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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF FINLAND AS FULBRIGHT STUDENT PROGRAM DESTINATION

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Abstract

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This work is the first academic study to investigate the factors influencing the choice of a Fulbright destination by U.S. Student Program grantees. While the topic of international education destination choice has been given a lot of attention in higher education research in the past two decades, this distinct group of international students has not been previously examined. Focusing on Finland as a Fulbright destination, this study seeks to identify factors that determined the choice of the country as a destination of graduate study and research.

The study employed sequential mixed methods design consisting of a survey of U.S. Student Program grantees to Finland from years 2000 to 2015 and follow-up interviews with eight survey respondents. A Model of Fulbright Destination Choice was created specifically for this study with the goal of exploring the factors influencing the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination. The study revealed that quality of education in Finland, its academic reputation, quality of research at Finnish higher education institutions, expertise of academic staff, quality and suitability of academic programs, and a scholarly interest in Finland were considered the most important factors in the choice of the country as a Fulbright destination. In addition, the higher acceptance rate into the Fulbright Program was recognized as a major factor of influence in the decision to choose Finland. Level of safety and security in the country and its development level were regarded as most significant social aspects guiding the choice. The research also demonstrated that previous encounters with Finland greatly influenced the choice of the country as a destination of graduate study and research. Among the conceptualized set of factors proposed by the theoretical framework of this study, the program dimension of choice was found to be the most significant component in the choice of a Fulbright destination.

This study has important practical implications for the stakeholders of Finnish higher education. It advances several recommendations for Finnish higher education institutions, Fulbright Center Finland, and the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland with regard to attracting high quality international students to Finnish higher education.

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1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the topics of globalization and internationalization of higher education and international student mobility. It presents the research problem and scope of the study, discusses the research gap, purpose and significance of this research, and introduces the research questions. The chapter concludes with the structure of this study.

1.1 Background Information

In the past three decades, globalization and internationalization have become the principal factors shaping and challenging higher education globally (Altbach, 2004, Knight, 2006, Middlehurst, 2003). Globalization refers to the “*process that is increasing the flow of people, culture, ideas, values, knowledge, technology, and economy across borders, resulting in a more interconnected and interdependent world*” (Knight & de Wit, 1997, p. 6). It has been largely driven by the rapid development of information and communication technologies and establishment of the English language as a lingua franca of global communication.

Internationalization in higher education is a response to globalization and is defined as “*the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education*” (Knight, 2004, p.7). The process of internationalization in higher education implies a conscious effort on behalf of individuals, higher education institutions, national governments and supranational bodies to incorporate a global dimension into post-secondary education. It therefore demands active engagement of higher education stakeholders in global networks and partnerships (NAFSA, 2011). In the context of higher education internationalization encompasses international mobility of students, academics and administrative staff. It is also manifested through making teaching, learning and research more international and promotes both cooperation and competition between individuals, academic institutions, nations, and regions (Kehm and Teichler, 2007). For instance, cooperation is achieved through creating strategic alliances, institutional consortiums, and regional agreements. At the same time, HEIs and national systems compete for high quality international students, researchers, and administrative staff.

Motivations for internationalization differ among countries and higher education institutions (later HEIs) and can be based on a plethora of reasons from political and economic to social, cultural, and academic. For instance, internationalization can be motivated by the prospect of enhancing intercultural understanding and social development, among social and cultural rationales. It could be fostered with the aim of increasing economic growth and competitiveness, creating financial benefits, and contributing to labor force. Some political rationales for internationalization include regards of foreign policy and national security, increasing the peace and understanding among nations, and development of national and regional identities. Academic rationales for internationalization involve enhancement of quality of education and research, language acquisition, adding a global dimension to research and teaching, and strengthening the profile and status of HEIs and national higher education systems (Knight, 2006; Middlehurst, 2003).

International Student Mobility

Undoubtedly, global student mobility is one of the most prominent manifestations of internationalization in higher education. Two important concepts in regards to student mobility are the notions of international student and foreign student. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (later OECD) define international students as *“those who are not residents of their country of study or those who received their prior education in another country”*, while foreign students are defined according to their citizenship (OECD, 2013). Conforming to these definitions, international students constitute a subgroup of foreign students.

The total number of students enrolled in study programs outside of their country of citizenship has increased twofold from 2.1 million in the year 2000 to 4.3 million in 2011, exhibiting an average annual growth rate of nearly 6% (OECD, 2013). For international students, studying outside of their country of citizenship is viewed as an opportunity to enrich their understanding and knowledge of other cultures, languages, and societies, obtain highly valued qualifications, and enhance future job prospects (OECD, 2013). For host institutions and governments, international students bring economic benefits (Altbach, 2004), enhance their status and reputation locally and globally, and enrich their cultural and academic environment (Wilkins and Huisman, 2011).

Developed English-speaking countries like the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia remain as top destinations for international students pursuing higher education abroad. In 2011 the three destinations accounted for 39% of all international students globally (OECD, 2013). Germany and France are developed non English-speaking destinations that have also traditionally attracted a large number of international students. While the five aforementioned countries remain on the top of the list of international education destinations, new players have emerged on the market of international education in recent years. Like that, Canada, Japan, the Russian Federation, and Spain welcomed a significant number of international students (OECD, 2013).

The spread of globalization and the growing importance of internationalization in higher education in the 21st century has affected national higher education systems of smaller developed countries. In pursuit of attracting international students to their HEIs, non English-speaking Northern European countries started offering academic programs in the English language. Like that, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden have established a large number of programs at all levels of higher education in order to draw international students to their countries (Macready and Tucker, 2011; OECD, 2013). Moreover, Finland and Norway do not charge tuition fees to international students (Study in Finland, 2015; Study in Norway, 2015). Recognizing the benefits that international students would bring to their countries, Finland and Norway also modified their naturalization laws to facilitate the process of obtaining citizenship by international students with advanced degrees from these countries (OECD, 2013). Regardless of the array of opportunities that the Nordic countries offer to international students, they host a relatively low number of international students (OECD, 2013). According to the statistical database of OECD, in 2012 Finland hosted 17,636 international students, Sweden hosted 28,629 international students, 3,956 international students undertook studies in Norway, and 22,363 in Denmark (OECD, 2015). In comparison, the Netherlands hosted 57, 509 international students and Germany welcomed 184,594 international students to its HEIs (OECD, 2015). With the number of international students as one the most significant indicators measuring internationalization, the Nordic countries, and Finland in particular, are greatly interested in attracting high quality international students to their higher education systems.

1.2 Research Problem and Scope of the Study

While the Nordic country of Finland is world famous for its education system and is an active player in the European higher education and research cooperation, the country has a low level of internationalization in comparison with other developed nations. The Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland acknowledges that *“the low level of internationalisation is still one of the key weaknesses of the Finnish higher education and research system when compared with [...] competitors”* (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009). The ministry officials are concerned with the relatively low number of foreign students, researchers and teachers in the country, the limited foreign research and development funding, and the decreased mobility of domestic students and researchers (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009). When the focus is on the international student indicators, the country is below the OECD average of tertiary education enrollment of international students, with this group of students constituting 5% of the total student population in the country (OECD, 2014). As previously noted, Finland hosted 17,636 international students in 2012, therefore lagging behind its Nordic counterparts Denmark and Sweden. Attracting international students to Finnish HEIs is one of the principal tasks on the internationalization agenda of the Finnish government, advanced in its “Strategy for the Internationalization of HEIs in Finland 2009-2015” (2009).

The importance of attracting international students to Finnish higher education demands academic research accounts of the reasoning behind the international students’ decision to choose Finland as a study destination. While several academic works set off to determine what factors influenced the choice of Finland by international students, American graduate students participating in the Fulbright U.S. Student Program in Finland have not been previously investigated. The Fulbright Student Program is one of the initiatives of the U.S. government seeking to promote peace and understanding between the U.S. nationals and people of other countries through academic exchange and cooperation (Fulbright U.S. Student Program, n. d.). The Program is available to American applicants who hold a minimum of Bachelor’s degree and wish to pursue coursework, research, or participation in an art program in the partner country for a period of one academic year. Finland has been a partner country of the Fulbright Program since 1950 (Fulbright Center Finland, 2015).

In order to look at the factors determining the choice of Finland as an international study destination, this work focuses on American Fulbright Student Program grantees as the research

population. To further narrow down the scope of this research, it includes only recipients of the Fulbright Student grant who went to Finland from the beginning of the 20th century and on. Thereby, the research population of this project is represented by all U.S. Fulbright Student program grantees to Finland from the grant years 2000-2001 to 2014-2015. The reason for such selection is determined by the aim to look at the most relevant population timewise.

1.3 Research Gap

The topic of international education destination choice has been in focus of multiple academic works. Governments and HEIs realize the social, cultural, economic, and academic benefits that international students bring with them, and therefore there is a strong need for academic studies that investigate why students choose particular destinations for international education. Research in the area of international student decision-making has been largely dominated by works focusing on developed English-speaking destinations like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Agarwal and Winkler, 1985; Chen, 2006; Maringe and Carter, 2007; McMahon, 1992; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011). In the recent years new players have emerged at the international education market, raising the need to examine the flow of international students to these destinations (Bodycott, 2009; Lee, 2014, Macready and Tucker, 2011, Mpingajira, 2011). Finland is an up-and-coming destination for international students. The great interest of the Finnish government in internationalizing Finnish higher education and attracting high quality students from abroad demands academic research on the reasoning behind the international students decision to choose Finland as a study destination. While a number of academic works in the Finnish and English languages focuses on the flow of international students to Finland and factors influencing the decision of current and prospective international students to choose the country (Hilden, n.d.; Kinnunen, 2003 & Niemelä, 2008 as cited in Vierimaa, 2013, Vierimaa, 2013), American graduate students' motivations to come to Finland through the Fulbright U.S. Student Program have not been previously researched. The Fulbright U.S. Student Program participants constitute a unique group of international students. The highly competitive and academically rigorous program admits only graduate students with excellent academic standing and a sound research project in the host country. This work is the first academic study to investigate the factors influencing the choice of a Fulbright destination by U.S. Student Program participants and is expected to have significant implications for the stakeholders of the Finnish

higher education and greatly contribute to the academic topic of international education destination choice.

1.4 The research statement

The intent of this two-phase, sequential mixed methods study is to investigate the factors that determined U.S. Student program grantees' choice of Finland as a country destination for their Fulbright year. In the first phase, the most influential factors for the decision to apply for a Fulbright grant in Finland are examined. Furthermore, different groups within the survey respondents are probed for significant statistical differences. Additionally, this phase of the research explores what groups of factors presented in the theoretical framework of this project exerted the most influence on the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination. Information from the first phase is further explored in the second qualitative phase. The aim of the second phase of the study is to probe significant results from the quantitative phase of the research. The reason for following up with qualitative research in the second phase of the study is to hear individual voices of grantees and their views and opinions on factors paramount for their decision to choose Finland as their Fulbright destination.

1.5 Research Questions

The principal question of this research project is as follows:

-What factors influenced the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination by U.S. Student Program grantees?

Furthermore, the research seeks to answer two additional questions:

-What group or groups of factors exerted the most influence on the U.S. Student Program grantees' choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination?

-Do the factors considered by U.S. Student Program grantees who chose Finland as their Fulbright destination differ significantly across groups categorised by (a) having been to Finland prior to the Fulbright vs. not having been to Finland prior to the Fulbright, (b) academic discipline, (c) location in Finland, and (d) host institution in Finland?

-What are the implications of this research for the stakeholders of Finnish higher education?

1.6 Research Design

In order to answer the research question in the best way possible, this research uses a sequential mixed methods design. Accordingly, the research starts with a survey of the population aimed to investigate the factors determining the U.S. Student Program grantees' choice of Finland. The quantitative survey stage is then followed by a qualitative phase comprised of interviews with a few former and current U.S. Student Program grantees. The interviews are directed to collect the specific accounts, language and voices of the participants about the topic of selection of Finland as their Fulbright destination.

Methodology of this study will be discussed in further detail in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

1.7 Significance of the Research

This study aims to contribute on a few levels. Firstly, it will add to the existing body of research in the area of international students' choice of study destination by researching the population that has been previously overlooked in the studies of international higher education mobility - Fulbright U.S. Student Program Participants. Secondly, this study will add to the understanding of the reasoning of American graduate students choosing a country destination for international education. Thirdly, the study will contribute to the research done on the Fulbright Program, which has been greatly dominated by the studies focused on post-Fulbright experience of grantees. Subsequently, the findings of this thesis will present a scholarly research account of Fulbright U.S. Student grantees' choice of Finland for the practitioners in the Fulbright Center Finland, therefore relating theory and practice. The implications of this work might be such that lead to enforcing or reviewing the existing strategies of the Fulbright Commission in Finland. Additionally, the findings of this research can be utilized by Finnish HEIs that look into further internationalizing their institutions, as this research will give a comprehensive account of

Finland's strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of high quality graduate American students. In a similar way, the findings of this research project can prove beneficial to the strategic level decision-makers in the Ministry of Education of Finland by presenting useful information on the U.S. Student Program grantees' perceptions of Finland as a study and research destination. From the methodological perspective, this study contributes to the scarce body of research on international student destination choice that chooses mixed methods research design (Chen, 2007, Bodycott, 2009). As the majority of the studies uses quantitative approach, this research will be a valuable addition to the research on the topic also from the methodological point of view.

1.8 Structure of the Study

The remainder of this study is structured as follows. The second chapter presents a review of scholarly studies related to the topic of international education destination choice. The third chapter describes the theoretical framework created for and used as a basis of the study. The fourth chapter elaborates on the methodology chosen for this research. Specifically it gives an account of the research approach and methods, data collection procedures, and elaborates on the participants of the research. The chapter also touches upon ethical considerations, discusses reliability and validity of the research, and reviews the limitations of this study. The fifth chapter is devoted to presentation of findings from the first quantitative stage of this sequential mixed methods research project, gathered through an online survey. The following sixth chapter presents the findings from the interviews conducted in the second qualitative stage of the project. The seventh chapter is devoted to the discussion and interpretation of the results of this research. It is supplemented by the account of interesting and surprising findings, presents practical implications of the research and critique of own work, and discusses potential for further research. The final eighth chapter presents the conclusions of this research project.

2. Literature Review

This section introduces literature on the topic of international education destination choice. It looks at empirical studies that focus on destination choice and at theoretical works that aim to develop conceptual models of international education destination choice. Specifically, the section looks at research on the factors that influence, affect, and determine the choice of a country destination for international education and the choice of the location, institution, and program. Research on factors influencing international students' choice of Finland is presented in a separate subsection. In regards to the Fulbright program, as academic literature on the program is scarce and largely focused on post-Fulbright experiences, only relevant research is examined.

2.1 Factors Influencing International Education Destination Choice

2.1.1 Push-Pull Factors in International Education Destination Research

Research on international student destination choice is dominated by studies that investigate the flow of international students to developed English-speaking countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada (Agarwal and Winkler, 1985; Chen, 2006; Maringe and Carter, 2007; McMahon, 1992; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011). The dominance of academic research on these countries as destinations of international education is determined by their status as global leaders in international education export (OECD, 2013). These countries have been the receivers of the most international students during the past few decades, and revenues from foreign students constitute a significant part of income of HEIs in these countries, therefore greatly contributing to their economies at large (Lasanowski, 2009). The status of these countries as global leaders of international education demands higher education research on motivations of international students.

Agarwal and Winkler (1985) and McMahon (1992) are one of the pioneers among researchers investigating motivations of international students. Both studies examined the flow of international students from developing countries to the United States in the last half of the 20th century, exploring the motivating factors through a larger economic lens. Agarwal and Winkler (1985) concluded that the main driving forces for international students to go to the United States were the per capita income in the home country, cost of education, study opportunities in the

sending country, and the benefits of studying internationally. McMahon (1992) examined students from 18 developing countries who chose the United States as their study destination in the 1960 and 1970s. She argued that patterns of international study correspond with the sending nation's economic and educational status. The author employed two models adapted from the migration theory, the push and pull models (McMahon, 1992). The former is utilized to explain the flow of international students from their home countries, while the latter provides an account of forces that attract international students to the host country. McMahon concluded that according to the push model, the flow of international students was contingent upon the level of economic wealth of the sending country, its involvement in the world economy, the availability of educational opportunities in the country, and the attitude towards education in the sending country. The push model demonstrated that attraction of international students was affected by the size of the home country's economy compared with the size of the host country's economy, economic relations between the sending and receiving countries, the host country's political interest in the sending country, and the financial support of the sending country to its students. Employing the push and pull models, McMahon set the stage for subsequent research on the topic of international student flow. After her work, published in 1992, the majority of research studies on international education destination choice utilized the push-pull framework either on its own or in combination with other conceptual tools to explain the choice of country destination in international education (Bodycott, 2009; Chen, 2006; Lee, 2014; Macready and Tucker, 2011; McMahon, 1992; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011). Research studies that employ the push-pull conceptual framework will be discussed in more detail in the chapter describing theoretical framework of this study.

The globalization of higher education in the 21st century and the rapid expansion of the international student body (Altbach, 2004; Altbach and Knight, 2007; Middlehurst, 2003) gave rise to the strong interest in the topic of international education destination choice. Multiple studies produced in the last 15 years aimed at investigating the factors that determine, influence, and affect the choice of a specific country destination of international education (Bodycott, 2009; Chen, 2006; Lee, 2014; Macready and Tucker, 2011; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001; Mpingajira, 2011; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011). Examination of these works revealed the most influential factors that determine the choice of international education destination.

2.1.2 Academic Aspects of Country Destination

Many a study in the domain of international education destination choice confirm that one of the main factors influencing the choice of a country for undertaking international studies is related to quality of education in the host country (Chen, 2006; Lee, 2014; Macready and Tucker, 2011; Mpingajira, 2011; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011). The report of the Institute of International Education “Who goes where and why?” (Macready and Tucker, 2011) that offers an overview of global education mobility, articulates that the availability of high quality study opportunities offered by host countries is one of the most influential factors in the decision to choose a country destination for international education. When Chen (2006) investigated the factors influencing East Asian graduate students to choose Canadian HEIs, she discovered that quality of education in Canada and academic reputation of the country were two key characteristics of the country attracting the graduate students in focus to study and do research in Canada. Chen’s work is of particular importance to this study, as it researches graduate students exclusively. The population of Fulbright U.S. Student Program participants is also represented solely by graduate students, both at master and PhD level. While research on international education destination choice focuses on undergraduate students or at times groups undergraduate and graduate students in one study, Chen (2006) fills the gap of research on international graduate students. Undertaking international graduate education “for the love of knowledge” (Chen, 2006, p. 759) and personal and professional development, these students are often in pursue of rigorous academic study and research abroad and therefore might have different factors determining their decision of a country, institution, and a program compared to undergraduate students. Lee (2014) arrives at the same conclusion when investigating the factors that determined the choice of Taiwan as a destination of international education. Quality of education in the United Kingdom is reported to be the most influential factor in international students’ decision to undertake education in the country, as revealed by Wilkins and Huisman (2011). Mpingajira (2011) examines the reasoning behind international students’ choice of South Africa as a study destination and confirms that quality of education in the country is one of the determinants of choice of the students surveyed as part of the research project.

Availability of specialized study opportunities is another key factor influencing the choice of a specific country with the purpose of international study. With the increasing specialization of higher education programs all over the world, particularly at the level of graduate research

programs, the reasoning behind choosing a particular country is contingent upon the availability of highly specialized programs that international students can not find elsewhere (Macready and Tucker, 2011). Graduate students interviewed as part of Chen's research project (2006) confirmed that program specialization and uniqueness were the key attributes determining the students' choice of Canada. Besides Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Japan, France, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, South Korea, and Sweden are reported to have higher participation of international students relative to total enrollment in highly specialized graduate programs (Macready and Tucker, 2011).

Teaching and research in a language that mobile students can speak or want to learn is another major factor determining a destination of international education (Macready and Tucker, 2011). In this respect, English-speaking countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia have a more beneficial position in attracting international students. These destinations accounted for 40 percent of all international students in OECD countries in 2011 (OECD, 2013). Wilkins and Huisman's research (2011) confirms this point, revealing that development of language skills was a main motivator for the research participants' decision to study in the United Kingdom. When mainland Chinese students and their parents search for a destination for international education, they consider English-speaking environment as one of the key factors when choosing a country (Bodycott, 2009). Mpingajira (2011) confirms that having English as a language of instruction is one of the major factors determinant of the choice of South Africa as a study destination by international students.

Research on international student mobility highlights another important factor related to academic characteristics of the country destination. Internationally mobile students find having globally recognizable qualifications crucial for their choice of study destinations (Bodycott, 2009; Lee, 2014; Macready and Tucker, 2011; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001; Mpingajira, 2011). As undertaking international study is a serious and often costly decision (Cubillo et al, 2006), prospective international students want to be assured that their international studies and credentials are recognized globally, thereby ensuring the prospects of employability and high returns.

2.1.3 Social Aspects of Country Destination

When choosing a country destination to undertake international education, prospective students evaluate social aspects of potential destinations. Primarily, the better knowledge or awareness they have of a particular country, the more likely they are to select it as an international study destination (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001). In regards to specific social aspects of a potential country destination, environment in the host country, both social and physical is reported as one of the influential factors for prospective international students (Bodycott, 2009; Chen, 2006; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001). Chen (2006) discovered that quality of life, diversity and tolerance of Canadian society and overall image of a peaceful country contributed to East Asian graduate students decision to choose the country for their study and research. Physical climate has a great influence on the choice of international education destination, asserted Mazzarol and Soutar (2001). Student from South East Asia preferred Australia to the United Kingdom, Canada, and New Zealand in view of the fact that the weather in the country was better. In contrast, students from Japan and the United States regarded the country as an unsuitable place for “serious” education due to its physical climate and reputation as a “beaches and fun” destination (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001). In the same vein, mainland Chinese students surveyed by Lee (2014) found physical environment in a prospective international study destination as an important factor for their choice.

Social connections, traditional diasporas and presence of an established population of international students in the country destination are important social aspects influencing a choice of a particular country for international education (Chen, 2006; Macready and Tucker, 2011; Mazzarol and Soutar). Globally, common migration patterns explain why students from some countries choose particular destinations. Like that, Turkish students prefer Germany for studying internationally, Portuguese commonly go to France, and Mexicans choose to study in the United States (Macready and Tucker, 2011). Alike, students from Hong Kong in Chen’s study (2006) admitted that having Cantonese diaspora in Canada influenced their choice of the country for undertaking graduate studies. Students surveyed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2001) disclosed that presence of social connections, e.g. family members or friends in the host country was important for their choice. Related to the presence of social links in the country destination, alumni referrals and recommendations are found to exert great influence on prospective students’ choice of both country and a particular institution (Bodycott, 2009; Maringe and Carter, 2007; Mazzarol

and Soutar, 2001). Word of mouth is an important tool in promoting an institution and a destination for international study (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001), and therefore providing quality services and good academic and social experiences to international students is a key channel of informal promotion of specific international education destinations.

2.1.4 Cost and Convenience

Undoubtedly, one of the main factors influencing the choice of a destination of international education relates to the issue of cost. Affordable tuition, cost of living in the country and specific location, and availability of financial assistance are all factors that were found to be of utmost importance for international students selecting a study destination abroad (Agarwal and Winkler, 1985; Chen, 2006; Lee, 2014; Macready and Tucker, 2011; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001; Mpingajira, 2011). Chen (2006) discovered that “tuition fees and scholarships” was the number one factor determining the choice of Canada by East Asian graduate students, followed by “academic reputation of the country” and “visa process”. The preference of South Africa as a study destination over other English speaking countries was largely influenced by the lower cost of living and education in the country, reported Mpingajira (2011). Availability of financial assistance from both host destinations and home countries in forms of scholarships, grants, and loans is a crucial factor in the overall decision to study abroad (Macready and Tucker, 2011). The matter of availability of part time work during studies is closely related to the overall cost issues associated with a study overseas and is found to impact a choice of a destination. For prospective students surveyed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2001) an opportunity of part time work during studies was rated the highest in importance in the group of factors related to cost considerations.

A significant factor in the choice of an international education destination related to the aspect of convenience is the existence of helpful visa arrangements for international students in the host country (Chen, 2006; Macready and Tucker, 2011; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011). Favorable policies of host countries ensuring that visa arrangements for international students are organized with minimal difficulty and bureaucratism have proven to influence the choice of some destinations over other (Macready and Tucker, 2011). Chen’s findings (2006) demonstrated that many graduate students from China had the United States as

the first choice of a study destination but chose Canada because of the ease and speed of the process of obtaining Canadian visa.

2.1.5 Career Enhancement Prospects

Overall, the decision to undertake academic studies internationally is influenced by the prospect of higher monetary returns. In a competitive job market, students are concerned with their marketability during career search. While overall costs of higher education abroad are generally high, studying internationally is justified by the likelihood of higher earnings in the future (Macready and Tucker, 2011). Additionally, many international students select a country destination with consideration of potential career opportunities after graduation (Macready and Tucker, 2011; Lee, 2014). For instance, East Asian students surveyed and interviewed by Chen (2006) acknowledged their interest in gaining employment in Canada after their graduate studies. Host countries interested in augmenting their workforce with talented foreign students with that country's academic credentials, establish national policies favoring international students opportunity to be employed after graduation (Macready and Tucker, 2011).

2.1.6 Choice of Location, Institution, and Program

When the choice of a program, institution, and location is in concern, international students evaluate various attributes of programs, HEIs and cities before their make final decision. In regards to the choice of an institution, quality of the institution, its academic reputation, rankings, and quality and expertise of professors were found to be of high importance to international students (Chen, 2006; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001; Soutar and Turner, 2002; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011). Consideration of the institution's rankings position is influenced by the perceived value of a degree from a highly ranked institution for future career opportunities (Chen, 2006). Recognition of qualifications from the institution and the strategic alliances that it has with HEIs globally (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001) and facilities it offers (Bodycott, 2009) were regarded important by international students.

Academic works that investigated international students' program choice revealed that quality of the program (Wilkins and Huisman, 2011) and course suitability (Soutar and Turner, 2002) were found influential. Chen (2006) devoted much attention to investigating program attributes of choice of international graduate students to Canada and presented a comprehensive account of

the factors of influence related to program evaluation. Above all, she discovered that program was the main factor in her research participants' choice, determined by uniqueness and specialization of programs that the graduate students were pursuing. Because Chen's survey and interview participants were exclusively graduate students, factors in their consideration included expertise of academic staff in the program, positive interaction with faculty and staff, and the ability of the program to serve their research interest. Some students in her research declared that they chose a particular program and institution in order to work with a specific professor whose research interest they shared. Findings of Chen's research highlight the academic inclination of graduate students that results in the specificity of their choice patterns.

International students are considerably less concerned with the choice of a city where their academic institution is located and report safety, diversity, and international environment as important factors in the choice of location (Chen, 2006).

2.1.7 Choice of Finland as an International Education Destination

Academic studies on factors influencing the choice of Finland as an international education destination in English are rather limited and represented by graduate theses (Hilden, n.d.; Vierimaa, 2013). In his graduate work Vierimaa (2013) investigated the decision-making process of prospective South Korean and Chinese students that consider Finland as their study destination and concluded that the country and institution's image, cost of education in Finland, advice from friends and professors back home, and previous personal experience of Finland (2013) are the most influential factors for the choice of Finland as a destination for international education. Vierimaa's study is valuable particularly because it researched prospective East Asian students to Finland, but lacks generalizability, as he interviewed only 13 students as part of his qualitative research. However, Vierimaa's study is significant for this research because the author gives a summary of two academic works on the topic of international student mobility to Finland conducted in the Finnish language. The two larger scale survey studies were performed by Kinnunen and Niemelä and looked at 873 and 972 international students to Finland respectively. According to Vierimaa's summary, Kinnunen concluded that quality of education and positive future career development as well as absence of tuition fees are the most important factors that the respondents regarded when choosing Finland as a study destination (2013). Niemelä, as reported by Vierimaa, got similar results in her research. Quality of education in

Finland, absence of tuitions fees, career development, and experiencing a new country were found to be the most important factors in the foreign students' choice of the country (Vierimaa, 2013). Additionally, less important but still significant were high standard of living in the country, learning a foreign language, previous knowledge of Finland, and future career plans in the country (Vierimaa, 2013). Similarly to Kinnunen and Niemelä's findings, Hilden (2014) discovers that enhancing future career prospects and cost of education in Finland are two of the most influential factors in the decision of graduate students at Lappeenranta University of Technology to chose Finland. Additionally, program suitability and recognition by future employers were reported as determinant factors of the choice of Finland, conforming with the global trends discovered in the literature on international education destination choice.

2.1.8 Theoretical Frameworks Explaining Factors of Influence

While push-pull model has been preferred by the majority of researchers of international education destination choice to explain the factors of influence in the decision to study internationally, a theoretical study by Cubillo, Sanchez, and Servino (2006) offers a conceptual framework focusing on specific groups of factors.

In their Model of International Students' Preferences the researchers identify five groups of factors that influence the prospective international students' choice of a specific country, or as the authors put it, the 'purchase intention' of students. Coming from the jargon of business and marketing, the term stands for 'a plan to purchase a particular good or service' (purchase intention, 2015). In this case, international education is considered a service and a student is regarded as a customer (Cubillo et al., 2007, p. 4). The groups of factors proposed by Cubillo et al. are personal reasons, country image effect, city image effect, institution image, and program evaluation. Individual factors within the groups are independent variables that influence the dependent and not observable variable - the purchase intention. Individual factors will be further discussed in the theoretical framework subsection.

2.2 Research on the Fulbright Program

One critical aspect of the choice of Fulbright Student Program destination is the level of competition for grants, or in other words, acceptance rate into the Fulbright Program, which varies from country to country. In the European region the United Kingdom, Germany, France,

Italy and Spain are notorious for getting a high number of applications, while only a small portion of the applicants actually receive the grant. To illustrate, in the academic year 2013-2014 the United Kingdom received 706 applications, while only 35 candidates were accepted (Fulbright U.S. Student Program, 2015). The ratio for the same year for the German Fulbright program was 303/82, for France - 189/19, and for the Italian program - 112/15 (Fulbright U.S. Student Program, 2015). Finland lies lower on the competition spectrum among European destinations with the ratio of applications and acceptances being 42/10 (Fulbright U.S. Student Program, 2015). Gill and Lang (2014) investigate the issue of competition for the Fulbright Program in their work 'Are Fulbright Applicants Idealists or Opportunists?' They review data on U.S. student applications to 68 countries from 2002 to 2008 and conclude that generally high competition does not prevent students from applying to more popular countries (Gill and Lang, 2014). When the researchers looked at specific groups of U.S. Student Program applicants, they noted that English Teaching Assistants tend to prefer countries with lower level of competition, while research students disregard the high competition and follow their choice no matter what the level of competition is for their country of preference. Additionally, Gill and Lang observed opportunistic behavior of applicants when the unemployment rate for a certain application year is higher than average (2014). Competition is a significant factor in a Fulbright students' choice of country destination, since a potential applicant only has one choice of country to apply to. Therefore attitude of the participants of this research towards competition for Fulbright grants will be investigated in the study.

From the methodological perspective, the majority of empirical academic works reviewed in this section chose quantitative research inquiry with the exception of Chen's (2006) and Bodycott's (2009) studies that employed mixed methods methodology and Vierimaa's (2014) qualitative study.

U.S. Fulbright Student Program participants constitute a distinct group of international students. Due to the strong academic nature of the program and the peculiarities of the American psyche, factors that determine the U.S. Fulbright Program grantees' choice of a particular country are especially interesting to examine. It remains unknown whether similar research has been done in other countries that participate in the Fulbright Program. Notwithstanding, this study will fill in

the gap in academic research on international education destination choice by investigating the motivations of the Fulbright U.S. Student Program participants to choose Finland as a Fulbright destination.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents a theoretical framework developed for this study. It offers an overview of theoretical frameworks used in previous research studies on the topic of international student destination choice and elaborates on the features of the created Model of Fulbright Destination Choice.

3.1 Theoretical Frameworks in Relevant Literature

The “push-pull” model is largely utilized in the studies on the topic of international student destination choice (Bodycott, 2009; Chen, 2006; Lee, 2014; Macready and Tucker, 2011; McMahon, 1992; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011). As the majority of these studies investigate why students from developing countries decide to undertake international studies in the developed English-speaking countries, there is a rationale for investigating push factors, that often turn out to be negative. At the same time, these studies repeatedly find out that push factors are not important in the choice of an international education destination as the pull factors prove to be (Chen, 2007; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Wilkins and Huisman, 2011). Wilkins and Huisman (2011) even suggested that the widely accepted push-pull model in the context of international student destination choice could potentially evolve into a model where the push factors are insignificant.

Although the “push-pull” framework is commonly used in the literature on the topic of international education destination choice and is widely accepted by the researchers in the field, it is limited in providing a comprehensive account of factors influencing the choice of a country destination.

Authors of other studies on the topic offer more comprehensive theoretical frameworks. Chen (2006) created a Synthesis model that incorporated push-pull framework, Hossler and Gallagher’s model of College Choice, social capital theory and creative capital theories. Her model examined both factors influencing the choice of Canada as a graduate study destination and the decision-making process behind the choice.

Cubillo et al. (2006) designed a framework of International Student Preferences that provides a conceptual representation of groups of factors that influence the choice of destination of

international study and examines the relationship between factors of influence as independent variables and the purchase decision as a dependent variable.

In this research my aim was to employ a theoretical framework that would offer an opportunity to both present a comprehensive account of factors influencing the choice of a Fulbright destination and conceptualize the factors that influence the choice. In order to do that, I developed a Model of Fulbright Destination Choice, largely based on the Model of International Student Preferences by Cubillo et al.

Before presenting the “Model of Fulbright Destination Choice”, it is necessary to elaborate on the original framework used for the development of the model.

3.2 Model of International Student Preferences by Cubillo et al.

The model created by J.M. Cubillo, J. Sanchez, and J.Cervino aims to explain what factors influence prospective international students’ choice of a specific country. The theoretical model was built upon a literature review spanning 12 works on the topic of international student decision making. The researchers looked at studies of both theoretical and empirical nature on the topic, concluding their review with the model of International Students’ Preferences. The Model is comprised of five groups of factors: personal reasons, country image effect, city effect, institution image, and program evaluation that determine the purchase intention of students choosing an international study destination. Personal reasons incorporate factors related to the overall goals of international education, e.g. personal improvement and better career prospects. Factors belonging to the country image effect group describe academic and social attributes of countries, for instance, socioeconomic level of the country and its social and academic reputation. City effect group is composed of factors related to the city dimension of choice, while institution image and program evaluation include aspects related to HEIs and academic programs. The purchase intention is a dependent and non-observable variable, while the individual factors in the five groups serve as independent variables. 19 independent variables in total are believed to influence the decision of an international education destination according to the Model of International Student Preferences.

3.3 Model of Fulbright Destination Choice

The developed theoretical model represents the factors that influence the choice of a Fulbright destination, inclusive of the choice of the country, city, institution, and program. The model proposes that 35 factors (independent variables) influence the final choice (dependent variable). Individual factors are combined into five clusters that represent conceptual thematic categories: academic characteristics of the country, social characteristics of the country, city, institution, and program (consult Figure 1).

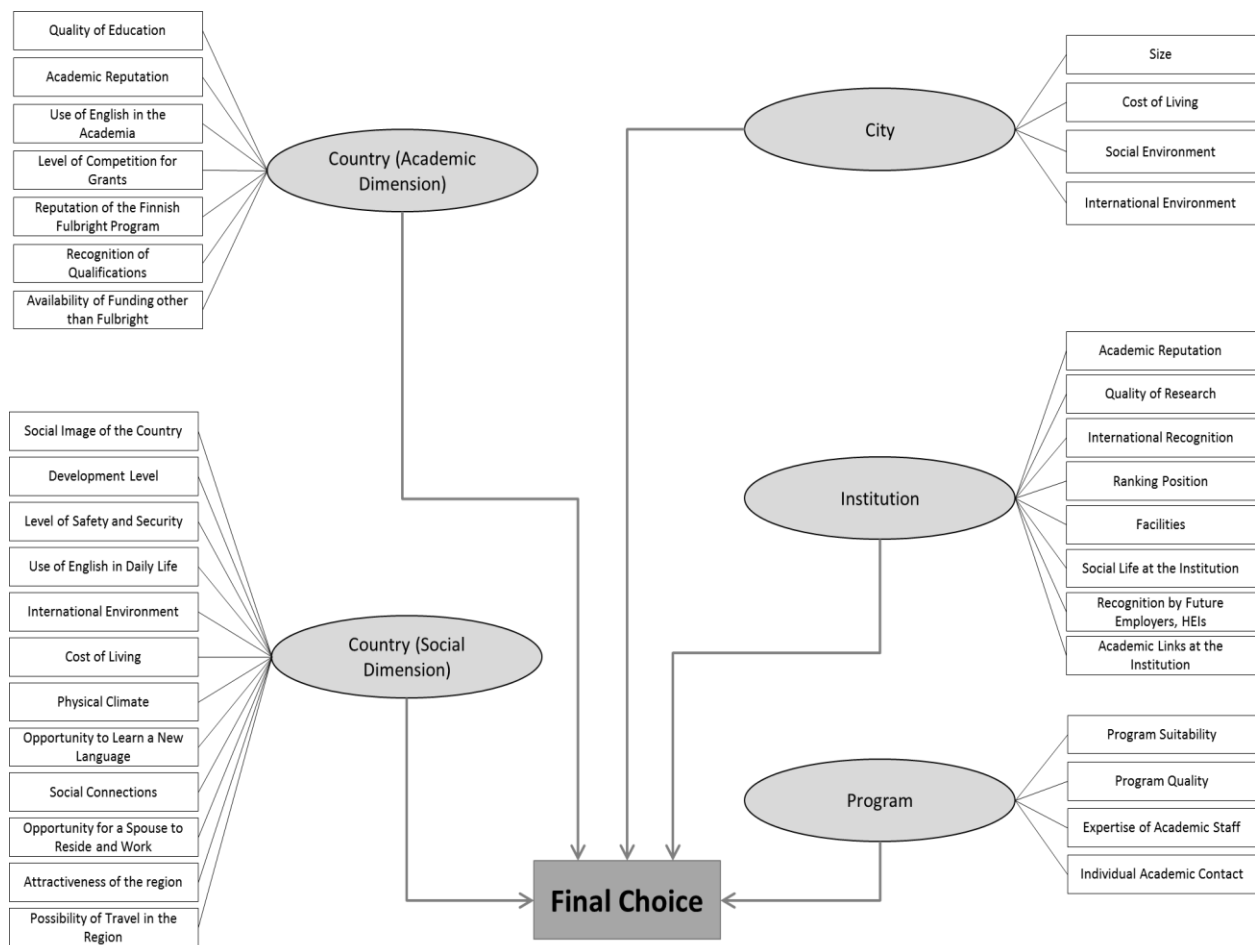


Figure 1. Model of Fulbright Destination Choice

Factors of influence were gathered from the academic literature on the topic of international education destination choice (Chen, 2006; Cubillo et al, 2006; Macready and Tucker, 2011; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001) and supplemented by factors specific to the Fulbright Program.

Among these factors, level of competition for grants, reputation of the Finnish Fulbright Program, and availability of funding other than the Fulbright grant were added to the comprehensive list of factors in accordance with recommendations from practitioners at the Fulbright Center Finland.

The complete list of factors organized into thematic cluster categories is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Factors Influencing the Choice of Fulbright Destination

Country (Academic Dimension)	City
Level of Competition for Grants	Size of the City
Quality of Education	Cost of Living
Academic Reputation	Social Environment
Use of English in the Academia	International Environment
Recognition of Qualifications	
Reputation of the Finnish Fulbright Program	Institution
Funding Other than Fulbright Grant	Academic Links
Country (Social Dimension)	Academic Reputation
Social Image of the Country	Ranking Position
Development Level	International Recognition
Level of Safety and Security	Quality of Research
Physical Climate	Recognition by Future Employers
Cost of Living	Facilities
International Environment	Social Life at the Institution
Use of English in Daily Life	
Opportunity to Learn a New Language	Program
Social Connections	Program Suitability
Opportunity for a Spouse to Reside and Work	Quality of the Program
Attractiveness of the Region	Expertise of Academic Staff
Possibility of Travel in the Region	Individual Academic Contact

An important note here, the organization of thematic clusters of factors in this model is deviant from that proposed by Cubillo et al. Dividing the country set of factors into two categories was necessary in order to highlight the important differentiation between the academic and social aspects of the country-choice. Personal reasons group of factors was omitted as the majority of factors suggested by Cubillo et al. are push factors, while this theoretical framework focuses exclusively on pull factors. One factor that belongs to the thematic group of personal reasons is “social connections” in a potential choice country. This factor is more suitable in the thematic

cluster of factors related to the social aspects of the country and is therefore placed into that group.

This theoretical framework proposes that all 35 factors that represent independent variables influence the dependent variable, the final outcome. Representation of individual factors within larger groups or clusters is done with the aim to organize these factors thematically and conceptualize the groups of factors.

The Model of Fulbright Destination Choice is used in this project to explain the phenomenon of choice of a Fulbright Program destination. It guides the process of this research study and provides a context for examining the importance of individual factors for the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination.

Review of relevant literature on international education destination choice provided a rationale for constructing this framework with the aim to answer the main question of this research study: what factors influenced the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination. The importance of factors derived from the literature is examined in the quantitative survey and later probed in qualitative interviews. In the first quantitative stage of this research, the level of importance of each individual factor is measured through analysis of Likert-type data.

This work is the first study investigating the choice of an international education destination by a distinct group of international students - the Fulbright U.S. Student Program participants.

Considering the unique characteristics of the research population represented by high-quality American graduate students and having examined academic literature on international education destination choice, this research project assumes that factors (independent variables) related to the academic country dimension, program, and institution exerted the most influence on the choice of Finland (dependent variable) by the Fulbright U.S. Student Program grantees.

Therefore, this project advances the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis:

Factors related to academic characteristics of the country, program, and institution exerted the most influence on the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination by U.S. Student Program grantees.

4. Methodology

This chapter introduces the reader to the philosophical worldview adhered to in this research and describes the methodology and specific methods used in the study. Further, it gives information on the research participants and reports on the methods of data collection. Additionally, the chapter provides information on treatment of ethical issues throughout the research process, validity and reliability of the study, and its limitations.

4.1 Research Epistemology

In this research I take on a pragmatic philosophical worldview. Adherents of pragmatism use multiple approaches with the goal of better understanding the research problem (Creswell, 2009). As this philosophical worldview in the research realm is not committed to a particular system of viewing reality, it provides a great flexibility that allows the investigator to employ both quantitative and qualitative assumptions in their study (Creswell, 2009). Thus, pragmatism can give the freedom to choose assumptions, methods, procedures, and forms of data collection that best fit the purpose of this research at a given moment in the study. The pragmatic worldview supports mixed methods research approach which has been chosen for this research project.

4.2 Research Methodology

This research applies a mixed methods strategy of inquiry, also referred to as “multi-method”, “convergence”, “combined” or “integrated” inquiry in various sources (Creswell, 2009). The mixed methods research strategy brings in both forms of data, quantitative and qualitative, in a single study. Mixed methods research inquiry has been chosen for this study for the many advantages that it provides. Incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches is the key to better and broader understanding of the research problem. It helps construct a more comprehensive account of the area of the research inquiry. While individual methods have their limitations, the mixing of methods is believed to neutralize or cancel out the flaws of other methods (Creswell, 2009). Despite the numerous advantages, the mixed methods research inquiry poses some challenges. It requires extensive data collection, the analysis of both numeric and text data is time-intensive and entails the familiarity of the researcher with both forms of research. Having said that, mixed methods research strategy is the best fit for this research

project and allows to use both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry in tandem to get a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Mixed methods design offers various possibilities of structuring the research that serve different purposes. It incorporates two major groups of design strategies based on timing of data collection of both types: sequential and concurrent strategies. When sequential strategy is employed, data collection occurs in two phases. Sequential design can be exploratory, when the researcher first collects qualitative data and follows up with gathering quantitative data during the second phase, or explanatory, when the inquirer first collects quantitative data and later gathers qualitative data. When a researcher does his study in quantitative/qualitative phases while looking at the research through a theoretical lens, the mixed methods design is transformative. With concurrent strategies of mixed methods design, both types of data are collected simultaneously. As part of the concurrent strategy designs the researcher often embeds one smaller form of data within another larger data set.

Sequential explanatory design was found to be the most suitable methodology for this research project. It allowed to first survey the members of research population and later follow up with qualitative interviews that offer detailed views of participants. The second phase thus served to elaborate, enhance, and clarify the results from the quantitative method with the results of the qualitative method.

Following is the visual representation of the Sequential Explanatory mixed methods procedure. The framework is adopted from the 3rd edition of John W. Creswell's "Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches" (2009):

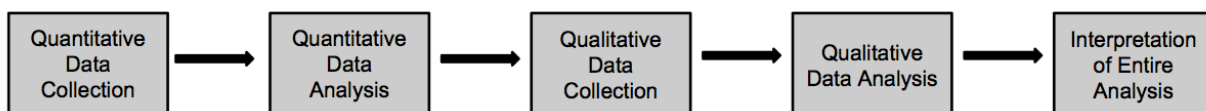


Figure 2. Sequential Explanatory Strategy

Specific methods utilized in this research project will be talked through in the next section.

4.3 Research Methods

The specific research methods involved in data collection and analysis for this research are determined by the mixed methods research design. In this sequential mixed methods research I used both quantitative and qualitative data and, therefore, both forms of data collection and analysis characteristic of the two research methods. The instrument of the first phase of research consisted of closed ended questions, while in the second phase open-ended questions were employed as part of the qualitative interview data gathering.

Regarding the analysis process, both statistical and text analysis were used in order to answer the research questions. The specific instruments of data collection will be talked about in more detail in the upcoming sections about data collection.

4.4 Participants

A total of 134 U.S. students applied for and obtained a Fulbright grant to Finland within the timeframe of 15 years starting with the grant period of 2000-2001 and ending with the grant year of 2014-2015. These students constitute the research population for this project. Since the study researches the whole population, it did not use any sampling procedures in the quantitative stage of the research.

During the first quantitative stage of this research, 60 out of the population of 134 U.S. Student program grantees participated in the online survey creating a response rate of 48%. During the subsequent qualitative stage, eight grantees took part in follow-up interviews conducted in person or via Skype.

4.5 Data Collection

According to the predetermined sequential mixed methods strategy design, the process of data collection started with gathering quantitative data during the first phase of the research and qualitative data collection in the following phase. The quantitative data was collected through a self-administered online survey of all members of the research population, and the qualitative data was subsequently gathered from eight in-depth interviews with former and current U.S. Student Program grantees to Finland from various years of participation in the program.

4.5.1 Quantitative Phase of Data Collection

Instrument

The instrument of data collection in the first stage of this research was an online self-administered questionnaire. The choice of this instrument was determined by its ability to reach all members of the research population, as the grantees were physically dispersed and most likely located in the United States. Additional benefits of this method of data collection are the economy of the design and the fast turnaround in data collection.

The questionnaire was created with the help of Google Forms - a free online survey tool. The tool was preferred to others because of its many strengths. Google Forms allowed unlimited questions and responses, had various survey question types, and was free of charge.

Additionally, collected data was automatically organized into a Spreadsheets document that could be easily used and analyzed.

The instrument was developed specifically for this research in collaboration with professionals in the field, the staff members of the Fulbright Center Finland. Largely based on the review of relevant literature (Chen, 2006; Cubillo et al, 2006, Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002), it had additional context-based questions. The creation of the questionnaire was guided by the theoretical framework of this study.

The questionnaire is divided into three parts. Questions in the first part asked participants about their academic disciplines, location in Finland and host institution(s) during their Fulbright year, and whether they visited Finland prior to Fulbright. In the second part of the questionnaire the respondents were asked to rate the importance of 35 factors on a 5-point scale from the unimportant (1) to very important (5). 35 factors corresponded with the independent variables proposed in the theoretical framework of this study. An additional "I did not consider this factor" item was added, as it was anticipated that not all factors from the comprehensive list were considered by the grantees. Factors were divided into four groups for a more clear representation of information. The first group was comprised of 19 academic and social factors related to the country dimension. The second group included 4 factors associated with the city dimension. Eight factors in the third group were associated with the academic institution dimension, and the last group contained 4 factors related to the program dimension.

The third and last part of the questionnaire requested demographic information of the respondents, including questions about gender, marital status, and their year of birth. This part of questionnaire also asked participants to state the year they came to Finland with a Fulbright grant. The questionnaire concluded asking grantees for possible additional comments and suggestions.

4.5.2 Qualitative Phase of Data Collection

In the second phase of this research, qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with eight grantees from various years of participation in the program and diverse academic disciplines. The interviews took semi-structured format. Having such format allowed for both freedom to express their views and opinions for the participants and a loose structure that aided in covering all the questions raised after the analysis of quantitative data.

The eight interviews were conducted either in person or via Skype and were audio recorded and later fully transcribed. The interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes. Every interviewee received and signed an Informed Consent Form (later ICF) before they engaged in the research. The ICF, that can be consulted in the appendix, acknowledged that the rights of participants would be protected and assured confidentiality of their responses.

The issue of confidentiality and other ethical matters will be discussed in the next section.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues can be present during all stages of a research project, including preparation stage of research, data collection, analysis, and discussion, and post-research stages (Creswell, 2009). The concerns of the protection of privacy of the research participants, provision of confidentiality of the research data, and transparency in communicating the results of the research are some of the many ethical issues that have been taken into consideration throughout this research project.

Regarding the participation in this project, survey respondents and interviewees participated in the research voluntarily. Survey respondents were debriefed about the aims of this study through the cover letter sent to them in an email invitation to participate in this research. Interviewees in

the second qualitative stage of the project were given ICFs that described the aims and objectives of the research in detail.

Small number of U.S. Student program grantees per year and readily available information on their academic profiles would make survey respondents identifiable through the information on their gender, academic disciplines, and years of participation in the Fulbright program provided in the survey. With respect to the confidentiality of the survey respondents, their identity was not deduced during the analysis of the survey data thus assuring the privacy of the participants' responses.

Prior to the interviews participants were asked to be audio recorded and informed that the recording was conducted for transcription purposes and to ensure that no verbal information is missed during the interview. The participants were also notified that they could withdraw at any time during the interview if they felt uncomfortable or did not wish to continue participation. By signing the ICF that presented this information, they agreed to be audio recorded. In cases where the interview was only possible via Skype, the ICF was sent to participants in an e-mail to which they responded with their agreement.

Concerning the future use of the collected data, it will be kept for a period of five years in a digital format as a separate folder on my computer that can only be accessed by me. After this period the data will be discarded.

To ensure ethical principles in communicating the results of this research project, the works of other researchers used in this paper have been acknowledged by referencing in the APA Referencing System format.

4.7 Validity/Reliability

As this research is a sequential mixed methods study composed of a quantitative stage followed by a qualitative stage, it is necessary to establish both quantitative and qualitative validity and reliability.

Since the instrument of the quantitative stage, online questionnaire, was developed specifically for this study, it was important to build its validity and reliability during the stages of the instrument preparation and data analysis (Creswell, 2009). In order to establish the content validity, the questionnaire was tested by six staff members of the Fulbright Center Finland. Comments of the testers regarding questions, format, and scales were incorporated into the final

version of the instrument. The reader can consult full questionnaire and cover letter to participants in the appendix of this work. At the data analysis stage, internal consistency reliability of the instrument was measured with Cronbach's coefficient Alpha, showing that the instrument was reliable.

To ensure qualitative validity, interview transcripts were checked for any discrepancies with interviewees' words. Additionally, during the process of coding, codes were constantly compared with the data in order to make sure there was no shift in the meaning. Regarding qualitative reliability, the concept itself is understood and interpreted in various ways by the academic community. While some authors believe that the concept of reliability is entirely incompatible with qualitative research, others argue for different terminology proposing "dependability", "trustworthiness", and "consistency" as more suitable terms (Golafshani, 2003, p. 601). Many researchers suggest that consistency of qualitative research can be achieved through the demonstration of validity (Golafshani, 2003, p. 601). Therefore, in this research qualitative reliability is attained through ensuring that validity procedures are employed.

4.8 Limitations

Regrettably, this research does not include all applicants for Fulbright U.S. student grant to Finland that applied but got their applications denied. The reason for not incorporating this group into the research was the absence of contact information for such applicants. Including this group of applicants would provide the most comprehensive account of why and how Finland was chosen as a Fulbright destination. However, as stated, it was beyond the bounds of possibility to find contact information for the applicants not awarded the grant.

5. Quantitative Findings

The following section introduces the findings from the first quantitative stage of this research project. It acquaints the reader with the data analysis used and follows with general description of collected data, including the demographic characteristics of respondents, their academic disciplines, years of participation in the Fulbright Program, their location and host institutions in Finland. Presentation of the demographic characteristics of survey respondents is followed by the results of descriptive analysis of the attitudinal items from the survey. Further, results of inferential analysis are introduced, comprised of independent sample t-test and one way analysis of variance test results. Additionally, this section covers the results of analysis of internal consistency reliability of the instrument proposed by this study.

5.1 Data Analysis

Quantitative data in this research has been analyzed with Excel Spreadsheets. The program was selected for analysis of the data because the number of survey respondents (N=60) is not large and therefore suitable for manual analysis. In addition, the program is free of charge and easily available on personal computer devices. Performing data analysis manually was chosen because it allowed for a deeper understanding of the process of quantitative analysis. The majority of the tests were performed manually using the build-in functions of the program. For one way analysis of variance tests and Cronbach's coefficient alpha, Real Statistics Resource pack was used.

5.2 Survey Participation

Prior to revealing the results of the quantitative analysis, it is important to demonstrate the representation of all grantees that went to Finland with a Fulbright student grant from years 2000 to 2015 by those who responded to the survey. This information is necessary to see the potential generalizability of the research results to the research population. The following graph shows the ratio of grantees from a given year of participation in the Fulbright program who took part in the survey and the total number of grantees for that year. Blue bars represent the number of grantees who participated in the survey, while the red bars correspond to the total number of U.S. Student Program grantees for that academic year.

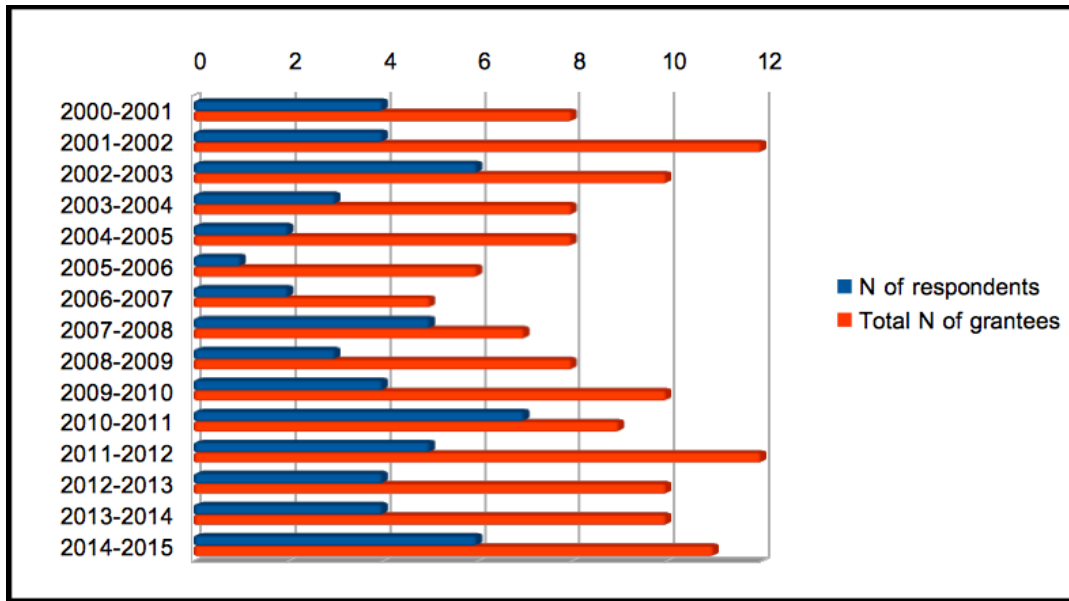


Figure 3. Representation by Year of Participation

As can be seen from Figure 3, respondents of the survey represented the research population fairly well with the exception of the grant year 2005-2006 where only one respondent out of six grantees for that year participated in the survey. Such distribution of survey respondents in relation to the total number of grantees per given year is believed to support sound generalizations for the whole population of this research and strengthens reliability of this research.

5.3 Summary Profile of Respondents

This subsection shows the distribution of survey respondents by gender, age at the time of participation, and marital status.

Table 2. Demographic items (n=60)

Categories		N	%	Categories		N	%
Gender	Female	35	58.0%	Age at the time of participation	20-25	24	40.0%
	Male	25	42.0%		25-30	20	33.3%
Marital Status			30-35		7	11.7%	
			35-40		5	8.3%	
			40 and up		4	6.7%	
	Single	49	81.7%				
	Married	7	14.3%				
	Other	4	6.7%				

While female respondents constituted the majority in the gender category, a fair number of responses from male participants was collected, making the data representative of both genders. The majority of the grantees went to Finland with a Fulbright grant between the ages of 20 and 25, with the next highest in number age group being from 25 to 30 years of age at the time of participation.

Information not included in this table but important to mention is that the mode mark of central tendency for the 60 respondents was 24. The fact that the most popular age of participation in the Fulbright program is 24 years of age could be explained by the preference that is given to recent graduates of bachelor's degree in receiving the Fulbright Student grant.

A large percent of the respondents reported being single during their time as Fulbright recipients.

5.4 Summary of Academic Disciplines

This subsection shows the distribution of academic disciplines among the survey respondents.

The participants were asked to state their academic discipline. During the analysis process, reported academic disciplines were organized into six categories: arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, professional disciplines, formal sciences, and interdisciplinary studies. The category of professional disciplines included such academic subjects as environmental studies, architecture, library and information sciences, law, public policy and education.

The following table demonstrates the distribution of the disciplines among the respondents of the survey. The table has an additional section that depicts the distribution of academic disciplines for the whole research population. The information on the grantees' academic disciplines was acquired from the website of the Finnish Fulbright Commission. This information was analyzed for all grantees who went to Finland with a Fulbright grant between the years 2000 and 2015 in the same manner as the data for the academic disciplines of the survey respondents. The following table has two sections in order to demonstrate the representation of the survey respondents' academic disciplines in relation to those of the research population. The purpose of this demonstration is to establish more evidence of generalizability of the research findings.

Table 3. Summary of Academic Disciplines

Survey Respondents (N=60)			Research Population (N=134)		
	N	%		N	%
Arts and Humanities	22	36.7%	Arts and Humanities	47	35.1%
Music and musicology	9	15.0%	Music and musicology	15	11.2%
Other	13	21.7%	Other	32	23.9%
Professional Disciplines	16	26.7%	Professional disciplines	40	29.9%
Education	5	8.3%	Education	10	7.5%
Other	11	18.3%	Other	30	22.4%
Social Sciences	13	21.7%	Social sciences	23	17.2%
Natural Sciences	6	10.0%	Natural sciences	18	13.4%
Formal Sciences	1	1.7%	Formal sciences	4	3.0%
Interdisciplinary	1	1.7%	Interdisciplinary	2	1.5%
n/a	1	1.7%			

The table demonstrates that the distribution of the groups of academic disciplines of the survey respondents mirrors that of the whole research population, thus creating strong evidence for the high level of generalizability of the findings of this research.

Having a closer look at the distribution of academic disciplines both among the survey respondents and the whole research population, Arts and Humanities prevail among the academic disciplines of American grantees to Finland. Notably, music and musicology stand out as a particularly popular subject among the grantees to Finland whose fields of study belong to the Arts and Humanities.

The second largest group of disciplines represented by the survey respondents is the so-called professional disciplines that included architecture, environmental studies, library and information sciences, law, public policy and education. Education is a popular academic field for the students of professional disciplines going to Finland. The group of social science fields of study closely followed the professional disciplines in numbers. Natural and formal sciences constituted a less significant number of respondents of the survey, mirroring the representation of these disciplines in the whole population of grantees to Finland from the years 2000 to 2015.

5.5 Summary of Location and Host Institutions in Finland

This subsection presents the distribution of the survey respondents in terms of location in Finland during their Fulbright year and their host institutions. In the same way the previous subsections were structured, this segment introduces the summary of location and host institutions of survey

respondents in comparison with the corresponding distribution of the whole population of the research. The intent of such organization of survey results is to demonstrate that the distribution of survey respondents by location and host institutions reflects the alike distribution of the whole population of U.S. Student Program grantees to Finland from years 2000 to 2015. Accordingly, generalizability of survey results to the whole population proves sensible.

Table 4. Location in Finland

Survey Respondents (N=60)			Research Population (N=134)		
City	N	%	City	N	%
Helsinki	37	61.7%	Helsinki	81	60.4%
Turku	6	10.0%	Turku	14	10.4%
Tampere	5	8.3%	Jyväskylä	7	5.2%
Joensuu	4	6.7%	Tampere	6	4.5%
Jyväskylä	4	6.7%	Oulu	6	4.5%
Oulu	1	1.7%	Joensuu	5	3.7%
Kuopio	1	1.7%	Rovaniemi	4	3.0%
Multiple Locations	2	3.3%	Kuopio	2	1.5%
			Åbo	1	0.7%
			Hämeenlinna	1	0.7%
			Multiple locations	4	3.0%
			n/a	3	2.2%

Over 60% of survey respondents resided in the Greater Helsinki area during their Fulbright year, which is also true for the whole group of U.S. Student Program grantees to Finland from years 2000 to 2015. Turku (10%), Tampere (8.3%), Jyväskylä (6.7%), and Joensuu (6.7%) hosted a larger part of the remaining grantees who participated in the survey. Respondents who lived in Oulu, Kuopio, or in multiple locations during their Fulbright year constitute a less significant percent of survey respondents. While the research population is more diverse in regards to the location during the Fulbright year, survey respondents represented the majority of locations of Fulbright grantees to Finland and to a great extent mirrored the distribution of the whole population based on location. Additionally, we can observe that grantees who stayed in Tampere and Joensuu during their Fulbright year were more enthusiastic to participate in the survey.

Table 5. Host Institutions in Finland

Survey Respondents (N=60)			Research Population (N=134)		
Institution	N	%	Institution	N	%
University of Helsinki	17	28.3%	University of Helsinki	44	32.8%
Sibelius Academy	9	15.0%	University of Turku	13	9.7%
University of Turku	6	10.0%	Aalto University	11	8.2%
Aalto University	5	8.3%	Sibelius Academy	10	7.5%
University of Tampere	4	6.7%	University of Jyväskylä	7	5.2%
University of Joensuu	4	6.7%	University of Tampere	5	3.7%
KUVA	2	3.3%	University of Oulu	5	3.7%
University of Jyväskylä	2	3.3%	University of Joensuu	4	3.0%
Other	7	11.7%	University of Lapland	4	3.0%
Multiple hosts	4	6.7%	University of Kuopio	3	2.2%
			University of Art and Design	3	2.2%
			Helsinki University of Technology	2	1.5%
			KUVA	2	1.5%
			Other	12	9.0%
			Multiple hosts	9	6.7%

In regards to the host institutions, the most survey respondents (28.3%) studied or did research at the University of Helsinki. Sibelius Academy was the second most popular host institution for the survey participants (15%), followed by the University of Turku (10%), Aalto University (8.3%), University of Tampere (6.7%), and University of Joensuu (6.7%). Survey respondents reflected the general distribution pattern of all grantees to Finland by host university relatively well. Furthermore, respondents hosted by Sibelius Academy, University of Tampere, University of Joensuu, and KUVA have shown more eagerness to participate in the survey.

5.6 Summary of Factors of Influence

The following subsection presents the results of analysis of the attitudinal items from the survey, presented by the Likert-type questions on the perceived importance of factors influencing the choice of Finland by U.S. Student Program grantees. The section incorporates information on the mean and standard deviation scores of factors of importance rated by survey participants.

Likert-type data is treated as interval data in this research, therefore parametric statistical methods are used in the analysis. The following table offers the means of 35 factors of influence and their standard deviation scores. The means are calculated on the scale from 1 to 5 with the following values: 1- unimportant; 2- of little importance; 3- moderately important; 4- important; 5- very important.

Table 6. Mean and Standard Deviation Scores

Factor	Mean	SD
Use of English in the academia	4.36	1.09
Quality of education in Finland	4.22	0.95
Academic reputation of Finland	4.20	0.88
Expertise of academic staff	4.11	1.05
Program suitability	4.06	1.07
Quality of the program	4.04	1.03
Individual academic contact	3.94	1.05
Quality of research at the institution	3.83	1.19
Academic links at the institution	3.77	1.23
Level of safety and security in Finland	3.74	1.06
Use of English in daily life	3.74	1.13
Institution's academic reputation	3.63	1.22
Attractiveness of the region	3.60	1.06
Level of competition for grants	3.57	1.25
Possibility of travel in the region	3.55	1.08
Reputation of the Finnish Fulbright program	3.52	1.19
Development level of Finland	3.47	1.14
International environment (city)	3.36	1.05
Facilities	3.36	1.08
Opportunity to learn a new language	3.34	1.15
Social environment (city)	3.27	1.15
Social image of Finland	3.24	1.22
International environment in Finland	3.19	0.93
Recognition by future employers, HEIs	3.12	1.24
International recognition of the institution	3.08	1.13
Social connections	3.06	1.42
Size of the city	2.96	1.25
Social life at the institution	2.96	0.95
Recognition of qualifications from Finland	2.95	1.47
Institution's ranking position	2.79	1.30
Cost of living in Finland	2.74	1.10
Cost of living (city dimension)	2.70	1.05
Availability of funding other than Fulbright grant	2.48	1.29
Physical climate in Finland	2.47	1.32
Opportunity for a spouse to reside and work in Finland	2.31	1.78

Notes: (1) Data is presented from the highest importance to the lowest importance;

(2) SD = standard deviation.

Quantitative analysis of mean scores of 35 factors in the attitudinal section of the online survey identified the following factors as having the highest score in the level of importance. Such academic aspects of Finland as “Use of English in the academia” (4.36), “Quality of education in Finland” (4.22), and “Academic reputation of Finland” (4.20) had the highest mean scores among the factors rated by the survey respondents, exhibiting the utmost importance of these factors in the decision to choose Finland as a Fulbright destination by U.S. Student Program grantees. These three factors are followed by aspects related to the program of choice. Mean scores for “Expertise of academic staff” (4.11), “Program suitability” (4.06), “Quality of the program” (4.04), and “Individual academic contact in the program” (3.94) exhibit high importance of these factors for the survey respondents. Following are the academic aspects of the institution of choice, “Quality of research at the institution” (3.83) and “Academic links at the institution” (3.77). The results convey that survey respondents considered the factors related to the academic aspects of Finland, a specific program and institution as the most important. These results can be explained by the academic inclination of the Fulbright program and its participants and support the findings of previous research studies. The importance of quality of education in the country and its academic reputation were highlighted in the works of Chen (2006), Lee (2014), Macready and Tucker (2011), Mpingajira (2011), and Wilkins and Huisman (2011). The possibility of studying and doing research in the language international students speak was found to be one of the key factors in the choice of a destination for international education by Bodycott (2009), Macready and Tucker (2011), Mpingajira (2011), and Wilkins and Huisman (2011). Findings of this project resonate with the results of research works by Chen (2006), Soutar and Turner (2002), and Wilkins and Huisman (2011) on such aspects related to the program evaluation as expertise of faculty and quality and suitability of the program. Chen’s research sample students similarly admitted the paramount importance of an individual academic contact in the program and quality of research at the institution (2006). The results of the descriptive analysis of factors support the hypothesis advanced in this study. To remind the reader, the hypothesis proposed in this study stated that factors related to academic aspects of the country, program, and the institutions exerted the most influence on the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination by U.S. Student Program grantees.

“Recognition of qualifications from Finland” (2.95), “Institution’s ranking position” (2.79), “Cost of living” in both country (2.74) and city (2.70), “Availability of funding other than Fulbright grant” (2.48), “Physical climate in Finland” (2.47), and “Opportunity for a spouse to reside and work in Finland” (2.31) have the lowest mean scores and show that they are on average the least important for the respondents of the survey. The factor that regards the opportunity for a spouse to reside and work in Finland has the highest standard deviation score, which can be explained by the division of respondents into two groups based on their marital status, with the respondents having a spouse giving higher importance to the factor, while for the rest of the respondents the factor was rated “unimportant” or “of little importance”, if considered. Considerations of institution’s ranking position, recognition of qualifications from Finland, and cost issues, rated as some of the least important factors affecting the choice of Finland by U.S. Student Program grantees, proved to be the opposite for international students in numerous research works reviewed in Chapter 2. Like that, cost issues were accentuated by Agarwal and Winkler (1985), Chen (2006), Lee (2014), Macready and Tucker (2011), Mazzarol and Soutar (2001), and Mpingajira (2011). Rankings of academic institutions were rated important in the works by Wilkins and Huisman (2011) and Chen (2006). Lastly, the importance of recognition of host country’s qualifications was featured in academic studies of Bodycott (2009), Lee (2014), Macready and Tucker (2011), Mazzarol and Soutar (2001), and Mpingajira (2011).

A possible explanation for the nonconformance of U.S. Student Program grantees attitudes towards rankings, recognition of qualifications and cost matters relates to the nature of the Fulbright Program. In regards to the cost issues, two characteristics of the program might offer an explanation. Firstly, the program provides a substantial scholarship for the participants. For other international students this is often not the case, therefore more regards are given to consideration of costs. Secondly, the Fulbright Program’s duration is one academic year, while other international students prepare for a longer time spent abroad for educational purposes (varying based on the level of degree). Having to plan on how to financially sustain themselves during years of studying abroad, other international students are more considerate of cost issues. Conceivably, the duration of the Fulbright Program and the amount of scholarship available to grant recipients allows Fulbright grantees to focus less on cost issues.

Regarding the consideration of rankings of academic institutions, it is possible that U.S. Student Program grantees did not regard the factor as important because of the high value of the

Fulbright Program itself. As for the recognition of qualifications from Finland, U.S. Fulbright Student Program grantees could treat this factor as less significant both because of the value of the Fulbright Program and the perceived high quality of Finnish education system.

5.7 Independent T-test Results

Independent T-tests were performed in order to determine whether there is a significant statistical difference among the means of all 35 factors for two independent groups within the survey respondents. Like that, responses of (1) survey participants who visited Finland prior to their Fulbright year and (2) survey participants who had not been to Finland prior to the Fulbright year were compared using the independent sample T-tests. The analysis assumed that the groups had unequal variances.

Sizes of the two groups were unequal with 26 people in the group of respondents who visited Finland prior to their Fulbright and 34 grantees in the group of respondents who had not been to Finland prior.

The hypotheses for the comparison of means of factors of influence for the two groups were:

H0: means of the two groups are equal

H1: means of the two groups are not equal

A p-value of <0.05 provided evidence that the means are not equal and therefore supported the rejection of the null hypothesis.

The following table introduces the results of the T-tests among the two groups of the survey respondents based on the previous visits to Finland vs not having been to Finland prior to their Fulbright year.

Table 7. Results of T-tests (Previous Visits to Finland)

FACTOR	P<0.05	Mean (+)	Mean (-)
Quality of education in Finland			
Academic reputation of Finland			
Use of English in the Academia			
Level of competition for grants			
Reputation of the Finnish Fulbright Program	v	3.90	3.23
Recognition of qualifications from Finland			
Availability of funding other than Fulbright grant			
Social image of Finland	v	3.67	2.93
International environment			
Physical climate			
Opportunity to learn a new language			
Social connections in Finland	v	3.68	2.64
Development level of Finland			
Level of safety and security in Finland	v	4.10	3.52
Cost of living in Finland			
Use of English in daily life	v	3.36	3.97
Attractiveness of the region	v	4.00	3.33
Possibility of travel in the region			
Opportunity for a spouse to reside and work in Finland	v	3.40	1.63
Size of the city			
Cost of living (city)			
Social environment (city)			
International environment (city)			
Academic links at the institution			
Institution's academic reputation	v	3.95	3.41
Institution's ranking position	v	3.28	2.42
International recognition of the institution	v	3.47	2.83
Quality of research at the institution			
Recognition by future employers (institution)			
Facilities	v	3.75	3.10
Social life at the institution			
Program suitability			
Quality of the program	v	4.48	3.74
Expertise of academic staff	v	4.48	3.88
Individual academic contact in the program	v	4.24	3.77

Notes: (1) v = P value for this factor is less than 0.05; (2) + = group of survey respondents who visited Finland prior to their Fulbright; (3) - = group of survey respondents who had not been to Finland prior to their Fulbright

The independent t-test analysis showed that there are significant differences in the means of the two groups in a number of factors. Reputation of the Finnish Fulbright program was rated higher by survey respondents who visited Finland prior to their Fulbright year, with mean scores of 3.90 vs. 3.23. Conceivably, grantees with previous experiences in Finland had more knowledge about the works and reputation of the Fulbright Commission in Finland. Social image of Finland and level of safety and security in the country were other factors regarded as more important by grantees who visited Finland prior to their Fulbright. Means of the first group was 3.67 and 4.10 for the two factors respectively, while the second group's mean scores were 2.93 and 3.52. Previous knowledge of the country, its societal and cultural aspects might have influenced the level of importance that grantees who visited Finland before their Fulbright gave to the social image of the country and the level of safety and security in Finland. Sensibly, grantees who had previous experience with Finland had social connections in the country, rating the importance of this aspect as more influential in their decision in comparison with grantees who hadn't visited Finland prior to their Fulbright year. The factor related to the importance of social connections in Finland had the mean score of 3.68 for the first independent group, while the second group had a mean of 2.64. Curiously, grantees who visited Finland prior to their Fulbright year regarded the use of English in daily life as a less significant factor (mean of 3.36) compared to the grantees who had not been to the country before the program (mean of 3.97). Presumably, grantees who had not been to Finland prior to their Fulbright year were more concerned about the possibility of communicating in English in day-to-day life and therefore rated this factor as more important. Independent t-test results also showed significant statistical differences among the two groups in the majority of factors related to academic institution and program. Like that, institution's academic reputation (3.95 vs. 3.41), institution's ranking position (3.28 vs. 2.42) and international recognition (3.47 vs. 2.83), and facilities in the institution (3.75 vs. 3.10), together with such program aspects as program quality (4.48 vs. 3.74), expertise of academic staff (4.48 vs. 3.88), and having an individual contact in the program (4.24 vs. 3.77) were rated higher in importance by the grantees who had been to Finland prior to their Fulbright. Additionally, these grantees considered the attractiveness of the region as more important (mean score of 4.00) in comparison with the grantees who had not been to Finland before their participation in the Fulbright program (mean score of 3.33). Lastly, the opportunity for a spouse to reside and work in Finland had a striking difference in mean scores for the two groups, 3.40 vs. 1.63. I believe

this result is coincidental and reflects that grantees who had been to Finland prior to their Fulbright happened to have spouses or significant others and therefore gave more importance to the consideration of work and residence opportunity for their partners. In order to investigate this issue, the distribution of survey respondents by two characteristics, marital status and prior visit to Finland, was examined. The analysis showed that nearly 30% of respondents who visited Finland prior to their Fulbright year were married, engaged, or lived with their significant others, while only 8.33% of the grantees who had not been to Finland prior had the same status. To further scrutinize the issue, a t-test for two independent groups based on marital status was performed. Means of the group of single survey respondents and married, engaged, or living with partners were compared on the dependent variable “opportunity for a spouse to reside and work in Finland”. The results of t-test showed a statistically significant difference between the means of the two groups: 4.38 vs. 1.39 ($p < 0.05$). The mean scores of the two groups on the “opportunity for a spouse to reside and work in Finland” exhibited similarity to the scores for the same factors based on the previous visit to Finland variable. To remind the reader, the scores were 3.40 for the survey participants who had been to Finland before their Fulbright and 1.63 for the group of respondents who had not been to Finland prior to the Fulbright year. The chances are that the latter score is purely coincidental.

5.8 Analysis of Variance Test Results

5.8.1 Academic Disciplines

The one way Analysis of Variance test (later ANOVA) was performed to compare the means of independent groups of academic disciplines for significant statistical differences among them. The test included four clusters of academic disciplines: arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and professional disciplines. Two groups of academic disciplines (interdisciplinary sciences and formal sciences) were excluded from the analysis because they each had only one representative. Performing the one way ANOVA showed whether there were any significant statistical differences among the means of the four groups of academic disciplines on the following factors related to the academic aspects of Finland, institution, and program:

Academic Reputation of Finland

Institution's Academic Reputation

Institution's Ranking Position
 International Recognition of the Institution
 Quality of Research at the Institution
 Facilities
 Program Suitability
 Program Quality
 Expertise of Academic Staff

The factors were chosen for the one way ANOVA tests based on an assumption that attitudes of grantees with different groups of disciplines might vary for these factors. These factors are all independent variables in the analysis.

The null hypothesis stated that the means of all groups are equal:

$$H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2 = \mu_3 \dots = \mu_k$$

According to the alternative hypothesis, the means of some groups were not equal:

H₁: Means are not all equal

A p-value of <0.05 would provide evidence that the means are not equal and therefore supported the alternative hypothesis. A p-value of >0.05 proved the null hypothesis

The one way ANOVA was performed in Excel Spreadsheets using the Real Statistics Resource Pack. The analysis showed that there was a statistically significant difference between group means on the "Institution's Academic Reputation" factor.

Table 8. One Way ANOVA Test Results (Institution's Academic Reputation)

One Way ANOVA:	DF	SS	MS	F	P
Factor	3	13.46666667	4.488888889	3.410201149	0.02495650606
Error	47	61.86666667	1.316312057		
Total	50	75.33333333			

The mean and standard deviation scores of the groups for this factor are as following:

Social Sciences: Mean = 2.92, SD = 1.44;

Professional Disciplines: Mean = 4, SD = 0.96;

Natural Sciences: Mean = 3, SD = 1.58;

Arts and Humanities: Mean = 4.05, SD = 0.94

It was necessary to perform post hoc tests to determine where the significant statistical difference lies. Excel spreadsheets automatically performed the Tukey-Kramer, Bonferroni, and the Fisher LSD tests, introduced in the table below:

Table 9. Post hoc Tests for One Way ANOVA Test (“Institution’s Academic Reputation”)

Pairwise Comparisons:		Tukey-Kramer		Bonferroni		Fisher LSD			
Factor 1	Factor 2	q	P	t	P	P	Range Min	Range Max	
Social sciences	Professional	3.394420498	0.09100003194	2.400217752	0.1223916793	0.02039861322	-1.991337033	-0.1753296332	
Social sciences	Natural sciences	0.1929769716	0.9991374061	0.1364553252	5.352265	0.8920441667	-1.311916104	1.145249438	
Social sciences	Arts and humanities	3.82581409	0.04525494863	2.705259086	0.05686518285	0.009477530475	-1.976134161	-0.2905325056	
Professional	Natural sciences	2.365962123	0.3487371318	1.672987862	0.6058446083	0.1009741014	-0.2024952392	2.202495239	
Professional	Arts and humanities	0.1768663159	0.999359491	0.1250633714	5.406040714	0.9010067856	-0.8542962207	0.7542962207	
Natural sciences	Arts and humanities	2.588539896	0.2722615257	1.830374114	0.4412346851	0.07353911418	-2.204052562	0.1040525621	

The more conservative Tukey-Kramer test showed that the significant statistical difference existed between the group of social science disciplines and the disciplines within the group of arts and humanities. The results of the one way ANOVA and post hoc tests show that grantees with disciplines in the domain of arts and humanities gave more importance to the academic reputation of their institution of choice.

Regarding the rest of the factors, one way ANOVA test has shown no statistically significant differences between the groups. An account of the results of the tests for these factors is presented in Table 10.

Table 10. One Way ANOVA Test Results by Academic Disciplines

Factor	Results of One Way ANOVA Test
Academic Reputation of Finland	$F(3,43) = 1.637, p = .195$
Institution's Ranking Position	$F(3,35) = 0.775, p = .516$
International Recognition of the Institution	$F(3,41) = 2.307, p = .090$
Quality of Research at the Institution	$F(3,47) = 0.392, p = .759$
Facilities	$F(3,43) = 0.598, p = .620$
Program Suitability	$F(3,44) = 2.124, p = .111$
Program Quality	$F(3,45) = 1.266, p = .298$
Expertise of Academic Staff	$F(3,46) = 0.186, p = .906$

5.8.2 Location in Finland

One of the objectives of this research was to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences among the means of the groups within survey respondents based on the location in Finland during their Fulbright year. Five groups with two or more members represented the following locations: Helsinki, Tampere, Turku, Joensuu, Jyväskylä. The one way ANOVA tests were conducted to discover whether there is a statistically significant difference in the means of these groups for the following factors related to city characteristics:

Size of the city

Cost of living in the city

Social environment in the city

International environment in the city

The null hypothesis stated that the means of all groups are equal:

$$H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2 = \mu_3 \dots = \mu_k$$

In accordance with the alternative hypothesis, the means of some groups were not equal:

H_1 : Means are not all equal

A p-value of <0.05 would provide evidence that the means of at least two groups are not equal. A p-value of >0.05 supported the null hypothesis.

The one way ANOVA tests performed in Excel Spreadsheets showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the means of the groups based on location in Finland for the four factors of city dimension. Table 11 presents the results of the analysis:

Table 11. One Way ANOVA Test Results by Location

Factor	Results of One Way ANOVA Test
Size of the city	$F(4,39) = 1.485, p = .225$
Cost of living in the city	$F(4,39) = 1.670, p = .170$
Social environment in the city	$F(4,41) = 1.189, p = .330$
International Environment in the city	$F(4,41) = 1.563, p = .202$

P value in all test results for the one way ANOVA by location was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was supported. The test results imply that there is no difference in the attitudes of survey respondents towards the factors related to the aspects of the city when participants from different locations in Finland are compared.

5.8.3 Host Institutions in Finland

One way ANOVA tests were performed to establish whether there is a statistically significant difference among groups of survey respondents based on the host institution in Finland on the factors related to aspects of academic institutions. Independent variables looked at in the analysis were grouped by host institutions in Finland: University of Helsinki, Sibelius Academy, University of Turku, University of Tampere, Aalto University, University of Joensuu, KUVA, and University of Jyväskylä. Groups with less than two representatives were not included in the analysis. The dependent variables analyzed were the following:

Academic links at the institution

Quality of research at the institution

Institution's academic reputation

Institution's ranking position

Facilities

International recognition of the institution

Recognition of qualifications from the institution by future employers and HEIs

Social life at the institution

The null hypothesis stated that the means of all groups were equal:

$$H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2 = \mu_3 \dots = \mu_k$$

Conforming to the alternative hypothesis, the means of some groups were not equal:

H₁: Means are not all equal

A p-value of <0.05 would provide evidence that the means of at least two groups are not equal. A p-value of >0.05 supported the null hypothesis.

The one way ANOVA tests performed in Excel Spreadsheets showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the means of the groups based on a host institution in Finland for the eight factors of institution dimension. Table 12 reports the results of the analysis.

Table 12. One Way ANOVA Test Results by Host Institution

Factor	Results of One Way ANOVA Tests
Academic links at the institution	$F(7,33) = 0.746, p = .635$
Academic reputation of the institution	$F(6,34) = 0.973, p = .458$
Institution's Ranking Position	$F(6,25) = 0.696, p = .654$
International Recognition of the Institution	$F(7,31) = 1.312, p = .277$
Quality of Research at the Institution	$F(7,34) = 1.558, p = .186$
Recognition of qualifications by future employers and HEIs	$F(7,32) = 0.525, p = .809$
Facilities	$F(7,31) = 1.149, p = .359$
Social life at the institution	$F(6,27) = 0.528, p = .782$

P value in all test results for the one way ANOVA by host institution was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was supported. The test results imply that there is no difference in the attitudes of survey respondents towards the factors related to the aspects of the institution when survey respondents with different host institutions in Finland are compared.

5.9 Reliability of the Instrument

In order to analyze the internal consistency reliability of the proposed instrument, Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha was used to test every dimension proposed in the instrument. To remind the reader, the survey proposed five sets of factors: dimension of academic aspects of the country comprised of seven factors, dimension with social aspects of the country containing twelve

factors, city dimension with four individual factors, institution dimension that included eight factors, and program dimension composed of four factors.

The results of Cronbach's alpha coefficient analysis are presented in Table 13.

Table 13. Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient

Dimension	Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha Value (α)	
	Raw	Standardized
Country (academic dimension)	0.72	0.74
Country (social dimension)	0.73	0.75
City dimension	0.83	0.83
Institution dimension	0.91	0.91
Program dimension	0.88	0.88

After Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha analysis, the five dimensions of factors in the instrument were found reliable, since all values are above 0.70. This value is regarded as acceptable for instruments used in basic research (Nunally, 1978, p.245).

5.10 Importance of Factors by Group

This subsection looks at the importance of factors in each of the five thematic groups outlined in the theoretical framework of this study. The first group is comprised of factors that relate to the academic dimension of the country. The second group represents factors associated with the social dimension of Finland. The third group is composed of factors related to the city dimension. The fourth group represents factors related to the institution dimension, and the fifth group encompassed factors linked to the program dimension. Mean and standard deviation scores of factors within each group and cumulative means for each group are presented in order to show which group or groups of factors exerted the most influence on the decision of U.S. Student Program grantees to choose Finland as their Fulbright destination. The means are calculated on the scale from 1 to 5 with the following values: 1- unimportant; 2- of little importance; 3- moderately important; 4- important; 5- very important.

The following table presents mean and standard deviation scores of factors related to the academic aspects of Finland.

Table 14. Country (Academic Dimension)

Factor	Mean	SD
Use of English in the academia	4.36	1.09
Quality of education in Finland	4.22	0.95
Academic reputation of Finland	4.20	0.88
Level of competition for grants	3.57	1.25
Reputation of the Finnish Fulbright program	3.52	1.19
Recognition of qualifications from Finland	2.95	1.47
Availability of funding other than Fulbright grant	2.48	1.29
Group mean score	3.61	

Notes: (1) Data is presented from the highest importance to the lowest importance;

(2) SD = standard deviation.

Among the factors that belong to the country's academic characteristics, "Use of English in the Academia", "Quality of education in Finland", and "Academic reputation of Finland" have the highest mean scores among the items in the group exhibiting the highest level of importance for survey respondents. "Recognition of qualifications from Finland" and "Availability of funding other than Fulbright grant" have mean scores below 3, bringing the overall mean score of the dimension down to 3.61.

Table 15 displays mean and standard deviation scores of factors related to the social aspects of the country dimension.

Table 15. Country (Social Dimension)

Factor	Mean	SD
Level of safety and security in Finland	3.74	1.06
Use of English in daily life	3.74	1.13
Attractiveness of the region	3.60	1.06
Possibility of travel in the region	3.55	1.08
Development level of Finland	3.47	1.14
Opportunity to learn a new language	3.34	1.15
Social image of Finland	3.24	1.22
International environment in Finland	3.19	0.93
Social connections	3.06	1.42
Cost of living in Finland	2.74	1.10
Physical climate in Finland	2.47	1.32
Opportunity for a spouse to reside and work	2.31	1.78
Group mean score	3.20	

Notes: (1) Data is presented from the highest importance to the lowest importance;

(2) SD = standard deviation.

“Level of safety and security in Finland”, “Use of English in daily life”, “Attractiveness of the region”, and “Possibility of travel in the region” are rated the highest within the group of factors related to social aspects of Finland, all having a mean score above 3.50. “Cost of living in Finland”, “Physical climate in Finland”, and “Opportunity for a spouse to reside and work in the country” exhibit less importance in the eyes of the survey respondents, with mean scores below 3.00. The cumulative score of the 12 factors in this dimension amounts for 3.20.

Table 16 provides information on the mean and standard deviation scores of factors within the group of city related aspects of choice.

Table 16. City Dimension

Factor	Mean	SD
International environment (city)	3.36	1.05
Social environment (city)	3.27	1.15
Size of the city	2.96	1.25
Cost of living (city dimension)	2.70	1.05
Group mean score	3.07	

Notes: (1) Data is presented from the highest importance to the lowest importance;

(2) SD = standard deviation.

While international and social environment in the city were rated moderately high by survey respondents, having mean scores of 3.36 and 3.27 respectively, size of the city and cost of living in the city mattered less, exhibiting means scores below 3.00. Factors belonging to the city dimension had a cumulative mean score of 3.07.

Table 17 displays mean and standard deviation scores of nine factors associated with the institution dimension of choice.

Table 17. Institution Dimension

Factor	Mean	SD
Quality of research at the institution	3.83	1.19
Academic links at the institution	3.77	1.23
Institution's academic reputation	3.63	1.22
Facilities	3.36	1.08
Recognition by future employers, HEIs	3.12	1.24
International recognition of the institution	3.08	1.13
Social life at the institution	2.96	0.95
Institution's ranking position	2.79	1.30
Group mean score	3.32	

Notes: (1) Data is presented from the highest importance to the lowest importance;
(2) SD = standard deviation.

“Quality of research at the institution” (3.83), “Academic links at the institution” (3.77), and “Institution’s academic reputation” (3.63) are the factors associated with the institution dimension rated the highest by survey respondents. With an exception of “Social life at the institution” and “Institution’s ranking position”, all the factors in this group exhibit mean scores above 3.00. The group cumulative mean of the nine factors is 3.32.

Lastly, Table 18 introduces mean scores of factors related to the program dimension of choice of a Fulbright destination.

Table 18. Program Dimension

Factor	Mean	SD
Expertise of academic staff	4.11	1.05
Program suitability	4.06	1.07
Quality of the program	4.04	1.03
Individual academic contact	3.94	1.05
Group mean score	4.04	

Notes: (1) Data is presented from the highest importance to the lowest importance;

(2) SD = standard deviation.

Exhibiting consistently high scores within the group compared to other sets of factors, all factors related to the city dimension were rated above 3.50. Like that, “Expertise of academic staff” has a mean score of 4.11, “Program suitability” and “Quality of the program” have mean scores of 4.06 and 4.04 respectively, and “Individual academic contact” scored 3.94. The group mean score is at the high 4.04.

Analysis of the sets of factors in the five dimensions of choice concluded that the Program dimension was rated as the most important by U.S. Student Program grantees to Finland (M=4.04), followed by the academic country dimension (M=3.61), institution dimension (M=3.32), social country dimension (M=3.20), and lastly, city dimension (3.07). These results showed the strong academic inclination of the Fulbright student grantees for whom academic aspects of the program, country, and their host institution were the most influential factors in the choice of the Fulbright destination. The results of the analysis of sets of factors determinant of the choice of an international study destination matched the findings of Chen who discovered that program was the most important factor for graduate students choosing a Canadian HEI (2007).

6. Qualitative Findings

This section of the study introduces the findings of the second qualitative stage of the research project. It commences with the introduction of data analysis employed to examine the qualitative data collected through eight in-depth interviews with former and current U.S. Student Program grantees. Later, the section introduces the findings of the interview data analysis, organized in thematic categories.

Interviews in the second stage of the project served two purposes. Firstly, they provided a chance to hear individual voices of grantees on the factors that exerted the most influence on their decision. This allowed the triangulation of data from both stages of the research that provided a comprehensive answer to the question on the factors that influenced the choice of Finland by U.S. Student Program grantees. Secondly, the interviews were employed to elaborate on the findings from the quantitative stage. Specifically, grantees who took part in the interviews were asked about their attitudes towards the following factors. The rankings of academic institutions in Finland, recognition of qualifications from Finland, physical climate in the country, and the opportunity to learn Finnish. First three factors were ranked low in importance by the survey respondents signaling that they were not crucial in determining the choice of Finland. The interviews served as an opportunity to find out how these factors influenced the decision of individual grantees. Regarding the last factor, inquiring the interviewees about their attitudes on the opportunity to learn Finnish was on the agenda because of the importance of the topic. Teaching of Finnish to international students and staff is a crucial subject in the dialogues about internationalization in Finland (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009). The survey results showed that nearly 50% of the respondents found the opportunity to learn Finnish either important or very important. Hearing individual grantees' voices on the topic was expected to build a more comprehensive picture of the attitudes of American grantees towards the learning of the Finnish language.

Prior to presenting the interview findings, framework used for analysis of the qualitative interview data is described.

6.1 Data Analysis

Qualitative data obtained from eight semi-structured interviews was analyzed in several steps in accordance with the framework of Qualitative Data Analysis proposed by J.W. Creswell (Creswell, 2009, p.185):

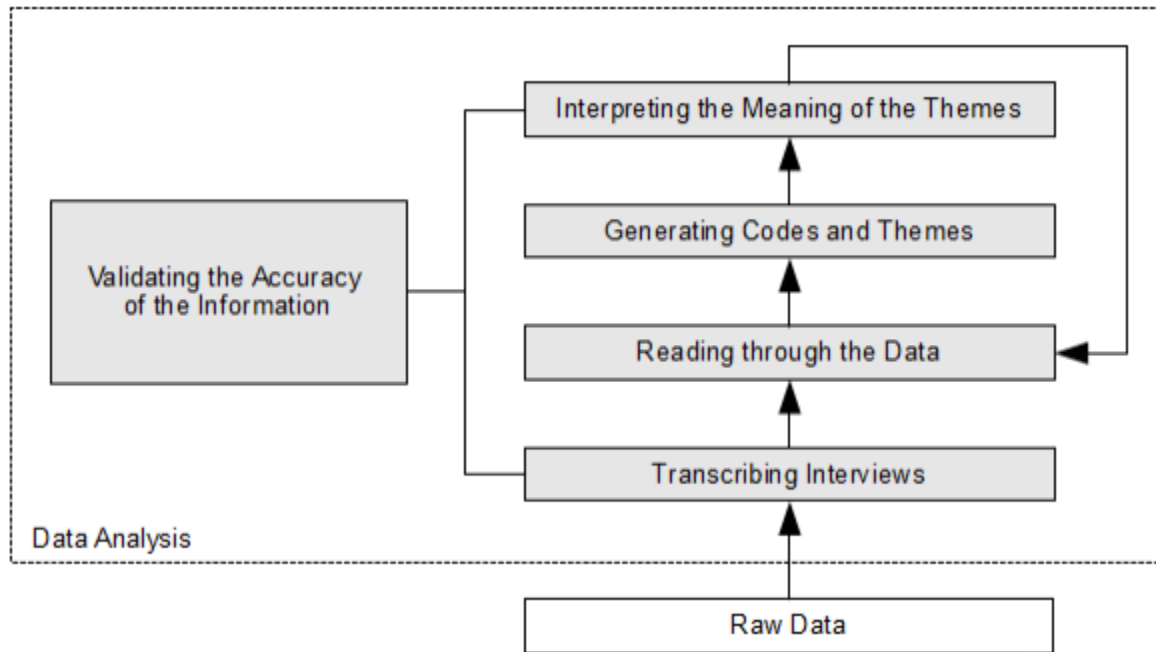


Figure 4. Framework for Qualitative Data Analysis

Raw data was first fully transcribed. The transcripts were read through several times before the beginning of the coding process. It is important to note that in the process of coding a combination of predetermined and emerging codes was used. Like that, codes and themes were compared with the existing categories from the quantitative stage of analysis and the theoretical framework. Codes obtained from qualitative data analysis generally corresponded with factors and themes with sets of factors from the theoretical model of International Education Destination Choice. Besides the confirmation of the predetermined codes from the quantitative stage of this research, a substantial number of new codes emerged during the analysis. The extraction and comparison of the codes was followed by interpretation of the meaning of the themes. During the process of qualitative data analysis, qualitative validity was constantly checked by having a few cycles of reading through the transcripts after the themes were interpreted. Moreover, codes were constantly compared with the data to ensure no shift in the meaning.

Regarding the instrument employed in the process of qualitative analysis, Excel spreadsheets program was used to organize, store, and sort information.

6.2 Factors Affecting the Choice of Finland

The interviews conducted with eight U.S. Student Program grantees provided important insights into the dynamics of factors determining the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination.

6.2.1 Use of English in the Academia and Level of Competition for Grants

Use of English in the Academia and level of competition for grants were the most discussed items during the interviews. Use of the English language in the Finnish higher education was a paramount factor in the choice of Finland, emphasized by almost all interviewees. It was essential for the grantees to be able to do their study and research in English during their Fulbright. Moreover, Finland was favored over other countries where knowledge of a national language was required for participation in the Fulbright Program. The importance of use of English in the Finnish Academia to the interviewees resonated with the results of the survey. To remind the reader, the factor was given the highest rating by survey respondents. Similarly, previous research suggests that the possibility of studying and conducting research in the language mobile students know is a highly influential factor for international students in their choice of a destination (Bodycott, 2009; Mpingajira, 2011; Macready and Tucker, 2011).

Higher acceptance rate into the Finnish Fulbright Program was another factor that determined the choice of Finland for the interview participants. The majority of interviewees stated that lower competition for grants in comparison with other Fulbright destinations, mainly in Europe, was a significant contributor to their choice of the country. As one of the grantees puts it:

“[An] opportunity to get a Fulbright here is actually a lot better than in a lot of other countries as well. So that was another [reason]. I was hesitant to spend a whole lot of time developing a project and an application to not even having it looked at or really glanced at”

Level of competition for grants is a unique aspect of the Fulbright Program distinguishing U.S. Fulbright Student Program participants from other international students. The latter have an opportunity to apply to multiple countries and institutions, while the Fulbright Program applicants can submit only one application. As one of the interviewees aptly noted, “you basically have one shot”.

In their work “Are Fulbright Applicants Idealists or Opportunists?” Gill and Lang (2014) concluded that research students did not choose to apply to countries with lower competition or refrained from applying to countries with higher competition, while English teaching assistants showed more opportunistic behavior. As the Finnish Fulbright Program does not accept English teaching assistants, and the interview participants were all research students, the findings of this study suggested the opposite.

6.2.2 Academic Aspects of Finland

Another key factor mentioned by many interviewees was having a scholarly interest in Finland. This concept does not mean that the grantees’ research was centered on the study of the Finnish language, literature, or culture. In fact, none of the interviewees did studies or research on the following topics. Having a scholarly interest in the country signified that the interviewees’ research interests were well served in Finland. Whether it is the topic of research that the grantees were capable of thoroughly study specifically in Finland, the topic’s feasibility, or the collaboration with Finnish researchers interested in the topic, many interview participants acknowledged that Finland was a perfect destination to serve their research interests.

In relation to this, such aspect as the quality of research in the interviewee’s field of study was another pivotal factor for many interviewees to choose Finland. As an example, one of the grantees talks about the prominence of Finnish research in her area of expertise:

“And as I kept reading paper after paper, article after article, it was one Finnish scholar after another”

Another grantee recognized that she preferred one institution in Finland over other potential choices because of the internationality of research done in that particular institution. Her choice was also influenced by the desire to work with a specific researcher in Finland.

We find similar results in Chen's study on graduate students' choice of Canadian HEIs (2006), where the participants' decision was influenced by the quality of research in their academic fields and for some students, a possibility of working with a particular researcher or supervisor.

Quality of education in Finland was acknowledged to be a major factor for the grantees whose field of study and research was education. The reputation of the Finnish education system in light of the PISA results and the popularity of the country in the education related discourses in the United States exerted great influence on the choice of a Fulbright destination for these grantees. As one of the grantees articulated it:

"I feel like especially if you are in the education world, Scandinavian countries and Finland specifically are talked about as being one of the sort of model education systems and really social systems as well"

One of the interviewed U.S. Student Program grantees to Finland presented an interesting case. The grantee was going to continue as a master's student in Finland after the Fulbright year. The Finnish Fulbright Program allows American students to complete a full degree in a Finnish HEI. When this is the case, the grantees can use their Fulbright grants for financial support during the first year of academic studies and have to secure their own funding in consecutive years (Fulbright Center Finland, 2015). It is important to note that, along with program suitability and quality, the interviewee regarded the absence of tuition fees in Finland as one of the crucial factors in the decision to choose Finland. The results of the online survey demonstrated that cost related issues were among the least important factors for the survey participants. In this particular case, the grantee who completed a whole degree along with participation in the Fulbright program considered the aspect of cost of education in Finland as a key factor, which resonated with the attitudes of previously researched international students (Agarwal and Winkler, 1985; Chen, 2006; Lee, 2014; Macready and Tucker, 2011; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001; Mpingajira, 2011).

6.2.3 Social Aspects of Finland

Turning the attention from academically related factors to social aspects affecting the choice of

Finland, such factors as the level of safety and security in the country and the development level of Finland were mentioned as significant by some interviewees. Safe and comfortable environment and development level of the country destination were similarly highlighted as influential factors in previous research (Chen, 2006).

Knowledge of Finland and encounters with the country prior to participation in the Fulbright Program were found highly influential in the choice of the country as a Fulbright destination. The analysis of the survey demonstrated that the grantees who visited Finland prior to participation in the Fulbright program differed in attitudes towards numerous factors of influence, including social aspects of the country and academic aspects of programs and institutions. As many as five out of eight interview participants visited Finland, studied or lived in the country prior to their Fulbright year. For these grantees their previous encounter with Finland was one of the key factors affecting their choice of the country for the Fulbright program. As Mazzarol and Soutar emphasized in their research (2001), the better knowledge and awareness an international student has of a particular host country, the more likely she is to select it as a study destination.

Besides the aforementioned social aspects of Finland, cultural difference between the United States and the country was also acknowledged as a factor strengthening the grantees' decision to choose Finland. To clarify this statement, the interviewees perceived Finland as culturally different from their home country and therefore attractive. Some of the characteristics of Finland dissimilar to the United States mentioned by the grantees were the social welfare system in Finland, free education, the language, culture and society.

Finally, regarding social connections in Finland prior to the Fulbright year, one of the grantees reported having Finnish heritage as a major factor in the decision to choose Finland as a Fulbright destination, while for another respondent having a significant other residing in Finland was one of the key factors influencing the choice of the country.

6.2.4 Rankings of Higher Education Institutions

Online survey showed that international rankings of academic institutions were not considered important in the decision to do Fulbright in Finland. Interview participants were inquired whether rankings of academic institutions in Finland played a major role in their choice of an institution.

The interview results on this matter confirm that consideration of rankings of academic institutions was an insignificant factor in the decision to choose Finland and a particular institution. While the majority of interview respondents confirm that they considered rankings of their academic institutions, they place higher importance on what the institution had to offer. In the words of one of the grantees:

“I did discover that at the time Finland didn't have very many universities on the so-called “top 500 list”, and at least those that were, were not very highly ranked. But that really didn't concern me. I was more concerned about the specific program that I was looking at and my perceptions of what I would be able to learn from them”

For another grantee, the focus was similarly on the program offered. Certain in the quality of education in Finland, the grantee did not regard the rankings of the academic institution as an important factor:

“I think that I just had this expectation because the education system is generally so good, I was certain it would be adequate and great. So I didn't really consider my institution. It was more about what they offered, what programs they had, and how I could fit into that”

The importance of the Fulbright program's reputation as superior to the ranking position of an HEI was communicated by another interviewee:

“Sure I can't say I completely disregarded rankings, but next to the Fulbright name rankings were secondary”

Another grantee for whom ranking position of his institution (University of Helsinki) was an important factor, brought up a valuable point. The interviewee suggested that looking at the area

of expertise and quality of research is more useful than considering the ranking position of the university. It is possible that while an institution is highly ranked as a whole, certain programs do not necessarily have high quality. On the contrary, a program might be ranked as the best in the world while the institution does not enjoy a high standing in the international rankings. The interviewee commented on the HEIs in Finland in relation to his area of study and research:

“I think the universities are all very good. I feel that they have different areas of expertise. And in their area of expertise they are usually the best in the world”

Overall, interview participants tended to give less value to international rankings of their institutions and focused instead on the departments and programs, expertise of academic staff, and quality of research at the institution. Confirming the findings from the quantitative stage of this research projects, the interviews showed that U.S. Student Program grantees differed from other international students in their attitudes toward rankings of HEIs.

6.2.5 Recognition of Qualifications from Finland

Previous research conveyed that recognition of qualifications from the host country is considered as one of the major factors by international students when the decision about a destination of study is made (Bodycott, 2009; Lee, 2014; Macready and Tucker, 2011; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001; Mpingajira, 2011). The results of the online survey suggested that the factor did not play a major role in the decision of U.S. Student Program grantees to choose Finland. The attitude of the interview participants towards this factor of importance confirmed the findings of the first quantitative stage of this research project. Unlike other international students, the Fulbright Program grantees generally did not consider whether academic qualifications from Finland would be recognized in the United States. Instead, they contemplated the participation in the Fulbright Program having a higher value than recognition of qualifications from Finland in the United States.

A contrasting position was put forth by a grantee whose field of study and research was education. Because of the reputation of the Finnish education system in the United States, the grantee preferred Finland over another country destination precisely because of the future recognition of qualifications from the country. As the grantees emphasized:

“If you think about it that way, the reason why I picked Finland is because everybody in the United States was talking about Finland. Upon return I thought it could only further my career by going to Finland. It was a factor and a consideration and it has proven to be true. I think it has helped me to further my career”

With the exception of this particular case, the interview analysis captured that recognition of qualifications from Finland in the United States was not an important factor in the choice of the country as a Fulbright destination by U.S. Student Program grantees.

6.2.6 Physical Climate in Finland

Physical climate in Finland was rated by the survey respondents as one of the least important factors in their decision to choose Finland as their Fulbright destination. The factor had the second lowest mean score out of the 35 factors rated in the survey. It was necessary to explore the attitude of the interviewees towards this important aspect of the social image of Finland. Seven out of eight grantees reported their excitement and curiosity about the Nordic winter, change of seasons, and Finland’s natural elements - the attributes of the physical climate in the country. They regarded this aspect positively and for many it was an important additional factor that reinforced the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination. As one of the interviewees puts it, commenting on the factors influencing his choice of Finland:

“And then of course I was excited about the Nordic winter”

Similarly, another participant acknowledges that the physical climate in Finland was an attractive aspect of the country:

“But that kind of drew me to Finland too - I should say to Nordic countries - the forests, the natural elements”

The majority of interviewees acknowledged their enthusiasm about the physical environment that Finland has to offer. While some regarded it as an important factor for their decision to

choose Finland, for others physical climate in the country was not a determinant factor of the choice of Finland but rather a supporting factor and an attractive aspect of the country.

6.2.7 Opportunity to Learn the Finnish Language

An opportunity to learn Finnish during their Fulbright year was reported as being either important or very important by 48% of all survey respondents. With nearly half of survey participants giving high importance to this factor, the attitudes towards the opportunity to learn Finnish were necessary to explore during the in-depth interviews.

When inquired about their opinions about learning Finnish during their Fulbright year, the majority of interviewees reported having interest and enthusiasm. This keenness to learn the language typically showed at an early stage. Some grantees searched for ways to get acquainted with the language before getting to Finland. They inquired about Finnish classes in their area in the United States, purchased books and audio materials, and looked for sources to learn the language online or with help of language programs. All but one interviewee started their Fulbright year with an expectation and determination to learn Finnish. Throughout the interviews a similar pattern related to the expectation vs. reality of learning the language was observed. What typically happened throughout the Fulbright year is summarized in the following figure.

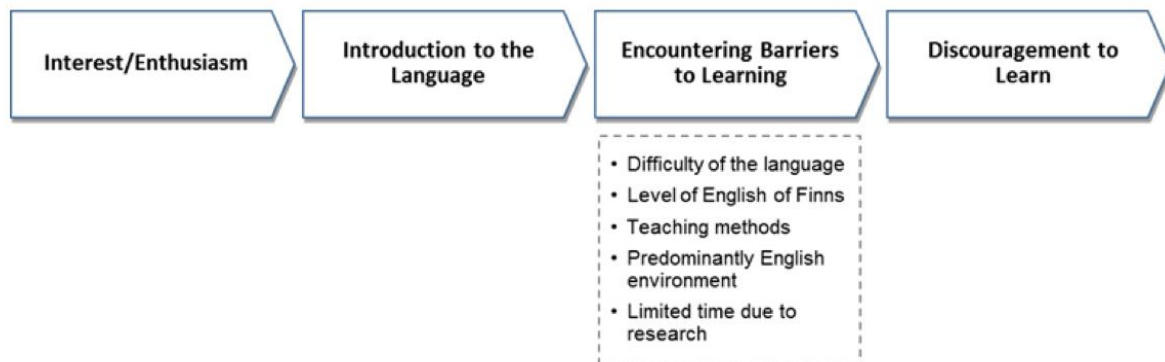


Figure 5. Learning the Finnish Language

Figure 5 represents an important account on how the expectations of grantees to learn Finnish during their Fulbright year were not met. Grantees showed interest and enthusiasm to learn

Finnish prior to their Fulbright year, some eager to familiarize themselves with the language even before getting to Finland. In the initial stages of learning the language while in Finland, the grantees took language classes provided by their HEIs. One of the interviewees who wasn't affiliated with an HEI in Finland during her Fulbright year had to make an extra effort and endure additional work in order to be able to enroll into a Finnish class.

During their learning process, grantees encountered multiple obstacles. They reported the difficulty of the language and the overall dissatisfaction with the teaching methods. As one grantee remarks on the teaching methods used:

“It's interesting. When I took a class, they focused a lot on details that in my mind didn't feel important. When you are trying to learn a sort of combat language, you just want to know enough to get by. It seemed it focused a lot on grammar, and for me it was, why do I need to know this right now? I want to know how to say, can I have a coffee, you know. I didn't really care about the fifty tenses that a verb can have”

Excessive focus on the grammar of the Finnish language was a discouraging factor for grantees whose purpose was to acquire basic conversational skills applicable from the start of their life in Finland. An additional obstacle in practicing Finnish was influenced by the high level of English of Finns. From the words of one of the interviewees:

“And then I found that even if I tried to speak Finnish, even just a sentence or two, people would typically just switch to English. And so my opportunity to practice was really hard”

On the same topic, another grantee who participated in the Fulbright program in a smaller Finnish city closer to the beginning of the century acknowledged that the setting was beneficial for the learning of Finnish:

“And so in a way [a smaller Finnish city] kind of encouraged the desire to learn Finnish. Cause back then not everybody necessarily used English or wanted to use English”

In this instance, the grantee had a favorable setting for learning Finnish. For other interviewees the predominantly English speaking environment both socially and academically created a disadvantage in learning the language.

Academic inclination of the Fulbright program and its research component assumed an intensive workload of grantees in relation to their research projects. Focusing on the research projects conducted in English entailed less time dedicated to learning Finnish. According to one of the grantees who had to extensively travel for her research project, both learning Finnish and conducting research eventually became hard to manage simultaneously:

“I was going to Helsinki often to conduct interviews, so I had a travel schedule that was a little crazy. And I wasn't able to go every class. And there was a point where the teacher said, “if you do not come to every class, you can not come to class anymore”. And I said “OK, well, there it goes, my research wins over again”. So that is the challenge of learning language here. As a researcher you don't have that flexibility with language learning”

An issue of the interaction between the language learning and research are brought up in another grantee's account. The only grantee out of the interviewed U.S. Student Program participants who reported no interest in learning Finnish during the Fulbright year placed the most importance on being able to conduct research without compromising his time. The grantee reflects on the language learning issue and the opportunity to focus on his research while in Finland:

“I knew that I could get by with just English. To be honest I don't speak Finnish. I could go to Germany, or France, or Spain, you know, but I'd have to learn another language, and that would be challenging. Here I could just focus on research, my PhD and not have to worry about spending 10 hours a week trying to learn Finnish”

All the previously mentioned obstacles resulted in the final discouragement to learn the Finnish language by the majority of the interviewees. Additionally, not having an opportunity to use the language outside of Finland after the Fulbright year added to the overall lack of enthusiasm in continuing to learn the language.

To remind the reader, nearly half of survey respondents found the opportunity to learn Finnish during their Fulbright year important or very important. During the interviews we observed how the majority of grantees went from being extremely enthusiastic to discouraged in learning Finnish throughout their Fulbright year. Many of the obstacles that the grantees face in learning Finnish can not be fixed by outside measures and could only be overcome with an extra effort on behalf of grantees themselves. One of the aspects of the learning process that could be improved relates to the teaching methods employed in teaching Finnish to foreigners. Providing a research account of this problem entails important implications for the Finnish HEIs and the didactics they use.

7. Discussion and Implications

The intent of this section is to discuss the findings that emerged from the online survey and in-depth interviews in this two-stage mixed methods research project. The section presents an overview of the factors determining the choice of Finland by U.S. Student Program grantees. Additionally, it includes an account of interesting observations and results, suggestions for further research, and critique of own work. The chapter also discusses practical implications of this research for Finnish HEIs.

7.1 Interpretation of the Results

This research showed that the most important factor in the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination was the use of English in the Finnish Academia. The opportunity to study and conduct research in English was an essential condition for majority of grantees to participate in the Fulbright Program, and Finland offered this opportunity. The country has a large number of English taught academic programs at all degree levels in proportion to the total number of programs (Macready and Tucker, 2011), and holds the 26th position in the world in the number of academic publications (SCImago journal & country rank, n.d.). It is important to note that the statistics on the position in the ranking of academic publications by number do not reflect the proportion of the number of academic publications to the total population in the country. If this aspect was taken into consideration, Finland would have had an even higher position on the list of academic country output. Finland, therefore, offers an alternative to traditional English-speaking study and research destinations like the United Kingdom and Australia.

Other factors that determined the choice of Finland for the U.S. Student Program grantees were related to the academic characteristics of the country, its HEIs and programs offered. Quality of education in Finland, academic reputation of the country, quality of research, expertise of academic staff, along with quality of academic institutions and programs were recognized to govern the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination. The importance of academic characteristics of Finland to Fulbright Student Program participants reflects the academic rigor and ambition ingrained in high-quality graduate students.

Besides the clear focus of the U.S. Student Program grantees on the academic aspects of Finland, the country's social attributes were found attractive as well. A safe, secure, and economically

and socially developed country, Finland was regarded as a good destination for undertaking study and conducting research abroad.

This research revealed that one very distinct aspect of the Fulbright program, its competitiveness, influenced the consideration of Finland as a favorable country based on the level of competition for grants. Since the Fulbright Program allows only one choice during the application for a grant, applicants carefully weigh their options. Conversations with U.S. Fulbright Student Program grantees uncovered that the higher acceptance rate into the Finnish Fulbright program served as a clear advantage of the country over other destinations. In combination with attractive academic and social aspects of the country, Finland was considered a good choice for a Fulbright destination.

Importantly, previous encounters with Finland proved to exert a strong influence on the choice of the country for grantees who visited Finland prior to their Fulbright year. 43% of all survey respondents visited Finland prior to their Fulbright, and quantitative analysis showed a statistically significant differences between the grantees who previously visited the country, and the grantees for whom their Fulbright year was the first encounter with Finland. The attitudes between representatives of these two groups differed in many aspects regarding the choice of the country as a Fulbright destination. Among these differences, the social image of Finland, level of safety and security in the country, the existing social connections in the country, as well as various aspects related to the academic institutions and programs in Finland were on average more important to the respondents who had previously been to Finland. The majority of grantees interviewed for this research project had visited Finland for various academic and non-academic reasons before their Fulbright and confirmed that their previous experiences with Finland made a big influence on their choice of the country. The results of this research project thus suggest that previous experiences with a country positively influence the choice of that country for future study and research.

This research also detected the difference in the attitudes of the grantees to Finland whose academic disciplines belonged to the fields of arts and humanities and those with social sciences disciplines towards the aspect of academic reputation of their institution. The one way ANOVA

test analysis exhibited statistically significant difference among the groups of arts and humanities and social sciences on the factor of academic reputation of their HEI. Similar analysis of groups within survey respondents by location and host institution in Finland showed no statistically significant difference between the aforementioned groups.

This research project produced interesting findings contradicting earlier academic works on international student mobility. Contrary to the results of works by Agarwal and Winkler (1985), Chen (2006), Lee (2014), Macready and Tucker (2011), Mazzarol and Soutar (2001), Mpingajira (2011), and Wilkins and Huisman (2011), rankings of academic institutions, recognition of qualifications from Finland, and cost related factors proved to be of little importance to U.S. Student Program grantees to Finland. When international students consider a destination for international education, these factors have a strong influence on their choice. In the case of Fulbright students to Finland, recognition of qualifications from the country was found unimportant in comparison with the reputation of the Fulbright Program, cost issues did not matter because the grantees received a scholarship sufficient for the year abroad, and rankings of Finnish HEIs were not important in light of participation in the Fulbright Program and reputation of education and research in Finland. We can hereby observe that in regards to some aspects of country choice for international education, Fulbright students substantially differ in their reasoning in choosing a destination for study and research outside of the United States.

Some interesting observations were made in regards to the perception of the physical climate in Finland by U.S. Student Program grantees. While survey results revealed that the factor was unimportant in the decision to choose Finland, interview participants admitted that, although not determinant of the choice, the factor was an additional and reinforcing of the choice feature. This discrepancy might suggest that coincidentally only the interviewed grantees happened to have this opinion about the physical climate in Finland. Nevertheless, it is important to know that physical climate attributes of Finland are found attractive by some grantees.

In regards to the importance of factors proposed in the theoretical framework on the choice of Finland, the research confirmed the hypothesis that the factors related to academic country aspects, institution, and program exerted the most influence on the decision of U.S. Fulbright

Student Program applicants to choose Finland. Program dimension of choice was rated as the most important group of factors. The city dimension was recognized as the least important for the final decision. It is certain that consideration of program and institution influenced the choice of a particular destination. The city itself and factors related to the city dimension of choice were found to be of secondary consideration and in no way determinant of the choice of an institution.

In addition to the main findings of this research project related to the the factors determining the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination and the decision-making patterns behind that choice, it is necessary to present some interesting findings.

7.2 Interesting Observations and Results

Some interesting findings sprouted from the interviews with several grantees that can have some important implications for strategic-level decision-makers, Finnish HEIs, and the Fulbright Center Finland.

Having experienced Finland during their Fulbright year and yet further, as some grantees went on living, studying or working in the country, interviewees pointed out that Finland possesses unique characteristics especially remarkable in the eyes of Americans. Such core Finnish values as free higher education, gender equality, provision of social welfare to all members of society, the culture of educating children, and work-life balance are attractive to Americans in particular, specifically because these aspects of the Finnish culture are strikingly different from the culture and attitudes in the United States. Having experienced the Finnish culture and society, the grantees highlighted these unique cultural and social characteristics of Finland.

An outstanding suggestion related to the use of core Finnish values in marketing Finnish higher education came from one of the interviewees. The grantee emphasized that the appeal of the essential Finnish values would be particularly strong to Americans. Following is the interviewee's opinion on the unique Finnish values and attracting U.S. students to Finland:

“It's important of course to market schools and the programs, and the educational opportunity, but the other marketing that I recall seeing was mostly touristic [...]. When you look underneath this, I think what you'll find is some interesting invaluable cultural aspects and values in Finland that I think would be really appealing to all of Americans. And in some ways I think that Finland

and the U.S. are quite similar, but when you look at, for example, gender overlap, I think what you find here is that welfare society has more opportunities for women. There is the universal healthcare in the welfare system in place, which I find very valuable and comforting. And there are good business, and teaching, and educational opportunities here. And of course you get to go home at four. You know, you really need to flash out the underlying core value that Finland offers, which may not necessarily appear in the touristic messages or may not really come out in the discussion about education and schools”

In a similar vein, acknowledging the unique values of the Finnish culture and society, especially from American perspective, another interviewee shared the following observation about Finland:

“One of the components of the Finnish policy of defense was social welfare and psychological well being. In defense discussions and dialogues in America there is nothing about social welfare and psychological well being. The idea is that in Finland if we have a happy populus, they are more than likely gonna recover quickly from a national disaster or an attack. And that was really mind blowing to me. And also seemed very Finnish”

The same interviewee contributed a valuable insight about the importance of understanding a culture and a society during a short time of one academic year spent with the Fulbright Program. Finland is seen as an advantageous destination in this respect.

“[Finland is] a smaller country, so you can sort of ingest it all in ways that you might not be able to with a bigger culture”

The grantee believed that the opportunity to deeply understand and appreciate the culture of the host country in a limited time was a valuable outcome of having spent the Fulbright year in Finland. In this way, Finland can offer an advantage of providing international students and future Fulbrighters with an opportunity to grasp and understand the culture compared to other countries.

Another important aspect of Finland that surfaced during the interviews was the collaborative academic culture in the country. Some grantees emphasized that it was easy to collaborate with

researchers in Finland. They showed support and eagerness to cooperate. One grantee who particularly accentuated this aspect of Finnish academic culture in his interview, noted that, unlike in the United States, he was able to use facilities of other institutions and research centers free of charge. The grantee commented on the advantages of the cooperative nature of the researchers in Finland in his field of study:

“There are these different groups in Finland that have different areas of expertise. It's easy to work together. It still forces competition, but, you know, it's a good thing that you can build on these areas of expertise to take your research further”

Perhaps, the best example of this eagerness to collaborate on the part of Finnish researchers comes from another interviewee who was capable of organizing a small conference in Finland after having spent only seven months in the country. The grantee remarks on the unprecedented opportunity of bringing together researchers from all over Finland during her Fulbright year:

“So for me to only have been there for nine months to put together a mini-conference like that at month seven, and I think we were like 22 people there studying all these subjects, all these different perspectives. It was really neat. And in the U.S. I might try to put together people from my discipline to study this, but to that quickly have gotten people from all over the country to come together about [the topic], I'm not sure I could have done it in many countries”

The enthusiasm to collaborate and provide support that Finnish researchers exhibit, highlighted during the interviews, has a potential to attract future Fulbright Student Program applicants and graduate international students to Finland.

In-depth interviews with U.S. Student Program grantees to Finland unveiled some important aspects of the Finnish culture, society, and the academic culture. Communicated effectively to prospective students, these characteristics can be appealing to international students in general and Americans in particular.

7.3 Implications and Recommendations

This subsection is devoted to the presentation of practical implications of the findings of this research project and provides recommendations for the stakeholders of Finnish higher education.

Use of English in the Finnish Academia

The research showed that use of English in higher education and research in Finland was the most important factor that determined the choice of the country by Fulbright student grantees. Availability of many academic programs in English in Finnish HEIs and English language as a medium for research production and communication create a favorable atmosphere for international students and researchers. In the times when the English language has truly become a lingua franca of higher education and research, Finnish HEIs will highly benefit from continuing to provide high quality academic programs in English as a medium of instruction.

Reputation of Finnish education and research

Outstanding reputation of Finnish education and research proved to attract high quality American graduate students to the country. Quality of academic programs, expertise of academic staff, research reputation of HEIs in Finland were all highlighted as the most attractive attributes of the country and most influential factors for the decision to choose Finland as a destination for studying and conducting research. Maintaining the reputation of Finland as a destination of high quality education and research should be one of the key priorities for the higher education stakeholders in the country. Additionally, emphasizing the highly collaborative academic culture in Finland would even further enhance the positive academic image of Finland globally.

Unique cultural and societal aspects of Finland

Conversations with U.S. Fulbright Student Program grantees to Finland revealed that Finland's unique cultural and societal values that rarely appear in marketing discourses are some of the aspects that would be highly appealing particularly to American students and researchers. Attitude towards education and teaching, social welfare, gender equality and life-work balance are just some examples of these inherently Finnish values. Highlighting these unique cultural features of Finland in addition to stressing the academic reputation of the country would create a new attractive dimension of the country for foreign students and researchers.

Teaching Finnish to international students

Teaching of the Finnish language to foreign students and faculty has been one of the priorities for the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009). This research revealed tremendous interest and enthusiasm of American Fulbright students to learn Finnish. Despite this enthusiasm, the students are often discouraged to learn the language for several reasons. The difficulty of the language, high level of English spoken by Finns, English-speaking environment, dissatisfaction with the teaching methods, and limited time for the language learning due to research are some causes for the discouragement to learn the language. Among these, the inadequate teaching methods, mainly the excessive focus of instructors on grammar, has a potential to be improved. Accordingly, the revision of the teaching methods used in instruction of Finnish to foreign students would prove beneficial. This would entail, for instance focusing on teaching vocabulary and grammatical structures that aid in developing immediate basic communications skills. Departing from the traditional grammar-heavy language didactics could potentially improve the outcomes of language learning by international students in Finland.

Previous encounters with Finland

This research showed that encounters with Finland prior to the Fulbright year greatly influenced the choice of the country as a Fulbright destination later. Having been to Finland introduced the future grantees to the culture, language and society, and, when the purpose of their visit was academic, to the academic culture, intellectual climate in the country, and student life. Encounters with a country have a profound effect on the understanding of the country by foreign students, enhance the knowledge about it and can potentially lead to further academic and professional engagement with the country. In light of this, one suggestion of this research to Finnish HEIs is to focus on short-term educational and academic exchanges. These short academic encounters with the country would introduce foreign students to various aspects of its culture and society and form a basis for potential future academic and professional relationships.

7.4 Suggestions for Further Research

This study is the first to look at the factors influencing the choice of a Fulbright destination. It looked at the choice of Finland by the segment of U.S. Student Program participants. In continuation of the research on the Fulbright Program and international education choice, student grantees and applicants to other countries could be investigated. It would be especially interesting to see a comparison between two or more countries in regards to the factors of importance in the choice of a specific destination. Furthermore, decision-making and factors determining the choice a specific country as a Fulbright destination could be examined in participants and applicants of other Fulbright programs, e.g. the U.S. Scholar and Specialist programs.

7.5 Critique of Own Work

Writing a master's thesis for the first time, one is bound to realize at one point or another that some things could be done differently during the research process. Assessing my own work after the project is finished and the thesis is ready to be submitted, I can openly declare that have I had another opportunity at conducting the same study, I would have inquired the survey participants the level of the last degree completed before their Fulbright. Having this information could make for an interesting comparison of the participants' attitude towards certain factors based on their level of education. All things considered, conducting this research project was a process of learning and growth for me both as a researcher and a higher education professional.

8. Conclusion

This research is the first study focusing on factors influencing the choice of a Fulbright destination by U.S. Fulbright Student Program participants. It offers some important insights on the factors that determined or influenced the choice of the country. The research revealed that the reputation of Finnish education and research, quality of Finnish higher education institutions and programs, expertise and quality of academic staff, and a scholarly interest in Finland were the most influential factors in the Fulbright U.S. Student Program grantees' decision to choose the country. Development level of Finland and safety and security in the country were significant social aspects that influenced the decision to choose the country as a Fulbright destination.

Furthermore, the higher acceptance rate into the Finnish Fulbright Program greatly contributed to the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination for U.S. Student Program participants. The research confirmed that for students who visited Finland before their Fulbright year, their previous encounters with the country influenced the final Fulbright destination decision.

This study also demonstrated that the U.S. Student Program grantees constitute a distinct group of international students. Like that, certain factors regarded as very important by international students previously investigated in academic literature on international education destination choice proved to not exert strong influence on the Fulbright students. Among these factors, recognition of qualifications from Finland, cost of living in the country, and ranking position of higher education institutions in Finland were found to be the least important aspects of the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination.

A theoretical Model of Fulbright Destination Choice created for this research work offered a comprehensive a conceptualized set of factors influencing the choice of Finland as a Fulbright destination. Characteristics of the program, institution, and academic country aspects were found to be the most influential groups of factors in the choice of a Fulbright destination.

This study has significant practical implications for higher education institutions in Finland, Fulbright Center Finland, and the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland. In order to attract high quality international students, especially students coming from the United States, it is important to continue providing high quality study opportunities in English as the medium of instruction, maintain the reputation of the Finnish education and research, emphasize the collaborative culture of Finnish researchers, ensure the provision of short educational exchanges

with the goal of introducing Finland to international students, and include unique cultural aspects of Finland in the marketing efforts.

As this study is the first to investigate this unique group of international students, U.S. Fulbright Student Program participants, and factors influencing the choice of a specific Fulbright destination, it hopes to generate further discussion and academic research on the topic.

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Appendix

Online Survey Cover Letter

Dear name of the grantee,

My name is Katsia Mikalayeva and I am a graduate student in Erasmus Mundus Master's degree in Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE) at the University of Tampere, Finland.

In collaboration with Fulbright Center Finland and under the guidance of the Executive Director Terhi Mölsä and Professor Yuzhuo Cai from the University of Tampere, I am carrying out research that focuses on 'Factors influencing U.S. Student Program grantees to choose Finland as their Fulbright destination'.

This research topic is of great interest to key institutions involved in the Fulbright program both on the Finnish and the U.S. sides of operation, including but not limited to Fulbright Center Finland, Institute of International Education, and the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland.

As part of this research I am conducting an **online survey that you are warmly invited to complete**. Your contribution is of utmost value to this research because, as a current Fulbright grantee to Finland, you can provide firsthand information about the decision-making process behind selecting Finland as your Fulbright destination.

The **anonymous online survey** is expected to take 20 minutes to complete. It will start with a few general questions about the Fulbright program and then will be followed by questions related specifically to Finland. The term "Fulbright exchange" used throughout the survey refers to the period spent with a Fulbright grant in Finland.

Please use the link below to access the survey: [...]

Deadline for submission is [...].

If you have any questions about the survey or are interested in learning the results of this research project, do not hesitate to contact me at the following e-mail: [...]

Online Survey

What is your academic discipline?*

What was/were your host institution(s) in Finland?*

Where in Finland did you live while participating in Fulbright exchange?*

Have you been to Finland prior to Fulbright exchange?*

- ☐ No
☐ Yes

How important were the following factors in your decision to choose Finland as your Fulbright exchange destination?*
Country dimension

	Unimportant	Of little importance	Moderately important	Important	Very important	I did not consider this factor
Level of competition for grants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of education in Finland	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic reputation of Finland	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use of English in the academia	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recognition of qualifications from Finland by universities and employers in the U.S.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social image of Finland	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Development level of Finland	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Level of safety and security in Finland	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical climate in Finland	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How important were the following factors in your decision to choose Finland as your Fulbright exchange destination?*

Country dimension

	Unimportant	Of little importance	Moderately important	Important	Very important	I did not consider this factor
Cost of living in Finland	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
International environment in Finland	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use of English in daily life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunity to learn a new language	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attractiveness of the region	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Possibility of travel in the region	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social connections in Finland	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reputation of the Finnish Fulbright program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Availability of funding other than Fulbright grant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunity for a spouse to reside and work in Finland	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How important were the following factors in your decision to choose Finland as your Fulbright exchange destination?*

City dimension

	Unimportant	Of little importance	Moderately important	Important	Very important	I did not consider this factor
Size of the city	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cost of living	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
International environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How important were the following factors in your decision to choose Finland as your Fulbright exchange destination?*

Institution dimension

	Unimportant	Of little importance	Moderately important	Important	Very important	I did not consider this factor
Academic links at the institution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Institution's academic reputation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Institution's ranking position	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
International recognition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of research at the institution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recognition by future employers, universities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social life at the institution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How important were the following factors in your decision to choose Finland as your Fulbright exchange destination?*

Program dimension

	Unimportant	Of little importance	Moderately important	Important	Very important	I did not consider this factor
Program suitability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality of the program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Expertise of academic staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Individual academic contact in the program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?

Consent to Participate in Research

“Factors Influencing U.S. Student Program Grantees to Choose Finland as their Fulbright Destination”

Introduction and Purpose

My name is Katsia Mikalayeva. I am a graduate student in Erasmus Mundus Master’s degree program in Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE) at the University of Tampere, Finland.

In collaboration with Fulbright Center Finland and under the guidance of the Executive Director Terhi Mölsä and Professor Yuzhuo Cai from the University of Tampere, I am carrying out research that focuses on ‘Factors influencing U.S. Student Program grantees to choose Finland as their Fulbright destination’. I invite you to participate in this research project as an interviewee.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research, I will conduct an interview with you at a time and location of your choice. It should last about 30 minutes. With your permission, I will audio record the interview with help of a mobile phone. The recording will be used for transcription purposes only. If you choose not to be audio recorded, I will take notes instead. If you agree to being audio recorded but feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, I can turn off the recorder at your request. Or if you don't wish to continue, you can stop the interview at any time.

Benefits

There is no direct benefit to you from taking part in this study. It is hoped that the research will benefit Fulbright Center Finland, Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland, and Institute of International Education in the United States by providing an in-depth analysis of factors that play major role in selecting a Fulbright destination by U.S. Student Program grantees and the decision making processes behind such selection.

Confidentiality

The study data will be handled with confidentiality. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

Compensation

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Rights

Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in the project. You can decline to answer any questions and are free to stop taking part in the project at any time. Whether or not you choose to participate in the research and whether or not you choose to answer a question or continue participating in the project, there will be no penalty to you.

Questions

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me. I can be reached at [...].

CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your own records.

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below.

Participant's Name (*please print*)

Participant's Signature

Date