



Risk Analysis Model on TAMK's Educational Export to China from Political, Social, and Financial Aspects

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ABSTRACT

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The thesis was commissioned by Tampere University of Applied Sciences' Global Team. The study aimed to analyse risk management methods and develop a model for TAMK's educational exports to China, focusing on social, political, and financial risks.

The study utilised a mixed-methods approach, combining benchmarking of two foreign universities with expert surveys and interviews. The Delphi method helped build consensus among experts, while Grounded Theory interviews provided new insights. The study was guided by the risk management framework materials provided by TAMK.

Due to a lack of accessible prior research in the field, a complete risk management model could not be produced. However, the study offered valuable groundwork, identifying applicable practices. Security risks emerged as a key focus in addition to social, political and financial risks. Continuous monitoring was emphasised as essential for partnerships with Chinese institutions.

While the model was not fully developed, the findings support the initial aim of focusing the risk management model on social, political, and financial risks. Further research is required to create a tailored risk management model for Chinese collaborations. Based on the benchmark findings, the frameworks can be adapted to enhance risk management for other foreign educational exports.

Keywords: Education Export, Risk Analysis, China, TAMK

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose, objective, and research questions of the thesis

Educational Export has become a notable stakeholder in internationalisation strategies for many institutes of higher education as they aim to attract international students, sign contracts with global partners, and gain new revenue streams (EDUFI 2022).

The phenomenon does not come without risks, which range from political and regulatory to social and financial matters. The purpose of this thesis is to improve the existing risk management process for TAMK's educational exports to China. Thus, the team responsible for education exports will be better able to manage education export risks and streamline the risk management process.

Risk analysis and management are core factors for businesses and institutions when signing contracts with new partnerships or similar business actions. The function of risk management is to minimise the risks that business actions could pose to the institute by analysing potential risks, as well as their likelihood and severity. Risk management can help businesses prevent risks from happening and prepare actions if they do. Risk management can be conducted using many different methods and theories, such as ISO 31000. (Ruzic-Dimitrijevic & Dakic 2014.)

Finland has excellent and broad political relations with China, and the countries regularly discuss international and transnational issues. With China's rocketing economic situation and the high value of Finnish education and schooling, education exports have a vast market with high demand. Economically, China was Finland's fifth-largest export destination in 2021. (Finland Abroad n.d.)

TAMK has worked with multiple Chinese universities over the last two decades; yet, with the current situation in global politics, it is in the interest of TAMK to consider new partnerships carefully and with thorough risk management. When Russia invaded Ukraine in February of 2022, and the President of China, Xi Jinping, did not condemn Russia's President Vladimir Putin's actions, it created tension between Western countries and China while raising the question of what

would happen to TAMK's educational export contracts should the European Union, for example, impose sanctions on China.

As a result of this, the thesis research question will be as follows:

- *How can a risk analysis model be developed to help TAMK evaluate and manage risks when planning new education export cooperations in China?*

The reasoning behind the chosen research question is that there is already risk management of a sort done by TAMK, but with the help of this thesis' research, a more concise risk management process can be followed. This thesis aims to summarise key findings from the literature on risk analysis and education export to China, focusing on political, social, and financial risks.

To support the findings, benchmarking research will be done on two foreign universities to clarify their most effective practises of risk management in educational export, which TAMK could possibly utilise. Lastly, the conclusions will be brought together with qualitative and quantitative data from expert surveys and interviews to create a recommendation for a risk analysis model that can be adopted when TAMK considers new partnerships in China.

1.2 The commissioner

The commissioner of the thesis is Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK), specifically their Global Team, which is responsible for educational exports.

TAMK is a multidisciplinary higher education institute established in 1996 and located in Tampere, Finland. The institute offers degree programmes in multiple professions, such as business, engineering, health care, and media. In 2010, TAMK was fused with Pirkanmaa University of Applied Sciences (PIRAMK) and became Tampere University of Applied Sciences. TAMK is part of the Tampere University community (Tuni), which also includes Tampere University. (Tuni n.d.) In the spring of 2024, TAMK was Finland's second most sought-after University of Applied Sciences (STT 2024).

To facilitate educational exports, TAMK has a group of experts, the Global Team, which has established multiple international partnerships, particularly with Chinese universities, and offers many forms of educational exports (elaborated in Chapter 1.3.1). Since there are many partnerships and the global situation is changing, resulting in new potential risks that may impact TAMK, the risk management process needs to keep up to date. The Global Team, together with TAMK, has its risk management process, but is open to suggestions for improving it to ease the workload of the experts in the Global Team when negotiating new education export partnerships.

As mentioned, TAMK has partnerships with a variety of universities globally, but this thesis focuses exclusively on Chinese partnership risk management to narrow the research into a more detailed paper and to keep the research on a bachelor thesis level. With the narrowing, the author can search for more specific cases and interviewees with certain expertise and experience. Another reason for the narrowing is the author's prior interest, knowledge and experience in Chinese education and culture.

1.3 Concepts and theory

This sub-chapter introduces and defines the central concepts and theories used in the research.

1.3.1 Educational export

Educational Export is a business model in which an institute provides a service related to education abroad or teaches foreign degree students in Finland. It can also include exporting physical learning materials or environments abroad. According to the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), there are four modes of supply (Lim & Saner 2011):

1. Cross-border supply: The services are supplied abroad without the provider's physical presence. For example, the exporter party provides educational material.
2. Consumption abroad: where a student is moved abroad to receive the education the exporting institute provides.
3. Commercial presence: The supplier establishes a commercial presence in the territory abroad, i.e. a satellite campus.
4. Movement of natural persons: a natural person of the supplier delivers the education abroad. For example, a teacher is sent to a partner institution to provide education.

In 2019, the total value of Finnish education exports was close to EUR 1 billion, and the turnover is expected to grow, making the business area significant to Finland (EDUFI 2022).

TAMK offers tailor-made educational programmes to fit the needs of the potential partner institution, which can be delivered in Finland, the partner's country, online or through a combination of the mentioned methods. These programs are offered in different fields, for example, teacher education, engineering, business, and arts, such as music and media. (TAMK n.d.)

1.3.2 Risk management

Due to its adaptability, the education export market is prone to complex risks in various internal and external aspects. This necessitates a sturdy risk management strategy to support its profitability and continuity.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines a risk as 'the possibility of something bad happening'. It is also possible that risks can materialise in a positive matter; for example, in finance, a risk of an investment can turn out to be profitable despite the odds. (Cambridge University Press n.d.) A systematic approach is needed to manage the risk, be it positive or negative, if it can comprise the value (Field 2023).

Risk management should be done for a higher educational institution (HEI) as a whole and separately for each department. For a department, i.e., for education exports, risk management should be done on a case-by-case basis of export to prevent the possible risks from materialising. (Ruzic-Dimitrijevic & Dakic 2014.) An expert from each business area can model a list of possible risks and what outcomes they could produce. Furthermore, they can recommend preventative measures to reduce the potential damage or even prevent incidents. Sufficient risk management creates security around the business and its services. By minimising risks, institutions can prevent poor experiences and promote partnership trust. (Ruzic-Dimitrijevic & Dakic 2014.)

All forms of risks should be identified, assessed and managed accordingly. For a business focusing on international trade, the risks identified usually fall into the following categories (MFA 2021):

1. Strategic risks
2. Operative risks
3. Financial risks
4. Damage risks

Risks should be assessed in relation to the goals of the provided service. This will ensure that the implementation of activities is uninterrupted, sustainable, and able to continue to function. Adaptable risk management supports the development of business and its ever-changing outside factors, should the reported and analysed information provide data on a change of need. (MFA 2021.) The theories of risk management and standards used for this thesis include PESTEL and ISO, together with supportive literature.

1.3.3 PESTEL

PESTEL, also known as PESTLE, refers to risk analysis theory, where political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal aspects are considered separate sections. The theory's first version was invented by Harvard professor Francis J. Aguilar in 1967 and slowly formed its current form (PESTLE Analysis

2017). The analysis is a strategic tool for organisations to use to understand macro-environmental factors, as the analysis can focus on, for example, political changes, economic trends, or technological advancements. PESTEL analysis can be utilised to identify factors that are not in an organisation's control and may cause significant consequences on its performance. (Washington State University n.d.)

The PESTEL theory is chosen for this study due to its extensive approach to understanding macro-level actors that may influence TAMK's educational export. The theory is relevant to creating a risk analysis model on the international market due to its capability to define external risks from political, social, and financial aspects, which are the key topics of the study. The PESTEL framework can be used to categorise the possible risks that TAMK's Global Team identifies into six macro-environmental dimensions. For example, political factors may encompass risks related to governmental policies and international relations, while social factors can include the risks posed by cultural differences that could impact educational practices in educational export.

1.3.4 ISO 31000

ISO, the International Organisation for Standardisation, is a global federation of national standards bodies. ISO 31000 is an international standard risk management framework that can be implemented in organisations. It assists in managing diverse risks, such as financial volatility or political instability, by systematically identifying, assessing, and mitigating them. (ISO 31000:2018 n.d.) The theoretical significance lies in its adaptability, which demonstrates how risk management can be implemented in organisational governance, strategy, planning, and culture (ISO n.d.).

ISO 31000 comprises three main risk management components: framework, principles, and process. It can be adapted to almost any organisation, regardless of size, nature of activities, environment, or field of operations. The standard helps organisations develop their risk management plans by addressing their specific needs, guiding them towards desired goals, and recognising

opportunities. (Field 2023.) ISO 31000 serves as a standard for providing guidelines rather than for certification purposes.

The framework promotes a proactive over reactive approach by enabling organisations to anticipate and address risks strategically. By providing structured guidelines and monitoring criteria, ISO 31000 assists organisations and institutions in cultivating a comprehensive risk management culture. (Field 2023.)

ISO 31000:2018 was chosen as one of the key theories for this research because it is widely recognised within the organisational field. Finland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs also recommends ISO 31000 to institutions involved in international development cooperation, and the Global Team of TAMK has utilised it, with participants in the research being aware of the standard's qualities.

1.3.5 Delphi method

The Delphi Method is a structured and systematic approach used to gather and refine experts' opinions on selected topics or issues. It was created in the 1950s by the RAND Corporation in the interest of the United States Air Force and has since then evolved to be a popular research method in various fields, for example, corporate management and marketing. (Dalkey & Helmer 1962.) In a research setting, the method is used to forecast and reach a consensus among a group of participants. The method is conducted anonymously to avoid bias or influence, and the process involves multiple rounds of surveys or questionnaires, with each round refining the previous ones. (Linstone & Turoff 2002.)

The Delphi Method is selected for this thesis as it best meets the research needs; the anonymity among participants, most of whom are colleagues, minimises bias, and the multiple rounds offer participants new perspectives from which to view the risks. Additionally, the emphasis on consensus aligns well with both the Delphi Method and the aim of the research.

1.3.6 Benchmarking research

The aim of benchmarking is to systematically analyse, compare, and measure the best processes and practices of a dominant organisation or competitor, as well as their outcomes. Comparing and adapting outstanding practices is useful for organisations when planning to improve their processes and performance. (Hong, W., Hong, Roh & Park 2012.)

This study uses benchmarking to identify the best risk management processes universities employ when offering or producing educational exports in collaboration with Chinese educational institutions. The two universities selected for this study, the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), were chosen based on their publicly available information on risk management and their similar cultures, making it reasonable to consider implementing aspects of their risk management practices to influence TAMK's education export risk management.

1.3.7 Grounded theory

Grounded Theory was introduced in 1967 by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss as a response to the limitations of traditional qualitative research methods, which often heavily relied on researchers having existing theories or hypotheses. The methodology was created to enable new theories to emerge from collected and analysed empirical data. (Delve n.d.)

By utilising Grounded Theory, the analysis begins as soon as the first data is collected, for example, from an interview, informing subsequent interviews and observations. This iterative process ensures that the research captures all potentially relevant aspects of the topic. Grounded Theory builds change into the method, recognising that phenomena are not static but continually evolving in response to conditions. (Corbin & Strauss 1990.)

The methodology was thus the best fit for the interview because it allowed for a semi-structured development of interview questions. While formulating these

questions, the author recognised that prior research highlighted the limited scope of educational export risk management, necessitating a more flexible interview format to enable the emergence of new theories. With a semi-structured approach, the interview questions could elicit more elaborate answers beyond simple yes or no responses, and they could be adjusted based on the interviewee's previous answers, facilitating a free-flowing conversation which could potentially bring up new theories or perspectives the interviewer had not been aware of before.

1.4 Research methodologies

This sub-chapter elaborates on the methodologies utilised in this study, which were chosen to provide comprehensive insights into TAMK's education export and risk management by enabling both qualitative and quantitative methods.

1.4.1 Literature review

The first method for the study is a broad literature review to gain a comprehensive understanding of export education, risk management, and China as a political, social, and economic legal person. Since the author has not previously majored in risk management, the literature review creates a solid base for the thesis as it gives the author a clear idea of the current internal and external view on China and modern risk management.

The author began researching previous studies, articles, and journals from ResearchGate, Theseus, and Google Search to create the basis for the risk analysis model. Keywords used for this search were "educational export," "risk analysis," "Chinese education," and "Finland and China partnership," to mention a few.

1.4.2 Delphi method survey

The second method, a mixed-methods approach, will be employed to gather data about TAMK's education export, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods. The data will be collected using the Delphi method; this group technique aims to produce reliable consensus from a group of expert individuals by using multiple surveys in a controlled feedback process (Tierney, Rizvi, & Ercikan 2023.)

The selected interviewees will first be sent a structured survey with fixed questions and then later a second semi-constructed survey with open questions, thus producing both qualitative and quantitative data. The Delphi method allows the study to gain a broader base of data, yet the small sample size may limit the results. The number of applicants is kept narrow to have the opinions of only those with the most experience and knowledge regarding TAMK's educational export or Finland-China export relations.

1.4.3 Grounded theory interview

For the third method, a Grounded Theory semi-structured interview will be conducted with the current Education and Science counsellor at the Finnish Embassy in Beijing, who has knowledge of Finland-China relations and the educational context field.

A semi-structured interview aims to give the interviewee room to elaborate on open-ended questions and, therefore, provide more information during the interview (Corbin & Strauss 1990). The external interviewee was chosen as a research method to provide insight into how TAMK could improve its education export risk management from a different perspective. The interview differs from the survey with TAMK's professionals as the interview is more freely conducted, and the findings will be compared to the ones found with the Delphi method and literature review.

1.4.4 Benchmarking

The fourth method will be benchmarking research on two foreign universities that also provide educational exports and have extensive risk management processes. The aim of the benchmarking is to identify the two universities' common key risk management practices and analyse their possibilities for the Global Team's risk management process.

The universities were chosen based on the information available for research purposes and the countries' relations with China. For this thesis, the author chose the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) in Australia and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the United States of America. The reason for these specific universities was the limited information on universities' international relations risk management and even narrower information on educational exports. The research field has proved to be extremely minor, making it difficult to find information.

UTS and MIT are both research universities globally recognised as some of the best institutions and both export education to multiple countries. These institutions have shared information on their risk management strategies and provided reports focusing on Chinese partnerships, making them a feasible match for the study of the thesis.

It is important to note that since TAMK is a university of applied sciences, its level of risk management will differ from that of research universities like MIT and UTS. However, the author takes this into account when making comparisons, conclusions, and recommendations. The small sample size of two universities is also justified by the thesis being a bachelor's, resulting in the author to narrowing the data reasonably.

1.5 Ethical consideration

The author applied for a research permit from the Tampere University of Applied Sciences to collect data from staff members and access documents provided by the TAMK Global Team. The application included a thorough research and data management plan and a privacy notice modelled by the EU General Data

Protection Regulation (EU 2016/679, art. 12-14). The permit was granted by TAMK Vice President Ari Sivula on the 16th of December 2024.

Before conducting interviews and surveys, all participants were sent a document with a privacy notice based in Arts. 12-14 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Finnish Data Protection Act (1050/1080) (Finlex n.d.). The notice informed the participants of their rights to the data, how it would be handled, and their right to withdraw from the research process whenever they wished. All the information given by TAMK staff members and external participants involved in the research was collected, stored, and shared anonymously in confidentiality. All participants gave their consent to be interviewed and answer surveys.

1.6 Thesis structure

Chapter 1 explains the thesis's idea and base research, the research questions, and its initial structure. It defines the methodologies, theories, and data used for creating the risk analysis model.

Chapter 2 follows the TAMK personnel survey. It focuses on the participants' answers and analyses their similarities and differences. The combined data is returned for the participants' final examination, on which they can comment. The author presents the key findings of the survey and defines why the research focuses on political, social, and financial factors.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the interview conducted with a China-Finland relations expert counsellor. The interview showcased their opinions and experiences on the topic to provide another point of view on the importance of risk management and how the geopolitical changes have affected education exporting.

Chapter 4 focuses on benchmarking research. The author examines the risk management of two foreign universities to find the key methods that TAMK could use to strengthen and streamline its risk analysis process when considering

partnerships in China. The author then compares the findings of the chosen universities and defines the chosen frameworks or methods found in research.

Chapter 5 combines all the relevant findings of surveys, interviews and benchmark research to illustrate how TAMK's education export risk management could be developed based on them.

2 SURVEY

TAMK's Global Team were approached to find pre-existing material, which proved successful. The team had done a PESTEL analysis on TAMK's educational export in 2022 and focused its main risks and questions on political, social, economic, and legal sections. Along with the PowerPoint showcasing the PESTEL analysis, the team was able to provide the author with an Excel document where some preventative measures to the principal risks had been identified, as well as a document written by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs under the title of 'Risk management policy for development cooperation', published in December of 2021. The document was based on the ISO 31000 risk management theory, which became one of the core theories of this thesis. Since the focus of this research was to develop the risk analysis model for TAMK, their material was the centre; therefore, the author chose both PESTEL and ISO as the frame for the model.

To further elaborate on the previous risk management processes regarding Chinese educational export collaborations, the commissioner stated in an email on April 10, 2025, that projects were individually assessed by an expert during the initial stages. No systematic documentation has been completed; rather, reviews were primarily conducted from a customer and financial risk perspective before contracts are prepared. Simultaneously, risks associated with implementations have been discussed.

In addition to the data provided by the TAMK Global Team, more information was needed regarding the risk analysis of educational exports to China. The keywords mentioned in Chapter 1.4 found multiple results, yet many proved to be outside the research questions, thus not applicable as sources. The author found surprisingly little information and prior research regarding Finnish educational exports to China.

Due to the nature of the topic, it is possible that most of the information is private and not accessible to outsiders. The limited amount of data challenged the author to search for key terms from articles related to the topic, 'risk analysis on exporting

business,' and implement the findings into TAMK's situation as an educational institute. The limitations of the corresponding literature highlighted the necessity for the thesis, as it is a relatively new field of research. The author discovered two theses in Theseus pertaining to another University of Applied Sciences' education export risk management and attempted to contact the authors of those works but received no response. Both theses were classified.

The semi-constructive research method included both qualitative and quantitative data gathering. For qualitative data, the author used the 'Risk Management in Global Team Programs' theoretical model, which included risk assessed by TAMK's Education Global Team using the PESTEL risk management theory. The findings included a condensed set of leading questions to be answered based on the risks found previously (Figure 1). These questions all fall under the political, social, economic, and legal risks sections; thus, the author focused on the mentioned areas when constructing the survey.

Main questions for us:

Is the client able to pay? ECONOMIC

Can TAMK accept the risk and pay in case of worst scenario? ECONOMIC

Can someone recommend them (background check)? ECONOMIC

Is there an existing network? ECONOMIC

Is the end user aware of the economical commitment they are making? ECONOMIC

Are the signatories valid? LEGAL

Are we able to provide our services as stated in the agreement? LEGAL

Are countries willing to take GDPR in their actions? LEGAL

What is the political situation in the country; is there stability and continuity? POLITICAL

Can we avoid dropouts? How to check the motivation? SOCIAL

Is there a serious need for the program? Can we evaluate the potential? SOCIAL

Are there "risky" cultural differences? SOCIAL

Can we prepare information package for the selected students? SOCIAL

What is client's/ end users' knowledge about finnish context (prior experience)? SOCIAL/ POLITICAL

Has client prior experience in the edu export or tailored groups? SOCIAL/ POLITICAL/ECONOMIC

Is there hurry in making the decisions? LEGAL/POLITICAL

Is the area/project sensitive? POLITICAL/ LEGAL

Can we involve in the selection process? LEGAL/ SOCIAL

FIGURE 1. PESTEL Main questions by TAMK Global team 2022.

To further analyse the risks, surveys were conducted to support and challenge the PESTEL results. The four interviewees were chosen from TAMK staff with knowledge and expertise in education export. To widen the spectrum of points of

view on the data, external experts with information on Finland-China relations were approached.

2.1 TAMK staff survey

In the survey, all participants were asked the same questions in the same order (Appendix 1). Using the semi-structured method, interviewees could discuss the material further in an open comment box if they wished. This way, the author was able to collect a variety of data, from opinions to experiences. The scaling questions produced quantitative data and showcased high contrast in some opinions on areas of the topic. The interviewees had no information on who had graded the risks and on what level.

A factor affecting the amount of collected data was the number of participants from the TAMK Global Team, who work in educational export. As the commissioner of this thesis was TAMK, the research was kept narrow to apply solely to its needs, even if the sample size was small.

The author summarised the findings from the first survey and provided the paper to the participants. To implement the Delphi method in practice, the interviewees were given the opportunity to reflect on their own and others' responses, justify their choices, and change them if they found the other findings more to their liking.

2.1.1 Experience and existing risk management processes

The interview participants were from the same team yet had different histories with educational export. The first question was set to determine how long each had worked in the field to help the author understand how much experience they may have, which could affect the opinions and results of the survey. One participant had worked for less than a year, two participants had experience of three to seven years, and one participant had been in the field for seven to ten years.

The thesis benefits from incorporating as many experiences as possible from a sample of participants who have worked in the field for different periods of time, as it enables a variety of perspectives.

The varying perspectives are demonstrated in question two of the survey, where the participants were asked about their prior risk management processes or theories with a very general partnership with a Chinese education institution. All participants had differing answers, and to summarise them into a list, here are the findings:

- Check of financial and social reliability of the organisation
- Earlier cooperation
- SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis
- Risk identification, assessment and monitoring

The risk management process differs depending on how the participants see a 'general partnership with a Chinese education institution'. However, all the answers fit the findings of the Risk Management workshop by the Global Team in 2022. Considering the differing answers, perhaps the author should have specified the case situation. Nevertheless, all the answers helped the author understand what type of risk management the Global Team focuses on.

2.1.2 Risk scaling

The survey then concentrated on a range of risks and questions, from four to six, taking into account the scale of both the likelihood and the level of impact of the given risks upon materialisation.

The assessment scales for the risks in the survey were modelled after MFA's policy of risk management (2021) and were as follows:

The assessment scales for the risks' likelihood:

1. Unlikely: The risk is not prone to happening unless in exceptional circumstances. It is not known to have occurred before.
2. Possible: The risk may happen. There are previous cases.
3. Likely: The risk has happened multiple times or has had many close-call situations.
4. Close to certain: The risk is expected to happen with a high probability.

The assessment scales for the risks' impact:

1. Minor: The risk materialising may cause minor harm to the case.
2. Moderate: The risk materialising can decelerate the process or weaken the reaching of the goal. Minor expenses are feasible.
3. Significant: The risk materialising can complicate, decelerate, or cause other substantial damage to the case. Moderate expenses are feasible. Reputation as a trusted actor weakens.
4. Critical: The risk materialising can suspend the entirety of the case. Moderate to high expenses are feasible. Reputation as a trusted actor weakens dramatically.

The purpose of the scaling was to highlight the risk areas and to explain why these particular areas were selected. Another purpose of the scaling was to isolate the main risks, either due to their likelihood or severity, and to use these as perspectives when considering a risk management process. These perspectives were needed to streamline the information regarding risk management and assisted the author in pinpointing relevant topics for the benchmarking process of the thesis.

In the survey question 3 (Appendix 2), the participants were given nine questions from which they were asked to choose the five most important ones to address. The survey identified four risks that were considered the most important by the participants, based on a minimum of 75% of the available votes.

Written in the order of most votes to least, the findings were as follows:

- Is the political situation inside the country stable?

- Four votes. Political area.
- Is the client able to pay?
 - Three votes. Financial area.
- Are they aware of the financial commitment?
 - Three votes. Financial area.
- Can TAMK be involved in the selection process?
 - Three votes. Social area.

Regarding the likelihood of the risks, in question 4, the participants were asked to rate the risks based on the options in question 3. Appendix 3 illustrates that in three out of nine risks, the participants shared the same or similar views on the likelihood; however, a noticeable contrast is evident in other risks, such as the client's unwillingness to comply with the EU's GDPR.

The risks deemed least likely to occur by the participants were a client being unable to pay or lacking awareness of the financial commitment. Although these risks were identified as some of the most critical concerns, they are not likely to happen or have occurred previously in the context of a Chinese partnership, according to the participants' votes. A similar pattern emerges when participants are asked about the political situation in the country of the partner institute in this study, China. However, the opinions were divided evenly: half of the participants did not consider it a likely phenomenon, whereas the other half viewed it as a near-certain situation.

After likelihood, in question 5, the participants were asked to rate the impact of the same risks from minor to critical. The results reveal a more diverse distribution of opinions than the latter two questions. (Appendix 4.)

The range of impact levels varies significantly in seven out of nine risks. This can be attributed to the ambiguity of the scenario presented to the participants, as TAMK offers various types of education exports across different levels of commerce. Depending on the level of export, the effects of a risk materialising can vary; for instance, some contracts may involve Chinese students studying at our campus in Finland, while others may include TAMK supplying educational materials to China, where the education takes place at the partner institution's

campus. In these cases, the level of impact from, say, a political risk is markedly different. Another factor that might influence the outcome is the diverse experiences of the participants, as not all are equally engaged with Chinese partners.

The most critical impact stems from the risk of a changing political situation in China. This risk is perceived as somewhat probable, and considering that most votes indicate it has a significant impact, it should be emphasised in the research.

The participants had an opportunity to imply risks that were not in the options of questions 4 and 5 of the survey and the participants pointed out additional risks: the political risks associated with Finland-China relations and governmental decisions, economic risks stemming from fluctuations in the Chinese Yuan's unstable exchange rates, and social risks related to clients' views on TAMK, including leadership changes, reduced government funding, and TAMK's ability to provide services.

Participant 4 highlighted that Finland-China relations are susceptible to tension, and potential disagreements may result in restrictions or hesitations when establishing educational partnerships. Furthermore, shifts in political leadership and policies in the Tampere region, or even on a national scale, can alter priorities or regulations, which could impact both ongoing and planned partnerships. The participant provides an example: if TAMK prioritises political alignment over the educational quality of mutual benefits, it could undermine collaboration. This is an important consideration because TAMK receives government funding, operates under the Ministry of Education and Culture, and exists as a legal entity. Thus, it must adhere to and accommodate government policies based on the University of Applied Sciences Act (932/2014) (Finlex 2014), which can adversely affect partnerships.

2.1.3 Risk management process

Questions 7 to 14 concentrate on developing risk management processes. The author aimed to comprehend the type of risk management required and how

employees perceive its applicability in a typical partnership with a Chinese education institution.

After conducting the survey, the author did not see the findings from questions 7 to 9 as relevant to the study. Therefore, the study jumps to question 10 (Appendix 5).

In question 10, the participants were presented with four options regarding the collection of documents that would serve as proof of a potential partner's reliability. Two participants preferred fewer documents of greater significance (quality over quantity), one participant opted for a fixed set of documents to be requested from all potential partners to which further amendments could be requested, if necessary, while Participant 2 selected 'Other' and opened it by emphasising the importance of gaining access to the audit materials of partner institutions.

Originally, the author had thought about building a model of set documents that all possible Chinese partners would have to provide, only to realise through the survey answers as well as the thesis supervisor's comment (feedback video 2024) that risk management should not focus on quantity of proof but rather the quality of it and especially focus on areas that are of importance, i.e., Participant 2's mention of access to audit material.

Questions 11 and 12 asked the participants about external agents used in risk management. 75% of the participants stated that they use external agents of Business Finland, Chinese and Finnish embassies, other universities in Finland, agents recommended by the Finnish embassy, and locally signed agencies who find reliable partners.

In contrast, the other 25%, Participant 4, stated that they do not employ external agents by elaborating that the Global Team is in direct contact with an institution; there has been no need to check the background of the above-mentioned parties because there are numerous institutions in China, and these parties usually do not have more information than the team does. Most of the time, they meet face-

to-face, both in China and Finland, before reaching major cooperation agreements.

The findings indicate that, depending on the situation, there are various external agents that the Global Team can approach. Participant 4's remark regarding external parties not possessing more information than the team may also depend on whether the partner institution is new or a previous connection. According to the material provided by the commissioner, Hannu Koponen, the Global Team, in some manner, adheres to MFA's Risk Management Policy for Development Cooperation (2021). Whether that is through external agents or internally, is not known by the author.

2.1.4 Summary and key findings

The TAMK Staff Survey employed a semi-structured format to gather diverse perspectives on risk management in educational exports to China. All the participants who answered the survey provided a great amount of information which either supported or challenged the author's original thoughts on the topic. Some results had a noticeable contrast (See 2.1.2 Risk Scaling), which are to be considered, as well as the open comments which brought into light the importance of political questions and risks not only from TAMK but also from the client's point of view.

The use of the Delphi model was not entirely successful because there were no new opinions in the second round, where participants could have expressed differing or supporting ideas. The Delphi Model entails using two or more rounds of survey questions to allow experts to share multiple points of view anonymously, potentially generating new ideas or opinions (Linstone & Turoff 2002). Due to time constraints, the author did not want to pressure the participants into broadening their answers in the second round if they initially felt no need to change their opinions or provide different perspectives. The author deemed the responses adequate to provide sufficient data for the study to progress. The survey findings offered valuable insights into TAMK's educational export risk management situation in China.

Critical risks were identified, and the four major risks, each receiving a minimum of 75% of the votes, were from the three categories this thesis originally focused on. Political risks were seen as the top concern, accompanied by additional comments from the participants regarding potential governmental restrictions in Finland and a change in political stability in China. Financial risks, such as awareness of financial commitments and payment capacity, were regarded as critical yet less likely to occur.

In relation to risk management processes, the participants provided a range of responses, including SWOT¹ analysis, financial and social reliability checks, and risk monitoring. Participants emphasised the importance of quality over quantity in the documentation for partner reliability and noted the use of external agents for risk assessment.

Ultimately, the findings highlight the necessity for tailored risk management strategies based on various experiences and contexts. The risk management process may involve internally establishing fixed document requirements and implementing audit material review procedures, as well as a continued reliance on external agents such as Business Finland and the Finnish/Chinese embassies, to name a few.

¹ SWOT is a strategic planning tool that identifies an organization's internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats, to guide decision-making and strategy formulation. (Sarath Kumar & Praveena 2023)

3 INTERVIEW

This chapter involves the creation and conduction of an interview to gather additional data for the study. The qualitative interview was conducted to provide the study with an external perspective in contrast to the survey, which was conducted internally.

The interview followed a grounded theory method with a semi-structured structure to keep the interview articulated while giving the interviewee freedom to provide their opinions and opinions more broadly and thus guide the interview's direction and enabling the questions to be modified on the spot (Corbin & Strauss 1990). Since the questions were based on the author's literature findings and TAMK survey, they focused on current observations of educational exports in China.

The interviewee was contacted by the recommendation of the commissioner and contacted by email. The interviewee, Olli Suominen, has worked at the Finnish Embassy in Beijing for two years as an Education and Science Counsellor (ongoing employment) and has previously worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a Desk Officer for China. After Suominen agreed to be interviewed, the interview was conducted and recorded through Teams because they work in China with a time difference of +6 hours to Finland.

For the interview, a short set of seven questions was prepared by the author (Appendix 6), but the questions were adaptable based on the interviewee's answers. The interview questions started with more relaxed questions to make the atmosphere feel comfortable and also for the author to get a better understanding of Suominen's history and connection to China. From there, the interview followed a natural flow of a conversation where the questions guided the topics. The questions were ideated to be broad with focus points on certain aspects, yet vague enough for the interviewee to be answered as they felt fit.

As stated above, the interview was recorded with the consent of Suominen and transcribed by the author. The interview was conducted in the participants' common language, Finnish, and thus translated afterwards. The author provided

the final transcribed interview and extracted comments for the interviewee's reading and approval. As the topic of the study is sensitive, the author wanted to ensure Suominen was aware of the findings before writing them to the thesis.

3.1 Findings and analysis

Due to the semi-structured interviewing method, the interview provided a substantial amount of data that needed to be skimmed through to extract the key findings relevant to the study. The interview provided a comprehensive overview of how Western educational exports are perceived in China and how the field has evolved over the past decade.

According to Suominen (2025), Chinese universities are eager to cooperate with European partners due to geopolitical shifts. The issue arising, according to Joske (2019) is that Chinese universities and other educational institutions are simultaneously under tighter political control by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The CCP prioritises political, economic, and military objectives, which can be seen, for example, in the contribution to the Military-Civil Fusion² (MCF). This results in foreign educational partners needing to keep risk management processes up to date and pay attention to political shifts. (Joske 2019.)

With the current world situation and politics, the tension has caused a shift in educational exports, as foreign institutions are focusing more on existing partnerships rather than signing new contracts. The market has also changed as institutions are now more inclined to provide in-China programmes instead of bringing Chinese students abroad. (Suominen 2025.) According to Suominen (2025), the shift towards the so-called "in China, for China" initiative aims to serve local needs without integrating into global trade. Additionally, decoupling models are being adopted to isolate Chinese partnerships from broader institutional impacts.

² Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) is a strategy that integrates a country's civilian and defence sectors—particularly in technology, manufacturing, and research—to support both commercial and military advancements. In China, MCF plays a key role in military-technological innovation by leveraging educational institutions to channel academic research, talent, and resources into military modernisation efforts. (Bitzinger 2021)

Considering these changes in the Chinese governmental priorities and the field of educational export, Suominen (2025) recommends that HEIs revisit ongoing agreements with Chinese institutions and assess the dependence on the partnership and the possible impact of sudden economic changes. As the world saw during COVID-19, China was able to isolate itself overnight, showcasing that China can act rapidly without a warning. If a foreign institution has a lot of financial ties to collaborations in China, the impact could be significant in the case of another major shutdown or similar phenomena.

Regarding risk management, Suominen (2025) brings up the Intellectual Property Regulation (IPR) issues that China has had before, causing a decline in the reliability of Chinese partners. While commitment to IPR has improved over the years, trustworthiness concerns persist, amplified by a growing awareness of issues, especially as technology evolves. However, Suominen (2025) also argues that the untrustworthiness has not necessarily changed, but rather the awareness of data protection has grown, and institutions understand the importance of, i.e., GDPR on a new level.

There are no direct risk management models that Suominen (2025) can directly recommend; however, government publications can offer valuable insights. The author had previously found a report by MFA that recommends the use of ISO 31000 when collaborating with international partners, as well as a guide produced by Education Finland (2023) on ensuring ethical action in educational export, which highlighted the importance of conducting due diligence analysis on potential partners. Both the author and Suominen recognise that there is a lack of documents that guide institutions when considering educational export to China. Nevertheless, institutions may combine guidelines for export to China with guidelines for higher education and educational export.

4 BENCHMARKING RESEARCH

Benchmarking research is frequently employed to compare an organisation's actions and processes to those of an industry leader or other successful entities. This research can assist an organisation in enhancing its practices, identifying trends, and raising awareness of potential risks. (Hong et al. 2012.)

4.1 Implementation

To better understand risk management in educational exports, two international universities were examined to assess how they handle risk management processes. The selected institutions are the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which were chosen for their strong reputations as prominent universities in the field of educational exports. The author aimed to gather multiple perspectives, which justified the choice of both Australian and American institutions.

Australia was a logical choice as one of the origin countries for benchmarking research, given that it shares similar values with Finland, such as democracy, human rights, and trade liberalisation (DFAT N.d.). Thus, it is reasonable to compare their risk management processes in one university collaborating with China, where these values have been under threat.

Australia is commonly known for being very alert to risks, and it strictly protects its culture, infrastructure, and safety. The theme includes education, and in the financial year 2023-2024, international education was estimated to be worth \$51.0 billion (AUD) to the Australian economy (Australian Government, Department of Education n.d.). Simultaneously, the education export income in the state of New South Wales was around \$19.3 billion. As a single partner country, education export income from China to Australia amounted to \$12.3 billion, making it one of Australia's key partners. (Australian Government, Department of Education n.d.). UTS is located in Sydney, New South Wales, and

offers educational exports at a high level. It is named the world's 88th top university by the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings 2025.

The United States was chosen as the other country of origin for benchmarking as it is well known for its globally highly ranked educational institutions. One of the most prestigious universities is MIT, and it has been named the top university by the QS World University Ranking for the 13th year in a row (MIT News 2024). The U.S. also has significant relations with China, and research universities take risk management with Chinese collaborations very seriously. In 2023, the U.S.'s educational export was valued at \$51.2 billion (USD), according to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) and a major part of it is conducted in or with China.

The aim of this benchmarking research is not to recommend copying the exact risk management procedures of the mentioned universities but rather to gain insight into how foreign universities implement risk management in the educational export business and possibly implement some singular components to TAMK's process. The selected universities are not directly comparable as they are research universities, whereas TAMK is a polytechnic university focusing on practical matters. These universities were chosen due to their reputation, the number or value of educational exports, and available information.

4.2 UTS

University of Technology Sydney was founded in 1988. It currently has over 44 thousand students, making it one of the largest in Australia. The university has multiple international campuses, five of which are located in China. (UTS n.d.)

UTS refers to its international education as Transnational Education (TNE), which is included in the bigger picture of educational exports. The regulator in the field of higher education is the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

As the concept of risk management is broad, the author focuses on the three main aspects of the thesis to provide a more in-depth overview without overextending the paper. The UTS has a very detailed risk management policy, not only for TNE but also for all faculties and the whole institution. The author skimmed the core elements of the UTS's risk management in international matters and TNE. These findings are from the publicly accessible papers and websites of the UTS, Department of Education, and TEQSA.

4.2.1 Transnational education at UTS

The UTS TNE programmes are regulated by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), which the Australian Government recognises as an independent national agency for quality assurance in higher education institutions across Australia. TEQSA advocates for students while ensuring that providers in the higher education sector remain under regulation. In this way, it maintains the reputation of Australia's higher education system. (UTS n.d.)

UTS has a team similar to TAMK's Global team, which looks after, for example, discovering and developing new TNE cooperations, risk assessment, and operational management of ongoing TNE programmes. Similarly, the TNE team has externalised risk management, but according to UTS's risk management policy, they identify the key risks and challenges themselves. (UTS n.d.)

As an institution of higher education, UTS employs a principle-based approach to partnerships on a global level, ensuring that the cooperations pursued align with the university's vision, values, and government policy. These factors are both social and political and essential, especially when cooperating with an institution from a country with known opposite values or policies, which may foresee their strategic objectives. (UTS n.d.)

For the TNE faculty, this is done by employing a systematic framework to oversee the entire lifecycle of international collaborations, covering both ongoing management and assurance processes. The framework is consistent with ISO 31000:2018 and facilitates a swift and coherent adaptation to external changes

that may occur. The staff are educated to understand the constantly shifting geopolitical environment in which they may operate. To further help the staff to manage risks, the UTS utilises a risk-based delegation framework, in which the seniority of the delegate rises proportionally with the risk associated with an activity. (UTS n.d.)

4.2.2 Risk management precautions

Regarding risk management precautions, since 2017, the UTS has used an external due diligence provider to support all international cooperation opportunities. Similarly, the university is extensively engaged with multiple government departments and agencies, such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (economic), the Department of Education (social), and the Department of Defence (political). These departments advise on related risks and guide responding to materialising risks. (UTS n.d.)

As previously mentioned, TEQSA regulates Australia's university sector, and to help universities with their TNE risk management and operations, they created a Transnational Education toolkit in November 2022. The toolkit was created to help universities' TNE faculties identify areas of interest, recognise common issues and risks, offer guidance on best practices for high-quality offshore delivery, and include information on legal and policy matters and requirements. The toolkit introduces the concept of a transnational education lifecycle that provides step-by-step guidance for adaptable TNE delivery based on the kind of product a university is delivering, e.g., an offshore branch campus or third-party agreements. (Young, 2022.)

To mitigate the chance of risks materialising, the TNE toolkit has provided universities with precautionary methods to be done before conducting a partnership as well as development recommendations for ongoing cooperation. The key takeaways for this study are the following recommendations.

Precautious actions:

- Review information provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).
- Have due diligence as a fixed exercise for all potential partners. It should consider the perspectives of staff in each operational area that will be working together with a partner after a contract is approved.
- Check for any intersections of Australian and offshore laws and policies. Do a legislative scanning of relevant in-country laws, including GDPR, labour, fraud, and anti-bribery laws.
- Check for how offshore data management adheres to Australian privacy laws.
- Check reputation in the market or pre-existing TNE arrangements.
- Check for financial viability and track record of probity.

Development actions:

- Continue risk assessment for possible geopolitical or policy changes.
- Continue risk assessment and monitor high-risk matters through the duration of the contract.
- Develop contingency plans, e.g., termination of contract (force majeure) and TNE service or product arrangement.
- Continue checking in with the partner and clarify roles or actions if needed.
- Contribute to effective and clear communication during contract renewals. Conduct end-to-end reviews of all partnership activities.
- Perform cyclical audits.

UTS's TNE team and the TEQSA toolkit both focus on risk management throughout the duration of an international partnership, mitigating risks that may arise after a contract is signed. This means that the TNE team continuously communicates with partners to ensure everything is proceeding well and, if any issues arise, they can be addressed before escalating into larger problems. An example could be when the offshore institution lacks experience in integrating educational inputs into their campus life, which may lead to quality performance issues and potentially result in complaints and subsequent demand for a refund in extreme cases. Another significant risk is reputational damage if the quality of education does not meet standards. UTS prioritises international cooperation with

institutions that share similar values; therefore, it is important to it that student interests are considered, not solely the financial gains from successful education exports. (UTS n.d.)

4.2.3 Comparison to TAMK

As for political, social and economic takes from the research, TAMK and UTS (with TEQSA TNE toolkit) have similar views on risks, their precautionous methods and the utilisation of external governmental departments and other agencies.

There are numerous similarities between the Global Team's survey responses and the findings of UTS's international operations. One notable point is that the TNE toolkit recommends developing actions for ongoing partnerships. Participant 4 from TAMK's survey also highlighted that when a client or partner lacks experience in educational exports, it is essential for the institution providing the educational export or TNE to guide them step by step to maintain the partnership. Educational export is generally not a one-way action but rather a collaboration between two institutions. Therefore, it is crucial that the partner acquires the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate the complexities of educational export, as emphasised by Participant 4 (TAMK survey 2025). They also recommend regular online and offline meetings, detailed documentation, and continuous support, which are vital to this educational process and help the client build confidence and competence in this new venture, potentially leading to contract renewal. The TNE toolkit focuses on the same goal: fostering enduring, long-lasting and reliable partnerships.

Similarly, UTS states on its website that it follows the ISO 31000:2018 framework, which is the Australian standard and focuses on four aspects of risk management: identifying hazards, assessing risks, controlling risks, and monitoring risk controls (UTS n.d.). The commissioner provided the author with an MFA report on the same framework recommended for institutions working with international collaborations. Based on the survey answers and the Global Team's workshop, TAMK takes similar actions but does not refer to ISO 31000.

The main difference is how the Australian HEI sector highlights due diligence on multiple platforms and recommends it as a fixed procedure before further discussing a potential partnership. In the TAMK survey (2025), the participants mentioned the use of SWOT analysis, risk identification, assessment and monitoring, check of financial and social reliability of the potential partner, as well as earlier cooperation. However, due diligence is not mentioned in these processes. Later in the survey, the participants brought to attention the utilisation of external agencies that find trustworthy partner institutions, and it is possible that those agencies produce a due diligence exercise before recommending them further. TAMK Global Team utilises Finnish embassies, Business Finland and other agencies, all of which recommend a due diligence exercise to determine reliability, just as Australian agencies have in the research findings.

What also differs is the publicly accessible information. UTS has a page on its website where all the information regarding its risk management policies is available for everyone to read. TAMK, however, does not have its own information displayed online for public access. Having the risk management policies and similar information available for everyone promotes trust, as not only faculty members and students but also potential partner institutions can see in advance how TAMK's policies are implemented.

Together with TEQSA, the Department of Education has guidelines to counter foreign interference in the Australian university sector, similar to Finland's OKM recommendations. TEQSA provides the Australian HEI sector with a Transnational Education Toolkit (2022), which the whole of Finland lacks. While Finland has a toolkit for either university-level cooperation or international trade, there is no document with recommendations solely for education export. As a result, universities must either conduct extensive research in risk management to identify parts of the toolkits that suit their needs or seek assistance from external agencies. Education Finland (2023) provided a guide focusing on ensuring ethical educational export and includes recommendations on risk management, particularly through the utilisation of due diligence. However, the guide primarily addresses social and ethical risks, with less emphasis on political and economic concerns.

4.3 MIT

Similarly to UTS's risk management, the author focuses on the three main aspects of the thesis without disregarding the broadness of their complete risk management processes for the whole institution and faculties. The educational export and international collaboration (focusing on Chinese partnerships) risk management processes were gathered from MIT faculty reports and MIT websites.

4.3.1 International collaboration at MIT

MIT has a long history of international collaborations with a significant amount of those with Chinese HEIs. Usually, most of the collaborations fall under the categories of research, education and innovation, reflecting on MIT's values and mission to share knowledge globally and bring educational institutions together. (Lester et al. 2022.)

MIT offers different types of collaborative programs and research to Chinese institutions and students, including initiatives such as joint programmes, research collaborations, and educational exchanges. The key aspects relevant to this study are graduate fellowships, joint research initiatives, management education projects, and digital educational exports. In those, MIT collaborates with multiple Chinese universities to either provide education in China, which is available to Chinese students as well as MIT exchange students (conducted online or in person) or bring Chinese students to the MIT campus in the U.S. (MIT n.d.)

4.3.2 Risk management precautions

For projects, MIT has a structured risk evaluation and management framework that is implemented on a case-by-case basis, depending on the risk level of the collaboration. The framework of the systematic elevated risk review process represents a proactive approach focusing on academic integrity, the mitigation of

ethical violations, and the addressing of national security concerns. (Lester et al. 2022.)

The framework, introduced in 2019, is used when collaborators are countries posing elevated risk to MIT, including China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. In collaborations where MIT is bound by contractual relationships or agreements with these countries, the International Coordinating Committee (ICC) and International Advisory Committee (IAC) review each case separately in consultation with a Principal Investigator (PI). (MIT Global Support Resources n.d.)

The following principles guide the framework:

- Preservation of Academic Integrity: Ensuring collaborations align with MIT's values while maintaining objectivity and transparency.
- Protection of National Security: Preventing contributions to foreign governments' military or intelligence systems.
- Commitment to Ethical Standards: Avoiding collaborations that could imply MIT in human rights abuses or discrimination practices.

Under these guidelines, the elevated risk review process considers political, social, financial and security risks.

To mitigate political risks, the faculty and administrative evaluations assess the benefits, risks, and alignment of collaborations with MIT's values and mission. It ensures alignment with uncompromising policies as well as U.S. values. The collaborators are screened during proposal development for restricted parties or entities that may be on the U.S. sanctions list. Selective engagement involves avoiding partnerships linked to human rights violations, such as in the region of Xinjiang, or military applications, such as the Military-Civil Fusion strongly pursued by Xi Jinping (Bitzinger 2021). A risk-based review considers geopolitical tensions and changes. MIT recognises that many Chinese institutions have obligations to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which could pose risks to academic freedom and intellectual property. Thus, collaborations with such affiliations are carefully monitored to prevent MIT from unintentionally participating in such actions. (MIT Global Support Resources n.d.)

For social risk management, one of MIT's core values is maintaining academic integrity and avoiding discriminatory practices based on nationality, race, ethnicity, or any other characteristic, which is also expected from collaborating institutions. MIT implements broad measures to ensure data control through Technology Control Plans (TCPs), which also apply to safeguarding sensitive research or personal data from misuse or unauthorised access. China implemented a Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL) in 2021, but its enforcement remains questionable due to China's history of violations of private data and cyberattacks. (Lester et al., 2022.) The PIPL is similar to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in that it regulates the collection, storage, use, transfer, and disclosure of personal data. This law applies to both domestic and foreign entities handling the personal information of individuals in China. (Dai & Deng 2022.)

Financial risk management is one of the main priorities at MIT, for the institution has multiple collaborations in China, and Chinese collaborators fund many joint research programmes (Lester et al. 2022). However, the institution recognises that over-reliance on Chinese funding alone poses a notable risk and creates a vulnerability. As a preventative measure, MIT diversifies its funding sources. Geopolitical tensions also may lead to the U.S. implementing sanctions against China, which could disrupt the flow of funding for joint projects. MIT's risk management considers the cautiousness of long-term financial commitments that depend on stable U.S.-China relations. MIT also recognises that foreign collaborations may threaten U.S. economic competitiveness by empowering foreign governments to enhance their business sectors at the expense of American entities or by allowing foreign entities access to unpublished research. (MIT Global Support Resources n.d.)

Another major area of risk management for MIT focus is security risks. The author found the chapter to tie closely together with all three main areas of the study and thus chose to implement it as well. The collaborator uses a Technology Control Plan (TCP) to manage restricted technology access and ensure compliance with U.S. export laws. The TCP controls data use agreements and collaborates with the Office of Strategic Alliances and Technology Transfer (OSATT) on material

transfer agreements and with the Office of the General Counsel (OGC) on TLO licence agreements. These processes are conducted to identify all export-controlled material. TCPs are ordered by the Principal Investigator (PI) or the Export Control Office (ECO).

As precautionary risk management processes, the MIT faculty, administrators, and PIs provide resources and training to staff to ensure awareness of regulations and geopolitical dynamics, which could affect collaboration with Chinese institutions. To further support staff in risk management, MIT has an internal reporting system to ensure transparency regarding conflicts of interest or commitment. The reporting system enables staff to easily report any irregularities, allowing the appropriate administrators to take effective action before a risk materialises further.

4.3.3 Comparison to TAMK

Comparing MIT's risk management processes to those of TAMK reveals clear differences, but where there were differences with TAMK and UTS, there are similarities between MIT and TAMK.

From the study, the primary similarity is that risk management occurs on a case-by-case basis: at MIT, projects collaborating with China undergo an elevated-risk review process, with actions varying based on the project's nature. TAMK employs a similar process where potential collaborators are assessed as a single legal entity prior to initial contract preparation. For MIT, the assessment is conducted internally by faculty and the ICC and IAC rather than by an external expert or company. However, MIT emphasises, similar to Participant 4's response and the UTS Toolkit, that risk management and review should be applied to existing collaborations when necessary, such as during tensions in international relations or other significant events.

For political risks, MIT strongly emphasises federal policies and values, as well as its own. The main risk appears to be the Chinese collaborator connected to an MCF practice, potentially passing on confidential information to military or

knowledge entities. To mitigate this, MIT's elevated risk review process employs screening to assess the likelihood of the risk. MIT acknowledges that it is impossible to prevent risks completely, and a low probability of risk materialisation should not hinder shared knowledge and education. It is understood that MIT must undergo a comprehensive risk management process for foreign collaborations, given its status as a research university with programmes and projects in areas like Nuclear Sciences. In contrast, TAMK's educational export prioritises practical studies over research into new information or technology. As mentioned in the expert interview with Suominen (2025), TAMK and other higher education institutions in Finland likely do not offer educational exports involving material that Chinese institutions are unfamiliar with.

For social risks, MIT highly values individuals and does not tolerate discrimination on any basis, which is also expected from collaborators. In addition, the safety of personal data is a key aspect that the collaborating institution must respect. Considering Figure 1, which highlights risks for Global Teams, TAMK is focusing significantly more on the social aspects of clients' students. For example, are they prepared for Finland's culture, or is their level of English high enough to understand the provided education and other similar questions.

MIT prioritises the financial risks of joint research projects and other collaborations with Chinese institutions, as they fund parts of the actions. MIT acknowledges the risk of over-reliance on Chinese funding, which is why it diversifies its financial sources. (MIT n.d.) For TAMK, before contracts are put into action, the Chinese partner is assessed to ensure they are aware of the financial commitment and that their ability to pay for the educational export is genuine. The key difference between MIT and TAMK financial risk management is that MIT also considers that foreign partnerships might threaten U.S. economic competitiveness by benefiting foreign industries or exposing sensitive research.

In summary, while MIT and TAMK operate in very different educational and geopolitical contexts, their approaches to risk management indicates equally similarities and differences. Both institutions assess risks of educational export and international collaborations on a case-by-case basis and implement tailored review processes. MIT's elevated-risk review process is integrated into its internal

governance, focusing especially on projects in sensitive or confidential areas. In contrast, TAMK's risk management focuses more on expert analysis before contract negotiations. Financially, both institutions seek to mitigate risks by verifying the credibility and capability of their partners. Yet, MIT's considerations extend further, reflecting concerns about national economic security and the long-term implications of foreign influence on research integrity. Ultimately, while the scope and depth of their risk management differ, both MIT and TAMK demonstrate a shared commitment to responsible international collaboration.

4.4 Comparison of benchmarking results

The benchmarking will conclude with comparing UTS and MIT educational export findings. The study showcased similarities but also many differences. Below, a table showcases major differences and similarities between the two institutions.

TABLE 1 Risk Management Benchmarking Results: UTS & MIT

Risk Management Factor	UTS	MIT
Structure	Internal and external centralised risk management team	Internal centralised risk management teams
Main Procedure	Fixed process: Diligence Analysis	Due process: Elevated-risk review process
Risk Management Approach	Australian standards (e.g. TEQSA) and government guidance (DFAT)	U.S. federal regulations (export controls, TCPs) and MIT-specific protocols
Standard	Follows ISO 31000:2018	Non
Type of Educational Export	Transnational Education (TNE): joint-degrees and offshore campuses	Research collaborations, joint-degrees, academic exchanges
Risk Priorisation	Operational and reputational risks in program delivery and student experience	Risks in intellectual property, research and data protection

The benchmarking study demonstrated that UTS and MIT have different approaches to risk management concerning Chinese partnerships. The processes differ not only in structure but also in application, which may be due to the nature of the partnerships: UTS provides transnational education similar to TAMK's educational export, while MIT's partnerships focus more on research collaborations and joint programs. The difference in the fundamental business model reflects the varying risk management approach.

Both UTS and MIT demonstrate structured approaches to risk management in educational exports with China. UTS follows a proactive approach that aligns with ISO 31000:2018 and combines it with an external agent's thorough due diligence analysis of the partner. The toolkit provided by TEQSA combines these two risk management frameworks and results in an easily adaptable and comprehensive risk management model and strategy.

MIT focuses more on risk management based on the nature of a project, so they follow a case-by-case structure. The risk management approach, especially with Chinese partnerships, follows an elevated-risk review process. MIT utilises internal risk management faculty and committees to ensure the collaborations meet MIT's standards and do not pose unnecessary risks.

Both institutions train staff involved in educational export to ensure everyone has access to the same information and help employees collaborate effectively when reviewing risk management processes. Furthermore, both institutions have implemented a reporting system that allows staff members to notify risk management faculty if anything seems amiss.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this thesis was to develop TAMK's risk analysis model for educational export to China from social, political, and financial aspects with the research question being: *How can a risk analysis model be developed to help TAMK evaluate and manage risks when planning new education export cooperations in China?*

The study combined data from a staff survey, an expert interview, and benchmark analysis. The aim was to use these data sources with a literature review and develop a risk analysis model as a final product for TAMK's Global Team to utilise when assessing new partnerships with Chinese institutions. The study quickly showcased the limited amount of literature and research on the chosen topic, making the research more difficult and ultimately forcing the author to focus on creating a recommendation based on the findings, on which TAMK could further develop into a functional model together with a field professional. The study was able to produce support for why risk management on educational export to China is essential, especially considering social, political, and financial aspects.

5.1 Conclusion

The survey identified critical risks from a ready-made PESTEL analysis by the Global Team in 2022. The political risks were the top concern, accompanied by financial risks such as awareness of financial commitments and payment capacity. Social risks were also considered but were not found to be as important as the other two areas. Regarding risk management processes, the participants suggested SWOT analysis, financial and social reliability checks, and continuous risk monitoring. The participants emphasised quality over quantity in documenting a potential partner's reliability with the possible addition of access to audit material. The differing survey results suggest that joint risk management training could be beneficial for the staff to have the same knowledge on risk management policies and processes, not only regarding China but in general as well.

The interview highlighted the recommendation to review old contracts and monitor ongoing partnerships. In addition, TAMK could assess its dependence on Chinese partnerships and the potential impact if it were compromised. As both Suominen (2025) and the author recognised, there are guidelines for Chinese collaborations, educational exports, and risk management; however, there is unfortunately no unified guideline, resulting in institutions having to research and gather information from multiple sources.

The benchmarking research compared the University of Technology Sydney's and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's risk management in international collaborations, focusing on Chinese partners. The study showcased that the institutions have different business models, which reflect differing risk management processes. UTS follows a fixed framework that aligns with Australian Standards and ISO 31000:2018, along with a toolkit provided by TEQSA. MIT employs a case-by-case approach to risk management and has its own framework for the Elevated-risk review process for projects collaborating with Chinese institutions. Both institutions recommend ongoing risk monitoring in their current collaborations.

Furthermore, the study has shown that TAMK has a more comprehensive approach to risk management regarding social risks, showcasing their care for students and the success of the programmes. During the benchmarking study, neither UTS nor MIT highlighted the risk of Chinese or other foreign students' motivation towards the programme, their ability to adapt to a new culture, or their capability to study in English, to name a few. The author believes that the comprehensive consideration of social risks is crucial for the success of educational exports.

5.2 Recommendations

To conclude the study, the author recommends that TAMK and the Global Team integrate elements from both UTS and MIT. While MIT's risk management approach may be too focused on research, the case-by-case style of risk

management reviews suits TAMK's educational export better, as the projects may differ based on the contract and service. What TAMK could implement from UTS is the use of due diligence analysis to better understand potential partners and the risk management process structure, aligning with ISO 31000:2018, which is also the recommendation by MFA (2021).

In addition, UTS and MIT both have internal reporting systems allowing faculty to easily report irregularities related to educational export. TAMK has similar software, Rego, and based on the research results, the author recommends that TAMK and the Global Team adapt Rego or similar software to help staff or students report anything suspicious connected to educational export.

The risks highlighted in the PESTEL analysis (2022) created a solid and thorough foundation for risk management and outlined what information should be accessible before signing contracts. In addition, as Participant 2 noted during the survey, access to audit material would also ensure that partners are transparent with their financials and other administrative matters, which could further help manage social, political, and financial risk management. The study supports the assertion that the key risks are indeed social, political, and financial. However, security could be regarded as another risk factor, as seen in the interview with Suominen (2025) and benchmark research. It could be valuable for the Global Team to overview the PESTEL results from 2022 and see if there are new areas rising as potential risks to be considered in more detail.

As noted in the staff survey by Participant 4, in the expert interview with Suominen, and in the benchmark study, it could be advantageous for TAMK to review its current partnerships and contracts with China and assess any changes in the identified risk factors. For instance, how does the implication of PIPL in China reflect on the EU's GDPR, and does the client demonstrate compliance with these regulations?

Education Finland has produced a guide to help institutions in educational export manage mostly ethical and social risks with little attention to political or financial risks. The guide recommends a thorough due diligence analysis of potential partners, which is what UTS also does. UTS also uses the ISO 31000 risk

assessment framework, which could be adapted to TAMK's risk management. Combined with a due diligence analysis, it would create a comprehensive risk management model for TAMK's educational export.

As the thesis could not produce an actual risk management model, the author recommends deeper research on risk management in educational export along with the findings from this study. Further research could develop a process and streamline the risk management of TAMK's educational export while also saving the institution money. An external risk assessor can provide an outside perspective and experience.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. TAMK survey form

1(3)

1. How long have you worked in education export?
2. In a very general partnership consideration with a Chinese education institution, what kind of risk management processes or theories do you utilise? How?
3. In the same scenario, please choose the five most important questions, in your opinion, to address from the list below. The risks are based on a risk management workshop in 2022 by the Global Team.
 - a. Is the client able to pay?
 - b. Are they aware of the financial commitment and prepared?
 - c. Can someone recommend them?
 - d. Does the client have an existing network in Finland or EU?
 - e. Is the political situation inside the country stable?
 - f. Are they willing to follow the EU's GDPR?
 - g. Can TAMK be involved in the selection process?
 - h. Has the client had prior experience in education export?
 - i. How are possible dropouts considered? Can the motivation be checked?
4. How would you rate the chosen risks on a scale of their likelihood: **Unlikely** (Not prone to happening, not known to have occurred before), **Possible** (May happen, there are previous cases), **Likely** (The risk has happened many times or has had many close-call situations), **Close or Certain** (The risk is expected to happen)
 - a. Client is not able to pay
 - b. Client isn't aware of the financial commitment or is not prepared
 - c. Client has no recommendations
 - d. Client has no prior network in Finland or the EU
 - e. The political situation inside the country is changing
 - f. They are not willing to follow the EU's GDPR
 - g. Client won't allow TAMK to be involved in the selection process
 - h. Client has no prior experience in education export
 - i. Client has not considered dropouts or checked motivation

2(3)

5. How would you rate the chosen risks on a scale of the risks' impact? **Minor** (The risk materialising may cause minor harm), **Moderate** (The risk can decelerate the process or weaken the reaching of the goal. Minor expenses are feasible.), **Significant** (The risk can complicate, decelerate or cause other substantial damage to the case? Moderate expenses are feasible and reputation as a trusted actor weakens), **Critical** (The risk materialising can suspend the entirety of the case. Moderate to high expenses are feasible. Reputation as a trusted actor weakens dramatically.)

Same options of a. to i. as question 4.

6. If you wish to mention a risk which is common/of high importance and not on this list, please write it here and elaborate why it should be noted in a risk analysis process.
7. Have you ever come across a risk from Question 4 materialise?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
8. Did it change something in the risk management process afterwards?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
9. How did it change the risk management process?
10. Should there be a risk management process of demanding documents or a due diligence process from the potential Chinese partnership institution, would you rather:
- a. Focus on getting fewer documents of the highest importance in detail (quality over quantity)
 - b. Focus on getting as many documents of proof as possible (quantity over quality)
 - c. Have a set of fixed documents for all cases, and more would be requested if the amount of information is lacking
 - d. Other (what?)
11. In the case of a new partnership with a Chinese institution, does the Global Team background check the institution in question through Business Finland, Chinese or Finnish Embassies, or other external agents?
- a. Yes

b. No

12. What external agents do you employ?

13. Do you have any cases or experiences you think would be important to take into account in the risk management study?

a. Yes

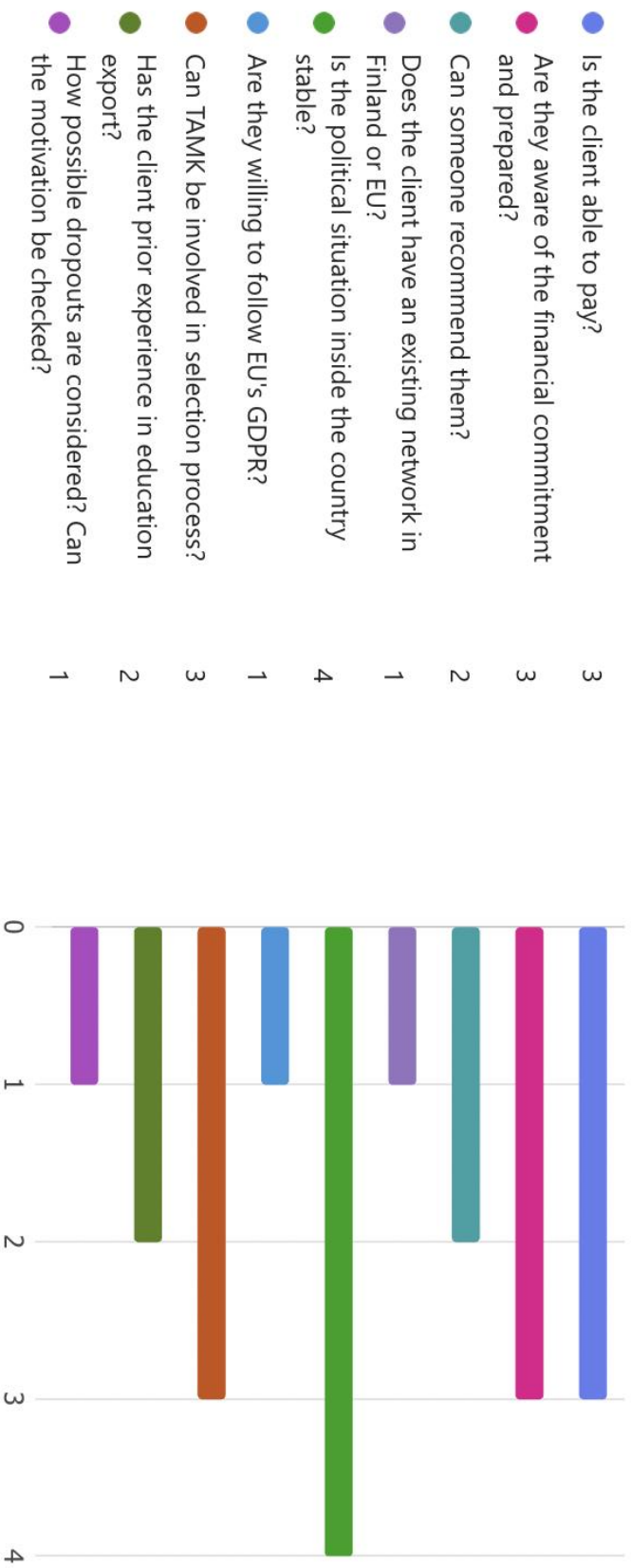
b. No

14. Please elaborate on the cases or experiences

15. Any additional comments to the author?

Appendix 2. TAMK Staff survey question 3 figure.

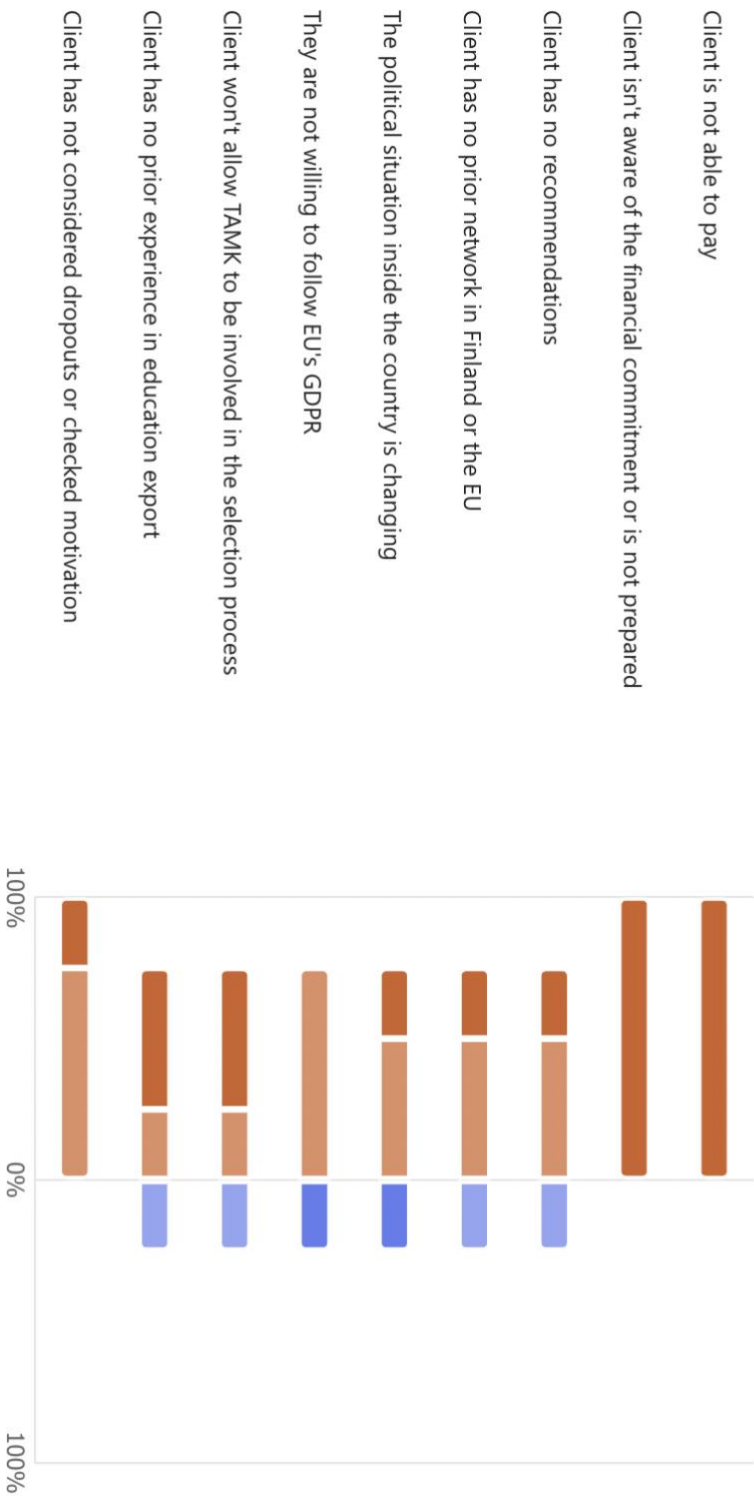
3. In the same scenario, please choose the five most important questions, in your opinion, to address from the list below. The risks are based on a risk management workshop in 2022 by the Global Team.



Appendix 3. TAMK Staff survey question 4 results.

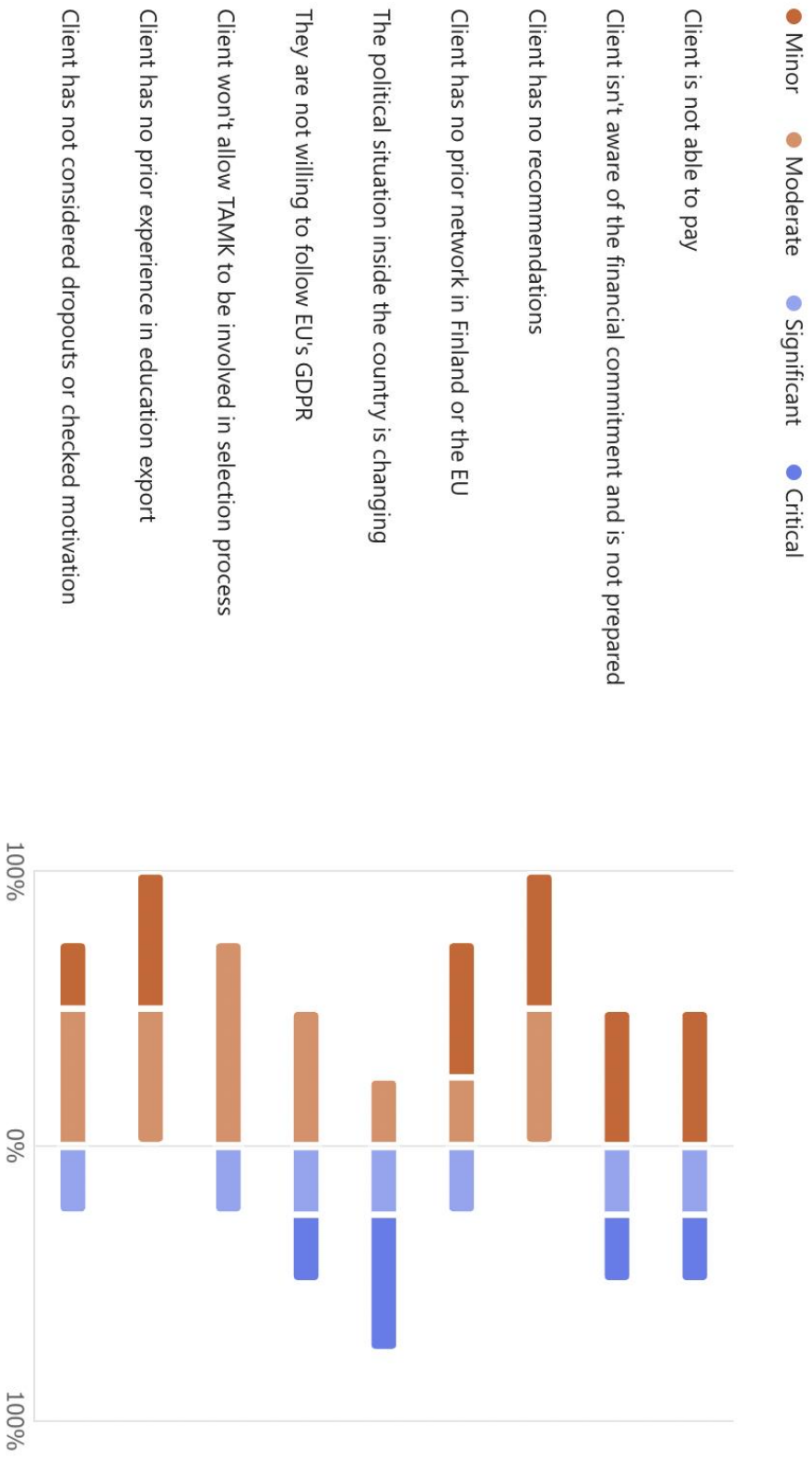
4. How would you rate the chosen risks on a scale of their likelihood

- Unlikely
- Possible
- Likely
- Close to certain



Appendix 4. TAMK Staff survey question 5 results.

5. How would you rate the chosen risks on a scale of the risks' impact

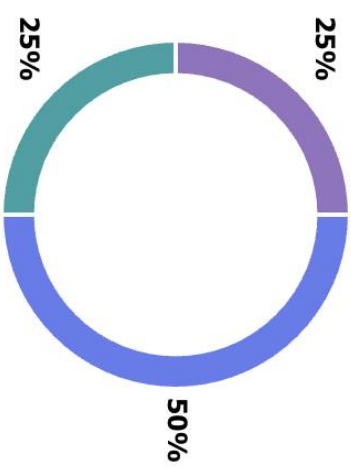


Appendix 5. TAMK Staff survey question 10 results.

10. Should there be a risk management process of demanding documents or a due diligence process from the potential Chinese partnership institution, would you rather:

[Lisätietoja](#)

- Focus on getting fewer documents of highest importance in detail (quality over quantity) 2
- Focus on getting as many documents of proof as possible (quantity over quality) 0
- Have a set of fixed documents for all cases, and more would be requested if the amount of information is... 1
- Muu 1



Appendix 6. Expert interview

1(2)

1. Kuinka kauan olet toiminut asiantuntijaroolissa Kiinaan liittyen?
2. Millaisena yhteistyökumppanina näet kiinalaiset korkeakoulut nykypäivänä?
3. Onko viimeisen viiden (5) vuoden aikana tapahtunut sinusta merkittäviä muutoksia Kiinan luotettavuuden kannalta, jos näkökulmana on vientikoulutus? Mitä?
4. Osaako sanoa, miltä länsimaalainen vientikoulutus näyttää Kiinassa nykypäivänä/onko sen määrässä tai tyyliässä tapahtunut näkyviä muutoksia?
5. Millaisia riskejä painottaisit suomalaisten korkeakoulujen ottavan huomioon, mietittäessä uusia vientikoulutuksen sopimuksia Kiinan korkeakoulujen kanssa?
6. Onko tiedossasi riskienhallintamalleja tai -prosesseja, joita suosittelisit suomalaisien korkeakoulujen vientikoulutuksen ammattilaisille?
7. Muuta huomioitavaa tai kommentoitavaa?

Translation:

1. How long have you been in an expert role on Chinese matters?
2. How do you see Chinese universities as partners today?
3. In the last five (5) years, do you think there have been any significant changes in terms of China's credibility from the perspective of education export? What?
4. Can you tell, what Western export education looks like in China today/are there any visible changes in its quantity or style?
5. What risks would you stress that Finnish higher education institutions should take into account when considering new education export agreements with Chinese higher education institutions?

6. Are you aware of any risk management models or processes you recommend to education export professionals in Finnish higher education institutions?
7. Any other comments or observations?