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EXPLORING THE EQUALITY AND EQUITY DISCOURSES OF FINNISH
EDUCATION EXPORTERS

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Abstract

During the past decades, global education policies and practices have experienced a neoliberal turn, which has changed the discourse around education. Instead of being regarded as a public service, education has become loaded with expectations of effective production of the human capital and financial profits. Finland has gained reputation as an educational powerhouse, whose exceptionally good education results are explained, inter alia, as results of the egalitarian principles on which the education system is grounded. However, the internationally recognized position has encouraged also Finland to commodify its free-to-all education system and establish it as an export product. This study explores how commodification and export of the Finnish education affects the egalitarian principles that Finland uses as explanations for its educational success. By asking how Finnish education export companies negotiate the notions of equality and equity in education, it seeks to find out whether neoliberal social imaginary has redefined the egalitarian principles. A critical discourse analysis is carried out on the blog posts and interviews with four Finnish education export companies. The results present three distinct discourses, according to which there is an inevitable need for skilful, competent and self-directed individuals that can respond to the needs of the growing economy. Equity and equality are negotiated as serving this 'truth'. They are defined as equal opportunities to access the resources that individuals can utilise to develop their skills and competencies. Although this study focuses on the discourses of Finnish education export companies, it could be viewed as an example of a larger transformation towards neoliberal equity and equality discourses.

Key words: Finnish education export, neoliberalism in education, equity discourses, equality discourses.

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1. Introduction

Equality and equity are well-known concepts in the educational literature, research papers, policy documents and media texts. Even though most people have a general idea of what they mean, there is disagreement in how to interpret them in relation to educational opportunities, capabilities, ideas of respect and recognition in schools and the increasing pressure for educational performance for instance (see e.g. Unterhalter 2009; Espinoza 2007). When negotiating educational equality and equity, there is a multitude of different systems of meaning making at play. During the past 15 years, Finland has gained reputation as an educational powerhouse whose good PISA-results have been explained, inter alia, by the successful equality policy implemented in Finnish schools. In addition to the many celebrative titles given to the Finnish school system in the global media, Finland has been presented as a country that has equality of opportunity as one of the guiding principles of their education system (Times of Malta 2017) and that gives everyone an equal chance to increase their educational performance (Kivirauma & Ruoho 2007, 298). However, only a little critical attention has been paid to what the equality principles in that context mean.

Educational equality and equity should be understood as sets of meanings that are situated historically. During the past decades, education has experienced a global turn towards commodification of systems and practices. Although still being regarded as a public good in Finland, the globally circulating expectations for effective production of the human capital and financial profits have had an influence on the Finnish education system as well. Countries are now racing over who has the best education results and which ranking is given for who, which increases the pressure for higher national performativity all over the world (Kettunen 2008, 21). Education is made more cost-efficient, effective, appealing and most importantly, something that can be packed and sold to improve the 'performativity' and conditions of living in other countries.

Being given the badge of a top-performer of the educational rankings and even an "education miracle" (Jamaica Gleaner 2017), Finland has been in a good position to go along commodifying its

education system and establishing it as an export product¹. During the past ten years, dozens of new Finnish education businesses have been founded to 'improve' the physical and digital learning environments in other countries, develop alternative materials, offer education programmes, teacher education, e-learning solutions and technologies. Finnish media has written proudly about teachers that have gone to Finland to experience and learn from its 'best practices'. The public however, has been surprised over Finland's decision to commodify its education system, especially as the commodification has immediate effects on how education is organized, who is to benefit from it and on what grounds. Finnish higher education for instance, introduced tuition fees for non-EU and -ETA students in 2017, which has made previously free-to-all higher education free only to those holding either a Finnish or an EU passport.

As Rezai-Rashti, Segeren and Martino (2017) note, neoliberal social imaginary redefines equity education. Yet, so far, only a little critical attention has been paid on the commodification of Finnish education and how it affects the meanings given to equality and equity. If education functions according to the rules of the business only, does it not distribute the costs and benefits in a way that marginalizes the disadvantaged, and further favours the privileged (Scholte 2005, 319)? What is, eventually, the purpose of equal education? Is it to increase the educational performativity and good results, or should it lead to much higher ends? That is, protection of democracy and human rights for instance. Can selling of educational products lead to a fair society? After all, the price tag makes it accessible for only those who can afford to buy it. With these questions in mind, I have set to explore the discourses of equality and equity within the Finnish education export.

¹ According to Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture, education export includes all business activities based on education, the education system and the transfer of knowledge, that create products or services that a foreign party pays for (MOEC 2016).

1.1. Aim and research question

Aim

By conducting a discourse analysis with interview transcripts and blog texts of four Finnish education export companies, this thesis aims to explore how educational equality and equity are negotiated in the context of commodified education.

Research question

1. How do Finnish education export companies negotiate the notions of equality and equity in education?

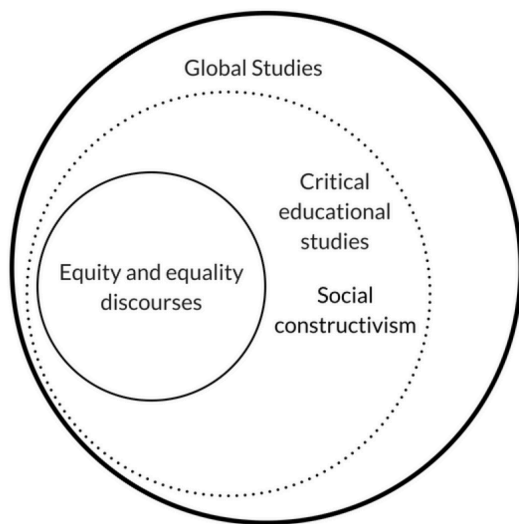
Sub-questions²

1. How is the goal of equal education negotiated?
2. How are the strategies for reaching that goal discussed?

1.2. Locating the study and relevance

This thesis is firmly grounded on several lines of research carried out within global studies. First and foremost, it is a study about unequal division of power, both in terms of economic power and capabilities. As Scholte (2005, 236) describes, global relations have, throughout the history of globalisation, tended to widen the resource gaps and reinforce class hierarchies. Thus, the privileged, that is, the managers, investors and skilled workers for instance, have profited much more from globalisation than the rest of the people. This has been mainly due to the neoliberal social imaginary, which has made profit-making a priority over equal distribution of the benefits. Instead of class injustice, policymakers have pursued stabilization, liberalization, deregulation and privatization (ibid., 239).

² Sub-questions have been formulated to guide and facilitate the analysis of the texts.



However, instead of seeing equality and equity only as matters of equal distribution of the economic benefits among people, one should consider the question of what each person is able to do and to be (Nussbaum 2011, 18). Thus, which are the capabilities taken as the core indicators in the comparison over equal share of life qualities. For instance,

in acknowledging that education has a significant role in the allocation of life opportunities (Biesta 2015), one should ask what kind of opportunities are taken as the goal of the education project. Is it the opportunities to have a job that pays well, opportunities that enable one to develop as a person, opportunities that give one political power or opportunities that enable one to transform the existing social order? Critical educational studies is an academic field devoted for such questions. Drawing from, inter alia, post-structural, feminist and postcolonial research it examines who is the one that benefits from the current social arrangements in education.

In addition to adhering to the research done within critical educational studies, this study adopts the social constructivist approach. Thus, it understands language as a social practice. The *way of speaking* is understood to reflect and shape the social order and therefore, our interaction with the society (Jaworski & Coupland 1999,3). From the critical educational point of view then, it is important to pay attention to the processes of meaning making, and how they affect what is regarded as 'true' or important in the context of equity education.

As far as it has come to my knowledge, no other study so far, has been carried out on the discursive constructions of equity and equality within Finnish education export. The need for critical research that can build alternative spaces to neoliberal education is outspoken by several scholars (see e.g. Connell 2013, Simpson 2018, Schatz 2016). Simpson (2018) and Schatz (2016) for instance, have posed Finnish education discourses under critical analysis. They call for further academic attention on education export policies (Schatz 2016, 145) and the ways education export discourses are constructed in relation to democracy, equality and human rights in particular (Simpson 2018, 40). Equality and equity discourses, especially as they are so deeply embedded in

the self-portrait of the Finnish education, have true effects on how policies come to define educational justice (see Jaworski & Coupland 1999, 3). Thus, they have an immediate influence on what kind of politics is made. By drawing from critical theory (Ackerly & True 2010, 2), this study does not only aim to contribute to the existing research by explaining the processes of meaning-making behind some of the Finnish education export companies. Through conducting a critical discourse analysis, it also seeks to contribute in transforming the current social order and its power hierarchies.

The focus on the aspects of equality and equity neglects the other possible discursive constructs that could, potentially increase our understanding of the aims and purposes of the Finnish education export. Such a demarcation however, has to be made in order to narrow down the scope of the analysis and the theories discussed. Neither will this thesis discuss national equality policies or how policies are enacted in Finland or in other countries. Although limiting to a national case example, that is, how Finnish education exporters negotiate the notions of equity and equality, it takes a global perspective on the changing meanings of these concepts. The theoretical discussion about neoliberalism and the conceptions of equity and equality sees educational discourses as fluctuating, changing and communicating on a global level. Thus, Finnish education export is treated only as a case example, whose ways of speech reflect the global educational discourses, policies and practices.

1.3. Finnish education

1.3.1. Exploring equity and equality within Finnish education

Finnish school system is often celebrated as the role model for equal and inclusive education. The Country Branding Strategy (2017), composed by Finland Promotion Board³, states that “Finland has one of the best education systems in the world. All Finns have equal opportunities to learn and study”. Education Finland (2018:2), a state-supported growth programme for Finnish education export, further explains that “the Finnish school system has been built on the egalitarian principle of good quality universal education, which is inclusive and comprehensive. In

³ Finland Promotion Board works under the Finland’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs and is responsible for the marketing and long-term promotion of Finland. Country Branding Strategy can be accessed in <https://toolbox.finland.fi/research/finlands-country-branding-strategy/>.

fact, the learning gap of the weakest and the strongest pupils in Finnish schools is one of the narrowest in the world". There is no doubt that the history of Finnish education with free access, free school meals and longstanding investments in special needs education (Niemi 2012) gives it a unique value position in international comparisons. However, the history of Finnish education and equality is multifaceted, and it earns to be examined in the light of these statements.

In the Finnish language, there is only one concept, *tasa-arvo*, which has been used to discuss both the equity and equality of education. In the early 1970s, *tasa-arvo* was understood both as a process and a goal. The objective of the education politics was to provide everyone with equal access to education, which would eventually lead to a fair society, that is, more equally distributed social benefits (Ahonen 2012). The educational reforms occurring at the same time mixed up the 'old ways' of thinking about education. It was no longer the values of home, community, work, religion and the fatherland that guided the selection of the teaching methods, materials and equipment. It was neither the group of pupils, but the needs and abilities of the individuals that were in the focus of attention (Simola 2015).

Such a goal-rational and individual-centred turn can be seen as marking the early neoliberal development in the education politics. Conceptions of equality and equity have had to adapt to this change. In the 1980s, the discourse of *tasa-arvo* emphasized the importance of each individual to fulfil their distinct, talent-based opportunities (Kettunen, Jalava, Simola & Varjo 2012, 47). As it was stated by the Finland's prime minister at that time, the country could only maintain its position in the global race on science and economy if it focused on further educating the ones who showed talent (ibid.). Thus, education no longer existed to provide everyone with the equal resources, but to support individual students in reaching their 'potential'. The discussion between the right for equal opportunities to access to education and the right to maximise one's potential is still ongoing. In their plan of operations of 2004-2007, Finnish Education Evaluation Centre defined equality so that each individual, regardless of their gender, place of living, age, language or economic status should be granted equal opportunities for quality education *as well as* a right to get education according to their talents and special needs (Finnish Education Evaluation Centre 2004, 15), integrating thus both aspects in their definition. Throughout the 2000's, equality in education has been defined on the basis of individual education interests. In the public debate,

educational equality has become a widely accepted goal, that has been discussed as beneficial for both national economy as well as for national competitiveness (Suomalainen 2014).

1.3.2. Education export

Finland has long proclaimed itself as going against the neoliberal market reforms, as argued by Simola, Rinne, Varjo and Kauko (2016, 613) in the following.

Rather than being the gloss scarp of the OECD, Finland is in this respect a kind of model case against it succeeding in spite of that in the international race for benchmarking by avoiding to play the same game by the same rules.

Thus, commodification of the Finnish education has caused a phenomenon that Schatz (2016, 144) calls the 'Finnish paradox'. That is, Finnish education is branded as an exception to the neoliberal rule and, at the same time, sold as an export product.

Finnish education export was first introduced by a nation branding initiative in 2008. An official 'country brand delegation' was established, and its aim was to build a Finland-brand, a self-portrait which eventually was outlined in the Country Brand Report in 2010 (CBR 2010). The report carried a title "a task for Finland, how Finland presents its strengths in solving the most wicked problems of the world", and it identified education as one of the key areas that the country should invest in. Taking place around at the same time as the country brand delegation, Ministry of Education and Culture set up a working group to create an education export strategy for Finland. The group came up with a strategy that was published in 2010 and carried the title "From interest to demand and products – the strategic alignments of Finnish education export" (MOEC 2010). Aiming at commodifying the competitive school system and excellent reputation gained from the PISA, it resulted in two objectives: "Finland is one of the leading education-based economies resting on the quality of the education system" and in 2015, "the proportion of the education and knowledge exports have grown significantly in overall exports".

Ambitious goals in bringing about "a new Nokia for Finland" (Kettunen et al 2012, 69), something to speed up the economic growth, needed a coordinated team to do the work. As a result of the newly directed policy focus on commodification of the Finnish education, Future Learning Finland (Later to be called Education Export Finland) was established to boost the trade. In 2017,

Education Finland, a state-supported growth programme for Finnish education export was launched under Finnish National Agency for Education. The programme would work as a network and an engine in enhancing the Finnish education export and brand. Its overarching objective was to “open doors and create opportunities for exporting the Finnish Excellence in Education” (Education Finland 2018: 1). In March 2018, the programme had, according to their website, 63 member organizations in 11 distinct service fields, for instance, in basic and upper secondary education, development, consultancy, digital learning solutions and lifelong learning. While some of them were start-up companies founded for offering globally adaptable learning solutions, some of them exported education on the side of their main services.

When comparing to the big education export markets in Australia and USA for instance, the Finnish approach on the education export has taken a different direction. Instead of being led by private universities or businesses, it has an official status in the state’s foreign trade policies. While many other countries have focused on attracting higher education students, Finland started by commodifying their basic education. However, the business was later extended also to higher education.

Finland has indeed succeeded in building an education system that is equal in quality, and geographically accessible to everyone. However, even though celebrated as the egalitarian Eden of schooling, one should not pretend that the neoliberal development has had no effects on what kind of educational politics is made. The Finnish education system has undergone some major financial cuts during the last few years, lowering thus the resources that would ensure the inclusiveness and equity in education. At the same time, a great amount of basic schools, upper secondary schools and higher education institutions have been cut down (Varjo, Kalalahti & Silvennoinen 2016, 354–355). For the areas with lower population density it has meant weakening of the opportunities to access to education (ibid.). In the areas with higher population density on the other hand, the schools, and therefore also the residential areas, have become more segregated as more and more parents want to choose the best school for their children (ibid.). Thus, even though equality of opportunity is still vibrant in the Finnish education-political discussion, ‘effectiveness’, pursuit of excellence and talent as well as the weakening of the resources pose serious threats to inclusion and fairness of the education (Ketovuori & Pihlaja 2016, 254–255).

2. Earlier research

Commodification of education, and the social implications it has brought along, has been in the interest of several scholars during the past few decades (see for example Apple 2001, Ball 2012, Kamens 2013, Spring 2009, Rizvi & Lingard 2010). Michael W. Apple for instance, has done a significant work in analysing the relations of education and power. In his book "Educating the "Right" Way" (2001), he examines the rightist educational beliefs, proposals and programmes, and points to the narrow concepts of 'reality' and 'democracy' that are applied and circulated by the neoliberals and neoconservatives. He argues that the language of privatization, marketization and constant evaluation has become common-sense in the sphere of education (Apple 2005). Stephen Ball on the other hand, has done an extensive work on sociological policy analysis, and is especially interested in the effects and consequences of the education market. His book "Global Education Inc." (2012) maps out and analyses the new actors, discourses and power dynamics of the current education policies. His work has been an invaluable guidebook to the workings of the neoliberal education discourses.

Studies on the conceptions of equity and equality in education show that neoliberal development has had a great influence on our understanding of just education processes and outcomes. Pat Thomson (2013) for instance, has looked into the education policies as narratives that relate to equity in education. To explore the meanings given to *equity*, she examines it as the sub-story of the master narrative of *progress*. She finds that equity is contrasted with the achievement of equal outcomes. Thomson calls this the distributive notion of equity, as it includes the assumption that everyone gets an equal share of 'knowledge'. Such a definition serves the purposes of the global knowledge economy, as it makes it easy to point out the groups that need support or intervention, actors that are to provide that support, and sequence of action and audit. However, the distributive notion of equity is problematic for four reasons: 1) it assumes that knowledge is an item that can be delivered and that everyone 'receives' it in the same manner, 2) it is only interested in the utility of knowledge and not in what knowledge is important, to whom, why and in whose interests that knowledge is constructed, 3) it privileges knowledge outcomes over purposes and processes and 4) it assumes that learning can be measured.

Rezai-Rashti, Segeren and Martino (2017) again, have looked into the changing conceptions of equity education in Ontario, Canada. Like Thomson, they argue that recent discourse shows a growing concern over test scores, outcomes and the performance of students, especially of boys, and in that way, works to maximise the productivity of the citizenry. Equity is seen as a vehicle through which test scores and international competitiveness can be enhanced. Savage, Sellar and Gorur (2013) have found similar results when examining the marketization of education policies in Australia. According to them, contemporary policies and practices construct several varying, and sometimes competing discourses of equity, in which contemporary policy trends and the neoliberal imaginary play a central role.

In Finland, commodification of education and its effects on equity and equality in education have been studied especially in relation to 'Finnishness' and its cultural others (e.g. Schatz 2016; Simpson 2018; Simpson & Dervin 2017; Riitaoja & Dervin 2014; Liu & Dervin 2017). In his dissertation "[t]he dialogism of ideologies about equality, democracy and human rights within Finnish education, many voices and many faces" Simpson (2018) focuses on the relationship between meta-discourses about Finnish education and individual assertions in constructing representations about Finnish education, that is, when related to the concepts of democracy, equality and human rights. Drawing his analysis from the methodological framework of Bakhtin's dialogism, he goes on to demonstrate that the discursive constructs of democracy, equality and human rights are not only intertwined within discourses about Finnish education, but function in setting agendas and framing ideologies about the country of Finland. The social construction of Finland, in these terms, as superior to other countries is problematic, as it can suppress marginal voices and counter-narratives and thus engender discrimination. Simpson calls, therefore, for further attention to nation branding discourses as well as education export discourses, and how they are constructed in relation to discursive constructs like democracy, equality and human rights.

Juusola (not yet published), has set out to investigate the quality of education in Finland's higher education export activities. She points to the complexity of 'good quality' in education that Finland uses as a marketing argument, and that it can be very differently understood depending on the socio-cultural perspective in question. Like Simpson states, equity and equality are part of what

Finland sells as 'good quality education'. As a value base, their shifting meanings should, and hopefully will, earn extra attention also in Juusola's work.

3. Theoretical framework

As shown by the examples discussed above, discourses of the educational equality and justice are never just nationally situated. Rather, they are constantly influenced, repositioned and renegotiated by what is going on globally. Thus, they are worked in interaction between the global and the local. This chapter locates Finnish education export in the (global) neoliberal education ideology. It starts by presenting social constructivism as the theoretical ground for neoliberal discourses. After that, it presents the norms and mechanisms of neoliberalism and goes on to discuss the different aspects of educational equality, equity and justice, and how they have been theorised in the study of education.

3.1. Social constructivism

Social constructivism refers to a theoretical approach that sees interaction and discursive practices, that is, ways of speaking, as participating to the construction of the social world (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 2). Thus, the ideas that circulate within the world are not solid or objective facts. They are socially constructed, historically and culturally specific, and constantly changing and interacting with each other (ibid. 5–6). Knowledge produced by the education providers, business and policies reflects other knowledges. Thus, it should be understood as a product of the current social and political imaginary; 'businessification' of everything and the increasing discursive control of the transnational educational organizations such as the OECD, Unesco and World Bank.

According to the Foucauldian theories, knowledge is inherently linked to the questions of power. Power works, as Foucault argues, through knowledge that becomes accepted as common-sense or the 'truth' (Mills 2003, 33). Finnish education for instance, has granted the title of being the top-performer of the educational race because international testing and ranking instruments such as PISA, have become common-sense mechanisms of measuring success. Therefore, naturally, the

countries that gain high results perform 'better' than ones gaining low results. Such discursive constructs of success and failure have true effects when, for instance, some countries that are depicted as 'better' are granted more business opportunities, jobs and credit than the others. Power is therefore always also performative – it does things (Mills 2003, 35). In terms of education and educational equity and equality in particular, it is important to pay attention to the ideas and knowledges that are seen as 'real' and important by the policies and practitioners of today (Apple 2000, 112).

3.2. Neoliberalism in education

Traditionally, education has occupied mostly social and political discourses, for example it being a welfare project, a tool for constructing a solid nation or a citizenship right. However, the last few decades have changed the frames thoroughly as a market-oriented vocabulary has entered the education discourse on a global scale (see e.g. Nordensvärd 2014, Ball 2012, Meyer & Benavot 2013, 12), applying concepts such as human capital, investments, education products and global knowledge economy to a sphere that traditionally was considered public.

The concept of neoliberalism is often used "so widely and so loosely that it is in danger of becoming meaningless" (Ball 2012, 3). Thus, to avoid confusion and 'looseness' of the analysis, Ball's (ibid.) definition of neoliberalism is applied in this thesis. According to him, it is a set of practices that are organized around an imagination of 'the market' as the basis of all social relations, including the way we understand and talk about the social. Seen through the eyes of neoliberalism, efficiency and cost-benefit analysis are given the priority in education. Therefore, neoliberalism erodes the welfare provision of states and depicts public institutions as inherently 'bad' and ineffective (Apple 2001, 38). They are bad, as they only waste money and do not provide with adequate results in return. Education should, according to the neoliberals, follow an economic rationality and be arranged in a way that is effective in using its finances (ibid.).

3.2.1. Human capital theory

What is central in the workings of the neoliberal education discourse, is the way in which it constructs the subject. According to Walkerdine (2003), subjects come to understand themselves

as responsible for the management of themselves. They should produce, and constantly reinvent themselves as skilful and qualified individuals that can succeed in the new economy (ibid.). Such understanding of the subject is central in the *human capital theory*, which sees education first and foremost as an investment to individual's capacity and therefore, productivity (Nordensvärd 2014). Students are thus viewed as human capital who must be equipped with skills than can then be transformed into effective workforce (Apple 2001, 38). Thus, it has become a well-adopted educational goal to invest in the productivity of the citizens that contributes to the national economic growth. It is not only the national policies or education businesses that focus on these instrumental aspects of education, but also development cooperation projects and initiatives (Mok & Jeong 2016).

3.2.2. Constructions of success and failure

Neoliberal education project produces also implicit value judgements about the 'good' and 'bad' schools, students and ways to organize education. In terms of educational equity and equality, it is important to examine how success and failure are negotiated within the project, and how such social constructs can be used as the basis for social exclusion.

As outlined in the beginning of this thesis, testing and measurement of the educational outcomes have become well-accepted norms in most educational policies. Therefore, the content and use of the assessment systems has a significant importance (Bradbury 2013). Bradbury (2013) for instance, has studied the construction of an 'ideal' learner in the assessment system for five-year old children in England. Her results show that the 'ideal' subject is constructed as an enthusiastic and motivated learner, who can choose activities in an appropriate manner and is able to display learning at the correct times and in the correct ways. The 'failing' subject on the other hand, becomes the opposite, the one who cannot identify with the neoliberal norms of choice, responsibility and self-regulation (ibid.). Depicting some students as 'failures' even before they start their education 'career' works as a technology of exclusion and can have serious effects on the child's self-image.

On the state level, international educational assessments such as TIMMS, PIRLS, CivEd and PISA work to construct that very same notion of success (Kettunen 2008, 21; Kamens 2013, 126). They

provide numerical, “easy to digest information” about the supposed quality of the education systems and are thus simple tools to look at and compare different systems with one another (Biesta 2015). Furthermore, they make education performance seem more manageable. They can help in the process of providing each individual with equally ‘good’ education (ibid.). The ranking of the countries based on their educational success fits into the neoliberal project. It helps to place some countries in the category of the underachievers, non-performers or the ‘at risk’ –nations (Connell 2013). The ‘losing’ has to be legitimated, and therefore, standardized tests become normalized (ibid.).

Such division to successful and failing countries, systems and individuals restores the privilege by offering the ones already ‘well-off’ a way to ‘help’, and benefit from, the underachievers. There are a mix of alliances, joint working groups, businesses, networks and partnerships constituting alternatives for the ‘state failures’ (Ball 2012, 7–9), education export companies being just one among many. Similarly, there are businesses of varying sizes that offer courses, remedial instruction and support for the individuals that have not shown progress the same way as their peers. They all participate in constructing the discourse of the ‘right’ kind of education.

However, what should be then the right kind of education? That is a question widely debated by scholars across educational and social sciences. In terms of equality and equity in education, it is indeed an important one. It does, after all, construct the way in which we understand a fair society.

3.3. Equality and equity in education

As a political project, equality emerged already in the 1700s when the enlightenment philosophers agreed upon the equality of all men. From the 1950s onwards, most educational systems in the world have had the issues of equality under concern. Equality has been evaluated from the point of view of both economic efficiency, that is, productivity of the nation, and social justice, namely that it is a human right and therefore, essential for social cohesion. (Rizvi & Lingard 2010, 140.) For many, equality in education has meant a project for greater opportunities in upward social mobility.

The English words equality and equity are sometimes used as if they were interchangeable, and there is disagreement among scholars in what those concepts mean. Oxford dictionary defines equality as “the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, or opportunities” whereas equity is appointed as “the quality of being fair and impartial”. Equality can therefore be understood as *a state of being*, different to equity, *a way of doing*. A common distinction is that while equality emphasizes the sameness of treatment to all people, equity takes individual circumstances and needs into consideration and is thus more concerned of the fairness and justice of the treatment (see e.g. Corson in Espinoza 2007). In the following, two approaches on equality/ equity problematics are discussed: equality and equity *in the education process* and justice *through education*, that is, how education promotes equal society.

3.3.1. Equality and equity in the education process

Oscar Espinoza⁴ (EdD) has done an extensive work on the access to and equity of education. His analysis on the narratives of equality and equity in education have proven useful in theorising the different aspects of equality and equity in the process of education. In his model, there are five different stages in the education process: financial, cultural and social resources that one has before education (1), access to education (2), survival, i.e. how long one stays in school (3), educational achievements (4) and outcomes, that is, what occupational status, income or level of political power one has after education (5) (Espinoza 2007). When evaluating the equality and equity in the process of education, all the stages should be considered individually (ibid.).

Equality

‘Equality for all’, according to Espinoza (2007), points to a natural equality among all people. According to that, every student should be guaranteed a minimum amount of resources to take part in education at different levels. ‘Equality on average across social groups’ on the other hand, refers to a similar ideal but takes groups as a point of reference instead of individuals. For Espinoza (ibid.), equality on average gets distinct meanings when coupled with different stages of the education process. For instance, when looking at the educational outcomes, equality exists if people from different socio-economic, ethnic or gender groups have the same average outcomes,

⁴ Espinoza is currently working as an associate researcher at Playa Ancha University in Chile. His is also an associate researcher in the Interdisciplinary Program of Educational Research (PIIE).

i.e. occupational status, income or political power. However, it does not necessarily mean that they would be provided with the same resources or same access to education. Nevertheless, neither the narratives, 'equality for all' or 'equality on average across social groups' considers the unequal family or community resources effecting one's educational career (ibid.).

These theories are often supplemented with a strategy for 'equality of opportunity', a removal of barriers (Thomson 2013). In Finland, especially the 1960s and 1970s educational reforms drew from this school of thought, aiming to moderate societal differences in opportunities to, and consequences of participating in education (Kettunen et al. 2012, 47). This narrative is quite generally agreed upon but also criticized as the normative ideal. It implies that all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic status, gender or place of living for instance, should be able to achieve desirable ends. However, such interpretation does not consider that the desirable ends might be very different to different individuals (Espinoza 2007). That leads us back to question of what the purpose of education is, whether people learn only because they want to achieve something, a better job for instance, or if learning can have an intrinsic value e.g. in terms of fulfilling aspirations for enlightenment, self-improvement or social interaction (Mok & Jeong 2016). Amartya Sen's capability approach for example, emphasises education's role in achieving *substantial freedom* instead of being an instrument for mere economic growth (ibid.). Giving attention to the great variation on why people learn, what is selected for learning, and how learning is organized and progresses, one-dimensional theory of the fairness of education seems distorted (Unterhalter 2009).

Equity

Equity refers to the *fairness* in education, that is, how education should be organized so that it would be fair for each individual. 'Equity for equal needs' indicates that all people with same needs should be granted the same access, same level of achievement and/ or the same educational outcomes (Espinoza 2007). 'Equity for equal achievement' on the other hand, points to the importance of past achievements as determinants for present educational distribution (ibid.). Everyone with equal past achievements should, for instance, be able to have the same access to education or reach the same achievements in the present.

'Equity for equal potential', third equity narrative of Espinoza's analysis, refers to Tumin's (in Espinoza 2007) *full opportunity definition*, according to which each student should be able to maximise his or her potential, and governments should devote resources accordingly. It implies that all people with similar abilities and skills should have the same access to education, reach the same educational attainment and/ or obtain the same achievements. In the 1980s – 2000s, this was the prevailing paradigm of the education politics in Finland, although applied, especially in the late 1990s and 2000s beside the equality of opportunity (Kettunen et al 2012, 47; Finnish Education Evaluation Centre 2004, 15). However, such approach to equity has a few quite substantial problems. Firstly, it ignores the fact that 'potential' is inherently connected to the individual's earlier opportunities, influenced by family background and social structures for instance. Therefore, possibilities for reaching one's potential are not the same for everyone and claiming so might marginalize some less-advantaged social, cultural or ethnic groups (see e.g. Biesta 2015). It is also hard to define 'potential' and how much one should spend to maximize a person's potential (Espinoza 2007). Therefore, as a definition, the narrative proves weak.

In fact, none of the above discussed narratives seems to be enough on its own to cover all stages of the education process. Equality and equity to be met in terms of resources, access to education, survival, achievements and outcomes, they need to be posed to a close critical analysis. As long as we stick to the single question of whether education is equally distributed among citizens, we are blind to the fairness of the procedures of education and learning (Espinoza 2007). Educational quality is not just about performance and distribution, but how these are brought about. Yet, it is also about *why* these are brought about, namely, what the purpose of education is for the society at large. According to Biesta (2015) for instance, school does not only prepare students to have a job and become productive, but also introduces them to different cultural, religious, political and social traditions. It should, at least, be concerned over the formation of the individual as a person, and to help students to lead independent, responsible and meaningful lives. In the following chapter, the problematics of education's role in bringing about equal and just society will be discussed.

3.3.2. Justice through education

In her article, Thomson (2013) writes about the *distributive conception of justice* in education, namely, that everyone is given an equal share of 'knowledge'. However, the current conflicting views on the nature of social justice, whether it should be about economic redistribution, cultural group recognition or political representation, make it hard to evaluate the realization of justice (Fraser 2008, 3). Fraser (2008, 32) notes that beside the question of the 'what' of justice, philosophers now openly argue about the 'who' of justice, namely, among whom should we examine equality and equity. While liberal-nationalists argue for the relevance of the domestic sphere in thinking about the 'who', cosmopolitans think that the justice applies globally, regardless of nationality or citizenship (ibid. 33–34). For those in favour of the internationalist 'who' on the other hand, egalitarian distributive norms apply internationally, among the states (ibid.). The 'who' of justice is particularly relevant in the analysis of the debate over educational equity. It is important to note how educational policy discourses work in the intersections of the national, global and international, and what kind of influence that has on individuals.

As argued earlier in this thesis, global education discourses make implicit value judgements of the 'good' and 'bad' subjects, institutions and states. Thus, they have a great impact on who we think is entitled to enjoy the benefits of education. *Social justice education* works as a frame through which to look at and unpack those 'whos' at play. It is an umbrella term for a number of theories focusing on diminishing inequalities between individuals and groups. It is however, increasingly used to address the classroom practices in particular (Francis & Le Roux 2007). Justice *through* education, the name of this chapter, refers therefore to the classroom pedagogies and practices that deal with different forms of oppression in order to bring about just and equal society. These forms include, for instance, racism, classism, ableism and sexism. Feminist studies⁵, feminist

⁵ Feminist studies is an interdisciplinary scholarly field, that includes, inter alia, critical research on gender/sex, gendered hegemonies, gender relations, gender identities and intersections between gender/sex, sexuality, race, class and ethnicity (Lykke 2010, 14–15). In terms of education, it has a lot to do with the question of how *gender perspective* is or is not integrated in education practices and policies.

pedagogy⁶ and gender equality pedagogy⁷, although significant in the context of anti-oppressive classroom practices, are not in the particular focus of this thesis and thereby not discussed here in further detail.

Social justice education draws from the critical theory and critical feminist school of thoughts, according to which the goal of the research, and education, is always to transform, and not only to explain the current social order (Ackerly and True 2010, 2). One of the most famous scholars in this field is probably Paulo Freire, a Brazilian philosopher of education whose critiques on 'banking education' and theories on critical education and liberation pedagogy have been widely discussed across educational science. He problematizes 'banking education', a fixed learning process in which a learner memorizes and stores facts that a teacher lectures about (Tomperi 2016, 28–29). Instead, he calls for a dialogical relationship between the teacher and the learner that eventually leads to *conscientization*, a critical awareness of the world and its unequal state of affairs (ibid.). Social justice education recognizes that by supporting people from the dominant groups and marginalizing people from the non-dominant groups, educational institutions and norms preserve the status quo (Mthethwa-Sommers 2014, 9–10). The aim of the critical pedagogy is to transform these institutions and norms.

In regard to the problem setting of this thesis, Freirean theory brings along important links with the (unequal) structuring of knowledge. As knowledge is constantly negotiated, produced and reproduced in education, a relevant question to ask is what knowledge then, is considered important. Is it the knowledge that encourages the prevalence of the unequal social order, the one that seeks to transform it or something else? To whom, why, how and in whose interests is such knowledge constructed (Apple 2001, 6; Thomson 2013)? If we do not expose such knowledges to critical examination, and if we are only interested in how knowledge serves us in the process of

⁶ Feminist pedagogy can be seen as a form of critical pedagogy. However, critical pedagogy has been criticized by feminist theorists as it has not problematized gender as a power relation (e.g. Gore 1993). Thus, feminist pedagogy emphasizes the gender perspective and has called attention to the bourgeois and heteronormative ideology in education (see Ylöstalo & Brunila 2017).

⁷ Gender equality pedagogy refers to "a form of pedagogy, which is sensitive to discursive power that operates not only in gender equality work, but also in feminist pedagogy" (Ylöstalo & Brunila 2017). Gender equality in the context of gender equality pedagogy is understood as a social value that is concerned with gender, power and hierarchy and that includes a vision of a gender equal society and commitment to it (ibid.).

economic profit-making and nothing else, transformation of the unequal social structures is not possible.

4. Research methodology

This chapter presents and discusses the methodological choices made in the study. For the research question “how Finnish education export companies negotiate the notions of equality and equity in education”, two distinct methods were used to gather data: qualitative interviews and analysis of the companies’ blog discourses. After the data collection, a critical discourse analysis was conducted to answer to the question. The methods for sampling, data collection and the analysis, as well as their weaknesses and ethical problematics, will be explained and discussed against the relevant methods literary.

4.1. Collection of data

To study the social construction of educational equity and equality, purposeful sampling (Bryman 2008, 458) of the informants was used. That means, I did not pick randomly the companies to be the focus of the study. Instead, the companies were chosen on the basis that they are committed to making a *social impact*⁸ through exporting their education products. Thus, they employed business tools in meeting a social need, low level of education or illiteracy for instance.

The focus on social impact was outlined to make sure that the texts would be relevant for the analysis, that is, they would be more likely to discuss the impacts and efforts the products have on educational equity and equality. The decision to focus on social impact was made after a pilot interview with a randomly picked education export company. After the interview I realized that if random sampling was used, there would be a risk that the companies would have nothing else to

⁸ Social impact business is different to socially responsible business. Socially responsible business is often applied under the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). While socially responsible business considers the influence it has over communities, social impact business seeks to respond a certain identified ‘social need’.

say about equity and equality than reproducing the meta-discourses on the subject matters. As Simpson (2018, 39) found when working with his dissertation,

an increasing amount of people I would talk to were reluctant to discuss democracy, equality, and human rights other than reproducing meta-discourses about the subject matters. Speakers from within Finnish education whom I spoke to not only lacked a critical perspective about democracy, equality, and human rights but seemingly were scared of voicing criticisms against the so-called status quo.

In order to avoid such 'empty conversations', the sample was limited to the Finnish education export companies that communicated their aim in responding to a particular 'social need'.

The companies were discovered by exploring the websites of the 63 member organizations⁹ of the Education Finland programme. Particular attention was paid on how the companies communicated their values and aims, and whether they equalled the above definition of the social impact business. Six organizations matched these conditions, and all of them were contacted¹⁰ and asked to participate in a research interview. However, one of them appeared to have shown no activity in the previous six months and thus, I assumed, did not exist anymore. Another one did not respond to any of my contact requests. Eventually, four companies agreed to take part in the interview. Three of them had also blogs that were taken as targets of the analysis. The blogs were involved in the analysis so that they would bring along more voices and enrich the discourses produced by the companies.

All the companies that participated were members of the Education Finland programme and exported educational products to other countries. While one of them was just starting their business, the other ones had existed from two to five years. The companies employed from 4 to 30 people, and their target groups varied from early childhood education to higher education and further to businesses and NGOs¹¹. The products that were sold were either e-learning solutions or unique educational approaches that used online environments in dissemination. All the companies argued that due to the changing conditions of work and digitalisation, education was now globally

⁹ The number of the member organizations in March 2018.

¹⁰ The email that was sent to the potential interviewees can be found in the appendix 1.

¹¹ Non-governmental organizations

experiencing a turning point. Their products therefore, offered solutions to the challenges posed by this new, 'inevitable' situation.

4.1.1. Qualitative interviews

The interviews took place in the interviewees' offices, except one which was arranged via Skype. They lasted from 40 minutes to 1 hour 40 minutes, and were conducted in Finnish or English, depending on the interviewee's language. As one of the interviewees wished not to be recorded, only three of the discussions were recorded, transcribed and used for the discourse analysis. All the interviewees held managing positions and all except one had been involved in the company from the start. The interviewees were asked to participate as representatives of their companies. However, as noted by some of the informants, the line between a company representative and a private person is fine. Thus, all the narratives should primarily be considered as the speakers' own.

The interviews were qualitative, more semi-structured than unstructured in nature. Although I had an interview guide¹², I was not strict in sticking to it. Furthermore, I chose not to pose any questions about equality and equity of education, unless mentioned by the interviewee. The focus of my interest was first and foremost the interviewee's point of view; thus, pre-determined questions could have led the conversation too much to a direction that was not regarded as important by them. After all, I did not know whether the informants regarded equity or equality as worth to mention, whether it was something that they had reflected upon or whether our definition of equity and equality would be the same. *Frame for interpretation* (Kendon 1999, 368), that is, what the participant could expect from the interaction, was agreed to be a research interview about Finnish education export. That guided the expectations and utterances of both myself as a researcher, and the participant as the informant of the study.

4.1.2. Blogs

In addition to the interviews, three of the four companies had blogs that were used as targets of the analysis. All of them included several authors from within and outside the company. All three

¹² The interview guide can be found in the appendix 3.

companies had been active in writing posts, and altogether 46 posts had been written during one year (March 2017– March 2018). As I was interested in the most recent posts, such one-year time span was used to collect the texts for the analysis.

As a genre, a blog is quite different to company's official communication media. It is a public online journal that often includes the possibility for reader interaction. The posts are presented in a chronological order, with the last post being at the top of the blog. The relationship of blogs with other products of blogging, other posts or individual blogs for instance is, as Wakeford and Cohen (2008) state, one of the fundamental constitutes of blogging. Unlike most personal blogs however, company blogs do not always accept comments. Only one of the blogs had the comment field displayed. A blog is yet an informal channel for company communication that encourages personal stories, opinions and experiences to be expressed in a way no other media does. The opinions are usually the writers' own, although published under the company name. All the 46 texts that were collected included the name and sometimes, also the title, of the author. The possibility to analyse the blog posts of several authors brought along more depth to the produced discourses.

4.1.3. Reflections and delimitations of the collection of data

The method of purposeful sampling and the choice to focus only on the companies that aim to make a 'social impact' is not unproblematic. There is a risk of a 'convenient sample' (Barker 2008), namely, that I as a researcher choose only the cases that fit into my pre-given position and purposes. However, by having chosen the ones that focus on social impact and not the other ones, I believe I gained more in-depth knowledge about the equity and equality discourses. It is not only about getting enough reflections on the meanings behind the concepts. It is also about the fairness of analysing the texts that have taken aspects of equality and equity under consideration. Barker (2008) asks to whom the chosen texts are relevant other than the analyst. I think that they are relevant to everyone. By legitimating certain knowledges over others, they construct our ways of knowing and thus, also the ways of acting upon the issues that we know to be 'right' or 'necessary'. Thus, it is important to expose and deconstruct the power structures that underlie those conventional truths.

However, was the sample big enough? The question of whether three transcribed interviews and 46 posts of three distinct blogs is enough to produce a valid study, is eventually a matter of research *validity*. As concepts, reliability and validity are often linked with quantitative studies. LeCompte and Goetz (In Bryman 2008, 376–377) have attempted to redefine and discuss about them in the context of qualitative studies. The study is valid if the researcher’s observations equal the theoretical ideas they develop, and if the findings can be generalized across social settings (ibid.). However, while the first can be a strength for studies producing in-depth results and thick description¹³, the second poses problems to qualitative studies. As in the case of this study when the total amount of the research participants is only four, the small sample easily fails to say anything specific about a larger social setting (ibid.). However, neither the interviews nor the blogs are meant to provide generalizable information about a wider population. Instead, the purpose is to draw them together with theories (Bryman 2008, 391–392) and thus, provide more in-depth information that could be, to some extent, generalized to larger social phenomena. I admit that I might have gained even more detailed results if the time frame would have allowed a second round of the interviews. However, considering the tight schedule of the master’s thesis process, the accuracy of the analysis could have suffered if I would have set out for critical discourse analysis with more than 49 texts.

Reliability, on the other hand, means the degree to which a study could be replicated. However, as LeCompte and Goetz (in Bryman 2008, 376–377) acknowledge, freezing a social setting and the circumstances of the original study in order to repeat it, is often very hard and cannot guarantee the comparability of results. Also, studying discourses is never a neutral process. I as a researcher bring certain presuppositions, perceptions and previous knowledge into the analysis. Thus, it is hardly possible that a replicated study would produce the exact same results.

As categories of events, interviews and blog posts belong to different genres, that is, semiotic ways of acting and interacting (Fairclough 2016, 88). While the first is a social media text created in communication and marketing purposes for all audiences potentially interested in the company, the second one is a research interview tied by the consensus for confidentiality and mutual trust. They also include different styles or ‘ways of being’ (Fairclough 2016, 89) when, for instance, the

¹³ *Thick description* means the rich accounts of details of a culture (Geertz in Bryman 2008, 378).

author being a CEO or a marketing manager of the company. That 'way of being' then, presupposes developing a certain 'right' style of speaking. The most obvious difference between the text genres is that while the interviewees speak mostly about the things that are of interest to me as a researcher, the blogs are more general in nature. Thus, they include also topics that have nothing to do with the research questions posed in this thesis. Furthermore, the style of speaking of the interviewees is more relaxed than the style of the blog posts, which is shown as more direct, bold or sometimes even provocative way of phrasing things.

4.2. Critical discourse analysis

After gathering the data, the texts were transformed into an analysable form with a transcription programme. The data was coded by paying particular attention to the sub-questions¹⁴: how the goal of equal education is negotiated (1) and how the strategies for reaching that goal are discussed (2), allowing thus further reflection on the social constructions of equity and equality of education. Such question-guided approach helped to expose the themes that appeared significant in the data. Thus, I did not engage with close reading of all the 49 texts but selected the parts that were most relevant for my questions. After the coding, critical discourse analysis was conducted to disclose the discursive constructions behind the words.

In the analysis, discourse was understood as a semiotic¹⁵ way of constructing aspects of the world (Fairclough 2016, 88), that is, *how* something was being said. Discourse is a form of social practice that is both renegotiating the social reality and, at the same time, constituted by and referring to other social practices. It should be born in mind that it is more than verbal language or words. It includes forms of non-verbal interaction as well. It does matter, for instance, whether the speaker says the word 'only' with intonation or with a neutral tone of voice. Likewise, it matters where she looks at, how her body is positioned and what kind of facial expressions she has when saying it. However, due to the time and wording limits of this thesis, all the non-verbal interaction, such as facial expressions, silences, gestures, pictures etc., was excluded from the analysis.

¹⁴ See the sub-questions in the chapter "Aim and research question" on page 6.

¹⁵ For Fairclough (2016, 87), discourse analysis is interested in different 'semiotic modalities'. These are language, visual images and 'body language'.

In addition to analysing how certain discourses are constructed, it is important to acknowledge what they do. According to critical discourse theorists, discourses contribute to the creation and maintenance of unequal power structures. By constructing 'true knowledges', they have *ideological effects* (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 63) over the social. Ideology, in this case, means the construction of reality that is built on the discursive practices and contributes to the production, reproduction or transformation of relations of domination (Fairclough (1992, 87). Laclau and Mouffe agree with Fairclough on the ability of ideology to produce and renegotiate domination. They see it as the subjugation of one social group to others (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 63). These relations of domination, 'common sense' –ideologies and resistant ones, are yet always open for change, never set or fixed. The point of the critical discourse analysis, and hence, also my analysis, is to reveal the maintenance of, or the resistance to the (unequal or unjust) social world and, in that way, make visible the possible 'hidden' power hierarchies underneath the created meanings (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 62–64). To put in other words, my analysis worked to denaturalize the knowledges that were produced as neutral or the 'common-sense'.

4.2.1. Reflections and delimitations of the analysis

In terms of critical discourse analysis, it is good to keep in mind that the analysis itself is always a social construction. That means, the glasses through which I as a researcher view some things as relevant and some things as not, are never objective (Jaworski & Coupland 1999, 13). On the contrary, they are affected, inter alia, by my position, cultural background, previous knowledge and interests. I too, construct discourses by positioning some things as more important, relevant or 'true' than the others. Like Jaworski and Coupland (1999, 36) point out, it is often difficult to say why a particular text has come under the attention of discourse analysis and why some of its characteristics are addressed and others not. Thus, even though pursuing objectivity, the results should always be seen as 'filtered' by the author of the analysis. As the texts under the analysis are partly in Finnish, I have also had to translate them to English. Therefore, there is the risk that the translations have changed the intended meanings behind the language.

Furthermore, discourse analysis alone is not self-sufficient (Jaworski & Coupland 1999, 36). Thus, in order to provide comprehensive and comparable results, it needs to be supplemented with other traditions of research. It can however, give a glimpse on the ways some knowledges are

maintained, produced or reproduced in language. Thus, by either confirming or resisting the current forms of the academic knowledge, it contributes to the ways in which we understand educational equity and equality being negotiated, valued and acted upon.

4.3. Ethics

When it comes to the ethics of the methodological choices made, it is important to note that different rules apply to the use of the interviews and the blogs. Firstly, when interviewing company representatives, I was given information that is not necessarily publically available. Thus, it is important to reflect on the possible effects the findings might have that are contrary to the interest of the research subjects (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton & Richardson 1999, 150). It is likewise important that no confidential company information is exposed in the examples presented in the analysis. Furthermore, the identity of the subjects should be strictly protected. To guarantee a mutual agreement on the confidentiality principles of the study, a form of consent¹⁶ was signed by all the interview participants. It notified that

- The interviews are recorded and transcribed
- The study might present examples from the interviews
- All personal data, as well as company information will be handled with absolute confidentiality
- Any summary interview content, or direct quotation from the interview, will be anonymized so that neither the interviewee or his/ her company could be identified
- The participation in the interview is voluntary
- One can withdraw him-/herself from the study at any point.

For using the blog posts on the other hand, no additional consent was searched. The decision was made on the grounds that the postings are in public domain, the material is not sensitive in nature and no stated site policy prohibits the use of the material. However, I made a decision to protect the identities of the blogs on the grounds that that would protect the identities of the interviewees. As the companies under the interviews and the blogs are the same, the exposure of the blogs could expose the companies that participated in the study. Thus, to prevent the

¹⁶ See the form of consent in the appendix 2.

possibility to search the companies online, the excerpts of the blogs are only referred to, and not directly quoted in the analysis.

Another ethical question is the one of knowledge production. As discussed in the previous chapter, I too, produce discourses when analysing the discourses produced by others. Attaching meanings to discursive acts is never a neutral or a value-free process (Jaworski & Coupland 1999, 13). Thus, my interpretations might 'neutralize' certain knowledges that are in fact not neutral. They might also present the research subjects in a way that was not intended by them. It is thus extremely important to practice self-reflexivity throughout the research process and refrain from putting words into my informants' mouths. For a social science student, it is a difficult task to do. After all, even if I do explain my intentions and seek to justify the choices I make, the analysis is always my interpretation.

5. Analysis

This chapter presents the results of the analysis, and links them back to the theory and the research question presented in the beginning of this thesis. The research question "how Finnish education export companies negotiate the notions of equality and equity in education" was divided into two sub-questions: how the goal of equal education is negotiated (1) and how the strategies for reaching that goal are discussed (2). The results of the analysis are presented in the same manner. Thus, the first chapter presents the two discourses that were found to discuss the purpose of education. These are, skills equality (i) and individual responsibility (ii). The second chapter on the other hand, presents the strategy for reaching these goals and how it is discursively negotiated. That is called access to learning (iii).

Some examples of the interviews are given to facilitate the analysis. In direct quotations, ellipsis in square brackets [...] are used to mark omissions, and ellipsis without brackets indicate interviewee's hesitation or unfinished sentences. Citations of the interviews are marked as I1, I2 and I3, and citations of the blogs as B1, B2 and B2. However, the blogs are not directly quoted in the purpose of protecting the companies' identities.

5.1. Skills equality

In terms of educational equality and equity, the first discourse aims to combat the “skills inequality” of today. That is described as the huge discrepancy of learning levels experienced by children and young people across the world (B3). Equality of opportunity here, is thought of as the access to the educational content that would provide a certain level of adequate “skills”, that is, the skills that help people to face the “challenges of tomorrow” (B3). They include, inter alia, “collaboration, problem-solving and trust”, skills to become “a global citizen” (B2), “21st century skills”¹⁷ (B1 & B2), “creativity, critical thinking” (I2), “digital skills” (B3) and “learning how to learn” (e.g. I2 & I3). Fair education should therefore seek to reduce the gap between the ones that have, and the ones that do not have these skills. One of the barriers to skills equality is explained to be the gap in the availability of ‘good’ teaching methods between the marginalized and the well-off, or the “poor” and the “wealthy” (B3). The following quote shows how the education methods, content and professional knowledge of the teachers in the Sub-Saharan Africa are described by one of the interviewees.

[...] it is bad for many reasons. [...] they study, they just study the wrong way. They study the wrong things, the system is bad, teachers are bad [...] these are all like system level problems there are no single ways of how it would work [...] the only way one can manage the situation is like really, simply said, the only way that one has proven to change, to disrupt the global industries [...] is like the mobile, and the digital. That’s how it should be done. There is no other alternative. That’s what [the interviewee’s company] does. (I1, author’s translation)

Legitimizing the demand for mobile and digital solutions that can counteract skills inequality, the speaker describes what is wrong with the current education systems in the Sub-Saharan Africa. He/ she shows hesitation in repeating the words “bad” and “wrong” without providing further explanation to them. Failing to explain what the ‘badness’ actually entails, the speaker ends up presenting some territorial education systems and methods as inherently worse than the others. One of the blog posts goes a bit more in-depth in explaining the ‘badness’ of the teaching

¹⁷ 21st century skills refer to the skills identified as necessary to tackle the social challenges and challenges of today’s working life. Such skills have been defined by, inter alia, US Secretary of Labor’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21), the OECD, the American Association of College and Universities, researchers at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and other higher education institutions and private organizations.

methods. The speaker argues that the methods that currently counteract skills inequality tend to “reinforce formal education structures” and hold back students from developing the “essential skills” that are needed in the future (B3). The skills equality discourse constructs the export products as necessary in combating skills inequality. At the same time, formal education structures are portrayed as unable to provide students with enough resources for skills development. Such discourse is common in the neoliberal educational frames, where public institutions and systems are depicted as not producing the skills effectively enough (Apple 2001, 38).

5.1.1. Why should one target skills inequality?

The companies under the focus depict skills development as an inherent ‘need’ for both the individual and the social. Skills development is rationalized, inter alia, on the basis of its importance in navigating in tomorrow’s working life. One of the blogs explains that we are tasked with preparing our children for jobs, lives and future that are hard to predict and understand (B3). Thus, we “need” to enable them to develop the skills that are required to face the “challenges of the future” (ibid.). People also *want to* learn so that they can “keep competitive in the workforce” (B2) as well as “feel themselves as competent members of the society” (B1). Continuous self-development is depicted as desirable, as in a visitor’s blog post in which the speaker tells how he/she focused on improving him-/herself daily in order to become “a better version” of the self (B2). Promoting skills development and aiming to counteract skills inequality is thus depicted as the ‘need’ and ‘will’ of the individuals and therefore, a legit problem to work against.

The need to attain the capability to “keep competitive in the workforce” implies that the skills development is not only a question of self-development and individual motivation, but also of interest to the economy at large. The following quote for example, presents that also the future’s working life ‘needs’ people with a certain set of skills.

[...] at the same time, we know, we see somewhere that [...] the hard skills are no longer the ones needed. That employers in the western countries, in the global north, want people with 21st century skills, soft skills, but at the same time, one should have the hard skills to be able to employ oneself. (I1, author’s translation)

The interviewee argues that, as can be seen “somewhere”, the ‘hard skills’¹⁸ are “no longer the ones needed” and thus, their role in today’s working life has become useless. Making a distinction between the employers in the “western countries”, in the “global north” and in the countries not belonging to these categories, he/ she gives a careful remark that ‘soft skills’ are only required in the ‘western’ or ‘northern’ world and not elsewhere.

Such a construct is not only problematic in the critical intercultural perspective, it has also a strong neoliberal baggage. It promotes the role of education as a tool “to employ oneself”.

Simultaneously, it ignores all the other reasons in attaining education, for instance, that education could enhance capabilities to achieve substantial freedom (Amartya Sen in Mok & Jeong 2016) or help in leading independent, responsible and meaningful lives (Biesta 2015).

These children are going to find that this society is changing and even faster than right now. They *really need to innovate*, they *really need to* come up with new ideas in maybe a faster pace so it is *very very important*. (I2, italics added)

The individuals, in the above example that is, the children, are constructed as neoliberal subjects that should prove themselves as skilful and qualified individuals that can succeed in the new economy (Walkerdine 2003). That is a common subject construct in the human capital theory, where education is seen as an economic investment that can increase individuals’ productivity (Nordensvärd 2014). Thus, the capability to innovate and come up with new ideas in a “faster pace”, builds up a portrait of an effective and qualified wage earner.

The neoliberal ‘need’ gets mixed up with the discursive construction of a responsible individual. One of the blogs negotiates that it is “crucial” for *everyone* to develop 21st century skills and grow into knowledgeable and ethical decision-makers and individuals, so that *we* can ensure the “environmental, social and economic sustainability of the planet’s future” (B2). Furthermore, one should “expose individuals” to the values of democracy, human rights and intercultural understanding so that “individuals and societies” could live in peace and harmony (B1). Here, the skills development is presented as necessary for both the individuals and the societies. By using the first-person plural in saying that *we* could ensure the sustainability of the planet’s future, the speaker identifies with the people that need to take an active role. In the second example, the

¹⁸ Hard skills refer to the proficiency and degree certificates for instance. Soft skills on the other hand, point to the subjective skills such as interpersonal and leadership skills as well as ability to solve problems.

speaker takes the role of the adviser and positions him-/herself outside the responsibility by arguing that the individuals *should be exposed* to the values of democracy, human rights and intercultural understanding so that *they* could live in peace and harmony.

Reflected against Espinoza's theoretical model (2007), skills equality -discourse speaks mainly to the equality of opportunity in terms of education outcomes. It focuses on what happens *after* education and not so much on how education is organized. Simply put, the goal of the education is, according to the discourse, equally skilful individuals. The discourse answers to the question of *what* of equality. Thus, it helps us to understand what should be distributed in an equal manner so that equality could be achieved. However, instead of only paying attention to whether the skills are equally distributed among people, it would be important to consider the equality of resources one has before education, access to education, educational attainment and achievements (ibid.). Questions like the one of socio-economic background, ability or possibility to access digital learning applications should be given much higher value in evaluating the realization of educational equality. Furthermore, one should consider the question of why these skills matter. Critical reflection on the constructed 'needs' for skills development might open up new ways to think about the purpose of education. As Thomson (2013) states, if there is only one 'truth' and the utility of knowledge is of interest, the questions about what knowledge is important, why and for whom, are left unexplored.

5.2. Individual responsibility

The second discourse constructs the individual as a responsible agent and is thus an important one in terms of understanding the fairness of the education process and outcomes. While the skills equality discourse spoke to the *what* of equality, individual responsibility discourse is interested in the *who* of equality and equity. That is, who should be the one responsible for providing with the equal opportunities for skills development.

According to the texts under the analysis, that is the individual. Education should no longer provide with information on different subject matters. Instead, individuals should be seen as 'learners', that is, people that take an active role in their own learning. The following example constructs a difference between the 'old' ways of education and the new ways of 'learning'.

[...] if previously the *education system* produced people that knew the answers to questions, the *learning* in the future... so do you notice? The previous, or current *education system* produced people that could answer the questions, while the *learning* in the future should produce people that can pose new, independent questions. (I1, author's translation, italics added)

The speaker constructs a change between the previous/ current education system and the future requirements for learning. The intentional note that education is no longer education but learning, is evident also in other texts under the analysis. The following excerpt for instance, shows a 'moment of crisis'¹⁹ (Fairclough 1992, 230) in defining the concepts of education and learning.

[...] we want to bring the education, or the learning or the... ahm, these basic life skills that every child should need in the future [...]. (I2)

As a subjective concept, 'learning' poses the individual in the centre of the education process. Like in the skills equality discourse, the 'right' kind of subject is negotiated as an active one, that is, someone who can "pose new, independent questions" or find new ways of "acquiring competencies" (B1). The evaluative notions of 'goodness' and 'rightness' of such active behaviour are done in the speech. One of the blog posts for instance, argues that the students who can look for learning opportunities and use the available resources "will thrive" (B1). Moreover, another blog describes that taking an active role is an "important source of happiness" (B2). Walkerdine (2003) notes, that such a subject construct is central to the neoliberal project. Neoliberal subject is, she describes, responsible for the management of herself.

However, by saying that "the *learning* in the future should produce people [...]" (I1, author's translation, italics added) the speaker leaves unclear the notion of who or what is the 'learning' that is responsible for the production of the subjects. Thus, who should provide education or make sure that the students learn? The speaker argues that "*the education system* produced people that knew the answers to questions while the learning in the future should produce people that can pose new, independent questions" (ibid.), therefore referring to the system as unsuccessful in producing the right kind of subjects. It is left unclear, whether the 'education system' means a particular national system or if it is used to mark all the education systems in the world. The

¹⁹ 'Moments of crisis', which require participants to repair the communicative problem indicate the change in process. These moments are marked by repetition, hesitation, silence or sudden shifts in style for instance (Fairclough 1992, 230).

general remark makes the statement loosely justified and gives the impression that it is the educational institutions (in general) that are bad. However, it also erodes the role and responsibility of the teachers. Teachers should no longer be the ones to tell “how things should be done”. Rather, they should be the ones that “enable” students to reach their full potential (B3). Such a notion shifts the teacher identity from an expert of subject matters into a facilitator. A teacher becomes a hindrance, someone who stands in the way of the more self-directed learning, as in the following example.

That one can target his/ her own learning in a right way [...] that a teacher is not there as a conductor to tell how things should be done, this is the next phase. That we are more self-directed in our own learning (I3, author’s translation)

The construction of the individual as a self-directed and active ‘learner’, and the demolition of the role of the public institutions and teachers in providing with the education services, is problematic in terms of educational equity. By giving the responsibility to the individual, the discourse justifies the ignorance of the people that are in vulnerable positions. Instead, it is the ‘potential’ that defines the life opportunities of an individual. One of the blog posts argue that they (the company) want a world in which “determination, hard work and creativity” decide how far one goes in life (B3). Such a notion sits well with the full opportunity definition of equity (Tumin in Espinoza 2007). Thus, equity is not about providing everyone with the same amount of resources, but the amount that responds to their “talents and ambitions” (I1). However, as discussed in the theory section of this thesis, ‘potential’ is inherently connected to societal attributes, that is, things that one cannot necessarily have an influence on. Those are, abilities, socio-economic background, gender and race for instance. Thus, by giving the priority to the people with ‘potential’, the ones in the margins are easily left without additional support.

For the individual responsibility -discourse, the *who* of equality and equity is the self, that is, a subject that is responsible for the management of herself and constantly looking for opportunities to improve. It is the self that should make sure that one learns the skills that are needed in the future. Thus, the responsibility of the public institutions and teachers is bypassed as no longer relevant. In terms of equity, such a notion of the subject-centred education is problematic. It ignores that some people are in less-advantaged positions and depicts inactiveness as inherently ‘failing’. It is also contradictory to the skills equality discourse, according to which the goal of

education is to provide equal opportunities to develop skills. After all, one cannot get equal opportunities if the opportunities depend on how hard one tries.

5.3. Access to learning

While the previous two discourses have constructed the goals of education, *access to learning* pays attention to the strategies for reaching those goals. It constructs 'learning' and 'education' as items to be delivered to everyone in an equal manner. One of the blogs for instance, negotiates their company mission as to "spread learning to everyone, everywhere" (B2). One of the interviewees on the other hand, defines their goal as "to bring quality education to every child, everywhere" (I2). Equity therefore, is negotiated as the equal access to these learning and education resources. Even though sometimes referred to with the concept of 'equality' (in Finnish, *tasa-arvo*), this discourse constructs a fair way to 'do education' – thus, it is more accurate, in this case, to use the concept of 'equity'. The idea of the delivery of learning and education is what Thomson (2013) calls the distributive notion of equity, that is, that everyone gets an equal share of 'knowledge'. It is problematic, as it assumes that 'learning' and 'education' are artefacts that could be delivered and that everyone would receive them in the same way (*ibid.*).

Here, the equality of opportunity to access is used as a strategy to promote a fair society, in which everyone receives 'quality education'. Learning could not be, as one of the interviewees states, as "something where peoples' opportunities in life end" (I4, author's notes, translated). According to Espinoza (2007) such an approach implies that all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic status, gender or place of living for instance, should be able to achieve desirable ends. That is contradictory to the full opportunity definition of equity discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, it is important to explore how the barriers to equity of education are negotiated. One of the ways is the notion of the inequality of the income levels.

Well we don't want to keep this game away from children just because their parents cannot afford it. (I3)

What is often criticized in relation to the commodification of education, is that by making education something that can be purchased, it is only available to those who can afford it (see e.g. Schatz 2016, 56). This is a notion that the informants of this study contest and defend themselves against both in their speech and in their policies. Another one is the inequality of previous

knowledge, that is, what kind of knowledge, competences and skills the student has before the education. One of the blogs for instance, explains that it is possible to give personal support if the student is “lacking background information” (B1). The support is likewise important because everyone does not learn “at the same pace” and because learning “is not linear” (ibid.). Furthermore, some people might just need “a few ICT-classes” more than the ones who already got those skills at home (ibid.). Thus, according to the discourse, education should be accessible to all regardless of the income, previous knowledge, learning style or the skills level of the individuals. Only one of the interviewees identifies the inequality in the access to digital infrastructure as a barrier to equity. Given that most of the education export companies at hand sell digital solutions, it is a noteworthy silence. Barriers that have to do with the inequality of gender, race, physical, social or psychological abilities, nationality and therefore, also the social security benefits, are likewise left unexplored.

That brings us to the question of equity *for who*. Looking into how the speakers negotiate the beneficiaries of the equity exposes a cosmopolitan view, according to which egalitarian distributive norms apply globally (Fraser 2008, 33). For example, one of the interviewees explains that one of their goal is that “every person in the world would have the access to learning [...]” (I1). Another one speaks about making their product available for “every child on the planet” (B3). Thus, the ‘who’ that benefits, is not tied to the nationality or citizenship of the student. It is however, vaguely defined and leaves the notion of the above discussed inequalities detached. Therefore, it is important to ask whether justice applies also to those that lack the ability to use technology or have physical, psychological or social barriers in learning.

Access to learning -discourse constructs a distributive notion of equity (Thomson 2013) by depicting ‘learning’ and ‘education’ as items or artefacts that should be spread to everyone, everywhere. The informants refer to the equality of opportunity definition, although describing the barriers to equity in a loose manner. While paying attention to the inequality of opportunities in terms of income, previous knowledge, learning style or the skills level of the individuals, the texts leave other inequalities detached. Neither do they note the contradictions between the provision of the equal opportunities and the idea of the individual as the responsible agent.

5.4. Concluding remarks

The research question “how do Finnish education export companies negotiate the notions of equality and equity in education?” has shed light on three hegemonic discourses that are in interdiscursive²⁰ relationship with one another (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 74). These are, skills equality (1), individual responsibility (2) and access to learning (3). Finnish education exporters, that is, the speakers of the selected blogs and the interviews, negotiate equality and equity as the provision of equal opportunities for individuals to access learning, namely, to access the resources with which they can develop the skills that are necessary in the future. The research participants have adopted the distributive notion of equity (Thomson 2013). Thus, ‘learning’ should be equally spread for everyone, regardless of the country or citizenship of the individual, income, previous knowledge, learning style or skills. However, slightly contradictory to the equality of opportunity to access learning, they construct the notion of the subject as the one in charge of her own learning. Furthermore, they leave the barriers of the person’s socio-economic, cultural and racial background, as well as physical, social and psychological ability unexplored.

By pointing to the need to raise active individuals that are more self-directed in their learning, the texts ignore the questions of ‘who should organize the education’ and ‘who should be the one responsible for the realization of equality of opportunity’. Yet, in terms of educational equity they are extremely relevant questions. If the subject alone is responsible for her own learning, equal opportunities to have the needed resources, get an access to education, reach the same level of educational attainment, achievements and outcomes (Espinoza 2007) cannot be fulfilled for everyone. That is because not everyone has the same basis for learning. Furthermore, if life opportunities depend on who has the most ‘potential’, the system, be it a formal educational institution or an e-learning solution, supports the talented and thus, excludes the ‘inactive’, ‘untalented’ and the ones with lesser resources.

By constructing the ideal subjects, the discourses place individuals in different value-positions. The ‘model learners’ are negotiated as people who want to develop themselves in order to become

²⁰ Interdiscursivity is a form of intertextuality. Intertextuality on the other hand, means that all communicative events draw on earlier events (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 74).

competent in the eyes of the society. They manage themselves and constantly look for opportunities to improve. When looked from the perspective of equity and fairness of education, such way of speech depicts the individuals that struggle with, or do not actively seek to develop themselves as 'failures'. Thus, it restores the privilege of the neoliberal logics and the active and capable subject ideal of that logics (Walkerdine 2003). That one is given the identity of a failure, especially in an early stage of education, can have serious effects on the person's self-image and sense of capability (see e.g. Bradbury 2013). It would be therefore extremely important to critically reflect upon the subject positions given in the educational discourses, and how they affect educational equity.

As a social practice, discourse shapes, reshapes and reflects the social structures (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 62). It produces knowledges and if they become conventional enough, we come to think of them as the truths. The truths negotiated within the discourses of the Finnish education exporters are, for instance, the inevitable need for the skilful, competent and self-directed individuals that can respond to the needs of the economy. Equality and equity are then negotiated as serving this truth. Yet, it is important to explore what the discourses leave untouched. By focusing on the production of the right kind of individuals, they say nothing about the possibility of education to transform the existing power structures. Thus, the justice of the education practices or the ability of the education to contribute to the critical awareness of the world and its unequal state of affairs (Freire in Tomperi 2016, 28–29), are left unexplored. The justice perception of the discourse, that is, that everyone should be granted an equal access to learning (so that economic benefits would be distributed more equally), says nothing about other ways of evaluating justice, namely, cultural group recognition or political representation (Fraser 2008, 3). If we are to pursue justice, equity and equality in education, the representations and knowledges behind the 'truths' should be posed to close critical analysis (Apple 2001, 6; Thomson 2013). After all, education does not only produce people. It presents some matters, and *someone's* matters as more important than the others.

6. Conclusions and future research

The analysis has shown that neoliberal logics has indeed entered also the equity and equality discourses of the Finnish education exporters. Thus, if not posed to close critical analysis by policy makers and education practitioners such discourses are in danger of turning over the exact principles on which Finnish education identifies with. That is, Finland as a country that provides everyone, regardless of the person's socio-economic, national or cultural background, abilities or gender, with equal education opportunities.

Even though strictly contested and seemingly worked against by the informants of this study, turning education into a commodity promotes income inequality. It makes quality education accessible for only those who themselves, or whose institutions or countries can afford to buy it (see also Schatz 2016, 56). After all, no business can be done without someone having to pay for it. Moreover, it is about the question of getting excluded on the basis of talent or activeness. If the 'model learners' are the ones who show most 'potential' or are active in looking for opportunities to improve themselves, it leaves a remarkable group of people outside the ideal. While further marginalizing the non-active people or the ones that lag behind the imagined learning ideal, it favours the already privileged.

According to the full opportunity definition of equity (Tumin in Espinoza 2007), the subject is in charge of her own learning. That is an easy definition for businesses to apply, as it allows that responsibility is given to consumers instead of public institutions. However, it is extremely problematic in terms of equity, as it encourages the privileged to choose the 'best' institutions, materials and equipment available. As such, it may easily advance social and geographical segregation to the detriment of equality of opportunity.

Lastly, there is the question of what the purpose of education is. Is it to increase the educational performativity and productivity of the citizens, for which the neoliberal equity and equality discourses are easily mobilized to serve, or should it be something else? It is important to pay attention to the kind of knowledges and 'truths' the educational discourses contribute to. The need for skilful, competent and self-directed individuals that can respond to the needs of the

economy is not the only truth. Education can also increase capabilities, empower people, contribute to a responsible and democratic society, enhance civil rights and give meaning to peoples' lives. These goals are of course not necessarily exclusive. However, when looking at the meanings given for equity and equality one should be critical towards what kind of knowledge claims they serve. Thus, politicians, education practitioners and businesses, if they are to replace the public education providers in the future, should be posed the question of *how* education is to serve these other truths.

As seen in the process of this thesis, Finnish education does not exist in a vacuum. Even though proclaiming oneself as outside the neoliberal market reforms, the discourses and processes are constantly exposed to and shaped by what is going on globally. Thus, more critical research should be carried out on the changing conceptions of equity and equality within commodified education. Also, it would be useful to pay closer attention on how these conceptions change the equality policies and practices in the context of Finland.

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview request

Hei xx!

Opiskelen yhteiskuntatieteitä Göteborgin yliopiston Global Studies –maisteriohjelmassa, ja kirjoitan parhaillaan gradua suomalaisesta sosiaalisin vaikutuksiin (*social impact) tähtäävästä koulutusviennistä. Olen kiinnostunut ko. koulutusvientiä tekevien yritysten näkemyksistä liittyen koulutusvientiin ja vietäviin tuotteisiin/ palveluihin.

Toteutan tutkimukseni henkilökohtaisten haastattelujen muodossa. **Olisiko sinulla xx-yrityksen edustajana kiinnostusta ja aikaa osallistua tutkimukseeni?**

Haastattelut äänitetään (jos se sopii), ja saatu haastatteluaineisto käsitellään luottamuksellisesti. Toiveenani olisi päästä tekemään haastattelut mahdollisimman pian.

Jos tämä kuulostaa kiinnostavalta niin vastaathan minulle tähän sähköpostiin. Minulle voi mielellään myös soittaa, mikäli tähän liittyen nousee kysymyksiä.

Ystävällisesti,
Hilla Kurittu
0452608801

Dear xx,

I study social sciences in the master's programme Global Studies at the University of Gothenburg, and currently write my thesis about Finnish education export that aims for social impact. I am interested in companies that export education with such motives, and their views on education export and the products/ services that are being exported.

The study will be implemented in the form of personal interviews. **Would you, as a representative of xx-company, be interested in participating to my study?**

The interviews will be recorded (if it is ok), and the interview data handled with confidentiality. I hope to be able to start with the interviews as soon as possible.

If this sounds interesting to you, please reply to the email address above. In case you have any questions related to this study, you can of course also call me.

Kind regards,
Hilla Kurittu
0452608801



CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH INTERVIEW

UNIVERSITY OF
GOTHENBURG

Master's thesis about Finnish education export
School of Global Studies

The study at hand investigates education exporters' views on Finnish education export, and the products and services that are being exported. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The study may present examples from the interviews. All personal data, as well as company information, will be handled with absolute confidentiality. Any summary interview content, or direct quotation from the interview, that are made available through the publication of this thesis will be anonymized so that neither the interviewee or her/ his company can be identified.

Participation in the interview is voluntary, and one can withdraw her-/himself from the study at any point.

I agree to take part in the interview, and give a permission to use the interview data for the application of the master's thesis at hand.

Yes

No

Interviewee's signature and print name

Interviewer's signature and print name

Information about the study:

Hilla Kurittu
University of Gothenburg
guskurhi@student.gu.se
0452608801

Appendix 3: Interview guide

Before the interview

1. Set a time and place for your meeting
2. Ask the interviewee to bring along brochures, marketing material etc.

Before starting the interview

3. Tell the interviewee about his/ her rights e.g. to withdraw at any point. Ask to sign the consent.
 4. Ask if you can record the interview
 5. Remember to charge your phone before the interview, test the recorder
 6. Take paper and a pencil
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Background information

1. Name, title, name of the company
2. What do you do? What is the product/ solution that you sell? What is the purpose for your product/ service?
3. Where? Since when?
4. Who are your customers/ partners?

Need and social impact

5. What kind of demand there is for your product/ service in the countries that you export to? What kind of a problem/ challenge you wish to solve with your product?
6. How did you come up that there is such a need for the product?
7. How have you responded to this need?
8. Do you aim for a broader social impact globally/ in the countries that you are exporting to? If yes, what kind of social impact?
9. What kind of feedback have you got from the service users/ customers?

Values

10. What are the most central values that guide your work?
11. How do you define these (xx-) values?
12. Why these values in particular?

The objectives of education, Finnish education

13. What does quality education mean to you?
14. What is, in your opinion, the purpose and objective of education? What should it be?
15. Does it bring added value to export *Finnish education* in particular? If yes, what kind?
16. Is 'Finnish education' a good sales argument or would you be rather profiled as a global company? Why?