the immigration issue appears to trump the need for inbound private capital that arises of the international undergraduate students. The result which emerged is a narrative that is intended to develop a sector that largely has not been designed for the global market but is in the process of carving out a globalised setting that can see those involved partake on a global scale. This is a new and revolutionary reproach to higher education and is one that is borne out of a liberal agenda and is one that is heavily reliant upon unimpinged migration from state to state. Without this



essential component, the higher education sector is doomed to failure in its attempts to attract international undergraduate students. Therefore, this paper recommended the parallel approach of international university branch campuses, as well as the increased lobbying of government.

The narrative that has been developed within this study is designed in a manner that helps to offer direct access to both domestic and international undergraduate students and may be an approach that is of benefit to the state which is able to realise an improved fiscal and financial performance record via increased universities' tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students. The problem for university leaders is whether the state decides that universities' tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students is more important than developing a coherent migration policy that can facilitate the delivery of an increasingly self-financing higher education sector that is reliant upon universities' tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What are your main motivations to further increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?
2. What strategies do you use to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?
3. What are the challenges of implementing the strategies for increasing tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?
4. What has been the evaluation and decision process of selecting strategies to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?
5. How do you measure the success of the strategies, and within which time frames for increasing tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?
6. What are the key value propositions for the international undergraduate student to enroll in your university and therefore, increase tuition fee revenues?
7. What additional information can you share regarding your strategies to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

<b>Interview Protocol</b>	
<b>What to Do</b>	<b>What to Say–Script</b>
Due the geographic distance the conversation will take place by Skype	<p>Thank you for being available for this interview. I have selected you based on your expertise and professional experience as leader within the international education sector. You have valuable experience especially in international student mobility and in developing growth through internationalization of universities.</p> <p>The interview is scheduled to take on hour.</p> <p>I would like to record our conversation. The recording will be treated confidentially and will be deleted after five years. Are you fine with this?</p> <p>Would you mind to please sign the consent form as mentioned previously?</p>
During the interview: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Monitor for nonverbal language</li> <li>· Paraphrase as needed</li> <li>· Ask probing questions for more in-depth understanding</li> </ul>	<p>Q1. What are the main motivations to further increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?</p> <p>Q2. What strategies do you use to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?</p> <p>Q3. What are the challenges of implementing the strategies for increasing tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?</p> <p>Q4. What has been the evaluation and decision process of selecting strategies for increasing tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?</p> <p>Q5. How do you measure the success of the strategies, and within which time frames for increasing tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?</p> <p>Q6. What are the key value propositions for the international undergraduate student to enroll in your university and therefore, increase tuition fee revenues?</p> <p>Q7. What additional information can you share regarding your strategies to increase tuition fee revenues from international undergraduate students?</p>
Wrapping-up the interview	Thank you for the valuable information and the time you have taken for this interview.

	In the next phase, I will synthesize your answers and mail a copy to you for verification. I will contact you shortly after again for a brief follow-up interview, so you can verify the recorded information and my interpretations of the data and provide corrections or clarifications if you like.
Scheduling a member-checking interview	When can I best contact you again to arrange for the follow-up interview?
<b>Follow-Up Member-Checking Interview</b>	
Mail copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question	E-mail: Please find in the attachment a copy of the interview transcript for your review as agreed
Introduce follow-up interview and set the stage	
Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question Bring in probing questions related to other information that you may have found—note the information must be related so that you are probing and adhering to the IRB approval.	Question and review of the interpretation: review each question and read the wording. Is there anything missing or anything you would like to change, add or correct?
Final words and thank you.	