

The Finnishness
in
Exporting Finnish Education

Mengsi Chen

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Department of Education and Psychology
University of Jyväskylä

ABSTRACT

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Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) made an ambitious aim in 2010, which was to become "one of the world's leading education-based economies" (MOEC, 2010, p. 5). Since then, education export is officially a profitable business in Finland, a top-down national branding movement has begun and the concept of "Finnish Education" as a brand, a national identity has been created. As education is not possible to be copied as a whole, what can other countries really "borrow" from Finland would be an interesting area to explore. This article aims to identify Finnishness in exporting Finnish education in order to promote Finnish education globally.

In this qualitative research, two research questions have been formulated:

- 1) What is the "Finnishness" that current education exporters are promoting?
- 2) How Finnishness is exported in current education export activities?

The research was conducted through eight semi-structured interviews on current Finnish education exporters. Inductive qualitative content analysis was implemented in this study.

Finnish education's identity, Finnishness mindset, how Finnishness is exported and the challenges of exporting Finnish education have been recognised at the end of the study. Finnish education exporters identified Finnish education as an evolving process which provides soft skills for learners. Finnishness is a term that Finnish education exporters rarely heard of, four themes on Finnishness: Empathetic, Supportive, Critical and Communitarian were identified from Finnish education, and they have impact on Finnish education exports through at different stages of exporting activities. Finnishness in exporting Finnish education is more about the 'Finnish way' of carrying out education export, with its own challenges as well.

Keywords: Finnish education, education export, Finnishness, Finnish Education identity

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1. INTRODUCTION

Finnish education has received a lot of international attention throughout the years. Principals, teachers and students all over the world come to study Finnish education which has been recognised as an education miracle (Niemi, Toom, & Kallioniemi, 2012). National interest in branding education has been raised based on Finland's official Country Brand Report (CBR) (2010). This brought Finnish education into a new era, and this new era brought many possibilities to Finland. It has been seen as a top-down national branding movement which has created the concept of "Finnish Education" as a brand, as a national identity and promoted education export as a profitable business. "Fostering national identity is key to enhancing the capacity of ordinary citizens to act as brand ambassadors for their countries" (Koh, 2017, p.20). Since then different players from both public and private sectors in the education field have been practising exporting Finnish education, these professional organisations and personnel are regarded as the agents of Finnish education identity. Once a Finnish education project coordinator put, "We don't standardise world education in the wake of the Western program models but rather we do things the Finnish way" (as cited in Schatz, 2015). What exactly is the "Finnish way"? How do education exporters in Finland perceive the "Finnish way"? In this paper, this "Finnish way" will be studied under the term "Finnishness" (section 1.4). Understanding the Finnishness behind Finnish education might offer the international education community a new perspective on how to promote Finnish education and how to localise Finnish education in the importing country.

"Good education helps people analyse their own changing place in society, and the ability to learn new things sets people free to find meaning in their own life above a profession, income or other social status" (CBR, 2010, p.239). As a young adult who received education in Finland, my core values are shaped here. My views on the world, on other beings as well as on myself get hugely influenced by the education and the social encounters I have had in Finland. The acceptance of myself as a whole made me more confident than ever, the recognition of my own traits and limitations made me a more open and tolerant

person. Therefore, with my gratitude, by conducting this study I would like to promote Finnish education which I personally think could be beneficial for others too. At the same time, the entrepreneurial spirit inside of me drives me into the education export field. I see exporting Finnish education as a way to promote it, to get more international awareness.

Limited research has been done on Finnishness, only few scholars have seen Finnishness as a cultural trait, this study is trying to recognise Finnishness in Finnish education exportation, to explore the “Finnish way”. This chapter starts from a brief review of Finnish education structure and its history. Thereafter the highlighted features which account for Finnish education success. Then the education export situation in Finland will be explored. Finally, a touch of Finnishness from a cultural context.

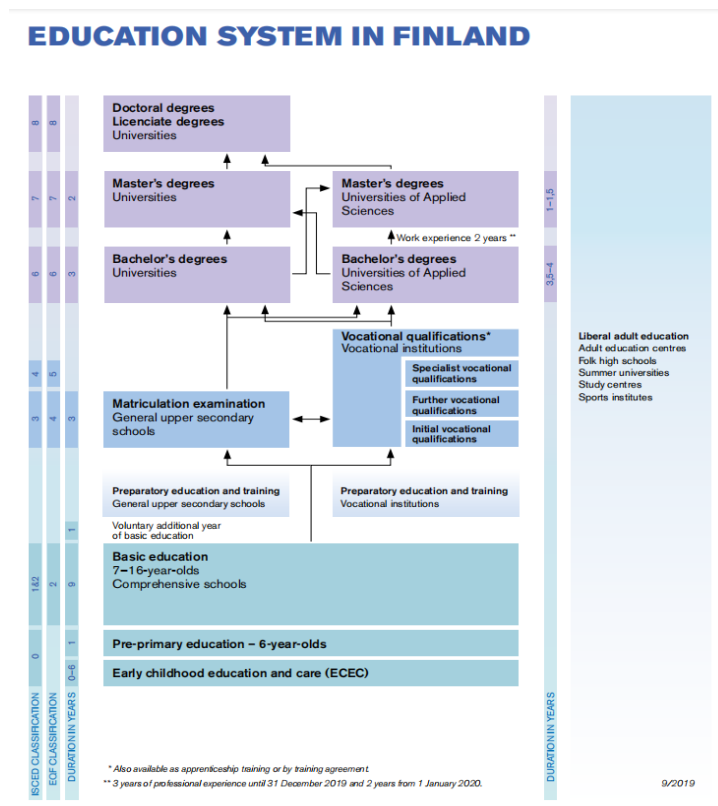
1.1 Finnish Education and its History

Finnish education consists of early childhood education, basic education, upper secondary education, higher education and adult education, it is considered a public service today (Niemi et al., 2016). Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) (2019) demonstrated how the system works by Figure 1.

Finnish educational system functions without tuition fees, and subsidised meals and teaching materials are regularly offered to full-time students. To have an educational infrastructure that is devoid of so called “dead-ends”, is one of the aims of Finnish education system (Niemi, Toom, & Kallioniemi, 2012). As we could see from the arrows in the figure, even choosing different educational path, it can all lead to a higher level. “High-quality education based on equal opportunity has played a key role in the success story of Finnish society” (CBR, 2010, p.9). The leading principle for school education in Finland is equality (Sahlberg, 2021). With farsighted planning and smooth implementation, Finnish education system has been solidly infrastructured, and other countries consider Finnish education system as a study model (Haarmann, 2016).

Figure 1

Finnish Education System (MOEC 2019)



Different stages of Finnish education development along Finnish history have been identified by different scholars. Risku (2014) has divided it into four important stages: Prior to 1944, during this period the famous “Finnish Folk School” which is well known nowadays as a basic school for all children was established; Until 1917, attending basic education became a compulsory regulation in Finland. Education was a luxury for a certain number of people, not everyone could attend school. Parallel education was supposed to maintain a class society; 1944 - 1980, achieve social justice through a centralised, norm-based and system-oriented administration was the goal during this period. When education was a tool to produce labour for the society, comprehensive schools started, when people had the equal right to go to get educated, education started to be regarded as the way to achieve social justice; 1980 - 2011, preserving social justice and developing local autonomy have been the

new goals. With the progression of society, the purpose of education proceeds, nowadays the public pays more attention to individualistic values, as a result, education starts to serve the purpose of actualizing personal value (Risku, 2014; Niemi et al., 2016; Sahlberg, 2021).

Education policies as a future roadmap, must be connected to where it is now and where it has come from (Taysum & Iqbal, 2012, p.13). Policies are mostly made to meet the challenges which are encountered in society. Through the glimpse of Finnish education history, it is not hard to find that education has been evolved all the time, and Finns have managed to adapt, to change, to care for equity and to marry past and future, while maintaining traditions and ensuring quality of education outcomes (Hargreaves et al., 2007, p.32). Along Finnish education history, “education has created prosperity, safeguarded democracy and evened out differences between regions and social classes” (CBR, 2010, p.9). The Finnish successful educational reform cannot be separated from Finnish social and economic reform, which is regarded as one of Finland’s lessons for other nations (Hargreaves et al., 2007).

1.2 Highlights of Finnish Education

Finnish education showed high-level results in PISA 2000, 2003, 2006 and 2009, which has gained Finnish education a very high reputation around the globe. The “miraculous results” made foreign researchers, decision makers and individuals admire Finnish education ever since (Niemi, Toom, & Kallioniemi, 2012). What is so special of Finnish education that makes it stand out in the world? Leading researchers of Finnish PISA team, Välijärvi et al. (2007, p.52) concluded the Finnish success in PISA and some reasons behind it as below:

Finland’s high achievement seems to be attributable to a whole network of interrelated factors, in which students’ own areas of interest and leisure activities, the learning opportunities provided by schools, parental support and involvement as well as social and cultural contexts of learning and of the entire education system combine with each other.

In order to have a better understanding of Finnish education’s success, Simola (2014, p. 209-210) demonstrated two remarks in his book *The Finnish education*

Mystery. (1) An authoritarian, obedient and collectivist mentality. (2) The relatively high status of teachers. Simola stated that something archaic, authoritarian, and even eastern in Finnish culture and mentality which permeates the Finnish schooling culture; Finnish teachers are trusted by the general public, political and economic elites, which is not the same case in many other countries. In the eyes of Simola, these two aspects are identifiable in the success story of Finnish schooling.

The education system, the highly competent teachers and the autonomy given to schools are the three criteria highlighted by the Finnish Ministry of Education as they are responsible for the success of Finnish schooling (MOEC, 2019). Again, in 2020 MOEC summarised seven special features of Finnish education system to further explain the Finnish secret: (1) The positive attitude towards education in Finnish society. (2) Highly educated and strongly committed teachers. (3) Only the core curricula are designed for nationwide application. (4) Individual support for pupils' learning and wellbeing has been paid attention to. (5) Multi-professional cooperation in order to further improve Finnish schools. (6) The nature of the evaluation of learning outcomes at schools is encouraging and supportive. (7) High quality and efficient library system (MOEC, 2020).

From the views of different scholars and the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, in accounting for the Finnish education success, two aspects have been repeatedly mentioned. They are Finnish society and mentality, and Finnish teachers. Education moves the society forward, it needs the participation and contribution from every societal role. Society creates this positive attitude towards education and professionals, while at the same time Finnish teacher has been seen as citizen model with high ethical standard, and transmitting knowledge is their mission (Simola, 2014). Teachers' higher academic qualifications have enabled schools to play an increasingly active role in curriculum planning, evaluating education outcomes, and leading overall school improvement (Sahlberg, 2021, p.223). Those elements in Finnish society and mentality which are expressed by the term Finnishness (section 1.4) will be

explored to see how they affect Finnish education and the education export in this paper.

1.3 Education Export in Finland

Education export is to sell education as a product abroad. The concept of education export is quite easy to understand, “education” and “export” can be explained respectively. In this term, education has been regarded as a commodity, a product triggering “big business” (Coate et al., 2001). Export here refers to the product being sold to another country than the country of production origin. Education as a commodity has a longstanding tradition in the international market, for instance tuition fee-based universities around the globe which gain revenue compared to those public funded schools (Schatz, 2015).

Education export combines different industries, it is considered as part of the global service economy (MOEC, 2010). Students who would like to stand out on the global job market have the demand on education export service (Lenn, 2002). Based on the international student flow data, the European Higher Education Area utilizes the factors such as language, historical ties, geographical distance, bilateral relationships and political framework conditions as key determinants for mobility (OECD, 2019). At the same time, the education export market is highly competitive among English speaking countries (Carrington et al., 2007). The active and main players in this sector are mostly those English-speaking countries, such as the US, England and Australia. They have been promoting their education system since the colonisation. Within these countries, education export services are mostly transnational higher education services. Lenn(2002) categorized international student recruitment, branch-campus, distance-education programs, and international corporate courses into transnational higher education services. Transnational higher education services alone, OECD countries attract 75% students studying abroad, 50% foreign students from the world received by Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States together (MOEC, 2010). Transnational education is shaped to be capitalised so as to bring revenue to both educational institutions and national economies (Schatz, 2015). From a long-term perspective,

enrolling international students not only can increase revenues from higher education, but also it can recruit highly skilled immigrants for the destination country from a broader strategy (OECD, 2013).

Among these main education export players, educational services are mostly pre-established (business) models that have also been called “Western models” by critics. These models have been mostly created and developed in Western contexts, to some extent when exporting these educational approaches people are making assumptions about their superiority (Whitehead, 2016). By exporting these educational products, it is also commercially exporting their standards, the overall cohesion of local education systems might be disrupted, especially if the local educational ecosystems work in isolation or incoherent, thus, it shall be done with caution (Reinikka et al, 2018). Meanwhile, there are also voices from supporters of educational export, “successful” education models spread throughout the globe is to educate global citizens and develop the “human capital”, to benefit mankind equally (Spring, 2009). As these models already exist, in a way they are more cost-effective and can be easily commercialised to customers (Reinikka et al, 2018).

In the past decades, many international organizations have compared education performance of different nations and published comparative information, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The comparative information they provided not only displayed differences and stimulated changes in education policies of different countries, but also initiated an “era of international competition” (as cited in Schatz, Popovic & Dervin, 2017, p.174). For example, Finland ranked high in international student assessment (PISA) for several years, as a result Finnish education gained quite a lot of international attention. This brought a positive image and reputation to Finnish educational system, Finnish government at the same time grasped the opportunity to capitalise it (Schatz, Popovic & Dervin, 2017). Becoming “one of the world’s leading education-based economies” (MOEC, 2010, p. 5) was the aim of Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture in 2010, it stated that in 2030 Finland will be the problem-solver of the world, Finland offers the world better education and teachers.

In Finland, education export refers to “the internationalisation of higher (tertiary) education services, the export of primary education, secondary education, adult education and also other educational services such as exchange programs, consulting services and digital learning solutions are included” (MOEC, 2010, p. 7). Among Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences, training for trainers, study visits, intensive programmes, consultation, tailor-made degree, double-degree and degree upgrading education programs are the most important exporting products (Kitinoja, 2016, p.21). Shazts (2016) categorised Finnish education export into three main parts: (1) Exporting Finnish educational equipment to other countries (2) Exporting Finnish educational knowledge to other countries (3) Selling Finnish education know-how, degree programs or non-degree programs to other countries. When looking deeper into Finnish education export, PISA test shows that the success story of Finnish education is based on primary education (Schatz, 2016, p.17), while “Higher education institutions as engines of educational exportation.” (MOEC, 2010, p. 13) is one of the main strategies to achieve the national education export goal. It somehow shows that there is a conflict on positioning education exports within Finnish education system (Schatz, 2015). Due to Finnish history and high levels of regulation, the practical experience of commercial export Finnish education is relatively little (Halttunen & Kokko, 2016). During the past ten years, some of the education export strategies have altered, different sectors in the education field have reacted differently, and Finland is still far from being a leading player in the education export field (Schatz, 2015).

Schatz (2016) argued that Finnish education export cannot easily be comparable to education exporters, it is a unique case itself and therefore Finland doesn't have concrete examples to follow, and doesn't benefit much from others' experience. Finnish internationalisation advisory organisation, Team Finland identified that unlike those main education exporters who sell pre-established models, Finland is employing the education export strategy of building tailored services and products to suit local needs (as cited in Toivonen, 2020). As we could see, from a strategy level, Finnish education export differs from other education exporters'. The elements which affect Finnish way of education exportation, and

with which how the Finnish education exportation has been influenced will be explored in this paper.

1.4 Finnishness from a Cultural Context

Finnishness describes the quality of being Finnish. The origin of the names formed on the base Finn - are as mysterious. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the term used for Finnish was Finnic, since the latter half of the 18th century, Finnish has been used as an adjective (Barnhart 2002, p384). The concept of Finnishness is also quite easy to understand, "ness" as the suffix putting after Finnish represents the state and the quality of being Finnish. Finnishness, similar to how foreigners carry images about Finns, implies a collective body of Finnish people's features, which explains the features of being a Finn. "Finns" which refers to the inhabitants of Finland by foreigners are borrowed terms (Haarmann, 2016, p86). Names are crystallizing the focus of identity, for both personal and collective names.

In the Highlights of Finnish education (section 1.2), we mentioned Finnish society and mentality is one of the two most important elements which are accounting of Finnish education success. Term "Finnishness" is chosen because it puts the Finnish features into a broader social and cultural context. According to Hofstede, culture is the collective programming of the mind distinguishing groups from each other. "Finnishness" is such a term that describes the inside of the collective body of Finns, of which Finns are living with it but might not realize it. At the same time, Finnish values and views manifested in their products, in their services (Haarmann, 2016). By conceptualizing Finnishness, it will be beneficial for Finnish educators, exporters as well as Finnish educational customers. Therefore, dive deeper under the surface of Finnish education, recognising the Finnishness inside of it, inside those exportable educational products is meaningful.

In the CBR 2010, the direction of Finnishness has been set as: functionality, nature and education. Meanwhile it also states that Finnishness supports the lack of hierarchical structure. "The Finns, to foreigners coming from the emotive cultures, seem 'closed' and often withdrawn. They are suspicious of melodrama,

which confuses them, and secretly believe that people showing this disposition are untrustworthy. They admire coolness and calm judgement" (Swallow 2011, p63). Law abiding, trust in authority (schools included), commitment to one's social group, awareness of one's social status, social position and the patriotic spirit are the traditional social values of Finnish people, according to Richard Lewis (2005) who studied Finnish culture closely (as cited in Sahlberg, 2021, p.198). In every stereotype, there is a bit of truth, through the collective body, some of the salient features of Finnishness has been analysed by Haarmann in his book *Morden Finland* at 2016 as below:

Introvert. Finnish shyness and humbleness might be perceived as closed by foreigners. In an international survey, Finland was noted among the most introvert countries in the world. At the same time, a small nation like Finland is acting as an important player in international economics and politics. The Introverted power of Finnish individuals might be the secret of the collective success of Finnish competitiveness in the world. There is a natural intelligence concerning Finnish people's behaviour, they have the tendency to use humour, use self-doubt to put themselves back to their 'place' (Swallow 2011, p104). Finnish weirdness of mocking and laughing at themselves which is seen as Finnish black humour becomes one important feature of being a Finn. For example, the world known book *Finnish Nightmares* demonstrates these Finnish features. This Finnish introvert power leads to a pragmatic mindset, which is a quality that shows up in practically all domains of life in Finland. Examples which could be found in Finnish life: the techniques of contrasting houses, the heating systems inside the houses, Finnish political arena... etc.

Trust. The Finns are known for being trustworthy and reliable, trust is what holds the Finns and their society together. In Finland, words have a greater weight than in many other cultures. Finns take words seriously, they mean what they say and they keep their promises. Finns have a saying about equality in business conduct without the pressures of corruption, "fair play" is the Finnish standard which values the most. A handshake, as confirmation of an agreement among business partners, is worth more than hundreds of pages of contract (Haarmann, 2016, p4). Meanwhile, trust professionals (including teachers) and

trust public institutions (including schools) is relatively high in Finnish society (Niemi et al., 2016, p.48).

Environmental mindset. Finns are forest people at heart. They are surrounded by nature and forests cover 72 percent of the land. Finns have the passion and willingness to make the planet a better place to live for themselves also for the next generation. The Finnish climate, nature and geography, to a large extent, has shaped the Finnish mindset (Swallow 2011, p.63). This Finnish mindset has the attitude and relationship towards nature, which indicates that human beings need to comply with nature's conditions, technology advancement shall be in line with the consciousness of the natural life circle, in historical industrialized society as well as in the network society of our information age (Haarmann, 2016, p.91). At the same time, climate conditions are much harder in northern Europe than in central Europe. All living beings have to endure extreme temperature changes, ranging from periods of hard frost in a long winter to sudden heat in a short summer. Those survived, overcame hardship and continued to cultivate plants, learning from bad experience and focusing on improvements of agricultural techniques. These are the people who pressed forward and advanced economic development. This also represent Finnish *Sisu*, the typical Finnish mixture of guts and resilience (Haarmann, 2016, p.93).

Communitarian Spirit, it describes terms i.e. 'common good', 'solidarity' and 'subsidiarity' (Etzioni, 1995; Giddens, 1998). Early manifestations of communitarianism among the Finns were economic associations that were established by villagers to benefit from common fishing grounds and village owned land and forest areas (Haarmann, 2016, p.108). The communitarian spirit exists in different aspects in modern Finnish society which includes Finnish education, e.g. Finnish education requires Finnish teachers to be active citizens, to constantly refresh their professional skills, and at the same time to cooperate with parents and other stakeholders (Niemi et al., 2016). Sahlberg (2021) stated that collaboration and teamwork are more typically characteristic of Finnish nation.

1.5 Research Questions

With the belief that Finnish education can be beneficial for other people. The overall aim of this paper is to identify Finnishness inside of Finnish education products and exporters' mindset, the result of this study can be utilised in Finnish educational exportation planning and delivering, thus to promote Finnish education. To fulfil the aim of this thesis, collecting Finnish education exporters' insights on Finnishness and Finnish education exportation is critical, as these education exporters are educational experts in Finland and they are the agents of Finnish education. Following research questions are formulated to achieve the purpose of this study:

- (1) What is the "Finnishness" that current education exporters are promoting?
- (2) How Finnishness is exported in current education export activities?

2. RESEARCH METHODS

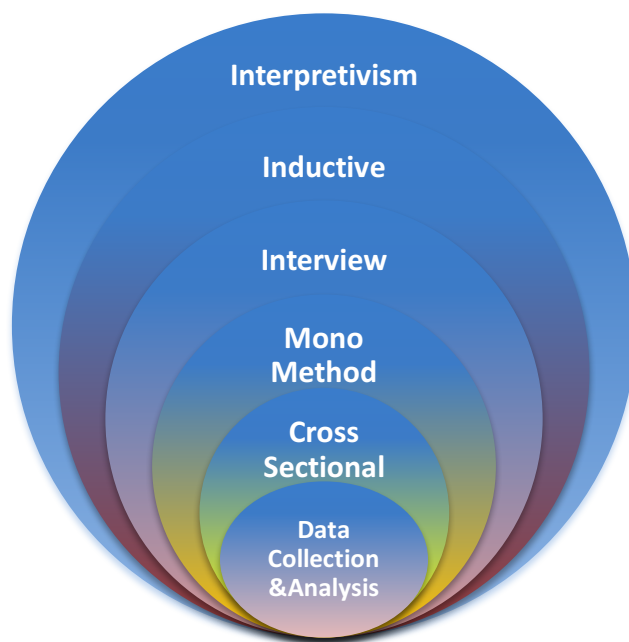
Good research provides opportunities for transformation, good qualitative research provides the understanding to the world, to the society, and its institutions (Tracy, 2013, p.5). Qualitative methodology investigates culture, society and behaviour, provides knowledge on societal issues, questions, or problems in order to serves humankind (Hogan, et al., 2009; Tracy, 2013). This paper is qualitative research, based on interviewing the current Finnish education exporters from different sectors - through public education organizations to private educational companies. This Chapter presents the methodological approaches of this article. It starts by the research context and the participants, then highlights the data collection process, followed by data analysis and ethical solution of this study. Data collection of this study includes studying website material and conducting interviews. Inductive qualitative content analysis is used in data analyses.

2.1 Research Context and the Participants

A research onion has been designed for this study - Figure 2, which was followed by Saunders' (2012) research onion. Bryman (2012) noted that research

philosophy is the fundamental sets of beliefs concerning the nature of the reality which describes how research will be undertaken. This research aimed to promote Finnish education, it is on an epistemological level. Epistemology includes positivism, realism and interpretivism (Bryman, 2012), this study interpreted educators' expertise on Finnish education, and it analysed Finnish educators' perception on Finnishness. Based on the limited existing literature on Finnishness and education export, the study itself determines it's a data driven study, thus it was designed to be inductive, more focus was put on the data collection and the data analysis. Interview was chosen to be the research strategy in this study, as interview provides in depth information concerning specific phenomena, and it examines patterns between informants (Flick, 2011). Choosing to use a mono method means one data type - either qualitative or quantitative (Saunders et al., 2012), in this study a qualitative method was chosen. The main data source comes through interviews in this study. The interviewees were the experts in Finnish education export field, they were invited for a short time study, they also were involved in the interview just for a certain period of time rather than a longitudinal study, this decided the research was a cross-sectional study. The main data collection technique of this study was a semi structured interview, and inductive content analysis was implemented in this study.

Figure 2
Research Onion Framework of this study



As the research topic is focused on the education export area, the potential participants were identified through a wide selection of all the educational organisations which are conducting education export activities in Finland. Most of these selected organizations are pioneers in the education export field, the potential participants are either the CEO of the company or the principle / head of the organization who has experience in education and education export. There were 10 potential participants chosen initially, after the discussion with the supervisor and also some of the participants' recommended certain experts in their field, the researcher chose 8 education organizations' representatives to have the further research on in the end. The selected participants are either Finnish by nationality, or they have been living in Finland for decades. They are

experienced, and have been practising education for quite many years. It is reasoned that they are the experts on Finnish education and Finnish education export.

2.2 Data Collection

This research is designed to be a qualitative study. To collect data for this research, several steps were followed. The study began by exploring the initial literature review focusing on education in Finland with its history and characteristics, and then export of education as focus areas. The topic of Finnishness in Finnish education export appears to be both theoretically and empirically unstructured, which led the author to use the exploratory research design in the first part of the empirical enquiry. Online research which includes websites of the potential interviewed companies, product and service description related to education export, news, reports and articles were involved. The objective was to better understand the current situation of education export in Finland and the core “Finnish quality” behind Finnish education.

The second phase of the study, also the main data collection technique of this study, was a semi structured interview, which is to explore the opinions of those education exporters. Valid and reliable data which is relevant to the research questions and the objectives can be obtained from interview (Patton, 2002; Robson, 2002; Bengtsson, 2016). Semi-structured interview, is often regarded as a non-standardised interview and is used in qualitative research to gather data, to find out what is happening, and at the same time to seek new insights (Robson, 2002). It allows the researcher to cover a series of themes and questions during the process, though it may vary from case to case. Interviewees might use their words / expressions differently, the research has the opportunity to “probe” the meaning of the data, and also has the opportunity to add depth and value to the data (Saunders et al., 2012). However, researchers’ awareness regarding the manner when they are interacting with the interviewees is needed, because it might have an impact on the data they are collecting (Silverman, 2007).

Interview questions were developed by the researcher in order to answer the research question. Questions for the interview (Appendix 1) were framed

after thorough literature review on Finnish education, Finnish education history and education export. They were coded to match the research questions of this study, so it was clear for the researcher that certain interview questions could lead to answering certain research questions of the study. Furthermore, the interview questions were reordered to make the interview itself in a natural Q&A flow, so that the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee would not be abrupt. Apart from the difficulty of designing the interview questions, the length of time required for the interview was also under consideration. In the end, there are 13 questions formulated to be used for the research interview to obtain data, meanwhile each individual interview was designed to be completed in approximately 1 hour. The interview questions were the same to all participants.

“The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Prior to the interview, the Letter of Intention (Appendix 2) upon the research interview which exhibits the research aim, research questions, the form and length of the interview was sent to all the participants by email. Interview questions were not mentioned to the participants by intention, so that all the participants can have a general idea about the research in a way not to provide prepared answers during the interview. At the same time, they were able to schedule their time to participate in this research accordingly. Luckily, all these 8 participants replied to the email and expressed the interest of joining the research.

The researcher served as the instrument of data collection in this study, mistakes, personal bias could be taken, but flexibility also was implemented (Merriam, 1998). Before the interview, the researcher had all the verbal consent of audio recording the interview. All qualitative research deals with some interpretation (Bengtsson, 2016), in order to stimulate better answers and have a good conversation flow, during the interview, the researcher also observed the interviewees’ reactions towards particular questions. The sequence of the questions asked might be modified depending on the flow of the conversation between the researcher and the participants, as during the interview the aim of the researcher is to obtain the data, so enable the participants to answer all the

interview questions freely and have an open discussion during / at the end of the interview is very important. Meantime, the researcher took down notes as much as she can as a backup in case the technology fails, and also for the convenience of the transcription later on. All the transcriptions were carried out right after the interview, so that the researcher still has a fresh memory of the conversation during the interview, also in case the participants would like to see the transcription to have a further adjustment or add on some new information. Each interview took approximately between 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15mins, the longest interview was 1 hour and 30minutes.

Under the pandemic situation, all the participants accepted to be interviewed through an online platform at a most convenient time for them. Eight semi structured online interviews scheduled with each participant who accepted to be part of this study were conducted through the meeting platform Zoom. The researcher had an in-depth conversation with each participant to generate the understanding on Finnishness and Finnish education export. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using English as the research language.

2.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a step by step procedure, the aim of the procedure is to make some sense from collected data sets, in order to do so, along which patterns, themes and categories need to be identified (Hitchcock & Hughes, 2002). Qualitative data analysis procedures include deductive and inductive approaches, ranging from responses' categorisation to identifying the relationships between different categories; it allows the researcher to develop theory from the data (Saunders et al., 2012). When the existing theory of or research literature on certain phenomena is limited an inductive approach can be applied. This study is an inductive type, a data driven study, it gets direct data from the interview with those participants, the data of this study includes 8 interviews that described above. Data analysis of this study begins with the transcription of these interviews. Content analysis was chosen as the analytical method in this study, as it is one of the most widely used analytical methods, it

describes data in a rich detail. Content analysis is an analysis method aims to provide new insights, knowledge and guidelines, it can produce replicable and valid inferences based on the description of the data collected (Krippendorff, 1980). It allows the researcher to have a better understanding from the data and abstract content related categories from the mass texts (Cavanagh, 1997).

The transcript data were analysed by the researcher in English, interesting features were noted, different categories and patterns were searched. After the “open coding process” (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), four main categories on Finnishness in exporting Finnish education were identified initially: (1) Identification of “Finnish Education” (2) Finnishness Mindset (3) Exporting Finnishness and (4) Challenges of exporting Finnishness. Qualitative content analysis can be proceeded in two levels: manifest analysis or latent analysis. In order to identify underlying meanings in the data, researcher served as an instrument in this study, thus latent analysis was adopted (Bengtsson, 2016). Instead of focusing on the surface meaning of the data, the themes were defined from an interpretive level, examining underlying ideas, making assumptions, and seeking to identify the reasons for the meanings of the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) have been included in the analysing process. Further analysis under the four categories were taken action, after reviewing the codes, the deeper relationship between different codes and themes were recognized.

Figure 3
Data Analysis Process of this study

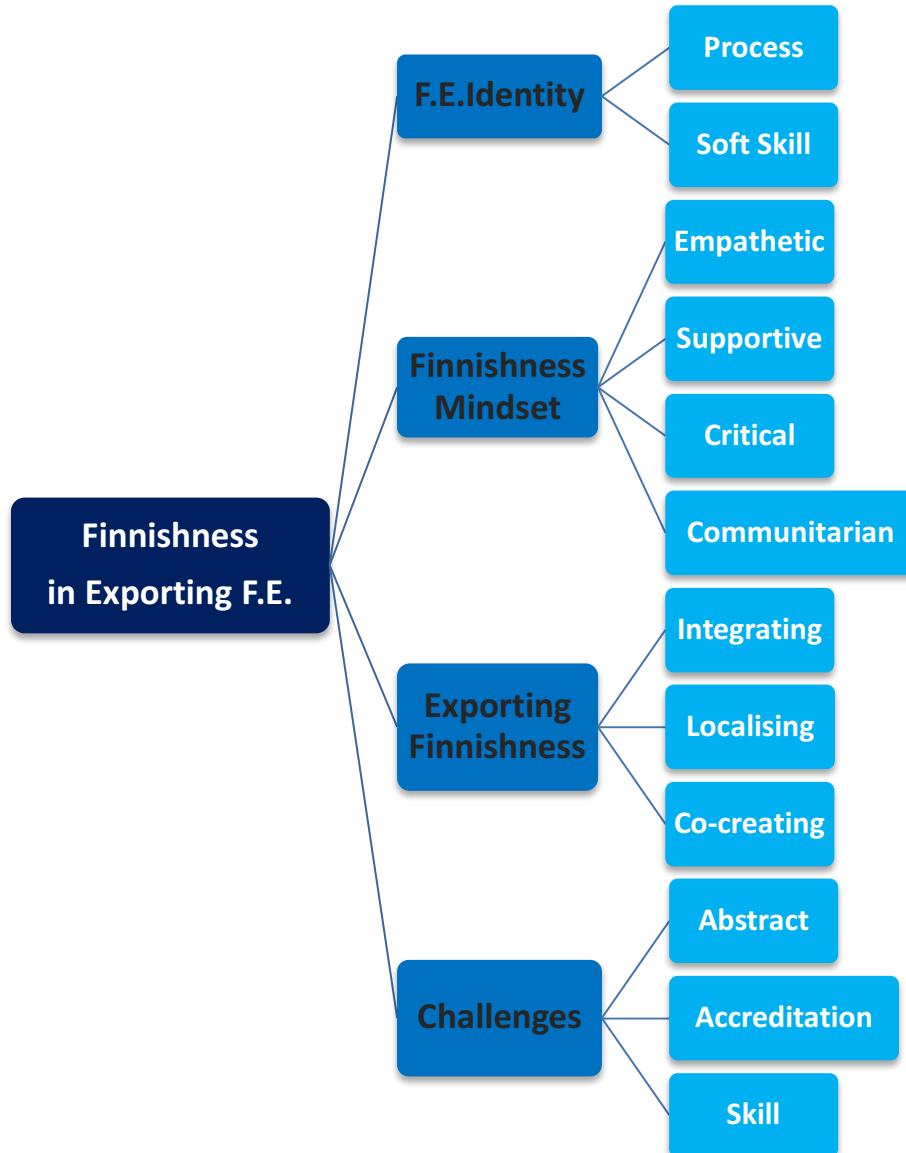


Figure 3 exhibits the analysis process of this study. It starts with the four main categories which were identified initially. Then followed by those themes under each category. The category of 'Finnish Education's identity' included the theme 'process' and 'soft skill'. Under the category of Finnishness Mindset there are four themes: Empathetic, Supportive, Critical and Communitarian. The category How Finnishness has been exported encompassed theme integrating, localizing and

co-creating which fit different education exporting stages accordingly. Themes such as abstract, accreditation and skills were under the category of challenges of exporting Finnish education.

2.4 Ethical Solutions

The responsible conduct of research (JYU, 2020) was followed throughout the whole research process. In every research work, ethical consideration on scientific writing and referencing shall be taken into consideration. All the material which is not originally mine have been acknowledged or cited in this study. In a qualitative research, data collection and the presentation of findings are most likely arise ethical problems (Merriam, 1998). During the research process, all the interview questions were designed by the researcher, consulted with the supervisor. Interviews were carried out within two months, all the interviewees are Finnish educators, who are involved in the education export field. Participants of the study were contacted through email, written consent of the participation was made with each of them. The research aim, research questions, the form and the length of the interview were described into a detailed letter of intention (Appendix 2) which was sent to all the interviewees respectively. During each interview, verbal consent of audio recording the interview was made between the researcher and the interviewees. Participants' privacy was protected, only the supervisor of the researcher and the researcher herself had access to the research data.

3. FINDINGS

Findings are presented following the inductive content analysis approach. This study was trying to find out the Finnishness these Finnish educators are promoting when they export education, and how the Finnishness is in the current exportable product. Four main parts have been found after the analysis process. (1) Finnish education's identity - How Finnish educators identify Finnish education. (2) Thematization of Finnishness - What makes Finnish education Finnish. (3) How has Finnishness been exported? (4) The challenges of exporting Finnish education will be exhibited in this chapter.

3.1 Finnish Education's Identity

Finnish educators are the ones who are practicing Finnish education, who are at the frontlines of exporting it, they are adding meanings to Finnish education, creating characteristics to it. When discussing Finnish education, Finnishness and Finnish education export, educators frequently described how they perceive Finnish education. Table 1 below demonstrates how Finnish education experts identify Finnish Education. Terms on the right side of the column are frequently used by Finnish educators when being asked to describe Finnish education during the interview. Terms in bold are the ones mentioned more frequently than others.

Table 1
Finnish Education Identity

"Finnish Education"	
(In the eyes of Finnish education experts.)	Value based curriculum, focus on value instead of skills. Focus on soft skills. Learn how to learn as a long-lasting result. Special/Unique/Different/New Open-ended, flexible. No standard tests, they do have other assessments. PISA result/ High reputation Is a process. Special support.

Interview revealed that Finnish educators are confident and proud of their education system, however not rooting for it is the best education system in the world, yet they are open to share their experiences with the whole world. "Finnish education is more like a process" as several interviewees stated, it requires cooperation among the whole society, which also includes the participation of parents, teachers and students. When discussing the interview questions about the most charming part and the biggest selling point of Finnish

education, Finnish educators shared more or less similar opinions: Instead of a skill-based curriculum, Finnish education has a value-based curriculum, there are no standard tests, it is open-ended. At the same time, it has its own assessment based on the trust of their professionals. Finnish education can be flexible, and most importantly it's evolving all the time.

When discussing the interview question how Finnish education differentiates itself from others as a product? Education exporters agreed that Finnish education is not an elite education, it does not try to compete with others education systems, nor does Finnish students, they do not try to compete with each other at school. Values of being a functioning human being with the soft skills which would support any individual personnel's life long journey are focused in Finnish education. In the eyes of Finnish educators, learning how to learn is way more important than what to learn in life. Individual student-centred approach is rooted in Finnish education, special support is everywhere whenever it's needed.

3.2 The Finnishness Mindset

The majority of Finnish educators who were interviewed in this research had not heard the term - "Finnishness" directly, instead, terms like Finnish mentality, Finnish philosophy, Finnish way, Finnish approach, Finnish pedagogy, Finnish cooperation way, and Finnish assessment have been used by these educators during their education activities, they would consider "Finnishness" is more like an umbrella term which covers those phrases they have used above. During the interview, phrases above were repeated by these interviewed education exporters. In the end, four themes on Finnishness were identified after analysing all the transcript data. They are Empathetic, Supportive, Critical and Communitarian.

3.2.1 Empathetic

Being empathetic towards oneself, towards other beings is the fundamental element of Finnishness. Self-acceptance and the principle that all human beings are equal, is the foundation of this empathetic attitude. Respecting every individual being is the norm in Finnish society. During the interview, educators

described that whether you are a young student or an experienced professor, at school, everyone is equal beings who just play different roles, as Finland is a non-hierarchical society. When working with children or students, Finnish educators tend to accept kids as kids, and try to put themselves into students'/ kids' shoes. One interviewed educators specified beautifully as

“We have empathy towards children, we see things through their eyes.” (P2)

Finnish educators also revealed one of the important factors of this attitude is that mistakes are allowed, people make mistakes and it is accepted, this is extended to the whole Finnish society. With this, at school or education organizations, students can express themselves freely, they are not afraid that they would be judged, they are allowed to make mistakes, that's how they learn. It's safe for teachers to make mistakes too, so that they can practise their pedagogy, do their own experiments. The statement below illustrates Finnish educators' empathetic attitude towards students/young children:

“Students are allowed to make mistakes, to express themselves freely.” (P3)

Under Finnish education system, “academic life allows a child to be a child” (P8). Unlike other cultures which prioritise chasing success/being the best that matters the most in one's life, Finnish students' well-being were more concerned, consequently, they are more stressed free students (Walker, 2017). Though Finnish education has a high international reputation, Finnish educators never felt their education system is superior to other countries' (section 3.1). This phenomenon also indicates the confidence of Finn as a nation, only those confident ones who can see other beings as equals. This empathetic mindset among Finnish society is on account for education, which will be discussed in more detail in the discussion.

3.2.2 Supportive

Based on the interviews, being supportive is one of the most important factors which makes Finnish education Finnish. It is one of the fundamental attitudes among Finnish society and community. When being asked to define Finnishness, one participant said, “It is the attitude we have towards people and things” (P6). When diving deeper into this “attitude”, being supportive has been revealed.

Finnish educators believe that there is a supportive culture among Finnish society which makes the society function well. One Finnish educator explained the supportive culture as below:

“We have the support from the whole society, the education culture, for example day-care, library, reading culture, maternity culture, the support culture.” (P4)

In the education sector, students get support. Student-centred approach, learner-centred approach, student-centred individualized approach was repeated by the Finnish educators participating in the current study. Instead of setting up an authoritarian role which students have to follow, Finnish teachers know their position deeply, which is to support the students, students are the centre of the school. Being supportive is also one of the features that the MOEC (2020) demonstrated in Finnish education: “a great deal of attention is paid to individual support for pupils’ learning and wellbeing”; Teachers get support too. Finnish teachers are highly appreciated and trusted in the society, teacher training programs highly support teachers in their later on careers, therefore, Finnish teachers are well trained and confident. The comment below sums Finnish educators’ confidence and the supportive mindset among the society:

“We are not alone, society, consortium, teachers, parents and students are all working together to find solutions.” (P3)

Both students and teachers are supported, which creates a harmonious atmosphere at school, thus teacher-student’s relationship was described as the “classroom climate” (P5) which also is the key to Finnish education success by several interviewed educators.

3.2.3 Critical

In the eyes of interviewed Finnish educators, one of the goals of Finnish education is “to train critical thinkers” (P8). Finnish educators are critical thinkers themselves, they implement this mindset in their teaching practice. When discussing Finnish education and education exports, Finnish educators have the tendency of asking “why”: why do we educate, why do students go to school, why do teachers teach? What is the purpose of education? By asking these questions, Finnish educators were trying to stimulate better answers at the same

time. With the critical attitude, when being asked about the challenges of Finnish education export, they did the self-questioning and answering again (section 3.4). Below statements are the examples to demonstrate the critical mindset in Finnish education by two interviewed Finnish educators:

“We need to ask, why do we go to school? To communicate, to interact, to learn how to learn, to have critical thinking, to do group work and to do self-assessment. From teachers’ point of view, we create better learners.” (P5)

“We need to constantly ask ourselves, what is the purpose of education? I think the purpose of education is to pass values, pass beliefs and culture, to support and develop the existing culture.” (P8)

Critical mindset enables Finnish educators to analyse their own position, to understand education deeply. In Finnish education identity section (3.1), we mentioned that during the interview most Finnish educators showed great confidence towards Finnish education, one of the reasons for that is “Finnish education is research based” (P6), as one participant specifically explained. Evidence based, scientific proofed education allows Finnish curriculum base on values rather than skills. Based on the interview, Finnish education exporters tended to agree that learning how to learn is way more important in the lifelong learning process, soft skills show great importance in individual life management, one interviewee demonstrated: “Finnish curriculum is based on values rather than skills. Learn how to learn is more important than what to learn.” (P8) It seems in Finnish Education, educators are convinced that the method of how to teach is more decisive for success than paying too much attention to an overcrowded package of data (Haarmann, 2016, p.156).

3.2.4 Communitarian

Interviews also showed that communitarian spirit is another element which makes Finnish education Finnish. The communitarian element in education is interrelated with the supportive element. In Finland, education is not only schools’ responsibility, educators are not all alone. Government and stakeholders value education, teachers who have been given enough autonomy, students have been supported, parents are also involved along the educating process, all these

towards a collective good - better education. Below statements illustrate the communitarian spirit in Finnish education by two interviewed educators.

“Education is the collaboration of stakeholders, families, government and children...”. (P1)

“We are not alone, society, consortium, teachers, parents and students are all working together to find solutions.” (P3)

Interviews also revealed that the communitarian spirit is toward certain visions of Finnish education. When being asked the message that “Finnish education” want to send to their customers, several participants indicated the vision of Finnish education in the global stage:

“I guess we have the ambition to make an impact through education, to promote democracy, to promote gender equality.” (P1)

“We want to co-create democracy with other nations.” (P8)

These statements indicated that a small nation like Finland would also like to make an impact in the world through education, maybe not alone but together with other nations. And how the communitarian spirit developed along Finnish education history will be further discussed in the discussion section.

3.3 How Finnishness is Exported

Again, when discussing Finnish education’s identity (3.1), Finnish educators showed their confidence towards Finnish education during the interviews. They were proud of the Finnish education system, they believed Finnish Education means quality, however with the modesty not assuming it is the best education system in the world. Finnish educators are open to share their experiences with other nations. In the eyes of these interviewed Finnish educators, Finnish education is constantly evolving, instead of a certain standardization, Finnish education is more like an evolving process, “Finnish Education” as a brand stands for quality, authenticity and uniqueness. When exporting Finnish education, Finnishness mindsets concerning integrating, localising and co-creating were found at different stages of exporting activities, such as, at the stage of planning, productising and at the delivering process.

At the stage of planning Finnish education export Finnish education exporters identified their situation critically. Based on the interviews, education exporters demonstrated that they lack business skills, personnel with productising, marketing and branding skills are needed in this field; They agreed they would like to have education export as a long-term business, which meant that more researches need to be done on Finnish education, more investment is needed in Finnish education, so as to keep Finland in the leading position in global education. Different resources such as human resources, fund resources and research resources need to be integrated and implemented at the planning stage of Finnish education exportation. Comments below revealed these perspectives by several interviewed educators:

“We need to recruit the right personnel with business backgrounds to make things happen.” (P5)

“We need to invest on Finnish education, to do more research on Finnish education, in this way to keep us in a leading position in education.” (P2)

“More funds and capital shall be invested on marketing and brand building.” (P7)

Productising Finnish education is frequently mentioned by these educators, they suggested that products like individual short courses, professional study modules and degree programs could be included in exportable products. When exporting education programs and products, Finnish educators showed their empathetic and supportive attitude towards other education systems, they focused on adapting rather than changing the local education system, as it covered in section 3.2.1 and 3.2.2. Interviews revealed that Finnish educators are humble, they are proud of their own education but they do not try to disapprove or change the local education program or system. Instead, in order to serve the local education system, Finnish educators went forward to make Finnish education products adapting to the local situation. Comments below are two examples which demonstrate Finnish educators’ empathetic and supportive attitude towards exporting Finnish education:

“I guess we have this Finnish mentality, we are more focused on adapting than change.” (P2)

“We would like to combine the local heritage.” (P3)

When delivering Finnish education export, supportive and communitarian mindsets were recognised. Co-design education programs/products with the clients and localizing products for the customers, combining the local heritage, supporting the customer to solve the problem are the key factors to keep a long run business from those education exporters’ point of view. Terms like co-design, co-create were mentioned frequently by them, most importantly, there is the “common good” they would like to achieve through the co-creation process. Democracy, gender equality was the common good in eyes of those interviewed education exporters. The statements below illustrate this aspect in Finnish education export by two Finnish educators:

“I think we want to develop education with other countries, to co-create democracy through education.” (P7)

“When we export Finnish education, we want it to be long term, when we leave the country/place, the local authority and local teachers can take over.” (P6)

Interview also revealed that Finnish educators didn’t treat education export as a business only, they genuinely wanted the receiving countries and organizations to benefit from Finnish education and would be able to perform well even when they leave the country of destination. Localizing and co-creating the educational products are interconnected, they can be found at both productising and delivering stages of Finnish education export activities, depends on the exact product.

3.4 Challenges of Exporting Finnish Education

Along with Finnishness and how it has been exported, interview also revealed Finnish educators’ opinions on the challenges of Finnish education export. Aspects on abstract, accreditation and lack of business skills were found.

The World Happiness Report announced that Finland is the happiest country in the world, PISA test result... brought a lot of international attention to Finnish education, it also gained Finnish education a large number of potential customers. Unlike other education exporters who are selling pre-established models with their own standards, Finnish educators agreed that Finnish

education characteristics such as no strict standards, value-based curriculum, no standard test and their own assessment...makes Finnish education quite abstract, which results in hard to productise Finnish education. Comments like “there is no clear product to export” (P7), “What are we selling?” (P3) were repeated by many participants. At the same time, with all the international attention, parents and educators from other nations have higher expectations from Finnish education which once again is not a “quick recipe”, educating customers is also one of the challenges of education export in Finland.

Based on the interview data, “Finnish education” has been regarded as a brand, however there is no official accreditation system to keep this brand authentic. Education exporters were concerned that anyone could claim their product is “Finnish education”. Brand protection is needed from the authority level, emphasised by one interviewed educator. Education exporters agreed that more research needs to be done on Finnish education, more investment is needed in Finnish education, so as to keep Finland in the leading position in global education, to keep this brand image.

Lack of business skills is what educators have identified in themselves during education export practice, marketing and branding is needed in this field. Education export is quite competitive in the international market, as the main players are those English-speaking countries with their pre-established models to sell. While, sales negotiation is kind of weak point for Finns, agreed by most interviewed educators, thus in this sector, Finns are a bit passive; Several interviewed educators emphasised that education as a product has its uniqueness, it takes time for the customer to see the result, using one participant’s words, “the changes brought by purchasing Finnish education products are tangible, it takes longer time to show” (P8). This also makes it challenging to export, because to those customers who do not have the patience to develop education together, they imagined by purchasing Finnish education, they would get the “magic powder” to their problems.

Along with the challenges of exporting Finnish education, when being asked what can be improved in the education export sector, suggestions were also given by Finnish educators: products like short individual courses,

professional study modules, degree programs and teacher training programs can be the exportable products. Finnish schools can be the showcase for international customers who are interested in building up Finnish schools overseas; Call for financial and human resources investment on Finnish education, so as to keep Finland at the leading position in the education field. More personnel with business background shall be engaged in this sector, so to market and brand “Finnish education”; Accreditation systems from Finnish ministry level are needed, so to protect “Finnish education” as a brand; Language localization and local heritage shall be considered when exporting Finnish education products.

4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed at discovering the Finnishness that current Finnish education exporters and providers are promoting and How Finnishness is exported in current education export activities? It is a qualitative research which was carried out in Finland. In order to minimise any bias of the researcher’s own influence, the researchers’ self-reflection is essential and has been taken into consideration in both research planning and analysing process (Burnard, 1995; Long & Johnson, 2000; Elo et al., 2014). “How can Finnishness be described?” is the question which was constantly being asked throughout the whole research process. Finnishness is a very interesting term, at the same time it is an abstract term. How can such a term be studied without ending up with reproducing similar research like the secret of Finnish education, the essence of Finnish education? This question has been kept in mind by the researcher, critical reflection has taken place along the whole research process, content analysis was implemented to search for patterns and categories from those Finnish education experts’ mindset, which led us to Finnishness in the end. Four themes on Finnishness mindset: Empathetic, Supportive, Critical and Communitarian were identified from Finnish education exporters’ view, and they have impact on Finnish education exports through at different stages of exporting. Finnishness in exporting Finnish education is more about the “Finnish way” of carrying out education export, with its own challenges as well.

Not only the results responding to the two research questions were found, but also the Finnish education's identity from those education exporters' perspective and the challenges of exporting Finnish education were found along the analysis process, which were presented in section 3. Finnish education exporters in this study can be regarded as professional agency, their prospection on Finnish education's identity indicates that "Finnish education" as a brand, as a national identity has been constantly practiced and negotiated by them (Eteläpelto et al., 2013), and this is a crucial step for a better performance of education export in Finland as a whole; Recognition of the challenges of exporting Finnish education itself from those interviewed education exporters demonstrated this critical mindset in Finnishness, which will be discussed more in below theme critical.

**What is the "Finnishness" that current education exporters are promoting?
And how Finnishness is exported in current education export activities?**

Theme *Empathetic*, provides the fundamental element of Finnishness mindset, we could find the roots of empathetic in the Trust culture (section 1.4), it is the Finnish truthfulness and openness which leads to equality (Haarmann, 2016). Equality and equity have been repeatedly mentioned as one of the secrets of Finnish education's success by different scholars (Niemi et al., 2016; Sahlberg, 2021). But the philosophy behind this hasn't been noticed earlier. Acceptance towards oneself and others makes Finnish educators more empathetic. In education, successful teacher education candidates must also possess "moral purpose for the teaching profession, positive personalities, excellent interpersonal skills, and a commitment to work as a teacher in school" (Sahlberg, 2021, p.134). In other words, teacher education supports teachers' to be high-quality professionals at work (Niemi et al., 2016), they respect others, they take students, parents as well as their clients as equal beings. When encountered with others, instead of forcing others to accept and follow their "rules", they embrace diversity, try to make the best out of differences. Meanwhile, highly educated persons from different fields share the same mentality which leads to an ecosystem of being empathetic in Finnish society. When practising education

export, Finland is employing the education export strategy which is built on tailored services and products to suit local needs (as cited in Toivonen, 2020). This is rooted in Finnish education itself, on the basis of national core curricula, Finnish local authority and their schools can write their own curricula, local needs can be taken into account in this curriculum (Niemi et al., 2016). When exporting Finnish education, instead of assuming it is superior and setting up standard rules, Finnish educators accept other education systems, they try their best to localise their products, combining the local heritage.

Theme *Supportive* shows one of the most important elements among Finnish society. From the societal point of view, Finland is a non-hierarchical country, being practical to get things done is one of the Finnish philosophies. The collaboration among different roles in the society makes it function well. We could originate the supportive element from environmental mindset (section 1.4), all human beings shall comply with nature which leads to the sustainable mentality (Haarmann, 2016). When applied to Finnish education, there is a multi-professional student care group in each school, which includes the principal, teachers, special needs teachers, social workers and nurses (Niemi et al., 2016). Pupils who fall behind the level of learning are given remedial teaching and additional support to catch up with their classmates (Haarmann, 2016, p.155). Finnish educators implement this supportive mindset in education exportation. When exporting Finnish education, Finnish educators do their best to support the local education system and local teachers, so that when the “exporting project” is complete, the local authority and teachers can take over immediately. This mentality is quite opposite from those selling pre-established educational models, which requires following the ‘western standard’ completely. Hence in the eyes of these interviewed Finnish education exporters, education export is not a business only, but a co-creating process.

Theme *Critical* is another element of Finnishness. Culturally critical can be related to Introvert (section 1.4), it was regarded that Finnish introvert power which is a natural intelligence concerning Finns’ behaviour, self-questioning and self-doubting were included (Swallow, 2011; Haarmann, 2016). Training critical thinkers is one of the goals in Finnish education, said by the interviewed

education exporters. Finnish educators are critical thinkers themselves, in Finnish education, it is considered vital that Finnish teachers' critical scientific literacy and the ability to use research methods (Niemi et al., 2016). Thus, when practising education, Finnish educators tend to ask questions a lot, questions not only to others but also to themselves: Why do teachers teach? Why do students learn? Why do we go to school? What is the purpose of education? Philosopher Ibn Gabirol once said "A wise man's question contains half the answer." Answers were given by Finnish educators themselves too and most importantly they practised their principles in their working lives - to pass values and beliefs, to support and develop the existing culture through education is their aim of education, working with the students, practising individualised student-centred approach is the way to achieve their goal. They "walk the talk" as one interviewee said. Meanwhile, being critical allows them to analyse their own "weakness" - marketing and branding skills, they stated that personnel who have more marketing skills are needed in Finnish education export field. They are longing for support - an accreditation system from ministry level is needed so to protect the brand "Finnish education", call for more investment and more research on Finnish education so as to keep Finland at the leading position on education. Integrating human resources, fund resources and research resources is needed at the planning stage of education exportation, so to keep a long-term business.

Theme *Communitarian* plays a unique role in Finnishness, which we also mentioned in the cultural context (section 1.4). After World War Two, education was regarded as a process to heal the wounds of the past, and most importantly to guide all Finnish people out of ignorance and poverty for a collective good (Andreotti et al., 2015). As society develops, the function of education evolves too (Andreotti et al., 2015; Niemi et al., 2016; Risku, 2016; Sahlberg, 2021). When the basic needs which were to get people out of poverty have been satisfied, the focus of education from a national level shifts into an international level, Finnish education is trying to form its own identity in the modern world, to promote democracy, equality, gender equality and to make a voice in the globe. Finns, as a nation of modest people, they never intended to be the best in education

(Sahlberg, 2021). Finnish educators tend to think education is the collaboration among stakeholders, families, government, parents, children...Each role involves and makes a contribution to move education forward for the collective good. This mentality in education could be traced to the popular saying "it takes a village to raise a child." Communitarian mindset exhibits in Finnish education export activities, as these Finnish educators in this study demonstrated they always invited their clients to co-create, co-design with them during the exportation process, together to promote democracy as several exporters mentioned. Giroux (1997) stated that democracy itself is a utopian project for a public good. This 'public good' extended from Finnish society to the international community when practising education exportation. Besides democracy, Finnish education exporters would also like to promote gender equality, to make an impact, and most importantly to develop education together with other nations.

Finnish education exporters in this study identified Finnish education as an evolving process which provides soft skills for learners. Finnishness describes the quality of being Finnish, four themes of Finnishness: Empathetic, Supportive, Critical and Communitarian were recognised in Finnish education and its exportation. Finnishness mindset makes Finnish education a unique existence in the world, and makes the exportation of it somewhat non-conventional. The Finnishness in exporting Finnish education is more about the Finnish way of carrying out educational export. With Finnishness mindset, Finnish education export focuses more on localising the educational products, combining the local heritage and co-creating education with the customer, thus the productising and delivering process is different yet challenging compared to other education exporters. Abstract product, no accreditation system and lack of business skills are considered as challenges of exporting Finnish education. Finnish education export is still at an early exploring stage, Finnish educators shall work together to define what is "Finnish Education", and shall collaborate with other international educators to discover the best way to export Finnish education.

Reliability

This study provides some perspectives on Finnishness mindset and how it is in Finnish educational exportation activities. Finnishness is rooted in Finnish culture, by understanding Finnishness, the international education communities could take a deeper look under Finnish education when it comes to revealing the “Finnish recipe”. Meanwhile, it can be beneficial for education exporters and its customers in the future education export activities.

The value of research is to create understanding and meaning, while reliability and validity are fundamental to a scientific research inquiry (Patton, 2002; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Tracy, 2013). Literature on Finnish education export and Finnish education policies in English is relatively limited compared to those in Finnish language. Which requires a larger and wider amount of reading of primary and secondary literature data from the researcher. All interviews were conducted in English, while English is neither my mother tongue nor the first language in Finland, there is possibility that the understanding might be blurred from both sides. How well the data address the focus of the research determines the credibility of the research (Polit & Beck, 2012). This research focused on examining Finnishness in Finnish education export, the data collection design limited that only Finnish education exporters were chosen and only their perspectives were analysed in this study, not all aspects have been covered in this study. One of the common features which support a research’s trustworthiness is reporting the content analysis accurately (Elo et al., 2014), a step by step inductive content analysis was covered in section 2.3.

Finnishness in education exportation is a very interesting phenomenon to study. In the future, more research could be done from more diverse perspectives, such as from the perspective of Finnish education exports’ customers - those who receive Finnish education as products, and other international education experts, their perspective on Finnishness and Finnish education. More comprehensive research could be done on how to combine Finnishness with education exportation, so that the brand “Finnish education” can be more identified in the world, thus to make it easier to productise and export Finnish education.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Research Questions	Interview Questions
<p>A. What is the “Finnishness” that current education exporters/providers are promoting?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What brings you to the Education export field? 2. How do you position your organization in education export? 3. Have you ever heard and used the term “Finnishness”? Where and how? 4. How would you define “Finnishness” from an educational perspective? 5. What do you think customers want to buy when they buy education from Finland or your products? 6. In your opinion, what kind of message customers think/assume is included in Finnish education / your product?

B. How Finnishness is inside the current exportable education products?

7. Can we always offer those products that the customer wants? Why? / Why not?
8. What do you think is the biggest “selling point” of the education product that you are offering?
9. What do you think is the most charming part of Finnish education?
10. How do you differentiate Finnish education as a product from other education products from those mainstream education industrialized countries?
11. *What kind of message we want to send / we are sending now to the customers by (branding) “Finnish Education”?*
12. In your opinion, what are the challenges of selling Finnish education?
13. What can be improved in Finnish education as a product so that we could do better in education export?

Appendix 2

Letter of Intention of research interview

Dear **,

Hope this email finds you had a lovely summer!

My name is Mengsi, a master student from Jyvaskyla university, educational science program. Originally from China, having been living, studying and working in Finland for a while.

With all my gratitude towards Finnish education which has shaped who I am, I am conducting a qualitative research on the topic of "The Finnishness in exporting Finnish education". Aim of my research is to promote Finnish education. I believe that Finnishness is everywhere inside the national identity, therefore also in Finnish education. It is important that we identify the Finnishness inside the education which could be beneficial to export, to promote Finnish education in the end.

My research questions are:

- 1) What is the "Finnishness" that current education exporters/providers are promoting?
- 2) How Finnishness is inside the current exportable education products?

The interview consists of 12-13 questions from my side, we could have an open discussion for each question or at the end of the interview. The whole interview takes approximately 1 hour.

I am writing this to kindly ask if you could spare some of your valuable time to participate in my interview? As you are the expert of Finnish education and education export, your opinion is very valuable for this research. As much as I would like to invite you to meet in person over a coffee, but Covid-19 has changed almost everyone's life, would it be okay for you that we conduct this interview through zoom at your most convenient time slot in the coming two weeks?

Your reply would be greatly appreciated! & Kiitos!

BRs

Mengsi