

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Reimagining International Students in Public Discourses: Can Media Facilitate the Inclusion of International Students in Society?

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## Abstract

The inclusion of international students in campuses and societies is an objective of many countries. While such policies are often accompanied by well-intentioned supportive practices and discourses, these activities may actually produce paradoxes where immigrant groups are excluded as “others” (e.g., Kangas-Müller et al., 2024). Hence, in this paper, by investigating articles published by two primary newspaper outlets from 2010 to 2023, we analyse the media framings and agencies of international students in Finland, a country that is considered a latecomer in both recruiting international students and welcoming immigrants to society. Through these analyses, we identify four main framings to represent international students: as numbers, as labour, as economic resources, and as social others. Three agency categories position international students as predetermined, active, and constrained. We conclude with a discussion of what is not present in Finnish media and the possible implications of public discourses as mediators of inclusive (or exclusive) language and practices.

**Keywords:** content analysis, Finland, international students, media, student agency

## Introduction

International students not only enter educational institutions, but they also become part of the complex social, economic, and political dynamics of their host countries. For host countries, this education-based immigration often serves different purposes, including revenue generation and demands for skilled labour (e.g., Ziguras & McBurnie, 2015). At times, the realities that international students encounter are somewhat contradictory. For instance, the receiving country may recruit international students for their eventual entry into local labour markets, yet students face significant barriers when they wish to stay (Paltridge et al., 2014). Many countries and institutions have policies and practices to foster inclusivity, yet, at times, these well-intended policies and practices may contribute to counter-effects which “other” international students (see Kangas-Müller et al., 2024). One example may be the “international talent” narrative attached to preferred skilled labour in policy discourses.

National governments have drafted internationalisation policies to operate on a global scale, including major objectives to recruit international students (Elken et al., 2023; Ledger & Kawalilak, 2020; Lomer, 2018). While many rationales for recruiting international students are mentioned in these policies, the financial value and labour significance of this student group seem especially important to national governments and their interests (Jokila, 2020; Lomer, 2018; Stein & Andreotti, 2016). A growing body of research also indicates that despite proactive policies on recruiting international students, their stay in host destinations has not been without problems, including experiences related to racism and discrimination (Lee, 2007). These issues became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed differentiated policies, racist rhetoric, and violence targeting international students, especially those from China (Koo et al., 2023; Ramia, 2021).

Finland, the national context for this study, has been a proponent of internationalisation policies, especially since the beginning of the 2000s. Through the establishment of separate bachelor’s and master’s programmes taught in English, Finland has facilitated an influx of international students. Given that the number of international students arriving in Finland has quadrupled over the last twenty years (Vipunen, 2023), it can be argued that the Finnish government has succeeded in its aims. However, the integration of international students into campuses, society, and labour markets seems to have become an issue (see Jokila, 2020). Although much attention has been paid to increasing the number of international students, such as by executing marketing campaigns, it is less clear how responsive and ready Finnish society is for the transformations resulting from diversified student and citizen populations.

Media can be perceived as playing the role of a mediator in the inclusion of international students as it shapes and disseminates public discourses. Previous studies have analysed various representations of international students in national media spaces (e.g., Brooks, 2017), as well as in social media globally (Mittelmeier & Cockayne, 2022). We aim to contribute to this body of literature by investigating Finnish news outlets as examples. First, we analyse in which kinds of frames the international students are positioned and, second, the agency in which these students are

constructed. Drawing on these framing and agency conceptualisations, we explore the representations of international students in Finnish media outlets as mechanisms to communicate specific meanings to Finnish society. This matter is relevant for any society hosting international students, especially for those sectors facing difficulties in including newcomers in society and labour markets. The data consist of 107 news articles from two major media sites, *Yleisradio Oy (Yle)*, the national broadcasting company of Finland, and *Helsingin Sanomat (HS)*, a major newspaper in Finland. Each of the articles were published after a national emphasis on internationalisation policies, generally, and on international student recruitment, specifically, from the 2010s onwards. In analysing these news pieces, we explore the framings and agency in which international students are situated.

## Media as a Mediator in Society

Different media outlets disseminate representations and ideas about international students. Earlier studies on the representations of international students have examined both legacy (e.g., Brooks, 2017; Collins, 2006) and social media (e.g., Mittelmeier & Cockayne, 2022). Studies have mainly focused on major Anglophone country contexts and demonstrated evidence of racialised and other controversial narratives about international students. For example, Paltridge et al. (2014) identified three separate and contradictory themes in the Australian media: economic policies denoting the significance of international students to the Australian economy, victims of racist and violent acts, and exploiters of the immigration system. The third theme presented contradictory views. On the one hand, international students were welcomed; on the other hand, the government made the transition from student to permanent resident more difficult. In Canada, international students were presented in the media in dual terms, either through positive language or negative language, such as threats to or users of the system (Anderson, 2019). Similarly, Lee et al. (2019) found that despite the important role of international students in Canada, local media portrayed them as voiceless. Bodis's (2021) study analysed a TV discussion show, pointing out the "double deficit" of international students' English language skills, as constructed in the media. Instead of recognising the many languages spoken by international students, the media highlighted their English language deficits in the Australian context.

A few studies have specifically focused on Asian international students. Collins (2006) analysed New Zealand's media content and identified three overlapping categories which represented media portrayals of Asian international students: economic objects, exotic others, and social problems. The first category was perceived as predominant, yet connected to the other two categories. Brooks's (2017) study in the UK context linked the discourses on international students to neoliberal and neocolonial narratives. According to her study, UK newspapers emphasised the pressure stemming from the Chinese education system, competitiveness, and some pedagogical stereotypes ascribed to Chinese students. The main framing of the Asian

students in the UK media was connected to economic interests and depicted in a positive tone. In their analysis of Chinese international students' representations in the U.S. media, Suspitsyna and Shalka (2019) argued that media portrayals had negative effects, for instance, on campus culture. Kim's (2020) study in the Korean context also showed "othering" in the depictions of international students. Globally, Mittelmeier and Cochoyne Cockayne (2022) examined international students' representations on Twitter (now X) during the COVID-19 pandemic and found two contrasting and mutable ways to discuss this student group. Initially, the students were presented as transmitters of the virus; eventually, the tone shifted to a more compassionate direction. Mittelmeier and Cockayne (2022) also noted that the narratives on international students were racially motivated, with Asian—and particularly Chinese—students discussed in a discriminatory tone.

These studies demonstrate different and contradictory ways of presenting international students in the media; a dominant frame is the economic sphere. As Yi and Jung (2015) pointed out, studies on public discourses about international students have mainly analysed the discursive marginalisation of non-Western students in Western countries. Previous research on media coverage of international students has focused on major Anglophone country contexts, concentrating on Asian student representations (e.g., Brooks, 2017). Despite the introduction of tuition fees in some Nordic countries, the discourses attached to international students may be attached to broader discussions concerning the welfare state.

Media can also be examined as a mediator in society. Jokila and Mathies (2024) showed that Finnish national practices in crisis communication during the pandemic were not fully inclusive, while international students' approaches to media usage varied. Access to information in host countries is important to enact the fullest possible mobile "citizenship" in the given context. As argued by Georgiou (2013), media use among minority groups is complex and provides a lens through which their sense of cultural and political belonging can be studied. Besides being an information disseminator, media can influence whether society chooses to employ inclusive or exclusive discourse practices.

We perceive the media as focal actors in creating meanings regarding different groups of people, including international students. This investigation consists of frame analysis (Entman, 1993), leading to an understanding of the purposeful frames to which the students are attached in the media content. News articles can be defined as performing a purposeful act of selecting one representation of international students over another to depict a theme, person, or event. Entman (1993) explains this process: "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). This strategy calls for approaching media outlets through the frames in which they situate people, such as international students.

In this study, besides framing, we also focus on international students' agency that is constructed in the media and has drawn increasing interest in the field studying international students (Inouye et al., 2023). Lipura and Collins (2020) observed some researchers' tendency to depict international students in narratives that focus on

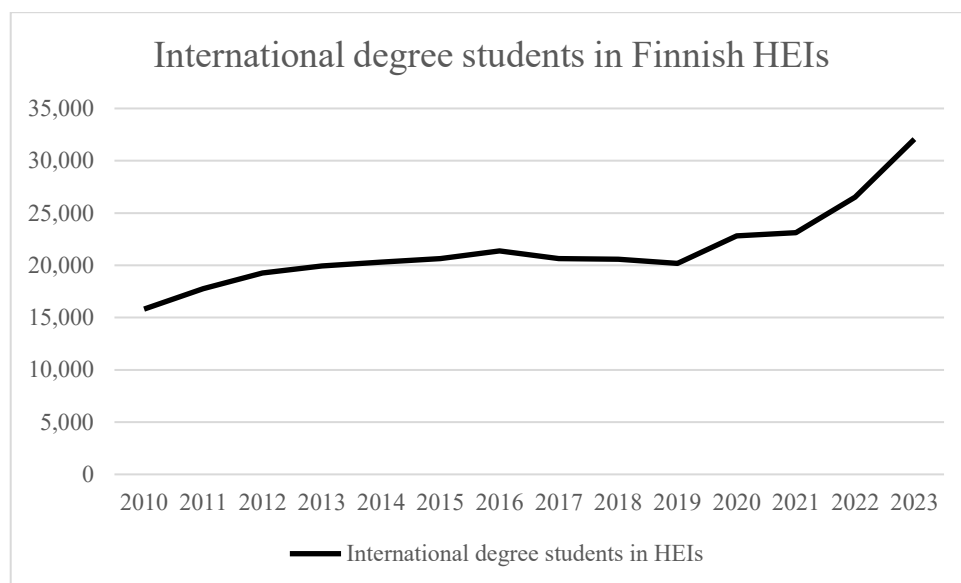
academic, financial, and agency deficiencies. Other researchers also pointed out the problematic framing of international students as a vulnerable group since such a framing might undermine their agency (e.g., Deuchar, 2022).

Kettle (2005) studied agency as a discursive practice that highlighted the agentic (rather than passive) position taken by international students when navigating an Australian university. Tran and Vu (2017) identified four forms of agency. First, agency in mobility refers to students' activities in building their own lives. Second, through needs-response agency, students identify their needs for additional support (e.g., in learning processes). Third, agency as struggle and resistance involves how students navigate situations where they exercise agency (e.g., informing others about their difficult experiences). Lastly, collective agency for contestation denotes students' joint actions in responding to a situation, such as the closure of an educational institution.

We consider news outlets to have two kinds of agencies: (1) the agency of media houses and journalists writing news articles and (2) agency as an output constructed in news outlets. The latter is of interest in our study. To understand how agency is constructed, we refer to discursive agency (Leipold & Winkel, 2017). Leipold and Winkel (2017) used discursive agency to understand how actors became politically relevant in discursive practices. We change this setting by focusing on international students' discursive agency that is constructed in news articles. This agency is then produced from word choices, ideas, and contextualisations. An understanding of agency constructions can reflect the space where international students are expected to take their positions in society and how they do so.

## **Finland as the Context of this Study**

Internationalisation policies in higher education came to prominence in the 1990s after Finland joined the European Union (EU). The country's policy objectives were communicated in its internationalisation strategies in 2001, 2009, and 2017, as well as its internationalisation vision in 2022. At the beginning, the focus was on sending Finnish students abroad and receiving international students from other countries in an exchange (Ministry of Education, 2009). Alongside this initiative, especially from 2009 onwards, Finland has shifted its policy attention to recruiting international students. The expansion objectives were initially rationalised based on the need to internationalise campuses and attract skilled labour; later, expansion was rationalised through the pursuit of financial interests as the country introduced tuition fees for students outside the EU and EEA countries in 2017 (see, e.g., Jokila, 2020). Figure 1 shows the increases in the numbers of international students pursuing degrees offered in higher education institutions.

**Figure 1: International Degree Students Pursuing Degrees in Finnish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)<sup>1</sup>**

Despite this demonstrated success in welcoming more international students, there is an ongoing discussion regarding how international students integrate into Finnish campuses, society, and labour markets (Jokila, 2020). A core discussion concerns the limited Finnish language skills that are perceived to be an obstacle to employment (Korhonen, 2014). The government has initiated the Talent Boost programme that, among other goals, aims to “retain international talent” in Finland, stating that “it is important for international students, researchers, and workers to find jobs that correspond to their skills, make progress in their careers and feel that they are part of Finnish society” (Talent Boost, 2023). Finland’s visa and residence permit procedures have also been under scrutiny due to slow visa handling processes, among other problems. In summary, the state has focused on providing international students with structural ease in staying in Finland, although the newly elected government has diminished their opportunities to stay in the country after graduation. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected international students’ mobility and life in Finland in many ways (e.g., their social lives) (Filippou & Jokila, 2024; Jokila & Filippou, 2023).

## Empirical Approach

In this paper, we examine how international students are framed in the public discourse in Finland and what kind of agency is constructed within these frames. An understanding of how international students are discussed in media coverage is critical when the national policy objective is to recruit more international students to Finnish

<sup>1</sup> Includes students from bachelor to doctoral level.

campuses. We analyse news pieces from two legacy media companies, *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Yle*, both of which publish their news online. *Helsingin Sanomat* is the largest newspaper in Finland by number of subscriptions, while *Yle* is Finland's national media company for public broadcasting. These companies reach a significant percentage of the Finnish population online, and *HS* is also available in print. Finnish people also trust media sources, in general, and *Yle* is especially well-trusted (EVA, 2025).

To collect data, an article search was conducted in the electronic database of *HS* (2010–2021) and the web page of *Yle* (2010–March 2023). First, we collected articles from these databases using the search terms “foreign student” and “international student” in Finnish to ensure that the target audience consisted of Finnish-speaking citizens. Second, we reviewed all articles and excluded the opinion pieces, editorials, columns, articles about exchange students, and articles that were not about international students. Both authors participated in this process; to ensure similar exclusion criteria, we discussed this process along the way. The final data comprised 63 *HS* and 44 *Yle* articles. We excluded pictures from the analysis. Most of the articles were published under a section regarding domestic news; very few came from sections devoted to the economy or politics. We translated the quotations from Finnish to English.

We used content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) to identify the framing through which international students were presented in the Finnish news media. First, both authors individually made raw observations about what was made salient in relation to international students in each article. We then identified the kinds of information about international students that were made evident in the news pieces by analysing the repetitions and placements of the information in the texts (Entman, 1993). Second, we discussed our observations together and formulated seven framings. We repeated this process of individual analyses and joint discussions several times. We continued individually coding the articles into the framings and developed the latter during our discussions in light of the findings from previous conceptualisations and our individual analyses. Finally, we distilled four framings and coded the articles into those that they predominantly represented. It is important to note that these framings overlap. After conducting the frame analysis, we continued to analyse the agency in which the media content portrayed the international students. This analysis helped us to go beyond mere content representation and understand how international students were perceived as actors in society. In this part, we conducted inductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) and identified three agentic positions: predetermined, active, and constrained. There is also overlap in these agency constructions. The authors established credibility through data triangulation by using two news outlets and researcher triangulation in comparing analyses and developing findings.

We, the researchers and authors of this paper, are Finnish citizens who have studied and worked in Finland for most of our careers. This insider position makes it possible for us to understand the news pieces in the broader societal context. However, it may also hinder interpretations that a researcher outside the country's context may produce. To mitigate this risk, we have developed our study and analysis together by critically reflecting on our ideas and understandings.

## Findings

Here, we discuss the four main framings identified in our analysis: international students as numbers, as labour, as economic resources, and as social others. One-third of the articles framed international students as economic resources (Table 1). The tuition fees were implemented during the period we examined; it was the most reported single topic. Also, the Covid-19 pandemic occurred during the analysed timeline and, hence, was impactful since 2020.

**Table 1: Frequencies of the Frames**

Frame	Total	%
Students as numbers	26	24
Students as labour	24	22
Students as economic resources	39	36
Students as social others	18	17
Total	107	100

### Frames in News Outlets

#### Students as Numbers

*Numbers* constituted the first frame through which international students were presented in the media. This form was very plain and often showed increasing (and at times decreasing) numbers of international students or applicants in a particular higher education institution, accompanied with comparisons to the figures in previous years. Occasionally, this knowledge was also combined with information regarding the countries that were represented in the statistics. The increase in the number of educational programmes was discussed as well. This increase may demonstrate the recent phenomenon of welcoming a larger international student body into the campuses, especially in some of the regional higher education institutions: “International education attracts students from abroad to [town in Finland]. Only in the [one of the universities of applied sciences], there are just under 300 international students” (Yle, 2010). Publishing this kind of news article reveals the significance of this particular student group to Finnish society.

In the following news excerpt, such an increase has resulted in pressures to accommodate the growing student body:

Every year in higher education institutions in [city in Finland], 5000 new students start their studies. It is a harsh competition over free apartments, and most international students are left behind Finnish students. Many international



students have been forced to leave their studies in [city in Finland] when it has been impossible to find an apartment (Yle, 2013).

This extract pointed out infrastructural shortages while positioning Finnish and international students against each other in a growing competition over housing while pointing out solutions for the issue. Another article discussed issues related to entering Finland and the slowness of its administrative processes. International student numbers were discussed in terms of lost opportunity, which especially related to the slowness of the visa procedures and residence permit application processes. Slow visa procedures were perceived as hindrances to students' entry to Finland from outside the EU and EEA countries: "[One of the universities of applied sciences] accepted over sixty students from outside the European economic area, but over one-third of those accepted could not receive residence permit decisions on time to start their studies" (Yle, 2019). International student enrolment figures were also discussed in terms of numbers as these were expected to drop after the introduction of tuition fees (in 2017).

### Students as Labour

*Labour* was the second framing of international students discussed in the articles. International students were connected to the broader societal changes that Finland was experiencing. The recruitment of international experts was offered as a solution: "In Finland, the population is getting older and the share of the working-age population is decreasing, so international experts are also needed from abroad" (Yle, 2021). This case is similar to those of many other Western countries experiencing declining population trends. While news pieces pointed out this need for labour, they also highlighted the problems that international students were facing in their attempts to enter labour markets in Finland. For instance, the labour market situation is presented in this extract: "Less than half of the international students who are awarded a Finnish degree find employment in Finland, states CIMO's<sup>2</sup> statistics" (HS, 2014). These kinds of articles were often accompanied by interviews with international students who either experienced difficulties or succeeded in finding employment in Finland. Although the news articles recognised the need for changes in the labour markets, they offered limited solutions on how to prepare markets for this transition. Students' challenges were portrayed as language barriers (fluency in Finnish is often a requirement) to obtaining a job, cultural misunderstandings, Finland's isolated location, lower salary levels, the residence permit policy, spousal employment, and better employment prospects elsewhere. Despite these challenges, the news articles also highlighted the international students' frequent interest in staying.

### Students as Economic Resources

Third, international students were also framed as making an economic contribution to Finland, which closely followed the Finnish government's national discourse on international students (Jokila, 2020): "Students from outside the EU mean income for [one of the universities of applied sciences], as the student pays nearly

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<sup>2</sup> CIMO is a former agency dedicated to solving issues of international education. It has been merged with the Finnish National Agency for Education.

10,000 euros per year for one's studies" (Yle, 2021). Tuition fees were discussed in this framing in two ways: as lost opportunities where they were not implemented and as problems that were expected to follow from the implementation. Higher education institutions in Finland have been able to collect tuition fees since 2017 (see Jokila, 2020); hence, discussions regarding the experimentation and implementation of tuition fees were common during the period that we analysed. The news articles on tuition fees generally portrayed international students as those who chose their education based on its cost or reputation: "Opponents of the tuition fees also estimated that a remote Finland would not be able to attract newcomers with anything other than free education" (HS, 2010), and, according to a representative of trade and industry, "the good brand of Finnish education is not utilized at all" (HS, 2014).

Student associations were also worried about tuition fees' possible effects on access to higher education: "According to [one student association], fees will not support the economy or the attractiveness of higher education institutions. According to the association, fees cause inequalities among higher education institutions and their students. Additionally, they would increase competition" (Yle, 2014). Here, fees were perceived as posing a threat to equality, and it was acknowledged that the fee liability for some students constructed social differences among them (Plamper, Siivonen & Haltia, 2023). The articles discussed pricing, changes in the numbers of students, and other difficulties in implementing the policies. Visa procedures are connected to tuition fees since prolonging these processes has resulted in losses in fee payments. These news pieces often utilised politicians, the Ministry of Education and Culture, higher education institutions, and student unions as the main voices.

### Students as Social Others

Fourth, the news articles also represented international students as social others. This framing was less frequent compared to the three earlier categories, although some elements in this framing were also present in the previous ones. This framing addressed social relations and the integration of international students into Finnish society. For instance, the following news piece stated:

During the first weeks, foreign students study, for example, knowledge about Finland and local study practices. According to the international affairs secretary [name], one of the issues mostly causing helplessness is academic freedom in Finnish universities. "Many of the students are not accustomed to organizing their own studies," [name] says. (Yle, 2011)

This framing bundled international students as one group that was targeted, for instance, by integration services. In discussing international students, one cited example was responsiveness to the Finnish culture and habits through activities with friends and families. This framing focused more on international students learning Finnish culture, although cultural exchange was also mentioned: "[One] university of applied sciences is looking for families or individuals in [town in Finland] as friends for international students. The most important thing is to take international students as part of your everyday practices outside study contexts" (Yle, 2012). To a limited extent, these

practices exemplified a cosmopolitan orientation through cultural exchange, yet the preponderance focused on international students adapting to the Finnish culture.

### **Agency in News Outlets**

As presented earlier, our study showed that international students were depicted by media content through four different framings. Similar to many other countries, Finland also aims to integrate international students into Finnish society and working life. Hence, we were also interested in what kinds of agency are constructed for international students to act in Finnish society. We identified three agencies in which the news articles constructed the students.

#### Predetermined Agency

The prevailing type of agency attached to international students in the media outlets was *predetermined agency*. This type of agency placed international students in the roles—as skilled labour and as economic resources—for which they were aimed to be recruited. In other words, some news articles presented international students as “unused resources” to fill gaps in the national system. Some of the news pieces were also critical about whether international students desired to occupy these predetermined positions and/or what kinds of possibilities were offered. Other articles seemed to target the employers. For instance, when asked about recruiting international students, an interviewed employer responded: “It is an opportunity to internationalise. They have studied in Finland; they have a perception of Finnish society, and they have studied the same courses as Finnish students [have taken]” (Yle, 2021). This kind of predetermined agency failed to recognise the comprehensiveness of international students’ lives that might include caring responsibilities, illnesses, among other things. Similarly, Waters et al. (2024) noted how the prevailing focus was on the minds of the skilled students, but the comprehensive needs and situations of students were not considered.

#### Active Agency

Second, in *active agency*, international students were depicted as actors, rather than as passive receivers of certain policy measures. For instance, this kind of agency was present when discussing international students’ and graduates’ efforts to find jobs in Finland. By highlighting the considerable effort needed to obtain employment, the media showed empathy towards international students. In fact, in these news pieces, the media presented international students’ success stories in almost heroic terms. To cite an example, “[Name] made a lot of effort and tried different channels, from job placement advertisement to direct contacting and open application. It only produced temporary work. In the end, it worked out” (Yle, 2021). The discussion suggested that the state and other actors could potentially support international students’ transitions to the labour markets. The Finnish labour markets and employers’ attitudes were regarded as barriers to international graduate employment: “The problem must be at least partly in [the companies’] unawareness and attitudes” (HS, 2021). This situation portrayed a narrative of an exceptional international student - or an account that

emphasised the persistence and talents of a student who overcame difficulties. For instance, an interview with an international student pointed out that the latter's "study speed has been vertiginous compared to the Finnish average" (Yle, 2021).

### Constrained Agency

Third, in *constrained agency*, international students were portrayed as victims. This was the least used form of agency pertaining to international students. In these articles, international students were led to their positions due to their respective regional actors' mishandling in sending them to study in Finland, as well as structural issues in the receiving country. These news pieces elaborated on the individual situations. One widely discussed incident in Finland involved the commissioned education of a student group from an African country and the associated potential challenges and instabilities, with their possible repercussions for international students as the alleged victims:

In addition to the termination of their study rights, the students are at risk of losing their housing and being forced to leave Finland. They have become the party suffering from a mess caused by a [sending] county. (Yle, 2023.)

Within a narrative of constrained agency, a story depicted a capable student who ended up in a desperate situation, lacking the means or power to resolve it:

As a last resort, David went around shops in Helsinki offering to work. Only a young hairdresser took him in to rake the yard of her house. David could never have imagined that things would turn out this way. In [home country], he was a university-educated chemistry teacher. He had a six-room house and a housekeeper. Now, he was unemployed and penniless. (HS, 2010.)

This reflection shows the difficult situation the student got into and how he had very limited possibilities to act. He reflects back to his stance in society prior mobility.

## **Discussion**

In this study, we have analysed Finnish news articles (published from 2010 to 2021/2023) as examples of public representations of international students. An understanding of media portrayals is increasingly important in societies that aim to recruit ever larger international student bodies. It can be argued that international student mobility is not merely an issue of education but also shapes the host societies and environments in many ways. Furthermore, the public discourse may influence society's responsiveness to this mobile group of students.

Overall, international students were discussed in Finnish news articles from different perspectives. Possible national, institutional, and individual repercussions of different political decisions—such as the introduction of tuition fees, pandemic control measures, and employment opportunities—were also considered. In this paper, we have identified four different, yet overlapping, framings in which international students

were discussed in the Finnish media: as numbers, as labour, as economic resources, and as social others. These framings have similarities with those tackled in earlier studies (e.g. Brooks, 2017; Paltridge et al., 2014). However, the framings were not solely perceived from one perspective. For instance, in labour force framing, our analysis shows that media discussions focused on narrow portrayals of international students and their meanings in Finnish society. The framings were developed from a national perspective, that is, how international students could contribute to Finnish society. Some of the news pieces also called for Finnish society and the labour market to be more welcoming towards international students. The coverage was limited to the acceptance of international students in workplaces and as part of the education system, rather than a more profound explanation about the meanings of internationalisation and the mobility of people. These framings seemed to have limited understanding of all the ways that students' mobility would have repercussions not only for them but also for Finnish society (beyond the set rationalities). Hence, the representations of international students were created in response to national policy objectives, but not to the more profound ideas and significant implications of a cosmopolitan society. Nevertheless, the media outlets did not stigmatize racially diversified international student groups, such as Asian students, in the same sense as in earlier studies (e.g., Brooks, 2017). Similar to the framings, the agency positions depicted in the media pieces emphasised the types of individual agency that promoted the achievement of national policy objectives, while discussing structures that hindered an individual's attainment of such goals.

We have identified three agencies where international students were situated in the media pieces: predetermined, active, and constrained. Primarily, international students were presented with a predefined agency that followed national and institutional expectations. This partial agency left little room for a comprehensive discussion of international students' lives. The second position was active agency, referring to international students as often actively pursuing their life goals within a challenging environment. This was particularly relevant in employment-related issues. Lastly, in a few news pieces, we identified constrained agency, where students were perceived as victims of others' actions.

Our study is limited to two main media outlets. Future work would benefit from a more comprehensive analysis of other regional media outlets to develop an understanding of what is discussed in regional contexts. Additionally, our study raises questions about societies' preparedness to welcoming increasing numbers of international students. The discussion in the news articles predominantly remained in the welcoming stage and justified the need for international students.

## Conclusion

Media space can have a profound impact on how the public thinks and approaches societal phenomena and groups of people. The public discourses attached to international students may shape how they are approached in everyday life and

practices, for instance, as potential employees. Given that international student populations are expected to increase in Finland, it should be a focal point to analyse media representations and interpretations of people and events.

This study has conceptual and practical implications. We suggest examining media texts with the agentic positions in which they place international students and other immigrant groups. An understanding of these kinds of agency formations may assist in reflexively identifying potential biases in representations. In this way, the discussion may advance from deficit narratives (see Lipura & Collins, 2020; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023) and nationally framed meanings to a more sustainable method of perceiving mobile people and developing their relationships with host countries. Conceptually, we propose extending the analysis of international students' individualised agency to public agencies provided by actors such as national media spaces. In this way, we can approach structures with the agencies that they produce.

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