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Internationalization of Finnish higher education: policy goals and alumni insights

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Internationalization of Finnish higher education: policy goals and alumni insights (Andreas Rogler)

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This thesis interrogates the influences of neoliberalism on the internationalization of Finnish higher education. It starts with an introduction to the way neoliberalism affects higher education while also providing a short introduction to Finnish higher education. It then combines both concepts and discusses the two policy papers: *Better together for a better world – Finnish Internationalization Policies of higher education from 2017 to 2025* and *Action Plan Report for Global Education Brand Finland*. Neoliberal influences are identified in both papers as the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture strives at improving the reputation of Finnish higher education by turning it into a brand. The future vision, that is outlined in the two documents, is then compared to the experiences of international alumni who have graduated from the study program Education and Globalization (EdGlo) at the University of Oulu. For this purpose, an alumni research has been conducted. Additionally, the author draws on both his own experiences as an EdGlo student, as well as on feedback sessions with current EdGlo students. Both the alumni research participants and the documents stress the need for an alumni network. The participants' overall high student satisfaction matches the description of the two policy papers. However, despite the policy papers' goals of integrating international students into the Finnish working life, the participants struggled to find employment and to continue their academic careers in Finland. Teaching methods in the EdGlo program received a mixed review. Additionally, the survey found student diversity to be a main contributor to students' satisfaction. Therefore, this thesis explores an alternative way of branding Finnish higher education based on an ethos of diversity and inclusion.

Keywords: Finnish higher education, alumni research, neoliberalism, internationalization, Finnish education brand

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1 Introduction

The thesis at hand aims at participating in the discourse about the influences of neoliberalism on higher education. A special focus is being put on the internationalization of higher education in Finland. Chapter 2 will introduce the concepts of neoliberalism and internationalization in higher education, discussing them first on a broader international level. At the end of the second chapter, both concepts are being analyzed in the Finnish context due to Finland's unique educational traditions and history. The research questions and purpose of the thesis are being outlined in chapter 3. In chapter 4, this thesis identifies neoliberal narratives in two recently written policy papers on the internationalization of Finnish higher education that were published by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The two documents that are examined in this thesis are *Better together for a better world – Finnish Internationalization Policies of higher education from 2017 to 2025* and *Action Plan Report for Global Education Brand Finland*. Both include a future vision for Finnish higher education that is being critically assessed. The second part of the thesis utilizes an alumni research that has been conducted with graduates of the international study program Education and Globalization (EdGlo) from the University of Oulu and compares its graduates' experiences to the vision outlined in the two policy papers. In doing so, the paper addresses a wide range of topics such as student satisfaction, teaching methods, employability, internationalization, alumni networks, doctoral studies and the integration of international students into Finnish society.

Interrogating the influence of neoliberalism on the internationalization of Finnish higher education is highly relevant due to recent changes in Finnish higher education policies, such as the introduction of tuition fees at the start of 2016 (Kauko & Medvedeva, 2016, p. 98). Therefore, it is important to discuss the neoliberal narrative of the education brand Finland and its possible effects on Finnish higher education and international students studying in Finnish universities. Given that the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture aims at attracting more international students, alumni research with international graduates can offer valuable insights. Knowing what international students experienced during their study period in Finland can help to position Finnish higher education in a global market attracting international talent. While the thesis does take a critical stance towards the raising influence of neoliberalism in Finnish higher education policies, it also tries to provide productive feedback that can be used to inform future policy directives by using international graduates feedback to identify possible strengths and weaknesses of Finnish higher education.

The author is an international student himself, which not only is the reason for his engagement with the topic, but also allowed him to draw on his own personal experiences when creating the survey and interpreting the data. Experiencing the value of learning with and from other international students in an openminded and inclusive environment further strengthens the author's ideological view on the internationalization of higher education as a way to improve mutual international understanding, respect, tolerance and to encourage us to face global challenges together. An ideal that might be threatened by the instrumentalization (Stier, 2006, p. 4) of higher education for the neoliberal imaginary. Ethical consideration that can be evoked by the author's personal involvement in the EdGlo program and his biases are being reflected upon in chapter 7.

2 Neoliberalism and the corporate university imaginary

Education in general, and higher education in particular have undergone many changes in the past. Andreotti, Stein, Pahsby and Nicolson (2016, p. 88) identified four major social imaginaries that western higher educational institutions have underwent in the past, starting with the scholastic imaginary in the 12th to 16th century. An imaginary that mainly drew on Hellenic and Christian traditions, educating clerics and professionals alike. Between the 16th and the 19th century, during the classical imaginary, universities' focus switched to education of leaders, nation building and creating knowledge for nation states. During the period of the civic imaginary, that started in the mid-19th century and continued until the late 20th century, universities shifted their attention from educating the elites to education of the masses. The increased accessibility of higher educational institutions also enhanced democratization and civic engagement. In the 1970s however, state funds for universities started to decline, which initiated the corporate imaginary. The imaginary highlights the importance of economic entrepreneurship and encourages collaborations between higher education institutions and the industry. Thus, "the worth of knowledge is measured by ... its exchange value ... in a capitalist market which indicates how much people are prepared to pay for or invest in them" (Andreotti, et al., 2016, p. 89-90).

While commercial applications of higher education are nothing new, university legislation are now focused more on profit (Marginson, 2006, p. 4; Marginson, 2013, p. 355), commodification (Häyrinen-Alestalo & Peltola, 2006, p. 274; Marginson, 2013, p. 355) and accountability (Barr, 2004, p. 5; Marginson, 2013, p. 354). Besides the traditional tasks of education and research, universities are now also expected to contribute to economic growth and capitalization (Torres

& Schugurensky, 2002, p. 433). As a result, the different academic fields are ranked in accordance with their profitability, and academic priorities shift towards more profitable fields that provide for technological areas and practical application of science (Häyriinen-Alestalo & Peltola, 2006, p. 272). Higher education from a neoliberal perspective is being seen less as a social investment with social responsibilities (e.g. in equity, accessibility or social transformation) but more as an economic investment that yields return rates (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002, p. 446-447). To ensure the economic investments pay off, higher education leadership focuses more on accountability, competitiveness and return rates than on the social aspects of higher education.

Due to increased interconnectivity and globalization, those neoliberal changes often occur on a global scale in dependence to each other, and the pressure to restructure higher education is visible worldwide (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002, p. 440). Therefore, besides in various cultural and historical backgrounds, the neoliberal narrative of globalization manifests itself in the commodification of higher education worldwide (Morrow & Torres, 2000, p. 39). The transformations are driven by global actors like the OECD (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 3) or the International Monetary Fund (Burbules & Torres, 2000, p. 16). The OECD for example is the driving force behind the standardized PISA tests that ranks countries, resulting in more accountability. Additionally, the OECD publishes frameworks on educational topics like global competencies that are being introduced as key competencies to succeed in the job market. Another actor that influences educational policies is the World Bank, an organization that ties their policy advices to economic reforms (Carney, 2008, p. 77). The European Union follows the trend and urges universities to act more market oriented, positioning them within the idea of a knowledge economy where universities' main goal is to increase the international competitiveness of the national economy (Häyriinen-Alestalo & Peltola, 2006, p. 255). Universities are competing over prestige, showcased for example by the university Shanghai Ranking (Marginson, 2016, p. 190-191), which makes higher education into a positional good (Deem, Mok, Lucas, 2008, p. 87; Marginson, 2013, p. 357). Furthermore, competition has also increased within countries. Drawing on longitudinal data in a comparative study, Auranen and Nieminen (2010, p. 827) were able to show that the competitive funding environment increased in all observed countries (including Finland) due to a decrease in public university funding. It can be concluded that any analysis on higher education has to address the phenomenon of globalization and its neoliberal narratives.

2.1 Neoliberalism as a driver for internationalization in higher education

Nowadays higher educational institutions are more market-oriented and perceived to be a tool for economic development. One of the first major documents in the US that showcases that trend is “a nation at risk”, published in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, positioning education as a key factor for any country in the global competition for economic dominance. It argues that the state has to hold education accountable and legitimizes business experts to talk on issues concerning education (Zhao, 2009, p. 28).

As a result, neoliberalism is an orientation that results into an increasing homogenization of higher education world-wide under the presumption of the necessity to compete in a single global market. Hence, competition has turned into an economic imperative that guides higher educational policies into similar market-oriented directions after the American university model (Torres & Shugurensky, 2002, p. 434). One of those university policies is internationalization. Haapakoski and Pashby (2017, p. 38) for example showed that university strategy papers and interviews with university staff working on internationalization revealed that predominantly neoliberal and liberal rationales were used to justify the need for increasing internationalization. Another example is the European Erasmus Mundus Program that aims at strengthening the European Higher Education Area, increasing its attractiveness and competitiveness (Weimer & Barlete, 2016, p. 119).

Internationalization can be understood as “the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (de Wit, Hunter, Howard, and Egron-Polak, 2015, p. 29). The definition importantly includes the intention behind the process of mainstreaming internationalization into higher education. Traditionally, fostering the understanding among nations was one of the main intentions behind exchange programs such as the European program Erasmus (Altbach & De Wit p. 2, 2015, Mutlu, 2011, p. 87-88). This value-grounded conceptualization of internationalization is very present in the definition that requires a meaningful contribution to society to be made. With the rise of the neoliberal narrative, however, internationalization also became a means to increase revenue, for example via tuition fees. By enhancing the quality of research and education, internationalization is aiming to make higher educational institutions more competitive. Thus, with the neoliberal imaginary for higher education, the importance attributed to internationalization has increased on a global scale.

2.2 Internationalization of higher education in Finland and the neoliberal narrative

The neoliberal narratives of globalization, that often encourage the changes discussed in the previous chapter, shifted the way we conceptualize the purpose of education in accordance to the human capital theory (Rizvi, 2017, p. 7). Economic development, competition, productivity and efficiency gained increased importance, as can be seen in the increasing marketization, higher tuition fees, corporatization and privatization of higher education. The changes however are mediated by local political and educational cultures (Marginson, 2013, p. 359). Thus, while neoliberalism in general prioritizes the markets over common goods, it manifests differently within different countries due to their unique cultures, histories and political settings.

Until recently however, Finland has not followed the general trend. Instead it relied on sustainable leadership (Aho, Pitkanen, Sahlberg, 2006, p. 117-118) that had a solid value-based foundation. The Finnish education system played a major role in building a democratic welfare state. Accordingly, the expectations of the Finnish education system go beyond fostering economic growth by creating human capital. Rather than enhancing competition via market-oriented reforms, the Finnish education system has been focused on equity, creativity, flexibility as well as teacher professionalism and teacher trust (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 152). As a result, higher education in Finland is being widely seen and accepted as a common good (Marginson, 2016, p. 14) that is characterized by high participation rates and accessibility without requiring private investments by students (Barr, 2004, p. 18).

Public funding in Finland is input-oriented (e.g. enrolled student) and not as dependent on outcome variables like productivity as in other countries (Auranen & Nieminen, 2010, p. 829). In comparison, funding of higher educational institutions in other countries is much more market-oriented. In Australia for example, universities are positioned as self-seeking corporations that need entrepreneurial behaviors to stay competitive (Marginson, 2006, p. 12). This however does not mean that higher education in Finland is not competitive and overly simplified analysis are to be avoided. The university research funding system in Finland is reliant on external funding and funding by research funding agencies, and hence is competitive (Auranen & Nieminen, 2010, p. 830). But the competition between higher educational institutions does not negatively affect accessibility of students and therefore is in accordance with Finnish core values such as equity.

3 Research purpose and questions

Recent policies in Finland indicate a shift in higher educational leadership towards more market orientation, highlighting the increased influence of the neoliberal imaginary on Finnish higher education. This thesis aims to investigate how the globally hegemonic neoliberal narrative affects Finnish higher education policies on internationalization and the way Finnish higher education is positioning itself globally. Therefore, the way Finland is branded as a destination for international students will also be examined as a part of the first research question by analyzing local and global influences on the content of two recently published strategy papers by the Finnish ministry of education and Culture. While there might be a great amount of research on the influences of neoliberalism on higher education in different countries, the research question still is crucial given that global trends, such as the neoliberal discourse, are being welcomed, opposed and adapted to differently in every local context. A necessary point to keep in mind considering that main educational policy documents can be very technical and dismissive of the influence of local histories and power dynamics. Therefore, it is important to examine the influence of the neoliberal discourse on the internationalization of Finnish higher education separately.

The second part of the thesis aims to examine the study experiences of international graduates from the University of Oulu by utilizing an alumni research. The alumni research allows for a better understanding and grasp on the current situation of international students in Finnish higher educational institutions. In chapter eight the thesis then compares the experiences and perceptions of the international graduates who participated in the alumni research to the way Finnish higher education is being represented by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture in the two policy documents *Better together for a better world – Finnish Internationalization Policies of higher education from 2017 to 2025* and *Action Plan Report for Global Education Brand Finland*. Thus, this research investigates whether international graduates agree with the strengths outlined by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. Therefore, the thesis will specifically explore international graduates' experiences with employability and the connection of the Finnish labor market to Finnish higher educational institutions, quality of teaching, innovation and PhDs, alumni networks, Finland's value approach and the integration of international students.

To summarize, the thesis addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How does neoliberalism affect Finland's internationalization policies on higher education and the way higher education is branded in the two documents *Better together for a better world – Finnish Internationalization Policies of higher education from 2017 to 2025* and *Action Plan Report for Global Education Brand Finland*?
- 2) What are the experiences of international graduates from the EdGlo program at the University of Oulu?
- 3) How do the experiences of international graduates at the University of Oulu compare to the way Finnish higher education is being represented and branded in the two documents?

The research questions address current policy guidelines by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture which are being outlined in the next chapter. Therefore, alumni research with international graduates and the research questions are relevant for Finnish universities who have to implement the internationalization guidelines as well as the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture to investigate the current status quo. Furthermore, the results can be used to gain ideas on how to refine Finland's branding approach by incorporating the experiences of international graduates. Due to the resource and time restrictions of a master thesis, the sample of this research does not allow for generalizations but offers insights that may be used to inform larger scale studies in the future.

4 Recent Trends in the internationalization of Finnish Higher Education

To understand current changes that are happening in the field of higher education it is important to examine the theoretical frameworks and assumptions that are the driving force behind the changes in Finnish higher education policies. Doing so allows this thesis to investigate the internationalization policies of higher education in Finland under the influences of neoliberalism and globalization. Hence, recent changes in Finnish higher education will be discussed as a phenomenon that is in a constantly evolving relationship with global educational trends. Since the emphasis of this thesis is on the internationalization of higher education, this thesis will analyze two publications. Firstly, "*Better together for a better world - Finnish Internationalization Policies of higher education from 2017-2025*", that has been published by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, outlining future directives for the higher educational sector, will be discussed. Then the paper "*Action Plan Report for Global Education Brand Finland*"

that was written by an advisor of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, William Doyle, will be shortly discussed. It refers to “*better together for a better world - Finnish Internationalization Policies of higher education from 2017-2025*” and proposes further initiatives for its implementation. Both publications have been published recently by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and are therefore representative of Finland’s official stance towards the development of higher education, hinting towards future developments.

4.1 Better together for a better world - Finnish Internationalization Policies of higher education from 2017-2025

The value basis of the Finnish education system is already being referred to in the title – for a better world. Using the framework from Andreotti et al. (2016, p. 89) that has been introduced in chapter 2, one would expect the report to be outlined in accordance to the civic imaginary in which the creation of knowledge primarily serves societal needs rather than economical needs, conceptualizing higher education as a common good (Marginson, 2016, p. 272-273). Especially given the importance of the Finnish education system for the Finnish welfare state. The title - For a better world- also reveals an outwards orientation towards the global. Sanni Grahn-Laa-sonen, the Finnish Minister of Education recognizes global trends and influences and specifically acknowledges them in the introduction:

“As well as their principle concern with learning and knowledge, education and research are also linked to well-being, the economy and competitiveness. We live in a world where cross-border competition for jobs, expertise, investments and companies is strong. For this reason, in Finland, too, we need to focus on building our competence. (p. 3)”

Linking education to the economy, competitiveness and an outwards orientation, are in line with the global trend discussed in chapter 2. Thus, the homogenization process, after the American model, that Torres and Shugurensky (2002, p. 442) referred to is visible in the language used by Finnish policy papers on the internationalization of higher education.

In order to meet the challenges that arose with globalization and neoliberalism, the paper identified the following seven goals:

1. Greater international attraction through focusing on the latest science and leading edge research
2. Finland is the home of high-quality education

3. Momentum for the export of Finnish competence
4. A warm welcome to Finland
5. The Finnish message is heard internationally
6. Bridge-heads in the world
7. Greater involvement of Finnish experts living abroad and alumni educated in Finland

Neoliberal narratives and the corporate university imaginary could be identified throughout the document. The most common expression of the corporate university imaginary are the many links and connections the document makes between higher education and economic advancement. The economy is a main concern (p. 3) and the paper therefore discusses several approaches to foster economic growth in Finland.

The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture aims at creating “innovation hubs that attract talented experts, companies and investment” (p. 7). Those innovation platforms are to be closely connected with companies and projects that are based on working life. Additionally, “The Global Education Brand Finland study [...] is examining Finnish strengths and the possibilities for turning these into products and marketing them” (p. 9). Both approaches may potentially lead to a shift from social sciences towards applied sciences. This is a common global trend in higher educational institutions that are led by neoliberal guidelines and has been briefly outlined in chapter 2. Attracting companies, international talent, capital and encouraging entrepreneurship all indirectly foster economic growth by creating tax revenues and increasing the gross domestic product in Finland.

The document however also aims at directly capitalizing off Finnish higher education and its reputation by exporting it. This approach has already been partly implemented with the introduction of tuition fees for international non-EU students in 2016 (Kauko & Medvedeva, 2016, p. 98). Other ways to directly monetize higher education are offering educational tours in Finnish educational institutions or selling Finnish expertise and guidance to foreign countries and institutions.

While the focus and content of the paper includes economic advancement, and thus is in line with current global neoliberal trends, it is important to also examine the language it uses to understand underlying assumptions and modes of thinking. Thus, also revealing how the paper

justifies the shift from the welfare states focus on sustainability and equity towards neoliberalism (p. 16). The document for example shares the neoliberal assumption of the importance of a global competition in higher education. The notion of competition gets often reinforced by referencing rankings (p. 8, p. 22-23) and Finland's expertise (p. 3). Finnish expertise can only be "first class" (p. 3) if it is compared to other "second-" and "third-class" expertise's that are less valuable and therefore less competitive. Hence, the document positions Finland in direct competition with other countries and states. The goal is to become a "leading country" (p. 3). This idea is further enhanced as the paper ends with a couple of rankings where Finland is in a top three position, many of which are not directly linked to higher education.

University rankings, like the Shanghai Rating, are however missing. A similar phenomenon can be observed as the publication praises Finnish higher education for its close link to the economy and high employability rates among graduates, not addressing the significantly lower employment rates among international graduates that will be discussed in chapter 8.1 in this thesis. The exclusions of the Shanghai Ranking, in which Finnish universities are not among the top universities, not only showcases a new competitive aspect, but also that Finnish Higher Education is increasingly being marketed as a brand, seeking a more favorable representation. Instead of challenging the way quality is conceptualized in many university rankings, university rankings are being neglected the document. Given the nature and topic of the document, overlooking university rankings can be interpreted as a deliberate act, aiming to improve Finland's reputation as a provider of high-quality higher education to attract international talent, sell Finnish expertise and educational tours.

Accordingly, the paper identifies the need to build Finland's reputation (p. 17) and research visibility (p. 16) in order to commodify it. A reputation that is being evaluated and assessed by neoliberal standards such as efficiency or profitability. The strong focus on Finland as an educational brand, strengthens the competitive tone of the paper. Furthermore, the publication emphasizes the need for accountability, (cost) effectiveness and international quality assurance (p. 11). Especially the focus on accountability and quality assurance are atypical for the Finnish education system that traditionally is built on trust (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 152).

The analysis of the paper "*Better together for a better world - Finnish Internationalization Policies of higher education from 2017-2025*" shows that Finnish higher educational policies are being influenced and affected by the global neoliberal imaginary. It would however be simplistic to reduce recent policy changes in Finland to a manifestation of global trends. Global

trends interact differently with different local spaces, due to different local experiences, traditions and histories. Besides the reference to the value basis of the Finnish education system, the publication also thrives at creating an open and inclusive Finland where research knowledge production is guided by value chains (p. 5). To make Finland the home of high-quality education, the key project funding has been allocated by the Finnish Government (p. 9), which is atypical for the neoliberal imaginary where state funding is decreasing, creating competition among universities, encouraging them to identify alternative ways of funding. Here the traditionally strong role of the government in the Nordic welfare states shows. It is also apparent stressing the need for close cooperation between the providers of higher education, international partners and the economy. The neoliberal language and framing of the document, however, make it questionable whether cooperation is being represented as a value in itself or rather as a possible competitive advantage.

4.2 Action Plan Report for Global Education Brand Finland

The duality between traditional Finnish values and neoliberal ideals is also present in the second publication. The document *Action Plan Report for Global Education Brand Finland* is proposing initiatives that are both “for profit and nonprofit” (p. 5). The report recognizes the “non-Finnish” nature of global trends like standardized testing or increased competition (p. 8) and even expresses the wish to see Finland as a strong counter draft to unproductive global education policies (p. 10).

While the document warns of the risks of globalization driven by neoliberalism and of the financialization of education for authentic learning, democracy, and governance (p. 9), it also positions businesses, private capital and pro profit entities in an important supporting role for the provision of high-quality education. Thus, strengthening the ties between education and the economy. The report views Finland as a competitor for educational services on a global market. As in the paper discussed prior, it focuses on the importance of branding Finnish education, utilizing rankings like the 2016-2017 Global Competitiveness Report (p. 6) or the world economic forum (p. 11). The report identifies Finland as a potential global educational superpower that needs to market itself more aggressively, overcoming its “cultural tradition of modesty and self-criticism” (p. 8). It values the Finnish education system as one of the best education systems from a neoliberal lens “on the basis of efficiency, inputs and outputs, and childhood impact” (p. 6).

As a leader in the field of education, Finland is supposed to show other nations the way, “following Finnish education values as equity, efficiency, play, childhood health and well-being, internationalization, collaboration, research, teacher professionalism, student-centered pedagogy, and continual system self-improvement” (p. 7). The report does recognize the dangers of simple policy borrowing without taking local contexts into account, stressing the necessity of exchange, collaboration and shared practices (p. 12). The primary focus however lies on monetizing the Finnish educational brand and selling Finnish expertise and the Finnish model. Building Finland’s reputation abroad is to convince international students to study in Finland and to pay the recently introduced tuition fees (p. 20). Additionally, the professional development market for teachers and principals has been identified as potentially highly profitable for Finland and a good opportunity to generate additional revenues (p. 26).

The publication goes into more details on how to monetize and build up Finland’s reputation as an educational superpower, using the same neoliberal framework as *Better together for a better world – Finnish Internationalization Policies of higher education from 2017 to 2025*. The focus lies on monetizing and exporting Finnish education. A clear indicator is the justification for the need of building up infrastructure in tertiary education. The paper identifies the often negative perception of Brexit and Donald Trump, as a chance for Finland to attract more international students that otherwise might have gone to the US or the UK (p. 10; p. 20). Hence, the paper advocates Finland’s possibilities to increase its market share (p. 8) and economic gains rather than justifying investments into higher education with a value-based approach. Especially in times of rising nationalism, the internationalization of higher education can play a vital role in connecting people and fostering intercultural understanding.

5. Alumni research

This chapter will describe why alumni research has been used in this thesis and outline the methodological approach of the thesis.

5.1 The role of alumni research in higher education

Graduates research plays an important role in higher education as they often are a driving force behind policies in the field of higher education. Due to the increasing importance allocated to universities to foster economic growth, this is especially true for alumni research that focuses on employability, graduates’ transition in the workforce and relevant key working competencies. Here research with alumni and/or employers of graduates is to shed light on the possible

mismatch between higher educational institutions services and the demands of the labor market, allowing for the optimal preparation of graduates for the labor market (García-Aracil & Van der Velden, 2008, p. 220). Johnston (2003, p. 418), however, notes that there often is a lack of scholarship and theoretical frameworks that go beyond the interpretation of empirical data.

Another big branch of alumni research is focused on donor behavior and generosity of graduates (see for example: Belfield & Beney, 2000; Baruch & Sang, 2012) which is especially important in the USA where universities rely more heavily on donors for funding (Gottfried & Johnson, 2006, p. 269). Since in the Nordic countries the governments provide most funding, this thesis did not gather data on graduate's annually income and donor behavior.

With the neoliberal discourse globally becoming more dominant, more focus has been put on accountability of higher educational institutions. One way to hold higher educational institutions accountable is via alumni research, for example by testing graduates' skills or asking their perceptions of their study experiences. Skill tests however are often problematic. Chanock, Clerehan, Moore and Prince (2004, p. 28) examined the "graduates' skills assessment" tests, developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research and pointed out several weaknesses. Not only is the validity of the test in question, it also has underlying cultural assumptions that could prove problematic for international students. Furthermore, using graduate skill tests for accountability also runs the risk of encouraging universities to prepare their students to take the skill tests instead of focusing on more subject relevant matters (p. 28).

Many studies with graduates however do not rely on quantitative data that has been compiled via standardized testing but instead use interviews and open question formats to get valuable insights from graduates. Those insights and experiences can be used to improve their former study programs. Especially for work with international graduates, this approach seems to be important as it allows the researchers to address individual experiences that are mediated by the graduate's cultural backgrounds. Therefore, this thesis relies mostly on qualitative data that has been accumulated with open format questions.

Given that this thesis aimed to get an overview of the situation of international graduates from the University of Oulu in Finland, it combines different approaches and functions of alumni research. While this approach does not allow for in depth data on certain aspects of alumni experiences, such as their working life experiences, it conveys a more holistic picture of the experiences of international graduates at the University of Oulu.

The survey consists of four parts that can roughly be divided into demographic data, working life skills, program evaluation and global citizenship education. The demographic data part gives contexts to the results and ensures that the required data is representative in terms of diversity of the sample and to make sure that the survey reached students from all enrollment years. The working life skills part help to investigate the match between EdGlo graduates' skills and the requirement of the labor market which is a main function of alumni research. The survey refrained from skill testing but instead relies on graduates' self-reports. The program evaluation lists a number of relevant features, hoping to identify ways to improve the experiences of future students. The part that roughly deals with global citizenship education helps to see to what extent EdGlo meets its goal in education global responsible citizens. The EdGlo program will be shortly introduced in the next chapter. Additionally, some of the data such as employment state or further educational attainments are relevant due to the importance the two policy papers discussed in chapter 4 allocate to them. Insights from the experiences of international graduates of the EdGlo program at the University of Oulu can help to inform future policies on the internationalization of Finnish higher education.

5.2 EdGlo alumni survey

The alumni research in this thesis has been conducted with graduates from the program EdGlo from the University of Oulu. Oulu is a city in North Ostrobothnia, Finland and the University of Oulu has been chosen for its commitment to internationalization. The program and the University of Oulu were also the pragmatic and most practical choice, with the author being an EdGlo student himself. Thus, the author is able to draw on his own experiences when conducting the research and able to contact graduates more easily. Own experiences as well as possible biases and ethical implication that arise from being an EdGlo student will be discussed in chapter 7.

Besides practical reasons, EdGlo graduates also have to potential to offer very valuable feedback and insights on the internationalization of higher education in Finland. EdGlo is a two years full time master program focuses on topics like ethics, policy, planning, curriculum, evaluation and comparative research in education, interculturalism and globalization. The program praisers itself for its diversity with students and alumni coming from over 60 countries, emphasizing the importance of a North-South-East-West dialogue. A diversity that is also important for research with international graduates as the experiences of international students can be influenced by their origin cultures (see chapter 8.6). EdGlo graduates not only are experts about

internationalization in Finland due to their own experience as international students who studied in Finland, but also are aware of current global trends in education. Additionally, their curriculum gives them more insights into the Finnish education system than other international graduates typically have. Hence, the familiarity with Finnish higher education as well as the theoretical knowledge on education and global trends that EdGlo graduates acquired during their studies, potentially makes their feedback very valuable. Possible future career paths for EdGlo graduates are in the public, private or civil society sector e.g.: project leader, coordinator, educational consultant, evaluator, researcher, teacher or administrator. More information about the EdGlo program and the current EdGlo curriculum can be found on the program's website (see link in the appendix).

The research was conducted via an online survey because EdGlo is an international program with alumnae all over the world. The language of instruction has been English. Before sending out the questionnaire a two weeks pilot study has been conducted with current international students who have taken EdGlo courses in the spring semester 2018. The participants of the pilot study were mostly current EdGlo students and very familiar with the program. Participation was voluntarily and responses were treated anonymously. The Pilot study served several purposes. Firstly, it helped to ensure that all questions are comprehensible and unambiguously formulated, which is an important feature for any survey or questionnaire (Krosnick, 1999, p. 37). Additionally, the pilot study could show that the survey was able to differentiate opinions since the participants responses varied for every item. Furthermore, the pilot study enabled participants to give feedback, which helped to identify further topics, such as understanding of the Finnish education system, that were integrated into the final version of the survey. Lastly, interviews were conducted with current EdGlo students to elaborate what concerns they were having about possible future career paths and what kind of information they would like to receive from alumni. The findings were integrated into the survey and an open question was added that specifically asked for advices for future EdGlo students. The survey has been created in cooperation with another master student who conducted a similar study with graduates of another international master's program at the University of Oulu. The constant exchanges and valuable peer feedback have been vital in creating the survey and research design, ensuring its trustworthiness and quality.

Since a name list of former EdGlo students was not available, a snowball sampling was used to reach as many alumni as possible. Snowball sampling enables participants to recruit further participants, by forwarding the survey (Goodman, 1961, p. 148), and hence utilizes existing

cohort networks that were established during the alumni's study periods. As a result, a reasonable number of participants could be recruited despite only knowing few alumni at the start of the research. The initial wave of alumni that started to spread the survey were contacted via Facebook and identified by belonging to former EdGlo study groups. The author used a personal Facebook account. After two weeks, a reminder to fill out the surveys has been sent out. Since Facebook is an open and accessible space, the contact message has been clearly tailored towards EdGlo graduates, ensuring that no former EdGlo teachers, exchange students nor life partners of EdGlo Alumni would complete the survey. Furthermore, alumni that are currently employed at the University of Oulu, as well as former tutors and EdGlo alumni ambassadors, have been contacted personally and asked to fill out and distribute the survey.

The final questionnaire consisted of 29 questions that were partly open questions, partly Likert scale questions and partly choice questions. The Likert scale questions consisted of five answer possibilities that resulted in good differentiation of the questions without over complicating them. Hereby the five guidelines of developing a Likert scale, understanding the construct, developing items, determining the outcome space, specifying the measurement model as well as gathering feedback and piloting the questionnaire, that were proposed by Nemoto and Beglar (2014, p. 2-7), have been taken into account. An uneven number (five) of response possibilities has been chosen to allow participants to express a neutral opinion.

An introduction informed participants about the purpose of the research, the expected time to fill out the survey, and that their responses will be anonymously and securely stored for future research as well as treated in accordance to the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA, 2017, p. 4-7; Drenth, 2012, p. 3-4). Since EdGlo is a small program with a rather limited number of Alumnae, it would be possible to conclude the identity of individual participants with information such as country of birth, gender or year of enrollment. To address this issue, participants were told in the introduction that they had the opportunity to skip questions that they felt uncomfortable answering or questions that they felt might compromise their anonymity. Additionally, the analysis of the survey refrained from linking some demographic data like age or gender to the individual responses to ensure participants anonymity. The complete online survey can be found in the appendix.

The survey can roughly be divided into the four parts: demographic data, working life skills, program evaluation and global citizenship education. The breakdown of the survey reflects the different types of purposes that alumni research can have (compare chapter 5.1). Additionally,

it allows for a better comprehensibility of the survey. It is however worth noting that due to its broad approach, the survey can provide valuable information for different research questions that may draw from all four parts of the survey.

One part of the questionnaire consisted of demographic data. It included the country of birth and the country of current occupation, the year of enrollment in the program, study period in months, current form of employment and whether participants did, did not or are planning to do a PhD. Those questions were either open questions or multiple-choice questions.

Furthermore, the importance of different working life related skills in the alumni's current job have been examined by using a Likert scale ranging from not important to very important. In case of unemployment, participants were asked to answer the questions in regard of their last employment or their last internship. The set of working life skills consisted of conducting research, teaching skills, reading and understanding of academic articles, critical literacy, academic writing, intercultural communication, evaluation of educational policies, administration, curriculum planning, being able to adapt to different cultural contexts, leadership skills, knowledge of international cooperation's, project management, foreign languages, teamwork and independent work. The skills very identified by looking at what skills the EdGlo program promises to foster on their website and on what skills are important for possible future career paths such as researcher or educational adviser.

The main part of the survey aimed at identifying strengths and weaknesses of the EdGlo program and studying in Finland as an international student. Thus, the survey can support future program development with alumnae feedback and data as well as shed light on the experiences of international students at the University of Oulu. This part allows for a comparison of the international graduates' experiences with the vision outlined in chapter 4. The program evaluation has been done in several ways. One question asked participants how confident they felt to find a job after graduation, to adapt to new challenges, to new cultures, whether they had acquired the necessary skills for their future jobs, how well prepared they felt and how much they still had to learn during their job. The question used a Likert scale and aimed at examining how confident EdGlo alumni felt in competing in a global job market. The other questions assessed how satisfied EdGlo alumni were with the program in general and with specific features of the program. A five range Likert scale, ranging from dissatisfied to satisfied, was used. The specific features that were inquired were professors and lectures, living in Oulu, EdGlo

curriculum, tutoring, study workload, colleagues, internship, free elective courses, practical applications of the curriculum, international atmosphere, visiting scholars, study visits, learning about the Finnish education system, teaching methods, learning materials, information provided before the start of the first semester, student union, the ability to express own opinions, thesis supervision and the University of Oulu. In order to gain more information, participants were given the opportunity to elaborate or comment on their answers in open follow up questions. The overall satisfaction was measured by a five-star rating. A single choice question interrogated whether expectations about the program existed and whether they have been met by the program. Again, participants had the option to comment on why their expectations have, or have not, been met in an open question format. Information acquired in those questions mainly aimed at supporting the further development of the program.

The survey also addressed the socialization and subjectification function of education (Biesta, 2009, p. 7), asking questions on how the program affected participants ethical perspectives. This may be especially relevant for a program like EdGlo that was found by professor emerita Rauni Räsänen, whose research was often focused on ethics and values in the field of education. An important theme for higher education in Finland in general due to its value foundation that has been discussed in chapter 2. The questions of this part addressed the frequency of personal engagement in the civic society, environmentalism or political engagement. A Likert scale, consisting of never, rarely, sometimes, often and always, was used. In addition, the survey interrogated to what extend EdGlo alumni consider themselves global citizens, global responsible, believe in their abilities to contribute to tackling global issues and to what extend they committed themselves to global agendas like the sustainable development goals.

Participants were also asked to give some advice to future EdGlo students. Those advices will be used to support future students and make their transition to Oulu, and in most cases to a new cultural context, easier. Additionally, the survey asked participants whether they want to take part in future research and whether they want to contribute to the current program (e.g. via skype lectures). If they answered any of the last two questions with yes, they had the opportunity to leave their e-mail address. This allows the EdGlo program to contact them in the future for further research or to utilize their expertise and experiences in the classroom.

Additionally, a protocol has been written during the EdGlo feedforward sessions that have been hold at the end of the spring semester in 2018. This allows this thesis to also take the most recent feedback from international EdGlo students at the University of Oulu into account. Since

they served to inform the creation of the survey, many points that were discussed at the feed-forward sessions have already been integrated in the survey and will be examined in this thesis. Other points that were brought up in the feedforward session but were not included in the survey will be discussed in chapter 6.5.

Furthermore, questionnaires have been sent to participants who indicated that they were willing to further contribute to the program’s development. The questionnaires were conducted via e-mail and were mostly used to elaborate in what ways EdGlo alumni can be integrated into the current program. All questionnaires were conducted in English. Besides the fact that the English language is not the mother tongue of the interviewer nor of the majority of participants, no communication problems occurred. The responses were documented and added to an EdGlo alumni data base that can be utilized for future research. As this thesis draws on the survey respondents, the questionnaires and responses are not been discussed any further in this thesis. Table 1 showcases the organization of the survey into 4 parts. The concrete questions can be seen in the appendix.

Table 1

Survey structure

EdGlo Alumnae Survey			
Demographic Data	Working Life Skills	EdGlo Program Evaluation	Internationalization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Country of birth - Country of current occupation - PhD - Current profession - Year of enrollment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic skills - Management skills - Adaptability - Communication skills - Teaching skills - Criticality - Teamwork - Independent work - Preparedness for working life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confidence and experiences in the job market after graduation - Experiences of the study period - Specific features of the program (e.g. teaching quality, thesis supervision) - Overall satisfaction - Open feedback and elaboration questions - Advice for future EdGlo students - Meeting of prior expectations of students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Engagement - Environmentalism - Faith and commitment to the role of education and the research community - Global Responsibility - Activism for humanitarian organizations - Internationalization (social life and curriculum)

6 Results

As the survey can roughly be divided into four different parts, the results will also address the four parts separately in order to achieve a better comprehensibility. After presenting the results of the survey, this thesis proceeds to discuss the results that derived from the feedback sessions with current EdGlo students and the author's personal experiences.

6.1 Sample characteristics and demographic data

In total 35 former EdGlo students responded to the survey. The student cohorts range from 2006, the founding year of the program, to 2016, with 2009 being the only year of enrollment that is not represented in the data. Figure 1 showcases that the most participants enrolled in 2014. Since the total amount of EdGlo graduates is not known and the sample was recruited using a snowball sampling technique, the return rate cannot be determined.

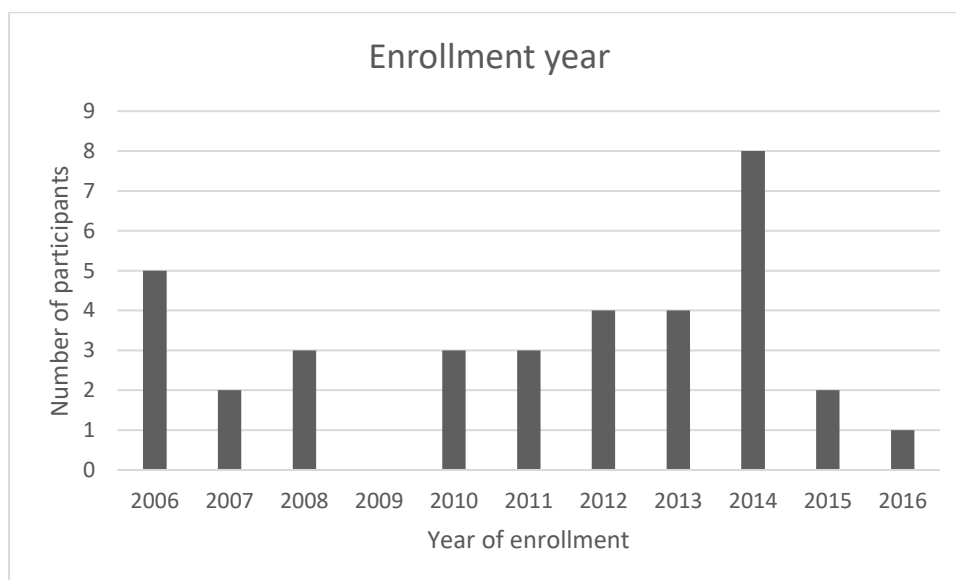


Figure 1. Enrollment year of the participants

The sample displays a wide variety in terms of country of origin with the participants being from the U.K, Canada, Indonesia, Iran, Brazil, Mexico, USA, Vietnam, Finland, Uganda, Malaysia, Philippines, Russia, Ghana, Thailand, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Spain, Austria, Somalia and Romania. Hence the sample represents the cultural diversity that EdGlo thrives to achieve. 16 of the participants returned to their home country after graduation, 13 stayed in Finland and six moved to a different country. Hereby only two participants moved countries more than once which may also be due to EdGlo being a relatively young program and therefore the graduations often happened rather recently.

As figure 2 highlights, 8% percent of graduates, three participants in total, finished their doctoral studies. 11 participants however are currently working on their PhD and another 11 participants are planning to write their PhD in the future. 14 participants did not do a PhD after graduation.

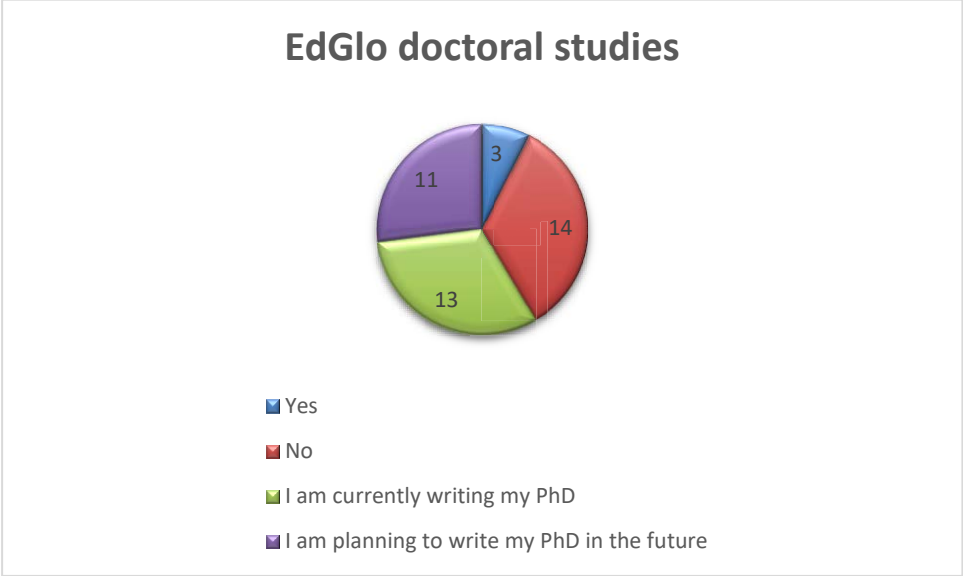


Figure 2. Number of participants who did not write a PhD, currently are writing a PhD, planning to write a PhD and have written a PhD.

After graduation 16 participants returned to their home countries, 13 stayed in Finland and 6 moved to a different country. Three out of the 35 EdGlo alumnae are currently unemployed, seven continued their studies and 25 found the following places of employment: content writer, university teacher, business development manager, high school teacher, translator/interpreter, community project coordinator at an international school, project developer, educational adviser, assistant director at the ministry of education, head of learning and development, researcher, contract administration, learning and development consultant, international student adviser and senior consultant in education and facilitation. University teacher, researcher, high school teacher and project coordinator/developer have been named multiple times. It should be noted that all working places were indicated by the participants themselves. The majority of EdGlo Alumnae, 23 participants, found employment within half a year after graduation. Seven participants already were working or found employment during their study period. Table 2 summarizes the employment status and home regions of the survey participants.

Table 2

Employment status and home region of the survey participants

Employment	Unemployed	8,57%
	Employed	71,43%
	Student/PhD Student	20,00%
Origin	Europe	20%
	Russia	5,71%
	North America	8,57%
	South America	5,71%
	South East Asia	17,14%
	East Asia	11,42%
	West Asia	5,71%
	East Africa	5,71%
	West Africa	2,96%
	Australia	2,96%

6.2 Working life

Non-surprisingly the importance of different working skills varies across the sample, reflecting the range of different professions of EdGlo alumnae. Curriculum planning and teaching skills for example are very important for graduates who pursued a career path in formal education as teachers or in the ministry of education but plays a minor role for other graduates. Conducting research as well as reading and understanding of academic articles on the other hand is very important for graduates who continued their PhD and graduates working for universities while not so important for other graduates. Similar conclusions can be drawn for the importance of foreign languages. Around 25 % perceived foreign languages to be not important or only

slightly important, which can be explained by the EdGlo alumnae who returned to their home countries. The study did not explicitly ask about the importance of Finnish language skills.

Some key skills could be identified that at least 75% percent of the participants described as very important or important in their current job. These skills are critical literacy, intercultural communication, being able to adapt to different cultural contexts, project management, teamwork and independent work. They all are skills that are important in a variety of different working environments. This finding highlights the importance for a program that is not directly tailored towards a specific profession, like EdGlo, to foster a variety of general, not context specific, working skills.

EdGlo offers various future career options. While most participants stated to be confident to find a job after graduation, 20% did not feel comfortable to find a job after graduation. The majority of participants felt they had the necessary skillset for working life after graduation while 5% felt they did not possess the necessary working life skills. However, over 75% of the participants stated that they still had to learn many things for their job after graduation. EdGlo graduates felt very comfortable about adopting to new challenges and working in different countries.

6.3 Program evaluation

Since no interviews or surveys were conducted with employers, the results are reliant on participants self-evaluation. The part can be divided into three parts, the evaluation of the specific features, whether study expectation have been met and overall satisfaction.

Participants were satisfied with the overwhelming number of features listed in the survey (for a complete list of the features see methodology or the questionnaire in the annex). There were only few test items that stood out. While 54% of the participants were satisfied with professors and lectures, only 20% percent were satisfied with the teaching methods, 40% of the participants were only slightly satisfied and 20% were slightly dissatisfied. The interviews and open-end questions revealed that while many lecturers were excellent, the variation was perceived to be too great (participant 5). Hence, some participants voiced the wish for the program to employ more full-time PhD lecturers.

There was no consensus about possible improvements among the participants. While some criticized lecturers for being too rigid (participant 6) some hoped for more discussion and interactions within the classroom. Participant 3 for example described some classes as “debates like

the ones we could have had in the cafeteria”. This observation is coherent with comments on the feedforward session that has been hold with the EdGlo student cohort that enrolled in 2017.

The item thesis supervision was somewhat remarkable in that it was slightly polarized, indicating that the satisfaction depended a lot on the individual supervisors. Furthermore, participant 11 indicated that the thesis supervision might be especially important for students from very different educational systems.

The majority of participants had a neutral opinion of the student union, which indicates that there is a lack of awareness of the events and services the student union offers. The items that were perceived as most positive, none of the participants were slightly dissatisfied or dissatisfied, were living in Oulu, the University of Oulu, free elective courses and colleagues. Additionally, the international atmosphere got praised with 82 % of participants being satisfied.

While most participants had a neutral stance (34 %) or a slightly satisfied stance (34%) towards the practical implications of the curriculum content, many responses in the open questions addressed the wish for a more practical approach. Participant 12 felt like working skills should be included while participant 7 stressed the need for “real life learning” that should be added to the research heavy curriculum. Participant 4 voiced a popular opinion stating that he/she “would have liked more opportunities to do projects with classmates and to do more research”. However, many also appreciated the theoretical part and wished for more research methodology, particularly qualitative research methodology. Other wishes were the creation of a functioning Alumni network, to better connect EdGlo with other programs at the university and to foster interdisciplinary exchanges. A concern that the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture recognized and shares (see chapter 2).

Half of the participants felt that their expectations have been met, 11 participants felt their expectations have been partly met, five participants did not have any expectations before enrolling to the EdGlo program and the expectations of one person has not been met. Since participants have been asked to elaborate on their answers, it is possible to identify where some alumnae’s expectations have not been met. Participant 3 critiqued the alumni network, and like some other participants, felt he did not get support to get a job that is related to EdGlo. As mentioned prior, some participants expected to acquire more practical skills and expected the program to be less theoretical. Participant 6 expected it to be easier to find a job in Finland or Europe after graduation.

6.4 Internationalization

EdGlo aims at creating an international experience that allows student to encounter people from different cultural contexts and a variety of different approaches to education. Nearly all participants (97%) felt that the program gave them the opportunity to make contacts with people from all over the globe. The participants also overwhelmingly agreed that EdGlo helped them to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. Nearly 10% percent however stated that they did not have colleagues who came from many different parts of the world. Hence, answer patterns might depend on the cultural diversity of a specific alumnae cohort. Unfortunately, there are not enough participants from the various alumni cohorts to test this hypothesis. A proper statistical analysis would have required at least 20 participants for every enrollment year.

While nearly half of the participants stated that they got confronted with research from all over the globe, only very few (6%) felt that it was an integral part of the EdGlo curriculum. Around 15% indicated that they were not exposed to research and scholars from different part of the world. Exemplary, participant 6 criticized that “reading material... visiting professors and researchers should be representatives and not on the western perspective alone”. The dangers of overemphasizing on western perspectives, or the Finnish education system, are also addressed by participant 14 who advises new EdGlo students to “watch out for Finnish brainwashing”. Concerns have also been voiced that the EdGlo program will lose its international atmosphere and diversity if non-EU citizens will be charged for the program. While student fees have been introduced in 2016 (Kauko & Medvedeva, 2016, p. 98), it is too early to tell whether that will be the case or not. Due to the importance of student diversity to the program, the introduction of tuition fees will be addressed in the discussion part of the thesis.

Coherent with the prior finding of the importance of critical literacy, 77% percent of participants often or always seek more information on pressing issues, a skill that might be more and more important in times when fake news influences global discourses. However, seeking further information does not necessarily lead to more action, as for example 51% percent of participants always vote in elections and 44% never went to a demonstration. It should be noted, that the cultural background heavily influences the outcome of the survey, European and US-Americans went to demonstrations more often than participants with other cultural backgrounds. Hence, the inclusion of the item reflects the authors European cultural background.

The participants often (37%) or always (31%) contribute to improvements in education. This can be explained by the fact that many graduates found employment in an educational field. Furthermore, participants rarely (34%) or sometimes (34%) contributed to a discourse on global challenges.

80% of the participants identified as global citizens, 85% find global responsibility important and 71% believed that their actions contribute to tackling global challenges. Among all graduates, education was valued very highly with 91% believing that education is the answer to respond to global challenges, 91% felt more money should be invested in education and 94% stated that education plays a major role in meeting the sustainable development goals. 63% of graduates agreed to commit themselves to the sustainable development goals. When tackling global challenges however, 38% strongly agreed with the statement that the global south is not heard enough and an additional 38% agreed with the statement. Participant 15 added a very valid point noting that “the global south is been heard loud and clear but just been ignored by the powers”.

6.5 Feedforward and feedback sessions

Most points that have been addressed and mentioned in the feedforward and feedback sessions, were integrated in survey, with the experiences of current EdGlo students matching the experiences of their predecessors. One topic however emerged that was not properly included in the survey and therefore requires special attention. Current EdGlos expressed the wish for more interaction with local Finnish students by tying the EdGlo program closer to other programs at the University of Oulu and making EdGlo classes more open for Finnish students. Alternatively, off campus activity such as sports, music or art classes can play an important role in bringing local and international students closer together and could be advertised more to international students. The student union also has the potential to play a major role in making international students feel welcomed at campus, especially given the strong status of the Finnish student unions. The importance of properly integrating international students at the host university, especially given the neoliberal framework and goals of the corporate university imaginary, are going to be discussed later in this thesis under the point a warm welcome in chapter 8.6.

7 Personal involvement - experiences, biases and ethical considerations

Throughout the thesis, I strive to proceed with objectivity to let the EdGlo graduates' voice be heard. But being an EdGlo student myself allows me to better understand points made by the

participants and add my own experiences to this thesis. It however also means that my own experiences affect the way I phrased my questions, interpreted my data and picked the main focus of this thesis. Hence, I feel that it is important to share my experiences and expectations of the EdGlo program, ensuring transparency and addressing possible biases. Therefore, this chapter will purposely abandon the common informal and objective academic language for a more personal and subjective style of writing. I hope that by including my own experiences, I can achieve a higher level of transparency, acknowledging that my experiences and my personal background affected the research topic I chose, the way I phrased my questions and interpret my acquired data.

Firstly, I want to address my personal motivations and expectations of studying in Finland. While I was aware of the good reputation of the Finnish education system and its success at PISA, I was mostly intrigued by its focus on equity and equality. Especially since I believe that the education system in my home country, Germany, with its various school forms is more likely to enforce stratification rather than to fight it. Thus, I decided to study in Finland for its value-based approach rather than its performance in standardized testing, which undeniably affects my personal perception and understanding of what high quality education and successful education means.

My experiences of one and a half years studying in Oulu overlap with the results of the alumni survey in many ways. As I am still studying, I will not be talking about working life experiences. I definitely agree that the most valuable experiences for me so far have been the daily interaction with students from different parts of the world as well as local Finnish students. Finnish language classes and university sports classes were from great importance to me, allowing me to make many close Finnish friends from whom I was able to learn a lot. Interacting in such an international space enabled me to challenge prior assumptions I did not know I had, to improve my intercultural communication skills and to learn about different cultures and countries. An experience that many of my colleagues shared and that often was the topic in class or at private gatherings.

The same experiences, which had a major influence on who I consider myself to be today, are certainly one of the main reasons why I am personally worried about the neoliberal discourses becoming more influential in higher education. I am afraid that it might negatively affect the diversity at campus and in international programs such as EdGlo, depriving future students of the learning and growing opportunities that I had. Student fees can be especially damaging to

diversity, considering that it favors students from a middle-class background. Thus, studying in Oulu did influence the way I look at the internationalization of higher education and my experiences will be reflected in this thesis.

Some ethical concerns like the anonymity of participants have already been addressed prior. Due to my personal involvement, the need arises to discuss a further issue. All the data was collected during a summer internship for the University of Oulu under the supervision of the same person who is supervising the thesis and is responsible for the EdGlo program. However, since alumni feedback is being appreciated by the program and actively looked for to further develop the program, there is no need to hide or weaken voiced criticism nor to highlight praises of the program. Thus, the possible conflict of interest to present the survey data in a more positive light to get a better grade on my thesis has been dissolved and is only mentioned for the sakes of transparency and objectivity. Additionally, the thesis will be evaluated by another staff member of the University of Oulu that has no prior connections to the thesis or my summer internship at the University of Oulu.

8 Comparison of the branding of the internationalization of Finnish higher education with international graduates' perceptions.

The Finnish Education Brand, conceptualized by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture in the two documents *Better together for a better world – Finnish Internationalization Policies of higher education from 2017 to 2025* and *Action Plan Report for Global Education Brand Finland*, lists a number of clear strengths such as its high quality and the close connection of Finnish higher education institutions to the labor market. Both publications promote Finland as the home of high-quality education and an attractive destination for international students. This chapter will interrogate whether the experiences of EdGlo alumni of Finnish higher education align with the narratives of Finnish excellence presented by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. Since EdGlo is just a single program, EdGlo graduates' experiences and perspectives can never be, and are not meant to be, representative of international graduates in Finland. Their experiences serve as a mere case that can inform the discourse on the internationalization of higher education in Finland.

Due to the limitations of the sample size, inputs from other studies will be taken into account and referred to. Furthermore, it is important to note that while in some cases the experiences of the respondents do not match to the narratives of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, those narratives are visions and imperatives that often are to be implemented. Thus, it is not to

be expected that the experiences of international graduates fully match the vision outlined in the two documents *Better together for a better world – Finnish Internationalization Policies of higher education from 2017 to 2025* and *Action Plan Report for Global Education Brand Finland*. The identification of areas that require attention and improvement via alumni research however may help to inform future policies and their implementation.

8.1 Close connection to the labor market and employability

Finland thrives at creating a close connection and cooperation between higher education institutions and the labor market. Graduates positively affect the economic development of the country they graduated from. Alumni research can play a vital role by addressing a possible mismatch between the labour market and graduates as well as by identifying factors that encourage international graduates to stay in Finland. The idea is mostly informed by human capital theory and has been outlined in the introduction. It assumes that graduates foster regional growth with their expertise and entrepreneurship. An assumption that is present in both the publications. Hence, it becomes important to ensure that international graduates, and therefore human capital, are finding employment and are not migrating out of Finland. As a result, those neoliberal narratives are emphasizing the importance of employability of graduates and traditional ideas like societal development by critical observations are losing influence (Puhakka, Rautopuro, & Tuominen, 2010, p. 36).

Puhakka et al (2010, p. 48) were taking a closer look at the employment rate of graduates from Joensuu and Kuopio University and concluded that graduates' employment situation in Finland is rather good as 83 percent of graduates were employed 5 years after graduation. The findings are confirmed by the OFS (Official Statistics Finland) and still are accurate. Nevertheless, when conducting alumni research on employability of Finnish alumni, caution is necessary since many students already start working while studying (Kivinen, Nurmi, & Salminiitty, 2000, p. 174). This was also true for the EdGlo sample used in this thesis where 20 % of graduates already found employment or were employed during their study period. While the general employment situation for post graduates in Finland is rather reassuring, there is little information on international students. The little research that has been done however, suggests that they seem to struggle more in the labor market compared to Finnish students. EdGlo students also voiced their concern for a lack of support in the job market and participant 3 would like to see an Alumni network established that can help with the search for employment for graduates.

Nevertheless, EdGlo seems to compare favorably to international students from other programs as 71,43% of the participants found employment. Shumilova, Cai, and Pekkola (2012, p. 11) for example refer to Majakulma (2011) who observed that the employment rate among international students in Finland was only 58% compared to 82% among Finnish graduates

Furthermore, the international graduates' country of origin seems to play a major role when searching for employment. Especially students from Africa have difficulties while students from South, West and central Asia have the least problems finding a job in Finland (Shumilova, Cai, & Pekkola, 2012, p. 31). A major issue for international students might be cultural capital that can express itself in familiarity with the job market, Finnish language proficiency or social support. Cai (2012, p. 20-21) notes that Finnish companies are often willing to higher international alumnae but fail do to so. More guidance and support for international students educated in Finland may be needed to reach the goal of a close connection of the labor market and higher educational institutions for international students.

8.2 Quality of teaching in Finnish higher education

The two documents describe Finland as the home of high-quality education, backing it up with international rankings. This thesis does not have the resources nor the time to engage in the ongoing critical discourse on standardized testing and rankings. Especially since participants have not been asked about their prior study experiences in other countries, this thesis will solely discuss Finnish higher education without comparing it to higher education in other countries. Instead, teacher's quality, that is presented as a major strength of the Finnish education system, will be discussed.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive feedback of the alumni who filled out the survey, the results showed that teaching methods received a mixed feedback. A point that reappeared in the interviews and open questions. It is difficult to generalize research findings that discuss student teacher relationships due to the diverse student-, and to a lesser extend teachers body for international programs such as EdGlo. Kuo (2011, p. 38) could for example show that students from Asia, Africa and the Middle East experience more stress in classrooms that require a high amount of student participation as they are unaccustomed to it. As a result, they can be at a disadvantage in the classroom (Sawir, 2005, p. 577), especially given that a student-centered approach that requires a lot of participation is more common at the EdGlo program.

Furthermore, some students may struggle with assessments and academic writing as it can differ from the academic requirements and expectations in their home countries. Especially for a program like EdGlo, emphasizing research skills, academic writing is an important and necessary skill. Thus, various scholars suggest academic writing classes or a writing center (Braxley, 2004, p. 29; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010, p. 45) for international students to familiarize them with the formalities and expectations of their new university. EdGlo offers such a course and while it is not possible to determine its effect, as there is no comparable control group, it is safe to assume that it contributed to the overall high graduates' satisfaction by making the transition process easier for students from different academic and cultural backgrounds. Support however should not be limited to written English, as spoken English is often perceived to be just as important, if not more important, by international students (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010, p. 44).

Hence, teacher's excellence may be one of the major strengths of the Finnish education system, but when trying to attract international students and encourage internationalization it is important to acknowledge challenges that come with diverse class rooms and prepare teachers to work with international students from different cultural backgrounds. Lee (1997, p. 94-99) for example identified several ways that can help teachers to support international students. The focus is on the following five main aspects of teaching: listening ability, differences in cultural background, oral communication skills, vocabulary and writing. To enhance international students' ability to follow the class, teachers should talk clearly, repeat key points and provide notes for students. Furthermore, cultural background information that is not always available to international students should be provided and students asked to rephrase important assignments and key points. This can be done by reviewing questions. Additionally, it is suggested to explain key terms and vocabulary as they may not be familiar to everyone.

This study managed to confirm some of those findings to a certain extent. Exemplary, participant 11 notes that EdGlo needs qualified teachers/thesis supervisors that can address the needs of students with different academic and cultural backgrounds, "especially for Asian students from very different education systems". The participants of this survey who had a variety of different cultural backgrounds, preferred different teaching styles. Some would have liked a more teacher centered approach while others preferred to have more student's participation in the classrooms. For international programs like EdGlo it is important to integrate both approaches. Reading groups and discussion groups could for example allow for a high level of participation.

8.3 PhD and further research

Doctoral students play a key role in creating new scientific knowledge and ideas (Pyhältö & Keskinen, 2012, p. 136) and are therefore a main priority for both discussed documents. If Finland wants to become a leading country in terms of innovation and research, it will also rely on international talent to continue their academic career in Finland. However, in 2017, Finland experienced a decrease in the number of doctoral students by 7 percent (Official Statistics of Finland, 2018). A similar, but smaller, trend could also be observed for bachelor and master's students. This trend is concerning if Finland aims at playing a more influential part in a global research community, as advertised by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture as a part of the internationalization strategy for Finnish higher education. Programs like EdGlo, that put an emphasis on research skills, will have to play a part in meeting the goals of the internationalization strategy. A better understanding of underlying causes of for the decline is necessary as funding incentives and competition do not necessarily enhance research productivity (Auranen & Nieminen, 2010, p. 828).

The 8% of survey participants that finished a PhD may seem discouraging at first, but since most alumnae graduated only recently, it is more important to take a closer look at the 63% of participants who are either currently writing their PhD or consider doing a PhD in the future. While it is reassuring that the majority of EdGlo graduates are at least planning to continue their academic career, it is important to keep in mind that EdGlo graduates cannot be representative of international graduates from other programs in Finland. This is especially true given the research focus of the program that already includes quantitative as well as qualitative methodology classes.

Further research should aim at identifying what hindered participants to realize their intention, possibly utilizing the EdGlo alumni database. Furthermore, higher educational institutions in Finland have to support current PhD students in better ways. Grover (2007, p. 10) identified several stages that PhD students typically undergo, starting with a stage of exploration where doctoral students are faced with new challenges and difficulties. Future research with doctoral students can help to identify difficulties in the transition process as well as help to identify the required skillsets, ultimately addressing them and integrating them into international master programs in Finland.

Furthermore, it would be important for doctoral students to be fully integrated, active agents in a supportive scholarly community. This however is not always the case in Finland as nearly one

third of doctoral students from the faculty's arts, medicine and behavioral sciences at Helsinki university did not feel like being a member of a scholarly community (Pyhältö, Stubb, & Lonka, 2009, p. 229). Creating a sense of relational agency among a scholarly community should be considered a priority as well as it leads to less negative emotions, exhaustion, less lack of interest in the study area and less students considering dropping out of their doctoral studies (Pyhältö & Keskinen, 2012, p. 142). Relational agency can only be achieved if the doctoral students perceive their role to be as an active member of a community whose action matters and are not mostly influenced by external factors. Among the sample of doctoral students that Pyhältö and Keskinen (2012, p. 141) investigated, 70% perceived themselves as passive and their contributions to be lacking meaningfulness. Feeling of relational agency was unrelated to the progress of the PhD. A qualitative study with natural science doctoral students of the Helsinki University, further emphasizes the importance of participation and collaborative research environment (Vekkaila, Pyhältö, Hakkarainen, Keskinen, & Lonka, 2012, p. 174).

Creating new PhD positions within the research groups that are affiliated with EdGlo or other higher educational institutions in Finland, as well as creating networks that allow international students to stay in touch with colleagues and professors may significantly increase the experiences of EdGlo graduates who are doing a PhD. It would also encourage international graduates who are considering doing a PhD to start their academic career. Additionally, research conferences can be an effective way to build connections within the scholar community and encourage students to pursue an academic career path. Universities can encourage students to attempt such conferences by providing them with information or covering travel costs. Alternatively, students and the faculty can be facilitators, organizing conferences themselves, as has been successfully done by EdGlo students in the past.

8.4 Alumni networks

Establishing an alumni network is one of the main goals of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. It addresses a concern and lack of educational infrastructure that has also been voiced by EdGlo graduates. The participants expressed their hopes that an alumni network would be beneficial when searching for employment opportunities, a message that was present in both publications. Participant 3 for example stated that "There were no links to the alumni network, and a lack of professional networking opportunities for students to find employment post-graduation".

Alumni networks could also help to tackle other issues than professional development and employability. Being able to draw on the experiences of international graduates, possibly with similar backgrounds, would enable future students an easier transition process to living in Finland and to the academic life in Finland. The alumni survey revealed that EdGlo alumni were interested being involved into the EdGlo program. Therefore, creating an alumni network with former students seems a realistic and important goal since the wish for an alumni network is shared by graduates, policy makers and students alike.

Thus, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture is actively focusing on an area that is in need of improvement. Creating an extensive alumni data base, of Finnish and international graduates alike, can be considered a first step. Therefore, the research at hand has been used to start building up an EdGlo alumni data base. Besides informing participants that the survey data will be stored and can be used for future research, participants had the options to express their wish to contribute to the current program, for example via skype lectures or by sharing and creating content for the program. Graduates have the potential to be a valuable asset to the EdGlo program who provide learning opportunities for current students. The data that has been acquired during this research can be used for future research and to tie EdGlo alumni more closely to the program. Additionally, for alumni to play a more significant role, social media and communication technologies can be used. Especially for international students who may be working all over the globe. If successful, EdGlo may be an example of how alumni research can play a vital role in achieving the goals of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture outlined in the previous chapters.

8.5 Finland's value approach

While the previous chapters (8.1-8.4) are mainly addressing priorities that are in line with a neoliberal approach to higher education, the chapter at hand as well as the next chapter will discuss Finnish core values that have been mentioned in the two policy documents. Of course, the separation between a "neoliberal frame" and a "Finnish welfare state frame" is simplistic and done mainly to showcase the way a global policy trend interacts with local traditions.

Finland wants to take the lead as an educational superpower (Action Plan Report for Global Education Brand Finland, p. 6-7), inspiring the world with its traditional value-based approach to education. The EdGlo study program is specifically tailored around values, education and globalization. Due to its niche position and curriculum design any sort of comparison to other study program and other graduates is unwarranted. EdGlo however did succeed to transfer a

feeling of agency and urgency to tackle global issues on to its graduates. Thus, some of EdGlo's experiences and contents could be used in other classes to convey a feeling of global responsibilities. Additionally, a global international perspective that is based on Finnish core values such as equity or sustainability could be integrated into higher educational programs in Finland. EdGlo can serve as an example of mainstreaming internationalization while staying true to Finnish core values by including contents such as the sustainable development goals into the curriculum.

8.6 A warm welcome

Finland is described as a warm, welcoming and inclusive place for international students by the Ministry of Education and Culture. EdGlo graduates shared that experiences with the survey items living in Oulu and University of Oulu being answered very positively. While that is reassuring, it should be noted that the survey only reached out to graduates and was not able to talk to students who dropped out of the program and might have made more negative experiences. As discussed earlier, it is impossible to generalize from a small sample of EdGlo students. This point is even more important in this case as students' experiences may differ significantly depending on the student's ethnicity, home country, religion, previous education experiences, age and cultural and social contexts.

The sample may be representative of the diversity within the program but cannot address the experience of graduates from different cultural spaces separately. Such an investigation on a much bigger scale however would be highly important. Andrade (2016, p. 143) has shown in his meta-analysis that the experiences of international students differ significantly depending on their country of origin. Especially the perceptions of minority groups are important to consider given that Hanassab (2006, p. 161) observed that international students from the Middle East as well as Asia experienced more discrimination than other international students at the University of California. Similar findings were reported by Brown (2004, p. 22) who showed that white students experienced the campus climate much more positive than Afro-American students did. Unfortunately, to be able to identify different experiences that international graduates from different cultural contexts make in Finland, all international students who graduated from Finnish universities have to be questioned to achieve a sample big enough that allows for drawing different conclusions for graduates that are based on their different home countries.

While discrimination can occur on campus, it occurs more frequently outside of the campus area (Hanassab, 2006, p. 165). Even though most studies have been conducted in the Anglo-

American regions, it can be assumed that international students in Finland are exposed to similar experience since a recent report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) revealed that Finland ranks among the most discriminatory countries in Europe. The used survey (EU-MIDIS, 2017, p. 29-31, p. 36, p. 42, p. 44, p. 58, p. 69, p. 75) questioned 25,500 people coming from marginalized groups like ethnic minorities, first generation immigrants as well as second generation immigrants. In Finland nearly half of the participants reported to have been discriminated against within the last year. This was particularly true for respondents from sub-Saharan Africa, who frequently experienced discrimination in their everyday life, either at the work place, in the labor or housing market. Higher educational institutions in Finland should also be aware of issues that international students may face outside of university and provide an adequate support network such as student counseling. Another supporting system for international students can be the student unions, which traditionally are very strong in Finland. EdGlo graduates however indicated a very neutral stance towards the student union, indicating little contact. Thus, there seems to be the potential to utilize strong student networks more to integrate international students and encourage more interaction between local and international students. Even though there were no reports of discrimination in the EdGlo sample, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture should be wary and careful to ensure a warm welcome in Finland for international students of various backgrounds. It is especially important for international students who wish to stay in Finland.

9 Discussion

Before starting the discussion, it is important to remember what kind of conclusions, suggestions and advices can and cannot be drawn from the study at hand. Therefore, it is necessary to revise the studies data sample. While the study at hand was never meant to generalize its findings, it is still important to critically examine the sample to ensure that the collected data properly reflects the experiences of EdGlo graduates from the University of Oulu. This is being done given the cultural diversity within the programs. Therefore, I will not address the overall small sample size as it results from a small population of graduates from a relatively young program that was established in 2006, only accepting between 14 and 20 students annually. Additionally, the sample size is also less relevant since the thesis is mostly drawing from the qualitative data that was collected and from other studies on similar topics. Furthermore, previous studies have shown that sample representativeness is a much more important criterion for evaluating the validity of a study than response rate (Cook, Heath & Thompson, 2000, p. 821). In general, sample representativeness is given since the survey was able to reach graduates from

different backgrounds from all but one enrolment year. It is, however, worth mentioning that the results may be skewed due to the fact that the survey only reached out to graduates, university drop-outs might have had different experiences during the program. Additionally, the snowball sampling approach and the first recruitment wave via Facebook may have been unable to reach graduates who did not connect well with their colleagues and thus broke off most connections with EdGlo. This may have led to an overly positive representation of the EdGlo program.

This thesis was able to show that recent changes in Finnish higher education policies, such as the attempt to monetize and commodify it, can be attributed to a global hegemonic neoliberal imaginary of universities as corporations. Finnish higher education has been reconceptualized as a brand (Schatz & Dervin, 2012, p. 4) to successfully compete on a single global market for international students, study visits and educational services. The branding approach often relies on international rankings such as PISA to position Finland as a provider of higher quality education. The explanation for Finland's success in international comparisons however are often outlined less clearly and reduced to a unique *Finnishness* or Finnish trait. Schatz, Popovic and Dervin (2017, p. 9) note that besides learning and teaching atmosphere and an educational ethos, not much clarification is being offered as to what constitutes the *Finnishness* in Finland's educational system. Similarly, education export documents are often vague (Schatz, 2016, p. 405). In the meantime, the often-cited strength of trust in teachers (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 152; Stepping up Finland's role in global education, p. 19) in Finland is being undermined by an increasing emphasis on accountability. While the experiences of EdGlo Alumnae cannot help us to fully understand the *Finnishness* in Finnish higher education, they might help to see what international students at the University of Oulu valued, thus providing ideas for a more detailed and concrete branding approach to Finnish higher education. Especially since traditional Finnish qualities, like teaching methods, were not perceived as a definitive strength by EdGlo graduates.

Of course, this thesis does not want to suggest that teaching quality in Finnish higher education is lacking behind its good reputation. But given Finland's strong focus on internationalization and attracting international talent, it is important to also consider the various challenges that arise from a diverse classroom of students with different cultural and academic backgrounds (see results).

On the other hand, the alumni survey also revealed what EdGlo graduates perceived to be the biggest asset of their study experiences at the University of Oulu. Internationalization within the program was not only the item with the highest satisfaction results, the open question also suggests that the participants encountered an ethos of diversity and inclusion at the EdGlo program. Exemplary, participant 11 describes her “learning experiences in Finnish higher education” as “great and worthwhile in a diverse group and wonderful people”. Many respondents indicated in the open question that this openness to diversity, different cultures and new experiences has been one of the most beneficial assets of their EdGlo study experiences (participants 2, 7, 10, 13, 19, 22), especially since it allowed graduates to also critically reflect on their own prior assumptions and epistemological frames (participants 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 20, 26). Participant 7 summarizes the experiences of many EdGlo graduates by stating that “the best thing about edglo is the diversity of its students and the opportunity to learn from people you never thought you would have met otherwise”. An opportunity that for some graduates proved to be a “life changing experience, helping me to see others from a completely new perspective” (participant 13).

The collected data therefore suggests that for many graduates the EdGlo program at the University of Oulu achieved the goal that William Doyle formulated in his *Action Plan Report for Global Education Brand Finland*. Internationalization and intercultural exchanges should not lead to a one-way stream of learning (p. 12) but become a mutual beneficial and fruitful experiences for students and teachers alike. Thus, instead of overcoming Finnish modesty and self-criticality (Action Plan Report for Global Education Brand Finland, p. 8) to aggressively brand Finland as the home of high-quality education and expertise, Finland could embrace those features as virtues that encourages open exchanges and innovation rather than doctrines. Therefore, it is not surprising that EdGlo graduates’ advice to future students is to occasionally take a step back, have an open mind, be reflexive and listen to what others have to say. Participant 11 puts it very pragmatic, advising future students to “listen more, talk less” while participant 13 additionally stresses the importance to talk to Finnish students who may be “very quiet but they have a lot of things that you can learn from”. Such an ethos cannot only play an important part in attracting international talent to Finland but is also a crucial premise for an open and respectful global dialogue among cultures that help us to face global challenges such as climate change. Challenges that can only be solved in cooperation (Better together for a better world, p.3). Thus, there are incents to mainstream internationalization and global perspectives in higher education that go beyond the neoliberal imaginary.

Hence, the experiences of EdGlo graduates suggest that modesty and a willingness to critically self-reflect might have the potential to be framed and presented as part of the *Finnishness* that the Finnish Ministry of education and Culture often refers to when talking about the Finnish education brand. Especially since they help to create an open and tolerant atmosphere that encourages learning from each other and working together on shared goals. It is however worth mentioning that the same neoliberal ideals that are behind the branding of Finnish higher education may also have negative effects on the features that participants appreciated during their studies in Finland.

In the introduction, this thesis roughly discussed ways for the corporate university to monetize higher education. One of which is the introduction of tuition fees. Adams (2007, p. 412) differentiates between two kinds of tuition fees. Tuition fees as an export good that creates a surplus, and tuition fees that do not cover the full costs of students. In Finland the Ministry of Education and Culture is advising universities to charge figures between 3,500 and 12.000 Euros for tuition fees. According to the University act 558 (2009), tuition fees cover at least the costs for providing education (Cai & Kivistö, 2013, p. 10) and could therefore be considered an export good.

To evaluate the possible impacts that the introduction of tuition fees may have on higher education in Finland, it is important to look at countries like Sweden that are in a similar situation. Just like Finland, Sweden aimed at attracting highly educated international students and thrived to do so by offering high quality education rather than tuition-free study places. Gair (2011) could show that so far, the results of the introduction of tuition fees in Sweden have been disappointing with applications from international students to Swedish universities going down to 26,846 applicants in 2011/2012 from 91,788 applicants in 2010/2011 (as cited in Cai & Kivistö, 2013, p. 9). Similarly, Denmark experienced a strong decline of degree seeking students coming from outside the European Union after the introduction of tuition fees (De Wit, 2010, p. 14). Thus, it is safe to assume that the introduction of tuition fees negatively affects the attractiveness of higher education in Finland and therefore also has a negative impact on the diversity and the internationalization of Finnish higher education (Kauko & Medvedeva, 2016, p. 109). Participant 14 reported that his cohort was predominantly European, voicing his concerns on how “full tuition reflects on the ethnic composure of EdGlo”. Thus, the way the introduction of tuition fees affects the internationalization of Finnish higher education and intercultural exchanges in the future remains to be seen. Finland’s approach to avoiding a similar loss in appli-

cations by international students, as experienced by other Nordic countries, after the introduction of tuition fees is to focus on its unique *Finnish* strengths. It is doing so by branding itself as an attractive and competitive destination for international talent.

Whether an ethos of appreciation for diversity and inclusion can be a part of this message and the Finland education brand requires further research. In order to build on the positive experiences many EdGlo graduates had, it is crucial to identify what were the main contributors to its positive learning environment, encouraging learning from and with each other rather than learning about each other. Besides the limitations mentioned prior, it is however crucial to point out that EdGlo students consciously chose an international program on globalization and therefore most likely already possessed a high level of openness and tolerance towards different cultures. A mindset that might not be shared to the same extent by other international students coming to Finland. To see how big the impact of programs such as EdGlo is on its students, a pretest-posttest design would be necessary, but it was not possible for a master's thesis. Another possible influential factor is the class size. Larger classes might be more prone to split up into smaller groups of students. The danger of the class splitting up in smaller groups that interact little with each other may also occur when the international students are predominantly from one country. Too many cultural similarities may be negatively affecting the classroom in general, by not pushing students to challenge their own prior assumptions and worldviews and predominant cultural similarities may also discourage single students with different cultural experiences to talk out. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind how gender, religion and socio-economic backgrounds affect students' experiences. Thus, future research could examine what kind of student compositions seem to encourage inclusiveness and openness for Finland to be able to facilitate them as a Finnish strength. Furthermore, the content of any program will mediate how the class interacts with each other. By introducing non-western content into mainstream curriculums, international students might feel more valued in their experiences and express their opinions more openly.

In an increasingly connected and globalized world, research on international students is going to be progressively important, whether it is for the practical implication of creating revenues or for idealistic reasons such as bringing students closer together to work on global challenges. Alumni research will have to play a vital role as it also allows the researcher to look at the long-term effects of the internationalization of higher education. In order to stay in contact with international graduates that spread around the globe, alumni networks need to be established and improved.

10 Conclusion

The master thesis at hand interrogated how Finnish higher educational policies are affected by the globally dominant neoliberal narratives and the corporate university imaginary. Hence, the thesis also investigated how Finnish higher education is being conceptualized and represented by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture in the two policy papers *Better together for a better world – Finnish Internationalization Policies of higher education from 2017 to 2025* and *Action Plan Report for Global Education Brand Finland*. The representation that has been identified in policy papers has than be compared with the impressions and experiences of international alumni. For this purpose, a survey has been sent out to graduates of the international master program Education and Globalization using a snowball sampling method.

10.1 The effects of neoliberalism on Finnish higher education policies on internationalization

Neoliberal frames and referencing are present in the current discourses on the internationalization of higher education in Finland. The Finnish Ministry of education and Culture emphasizes the importance of economic gains via the internationalization of Finnish higher education in the two recently published policy papers *Better together for a better world – Finnish Internationalization Policies of higher education from 2017 to 2025* and *Action Plan Report for Global Education Brand Finland*. In accordance to the corporate university imaginary, Finland aims at building a reputation as a provider of high-quality education, a reputation that than is to be commodified and monetized by attracting foreign talent. Besides directly outlining ways to economically benefit from Finnish higher education, such as the Global Education Brand Finland study, policy shifts are also based on neoliberal assumptions, namely competition and accountability. Additionally, policy changes are justified by identifying a chance for Finland to increase its market share due to the developments in the USA and the UK with the Trump presidency and Brexit. Thus, Finnish higher educational institutions are primarily being conceptualizes in accordance to the corporate university imaginary in the two analyzed documents.

Nevertheless, simply attributing a shift in Finnish higher educational politics to neoliberalism is simplistic and redundant. The value base of the Finnish education system has been referenced repeatably and promoting its value base has been identified as a non-profit mission. Thus, the analysis showed that the neoliberal global trend has been welcomed and integrated differently in Finland. While accountability became increasingly important, funding for higher education is still in firm control of the government. Another example would be the introduction of tuition

fees, while advertising for Finnish higher education for its equity approach. Finland presented itself open to global influences and adapting to them while trying to detain and utilizing a distinctive Finnish identity.

10.2 Similarities and differences between the conceptualization of the internationalization of Finnish higher education and international students' experiences

Driven by neoliberal imperatives, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture is putting increasing focus on branding Finnish higher education. Its narrative of excellence and high quality did however not always match to the perception and experiences of the EdGlo alumni who participated in the survey.

The close connection between the labor market and higher educational institutions was for example outlined as a clear strength of the Finnish higher education system. While the employability is very good for Finnish graduates, the situation is not as easy for international graduates, who for example lack Finnish language proficiency. Nevertheless, most EdGlo graduates found employment, but only few were able to stay in Finland, indicating that higher education in Finland is primarily doing a good job of integrating Finnish graduates in the work force.

Similarly, not all EdGlo graduates were satisfied with the teaching methods that were used during their study periods, despite the advertised high quality of teaching personal in Finnish higher education institutions. The open questions and interviews revealed how diverse and sometimes contradictory the expectations and wishes were. Finnish university teachers might require better preparation and support to deal with international multicultural classrooms in order to live up to their good reputation.

While Finland aims at playing a leading role as an innovator and knowledge creator, the number of PhD students has been declining in recent years. Internationalization will have to play a major part in increasing the numbers of doctoral students, especially given that an overproportionate number of doctoral students are international students. EdGlo has been successfully promoting an academic career path as the majority of graduates were interested in doing a PhD. However only a small percentage of participants were able to find a PhD position. Therefore, the experiences of EdGlo alumnae showcases that Finland has to provide a better educational infrastructure to encourage and support graduates who want to continue their academic career in Finland. Some challenges that can arise for PhD students in Finland have been discussed in chapter 8.3.

EdGlo alumni were satisfied with the program and their studying experiences in Finland, suggesting that Finland and the University of Oulu were able to provide international students with a warm welcome. Caution however seems advisable as international students off campus experiences may differ and especially the job market and housing market can prove to be difficult for international students. Furthermore, Finland is not yet able to provide international students with the infrastructure that it aims for and work is still to be done in creating alumni networks and strengthening the connection between international graduates and the labor market. Additionally, the conceptualization of the unique Finnish strengths of Finnish higher education is still unclear and needs further refining it is to be used successfully in branding Finnish higher education.

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Appendix 1

Education and Globalization website:

<https://www.oulu.fi/ktk/edglo>

Appendix 2

Alumni survey:

EdGlo Alumni Survey

The following survey has been constructed to learn from the experiences and impressions of EdGlo Alumni. The acquired information will be used to help evaluate and support the development of the EdGlo program. Therefore, your participation is very much appreciated and welcomed. The survey will approximately take 20 minutes but can be stopped at any time. Please feel free to skip questions you are uncomfortable answering or questions that might affect your anonymity.

All data are being handled in accordance to the European Code of Conduct for Research integrity and cannot be traced back to individual participants. The anonymous responses will be securely stored and used for future research.

Thank you very much for your participation!

1. What is your current profession?
2. How beneficial were your experiences during your internship? Are you currently working in a related field?
3. At what year did you enroll in EdGlo and for how many months did you study?
4. How many months did it take you to find a job after graduating from EdGlo?

5. How many times did you change profession after graduating from EdGlo?

6. What is your country of birth?

7. In which country are you currently living?
 - In my home country
 - In Finland
 - In a foreign country

8. How often did you move to a different country after graduating from EdGlo?

9. Did you do a PhD after graduating from EdGlo?
 - Yes
 - No
 - I am currently writing my PhD
 - I am planning on writing my PhD in the future

10. How important are the following skills and competencies for your current job? If you are currently unemployed please answer the question in regard to your last employment or your internship.

	not im- portant	slightly im- portant	moderately important	important	very im- portant
Conducting research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading and under- standing of academic articles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Critical literacy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Intercultural communi- cation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Evaluation of educa- tional policies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Administration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Curriculum planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being able to adapt to different cultural con- texts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. How important are the following skills and competencies for your current job? If you are currently unemployed. Please answer the question in regard to your last employment or your internship.

	not im- portant	slightly im- portant	moderately important	important	very im- portant
Leadership skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Knowledge of inter- national coopera- tions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Project management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Foreign languages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teamwork	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Independent work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. To what extend do you agree with the following statements?

	strongly disagree	disagree	undecided	agree	strongly agree
I felt confident to find a job after grad- uating	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt confident to have the needed skills for working life after graduating	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

EdGlo did prepare me well for my first job/internship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am confident to adapt to new challenges	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident to adapt to working in a different country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I still had to learn many things for my job after graduating	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. EdGlo aims at creating an international and intercultural space where students get in contact with a diversity of opinions and views from all over the globe. To what extent would you agree to the following statements that refer to your time as an EdGlo student?

	strongly disagree	disagree	undecided	agree	strongly agree
I got confronted with research from all parts of the globe	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I read articles/books/studies from scholars that came from many different continents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I read articles from scholars that represented a diversity of different opinions

I had opportunities to make contacts with people from all over the globe

I had opportunities to participate in a South-West-North-East dialogue

I am still in contact with friends I made during my studies that come from different countries

My study colleagues came from many different parts of the world

EdGlo helped me interact with people from different cultural backgrounds

EdGlo helped me to acquire a better understanding of different cultures

EdGlo gave me the opportunity to learn and experience Finnish culture

14. EdGlo aims at encouraging students to see themselves as agents for change. How often do you engage in the following actions?

	never	rarely	sometimes	often	always
Participated in a political debate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supporting a humanitarian organization financially	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Act environment friendly (garbage separation, reduce of waste or CO2 emissions etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participate in a debate on global challenges (e.g. the Sustainable Development Goals, climate change)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Voting in elections	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering/working for a civil society organization or action group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Went to a demonstration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seeked further education or information on certain issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Encouraged my friends and relatives to support a humanitarian cause

Contributed to an improvement in education

15. To what extent would you agree with the following statements?

strongly disagree disagree undecided agree strongly agree

I see myself as a global citizen

I believe that my actions can contribute in tackling global challenges

I have committed myself to the Sustainable Development Goals

Through education it is possible to respond to global challenges

Global responsibility is important to me

More money should be invested in education

Education plays a major role in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals

We need strong leadership by countries or global actors like the UN to tackle global issues

Countries from the global south are not heard enough

The research community plays a major role in tackling global issues

16. How satisfied were you with the following features during your studies in Oulu?

	dissatisfied	slightly dis- satisfied	neutral	slightly sat- isfied	satisfied
Professors and lecturers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Living in Oulu	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
EdGlo Curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tutoring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Study workload	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Free elective courses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Practical applications of the curriculum content	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
International atmosphere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. How satisfied were you with the following features during your studies in Oulu?

	dissatisfied	slightly dis- satisfied	neutral	slightly sat- isfied	satisfied
Visiting scholars	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Study visits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning about the Finnish edu- cation system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching meth- ods	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning materi- als	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information pro- vided before the start of the first semester	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student union	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ability to ex- press my opin- ions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thesis supervi- sion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The University of Oulu	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. Are there any other features of the EdGlo program you would like to comment on?

19. Please feel encouraged to elaborate on points you were dissatisfied about so we can work on improving them in the future.

20. Are there any topics missing that you feel should be included or emphasized more?

21. Were the expectations you had for the EdGlo program met?

- Yes
- Partly
- No
- I did not really have any expectations

22. Please elaborate on what expectations have not been met by the EdGlo program.

23. Would you recommend EdGlo to a friend, colleagues or relatives?

24. How would you rate the EdGlo program?



25. Please elaborate on your rating for EdGlo and why you would or would not recommend the program to a friend or relatives.

26. What advice would you give to current EdGLo students?

27. Would you be willing to talk about your career path and share your working experiences with current EdGlo students?

Yes

No

28. Would you be willing to be interviewed about your experiences in the EdGlo program to help us develop the program further?

Yes

No

29. If you answered "Yes" to any of the last two questions, please leave your name and e-mail address so that we can contact you in the future.

30. Thank you very much for your help and support. It is very much appreciated! Please forward the survey to other EdGlo Alumni. Feel free to leave a comment.