

# Research on the internationalization strategies and practices of higher education in Finland--taking the University of Helsinki as an example

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the internationalization of the University of Helsinki in Finland's dual-track higher education system. It details the system, the shift to internationalization driven by policies like the *Bologna Declaration*, and *Finnish International Higher Education Policies*. The case study of the university covers its mission, as well as its strategies in different aspects. SWOT analysis assesses these. The university has achieved success in internationalization, but also faces challenges. Future research should broaden the scope to other Finnish universities and explore more deeply considering various factors.

**Key words:** university of Helsinki; internationalization strategy; Finnish higher education policy; SWOT analysis

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## 1 Introduction

In the 1990s, Finland adopted a dual-track higher education model with universities emphasizing academic research and offering diverse degrees, and universities of applied sciences focusing on practical applications and vocational skills in line with market demands. Their degree systems differ, e.g., in the length of study. After a slow start, the 1999 *Bologna Declaration* spurred change. In 2005, new systems were introduced for European alignment. In 2007, a policy memorandum aimed to reform Finnish higher education was released [1].

Globalization has driven Finland's higher education reform. The government targets the best innovation system [2]. To enhance international competitiveness amid market competition and brain drain, universities must make changes. The government's education policy report outlines principles for education, aiming for national and international standards and long-term sustainability. By 2030, goals include half of young adults completing tertiary degrees with improved equity and recruitment, tripling foreign degree students, and leading in digital higher education. Three objectives for institutions are set: increasing education and competence, improving accessibility and equality, and reforming operating models, with actions centered on international higher education.

## 2 Case study: Helsinki University

### 2.1 Briefing

Founded in 1640, Helsinki University is Finland's largest and oldest academic institution. It has 40,000 in its academic community across 4 campuses and 11 faculties, known for multidisciplinary approach and global ranking. With

an annual turnover of 770 million euros, 60% funded by the Ministry, it also gets significant research funding, 24% internationally. Its investment assets have good returns, and donation funds support professorships [3]. The integrated quality system, audited in 2022 with a valid label till 2028, ensures quality. In sustainability, it leads in climate research, aids cancer research, educates future teachers, and is at the forefront of big data and AI research, applying these to meet global challenges.

## 2.2 The mission, vision, values and goals

Helsinki University's mission is to use knowledge to contribute to the world's well-being, address global issues like human and environmental health, social equity, and sustainable development. It aims to promote knowledge progress and influence society.

The university's vision is to become a world-leading academic institution by 2030, excelling in research, teaching, innovation, and social responsibility. It will be a recognized multidisciplinary hub for sustainable development science and teaching, attracting top talent and creating an excellent learning and working environment.

Its values include truth, building, freedom, and inclusiveness. Truth guides knowledge pursuit, building helps in personal and social development, freedom encourages innovation, and inclusiveness promotes equality and respect.

The goals include achieving academic excellence, engaging in open collaboration, creating a quality environment, and leading in sustainable development. For academic excellence, it entails enhancing research skills, guaranteeing quality, and attaining international influence.

## 2.3 International strategy and practices

For the first objective, the level of education and competence in Finland will be increased. Helsinki University vigorously engages in diversified cooperation within a global perspective. It collaborates with alliances such as Una Europa, LERU, EUA, and numerous international partners. Through such collaborations, it showcases its strengths on the international education exchange platform, attracts students from around the world, and sends out 350 students and hosts 800 international students annually.

The university also establishes close research collaboration relationships with the world's top institutions, such as the University of Edinburgh, Peking University, Stockholm University, etc. This not only enhances the university's scientific research strength and international reputation but also provides opportunities for teachers and students to access the international frontier of academia, attracts outstanding international researchers, and promotes the progress of Finland's education and scientific research capabilities.

For the second objective, accessibility and equality in higher education will be improved. Helsinki University promotes talent nurture and exchange. It carries out cross-cultural academic cooperation and large-scale exchange activities among teachers and students through projects such as Erasmus +. It also provides all-round support during students' international learning process, such as innovating exchange models, virtual exchange programs, and improving international student services.

For the third objective, the operating models and structures of higher education institutions will be reformed. Helsinki University acclaims research collaboration for innovation. It actively participates in international scientific research cooperation projects and uses digital technologies to build bridges for international cooperation. It also promotes extensive exchanges among international teachers, bilateral visits between institutions, and cooperation in joint projects to draw on advanced international management experience and educational models.

# 3 SWOT analysis

## 3.1 Strength

Helsinki University can promote international reputation through global alliance and building extensive partnership network. It attracts international students by developing comprehensive international programs. Being a member of global alliances such as Una Europa, LERU, and EUA significantly boosts the university's international standing. It has established diverse collaboration with around 300 education institutions worldwide, and promotes academic and cultural exchanges in significant research fields. The Erasmus + program also contributes to education equity.

### 3.2 Weaknesses

Helsinki University may face resource constraint and administrative complexity. The extensive international activities may strain the university's financial and human resources, and the funding for supporting international students and faculty, as well as for maintaining and expanding international partnerships, might be insufficient. The complex administrative structure may lead to inefficiencies and delays.

### 3.3 Opportunities

There are more opportunities to expand the number of international students due to growing global demand for higher education and technological advancements. The university can expand international students by strategically marketing its unique academic offerings, such as specialized programs in emerging fields sustainable development technologies. The rise of digital technologies also offers new ways to enhance international collaboration.

### 3.4 Threats

Helsinki University may face intense competition and policy and regulatory changes. The global higher education landscape is highly competitive, and many universities are vying for international students, research funding, and academic talent. Changes in immigration policies, funding regulations, and international education standards can pose significant threats.

## 4 Conclusion

This paper presents the Finnish higher education system and uses the University of Helsinki to discuss and analyze its internationalization strategy and practice via SWOT. The Finnish government's internationalization policy, with the *Bologna Declaration* and ECTS system, has enhanced education standards and capabilities in Finland [4]. While the University of Helsinki has notable internationalization achievements, it confronts challenges like resource limitations and fierce competition. Future research should widen the scope to other Finnish universities and consider subjective and objective factors for deeper exploration of the internationalization strategy [5].

### Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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