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# **Obstacles to Job Market Integration for International Students in Finland**

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**ABSTRACT:**

The inclusion of international students in Finland labour market is a challenge, which is not going away even after the national campaign of attracting international talents to the country by offering English-based higher education programs. This study discusses the issue of international students and new graduates searching a job in the Finnish labour market, which is considered to be an energy technology and innovation-oriented area.

In spite of the fact that national strategies of Finland focus on internationalization and retention of talents, there is a gap between the desires of Finland and the fulfilment of international degree graduates in the sphere of employment. The data collected in this qualitative research paper is obtained via the use of semi-structured questionnaire with ten international students and graduates at the University of Finnish labour market and other institutions located in the area. The three theories interrelate in that the study is influenced by the following theoretical frameworks to develop: Human Capital Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Psychological Contract Theory. These models are used to analyse the way skills, networks, expectations and perceived obligations affect the Finnish labour market employability of international students. Results indicate that the barriers to labour market integration are numerous with the Finnish language skills, a shortage of professional contacts, and the absence of local working experience. Cultural adjustment problems and implicit biases of the recruitment practices create particularly problems as well. Although the participants are well educated and exposed to the global world views, such advantages are usually neglected when local and cultural barriers come into play, which narrow their opportunities to get employment. This paradox explains why high levels of investments of education and skills do not yield in finding employment in the Finnish labour market.

The paper is on the fact that the process of integration needs to be coordinated at various levels, which includes universities, employers, and policymakers. Among the recommendations are the improvements of language training, betterment of the career placement services, better networking opportunities in the universities, as well as encouraging the employers to employ more inclusive methods of recruitment. The regional stakeholders are also encouraged to intensify retention programs to empower the international graduates. The paper can be applied in the discussion about employability, migration, and higher education in that it provides information on what international graduates are facing in the Finnish labour market.

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**KEYWORDS:** International Students, Higher Education, Employability, Labor Market Integration, Finnish labour market

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## Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIMO	Centre for International Mobility
CIO	Chief Information Officer
CV	Curriculum Vitae
EU	European Union
F2F	Face to Face
FLE	Finnish Language Environment
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GIS	Geographic Information System
HCT	Human Capital Theory
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HR	Human Resources
IB	International Business
IG	International Graduates
IM	Industrial Management
IS	International Students
IT	Information Technology
LM	Labour Market
OCED	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
P1–P9	Participant 1 to Participant 9
PCT	Psychological Contract Theory
RQs	Research Questions
SCM	Supply Chain Management
SCT	Social Capital Theory

An AI-based tool (*ChatGPT, Gemini*) was used in this study to support the brainstorming of the initial structure of the introduction and theoretical framework, as well as to assist with language refinement and improving the clarity and flow of the text. The tool was used solely as a supportive aid. All critical thinking, data analysis, interpretation of results, and final writing decisions remain the sole responsibility of the author.

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Background of the Study**

Within the recent years, Finland has established itself as one of the most desirable education destinations among international students, which is mostly explained by the high-quality education system, the good institutional image, and the friendly learning environment. International enrolments in the Finnish labour market and other Finnish tertiary institutions of higher learning have been on an upward trend owing to the English-based degree programmes meant to enhance international competence, innovation, and mobility of academic levels. Although these measures have enhanced internationalization of Universities in Finland, the issue of higher education being translated into the labour market has continued to be a challenge to a good number of international (Räty et al., 2020). This is especially noticeable in the Finnish labour market region, one of the biggest centres of energy technology, research and industrial partnerships where although the employed demand a high-quality and diversified workforce, the international graduates tend to experience a great amount of structural, linguistic and cultural barriers restricting their chances of employment.

The fact that the number of international graduates who are unable to find jobs on the completion of their studies is on the increase has raised a major concern among university, policy makers and employers. This dilemma has both personal and social consequences: international students open new opportunities to Finnish institutions in terms of cultural diversity, international perspectives, and specialised skills, but they are not used effectively in the labour market, and it weakens national policies regarding competence

maintenance and competitiveness in the region. Thus, there is an opportune need to investigate the things that impede the employability and integration of international students, in the labour market, in Finnish Labor market (OECD Economic Surveys, 2025).

The study is premised on semi-structured questionnaire on a sample of ten international students and recent graduates of the Finnish labour market and neighbouring institutions. The semi-structured questionnaire was in a form of questionnaire whereby the participants were given a chance to provide information on personal experience, challenges and perception of the job seeking process in detail. Their answers were informative on practical, cultural and psychological obstacles that affect the incorporation of labour markets.

Among the impediments that were detected by the participants were:

- (1) Finnish language specifications, which limited even entry-level jobs;
- (2) restricted professional and social contacts, which means that it is hard to find out about available positions or get referrals;
- (3) no Finnish work experience, which employers seemed to give preference even to foreign vacancies;
- (4) cultural adaption, such as lack of familiarity with the Finnish workplace norms and ways of communication;
- (5) implicit bias in recruitment practices, where some respondents received questions about their names, their accents or cultural backgrounds, or were undermined.

This study is theoretically based on three frameworks that are interconnected. The Human Capital Theory focuses on the role of education, skills and experience in improving employability, indicating that foreign graduates ought in principle to be competent in terms of what the Finnish employers demand (Souto-Otero & Białowolski, 2021). Social Capital Theory however holds that empathy of employability is also determined by social networks and informal channels of information, they are the areas where international students are usually less connected. The psychological Contract Theory also emphasizes the expectation and perceived obligation of the students, university and employers, as effects on motivation and career satisfaction. Collectively, the theoretical prisms can provide an overall picture of why the most highly educated and driven international graduates are still confronted with the obstacles in their integration into the Finnish labour market, especially in the Finnish labour market region (Xu et al., 2022).

## **1.2 Research Problem and Objectives**

The main issue that is discussed in the research is the low level of integration of international students and graduates into the Finnish labour market. Despite most of the international students obtaining the competent degrees and skills, they often face challenges in accessing jobs in Finland. Some of the challenges that have been noted in the past include language barrier, absence of professional network, inadequate work experience in the course of studies and inability to absorb the local workplace culture (Anttila, 2022). Nevertheless, qualitative studies to capture the real voices and personal experiences of the international graduates in this regard are still lacking. The published studies are inclined to use Interview or quantitative studies, which usually neglect the subjective and subtle aspects of employability and adaptation.

The thesis thus aims at bridging that gap by a qualitative interpretivist study that relies on semi-structured questionnaire. It is based on the lived experiences of international students studying in Finnish labour market to reveal how they perceive and negotiate the multiple challenges in their higher education to working life in Finland. The paper does not only point out individual issues, but also examines systemic issues that affect the outcomes of employability (Lu & Everson Härkälä, 2024).

Main research question: “What are the biggest barriers and what are the coping mechanism of International student integration into the Finnish labour market?”

The primary aims of the research are the following:

1. To identify the key challenges faced by international students in securing employment in the Finnish labour market after graduation.
2. To explore the individual and collective coping strategies.

### **1.3 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is divided into five major chapters. Chapter 2 on the review of the theoretical frameworks of Human and Social Capital in the Finnish labour market comes after the introduction. In chapter 3, the data collection approach is described with reference to the

qualitative methodology. Chapter 4 demonstrates findings and discussion of the questionnaire outcomes of the participants, and Chapter 5 addresses these results with references to the currently existing literature and presents various recommendations to stakeholders.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The importance of the regional analysis within the Finnish higher education sector is that it may contribute to academic knowledge and practical policy making related to the employability of international graduates in Finland. Academically, it expands the discourse on the issue of international students' integration by placing it on an interdisciplinary theoretical platform that connects the human capital, social capital, and psychological contract theories. When human capital theory describes why skills and education are relevant in the context of employability, social capital theory provides information on the significance of networks and relationships, and the psychological contract theory throws some light on the expectations and perceived fairness in the employment relationships. The intersection of these frameworks gives a detailed examination of how the structural and personal factors intersect to provide a comprehensive experience to international graduates (Alho, 2020).

Practically, this study would be beneficial to universities, employers, and regional development agencies. In the case of universities, it presents the areas where the institutions can enhance such as encouraging internships, language studies, and career advising. The findings will assist employers to learn how to attract and retain international talents by establishing inclusive recruitment and favourable workplace cultures. To policymakers, the implications can be used in talent retention programmes and also as part of national

strategies to enhance competitiveness in the nation by means of diversity and innovations (Lu & Everson Härkälä, 2024).

Finland, finding plenty of technological companies, energy corporations, and higher education facilities, provides a good background to analyse the issues of integration of international students and formulate the strategies that contribute to the further development of the region and the success of graduates.

## 2. Literature Review

The capability to incorporate global talent is one of the important metrics of the economic long-term strategy of Finland. With the population of the country experiencing demographic changes and the rising demand on the skilled workforce, the Finnish labour market is now the centre of attention on the experimental research concerning migration, employability, and social inclusion. The chapter puts the research in context by examining the available literature on the employment situation in Finland with specific attention to the so-called employability paradox according to which both high academic education and in-country graduates are not necessarily guaranteed profitable professions.

Traditionally, Finnish labour market has been distinguished with the high-trust and institutional stability, but the foreigners find it difficult to enter it because of its language peculiarities and unspoken culture (Nichols & Virsinger, 2021). Even though regional centres play a very important role in the national economy of any given country especially in the industry sector like energy and technology, the challenges to growth experienced in these centres simply represent structural bottlenecks within the national economy. Through the examination of the theories of Human Capital, Social Capital, and Psychological Contract, this review provides a paradigm through which the experience of international students in the Finnish host society in overcoming the complexity of the society can be understood. In the following section, the authors consider the role of language competence, professional contacts, and cultural acclimatization as the fundamental success determinants in this unique Nordic setting.

## **2.1 International Students**

The role of the international students within the world higher education system is increasingly getting significant as it introduces diversity in the academic areas, internationalisation and innovativeness in the host countries. In Finland, international student numbers have increased dramatically during the last ten years as a result of the proliferation of English-based degree programmes, as well as national policies that have sought to bring international talent to the country. These students will introduce different cultural orientations and expertise boosting the learning culture in Finnish universities.

Nevertheless, their path goes further than the academic achievements. Their post-graduation performance is very much determined by the extent to which they can assimilate socially, culturally and professionally into the host society. To others, the process of adapting to Finnish social norms, communication modes, and institutional arrangements is a continuous process that has direct implications on the employability and long-term settlement plans (Nshom et al., 2022).

## **2.2 Employability of International students**

Employability is not about finding a job but rather the ability to have sustainable careers because of having the skills, attributes, and versatility. According to Yorke, (2006), employability would be achieved by a combination of achievements, understandings, and personal attributes that render graduates more likely to attain and succeed in work.

The definition of employability for international students as a multifaceted concept extending beyond academic merit to include linguistic, cultural, and social integration is extensively explored in contemporary academic literature.

According to research by Pozdeeva, (2011) and Anttila, (2022), describes the employability of the international students in Finland as a complicated process of acquisition of the social and cultural capital and linguistic capital.. " Here, the academic credentials tend to be less significant when compared to four key situational variables namely: the need to adapt to local language (which in this case means acquisition of proficiency in either Finnish or Swedish language); capacity to absorb local professional and cultural norms, the growth of social and professional networks in the new country, and the success of the institutional sustenance of universities and government institutions. These research papers underscored the fact that, in the absence of these non-academic pieces, international graduates have a much steeper obstacle to labour market as opposed to their local counterparts.

The research carried out in Finland (Centre for International Mobility, 2016) repeatedly reveals that international graduates are less likely to be employed and also to move into the labour market than Finnish ones. This disparity identifies a structural mismatch between employer demands and university-level training, especially in areas like regional labour market where language, networks, and local experience are crucial to recruitment (Mezghani & Turki, 2025).

### **2.2.1 Barriers to Language Proficiency**

The most serious impediment to work is low proficiency in Finnish or Swedish. Several employers, even in global companies, give the local language proficiency in communication, customer service, and social integration the highest priority in the workplace Infoninland ,(2025).

#### **Overcoming Strategy:**

In order to address the hindrances to language proficiency in the Finnish labour market, the multi-faceted approach that will include higher education institutions, individual employers, and students will be necessary. Universities can ensure that this gap is overcome by having long-term and intensive Finnish language education as a straightforward part of degrees and not an optional elective, so that students can start learning it at the first semester (Anttila, 2022). In the case of employers, a dual-language approach where technical tasks are performed in English where Finnish is adopted very gradually can enable an organization to accommodate the introduction of an international talent and still maintain its existing productivity. Moreover, by matching these strategies with the principle of employability, such as cultivation of personal attributes and cultural adaptability, students see the opportunity to navigate the local market social and professional expectations better (Yorke, 2005). These interventions enable a more successful transition between academic study and pro-professional networks within the locality into future career success in Finland since language is no longer seen as a means of communicating but rather as an element of human capital required.

### **2.2.2 Absence of Finnish Work Experience**

Employers often give an opportunity to those applicants who have work experience in Finland. International students face hard times trying to get an internship or part-time job in the relevant field and this causes a vicious circle of not having an experience resulting to joblessness (Prospects, 2024).

#### **Overcoming Strategy:**

In order to defeat this lack of Finnish experience on the job, a multi-layered approach which considers student, university and employer, is needed to overcome the experience paradox. Systemically, universities need to step up the efforts to partner with industry players to more closely integrate work-based learning, including internships and project-based programs, into degree programs. Employers have been urged to practice inclusivity in recruitment such as structured trainee programs of international talent and the importance of the transferable global experience. On an individual basis, students need to pursue early local exposure, in the form of internships, volunteer experiences or part-time jobs, to attain the requisite professional experience and Finnish organization seal of approval. In addition, using university career services to provide employment-seeking expertise such as job-search training, Curriculum Vitae review and mentoring services can assist foreign candidates in adjusting their presentation of themselves to the standards of the job market and navigating the job market that is often hidden (Jackson, 2015).

### **2.2.3 Poor Professional and Social Networks**

The international students do not have as many people locally and their access to informal job information and referrals, which are key sources of information in the Finnish job market is limited (Infofinland, 2025).

#### **Overcoming Strategy:**

International students and graduates in the Finnish labour market with poor professional and social networks should apply a multi-level approach (targeting the development of local social capital) to overcome barriers. At a personal level, one of the best strategies is to do form specific targeted networking, utilizing tools such as LinkedIn, attending industry specific career fairs, or joining local professional communities (via Slack or technical meetups) to access the so-called hidden job market, where much of the work is done via informal referrals. Internships and volunteering roles are also suggested to the students in order to receive the so-called social proof and local references, which is valued by Finnish employers as one of the methods of checking the work attitude and cultural compatibility. Systemically, universities are suggested to fill this gap by providing work-based learning as part of degree courses and reserve cross-cultural mentoring programs where students are linked directly to industry players (Letnar & Širok, 2025).

### **2.2.4 Problems of cultural adaptation**

Vähäsarja, (2024) suggests that although more companies in Finland have become willing to hire international talent, most of these people, though attracted by the access to open positions in Finland, do not adapt very easily to the specifics of Finnish work culture due

to what the expert calls the unspoken thereof, as well as the professional culture that tends to favour the native ways of speaking and networking traditions.

### **Overcoming Strategy:**

In order to address the issues of cultural adaptation in the Finnish labour market, international graduates have to employ a method of cultural influencing, by proactively matching their professional practices with ideals of the local market. Studies have shown that the workplace culture in Finland is low-contextual, has high autonomy and highly cherishes the culture of Sisu or strong self-reliance (Lewis, 2006). Thus, applicants must take the initiative and attend specialized career guidance services and Finnicized CV consultancies to transform their presentation styles to be more modest and fact-oriented like the Finnish recruiters. Moreover, colleges can fill this by providing cross-cultural mentorship trainings and pre-hire orientation programmes that explicitly decipher the invisible workplace rules, including punctuality and flat hierarchies that are based on trust (Saunders, 2023).

### **2.2.5 Unconscious Prejudice and Racism.**

Other international graduates state having experienced minor types of discrimination based on nationality, name, accent, or cultural differences, which have an impact on the hiring process (Negassa, 2015).

**Overcoming Strategy:**

In order to break the ceiling of unconscious prejudice and racism within the Finnish labour market, there is a need to transition towards structural transparency and non-discriminatory hiring policies. There are indications that name-based based discrimination and the desire to employ cultural homogeneity tend to sift out qualified international applicants even prior to the interviewing process (Ahmad, 2011). In response to this, the employers are advised to have anonymous recruitment processes where applicant personalities (name, gender, and nationality) are eliminated on applications to allow screening decisions to be based on merit. Moreover, the HR professionals in the organizations need to be trained in diversity and inclusion on a mandatory basis, in order to notice and cancel out the implicit biases in the hiring processes. On the systemic level, encouraging a national discourse on making international talent an essential investment to the overall economic sustainability of Finland would contribute to the shift in understanding of foreign-born employees as an outsider to the innovation ecosystem to an essential pillar of it (OECD Economic Surveys, 2025).

**2.2.6 Inadequate Institutional Support**

There is a tendency that career services in most universities are not always customized to meet the special needs of international students (Khushboo, 2025).

**Overcoming Strategy:**

To handle the issues connected to the cultural adjustments in the Finnish labour market, foreign applicants have to engage in efforts to comprehend the existing local work standards and the values in the workplace. Individual strategies that can work well involve

befriending the other culture of Finnish that is known as unspoken culture that places more focus on modesty, self-reliance, punctuality and their trust-based and low-context communication style. University career services and specialized job-search training promote candidates to fill out their self-presentation by acculturating CVs and interview etiquette to local standards. Systemically, universities and employers can work together to overcome the cultural barrier by introducing cross-cultural mentoring programs, cultural training to employees and pre-employment orientation programs that clearly spells out expectations of the employees at workplace. Besides, the blanketing of various and inclusive hiring activities (e.g., anonymous applications), is a way of overcoming implicit bias and to create an environment in which foreign talent can easier integrate itself (Tomlinson, 2017).

## **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

When combined, two distinct theoretical perspectives offer a clear means of comprehending the intricate process of labour market integration. These hypotheses will serve as a framework for this investigation.

### **2.3.1 Human Capital Theory**

Relationship between education and employability is explained under the Human Capital Theory which is the foundation theory of education and employability (Leoni, 2025). The theory assumes that, people invest in education and skill formation in order to become productive and, therefore, increase their value in the labour market. In this view, international students are an important input to the Finnish economy because they learn advanced knowledge, language skills, and intercultural competencies in the course of their studies.

Their education is a kind of a capital build which is supposed to pay off in the form of employment (Sahlberg, 2007).

However, despite the fact that human capital theory predicts that the better one qualifies, the more he will get a better employment, the reality of international graduates contradicts that theory. It is worth noting that despite having the same or better educational qualifications, most international students have to contend with underemployment or joblessness. Management-based research has demonstrated that employability is not only determined by human capital but also by other types of capital like social, cultural, and identity capital and contextual and institutional factors that determine labour market outcomes. As an example, employers can undermine foreign qualification, favour local experience or the local language portion that is a constraint to the international graduates. This piece of evidence shows that human capital is not enough to ensure employment; instead, the transformation of education into useful employment is mediated by more extended institutional, social and cultural elements (Pham et al., 2024).

As an example, employers can underestimate foreign credentials or require a higher price on domestic experience and cultural understanding. In addition to that, soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and adaptability, are also important in recruitment. Such competencies usually tend to be culture-based and they might not be instantaneously identified or cross-border transferable. As such, the example of international students in Finland questions the generality of the human capital theory since it shows that local norms, labour policies, and employer perceptions are affecting the translation of education into employment opportunities (Lu & Everson Härkälä, 2024).

### 2.3.2 Social Capital Theory

Whereas the concept of human capital is concerned with the skills and knowledge of the individual, the Social Capital Theory focuses on the importance of relationships, trust and networks in unlocking information and opportunities (Szeman & Kaposy, 1986). When applied in the case of international graduates, social capital is observed in the form of social networks among other students, faculty, employers, and the local community. The networks are a significant connection to the Finnish labour market with informal networks such as personal referral, word-of-mouth and ethnic or professional contacts playing a critical role in passing job information and providing access to the immigrant workforce (Ahmad, 2011).

One of the greatest obstacles to employment among international graduates in Finland is the access to local social networks. Studies have shown that a good number of employment opportunities are filled by informal ways of recruitment e.g. internal referral, word of mouth etc. as opposed to the opportunities posted publicly. This is an inconvenience to international graduates who in most cases are not well versed with the Finnish language and have minimal access to the local professional networks. Consequently, even the most qualified ones can experience under-employment or struggle to find the related jobs. The findings of the (OECD Economic Surveys, 2025) show that language barriers and the lack of local relationships are still the critical structural challenges in the labour market integration in Finland.

The development of social capital needs to be culturally involved, life extracurricular, and interaction with local societies. Nonetheless, there are some institutional and structural

conditions preventing this process. Universities run the risk of separating international and domestic students whilst providing them with different programmes either in English or Finnish. In addition, temporary residential visas and unpredictable future performance in terms of post-graduation work opportunities deter long-term networking. The outcome is a disjointed social scene in which international students do not feel in touch with the Finnish labour market on either social or professional levels (Korhonen, 2014).

Social capital is especially essential in regional labour market, where the professional opportunities are consolidated in small interrelated industrial clusters. Social embeddedness is one of the most important employability in the energy and technology industries where many companies hire using their personal networks. Resolving how international students build up or do not build up these local ties gives crucial data on the employment performance (Dobryakova & Kotel'nikova, 2015).

### **2.3.3 Psychological Contract Theory**

The Psychological Contract Theory further explores this topic to the issue of expectations, obligation and perceived fairness between people and organisations (Rousseau, 1998). The psychological contract in this case pertains to the implicit assumptions that the international students make concerning the mutual relationship between the investment of education and the opportunities offered by the labour market in the host country. In the event that these expectations are not achieved e.g. the inability of international graduates to get jobs despite their high qualifications, then a perceived violation of the psychological contract is experienced (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

The expectations in the case of international students in Finland tend to develop before arrival because the universities are marketing their courses as the avenues to worldwide career prospects. Nevertheless, the process of education to employment does not necessarily go smooth. The limitations to international graduates include low proficiency in Finnish or Swedish language, scope of professional network, and discrepancy in recruitment practices. It has been shown empirically that these challenges may be a barrier towards effective labour market integration, thus being part of the problems that arise in getting employment that matches qualifications. Consequently, this can result in disappointment and can affect the motivation of graduates and their choice to stay in Finland because of this disappointment (OECD Economic Surveys, 2025).

The issue of psychological contracts also applies to employer-employee relationships where, the organisations usually have implicit expectations of the behaviour, communication styles, and attitudes towards the workplace, which may differ according to the cultural backgrounds. Modesty, independence, punctuality, and compliance with unspoken social rules are some of the values that are often stressed in Finnish workplaces, which are typical of low context communication and individualistic responsibility in the broader context (Lewis, 2006). In the case of international candidates who are not conversant with these expectations, there might be mismatch in the recruitment and integration at the workplace. The psychological contract theory, therefore, can be used to explain individual based misunderstandings as well as the structural based issues concerning employability, work place integration and international graduate retention in Finland.

### **2.3.4 Theoretical Frameworks Interconnection**

A combination of the human capital theory, social capital theory and psychological contract theory offers a holistic approach to the problem of employability of international students in Finland. The supply side is explained by human capital: students qualifications and competencies, the relational processes through which opportunities are realized are explained by the social capital, and the subjective experience and expectations which determine satisfaction and retention are captured by the psychological contract theory (Mathies & Karhunen, 2021).

These theories combine to show that employability is not a mere economic exchange, but it is a socially and psychologically entrenched process. The international students in the labour market is not solely based on the merit of the individual but on the extent to which they would cultivate a certain level of trust as local culture codes and harmonise their expectation on the employer (Tomlinson et al., 2022). This approach is multidimensional, which pre-determines the significance of the selection of a qualitative design, since it allows delving into the experienced reality of the participants and the contextual peculiarities of the real-life situation, which are often not reflected in structured quantitative questionnaires (Saunders et al., 2023).

## **2.4 Empirical Research on the Employment of International Students in Finland**

Empirical studies in Finland have continually emphasized systemic issues to international graduates. National talent retention efforts have not succeeded, with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment showing that less than fifty percent of foreign graduates

secure employment in Finland within one year after leaving school (Kwak, 2025). In a parallel manner, a study conducted by Fiset et al. (2023) revealed that despite the relevant technical abilities of international graduates, employers frequently use as a reason to reject them language-related factors and cultural fit.

The University of Vaasa has been involved in a number of studies concerning student employability including the research studies by Uni Talent Vaasa and Talent Coastline. These campaigns acknowledge that there must be increased partnership between higher education institutions and organisations, but there are still practical challenges. Though programmes are in place to connect students and internships, a lot of placements still demand fluent Finnish which creates a self-perpetuating cycle of exclusion since students cannot attain experience without language knowledge but cannot enhance language knowledge without experience in the workplace.

Recent qualitative research also shows that discrimination, either not only explicit but also implicit, remains fostered in the hiring practices (Lehtovaara & Jyrkinen, 2021). The international graduates have a feeling that their applications are automatically filtered out at the early stages because of non-Finnish names or language skills presumptions. Moreover, temporary residence status deprives them of opportunities to engage in career planning in the long run, which results in many moving to other countries in the EU after graduating. These findings are reflective of some of the obstacles that have been experienced in other settings where high educated international graduates find it difficult to get the right jobs despite their good academic qualifications (OECD Economic Surveys, 2022).

## **2.5 Conceptual Model**

The Conceptual Framework of the study can be used as an analytical tool of interpretation because it combines three key dimensions: Human Capital (including education, skills and competencies), Social Capital (including networks and cultural ties and community participation) and Psychological Contract (including perceptions of life and expectations and fairness). A combination of these factors is demonstrated to affect the different outcomes of employability among international graduates in Finland including good employment rates, underemployment and/or prolonged job seeking. This conceptual model offers a holistic approach to the complex process of labour market integration by emphasising on dynamic relationship between individual and structural conditions (Pham et al., 2024).

### **3. Methodology**

This chapter shows how this study will use a methodology in this research on the barriers of job market integration among international students in Finland. It gives the research design, research philosophy, the methods of data collection, recruitment of the participants, the methods of conducting the google form questionnaire, data analysis methods, ethical considerations, and the steps that were taken to ensure that the findings were trustworthy. Qualitative research paradigm is the guiding methodology as it focuses on the investigation of the meanings, experiences and social realities instead of the measurable results (Anttila, 2022).

Since the topic of the research is qualitative in nature, as the focus of the study is on personal experiences, cultural perceptions and the process of acculturation on an individual level, a qualitative approach was considered the most reasonable (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). The approach will allow gaining a better insight into perceptions and interpretations of international students regarding their employability issues in the Finnish labour market instead of focusing on statistical patterns. The design is based on an Anttila methodology (2022), which relied on semi-structured questionnaire to study the experience of international students in Finland in terms of their integration (Anttila, 2022). The current research builds upon that framework, and it involves theoretical contributions of human capital, social capital, and psychological contract theories, which were examined in Chapter 2.

### **3.1 Research Philosophy and Design**

The interpretivist research philosophy embraced in this study assumes that social phenomena are constructed as a result of the personal meanings and lived experiences of individuals. Unlike positivist methodologies which prioritize the use of objective measurement and quantification, interpretivism concentrates on the comprehension of human behaviour as both contextual, culturally constructed, and influenced by social relations. To this end, the subjective views of participants are prioritized in this study to understand their perceptions and interpretations of employability barriers alongside the social and institutional infrastructure that shapes their experiences (Saunders et al., 2023).

The research design type is qualitative, descriptive and exploratory. It will seek to identify patterns of patterns and themes of narratives by those who do not have a rigid set of hypotheses to follow. The research is also investigative and hence, will afford discretion to the new associations as they arise in the research data collection and analysis. This design is specifically very appropriate in a research context where there is limited previous qualitative information on job integration experiences of international graduates.

The qualitative questionnaire methodology is useful in catching intricate, situation-specific experiences that cannot be well quantified based on quantitative interview (Sithole, 2025). Equally, the current research is depth-oriented research rather than a breadth-oriented investigation because it entails limited cases of information richness and as compared to generalisation.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

The research design fits well in this study because it is qualitative; it involves using the inductive approach, which is imperative in exploring the complex and subjective experiences of international graduates. Sometimes referred to as the inductive method, in contrast to deductive reasoning which tries to test existing hypotheses, the inductive approach enables a bottom-up approach whereby the theory is formulated out of the data. Within the Finnish labour market, we find the approach highly useful since it helps the researcher to identify subtle impediments that may exist, such as implicit social norms or the invisible job market that may not be explained into strict and pre-established frameworks. The analysis of the research focuses on generalizations by collecting specific stories of the participants and drawing general patterns with the help of thematic analysis. This makes sure that the concluding findings on the paradox of employability shall be rooted in the actual reality of the Finnish host, which enable a greater appreciation of how social and human capital actually works in the context of the international talent in Finland.

As Nowell et al., (2017) point out, thematic analysis enhances qualitative research by facilitating a systematic and This is particularly helpful in management and organizational research, in the context of which complex, context-specific phenomena must be understood by using the means of eliciting the real perception of participants. The application of such an approach to international graduates in the Finnish labour market has allowed the study to reveal the subtle implications on employability such as non-formal networking practices and cultural demands that are not accommodated by the traditional theories. By repeatedly interacting with the data and developing themes it is through this consistent interaction with the data that the study will be able to make sure that its findings are based

on actual experiences and that there is a credible and subtle approach to understanding how social and human capital work within this specific context.

### **3.3 Data Collection Method**

The data collection methodology was a semi-structured questionnaire filled by the use of the Google Forms. The reason why this method was chosen is that it provides an opportunity to balance between structured responses and openness of participants. The questionnaire contained a series of major questions where some of the questions were open-ended questions that gave the participants the opportunity to expound on their experiences. This method helped to allow the participants to share their opinions, and at the same time address such main issues like language, work experience, networking, cultural adaptation and discrimination.

The questionnaire also relied on the previous research that offered a proven guideline on the investigation of integration experiences. It comprised of ten main questions in which the introductory questions were the background information followed by the reflective and evaluative questions. On February 2026, the questionnaire was given on Google Forms. The questionnaire could be filled in by the participants at their own convenience using the Internet. This was done in English which is the universal language of instruction and communication in the University of Vaasa.

The study invited ten participants due to time and accessibility limitations. The international students or new graduates of the University of Vaasa and the local institutions

formed the sample size. The respondents also had low response rate, however, to encourage the respondents further fill in the questionnaire, reminders were also sent to the respondent to respond within the stipulated time frame. Regardless of these limitations, the application of an available online data collection tool allowed obtaining useful qualitative data since even small, purposely chosen samples collected in convenient modes can still yield rich and quality information related to the research objectives (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

### **3.4 Participant Selection**

There was the application of a purposive sampling strategy in order to come up with a sample of most relevant participants to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria were:

1. Recent graduates (non-Finnish citizens) and international students who studied in Vaasa.
2. People who have partially experienced searching jobs in Finland.
3. Participants who were open and free to talk about their experiences in English

Purposive sampling also enables the researcher to concentrate on persons that will bring the greatest insight into the issue being analysed. The wide range of participants, who belonged to various nationalities, academic programmes and levels of work experience, assisted in the collection of a wide range of views and focus on the main research question. The profile of the invited participants (pseudonyms are taken to preserve identity) is illustrated in Table 1 below:

Participant	Gender	Nationality	Degree Programme	Field of Study	Employment Status
P1	Female	Nepal	Bachelor's Degree	Business	Job-seeking from 10 months
P2	Male	India	Master's Degree	Computer Science	Job seeking from 8 months
P3	Female	Bangladesh	Master's degree	Computer science	Job seeking from 6 months
P4	Male	Pakistan	Master's Degree	Business	Job seeking from 12 months
P5	Female	Vietnam	Master's degree	Business	Job seeking from 7 months
P6	Male	Philippines	Bachelor's degree	Engineering	Job seeking from 11 months.
P7	Female	Srilanka	Master's degree	Social Sciences	Job seeking from 9 months.
P8	Male	China	Master's degree	Hospitality management	Job seeking from 5 months.
P9	Female	South Korea	Bachelor's degree	Information Technology	Job seeking from 14 months.
P10	Male	Japan	Master's degree	Environmental Science	Job seeking from 4 months.

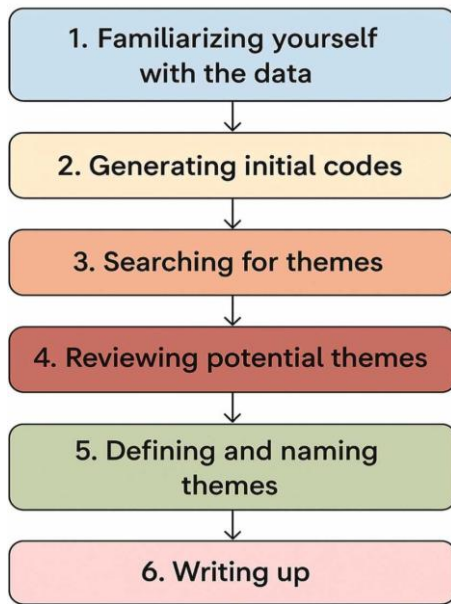
*Table 1: Participants of the research*

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, and it was performed based on the six phases model. This is an appropriate approach especially in the identification, analysis and interpretation of patterns of meaning of qualitative data. It specifically cites (Nowell et al., 2017) as the source of knowledge regarding the contribution of this approach to improving qualitative research by helping with its systematization. Also, the study notes that the general research design relies on the Anttila (2022) approach that, in the past, used a similar one to examine the assimilation of international students in Finland. The phases included:

- Data acquaintance by repetition of transcripts.
- Creating preliminary codes depending on repetitive words, concepts, and expressions.
- There is searching after more general themes, which embrace connotations.
- Revising and refining themes to make them coherent and differentiated.
- Defining and naming final themes.
- Creation of the report, synthesis of thematic with theoretical understanding.

The coding involved both the inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) coding (Bingham, 2021). The first codes were identified based on answers of the participants directly: language barrier, network gap, lack of Finnish experience and cultural mismatch. All these were then classified under larger themes that fitted into the conceptual framework:



### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

The issue of ethical integrity was very important during the research process. The University of Vaasa supervising department provided approval of the study. The participation was completely voluntary and the participants were allowed to withdraw at any point. Transcripts and reporting were done anonymously using pseudonyms and personal identifiers were eliminated.

The participants were told that their information will be utilized only with academic purposes and that the results will be presented in aggregate form. The ethical code of conduct of the University of Vaasa on research with human subjects was adhered to in all research activities, which followed the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

### 3.7 Research credibility

Trustworthiness is the substitute of the traditional tests of validity and reliability in qualitative research. Four criteria were used in this study based on the four criteria by Lincoln and Guba, (2016) credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

- Prolonged work with the data and careful transcription as well as member checking which implies the possibility of allowing the participants have the credibility.
- The transferability of the study was made easier, as comprehensive contextual notes were given regarding the Finish labour market.
- region and the background of the participants, giving the reader a chance to evaluate the applicability of the findings to the similar contexts.
- Reliability was also handled by using an audit trail which recorded all the steps of the research process with records of recruitment, and coding frameworks.
- Confirmability of the study was achieved by using reflexivity where the researcher kept on reflecting on his/her assumptions and possible bias and writing them down during the research process. Moreover, the transparency was ensured by ensuring clear documentation of the data collection and data analysis processes, and the creation of coding schemes.(Nowell et al., 2017).

These were the measures used to make the study methodologically transparent and the interpretations were based on the real experiences of the participants as opposed to the preconcepts of the researcher.

## 4. Analysis and Findings

The chapter gives the empirical findings that have been made based on the qualitative data on conducting structured questionnaires to a sample population of ten international students and graduates in Finland. This gave detailed written narrations of their own experiences, difficulties, and judgment towards the job seeking process in Finland. The results are examined in the Human Capital, Social Capital, and Psychological Contract theories in the context of the structural and personal factors which affect the employability.

### 4.1 Barriers in employment

The answers to the questionnaire brought out a number of challenges, which stand out as some of the obstacles that persist in frustrating integration of international talent into Finnish labour market.

#### 4.1.1 Language and Communication Interference

The greatest challenge is the language proficiency. Although many of the participants had high academic qualification and were fluent in the English language, they said that most of the employment opportunities, including technical opportunities do not demand fluency in the Finnish language.

*“Most employers demand candidates that are conversant with the Finnish language, particularly in local firms.”* – Participant 1

*“Many job advertisements demand fluency in Finnish, which greatly reduces my opportunities.”* – Participant 2

*“There is an absolute requirement of native-level Finnish competency in many fields.” –*

Participant 4

These reactions show that language acts as a structural obstacle and not just as a means of communication. It restricts the employment opportunities and diminishes the competitiveness of international graduates, despite having good academic and technical backgrounds. Moreover, the workplace integration is also affected by language expectations as the participants emphasized that in many organizations internal communication is conducted in the Finnish language. This strengthens the marginalization of non-Finnish speakers in formal and informal professional contacts, thus limiting their potential to be employed.

#### **4.1.2 Minimal Work Experience at the Local Level**

Another significant obstacle to employment was the absence of Finnish working experience. The respondents always noted that employers put more emphasis on applicants who have prior experience in the area even in entry-level jobs.

*“Most jobs demand previous work experience in Finland, which I do not have.”*

– Participant 2

*“Even junior positions require 2–3 years of experience in a Finnish working environment.”*

– Participant 3

*“My experience in my home country is considered irrelevant in the Finnish context.”* –

Participant 4

These results demonstrate that there is an experience paradox in which international graduates cannot be hired without some local experience, and cannot acquire this experience without hiring. This puts the international graduates in a structural drawback over the local applicants who will either have internships, part-time work or be conversant with Finnish working practice. Consequently, only the academic qualifications alone cannot guarantee successful labour market integration.

#### **4.1.3 Networking and Social Associations**

Networking and social associations were found to be a very important determinant of employability in the Finnish labour market. The results show access to informal networks and professional ties is a major factor in obtaining job opportunities. These reactions show that there exists a so-called hidden job market whereby vacancies are usually obtained through referrals, internal referrals and non-formal communications as opposed to formal advertisements.

*“I lack a decent professional network in Finland and thus lack any referral or even starting contacts.”* – Participant 1

*“Most vacancies are filled through word-of-mouth and informal discussions.”*

– Participant 8

*“Too many jobs are occupied through inner networks before they find their way to LinkedIn.”* – Participant 3

*“Internal company referrals can be much more effective than a cold application.”*

– Participant 6

*“The circles mentioned above are almost impenetrable to an international graduate.”*

– Participant 7

International graduates that do not have access to such networks therefore experience a great impediment in accessing the labour market. This marginalization is not a consequence of a deficiency of qualifications but a result of the lack of social capital to get the opportunities. These results are highly conducive to Social Capital Theory that highlights that relationships, trust, and networks are crucial factors of employability that go beyond personal skills and qualifications.

#### 4.1.4 Analysis of Human Capital

What human capital (in terms of skills, experience or qualifications) do you feel is the most essential?

Most of the participants, such as P5 and P9, probably saw “Language Proficiency” and “Local Work Experience” as the most important competencies of human capital.

"I feel that it is useful to have a degree from Finland, but the degree itself does not clear the doors without having experiences 100 per cent from Finland" (participant 5).

#### 4.1.5 Coping Mechanisms

Interpret the answers to "What are you doing to combat obstacles in the job market?"

Theme 1: Language Acquisition: Signing up for intensive studying of Finnish, outside of university classes.

Theme 2: Strategic Networking: Proactively engaging recruiters, such as in LinkedIn, or going to university career fairs, even if they did not think they were helpful.

Theme 3: Adjusting Expectations – Applying for jobs that are not just in their field in order to secure any local experience.

“To overcome the lack of networking,I have begun to join some local hobby clubs to get to know Finns and learn their informal-language” (Participant 10).

#### 4.1.6 Retention and Future Intentions

Interpret the information about participants' intentions to remain in Finland.

Findings: Talk about how the barriers have affected them – or how they are determined to stay. This relates directly to the research question that you have regarding retention.

“Although the hardship, I want to stay a minimum of two more years, the work-life balance here is great, but there are backup positions in Germany, too” - (Participant 9).

## **5. Discussion: Theoretical Integration and Labour Market Barriers.**

This part is a synthesis of the results in Chapter 4 with the theoretical concepts of Human Capital, Social Capital, and Psychological Contract theories to understand why labour market integration of international students in Finland has remained elusive. The discussion shows that structural and individual factors interacted to influence the outcome of employability, although students had excellent academic results, motivation and readiness to integrate (Lu and Everson Harkal, 2024).

All in all, the findings suggest that education alone does not determine labour market integration, but rather the complex interplay of skills, networks, institutional expectations, and labour market structures does.

### **5.1 The Employability Paradox and Human Capital.**

The results are a strong indicator of the existence of an employability paradox, with international students spending a lot of money on education and skills development, but failing to maximise their rewards in the Finnish labour market (Schiffer et al., 2026). This is in contrast to the conventional Human Capital Theory where the assumption is that an increase in education and skill levels inevitably results in a better employment outcome (Becker, 1964).

On the contrary, the data indicate that qualifications are not enough in the Finnish context. Rather, employability is conditioned by other localised obstacles, which generate a disconnect between human capital procured and what employers want (Cervantes and

Cooper, 2021). This is indicative of a larger paradox between expectations and reality in the labour markets.

A significant result is the demanualization of foreign human capital, where foreign qualifications and previous experience are frequently regarded as less important unless it fits in with Finnish working culture. This forms a structural obstacle in which the historical performance of students is not completely realised in the recruitment process.

### **5.1.1 The Experience Paradox**

One of the key consequences of the results is the experience paradox wherein employers insist on local work experience, and international graduates cannot secure entry-level jobs without local work experience (Kaymak and Cline, 2025). This forms a cyclical employment block and boosts labour market marginalisation.

Finnish-specific experience is in effect a restrictive demand that helps in excluding the first-time job seekers, though highly qualified graduates. Consequently, employability is not only reliant on education, but it also relies on past incorporation into the local labour market system.

### **5.1.2 Language as Core Human Capital.**

The results also show that language proficiency is a leading type of human capital in Finland. Not just in the communication, Finnish language skills work as a gatekeeping tool in the procedures of hiring (Bhar & Chua, 2025).

In those positions that do not require English as a functional language, it is common to prefer Finnish proficiency to the detriment of international graduates. This places the linguistic skill as a structural need but not an additional skill.

### **5.1.3 Soft Skills, Cultural Competence, and Local Knowledge.**

In addition to formal requirements, soft skills and cultural adjustment have a significant impact on employability such as teamwork, independence, and knowledge of the Finnish workplace culture (Heine, 2025). The results suggest that Finnish work culture highly values autonomy, flat structures, and proactive problem-solving, which might not be the same as the previous experiences of students.

Also, awareness of the local systems, professional norms and industry-specific policies also influence the employability outcomes. These results indicate that human capital needs to be viewed in a more expansive meaning comprising of behavioural and contextual competencies other than academic qualifications.

The findings suggest that while technical qualifications are a baseline, the "soft skills" of cultural adaptability and communication are perceived as the real gatekeepers to the Finnish market. Participants 5 and 9 specifically noted that technical competence alone does not bridge the gap if one cannot demonstrate a "cultural fit." This aligns with the literature

stating that Finnish employers prioritize trust and low-context communication styles. Therefore, the lack of local work experience is not just a lack of skills, but a lack of "cultural proof" that the candidate can operate within Finnish workplace norms.

## **5.2 Network-based Barriers and Social Capital.**

The results suggest that social capital is extremely important in accessing labour market, and it frequently supersedes formal qualifications. The international students do not have access to professional networks and this limits their exposure to job opportunities as well as entry into the labour market.

The jobs are often based on informal linkages as opposed to open competition to strengthen the fact that who you know is important in getting a job. This is in line with the perception that network-based benefits are largely at play in the process of integrating the labour market as opposed to merit (Granovetter, 1973; Bourdieu, 1986).

This deficit in social capital is caused by the absence of strong professional networks and, as a consequence, reduces access to internships, referrals, and insider information on job opportunities. This structural disadvantage strengthens the job gap between the local and foreign graduates.

The findings of this study, thus, can be used to substantiate the view that there is "breach" to the concept of the Psychological Contract of international students. According to this theory, students' expectations to an English-medium degree at a Finnish university are not uttered but implied in the following way; I assume that students who choose to study at an English-medium university in Finland have an expectation that this degree will increase their employment chances.

The Breach - The information of Participant 5 and 10, who expressed feeling frustrated even though they did everything that was encouraged (e.g., career fairs), suggests a blemish in the image of the host country's promise.

The Response: Breach is seen in "Coping Mechanisms" in section 4.1.5. When the formal contract (degree = job) fails, students fall back on informal strategies – perform high levels of aggressive networking outside the formal channels – in a way to regain or re-establish their feeling of being on a professional track.

### **5.3 Psychological Contract and Expectation Mismatch.**

The Psychological Contract Theory is used to explain the discrepancy between the student expectations and labour market realities. Finnish higher education is usually used to international students who expect academic success to provide them with the chance to get a job. Nonetheless, breach of a psychological contract takes place when the expectations are not fulfilled (Rousseau, 1995; Morrison and Robinson, 1997).

Such violation is manifested in a sense of frustration, rejection and less trust in the institutional avenues of employment. Perceived discrepancy between effort and reward has a role to play in lessening trust in the justness of the labour market system.

Moreover, higher education institutions and labour market organisations are frequently seen to fail on unspoken commitments of employability support, particularly regarding internships, job placement and labour market integration advice.

The heavy reliance on networking as a coping mechanism (as seen in P10's responses) underscores the importance of **Social Capital Theory**. The "hidden" nature of the Finnish job market means that human capital (what you know) is often secondary to social capital (who you know). For international students, the primary obstacle is not a lack of talent, but a lack of "bridging" social capital connections that link them to local professional circles.

## **5.4 Integrated Theoretical Explanation**

The three theories when combined offer a wholesome explanation of the problem of labour market integration:

Human Capital Theory, which describes the significance of education, skills, and language proficiency, does not provide a comprehensive consideration of structural barriers.

The Social Capital Theory describes the influence of networks and relationships on employment opportunities.

The Psychological Contract Theory describes the emotional and expectations-related outcomes of the failed employment results.

Collectively these theories demonstrate that labour market integration is a multi-dimensional process, which is shaped by individual capabilities and structural constraints.

## **5.5 Overview of Major revelation.**

The results show that the international students in Finland encounter a multi-layered group of obstacles that cannot be justified by human capital. Rather, effective labour market integration implies:

International qualifications recognition.

Learning of local language.

Professional networks.

Congruence between expectations and the reality of the labour market.

This underscores the importance of universities, employers, and policymakers to take a more holistic view of employability that extends past education and includes structural mechanisms of inclusion.

## 5.6 Practical Implications

In solving the practical implications of the universities, institutions should not stick to the traditional manner of offering the university's academic services but they should become dynamic agents of professional integration. The work-based learning (internships and co-op placements) should be integrated as it fills the experience paradox where students lack access to local working experience but cannot access the job without the local experience and vice versa. According to research conducted by Yorke (2005), employability is not only a set of skills but a complicated accomplishment that needs to be applied into the real world, which project collaborations with regional organizations offer. Besides, a change in the language teaching method to focus not on abstract grammar, but on communicative workplace Finnish, also supports the results of Alho (2020), who observes that functional language proficiency can be the key to the Finnish labour market.

Employers need to change towards a more proactive and inclusive human resource approach in order to help international talents make a professional transition smoothly. It is crucial to implement comprehensive applications in recruitment, including taking in applications in English and accepting international qualifications, to break the barriers in the structure that tend to eliminate highly qualified applicants during the screening process. Mandatory diversity and inclusion training of HR departments should support this change to reduce aspects of the unconscious bi-as that results in the tendency to hire domestic candidates with similar cultural backgrounds (Ahmad, 2011b). Moreover, ensuring an extensive orientation programs clearly stating Finnish workplace standards e.g. trust-based autonomy and low-context communication is the key to effective cultural adjustment and retention in the country (Bhar&Chua, 2025). Lastly, employers ought to no

longer passive perform recruitment by actively engaging institutions of higher learning through internship and lectures. According to Anttila (2022), this exposure to the industry at this early stage is an essential mechanism behind the construction of the historical and trust-based networks needed by the Finnish labour market regarding professional background.

To improve the process of international graduate integration, policymakers should consider that talent retention is one of the strategic pillars of long-term economic and demographic sustainability of Finland. Ensuring ease in the bureaucratic process of obtaining residence and work permits is a key initial step, where bureaucracies could be used as a deterrent to not only the graduate skilled workforce, but also to potential employers (OECD Economic Surveys, 2025). Moreover, the region initiatives such as the Talent Coastline in Vaasa should be ensured to be sustainable; these efforts help the local industries and international talents to build the crucial bridge that is lacking in centralized policies Anttila (2022). The government must provide economic incentives to get the private sector to engage in hiring international graduates like offering tax deductions or reward programs to firms that employ international graduates so as to counter the perceived risks of hiring cross-cultural employees. Finally, the necessity to address the declining workforce in Finland as well as to remain competitive on the global innovation and technology front justifies the need to shift the national discourse towards perceiving international talent as an indispensable investment, as opposed to a challenge.

### **Reflections and Limitations**

Although the research has some useful findings, it should be noted that it has its limitations. The number of participants (ten) is a problem to the generalisation of the findings, but at least acceptable in the framework of a qualitative design, which is concentrated on depth and meaning. Participants completed the questionnaire responses in writing through Google Forms, rather than participating in live interviews and this might have limited the richness of the data in some respects. Besides, the research focuses on the experiences smaller regional labour market in Finland; therefore, issues in bigger cities such as Helsinki or Tampere might vary (Korpela et al., 2008).

However, the use of theory and participant narratives enhances the validity of the study. The direct quotes and the interpretive analysis give the authenticity and credibility. Future studies may elaborate this by carrying out longitudinal interviews which follow the career path of international graduates over time, or comparing the regional differences in the process of integration.

This study is deliberately limited to the area of international students, and international graduates in Finland. The focus of the study will be people who have finished or are about to finish their degree programmes in the Universities of Finland. The study examines how they go about finding work and adjusting to the work culture in Finland. The study has provided insight and contextual information to generalize the findings for Finland.

The main limitation which is associated with this study is its low sample size. About ten participants were invited to take part in the study, although not all of them might be presented to take part in interviews because of the lack of answers and time. The use of

qualitative data implies that the results can only be interpreted and not generalised. Still, the vividness and richness of the qualitative descriptions enable drawing valuable conclusions about the patterns, perceptions, and processes that determine the employability of international graduates in Finland (Strukova, 2020). Also, given that the data collection will be based on voluntary responses, there is a possibility of self-selection bias since people with specific positive or negative experiences might be more willing to answer the question. The methodology chapter will be a transparent discussion of these limitations. The time factor and the use of the English questionnaire can also have restricted depth to those who are not conversant with the language. However, the strengths as methodology especially the richness of engagement and triangulation of theoretical lenses give a solid base to meaningful analysis (Clifford, 2020).

## **5.7 Future research recommendations**

In order to make these findings useful in practice, research must shift towards the exploration of the systemic and organizational environment of the Finnish labour market in the future in order to make these individual barriers known. The next key step would be to look at the demand-side factors by analysing employer attitudes, and organizational biases since the existing literature is not usually very detailed on the internal impediments that lead firms to avoid hiring international talent even with the intention to internationalize nationally (Ahmad, 2011). Furtherly, a changing aspect of the digital platform and social media in circumventing old-world net-working shortcomings deserves exploration since it may provide avenues to accessing the so-called hidden job market. It would also be possibly informative to conduct comparative research of other Nordic countries, to find the most effective policy level of national retention strategies with the best long-term

outcomes (OECD, 2025). Moreover, longitudinal studies would be required to follow the career trajectory of graduates once they have started, and rigorous impact analyses on university-based interventions, such as mentorship programs, would be done to establish whether such structures help graduates improve their chances of success in terms of the seal of approval (Yorke, 2005).

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to discuss the obstacles to job market integration of the international students in Finland. It has proven based on qualitative analysis of questionnaire data that the main barriers include the language requirements, the lack of local working experience, limited networks, cultural unfamiliarity and implicit discrimination. All these obstacles put together can be seen as cumulative constitutes a structural disfavour on the side of members of the international graduates, although they are being advantaged good education and employment qualifications

It has been argued that without the human capital a success cannot be ensured alone other funds of social capital and man controlled psychological contract. Integration is a multi-dimensional process, and it is dependent on individual adjustment and institutional openness. The findings indicate that universities, employers, and policy makers ought to unite in an attempt to bridge the difference between education and jobs. The key to utilizing the potential of the international graduates within Finland can be seen through the enhancement of language education, the expansion of the number of the internship offers, and the non-discriminative attitude toward the recruitment process. In such a way, the country will be at a more advantaged place, to achieve its vision to become a truly global and inclusive knowledge economy.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire questions

1. Which degree have you done in Finland?
2. What is your field of study?
3. What is your nationality?
4. How long have you been looking for job in Finland?
5. How many jobs have you applied during your stay in Finland?
6. Have you attended career services events or job fairs organized by your university?
7. Please enlist the key challenges you are facing while getting job in Finland?
8. Please explain how the enlisted challenges are hindering your employability in Finland? For example, in the recruitment and selection process.
9. What specific human capital (skills, experience, or qualifications etc) do you believe are most important for succeeding in the Finnish job market?
10. Keeping in mind the above answers, what steps are you taking to overcome job market challenges?
11. How do you envision your long-term career in Finland? Are you planning to enrol in some other degree or to leave Finland in case of not getting job in the near future?