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APPEAL OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

VAMK's international student perspective

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Kansainvälisiä opiskelijoita on tutkittu paljon viime vuosikymmenten aikana. Suuri osa tutkimuksesta on kuitenkin tehty maahanmuuton näkökulmasta ja se on keskittynyt suurimpiin kohdemaihin. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli tunnistaa, mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden päätökseen hakea Vaasan ammattikorkeakouluun (VAMK).

Opinnäytetyön teoriaosiossa kuvattiin kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden päätöksentekoprosessia ja eri tekijöitä, jotka vaikuttavat siihen. Korkeakoulumarkkinointia käsiteltiin 7P palvelumarkkinointimallin näkökulmasta. Opinnäytetyön empiirisessä tutkimuksessa käytettiin menetelmänä kyselyä, joka oli enimmäkseen kvantitatiivinen. Kyselyä käytettiin muodostamaan käsitys VAMKin kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden päätöksentekoprosessista.

Kyselyn vastausten ja teoriataustan perusteella VAMKin nykyistä markkinointia arvioitiin 7P:n avulla. Arvion perusteella VAMKille annettiin suosituksia markkinoinnin kehittämiseen. Merkittävin tulos oli, että VAMKin tämän hetkisiä markkinointitoimenpiteitä voisi tehostaa. Opinnäytetyön perusteella suositeltiin markkinointisuunnitelman luomista, jotta varmistetaan eri markkinointiviestinnän kanavien käytön yhdenmukaisuus.

Avainsanat	Kansainväliset opiskelijat, päätöksentekoprosessi, korkeakoulumarkkinointi
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ABSTRACT

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International students have been a popular topic of research over the past decades. However, majority of the research has been written from the perspective of migration studies and has focused on the largest destination countries. This thesis aimed to identify factors influencing the attractiveness of Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK) to international students.

In the theoretical part of the thesis, the decision-making process of international students and the different factors affecting the process were presented. Higher education marketing was discussed from the perspective of 7Ps service marketing mix. The empirical research was conducted using a mainly quantitative questionnaire as a research method. The questionnaire was used to describe the decision-making process specific to VAMK's international students.

Based on the questionnaire results and theory, VAMK's current marketing mix was assessed and recommendations for improving it were given. The main finding was that VAMK's current marketing communication activities are not as effective as they could be. A recommendation was given to establish a strategy combining different marketing communication channels to ensure their consistency.

Keywords	International students, decision-making process, education marketing
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1 INTRODUCTION

International students have been identified as an important part of talent inflow to countries. Therefore, the importance of attracting international students to local higher education institutions has been emphasized as well as encouraging them to stay and work in the destination country after graduation. (Wei 2013)

The majority of the current research regarding international students' decision-making has been focused on the largest English-speaking destinations, such as United Kingdom, United States and Australia. The results from these studies are not applicable to Finnish institutions as country and institution specific factors are an essential part of the international students' decision-making process.

This thesis combines the information regarding international students' decision-making with the higher education marketing theory to understand how to attract international students to Vaasa University of Applied Sciences.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the thesis is to get an understanding of the international students' decision-making process and use the information to assess the attractiveness of a specific institution.

The primary research question to be answered with the thesis is:

- How to attract international students to VAMK?

The secondary questions helping to answer the primary question are:

- How do international students decide where to study?
- Which factors influence the decision?
- How did the current international students choose to study at VAMK?
- What is the state of VAMK's current activities taken to attract more international students?

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

The second chapter of the thesis begins by defining international students and proceeds to describe the decision-making process of international students. The different steps in the process are discussed first after which the different factors that influence the decision will be explained. The third chapter continues the theoretical framework. The second chapter introduces a popular marketing theory and its application higher education marketing.

The fourth chapter of the thesis begins the empirical part of the thesis by introducing the research methodology used. The empirical part of the thesis is conducted as a questionnaire sent to VAMK's international students. In the fifth chapter, the results from this questionnaire will be introduced. In the sixth chapter, the results and the theoretical framework will be combined to form a 7Ps marketing mix regarding VAMK. In this chapter, recommendations will be given to improve VAMK's current practices.

1.3 Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK)

The institution research in the thesis is Vaasa University of Applied Sciences. VAMK has three degree programmes available in English. Two of the degree programmes are bachelor's degrees, Bachelor of Business Administration, International Business and Bachelor of Engineering, Information Technology. The third one is a master's degree, Master of Engineering, Project Management. (VAMK 2019)

In 2018, there were overall 40 students from EU and EEA countries outside Finland, who applied to study in VAMK. Of these 40 students, 16 had VAMK as their first choice and 4 accepted the degree place. International students from country outside EU and EEA who applied to VAMK totaled 1603. 539 of them had VAMK as their first choice and 112 accepted the place to study. As a comparison, the total number of applicants in VAMK was 4522 of which 1636 had VAMK as their first choice. 829 accepted the place to study (Vipunen 2019).

2 INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The following chapter includes an overview of the past research regarding international students' decision-making. The theoretical models used to explain the process of deciding where and what to study, the nature of the choice and different factors affecting the choice. In the chapter, the research related to push-pull model and the common factors affecting the choice are discussed.

2.1 Definition

International students can be defined as students who conducted their previous education in another country and are not residents of the country that they study in (OECD 2019).

Student migration and student mobility have both been used as terms to describe international students' movement. However, the terms have slight differences. Student migration refers to long distances, for example, moving to another continent to study or to a country with different level of development. Student migration also indicates longer period of study, such as full degree. Student mobility is used in international student movement in smaller areas such as inside Europe. Student mobility can also be used to describe student exchange abroad. Spending a part of the studies abroad is often as well referred to as credit mobility, whereas, completing a full degree abroad is referred to as degree mobility. (Martiniello & Rath 2012)

2.2 Decision-making Process

The decision-making process of students deciding where to study has two stages: predisposition stage and choice stage. In the predisposition stage the student decides that they want to pursue higher education. This stage is affected by for example family's opinions, expectations and financial support, professional aspirations and perceptions of student life. In the second stage, the student decides which university to study at. This choice consists of information search and is affected by different factors that make the student prioritize one higher education institution over another. (Sojkin, Bartkowiak & Skuza 2012)

The decision-making process for choosing where to study is among the most frequently researched topics in higher education literature. The general theories of decision-making process cannot be directly applied to the process of choosing what and where to study because no choice is entirely correct or incorrect. Therefore, the student is required to find information and establish criteria by which to choose the right institution. In addition, as there is no previously set amount of information that can be considered enough, the student must decide when they've gathered a sufficient amount. (Galotti 1995)

Two important variables in student's decision-making are the number of schools that student considers and the number of criteria they use. During the decision-making process there has been indications that students consider four to five alternative institutions and have eight to ten criteria by which they make their choice. Half of the alternatives and criteria are likely to change in the process of decision-making. (Galotti 1995)

2.3 International Students' Decision-making

International students' decision-making process must be discussed separately from the general decision-making process due to the separate stage of choosing to study abroad instead of studying in a local institution.

International students' decision-making process has three stages. Deciding to study abroad instead of studying in a local institution is the first stage. In the second stage, the student chooses the country in which they wish to study in. In the third and final stage, the student chooses the institution in which they wish to study at. These phases may also occur independently and separately. For example, the process can be driven by the choice of a specific institution. Each phase is affected by student's individual characteristics, the influencers, such as student's family, friends and professors, and external push-pull factors. The importance of pull factors increases in the second and third stage when the students decides the country and institution. The push factors have the most influence in the decision to study in a foreign country and the selection of the country. The external push and pull factors can have

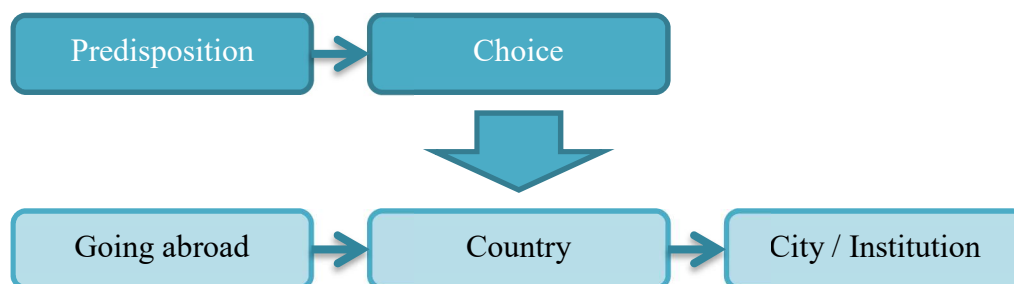
either negative or positive effect on the decision. (Jiani 2017, Singh 2016, Chen 2007, Mazzarol & Soutar 2002)

If the student has lived in the destination country prior beginning their studies, the decision-making process resembles that of local students. The choice is likely to originate from either recommendation of teachers and friends regarding an institution, country specific courses to access the education and Internet material provided regarding the course. In Master's studies, research supervisors' advice has been identified as a major factor. For those arriving to the country for the first time to study, the choice is typically inspired by either local agencies promoting the institution in the destination or experience of family members. The choice of destination, in many situations, is more important than the choice of institution. Friends' recommendation is in many situations the most powerful single factor. (Maringe & Carter 2007)

The final choice of where the student is going to study is made by weighing the options. The students make the final decision based on a cost-benefit analysis which they use to maximize their benefits. The benefits are different for each student. For some they may be economic, some emotional and some cultural. As a result of this cost-based decision-making process, the students often choose a destination that is more developed than their home country. (Jiani 2017; Wei 2013)

Figure 1 illustrates the decision-making process of international students. It has not been disclosed whether students decide to study before deciding to study abroad. Therefore, it is not possible to confirm that the decision-making process occurs in the choice stage of the general decision-making process. This thesis is focused on the two last parts of the decision-making process, the choice of a country and an institution.

Figure 1. Decision-making process. (Sojkin et al 2012; Jiani 2017)



2.3.1 Rational or Emotional

There has been a disagreement on whether the choice of an education institution is a rational choice or not. The theories regarding student decision-making can be divided to rational and emotional. Both approaches are needed to fully understand the choice of higher education institution. The rational factors affecting the choice include, for example, career opportunities, quality of education and costs. The emotional factors include for example personal values, expectations and influence of family and friends. (Angulo, Pergelova & Rialp 2010)

Greenbank (2009) found out that contrary to the common idea, the students in his study were not using a rational or comprehensive approach when making the decision where to study. Information sources used were limited and the students did not consider a variety of different alternatives. In addition, they relied on their intuition when making the final decision. These students were more drawn to personal information sources and considered higher education websites to be difficult to understand. However, Jiani (2017) suggests that the final choice is made by weighing the costs and benefits of different options. The students make the decision by maximizing the benefits which can be related to personal, economic or even cultural reasons.

The rationality of the decision-making will be discussed in this thesis, due to its implications on the information sources that the students use and the type of information that should be provided.

2.4 Factors Affecting the Process

In past research, several different factors affecting the students' decision-making process. The emphasis of different factors in students' decision to study abroad varies a lot. However, several different studies have identified economic and educational factors to be the most influential regarding the international students' decision. The research is often limited to a specific destination with students from a single origin. (Wei 2013)

A conceptual model by Perna (2006) divides the factors affecting the choice of a higher education to different layers. The basis of the model is human capital theory according to which the choice of a higher education institution is based on the comparison between expected benefits and the expected costs. These benefits and costs are affected by the academic preparation of the individual and resources for paying the costs. The layers in the model represent the contextual factors affecting the perceived costs and benefits. The first layer reflects the demographic characteristics of an individual, the second reflects the school and community, the third layer reflects the higher education institution's impact and the fourth reflects the larger scale social, economic and policy context.

2.4.1 Push-pull Factors

Push-pull factors in migration theories describe the factors that *push* a person to migrate from their country of origin and *pull* a person at the destination. Together these factors explain why someone decides to migrate. Push-pull factors have been discussed in traditional migration literature, but they have been applied to international students' movement as well. Push-pull theory has been the basis for several models created to explain the international students' decision-making process. (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002)

Maringe and Carter (2007) have proposed a model describing factors affecting international students' decision to study abroad, that is based on the push-pull model. In this model, key influencers, risks and anxieties, and experiential dissatisfiers have been added to the model. The key influencers and push factors are connected.

In this model the pull factors have been divided to country level, and institutional and course programme level. The pull factors are connected with risks and anxieties and experiential dissatisfiers.

Martin and Widgren (2002) have formed a model (Figure 2) illustrating the determinants for international migration. Reasons to migrate can be grouped into two groups, economic and non-economic. The economic reasons are related to the migrant's career or job opportunities. Noneconomic reasons can be for example family related. The factors affecting the decision can be divided to three categories: demand-pull, supply-push and networks. The demand-pull force is a factor that is attracting the migrant in the destination country and the supply-push force is a factor pushing the migrant from their home country. Network factor includes connections in the destination country. All the factors in these three categories can affect the decision to migrate simultaneously but their significance varies.

Table 1. Determinants of Migration. (Martin & Widgren 2002)

Type of Migrant	Factors Encouraging an Individual to Migrate		
	Demand-Pull	Supply-Push	Network/Other
Economic	<i>Labor recruitment, better wages</i>	<i>Un- or underemployment; low wages</i>	<i>Job and wage information flows</i>
Noneconomic	<i>Family unification</i>	<i>War and persecution</i>	<i>Communications; transportation; assistance organizations; desire for new experiences</i>

Recent studies have emphasized the individual push-pull factors affecting the decision to migrate for higher education. The students likely to emigrate for studies are likely to have high expectations regarding their career and education. The students who do not consider themselves to be likely to emigrate for studies were found not to have as high professional and education expectations for themselves. These students' decision to emigrate were effected by more general factors such as the political situation. (Labrianidis & Sykas 2015)

Although the push-pull factors are affected by the individual student's preferences, there are some factors that have been recognized important by various studies. These factors will be further discussed in the remaining part of this chapter

2.4.2 Reputation and Image

The research regarding student perceptions about the reputation of an institution is overlapping with the research regarding the perceived image of an institution. Therefore, these two concepts will be discussed simultaneously. The reputation of a study program has been found to be tied to the perceived reputation of an institution. Furthermore, the reputation of the education in a country has been found to affect the perceptions of the reputation of a single institution. When assessing an institution, students have been found to rely on the perceived institutional image rather than critical thinking. The image of an institution has been found to be most affected by recommendations in personal relationships. (Ahmad, Buchanan & Ahmad 2015; Wilkins & Huisman 2014)

The image of an institution has been recognized in several studies as one of the major factors influencing international students' decision of destination. One of the major factors influencing the image of an institution is the country image. Furthermore, the city image is often positively affected by the country image. Therefore, positive image regarding a country and a city enhances the positive institution image. (Herrero, San Martín, Mar García de los Salmones, Del Río Peña 2015)

In a research conducted by Alfattal (2017), it was found that the reputation was more important for those students who planned on returning to their home country after graduation. These students' motivation was to receive a tuition that would be of high recognition in their home country.

Reputation of an institution has also been found to influence students' willingness to recommend it to other people. The importance of Word-of-Mouth in higher education marketing will be further discussed in the following subchapter. (Branco & Oliveira 2016)

2.4.1 Influencers and Information Sources

The research regarding influencers that affect the decision to study a degree abroad and the information sources that are used is often overlapping. The reason for this is that the Word-of-Mouth (WOM) is recognized as one of the most important factors influencing the decision. International students seem to rely strongly on the personal recommendations received from friends, family or alumnus. A strong appreciation in the culture regarding international experiences may also itself be an important factor supporting the student's choice. (Alfattal 2017; Branco Oliveira & Soares 2016)

The choice where to study is not often made solely by the student. Especially in a more collective culture, the parents may have a strong impact on the decision. The influence of the parents is amplified when the parents are supporting the student financially. In addition, the students' friends may influence the decision. Degree migration has been found to have a strong network effect, which means that a large presence of the student's nationality in the destination increases the attractiveness of a destination. (Beine, Noël & Ragot 2012)

2.5 Past Results from Finland

As identified earlier, the country image and the pull factors are among the most important factors affecting international students' decision-making. Therefore, the factors identified in previous studies regarding the choice of Finland or a Finnish institution other than VAMK will be discussed.

In a research conducted by Taajamo (2005) factors affecting the attractiveness of Finland as a study destination were identified. Main sources of information regarding Finland was said to be former students, local professors or lecturers, Internet and friends. Local workshops with Finnish students was also mentioned as a source of interest. In cases where Finland was not the student's first choice, they preferred studying in an English-speaking country. The exchange students considered level of education in Nordic countries to be high and appreciated the countries for their nature. Finland especially was, according to the students, an exotic country. Finland

being a cheap country for students and the lack of tuition fees was identified as a major factor attracting degree students. Their priority was also to have the studies approved in their home country. Safety of Finland was identified as an important factor.

A research conducted by The Centre of International Mobility, CIMO (2018) revealed that the most important reasons for studying in Finland were a specific course, quality of research, cost of education and institution reputation. International students in Finland were more influenced by scholarships or other monetary assistance than the international students in other countries. The least influential factor identified in the research was proximity to the home country. Compared to their peers in other countries, the international students in Finland do not place much importance on the location, opportunities to work during or after studies, and the reputation of an individual academic.

3 HIGHER EDUCATION MARKETING

Higher education institutions' marketing tactics differ from the marketing tactics used by other organizations because the process of consuming the product is very different. In higher education marketing, there are some important themes that have been highlighted. The importance of marketing communications has been widely discussed in the higher education marketing. As stated in the previous part of this thesis, students rely strongly on the experiences of other.

The 7P model will be used to apply the information gathered regarding international students' decision-making to VAMK's marketing.

The 7P model in education has been modified from the service marketing model 7P. The service model has been originally created from the 4P marketing mix, which consists of four elements: Product, Price, Place and Promotion. This original model was proven to be inadequate for service marketing, which is why 7P was created. In 7P, the additional three P:s stand for People, Process and Physical evidence. The marketing mix was created as a tool for marketers and was the elements of the mix were intended to be used in different proportions. (Blythe 2010)

The classic 4P model has been used to describe education as well. Product and price variables in this theory have been identified as the most important things considered by the international students. The main promotion activities considered valuable from students' perspective were using alumni, local universities and colleges and the web sites. (Binsardi & Ekwulugo 2003)

The 7P model in higher education marketing can be used to categorize different elements that international students consider in their tertiary education decision-making. The importance of each variable in the higher education marketing mix is different depending on a student. The importance of different elements varies depending on the context and audience. A study comparing the emphasis of international and local student found that both groups viewed the availability of specific program and affordable costs as the most important factors. (Alfattal 2017)

The different elements of the marketing mix should be considered as a whole rather than focusing on each of them individually.

3.1 Product

Product in the marketing mix includes all the benefits that a product or a service will provide for a customer. Therefore, the product is not only tangible (Blythe 2010). The perceptions that customers have of a product directly influences their perceptions of the company behind the product. Therefore, the product is an important part of the company image. When purchasing products, customers also purchase the benefits received when consuming the products. A product mix refers to the variety of different products that a company offers. The product-based marketing strategy can include different variations of expanding the company's product mix. These variations can include, for example, introducing a new product category, or a new variation or a model of an existing product. Another way to use the product as a driving element in the marketing strategy is to drop some of the existing products. (Proctor 2002)

In higher education marketing mix, a product is comparable to a service due to its intangibility, inseparability, variability and perishability. In higher education marketing, the education itself can be perceived to be the product in which case the student is the customer. From another perspective, the student can be perceived to be the product which is then delivered to the labor market. From the student as a customer perspective, their demands will guide the development of the product. If the student is considered as the product, the education will be developed according to the demand on the job market. (Enache 2011; Ivy 2008)

3.2 Price

The price in marketing mix stands for everything that the customer does in order to receive the product or the service (Blythe 2010). There are several different strategies that can be used for pricing a product. These strategies can be divided to the ones that are based on only the cost related to the product and those that consider

demand as well. In a demand-based pricing the price of the product varies depending on the demand. Competition-oriented pricing means that the company decides the price based on its competitors pricing strategy. In psychological pricing, a company uses, for example, 199 EUR instead of 200 EUR because the customer tends to round the prices down unconsciously. Price communicates product's quality to the customer. (Proctor 2002)

Price directly influences the income of a higher education institution. It is influenced by the costs, demand and other institutions' prices. The price influences both the income that the institution received from the student but also their perceptions on the quality of the education. (Enache 2011; Ivy 2008)

In Finland, higher education is mainly free. In 2017, tuition fees for students from outside EU/EEA were introduced. Therefore, pricing is a relatively new competing factor in Finnish higher education institutions.

3.3 Place

In the traditional marketing mix, place is the exchange location of the product or the service (Blythe 2010). When constructing a place strategy, a company must decide, for example, which distribution channels to use, should they use one or multiple channels, which intermediaries should they use, and how long should the channel of distribution be (Proctor 2002).

In service marketing, distribution means making the services available for the customer. The distribution can be divided to three types of interaction between the customer and the service provider. The first type is that the customer goes to the place where the service provider operates. In this case, the location and physical appearance of the space is very important. The second type is that the service provider goes to the customer. The third type is when there's no physical contact between the customer and the service provider, for example, when the service occurs on the Internet. The service can be delivered directly from the provider to the customer, by using an intermediary that can be responsible for, for example, selling the tickets, or by using multiple channels. (Strydom 2015)

Perceptions of place in higher education marketing mix depend on the perceptions of the customer. If the product is the education the place stands for an efficient way of delivering knowledge to them. In this perception, place includes the different methods of teaching. With technology, the options for teaching have grown and contact teaching is no longer the only option. If the product is the student, the place stands for the most efficient way of delivering the student to the labor market. (Enache 2011; Ivy 2008)

3.4 Promotion

When developing a marketing communication strategy, the company needs to clarify the target audience, the objective, the message, the channels used, the budget, the promotion mix, and how to measure the results. The message should awake a need or a want in the customer and encourage them to act. The message can be based on a logical reason, a need, or a desire. With products where the customer does not use rational decision-making when making the decision, the message should be based on emotions. The promotion mix includes different kind of promotional tools that can be, for example, advertising, publicity, and personal selling. Advertising must draw the customers attention and be original enough that it will stay in the customer's mind. Cost-efficiency and the exposure to the target audience influences the choice of different media used in advertising. (Proctor 2002)

Promotion in the marketing mix represents the communication with the customer. (Blythe 2010) Promotion includes the activities taken to reach different stakeholders. Students are among the most important stakeholders that need to be reached which several different promotional tools are recommended to be used. (Enache 2011; Ivy 2008)

3.5 People

In the marketing mix, the people element includes everyone who is involved in delivering the product (Blythe 2010). People are an important part of delivering a service. Employees influence the customers' experience strongly which is why managing them should be a priority. Internal marketing should be used to develop

and maintain a service culture. The company should have a positive relationship with the employees to ensure that they deliver a positive image to the customers. They should also be taught how to communicate with the customers. Customers are involved in the service production process which is why their experience directly influences their perceptions regarding the service. Customers' perceptions on the quality of the service depends on what they realistically expect, what they find adequate, and what they predict based on previous experience. The goal is to produce a service that is satisfactory or exceeds the expectations of the customer. (Strydom 2015)

In higher education marketing, the people delivering the service are of high importance. This includes both the teachers of the institution and the administrative staff. Having the correct people who are motivated to deliver the service well is the key to creating a great institution image. (Enache 2011; Ivy 2008)

3.6 Process

Process in the 7Ps marketing mix describes the delivery of the product (Blythe 2010). When a service is produced, different processes take place for delivering each part of the service. Smoothly running processes are a very important part of delivering a service as problems with the process directly influence the company's image negatively. Critical incidents represent the contact moments in the delivery process between the customer and the service provider. These moments influence the customer satisfaction and perceived quality strongly. A visual presentation called a service blueprint can be formed to represent the processes. A service blueprint describes the actions taken by the customer, the activities conducted in front of the customer, and the activities conducted when the customer is not present. (Strydom 2015)

One of the major processes to consider in higher education marketing is the enrollment. The aim of the enrollment process is to prepare students for studying in the institution and attract students that are suitable for studying at the institution. (Enache 2011; Ivy 2008)

3.7 Physical Evidence

Physical evidence represents the tangible aspects of the delivery (Blythe 2010). Physical evidence gives an indication to the customer regarding the service reliability and quality. Therefore, the physical evidence is an important part in creating an image of the service provider. Servicescape includes the physical elements of the service provider's premises in which the interaction between the customer and the provider takes place. These can include the buildings, the interior design, and the atmosphere of the place. The physical evidence includes also any material provided for the customer such as receipts, business cards, and the webpages. The tangible elements should all be used to strengthen a consistent and clear image regarding the service provider. (Strydom 2015)

Physical evidence in higher education marketing is the diploma received after graduation. In the enrollment phase, the physical evidence consists of the tangible evidence – such as the buildings, equipment and facilities of the institution – that provide a first impression regarding the product that will be delivered. (Enache 2011; Ivy 2008)

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The theoretical part of the thesis was used to form an understanding of the international students' choice of destination, the factors that influence it and the educational marketing strategy. In the following chapters of the thesis, the information gathered will be used to form an understanding of the VAMK specific decision-making process. When an overall image of the decision-making process is formed, the information will be used to assess VAMK's current marketing activities and possible improvement ideas will be given.

4.1 Research Design and Data Collection

The research process began when the topic of the thesis was decided. Initially, the quantitative method was chosen for conducting the research because there was no existing data regarding the reasons international degree students choose to study at VAMK. Also, based on the previous research conducted on the topic, it seems that the data varies considerably between different institutions and because of this, results from those researches could not be directly applied to VAMK.

The empirical part of the thesis was conducted as a questionnaire. Contrary to the initial idea, a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods was used in the research. Majority of the questions in the questionnaire were still quantitative. Three qualitative questions were added because they were thought to allow the respondents to elaborate their thoughts. Questionnaire was chosen as a research method because it was thought to be the most efficient method for conducting a quantitative research. Because the research was conducted in language that was, for most of the respondents, their second language, an online questionnaire was also thought to give the respondents an opportunity to read the questions with time and use an online translator if needed.

The questions of the questionnaire were formed based on past literature. The questions covered drivers of the decision, rationality of the decision, information sources, and influencers. Finland and VAMK specific questions were asked to analyze the influence of different elements. Although the thesis discusses the VAMK

specific factors influencing the decision-making process, factors affecting the choice of Finland were measured as well. According to Herrero et al (2015), the image of a country influences the image of an institution. Therefore, the image of Finland was considered to influence the image of VAMK.

The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and distributed to the respondents via email. The questionnaire was sent to the students in study programmes in the field of business and engineering, which included all international classes in VAMK. The respondents were given one week to submit their responses. After the first two days from sending the questionnaire, there were no new responses received. Eight responses had been received at this point and due to the low number of respondents, the questionnaire was additionally shared in social media, in two different Facebook groups with VAMK's international students in them.

The data received from the questionnaire was analyzed using Google Forms, SPSS and Excel. Excel was used to transform the data to numbers only so that it could be processed in SPSS. SPSS was then used to find out the means of different variables and to create a cross tables between different variables. Google Forms was thought to be an informative way for analyzing the basic data such as the age and the nationalities of the respondents.

The total population of the research was approximately 400 and 10 responses were received. Therefore, the response rate for the questionnaire was 2.5%.

4.2 Validity, Reliability and Limitations

Validity and reliability are used to estimate the trustworthiness of a research. Validity describes how well the results are measuring what was intended to be measured. The validity of the research can be compromised if a question is misunderstood by the respondent. The the research was conducted as a questionnaire and no personal contact was had with the respondents due to which there was a risk of misunderstanding something. This risk was attempted to be minimized by asking an outsider to fill out the questionnaire as a test and identify possible issues.

Reliability describes the consistency of the research. A research is reliable when it can be repeated under the same circumstances and similar result will be received. The reliability of a research can be improved by asking more than one question with the same focus. Due to the small response rate, it is likely that same results would not be received when conducting the research again. Therefore, the reliability of the research might be compromised.

The small response rate is the most important limitation of the thesis. Because of the response rate, the results should only be considered as an indication of the factors influencing international students' decision to study at VAMK. Further research would be required to confirm the results.

5 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

5.1 General Information

Of the respondents, 70% were female and the remaining 30% male. With 70%, 20-24-year-olds were the largest age group among respondents. Half of the respondents were Vietnamese and they were the only nationality that had more than one respondent. The rest of the respondents were British, Ethiopian, Italian, Norwegian and Russian. 80% the respondents were International Business students, the remaining 20% consisted of an Information Technology student, and there was also one Project Management student. Half of the respondents had begun their studies in 2016. 30% of the respondents had begun their studies in 2015 or earlier and the remaining 20% in 2017 and 2018.

20% of the respondents lived in Finland already when beginning their studies. 62.5% of those who moved to Finland when beginning their studies had not decided whether they were going to migrate to Finland permanently or stay in Finland only for the duration of completing their degree.

5.2 Decision-making Process

The focus of the thesis was on the two last stages of the international student decision-making process introduced in chapter 2.3. Majority (80%) of the respondents chose to study in Finland first and study at VAMK after that, which is in line with the international student decision-making process described by Jiani (2017). 80% of the respondents chose to study at their study programme before choosing to study at VAMK. Therefore, for VAMK's international students the decision-making process was not driven by the choice of an institution but the choice of a study programme,

Finland was the first choice for 40% of the respondents when considering where to study. 80% of those respondents who stated that Finland was not their first choice chose an English-speaking country over Finland. This is in line with Taajamo's (2005) results. Half of the students had VAMK as their first choice when choosing

an institution. Higher ranking was the main reason for choosing other institutions over VAMK by 66.7%. Personal recommendation regarding another institution was the second most common reason by 33.3%.

Because Angulo et al (2010) among other researchers questioned the rationality of students' decision-making process, this aspect of the decision was considered in the questionnaire as well. The respondents were asked to review the decision-making process and the time they had spent reviewing different options. 30% of the respondents considered that they had done careful research and comparison of different institutions before making the decision. 40% of the respondents had done a moderate amount of research and comparison on different institutions, and made their final decision based on logic. None of the respondents indicated that they had made the choice with little to no research and comparison of different institutions and made the final decision at random. 20% relied on a gut feeling rather than logic when making the final decision.

5.3 Factors Influencing the Process

The respondents rated altogether 48 factors based on their perceptions of the factors' influence on their decision to study in Finland and at VAMK. The scale by which the respondents were asked to rate these factors was 1-5. 1 = No influence at all, 2 = Slight influence, 3 = Moderate influence, 4 = strong influence, 5 = very strong influence. The respondents who had lived in Finland were instructed to skip the questions regarding the factors influencing the decision to study in Finland. The reason for this was that these responses were considered not to reflect the decision-making process of an international student.

In Tables 2 & 3 the factors influencing international students' decision are listed from the most influential to the least influential. The scores are based on the mean of all responses and they reflect the previously mentioned 1-5 scale.

Based on the average score, the high quality of education was the most influential factors among the respondents for choosing to study in Finland. Cost of living,

quality of life, and the level of English all had the mean of 4 or more, which indicates a strong influence on the decision.

Table 2. Factors influencing the choice of Finland.

Factor	Importance
High quality of education	4.25
Cost of living	4.125
Quality of life	4.125
Level of English	4
Safe place to live	3.875
Stable political situation	3.75
Entry procedures (for example getting a Visa)	3.5
Opportunities to work after studying	3.5
Degree from Finland recognized at home	3.125
Simple application process	2.875
Information about studying in Finland easy to obtain	2.875
Culture or lifestyle	2.625
Opportunities to work while studying	2.5
Attitudes towards foreigners	2.5
Recommendation from someone who has lived in Finland	2.25
Recommendation from someone who has studied in Finland	2.25
Nordic country	2.25
Nature	2.25
Cost of travelling home	2.125
Geographical location	2.125
Someone you know lives in Finland	2
Exotic destination	1.625
Finnish design	1.5

Based on the results, the factor influencing the respondents' decision to study at VAMK the most was that the study programme was fully in English. Tuition fee was the second most influential factor and having the desired study programme available the third.

Table 3. Factors influencing the choice of VAMK.

Factor	Importance
Study programme fully in English	4.9
Tuition fee	4
Desired study programme available	3.9
International recognition of the study programme	3.7
International class	3.7
Quality of teaching	3.6
Content of the study programme	3.5
Location of Vaasa	3.5
Possibility of attending the entrance exam outside Finland	3.5
Opportunities after graduation	3.2
Scholarship	3.2
Recommendation from a past or a current student	3.2
Easy admission to the study programme	3.1
VAMK's website	3.1
School facilities	3
Presence of other international students	2.9
Reputation	2.9
Accommodation available easily	2.9
Recommendation from a friend or a family member	2.6
Vaasa perceived to be an interesting city	2.5
Ranking	2.4
Presence of other country nationals	1.9
VAMK's social media	1.8

The respondents were given the opportunity of mentioning additional reasons that affected their choice to study in Finland. Two responses were received in this question and both mentioned free education as both respondents had began their studies before 2017.

5.3.1 Reputation and Image

In chapter 2.4.2., reputation was identified to be one of the factors that several researches find having a high influence on international students' decision to study at a specific institution. However, as represented in Table 3. reputation had only a moderate influence on the international students' decision to study at VAMK.

Table 4 is the cross table of the reputation's influence on the decision to study at VAMK and the respondent's situation when beginning their studies. Contradictory to Alfattal's (2017) results regarding the reputation, the respondents who were planning to stay in Finland only for the duration of the degree stated that reputation had no influence at all on their decision to study at VAMK. The respondents who were open to migrate permanently or leave after finishing their studies rated the influence of the reputation on their decision strong or very strong.

Table 4. Crosstable: Reputation and situation when beginning studies.

What was your situation when beginning your studies? * Reputation Crosstabulation

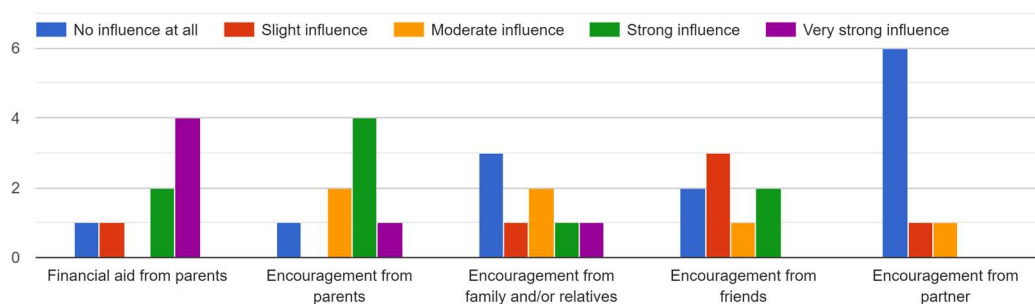
Count		Reputation				Total
		No influence at all	Slight influence	Strong influence	Very strong influence	
What was your situation when beginning your studies?	Lived before starting to study	1	1	0	0	2
	Intended to migrate permanently	0	0	1	0	1
	Intended to stay only for the duration of the degree	2	0	0	0	2
	Open to migrate permanently or leave after completing a degree	0	1	2	2	5
Total		3	2	3	2	10

5.3.2 Information Sources and Influencers

Figure 2 represents the influencers who affected the respondents' decision to study in Finland. Of the students that moved to Finland when beginning their studies, 50% considered financial support from parents to have had a very strong influence on their decision. 50% also considered the influence of encouragement from parents to have had a strong influence on their decision. Encouragement from family and/or relatives 75% stated that influence from partner had no influence at all on their decision.

Figure 2. Influencers.

15. How did the following influence your decision to study in Finland?



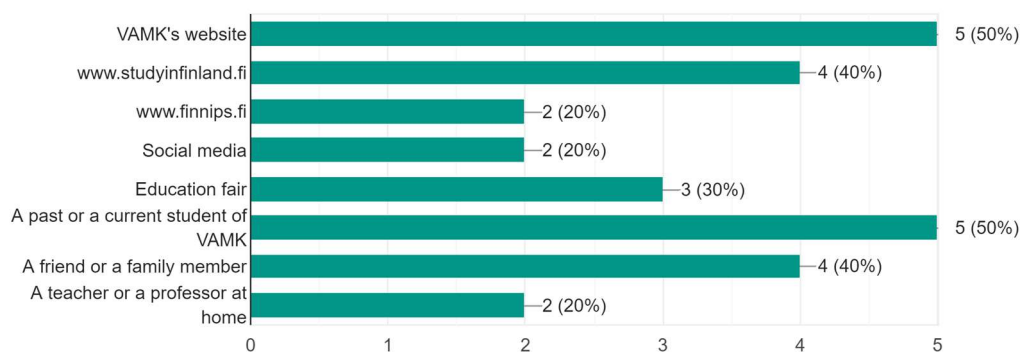
The first information for two respondents was www.studyinfinland.fi. VAMK's website, www.finnips.fi, social media, education fair, a past or a current student of VAMK, a friend or a family member and a teacher or a professor at home had all one respondent. A study abroad consultant and a higher education consultant were both options that were added on behalf of the respondents.

Figure 3 represents the information sources in which the respondents relied on the most when searching for information about VAMK. 50% of the respondents relied on VAMK's website and a past or a current student of VAMK the most out of the information sources. www.studyinfinland.fi and a friend or a family member were relied on the second most.

Figure 3. The information sources most relied on.

9. Which information source(s) did you rely on the most when researching different institutions?

10 responses



The respondents were given the opportunity to identify the best ways for reaching the students in their home country. The most frequently mentioned channel was social media. Social media was mentioned by 3 of 5 of the Vietnamese students. Visiting the local high schools or higher education fairs was also mentioned often.

6 7PS VAMK

The results of the empirical research combined with theory to analyze VAMK's current marketing mix. The 7Ps marketing mix was used to get an understanding of VAMK's current activities for marketing the international degree programmes to students outside Finland. After the model was conducted, recommendations were given based on it.

6.1 Product

VAMK has three degree programmes available in English. These programmes are Bachelor of Business Administration (International Business), Bachelor of Engineering (Information Technology) and Master of Engineering (Project Management). All the programmes are fully in English and with an international class. The students studying international business have the opportunity to study a double degree in Germany or in Poland. They also are encouraged to attend an exchange abroad during their studies. The Degree Programme in Information Technology is responding to the needs of the Vaasa region as it is based on the local energy industry. The Degree Programme in Project Management has been developed based on the feedback from the local industry. (VAMK 2019)

Enache (2011) explains that higher education marketing mix can consider the product to be either the education, the student or both. Based on the description of the engineering programmes' development being based on the local industry and the additional opportunities provided to the student, VAMK appears to use both approaches.

The study programmes content had a mean of 3.5 in the questionnaire results indicating that it had between a moderate and a strong influence on the students' decision to choose VAMK. International aspects of the study programme had a strong influence on the decision as well as study programme being fully in English received a mean of 4.9, international recognition the mean of 3.7, and international class the mean of 3.7.

6.2 Price

VAMK's tuition fees for non-EU/EEA students are 4,000 EUR in an academic year for the bachelor's degree programmes and 5,000 EUR for the master's degree programmes. At VAMK, the students obliged to pay a tuition fee can apply for a scholarship. The scholarship is 5000 EUR in an academic year. The scholarship will be granted if a student receives 55 ECTS in an academic year. In addition, the students pay for their living costs and material costs. (VAMK 2019)

Cost has been recognized to be a major factor influencing the decision of where to study. The questionnaire results support this idea as the cost of living was the second most influential factor affecting the choice to study in Finland with the mean of 4.125, and the tuition fee was the second most influential factor affecting the choice to study at VAMK with the mean of 4. Scholarship, however, had a moderate influence on the decision with a mean of 3.2. Also, the influence of financial aid from parents was considered to be very strong by 50% of the respondents. However, as majority of the respondents began their studies before the tuition fees were introduced, the result reflects that having no tuition fees was a major factor affecting the choice of an institution previously.

6.3 Place

According to Enache (2011), the perceptions on the place in the higher education marketing mix is dependent on the perceptions on the product. As stated previously, VAMK uses both the approach of the student as the product and the approach of the education as the product. Therefore, place in the marketing mix must be considered from both perspectives. VAMK's cooperation with local companies is the main method for delivering student to the labor market. The knowledge is delivered to the student using an online portal, contact teaching, and online teaching. VAMK uses direct distribution in delivering the knowledge to the student. (VAMK 2019)

The perceptions of Vaasa being an interesting city had with a mean of 3.5 between a moderate to a strong influence on the decision.

6.4 Promotion

The main marketing communication channel for marketing the programmes for international students is VAMK's website. VAMK is also marketed by The Finnish Network for International Programmes (FINNIPS) which is a cooperation network including 13 Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland. Their main operations include to organize entrance exams and attend education fairs and exhibitions abroad. In addition, VAMK has social media pages translated to Chinese, Vietnamese and Russian that are maintained by VAMK's students. Students visiting their home countries are also encouraged to visit their old schools and give presentations regarding VAMK there. (Finnips 2019; VAMK 2019)

Based on the research results, VAMK's website had a moderate influence on the students' decision to study at VAMK. The average score for this was 3.1. VAMK's social media, however, only had a slight impact with score of 1.8 on the decision. Social media was the most frequently mentioned factor when asked what the best way for reaching the students in the respondents' home country would be. VAMK's website and a recommendation from a past or a current student were considered to be the most reliable information sources by the respondents.

6.5 People

In VAMK's marketing mix, the most important people are the employees. From the international student perspective, the most important employees that influence the perception of the service provided by VAMK are the teachers of and the study office employees. The study office employees are an important part of influencing the students' perceptions on VAMK because they give advice on the practical matters related to the studies. The teachers are a part of the production of the service and, therefore, influence the students' perceptions of the service directly. The students' perceptions of the teachers are measured at VAMK after each course, as VAMK's students are required to give feedback on the quality of teaching and the course content. The feedback is given to the teacher and the head of the programme and is reviewed yearly in a development discussion. (VAMK 2019)

Quality of teaching received an average of 3.6 which indicates that its influence to choosing VAMK was between moderate and strong.

6.6 Process

The application process for international students to study in Finland is similar for different institutions. The application is done online at www.studyinfo.fi. For applications to programmes included in the same field, the student will attend to only one entrance exam. VAMK is a part of the FINNIPS network that organizes the entrance examinations also outside Finland. In 2019, the entrance examinations were organized in Brazil, China, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, India, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Nepal, Russia, USA and Vietnam. VAMK's most important process from the international student perspective is, therefore, managed by an outsourced organization. (Finnips 2019)

The possibility of attending the entrance examination outside Finland had the average rating of 3.5 which indicates that it was considered to have between a moderate and a strong influence.

6.7 Physical Evidence

VAMK's facilities are modern and well-equipped. Technobothnia, which is a laboratory for technology and research allows VAMK's engineering students to access modern technology. At the campus, VAMK has computers for the students to use freely and possibilities for utilizing, for example, audiovisual equipment. VAMK's students have the access to Tritonia University library which is located right next to the campus. VAMK's logo is used in the theses (VAMK 2019)

According to the results obtained from the questionnaire, school facilities were moderately important when deciding to study at VAMK. The mean score was 3.

6.8 Recommendations

The aim of the 7Ps marketing mix is to help create a clear and a holistic marketing strategy. VAMK's marketing mix revealed that VAMK's marketing mix has a

good foundation. However, some aspects of it could be improved to attract more international students to VAMK. The image of an institution has been found, for example, by Ahmad et al (2015) to have a high influence on the international students' decision to study in a specific institution. Strydom (2015) emphasizes the importance of image in service marketing. Based on the empirical research and 7Ps analysis, VAMK could benefit from strengthening its institution image. Also, according to Branco & Oliveira (2016), a positive institution image also results in positive Word-of-Mouth. This should be noted because the questionnaire results indicated that recommendation from a past or a current student was considered to be a reliable information source when researching information regarding VAMK. The recommendations to VAMK are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of recommendations to VAMK.

Product	Product is currently good and responding to the needs of the industry and the students. Quality of the study programmes from the students' perspective should be monitored and updated regularly.
Price	Tuition fees among the most influential factors for choosing VAMK. Price identified to be a highly influential component in the marketing mix. Tuition fees should be monitored to ensure that they respond to the students' perceptions regarding the quality of the education.
Place	Methods for delivering the education are efficient. Direct distribution is used which ensures the control over the quality of the education
Promotion	Promotional activities should be more concise. The image of an institution influences the decision-making of international students strongly. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social media marketing should be consistent - Website should have only one address - Website and English social media should be linked - Important information, such as, tuition fees, content of the programme, and information about teaching should be easy to find
People	The interaction between study office and the international students should be monitored and developed in necessary.
Process	The enrollment process is managed by an outsourced organization. Therefore, this process can not be influenced by VAMK.
Physical Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VAMK's physical facilities are modern and high quality - VAMK's logo should be used more to strengthen its image, for example, by selling t-shirts with VAMK's logo to students

The product in VAMK's marketing mix considered the needs of the student and the industry. In the empirical research, it was found that most respondents chose their

study programme before choosing to study at VAMK. The quality of the study programmes should be monitored and updated regularly as the experiences with the product influence the customers' perceptions of the company (Proctor 2002).

The price component in VAMK's marketing mix should be monitored carefully. In the empirical research, it was found out that the price influences the decision to study in Finland and at VAMK strongly. Because most of the respondents began their studies before tuition fees for non-EU or EEA students were established, there is not enough data to review the current international students' perceptions of the established tuition fees. According to Ivy (2008), the price of the education can influence the students' perceptions on the quality of education. Therefore, VAMK should consider if the current price indicates the desired level of quality.

Place in VAMK's marketing mix responds to the needs of the students and the industry. The methods of delivering the education are up-to-date and using direct distribution ensures that VAMK is in control of the delivery process.

Promotion in VAMK's marketing mix requires the most attention as promotional activities are the most direct way for influencing a company image. The largest factors that prevents VAMK from having a consistent image are its current advertising activities. Content in social media should be focused on as based on the questionnaire results, the international students think it is the most efficient way to reach students in their home countries. VAMK's students are creating content for their country nationals independently. While the students are more likely to know what kind of content should be created to make VAMK attractive for the locals, there should be marketing communication guidelines designed together with the responsible students to develop the communication to a more consistent direction. VAMK does not have any social media pages that are currently creating content in English. To begin creating content in English, VAMK should either create a new Facebook page for VAMK in English or begin to translate the posts on the Finnish page in English.

Based on the results received from the empirical research, VAMK's international students relied on VAMK's website and personal recommendations the most when

finding information about VAMK. Therefore, VAMK's website should be the most important marketing communication tool in VAMK's promotion mix. In the results, it was found that the students use rational thinking when decision to study at VAMK and do moderate research on average regarding different institution. Therefore, it should be ensured that the information that is important for the students is easy to obtain from the website. Based on the questionnaire results, at least the tuition fees, information about the content and teaching of the study programme, and information regarding the entrance exams should be clearly available. VAMK current English websites have two addresses www.puv.fi and www.vamk.fi. It is recommended that all the content would be only on www.vamk.fi. To improve the consistency discussed before, VAMK should also link the social media pages maintained by VAMK's students to VAMK's English website.

VAMK's teachers are reviewed after every course and the feedback from students is used in their yearly development discussions. However, the communication between the employees of VAMK's study office and the international students should also be monitored as well. The most important process in higher education institution is the enrollment process. Because the enrollment is not managed by VAMK, they can not influence the effectiveness of this process. VAMK's physical facilities are modern and enhance a positive image. VAMK's logo could be, however, utilized more to strengthen the image of VAMK. VAMK could, for example, begin to sell t-shirts with VAMK's logo to the students.

7 CONCLUSION

The primary research question of the thesis was: How to attract international students to VAMK? This research question was answered with the help of a set of secondary questions. These questions included:

- How do international students decide where to study?
- Which factors influence the decision?
- How did the current international students choose to study at VAMK?
- What is the state of VAMK's current activities taken to attract more international students?

The first secondary question was approached through the theoretical framework. It was found out that international student decision-making process has three stages. In the first stage, the student decides to study outside their home country. In the second stage, the student decides in which country they wish to study in. In the third stage, the student decides in which city or an institution they wish to study at. VAMK's international students mainly follow this process as they decide the country before the institution. According to some researchers, such as, Greenbank (2009) students do not use rational approach when making the decision where to study. VAMK's international students, however, made the final decision based on logic and did, on average, a moderate research on different institutions.

When reviewing past literature to find out which factors influence the decision, it became clear that the factors vary a lot depending on the destination country and the institution. Push factors that push the student out of their home country and pull factors that pull the student to their destination are often used to describe the factors that influence the decision. Reputation and image of the institution has been found by different researchers to influence the decision. Different influencers, such as the students' parents, are important factors influencing the students' decision-making process. Personal recommendations have been found to be considered a reliable information source by international students when researching different institutions.

VAMK being a Finnish institution had a strong influence on the decision to study at VAMK. The factors influencing the decision to study in Finland were reviewed as well because when constructing the theoretical framework, it was found out that the image of a country influences the image of an institution (Herrero et al 2015). Finland's high quality of education, cost of living, quality of life, and level of English influenced the choice the most. VAMK's having study programmes fully in English, their tuition fees, having a desired programme available, and international recognition of the programme were the factors influencing the decision to study at VAMK the most. The students who chose another institution before VAMK chose those institutions mainly because of a higher ranking or a personal recommendation. The students relied on VAMK's website and personal recommendations the most when making the decision to study at VAMK.

7Ps service marketing mix was used to answer the final secondary question: what can be done to increase the attractiveness of VAMK? VAMK's 7Ps marketing mix was conducted by combining the information gathered for the theoretical framework and by analyzing the results received from the questionnaire. VAMK's current marketing mix was found out to have a good foundation, but the activities were found to be insufficient for creating a strong image of VAMK.

To answer the primary research question, international students can be attracted to VAMK by:

- Maintaining the quality of the study programmes
- Maintaining the tuition fees in a level that is attractive to the students
- Using social media to enhance VAMK's institution image
- Ensuring that information is easy to obtain from VAMK's website
- Using the logo to enhance VAMK's institution image by, for example, selling t-shirts to students
- Maintaining the quality of the teaching

7.1 Future Research

This thesis gives only a general idea of the different aspects that influence VAMK's international students' decision-making. Interesting aspects of continuing this research would be to assess the impact of cultural aspects to a student's decision. Other interesting research topics would be to research the student retention and possible reasons for international students to transfer to a different university after beginning their studies

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APPENDIX 1.

Questionnaire

1. Gender: Female/Male/Other
2. Age: 19 or under / 20-24 / 25-29 / 30-34 / 35 or over
3. Nationality:
4. Degree Programme: Information Technology / International Business / Project Management
5. When did you begin your studies? 2015 or earlier / 2016 / 2017 / 2018 / 2019
6. Which of the following did you decide first?
 - a. To study in Finland
 - b. To study at VAMK
7. Which of the following did you decide first?
 - a. To study at VAMK
 - b. To study at your study program
8. Where did you first hear from VAMK?
 - a. VAMK's website
 - b. www.studyinfinland.fi
 - c. www.finnips.fi
 - d. Social media
 - e. A past or a current student of VAMK
 - f. A friend or a family member
 - g. Education fair
 - h. A teacher or a professor at home
 - i. Other
9. Which information source did you rely on the most when researching different institutions?
 - a. VAMK's website
 - b. www.studyinfinland.fi
 - c. www.finnips.fi
 - d. Social media
 - e. A past or a current student of VAMK
 - f. A friend or a family member
 - g. Education fair
 - h. A teacher or a professor at home
 - i. Other
10. Was Finland your choice for studying a degree in?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No, the options before Finland were English-speaking countries
 - c. No, the options before Finland were other Nordic countries
 - d. No, the options before Finland were other than described above
 - e. I don't remember
11. Was VAMK your first choice for studying a degree at?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

c. I don't remember

12. If you answered no to the previous question, why did you choose other institutions over VAMK ?

- a. The study programmes were more interesting
- b. The content of the same study programme was more interesting
- c. Someone you know studies or has studied at the institution
- d. Recommendations regarding other institutions better
- e. Higher ranking
- f. Other

13. Which of the following describes your decision-making process best?

- a. Careful research and comparison of different institutions
- b. Moderate research and comparison of different institutions
- c. Little to no research and comparison of different institutions
- d. The final decision made based on logic
- e. The final decision made based on a gut feeling
- f. The final decision made at random

14. Which of the following options described your situation the best when you began your studies:

- a. Lived in Finland already before starting to study
- b. Intended to migrate to Finland permanently
- c. Intended to stay in Finland only for the duration of the degree
- d. Open to migrate to Finland permanently or leave after completing a degree
- e. Other

If you were already living in Finland before beginning your studies, skip to question 17.

15. How did the following influence your decision to study in Finland?

1 = no influence at all, 2 = slight influence, 3 = moderate influence, 4 = strong influence, 5 = very strong influence

Financial aid from parents

Encouragement from parents

Encouragement from family and/or relatives

Encouragement from friends

Encouragement from partner

16. Rate the influence of the following factors on your decision to study in Finland.

1 = no influence at all, 2 = slight influence, 3 = moderate influence, 4 = strong influence, 5 = very strong influence

Simple application process to higher education institutions

Opportunities to work while studying

Opportunities to work after studying

Level of English

High quality of education

Safe place to live

Cost of living

Culture or lifestyle

Quality of life

Stable political situation

Entry procedures (for example getting a Visa)

Degree from Finland recognized at home

Information on studying in Finland easy to obtain from the Internet

Exotic destination

Cost of travelling home

Someone you know lives in Finland

Recommendation from someone who has lived in Finland

Recommendation from someone who has studied in Finland

Nordic country

Finnish design

Nature

Geographical location

Exotic destination

Attitudes towards foreigners

17. Were there any other factors influencing your choice of Finland?

18. Rate the influence of the following factors on your decision to study at VAMK.

1 = no influence at all, 2 = slight influence, 3 = moderate influence, 4 = strong influence, 5 = very strong influence

Desired study programme available

Study programme fully in English

Easy admission to the programme

Content of the study programme

International recognition of study programme

International class

Opportunities after graduation

Presence of country nationals

Presence of international students

Ranking

Reputation

Quality of teaching

School facilities

Tuition fee

Scholarship

Recommendation from a friend or a family member

Recommendation from a past or a current student

Accommodation available easily

VAMK's social media

VAMK's website

Location of Vaasa

Vaasa perceived to be an interesting city

Possibility of attending an Entrance Exam outside Finland

19. Were there any other factors influencing your choice of VAMK?
20. In your opinion, what would be the best way to reach students at your home country?