

**Understanding International Student Recruitment as Export Marketing Behaviour in  
Higher Education Institutions**

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May, 2018

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy.

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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for  
any other degree or diploma.

Signature .....

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to explore how higher education institutions (HEIs) develop, perceive, and manage the recruitment of international students. Many HEIs seek to attract international students through marketing and recruitment activity. This study explores the recruitment of students from foreign markets and explores the nature of export marketing behaviour from three institutions in Canada, Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom. HEIs exist in both public and market orientations (Marginson, 2016, 2017). These divergent orientations shape how and why some HEIs may adopt certain export marketing behaviours and others do not. Using activity theory to explore the practice of international student recruitment at three case studies in Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK this study shows that practitioners face similar challenges in their practice primarily in the form of competition and culture. Competitive forces act upon the recruitment of international students creating tensions in their practice as actors in institutions attempt to respond to markets. However, their reactions are different due to their internal culture, history, and institutional capacity. These factors help to understand the complex nature of higher education's dual public and market orientations and contribute to understanding why export marketing behaviours are unique to each HEI. This study shows that by examining strategy practitioners of international student recruitment, HEIs can improve their international student recruitment practice by understanding the convergence of national policy contexts, market forces, and internal culture on their practice.

Key words: higher education, international student recruitment, activity theory, export marketing

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## **Dedication and Acknowledgements**

I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to my PhD supervisor, Dr. Gemma Derrick. Dr. Derrick's support was invaluable, but more importantly, she quickly understood my strengths and weaknesses and pushed me to be better when I needed it. For that, I am truly grateful.

A sincere thank you to the three case study institutions for their participation. In particular to Cathy Wong at HKU, Annie Brunt at Lancaster University, and Dr. Barbara Campbell from UPEI. These three individuals made my research possible. I am forever grateful for your openness and hospitality.

Completing a PhD has been an aspiration of mine for over 25 years. I began this process four years ago and as it comes to a close, there have been many changes that make this accomplishment bittersweet. My parents have always been my biggest fans – which I am forever grateful. To my mother, who passed away in December 2015, thank you for instilling my love of learning. My entire academic life was because of you. Hugs to you, mom. Thank you to my dad, who taught me work ethic and to never give up. All of your sacrifices and support made this possible and I couldn't love and respect you more.

To my three sons, Alex, Ben, and Will – thank you for putting up with my frustrations and fatigue. I dedicate this dissertation to the three of you. My hope is that this journey gives you a sense of curiosity about the world and the rewards of sacrifice (and doing things because mom knows best 😊). I love you with all my heart.

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are changing and becoming more business-like in their activity as they introduce fees, market to prospective students, build brands, and employ strategies that aim at massification for individual benefits rather than as a public good (Findlay, McCollum & Packwood, 2017; Hegarty, 2014; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006, 2010; Marginson, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017; Molesworth, Scullion, & Scullion, 2011). Not surprisingly, what were previously institutions delivering education as a public good are now adopting practices more usually associated with the corporate world (Molesworth et al., 2011). “The corporatization of individual HEIs has increased the scope for executive decision-making and planning in financial matters” (Marginson, 2017, p. 15). This is a complex and difficult situation for HEIs as they attempt to balance interests in public education and market-driven environments. These evolving practices for HEIs are a response or reaction to a competitive environment as they are under increasing pressure to develop income streams to manage their budgets and to compete against other institutions (Marginson, 2011, 2016, 2017; Molesworth et al., 2011). “The fact that education is now one of the 12 service sectors in the General Agreement on Trade in Services is positive proof that importing and exporting education programs and services is a potentially lucrative trade area” (Knight, 2015, p. 4). This results in many activities for HEIs such as the expansion of their marketing efforts and the recruitment of international students. This thesis acknowledges the challenges for HEIs operating in a dualistic environment and seeks to bring greater understanding

to how HEIs respond and react to the recruitment of international students in export markets and suggests opportunities for HEIs to improve their practices.

This study aims to explore how higher education institutional practitioners develop, perceive, and manage the recruitment of international students, in the context of export markets. The thesis takes a different approach than other studies into export marketing in higher education by comparing HEIs in different countries and investigating the perspectives of a wide-range of actors involved in international student recruitment (Asaad, Melewar, Cohen, & Balmer, 2013, Asaad, Melewar, & Cohen, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross, Grace, & Shao, 2013; Ross, Heaney, & Cooper, 2007). International student recruitment plays a vital role for many HEIs and while the study is informed by literature on commercialised practices, it does not aim to take a side in the debate on commercialisation or managerialism approaches within HEIs. Rather the thesis argues as HEIs react and respond to market and global environments, it is important to consistently monitor and evaluate change occurring within these HEIs and how practitioners respond to these forces. The motivations to recruit international students are numerous for HEIs as they seek to internationalise their campuses by creating diversity in their student cohorts, attracting fee-paying students, or developing opportunities for local labour markets (Knight, 2015; Knight & Altbach, 2007; Qiang, 2003. Söderqvist, 2002; van der Wende, 1997; Walker, 2014). Many of these motivations are in response to individual institutional goals, changes in government policy, and enrolment patterns that create a complex and shifting environment for higher education policy-makers, academics, and staff (Findlay et al., 2017; O'Connor, 2017). Some researchers

describe the environment for higher education as becoming commercialised and commodified as institutions develop and enhance their educational experiences to attract international students (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Baker, E., 2015; Marginson, 2016, 2017; Molesworth et al., 2011). The attraction of international students to an institution is arguably the packaging and marketing higher education as an export product for consumption by students as consumers (Knight & Altbach, 2007). Within the context of this marketing environment, the global environment for higher education is in constant change with export marketing becoming evident (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross, et al., 2007, 2013). Export marketing is an interwoven, interconnected activity occurring within organisations (or institutions) that is evolving as the institution adapts to macro, meso, and micro changes and opportunities. As institutions evolve from local production (local students) to global production (international students) little is understood about HEIs' international student recruitment practices and export marketing behaviour.

Globalisation is a process where integration of the world economy is occurring between people, governments, and companies driven by the advent of global communication, information technology, and knowledge networks, and the rise of English as a dominant lingua franca (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2010). Within this global context, higher education is reacting through internationalisation strategies such institutional and government programmes and policies designed to manage and mediate the changing landscape (Altbach et al., 2010). As Altbach (2010) suggests, internationalisation is a strategy used by institutions, government,

and society to respond to the changing global world. This suggests that HEIs are actors who adopt strategies that are evident in the development of strategic plans, overseas campuses, international student recruitment, student immigration policies, and study exchange (Choudaha, Chang, & Kono, 2013; Cudmore, 2005; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatak, 2010; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011). The result is a dramatic increase in the number of students participating in education and the number of HEIs worldwide (Global Affairs Canada, 2016). Some argue that international student recruitment is a main factor for this increase in students to HEIs (Cudmore, 2005; Ross et al., 2013). As found by Ross, Grace, and Shao (2013), "...attracting international students has become a strategic imperative for universities in the pursuit of development, growth, and sustainability" (p. 219). The attraction of international students to HEIs has become a critical part of their operations and future success. International students contribute significantly to an institution's financial resources and typically pay full tuition making them some of most profitable students at institutions (Hegarty, 2014). International student recruitment also helps to compensate for the decline in domestic students that many countries are facing due to changing demographics and demand (Ross et al., 2013). Not only do international students contribute significantly to the income of the institution, but they also contribute significantly to the local economy (Knight, 2017). This contribution creates an incentive for governments and institutions to develop and invest in commercial-like practices to attract and to compete for international students as a commodity. Institutions are adopting market-like behaviours in practices such as the recruitment of international students and export

marketing behaviours, however little is known about these activities and how actors in these institutions view these behaviours.

The phenomena of international student attending institutions outside their home country are growing over the past several decades. The United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) account for approximately one-third of all international students. Of the four major English-speaking international student destinations, US, UK, Australia, and Canada, international student enrolment increased 42% between 2008 and 2014 (Institute of International Education, 2014). Data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (UIS) indicates the top five host countries for inbound international students in higher education are; United States (19%), United Kingdom (10%), Australia (6%), France (6%), and Germany (5%) (Global Affairs Canada, 2017). The US has long been the top choice for students studying abroad. A decade ago, the US received approximately 100,000 more students than the UK. However, enrolments have been declining in the UK since 2012, and currently, the US is exceeding a million international students while the UK is under 500,000. Meanwhile, Australian enrolments have started to rebound after a significant decline that began in 2010, and Canadian enrolments are continuing a ten-year-long increase (Global Affairs Canada, 2017). These trends in international student mobility suggest changes are occurring in policy and practice at national and institutional levels. These changes undoubtedly impact and shape international student recruitment practices at HEIs as they aim to boost available income from international students. As a result, they develop strategies, increase marketing efforts, and deploy resources in export



markets. These activities can be described as export marketing behaviour as institutions develop market intelligence, disseminate information, and coordinate these efforts. However, institutional practices in the context of international student recruitment policy and their individual responses are not static and are not well documented. Previous studies explore policy level impacts on international student recruitment, applying commercial frameworks, or examine student opinions of institutional practices (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Choudaha, et al., 2013; Cudmore, 2005; Findlay et al., 2017; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatak, 2010; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2017). Marketing behaviours are evolving and are valuable to examine at the institutional level to monitor changes as HEIs respond to global trends.

Much of the literature on international student recruitment focuses on the student perspective and experience, (Briggs, 2006; Soutar & Turner, 2002; Szekeres, 2010, Tatar & Oktay, 2006; Vrontis, El Nemar, Ouwaida, & Shams, 2018) rather than the HEIs' perspectives in attracting these students. With continuing growth of internationally mobile students, HEIs are adopting market-oriented activity to attract these students (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross, et al., 2007, 2013). However, market-oriented activities in HEIs are not well understood. Most research on international student recruitment focuses on the effectiveness of HEIs' marketing activities rather than exploring the unique circumstances that shape behaviour in the first place (Choudaha et al., 2013; Cudmore, 2005; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011; Vrontis et al., 2018; Zinn & Johansson, 2015). As student mobility increases around the world and the number

of international students continues to rise (Geddie, 2015; Goralski & Tootoonichi, 2015; Sood, 2012; West & Addington, 2014) exploring the internal operations of HEIs is important, not only in understanding how they attempt to attract students from international markets, but why they adopt certain international marketing behaviours and how they perceive these behaviours. Studies suggest that how institutions respond to these student demands are critical to their recruitment effectiveness (Huang, Raimo, & Humfrey, 2016; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011; Onk & Joseph, 2017), however little is known about how institutions develop, implement, and coordinate their international student recruitment strategies.

This thesis views international student recruitment activity in formal and informal ways based on a review of the literature (Choudaha, et al., 2013; Cudmore, 2005; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatak, 2010; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011; O'Connor, 2017). Recruitment activities are numerous and encompass tactics such as attending fairs, visiting high schools, contracting educational agents, producing marketing and promotional materials, and developing social media communications targeted towards prospective students. Recruitment efforts may be less obvious and be found in programmes such as partnerships with other institutions, presentations by faculty, and study abroad opportunities. Activities that improve the awareness of an institution and its reputation are considered less formal but contribute to the marketing and brand of an institution (Choudaha, et al., 2013; Cudmore, 2005; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatak, 2010; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011 O'Connor, 2017). This understanding is important when considering the scope and range of

international student recruitment within HEIs and provides the context for exploring the activity in this thesis.

Early studies into export marketing behaviour at HEIs by Asaad et al., 2013 2014, 2015, Hemsley-Brown & Oplata, 2010, and Ross et al., 2007, 2013 explore HEIs in several countries and provide insights into the phenomena in a higher education context. Asaad et al. 2013, 2014, 2015 study export marketing of HEIs by initially exploring international student recruitment as a function of an export marketing orientation in HEIs (Asaad et al., 2013). Asaad, et al. furthered their research in 2014 and 2015 by suggesting a framework of export marketing for HEIs based on the adaptation of the market orientation concept for the export market for commercial enterprise from previous studies (Cadogan & Diamantopoulos, 1995, Cadogan, Diamantopoulos, & Mortanges 1999; Cadogan, Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2002; Cadogan, Sundqvist, Salminen, & Puumalainen, 2005). Asaad et al. (2015) present three key components of an export marketing orientation consisting of export intelligence generation, export intelligence dissemination, and export intelligence responsiveness, and further find that the level of export coordination and university attitude towards governmental funding are predictors of export marketing adoption with HEIs. These researchers recommend that different institutions in other parts of the world should be examined. Furthermore, as Asaad et al., 2015 research suggests there is a need to include a broader set of participants such as senior leaders or top managers, who are important actors in the coordination of activity within institutions. This thesis examines senior leaders along with administrators, recruiters, and support staff who will bring greater insights into the nature and

extent of export marketing within HEIs and help to explain how and why specific strategies and resources are used within the practice. In this study, using the findings from Asaad et al. 2015, the export market behaviours of the case study sites are examined and compared to determine the nature and extent of these export marketing behaviours in the case studies from Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK.

There is value in understanding how the internal operations of higher education institutions operate and respond to the changing environments as they operate in different national contexts. Previous research demonstrates that HEIs conduct international student recruitment and adopt other marketing behaviours (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Beech, 2018; Findlay et al., 2017; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross, et al., 2007, 2013). However, there is a lack research comparing individual HEIs' international student recruitment practice in different national policy contexts. This presents an opportunity to discover how and why export marketing may occur within individual HEIs as they respond and react to global and market forces. This thesis explores export marketing behaviour within HEIs and argues the importance of understanding how HEIs may improve their practices as they respond to external forces. Asaad, Melewar, and Cohen (2014) support this claim suggesting "limited empirical evidence exists about how universities can manage their marketing activities towards their export markets" (Asaad, Melewar & Cohen, 2014, p. 147). With growing markets of international students (Global Affairs Canada, 2016) and increasing commercialised activity by HEIs (Albatch, et al., 2009; Baker, 2015; Marginson, 2016, 2017; Molewsorth, 2011) this thesis brings greater

understanding to how HEI's respond to changing environments through their practice of attracting international students.

## **The Study**

This study compares the recruitment of international students as export marketing behaviour in three universities from Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK. This is a unique approach to examining export marketing in HEIs as the thesis compares institutions from the perspective of their different national policy contexts and examines actors from various levels of the hierarchy in each setting (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplata, 2010; Ross et al., 2007, 2013). By critically investigating the perspectives of those involved in the recruitment of international students, the thesis presents opportunities to improve the practice of international student recruitment and export marketing. The thesis explores unique policy, history, and culture of institutions by situating the case study sites in different jurisdictions to provide distinct settings to study international student recruitment and export marketing. Canada's immigration policies for international students have become more flexible in recent years and the country has seen international student enrolment numbers increase by 18% from 2015 to 2016 (Global Affairs Canada, 2017). Hong Kong's student visa policy is quite simple, however the government limits the number of international students to 20% of total student enrolment for each of their institutions (UGC, 2017). Hong Kong is seeking to position itself as an economic hub in Asia and views higher education as a means to attract skilled labour (Lee, 2014). However, there are potential changes to internationalisation and higher education in Hong Kong as China begins to exert its influence over higher education

(Bray, 2017). Meanwhile, the UK hosts the second highest number of international students in the world but with increasing global competition and changes to immigration policies such as the removal of the post-study work visa, some argue that the shifting policy environment for international students has weakened demand to attend university in the UK (Walker, 2014; Warwick, 2014). These different trends and contexts suggests that there are changes happening on a global and national level that make Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK interesting case study sites to explore the national and local contexts of international students recruitment. There is a lack of empirical research comparing the supply-side or the internal operations of international student recruitment in HEIs and there is more to learn about HEIs and their commercial-like practices such as export marketing (Findlay et al., 2017). The study aims to fill this void by exploring how HEI international student recruitment strategy practitioners develop, perceive, and manage their activity in the context of international student recruitment. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How do practitioners view the role of institutional strategic plans in shaping international student recruitment?
2. What are the perceived tensions in international student recruitment practices at these HEIs and how do these tensions compare in each case study?

3. How do strategy practitioners describe and perceive the export marketing behaviours of their institution and how do these behaviours compare between Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK?
4. How can the lessons learned from these case studies assist in informing export marketing strategy and international student recruitment practice for these HEIs?

This thesis employs a qualitative methodology and uses an inductive and deductive approach to the data generation, collection, and analysis by using activity theory and export marketing theory side-by-side in the analysis. Data are collected using documents and semi-structured interviews with strategy practitioners from each institution. Strategy practitioners are those involved in the development and implementation of international student recruitment strategies and activities. The research design considers the national policies and market forces that shape strategy practitioners' perspectives of export marketing behaviours and the recruitment of international students.

### **Activity Theory and Export Marketing**

This study, for the first time, uses activity theory side-by-side with export marketing theory as a conceptual framework to examine international student recruitment as export marketing. This study draws upon Engeström's third generation of activity theory to understand the practice of international student recruitment and to identify tensions that present opportunities to improve practice (Engeström, 2001,

2005). Activity theory identifies resistance to change and disruptions caused by integrating new items such as using new marketing activities within public domains such as higher education institutions (Blin & Munro, 2008; Hu & Webb, 2009). Resistance is identified as tension and plays an important role when examining the success or failure of a system in response to change. Exploring export marketing at HEIs through activity theory and export marketing concepts provides an opportunity to understand and to explain international student recruitment activities and can add insight into the adoption of new policies and processes.

By presenting the internal tensions from the perspectives of the subjects, these institutions transform or develop their activity to improve institutional effectiveness. This thesis builds on the research of Asaad et al. 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; and Ross et al. 2007, 2013 by using international student recruitment as a lens to explore export marketing at HEIs. These previous studies examine the extent and nature of export marketing in HEIs but they do not compare the perspectives of institutional practitioners from three different parts of the world nor do they do address the underpinning factors that shape institutional adoption of export marketing behaviours. That is, they do not specifically study the internal institutional dynamics occurring within each system and why institutions behave in a certain way. This thesis does this by examining and comparing the perspectives of practitioners of international student recruitment using activity theory and export marketing theory to understand the complex factors impacting their international student recruitment. An important consideration in this thesis is the perspectives of the strategy practitioners within their institutional settings. There is relative lack of



research examining institutional actors, namely those involved in the development and implementation international student recruitment plans. These actors or strategy practitioners are well positioned in institutions to shed light on real-world of practice that can assist in understanding and improving export marketing and the recruitment of international students.

The perspectives of the subjects, as strategy practitioners, provide a unique vantage point to understanding export marketing behaviours in HEIs. They are used to bring greater understanding to how and why institutions adopt an export marketing behaviour and the challenges facing the practitioners as they seek to develop and implement strategies. Exploring strategy practitioners of export marketing through activity theory has not been used previously and is needed to provide a framework to better understand the internal dynamics that shape the nature of export marketing behaviour. This research explores international student recruitment as a strategy practice. Strategy as practice looks to explain how actors perform different strategies, both through their social interactions with other actors and with the resources available to them. Strategic intent can change based on social and historical constructs (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007).

HEIs are increasingly important sites for the study of strategic action by examining practitioners' tension within the individual systems to learn more about export marketing behaviour at micro, meso, and macro levels. Activity is considered strategic to the extent that it is consequential for the strategic outcomes, directions, survival, and competitive advantage of the organisation (Johnson, Melin, &

Whittington, 2003). According to Jarzabkowski, (2003), strategising occurs at the centre of praxis, practices, and practitioners. Jarzabkowski (2003) suggests that strategy as practice research may explain outcomes that are consequential to the organisation at all levels, from the most micro details of human behaviour to broader institutional levels. This study advances Jarzabkowski's research by incorporating other actors involved in strategic practice from different levels of the hierarchy in institutions including senior leaders, administrators, recruiters, and staff.

The activity system framework furthers our understanding of workplace dynamics within institutions and helps to understand the adoption of workplace strategy, export marketing. Learning is important for organisations by improving working conditions, learning new practices, and gaining informative instruction (Engeström & Kerosuo, 2007). The use of activity theory to explore the culture and history of local activities (international student recruitment) to determine whether apparently similar activities occurring in different places (countries or institutions) are similar or different in their functionality is highly useful. In this study, activity theory is used to compare the three systems of international student recruitment at three separate institutions in a cross-case study analysis. These different settings allow the study to explore the impact of institutional culture on practice. Actors implicitly transform institutional knowledge into habit, and over time, this knowledge becomes "the way things are done around here" (Selznick, 1957, p. 17). As such, this study aims to explore this conceptualisation of institutional culture from the perspective of the subjects in the activity systems. Here, activity theory presents a compelling

theoretical framework within the case study approach, to examine the work activity of international recruitment and the institutional learning of export marketing.

This study does not aim to debate or take a side in the marketisation of higher education, but rather situates the study in this dual reality. Arguably, HEIs may not be “commercial” enterprises but they do face an increasing marketised environment. Nonetheless by using export marketing theory to examine individual HEIs strategy practice, this thesis helps to inform strategy development and implementation for HEIs and provides opportunities for these institutions to improve institutional operations. Higher education, as a domain, has a vested interest in sustainability, stakeholder management, and the deployment of resources to achieve institutional goals and mandates (Marginson, 2017). Export marketing analysis for higher education can provide insight into achieving these goals for HEIs.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

The next chapter critically reviews the literature and identifies opportunities for further research within the fields of international student recruitment, export marketing, marketisation, and activity theory and argues that while commercialisation is occurring in higher education, little is known about how HEIs respond and react to changes in policy and markets. This chapter also presents the argument that different approaches to exploring export marketing within HEIs are necessary and argues that activity theory is valuable in expanding the research. It ends with a discussion of activity theory framework as the main methodological approach to the study. Chapter three outlines the methodology and describes the

qualitative research approach and design based on the principles of activity theory. It outlines the use and benefits of the case study approach taken in this study and how activity theory and export marketing theory are combined in the data generation and collection and analysis processes. It also outlines the sampling, data collection and generation methods, and describes the three case studies from Canada, Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom. The fourth chapter presents the results from the three case studies. It describes the strategy practitioners views of their institutional activity and identifies and compares tensions in each system. This chapter further describes and compares export marketing behaviour between each institution. The final chapter discusses implications of the research and identifies areas of improvement for the practice of international student recruitment and export marketing. The chapter discusses implications for HEIs and researchers by linking to the concepts and ideas from the literature on export marketing, internationalisation, and student recruitment. Finally, the chapter addresses the research questions at individual and group levels, and considers the possible impact of the research on HEIs.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Although HEIs adopt internationalisation strategies, a significant component of these strategies involve international student recruitment operating in a marketised environment (Brandenburg, Berghoff, Taboadela, Bischof, Gajowniczek, Gehlke, A., & Vancea, 2014; Findlay, et al., 2017; Marginson 2016, 2017; Molesworth et al., 2011; Onk & Joseph, 2017; Rumbley, Altbach, & Reisberg, 2012). This chapter reviews the literature concerning international student recruitment, export marketing, and marketisation in the context of internationalisation and discusses the conceptual framework of activity theory. It argues that international student recruitment for HEIs is complex due to national policies, competition, internal capabilities, and dualities in their market and public orientations. The current research does not examine the combination of these factors on individual institutions in the context of recruiting students internationally and how practitioners view these complexities. Furthermore, there is a relationship between students, other institutions, governments, and within the institutions themselves that contributes to how and why institutions adopt certain export marketing behaviours (Asaad et al. 2013, 2014, 2015; Findlay et al., 2017; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross et al., 2007, 2013). The existing literature on export marketing for HEIs is limited to a few studies and focuses on export marketing orientation within a wider context of applying commercial concepts to higher education (Asaad et al. 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross et al., 2007; 2013). There is much unknown about how actors involved in international student recruitment activities conceptualise and respond to market and government forces.

Given the complexity and the unique culture of HEIs, what is needed is an understanding of the challenges occurring at the individual institutional level. Other studies argue for greater understanding of international student recruitment activities in HEIs from the supply-side and the challenges faced by those involved in the practice as institutions aim to manage the dichotomy of public and market orientations (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Findlay et al., 2017; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011; O'Connor, 2017; Zinn & Johansson, 2015). There is a need for more critical perspectives on international student recruitment practice to offer accounts and descriptions from those involved in institutional strategy as a practice. This study will provide these perspectives and will further our understanding of international student recruitment as export marketing behaviour in HEIs.

### **International Student Recruitment**

Commercialised practices influence international student recruitment (Findlay et al., 2017; Hulme et al., 2014; Vontis et al., 2018; Wu & Naidoo, 2016). There are many dimensions to internationalisation that suggest the neo-liberal, trade approach to internationalisation may pose challenges for some HEIs as they bridge the world between market and public goods (Hall, 2015; Findlay et al., 2017; Teixeira, 2004). This thesis does not aim to debate the neo-liberal agenda but rather highlights the complex, dual existence that student recruitment and marketised agendas pose for institutions. This dual existence impacts how HEIs operate and the nature of their competitive behaviour (Findlay et al., 2017; Onk & Joseph, 2017). Some international student recruitment behaviours may be effective for institutions, but

there is limited examination of HEIs internal operations and culture to provide insights into institutional capabilities.

#### *National Policy and Commercial Practice*

According to Beneke and Human (2010), the main function of general student recruitment is “to generate an interest in a learning institution and attract a sufficient number of prospective students who apply and eventually enrol in the program” (p. 436). A prospective student is any potential student that a given HEI would like to recruit and eventually enrol (Zinn & Johansson, 2015). Within the international setting, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the General Agreement on Trades in Services (GATS) agreements, international student recruitment and its functions are the most developed form of export education (Naidoo & Wu, 2011). A significant component of internationalisation agendas for HEIs and governments constitute international student recruitment. The GAT agreement classifies higher education into four key supply chains 1) consumption abroad (students attending another country to study) 2) cross-border supply such as distance and e-learning 3) commercial presence through satellite campuses and partnerships 4) presence of natural persons (faculty mobility). “International student mobility represents, by far, the largest market share [of the four supply chains]” (Hulme et al., 2014, p. 676). This supports the view of recruiting students from foreign markets as an export marketing behaviour and suggests the importance of student recruitment as part of an organisation’s internationalisation strategy.

The link between national policy and international student recruitment is currently not well understood (O'Connor, 2017; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2017). O'Connor (2017) studied international strategy from the student and institutional perspective at an Irish university and found there are conflicts in the practice of recruiting international students that are highly local. Their national and local institutional policies are designed to attract international students for economic recovery and diversity, but the institution had a passive acceptance of these students, impacting the international student experience on campus. This study examines one institution in Ireland and sheds light on practice problems associated with national policies that affect the recruitment of international students and suggests further studies of institutions in other jurisdictions will hold value (O'Connor, 2017). This study supports this argument that further research is necessary to understand national policies in the context of local, institutional dynamics and that institutional actors shape practice based on their interpretations of these policies.

In a Canadian study on the internationalisation of higher education, Cudmore (2005) finds that it is critical for the educational system and governments to market collaboratively in a manner that enables successful recruitment in an increasingly globalised education market. Similarly, Zinn and Johansson (2015) argue, HEIs are responding and reacting to external forces, such as government policy that lead to a marketing orientation within and amongst HEIs. International student recruitment is a competitive environment, not only for HEIs but also for countries that are competing to attract the best and brightest candidates to learn and to contribute to their nation. These countries are competing to be an attractive destination for future



students from abroad for both economic and labour market reasons, given the economic benefits (Geddie, 2015; Beech, 2018). Many countries view international student recruitment as an economic generator creating earnings and wealth similar to other industries such as lumber, wine, or aerospace (de Wit, 2011). de Wit (2015) found that the recruitment of students is a valuable economic dimension to higher education for governments and these economic benefits undoubtedly contribute to national interests in how HEIs operate and the students they attract.

International students' fees and expenses are main contributors of these economic benefits and these fees have become increasingly important since the adoption of fee schedules by some countries (Koh, 2015, Geddie, 2015). Fee schedules and differentials for international students are used more so by Western countries such as the US, as a strategy to obtain additional revenues for institutions. The UK did not introduce this method until the late 1990's (de Wit, 2015, Beech, 2018) and even today, many European countries have not implemented a method of tuition differential that would separate residents from international students as a method to compete with other countries (de Wit, 2015). Nonetheless, the introduction of a fee structure for international students initiated a monetised and competitive view of international students for many countries and institutions (Koh, 2015, Geddie, 2015). Since then, competition for international students is growing, and countries are adopting unique strategies to attract talented students creating policies such as tuition fees, immigration policies, branding, and marketing (de Wit, 2015; Findlay et al., 2017; Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo; Onk & Joseph, 2017; Warwick, 2014; Wu & Naidoo, 2016).

These practices and behaviours suggest a competitive and marketised landscape at a national level that contributes to local, institutional approaches to international student recruitment. Previous studies show marketisation and national policy shaping higher education and argue it is important to examine institutional level impacts in the context of their national policy frameworks (Cudmore, 2005; Marginson, 2017; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011, O'Connor, 2017, Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). Beech (2018) explored international student recruitment staff from ten UK institutions. This study examined changes to the UK visa system and the impacts on recruitment methods through the relationships staff had with educational agents. It found that student mobility is an industry driven by market forces and institutional responses are important in facilitating student mobility. Geddie (2015) furthers this argument in a study of twenty-nine higher education policymakers in the UK and Canada and found that national policies change and evolve at local levels and that there are “perceived competitive relations between places and actors” (p. 245). This suggests that actors’ perceptions at local, institutional levels are important in conceptualising national policy.

Similarly, Findlay et al. (2017) study of stakeholders in the UK higher education sector show that institutions and inter-university organisations have different motivations to attract international students to the UK and suggest that financial motives and the drive to be “globally excellent” serves to position institutions globally to attract international students. At the same time, respondents in the study perceived government policy to restrict these objectives. Findlay et al. (2017)

is a comprehensive study of international students who chose to study in the UK and a small set of actors involved in attracting students to the UK. Findlay et al. (2017) argue more studies need to examine the institutional or supply-side perspectives of international student recruitment as there is limited literature on internal operations of HEIs and how they perceive national policies on their practice. This thesis extends studies such as Findlay et al. (2017) and O'Connor (2017) by taking the supply-side view (or institutional view) of international student recruitment practice by exploring practitioners, in three different countries, as a basis to compare their behaviours and their perceptions of practice. It does this by examining complexities such as national policy contexts and how practitioners view these policies impacting their practice.

These studies show that system actors may have different perspectives on marketisation and national policies and how these policies shape their practice. However, these previous studies focus on the implications of policies on one or two countries and consider different actors than this thesis. There are limited comparisons of international student recruitment practitioners from different countries. This thesis explores the local, institutional response to marketised environments facing practitioners of international student recruitment in Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK. This is a different approach than other studies (Findlay et al., 2017; Hemsley-Brown & Optlaka, 2010; O'Connor, 2017) as the thesis examines and compares the perspectives of a wide-range of practitioners who contribute to the institutional policy and implementation of international student recruitment.

### *Competitive Environment for HEIs*

HEIs are evolving their strategies to market themselves to prospective students in response to the changing environment and student needs (Onk & Joseph, 2017; Vrontis et al., 2018; Zinn & Johansson, 2015) and therefore, student recruitment has become an important issue and requires consistent adjustments and modifications to the practice for HEIs (Findlay et al., 2017; Koris & Nokelainen, 2015; Zinn & Johansson, 2015). Choudaha et al. (2013) suggest that the unpredictability of the global environment poses challenges for all institutions and that effective recruitment requires institutions to understand this volatility and develop strategies to respond to changes in student markets. This view of international student recruitment is demonstrated through recruitment planning and tactics derived from internationalisation strategies within institutions (Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011). Mosneaga and Agergaard (2011) see international student recruitment as the “doing internationalisation”. That is, institutions respond and react to international forces such as competition and markets, and behave in certain ways to attract cohorts of students around the world. The literature points to extensive research into student decision-making and complex choice models related to student choice of HEIs; (Briggs, 2006; Soutar & Turner, 2002; Szekeres, 2010; Tatar & Oktay, 2006; Vrontis et al., 2018) however, the literature examining the internal operations or supply side of HEIs’ international student recruitment practice is limited (Asaad, et al., 2013; Beech, 2018; Findlay et al., 2017). This is, in part, because of the competitive nature of international student recruitment. As such, there is much to be learned from exploring HEI recruitment activity as internationalisation strategy and how institutional student recruitment evolves at macro-, meso-, and micro-level.

Prospective international students desire to undertake higher education in countries other than their own in pursuit of a degree, particularly that of an English-speaking country (Briggs, 2006; Soutar & Turner, 2002; Szekeres, 2010; Tatar & Oktay, 2006). The top four English-speaking countries in the world for international student study are the US, Canada, the UK, and Australia (Goralski & Tootoonchi, 2015, Onk & Joseph, 2017). As these countries are the “top” in the world for international student recruitment, they compete with one another when it comes to enrolling international students (Onk & Joseph, 2017). Sá & Sabzalieva (2017) studied recruitment patterns in Australia, Canada, England, and the USA and found that international student numbers have grown in all four countries but they did not find a correlation between volume of students and national policy change. They argue that with increasing middle-class wealth around the world, student mobility is growing and institutions and countries are attracting students based on growing demand. This demand is arguably creating competition between HEIs and nations is shifting the way these HEIs are perceived and how they operate (Findlay et al., 2017; Marginson, 2011; 2017; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2017).

According to Kerr (2001), student mobility has been occurring since the mid-sixteenth century, when HEIs first attracted international students; however, the rapid increase in globalisation and internationalisation has led higher education to a more competitive environment (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). Today, more and more students are seeking opportunities to pursue higher education in other countries creating growing markets for countries and institutions (Global Affairs Canada,

2016). According to the OECD, the global demand for international higher education is set to grow from nearly 4.1 million students in 2010 to 7.2 million students in 2025 (OECD, 2015). As competition intensifies to acquire the talents and resources of mobile students, countries are developing rigorous strategies and policies that are supported by financial investments to increase enrolment to their institutions (Goralski & Tootoonchi, 2015). Globally, many institutions are facing similar policy priorities in higher education resulting in HEIs around the world pursuing international student recruitment opportunities (Marginson, 2011, 2016, 2017).

de Wit (2015) argues that competition is changing for top countries as they face increasing competition from other industrialised nations and emerging economies. Furthermore, competition is increasing within countries as emerging economies expand their higher education capacity at the undergraduate level at the same time foreign institutions establish campuses (de Wit, 2015). These findings support Geddie (2015) who suggests that the global education landscape is changing and becoming more competitive, as the geographic flows of students are shifting due to changing economies, national policies, and institutional responses. However, Geddie argues there is limited understanding of competitive forces on higher education landscape and how it impacts institutions (2015). This thesis will compare the competitive environments for HEIs by taking into account practitioners views of competition on their practice from institutions in Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK. These insights will extend the literature by examining competition at the institutional level and how competition, in combination with other factors, shapes international student recruitment practice.

### *Institutional Capabilities*

Students are the primary decision maker in choosing a HEI, and many factors influence their choice in an institution such as institutional ranking, advertising, programs, and fees (Briggs, 2006; Choudaha et al., 2013; Koris & Nokelainen, 2015; Onk & Joseph, 2017; Szekeres, 2010; Tatar & Oktay, 2006; Vrontis et al., 2018). At the same time, international students face different considerations in choosing an institution (Szekeres, 2010; Vrontis et al., 2018). For some international students, the brand becomes highly influential, and this suggests that international students decision-making can be quite different from domestic students (Findlay et al., 2017; Szekeres, 2010). HEIs invest significant resources to understand and to respond to these influences suggesting market intelligence and responsiveness are important considerations for HEIs (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Findlay et al., 2017; Hesketh & Knight, 1999; Moogan, Baron, & Bainbridge, 2001; Payne, 2003; Soutar & Turner, 2002). However, there is less understanding about how practitioners view these behaviours and their impact on recruitment practice. Institutions invest in branding strategies and rankings, social media, websites, recruiters, and agents to appeal to these types of students (Beech, 2018; Farrell & Van der Werf, 2007; Findlay et al., 2017; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Marginson, 2017; Robinson-Pant & Magyar, 2018; Tatar & Oktay, 2006). Other studies of international recruiters found that efforts needed focus on 1) technology for expanding reach, 2) partnerships for pathways and visibility, and 3) research to prioritise efforts and measure return on investment (Choudaha et al., 2013). These findings suggest that certain behaviours are beneficial for institutional practice and that institutions with a high degree of market understanding may achieve positive results (Findlay et al., 2017). However,

there is little understanding of why recruitment techniques or behaviours are used by some institutions and not others.

Onk and Joseph (2017) examined recruitment practices of institutions in top economic countries to determine similarities in their methods. This study found that these institutions established marketing strategies that focus on outreach to prospective students and developed marketing materials to support the specialty programmes they offer. de Wit (2015) supports this finding by suggesting that international students seek certain attributes from institutions such as employability and institutional reputation, and that institutions need to consider these factors when recruiting students internationally. Another important institutional resource is the use of educational agents and the relationships between agents and institutions. Robinson-Pant and Magyar (2018) and Huang, Raimo, and Humfrey (2016) studied recruitment agents and their relationships to their institutions in the UK. Agents were found to have substantial power over prospective students that lasted throughout a student's academic career (Huang et al., 2016; Robinson-Pant & Magyar, 2013). As such, institutions need to carefully manage their student recruitment strategies to ensure they have the appropriate capability to manage these activities such as agent relationships.

In another study of international student recruitment activity, Vrontis et al. (2018) studied social media as a means to attract international students to institutions in Lebanon. This study shows that international students rely on social media for its immediate access to information and can use social media to build relationships with



prospective students and by being responsive in real-time to students on social networking. Furthermore, this study found that granting independence to various faculties and departments to create their own social media channels is a “healthy practice”, however the ability to centralise and coordinate these channels is necessary to manage the university’s image (Vrontis et al., 2018). Vrotnis et al. (2018) further the argument that various international student recruitment approaches may be effective, but these activities require coordination and capability to be effective.

The current literature focuses on institutional tools, resources, or activities that suggest certain approaches to international students may be effective (Huang et al., 2016; Onk & Joseph, 2017, Vrontis et al., 2018). There is little examination of institutional history or culture and how it may shape international student recruitment capability. This thesis aims to examine more than just actions or tools, but rather it explores how and why certain behaviours occur in the case studies from Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK so that opportunities to improve practice are identified. Approaches to international student recruitment are important for HEIs, but they manifest and evolve in different ways based on global, market, and institutional forces. This thesis acknowledges that competition is increasing and institutions are reacting and changing (Geddie, 2015; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). By comparing different institutional actors with different responsibilities for international student recruitment, this thesis sheds light on institutional capability in their practice.

### *Managerialism and the Hierarchy – Marketisation Challenges for HEIs in Practice*

Previous studies suggest higher education is increasingly focused on economic benefits for institutions and countries, viewing it as an export (Beech, 2018; Cudmore, 2005; de Wit, 2015; Galway, 2000; Geddie, 2015; Madge, et al., 2014; Marginson, 2010, 2015, 2016, 2017). Immigration and trade policies adopted by governments have consequences for higher education as it impacts their internationalisation strategies and their ability to recruit students from international markets. As stated earlier, this thesis recognises HEIs operate in public and market domains and seeks to contribute to the understanding of this complex environment by exploring the perspectives of different practitioners of international student recruitment in Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK. An important aspect of this study is to contextualise public and market orientation and its impact on institutional strategies and recruitment practice (Beech, 2018; Cudmore, 2005; Geddie, 2015, Jones, 2014; Marginson, 2017).

Marketisation brings a consumerism lens to decision-making for students and has given rise to cohorts of students who choose institutions based on commercialised practices (Molesworth et al., 2011). Higher education is considered a public service with the purpose of creating an educated society, and many believe with marketisation, higher education has lost this mission. McChesney (2013) suggests the implementation of commercial values has reduced education to a monetary transaction with efficiency and profit becoming an institution's new purpose or mission. With efficiency in mind, HEIs are arguably straying too far from their initial mission of educating society and are becoming labour market focused as HEIs may

be educating to address the demand of the labour market. Schwartzman (2013) argues that programmes are becoming too specific and that students do not realise their full potential due to limits imposed by efficiency in an attempt to create job opportunities for students. These marketisation issues create pressure for governments and institutions as they seek to balance various interests. This is a unique situation for HEIs as they operate in the dualistic environments that are open and restrictive constructed by government policy and regulation (Marginson, 2013; Teixeira, 2004).

Taylor (2010) suggests that as HEIs compete in a global environment, they are adopting executive style management with hierarchies and decision-making processes designed to professionalise the services and supports they offer to students. Taylor calls this a “new approach” to internationalisation for institutions, but there appears to be no definitive solution to balancing these market and public interests for HEIs (Marginson, 2016). Pucciarelli and Kaplan (2016) describe this as complexity and uncertainty, and that individual HEIs need to determine their individual capabilities to adapt to these complexities. A main point of this thesis is to address the conflicts facing practitioners in their practice that exists in both public and market domains. This conflict is arguably the transformation of a public or common good into a commercialised commodity (Marginson, 2016; Schwartzman, 2013; Williams, 2016). In the case of higher education, the public good is an asset that each has a right to, while commodification turns these public goods into products or services that can be bought and sold by those who have the money to do so (Samuelson, 1954). This production, in turn, impacts how HEIs operate when

seeking commercial-like benefits. Hulme et al., (2014) explore the role of international student recruitment in Africa by examining the role of agents within the system and found that “agents are a symptom and effect of commercialisation in higher education” (p. 676) through the focus on education as a traded good or business. Their study suggests that HEIs are businesses with the lines between providing a public good (education) and private activity (revenue) becoming “blurred.” In this context, it is argued that students are consumers, paying for their education, which is considered a commodity or commercial good, instead of a public good (Molesworth et al., 2011). However, this creates potential conflict within HEIs as they seek to balance both orientations.

A contributing factor to the increased marketisation or commodification of higher education arguably is occurring over time with the reduction of state funding or subsidies to HEIs, full or partial privatisation of HEIs, and the organisational restructuring of management within institutions (Marginson, 2011, 2016, 2017; McChesney, 2013). However, commoditisation of higher education is not clear-cut. Higher education has long-term benefits to individuals such as social and economic rewards. This is different than traditional business or industries where economic benefits are the primary outcome (Asaad et al., 2013, Marginson, 2016). This view of higher education proposes there are benefits to higher education beyond commercial rewards and that HEIs need to consider their offerings beyond purely commercial terms. Therefore, research that explores the extent of commoditisation in the recruitment of international students can add valuable insights. This is a critical dimension of this thesis as seeks to understand the challenges faced by

practitioners as they communicate the benefits of their institutions and degrees. These perspectives will help shed light the challenges of HEIs operating in the dual market and public orientations as they compete for students in a global environment.

### **Export Marketing in Higher Education**

An export marketing orientation is the implementation of marketing efforts focused primarily on export or foreign markets (Rathor & Acharya, 1999). Asaad et al. (2014) explain, “limited empirical evidence exists about how universities can manage their marketing activities towards their export markets” (Asaad et al., 2014, p. 147). Ross et al. (2007, 2013) found that HEIs require market orientation to achieve diversity in student cohorts and to respond to decreases in government funding. Asaad et al. (2013, 2014, 2015) and Ross et al. (2007, 2013) show that international student recruitment can be understood as export marketing and suggest understanding the activity of international student recruitment is critical for HEIs. They argue that, “...until HE institutions realize the barriers to market performance that having traditional bureaucratic structures creates, then their sustainability may well be threatened” (Ross et al., 2013, p. 235). This suggests that if institutions do not understand the internal factors and dynamics that pose challenges to operating in export markets, their ability to be successful is limited. At the same time, the focus of higher education marketing research tends to be on the consumer or student perspective of international marketing and that there is little research on higher education export marketing strategy or the perceptions of managers on strategy (Asaad et al., 2014). Asaad et al. 2013, 2014, 2015 studies are some of the early

studies to examine HEIs' export marketing and involve both qualitative and quantitative methods exploring UK institutions. These studies conceptualise export marketing in HEIs and contribute to the development of a framework of export marketing in HEIs that highlights three main behaviours. These behaviours; market intelligence gathering, market intelligence dissemination, and market responsiveness are considered necessary for successful implementation of export marketing (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015).

This thesis furthers the work of previous studies (Asaad et al. 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross et al., 2007, 2013) by delving into the complexities of national policies, competition, institutional resources and capabilities, and internal culture facing institutional practitioners in their international student recruitment practice and how their approach to recruiting students internationally may be viewed as export marketing. By comparing the internal conflicts experienced by three case studies from Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK as they recruit international students from export markets, this thesis explores the public and marketised pressures experienced by institutional practitioners in charge of international student recruitment, that are different than commercialised environments and are uniquely influenced by their country's policies and individual settings. The recruitment of international students can be framed as export marketing behaviour that arises from marketised environments experienced by HEIs (Asaad et al., 2013; Molesworth et al., 2011). Export marketing analysis is used in this thesis, in combination with activity theory, to explore the recruitment of international students and to compare export marketing behaviours between the

three case studies. There are particular aspects of export marketing within HEIs that are important to consider when exploring the phenomenon through international student recruitment. For HEIs, export marketing appears to take a linear form where institutions must first generate market intelligence on international markets and prospective students; then disseminate this market intelligence to their relevant departments or units who are involved in recruiting students; and then products, services, and actions of the institution must adapt to the market to attract prospective students based on this intelligence (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Cadogan et al., 1999, 2002; Slater & Narver, 2000). Furthermore, a coordinating mechanism is necessary for HEIs to manage this activity across departments and is a primary concern for institutions to be effective in attracting international students (Cadogan et al., 1999, 2002; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross et al., 2007, 2013; Asaad et al. 2013, 2014, 2015). This thesis explores these behaviours from perspectives of practitioners of international student recruitment. This study extends previous literature by taking into account a wide-range of practitioners from various levels of institutional hierarchy, and by examining how they perceive their export marketing behaviours in their different national policy contexts. This thesis contributes to understanding the public and market orientations of HEIs and how they react and respond to national policy and market forces.

### *Identifying the Behaviours*

This study extends previous research of export marketing in HEIs that explore specific marketing themes (Hemsley-Brown & Optlaka, 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Naidoo & Wu, 2011) or market orientation frameworks (Asaad et al., 2013,

2014, 2015; Ross et al., 2007 2013). It does this by shedding light on the challenges and obstacles facing practitioners as they seek to attract students from export markets. As such, it is important to understand the various aspects of export marketing to contextualise and examine these behaviours in HEIs. Asaad et al. 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross et al., 2007, 2013 show that HEIs seeking to be effective export marketers need to generate export intelligence on international students, including prospective students, and must also monitor competitors as well as other moderating factors such as visa or immigration regulations. The institution must understand these factors and disseminate this as marketing intelligence throughout relevant departments. Dissemination provides institutional managers with new information to develop appropriate market responses. HEIs adopting these marketing behaviours may improve institutional performance in their export markets. “As a result, a high level of EMO [export marketing orientation] is expected to enhance the enrolment volume of international students and thereby boost universities’ revenue from international students” (Asaad, Melewar, & Cohen, 2013, p. 850). This finding suggests that if institutions are effective export marketers, they should be able to reap the financial rewards of attracting these students. However, institutions may not be effective due to internal tensions in their activity and uncovering those tensions will help to identify opportunities for practice improvement.

Asaad et al. (2015) export market framework show that commercial firms and HEIs exhibit similar behaviours in export marketing, namely intelligence gathering, dissemination, and responsiveness (Cadogan et al., 1999, 2002; Slater & Narver,



2000). However, Asaad et al., (2015) identify certain aspects of export marketing to be unique to HEIs namely, coordination capability and “university attitude toward governmental funding...are key predictors to all dimensions of EMO” (p. 145). Hence, the capability to coordinate export marketing activity within the institution and reliance on government funding suggest an institution is more likely to exhibit export marketing behaviours. Asaad et al., (2014) find that an institutional ranking in the league or international tables also impacts the nature of export marketing behaviours and the type of marketing activity undertaken in foreign markets. This finding means that higher international rankings may mean less reliance on other marketing behaviours as a high ranking may serve to attract international students (Asaad et al., 2014). An influential role of rankings also suggests that a country’s image in higher education guides institutional responsiveness to foreign markets and finds export marketing implementation highly related to achieving a competitive advantage in international education (Asaad et al., 2015). Therefore, a country’s attractiveness and policies towards prospective international students impact export marketing activity for HEIs. This means that individual institutional settings should be explored within the context of their national policy frameworks to provide insights into how these frameworks may shape their behaviour towards students in export markets. In this thesis, practitioners from various levels of institutional hierarchy assist to fill a gap in the literature by highlighting how various forces such as competition, government policies, and internal culture affect their practice.

Export marketing is an “evolution of a firm through distinct learning stages of increasing foreign commitment” (Tan, Brewer, & Liesch, 2007, p. 297). While export

marketing theory appears linear, it is rather evolutionary and cyclical (Leonidou, Paliawadana, & Theodosiou, 2011). Organisations begin export marketing as “experimental exporters” by initiating marketing activity in foreign markets with limited investment in resources (Katsikeas, Deng, & Wortzel, 1997). As expertise and investment increase over time, these organisations become “active exporters” that demonstrate market intelligence gathering, dissemination, and responsiveness to market needs (Cadogan et al., 2002; Cavusgil & Nevin, 1980). The final stage, demonstrated through the further investment of resources and increasing expertise, is called the “committed exporters” stage and suggests a high level of coordination in their activity (Koh, 1991). As such, examining HEIs' investment and coordination of international student recruitment can be explored as export marketing behaviour. Most studies on export marketing in HEI do not compare institutions by their level of export marketing (Asaad et al. 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross et al., 2007, 2013). However, they do discuss the extent HEIs exhibit antecedents of export marketing and their associated behaviours. This thesis seeks to address this gap by comparing the nature of behaviour exhibited by three universities in three distinct countries and how these comparisons can help to improve export marketing behaviour institutions.

It is found that the role of practitioners is critically important to export marketing, particularly through coordination (Asaad et al. 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross et al., 2007, 2013). Practitioners demonstrate coordination through their level of communication, cooperation, and problem-solving. Coordination is described as communication and understanding within organisations

that enhancing cooperation and solves problems (Nagy & Berács, 2012). For institutions to be successful in export marketing, communication, problem-solving and shared work-related goals amongst practitioners is necessary (Asaad et al., 2014). “Coordination between the international office and other departments/schools is essential for an effective EMO” (Asaad et al., 2014, p. 157). Different departments of the institution need to understand one another’s goals and have a similar understanding of the various tasks and roles necessary to achieve institutional outcomes. This understanding of export marketing means effectiveness requires monitoring of communications between departments and outlining goals regarding export markets (Nagy & Berács, 2012). Furthermore, general communication contributes to shared work-related goals within institutions and promotes problem-solving and coordination of the activity (Asaad et al., 2014). Practitioners demonstrate communication through regular meetings between departments and various methods of information dissemination. However, routine communication does not uncover the complexity of social interactions, conflicts, and cooperation that show the true nature of coordination (Nagy & Berács, 2012). These studies show the areas of potential problems for HEIs as they attract students from export markets. However, none of these studies investigate why these problems emerge in the first place (Asaad et al. 2013, 2014, 2015; Cadogan et al., 1999, 2005; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross et al., 2007, 2013). This thesis seeks to uncover those problems and to understand why these conflicts are occurring. This understanding of export marketing behaviour will shed light on how coordination, communication, and role clarity can improve practice.

Export marketing behaviours in HEIs may also be recognised in the absence or presence of shared goals and motives that highlight the true nature of institutional coordination and export market performance (Nagy & Berács, 2012). “Universities are social units with potentially some organisational phenomena such as communication channels, cooperation, inter-functional conflict and shared work-related goals (based on Cadogan et al., 1999). The presence or lack of these organisational themes shape export coordination” (Asaad et al., 2015, p. 132). This understanding is important as goals and motives contribute to intended and unintended outcomes of export marketing and impact institutional performance. By using activity theory to explore the perspectives of strategy practitioners of international student recruitment, this thesis explores their views of information gathering, dissemination, and market responsiveness, and the perceived level of coordination occurring within these HEIs. However, this thesis goes further than merely exploring behaviours and practitioners views; it sheds light on why HEIs behave in certain ways that contribute or hinder their practice.

Understanding export marketing within HEIs is still in the early stages (Asaad et al. 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross et al., 2007, 2013). Within the higher education context, export marketing implementation is described as “unchartered territory” (Assad et al., 2013) with little consideration to the distinctiveness of HEIs operating in the public domain, compared to traditional organisations (Maringe, 2006). Ross et al. (2007, 2013) and Asaad et al. (2015) examinations of HEIs export marketing activity finds that HEIs invest in information-based export marketing activities such as international student recruitment. Asaad

et al. (2015) confirm that market understanding and knowledge are critical for effective export marketing implementation and their studies support previous research suggesting the importance of information generation, dissemination, responsiveness to be effective in export marketing for organisations (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Cadogan et al., 1999, 2005; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross et al., 2007, 2013). This previous research shows that responsiveness is a critical component of export marketing for HEIs and an area of particular concern in implementation for some HEIs who may lack the capability to react to market forces expeditiously. These studies support the need to examine export marketing within individual HEIs, and to examine not only their capabilities, but the factors that may limit their practice (Asaad et al., 2015; Ross et al., 2013).

#### *Institutional Strategy and Internationalisation*

Global dynamics and institutional history arguably shape internationalisation for HEIs uniquely within their national policy frameworks (Geddie, 2015). The importance of government policy and environmental factors suggest “practices of international recruitment are shaped by a combination of proactive and reactive responses to wider transformations in the higher education landscape” (Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011 p. 533). In a case study comparison of two Danish institutions, Mosneaga and Agergaard (2011) found that international students are a necessary strategic interest related to internationalisation and HEIs formulate strategies based on indirect and direct government control. The literature suggests that for institutions in different parts of the world, approaches to internationalisation are shaped uniquely by politics and local discourse (Beech, 2018; Brandenburg et al., 2014; Callan, 2000; Knight,

2015; O'Connor, 2017; Rumbley et al. 2012). This context is necessary to understand how HEIs experience and adapt to changes in political and market forces that impact internationalisation policies, such as international student recruitment. This thesis argues that this context shapes institutional adoption export marketing behaviour and studies should consider the perceptions of a wide-range of actors who are involved in international student recruitment when examining HEIs' responses. This view of internationalisation positions international student recruitment as both strategy and practice within HEIs. In particular, is it essential to consider how practitioners make sense of these forces in their practice of international student recruitment and to what extent these policies influence their behaviours.

With growing demand for multiculturalism and global dimensions in teaching and learning processes, internationalisation is reflective of the globalisation of societies, labour markets, and economies in the 21st century (Qiang, 2003; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). Internationalisation has arguably become more complex and confusing as higher education policy is changing at both the institutional and national levels (Rumbley et al., 2012). Institutions adopt different approaches to internationalisation strategies that are shaped by their internal cultures and responses to their environments (Childress, 2009; Hawawini, 2011; O'Connor, 2017; Qiang, 2003). A review of the literature shows that there are four main approaches to internationalisation for HEIs; 1) the activity approach that focuses on specific curriculum or the recruitment of international students. This approach isolates internationalisation to a few areas within institutions 2) the competency-based approach that seeks to instill skills and knowledge amongst staff, academics, and

students 3) the process approach highly integrate internationalisation into the institutional operations through teaching, research, and service, and 4) ethos approach that suggests a strong belief system within institutions that support international views and initiatives (de Wit, 2005; 2015; Hawawini, 2011; Knight 2004, 2015; O'Connor, 2017; Qiang, 2003). The way in which an institution approaches their international activity and strategy can provide insights into how recruitment strategies are developed, and operationalised, and furthermore, shows insight into the culture of the institution. This thesis seeks to fill this gap in the literature by understanding institutional culture and how culture shapes the practice of international student recruitment.

Internationalisation of higher education is a multi-faceted concept. Following on from this, this thesis views internationalisation as an “activity” and institutional international student recruitment as the derivative of internationalisation strategies for institutions. In a previous study of strategic plan development in higher education, Childress (2009) found that the most “influential participants” in the development of international strategic plans were “campus-wide internationalization taskforces, chief international education administrators, and presidents and chancellors (p. 304). These findings highlight senior leaders’ behaviour as instrumental in the development of strategic plans for internationalisation and suggest that the creation of these plans bring meaning to internationalisation agendas in institutions by illustrating the intent and goals of the plans (Knight 2004; Childress, 2009). However, these studies show that understanding the operationalisation of institutional strategic plans is not well-

understood. In particular, previous studies have not compared the perspectives of practitioners, who have different roles and responsibilities for the recruitment of international students, from institutions in Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK.

### **Activity Theory**

This section introduces activity theory as a research tool in exploring international student recruitment as export marketing. The theory is used side-by-side with export marketing concepts to examine practice in the case studies from Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK. This section argues how activity theory is useful within HEI settings to understand the subjects' meaning of their practice and how those views inform the tensions occurring within the practice (Isssroff & Scanlon, 2002). These tensions identify opportunity for institutional learning and improvement. The theory requires a high understanding of historical and cultural settings such as the development of institutional and national policies and considers the practitioners' impact on practice (Hashim & Jones, 2007; Isssroff & Scanlon, 2002).

Activity theory is also known as cultural-historical activity theory that seeks to understand human activity from a cultural and historical perspective (Isssroff & Scanlon, 2002). Previous studies recognise that culture is a wide-ranging, all-encompassing concept that is used to discuss organizations, institutions, and people (Straub, Loch, Evaristo, Karahanna, & Strite, 2002). There are different conceptualisations of culture and the impact of culture on practice. Scholars have debated culture different contexts by examining culture from different perspectives



such as, shared values (Kroeber, 1952), as a problem-solving construct (Ford, 1942), or all-encompassing explicit and implicit system that exists as rules and order that have hidden influence on individuals (Hall, 1976). This study uses Engeström's third generation of activity theory that explores collective practice rather than the individual. This approach suggests that institutions have unique cultures that can be exposed in the institutionalised aspects of the organisation's activities (Spender, 1996). Actors transform this institutional knowledge into habit, and over time it becomes "the way things are done around here" (Selznick, 1957, p. 17). As such, this study aims to explore the concept of culture from the perspective of the subjects' understandings of "the way things are done around here" by studying the practice-level rather than the individual-level of activity and seeks to understand institutional implicit knowledge and rules that shape the practice of international student recruitment.

This study examines three different HEIs' and their practitioners by exploring their unique institutional and national settings as a basis to compare their practices. Strategic intent can change based on social and historical constructs and using activity theory allows a reflexive and exploratory approach to strategy practice by examining the research participants' views and perspectives. Kaptelinin and Nardi, (2006) describe activity theory as seeing "all practice as the result of certain historical developments under certain conditions. Development continuously reforms and develops practice" (p. 71). By examining the development and implementation of international student recruitment strategy, activity theory explores the history and culture of institutions "making internationalisation" and

“doing internationalisation” and between public and market orientations within HEIs. This approach to the study contributes to greater understanding of internationalisation activity such as the recruitment of students within individual academic environments (Beech, 2018; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011).

This thesis extends the research on international student recruitment as export marketing to understand why practitioners behave as they do rather than seeking to merely identify behaviours or conditions. Activity theory is not a laboratory experiment; rather it is used to look at active participation in the environment and changes in conditions (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). The relationships within activity units add complexity that suggests there is not a single methodology within the theory but rather different types, levels, and combinations of methods that result from different levels of development (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). Furthermore, as Leont’ev proposed in his three level-hierarchy of analysis, activity theory provides a framework for understanding motivations behind actions (Wilson, 2014). In this way, it is a qualitative methodology when approaching a specific situation with specific actions and relationships (Wilson, 2014). Because it studies social, contextual situations, activity theory allows the evaluation of “who (subject) does what to whom/what (object), in what circumstances (rules, community, division of labor, where, when)” (Boag-Munroe, 2010, p. 121).

The use of activity theory for international student recruitment enables the study to uncover practitioner motives and interactions that highlight tensions in the system. Activity theory can be seen as a methodology when researching complex social

interactions as it not only describes the subject and object, but motivations, divisions of labor, rules, tools, and communities. However, activity theory can also be used as an approach or framework when looking at activity units as informational systems. Researchers can identify boundaries within systems, which can guide the design, progression, application, and analysis of the investigation or research (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). When using it as a system analysis, understanding the three generations of activity theory and how to capture this information appropriately is an important consideration. Researchers using activity theory may explore Vygotsky's idea of mediated action and the two-way human-environment interactions (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010) before developing data collection methods to accurately capture the subjects' mediated processes that allow interaction between themselves and the environment (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). As well, from the second generation developed by Leont'ev (1981), researchers can understand the motives, skills, and processes that mediate activity, and identify them clearly in an activity unit. Furthermore, using Engeström's third generation work, researchers are then able to recognise bound systems without either oversimplifying or overcomplicating them. Therefore, researchers can look at the real-life interactions between personal, interpersonal, and collective systems (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Moreover, activity theory evaluates problems at different levels within a framework and facilitates interactions in social situations. (Issroff & Scanlon, 2002).

Previous studies use activity theory to explore organisations (Engeström, 2008, 2013, 2014) and to explore practices in HEIs (Bligh & Food, 2015; Blin & Munro, 2008; Issroff & Scanlon, 2002; Jarzowski, 2003; O'Connell & Saunders, 2012). Within

higher education, activity systems can be thought of as a university setting with different constituents of a hierarchy (Jarzabkowski, 2003). When studying social interactions in contextually rooted HEI practices, activity theory has been used to understand influences of technology, strategies, learning communities, rankings, and new curriculums (Blin & Munro, 2008; Issroff & Scanlon, 2002; Jarzabkowski, 2003; O'Connell & Saunders, 2012). These studies successfully use activity theory to generate data that provides insight into institutional practices and the tensions that arise from these practices. Bligh and Flood (2015) applied activity theory to five projects in higher education settings using a change laboratory to demonstrate tensions in these practices. Their study shows that activity theory is useful to identifying tensions that can be applied to institutional change in HEIs and propose that there needs to be greater understanding of culture and locality when examining conflicts in systems.

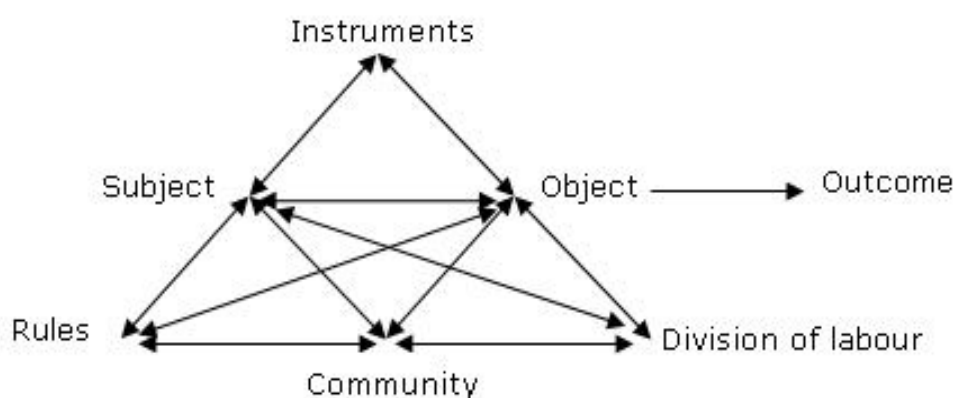
Within organisational systems, individuals' perceptions of policies change their interpretations and execution of actions (Canary, 2010). Canary finds that "in ongoing activities, people develop knowledge regarding what policies mean and how they relate to practice" (2010). Consequently, policy research is more than spreading information, but it involves a complex system of actions, objects, and subjects, to communicate policies such as internationalisation strategies or international student recruitment (2010). Several studies of workplace policy introduction show it is important to examine the complex interactions of organisational practices to understand the implications of policies put into practice (Canary, Rinehart, & Barlow, 2018; Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005). This suggests that policies are put into effect for

decision-making and action and actors interpret and construct meaning to action these policies. Therefore, organisational decision-making, such as strategy and international student recruitment, can be understood through policy examination (Jarzabowski, 2015). Activity theory is useful to deconstruct the complex construction of policy research because of its multilayered design (Canary 2010). More specifically, activity theory analyses action and can be used as a framework in policy research as it combines theoretical application, cultural-history, mediation, time, and individuals within a complex systemic structure (Smets, Greenwood, & Lounsbury, 2015).

#### *Activity Theory as the Conceptual Framework*

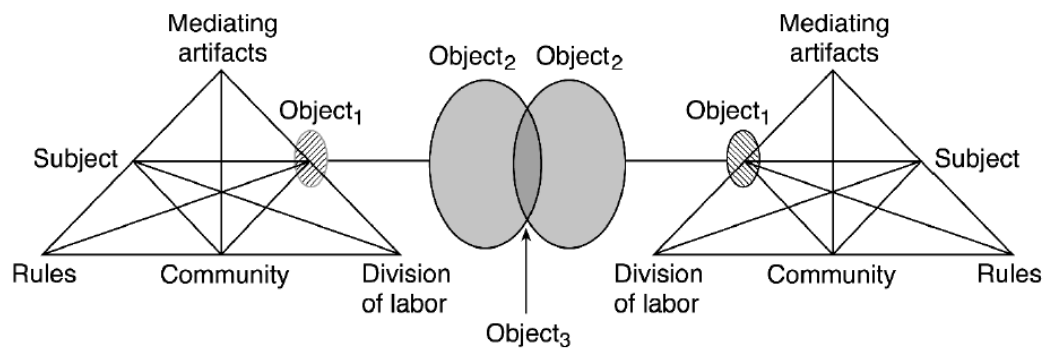
Engeström's third generation of activity theory helps to conceptualise the tensions within the international student recruitment practice by tying together Engeström's view of several interacting activity systems (Figure 2.2). This occurs by two of the second generation activity systems (Figure 2.1) interacting with each other at the object level and overlap to form a third object (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). This approach attempts to develop a network of activity systems that can be used for an analysis of contradiction, control, and power (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Within this model, Engeström recognises that activities are not isolated units, but the network influences through other activities (Issroff & Scanlon, 2002). Furthermore, within these activities, there are external changes that can cause an imbalance, for example when something is added such as new policies or plans or marketing, which does not have any means to be enforced (Issroff & Scanlon, 2002). These contradictions become tensions and lead to development within the activity and network of

activities (Isssroff & Scanlon, 2002). They are a characteristic of the system and not simply a problem (Engeström, 2001; Engeström & Kerosu, 2007). Engeström describes contradictions as “historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” (Engeström, 2001). Not to be understood as conflicts, contradictions are disruptions that interrupt the outflow of work (Blin & Munro, 2008). By understanding contradictions within an activity unit, activity theory perceives resistance and barriers resulting from the introduction of new objects, subjects, or tools (Blin & Munro, 2008). Depending on whether these contradictions are resolved or ignored can enable learning within the system to progress or regress (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008). As well, contradictions may not be immediately apparent as a whole or to various individuals, which influences community dynamics and relationship management (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008). While some contradictions are resolved without change to the community, some may offer an opportunity for development or transformation (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007)



**Figure 2.1 Engeström's activity theory diagram**

Source: Reprinted from “Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research,” by Y. Engeström, 1987, 78, Helsinki, Orienta-Konsultit.



**Figure 2.2 Engeström’s third generation activity theory.**

Source: Reprinted from (Engeström, 2001, p. 136).

The opportunities identified in the analysis allow a comparison between the case study sites that are necessary to identify learning opportunities for practitioners and the adoption new behaviours by institutions. This suggests that collaborative learning in practice that contributes to and leads learning opportunities for practitioners (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Vygotsky (1978) developed the concept of work learning through the subject-environment relationship known as the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which is defined by Barab, Evans, and Baek (2004), as the “distance between what an individual can achieve on her own (the actual level of cognitive development) and what the individual can accomplish when guided by more capable peers or adults (the potential level of development)” (p. 201). In other words, a person’s intellectual development is better learned through social

interaction within a cultural and tool-rich environment (Barab et al., 2004). In this way, mediated ZPD is actively learned and is partially the responsibility of the teacher or leader within the practice, such as senior leaders or institutional managers.

### *Strategy as Practice and the Role of Practitioners*

Activity theory is chosen over other practice strategy theories as it explores the human elements of strategy practice rather than solely non-human factors (Boag-Munroe, 2010). Previous studies of international student recruitment and export marketing (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Choudaha et al., 2013; Hesketh & Knight, 1999; Moogan, Baron, & Harris, 1999; Soutar & Turner, 2002; Onk & Joseph, 2017; Vrontis et al., 2018) focus on the actions and tools of the practice rather than exploring, in-depth, the practitioners and how they shape practice. However, activity theory will provide an in-depth understanding of behaviour and practice in this study. “It conceptualizes non-human artefacts as mediators between actors but not as actors in their right” (Jarzabkowski, 2003, p. 137). This distinction is important in this research. This thesis views strategy as more than just plan or document, but rather positions strategy as activity by considering practitioners’ intentions and how these intentions shape the meaning, outcome, and tensions of the practice (Barab et al., 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, activity theory becomes highly useful as it enables an examination of different practitioners views of international student recruitment and export marketing, rather than examining solely the behaviours or conditions that impact practice.



Strategy is a particular type of activity that connects with particular practices. Activity theory has been used previously to explore the activity of strategy within institutions (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Jarzabkowski, et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008; Jarzabkowski & Wolf, 2015). This thesis fills a gap in the literature by exploring strategy from the perspectives of a wide-range of actors involved in the practice, rather than merely senior leaders. Furthermore, this study views strategy as activity as it is considered strategic to the extent that it is consequential for the strategic outcomes, directions, survival, and competitive advantage of the organisation (Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003). According to Jarzabkowski (2003), strategising occurs at the centre of praxis, practices, and practitioners. Jarzabkowski (2003) suggests that strategy as practice research may explain outcomes that are consequential to the organisation at all levels from the most micro details of human behaviour to broader institutional levels. However, a wider definition of a strategist is necessary to expand the understanding of strategy beyond the predominance of top managers and to incorporate other actors who contribute to strategy (Johnson et al., 2003), as well as look at what impact a strategist has on praxis. Strategy practitioners are predominantly those directly involved in making strategy (usually managers and consultants), but may also be those who indirectly influence strategies such as policy-makers and managers who shape praxis and practices (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008). In HEIs, a top management team is usually the one that makes the final decisions, typically because they have the most access to power and resources. There are, however, other organisational actors who aid in making strategic decisions, such as faculty and other professional staff (for example, senior leaders, recruiters, administrators, and

staff). In Jarzabowski's (2003) study of three UK institutions, the research included those responsible for strategic planning, financial decision-making, income generation, resource allocation, and monitoring and control. Practitioners shape strategic activity through who they are, how they act, and what practices they draw upon (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). The majority of literature suggests the concept of strategy as a "top-down" process, which is why the main focus of strategy as practice literature is usually on top managers, their demographics, and their decision-making processes (Childress, 2009; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; O'Connor, 2017). The problem with this is those demographics do not speak to who a person is, and how that person acts, and the consequences of their actions. The identities that strategists bring to their work may constitute fundamentally different experiences in the way their actions shape strategy. The emotion and passion that strategists bring to their work, and their motivations and intentions are important to their practices and how these motivations shape their tasks and the outcomes of their practice. Middle managers and lower level employees are also important strategic actors. Even though these actors may lack a formal strategy role, they are significant to the organisation's survival and competitive advantage. It is important to identify other actors involved in shaping strategy, besides top managers (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007).

This thesis builds on previous studies that show HEIs are important sites for the study of strategic action (Childress, 2007; Jarzabkowski & Wolf, 2015; O'Connor, 2017). HEIs compete for funding, students and other resources and need to undergo strategic change to improve. Activity theory, in this study, will show how practitioners of strategy identify opportunities for change and how their position

within the system defines the meaning of the activity. This study expands the literature on international student recruitment by using activity theory and export marketing concepts side-by-side to bring greater understanding to HEIs practices.

## **Summary**

The review of the literature shows it is important to consider the various actors and policies that shape international student recruitment and how institutions are evolving (Findlay, et al., 2017; Hulme, et al., 2014; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011; O'Connor, 2017; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2017). Examinations of institutional strategy and their reactions and responses to public and market environments can add valuable insights higher education operational management. This is important as different forces may shape the recruitment of international students such as national policy frameworks, competition, internal capabilities and resources, and institutional culture. More importantly, different actors within institutional settings shape practice through individual motivations and goals. Those factors have not been examined in-depth in the literature. The literature examines various facets of international student recruitment including student choice and effectiveness of marketing tactics (Choudaha et al., 2013; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Naidoo & Wu, 2011; Onk & Joseph, 2017; Vrontis, et al., 2017; Zinn & Johansson, 2015) or specific policy comparatives of different jurisdictions (Brandenburg et al., 2014; Cudmore 2005; Geddie, 2015; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011; Rumbley et al., 2012; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2017). Furthermore, there have been few comparisons amongst institutions in different countries to determine similarities and differences in the practice of international student recruitment. Previous literature compares a

narrower range of actors and situations such as international student recruitment managers, agents, students, or academics in the same country or from two countries (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Beech, 2018; Findlay, et al., 2017; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross et al., 2013; O'Connor, 2017). These studies do not isolate how various actors, in different hierarchical positions and with different responsibilities for international student recruitment, view their practice. By using activity theory and export marketing theory, side-by-side, this thesis extends the literature to show how HEIs internal culture and history and external forces of competition and national policies shape their practice.

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

This chapter describes the research design by detailing the methodological approach of case study and describing the data generation, collection and analysis procedures. This chapter argues that by using activity theory and export marketing theory side-by-side as the analytical framework, the research questions are answered. This requires using a rigorous data generation and collection process to ensure quality with the documents and semi-structured interviews.

### **The Research Design**

This study examines international students as export marketing behaviour in three universities from the UK, Canada, and Hong Kong. In particular, the study explores the various actors, as subjects of the activity systems, who have different roles within the hierarchy of each institution. The majority of literature suggests the concept of strategy as a “top-down” process, which is why the main focus of strategy as practice literature is usually on top managers, their demographics, and their decision-making processes (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). This study purposively expands the definition of strategy practitioners to include different contributors to institutional strategy and practice such as staff, as they are significant to the institution’s survival and shape practice. As Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) argue, it is important to identify other actors involved in shaping strategy, besides top managers. This study expands the research on strategy practice by incorporating a broader set of participants in the hierarchy of international student recruitment and examining their perceptions and experiences to understand export marketing within

HEIs. Each case study also presents a unique policy, history, and culture and by situating the case study sites in different countries, the thesis explores distinct settings to study international student recruitment practice and export marketing. This thesis will address the lack of empirical research comparing the internal operations of HEIs as they participate in commercial-like practices such as export marketing and international student recruitment. The research questions guide the thesis in achieving this aim:

1. How do practitioners view the role of institutional strategic plans in shaping international student recruitment?
2. What are the perceived tensions in international student recruitment practices at these HEIs and how do these tensions compare in each case study?
3. How do strategy practitioners describe and perceive the export marketing behaviours of their institution and how do these behaviours compare between Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK?
4. How can the lessons learned from these case studies assist in informing export marketing strategy and international student recruitment practice for these HEIs?

The research questions outline the stages of the research process and illustrate the overall approach to the study. In the first stage, the strategic plans in each case study were examined to understand their influence on the subjects' practice. This understanding of the strategic plans assessed the mediating role of the strategic plans on the systems. Once strategic plans were contextualised within each practice, the study focused on the second stage of the research process that defined the activity systems of each practice and used the insights from the strategic plan analysis to identify the various nodes of each activity system. This stage of the research uncovered the tensions in practice. This was an important step as the tensions served to analyse the export marketing behaviours in each institution. The subjects' views uncovered tensions in the practice that informed the nature and extent of export marketing behaviours in each case study. The final step of the research analysed the three previous stages to discover learnings that informed the practice international student recruitment.

### **Activity theory as the Conceptual Framework**

Using the third-generation of activity theory (Engeström, 2001) as a research tool, this thesis examines the activity of international student recruitment and identifies tensions in the practice (Issroff & Scanlon, 2002, Jarazabowski, 2003, Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). It explores international student recruitment as a mediated activity and seeks to understand practitioners' views of institutional strategic plans and export marketing behaviours as human activity that is shaped by various actors, and institutional values, history, and culture. Previous studies of export marketing in HEIs focus on applying export marketing theory to HEIs in one or two countries and

identify areas for improvement within export marketing practice (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Optlaka, 2010; Ross et al., 2007, 2013). This thesis extends this literature by contextualising export marketing by exploring in-depth, the opportunities and constraints that exist within individual HEIs' environments. In this study, for the first time, export marketing is explored side-by-side with activity theory providing a flexible examination of the recruitment of international students that adds insight into the challenges of adopting export marketing behaviours in institutions.

Using activity systems encourages examining relational or mediating forces between subjects and objects (O'Connell & Saunders, 2013). Tools, rules, division of labour, and the community (Figure 2.1) shape practice and form a model to examine the mediation of these constituents on practice. In this thesis, the activity system approach was used to conceptualise institutional strategic plans as mediating international student recruitment. This was an important construct to understand the effects of institutional strategy on international student recruitment and export marketing. This enabled the research to assess coordination, communication, and market responsiveness capability within the practices and to understand the opportunities to improve practice (Asaad et al., 2015; Cadogen et al., 2002; Cavusgil & Nevin, 1980; Nagy & Berács, 2012).

### **The Paradigm**

The importance of understanding the subjects' views, ideas, interactions, history, culture, and the evolving world around them is a unique way to explore international



student recruitment as export marketing behaviour in HEIs. The main theoretical framework of this study is activity theory because it provides a lens to explore the historical and cultural context of the case study sites that helps to uncover the unique aspects of institutional dynamics that shape international student recruitment as export marketing at these institutions. A constructivist approach to examining international student recruitment offers a real-world perspective of the activity and has the advantage of considering the perspectives of the individuals or subjects in their own practices (Bryman, 2008). This real-world view of the subjects' practices takes the constructivist approach and was chosen for this study. While other ontology stances such as pragmatism or positivism may be used to explore export marketing, the purpose of this thesis is the subjectivity and views of those involved in the practice. It is this understanding of the subjects that is the foundation of this thesis.

This study views export marketing adoption as an active process that is constructed and shaped by subjects based on their motives and creates outcomes that may or may not be intended. This research argues that activity theory is well suited to explore international student recruitment as export marketing behaviour. An essential dimension of constructionism is that it is "subjective, constructed, multiple, and diverse" (Sarantakos, 2003, p. 41). Rather than being fixed or defined, the recruitment of students from international markets is an activity that is molded and shaped by national policy, administrative leadership, and individual activity occurring within institutions and between institutions and students. Individuals within these interacting systems have different motivations and meanings attached to the activity

and by selecting particular strategy practitioners, this study seeks to understand how these subjects perceive practice. As argued in the literature, export marketing behaviours are social constructs that are shaped by political interaction and internal capabilities that are not well understood in HEIs (Asaad, et al. 2013, 2014, 2015). Export marketing, as international student recruitment, is a practice that exists in a shared culture created by human interaction (Sarantakos, 2015). This constructivist view of export marketing positions the study to explore strategy practitioners in their unique settings that contribute to the way export marketing behaviours may be adopted.

Interpretivism further highlights the epistemological assumptions of this study. Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain that a useful way of understanding and applying epistemology is to see it as, “What is the nature of the relationship between the would-be knower and what can be known” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108)? This thesis compares the differences between the subjects and between institutions that sheds light on institutional practices to provide greater understanding and to create learning opportunities for individuals and institutions. “Interpretivism accepts that the world is constantly changing and that meanings are shifting and contested” (Thomas, 2003, p. 75). This study interprets the practice of international student recruitment as export marketing as co-constructed through relationships between subjects and mediating influences on their practice that enables activity theory and export marketing theory to be used side-by-side (Denzin, 2008).

### *Case Study Method*

Case study method was used to explore the multiple perspectives of the practitioners involved in the recruitment of international students and to compare the practices of three higher education institutions in separate locations; Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK. The three case studies were chosen to explore and compare the activity systems, the University of Prince Edward Island, University of Hong Kong, and the Lancaster University. Case study method provided a flexible examination and context of the practice of international student recruitment at each HEI and a basis to conduct comparisons (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Case study research is a method of systematically looking at contextual phenomena, or related phenomena, with the intention of generalising the information to a wider application (Gerring, 2004). Case study method was used in this study to examine three institutions resulting in a cross-case study analysis (Stake, 2013). According to Yin (2009), using case study research is useful when the focus of the research questions are “how” and “why” problems. A case study may be beneficial because observed and interview-based evidence may be better for understanding (Yin, 2003). This thesis focused on how and why these institutions adopt export marketing behaviours and how they conduct international student recruitment, from the perspectives of different practitioners in each system. Each of these case study sites has international strategies that focus on recruiting students from international markets and invest in marketing resources to attract these students. By examining each case and its context from multiple perspectives, this case study research gathered qualitative information within a broad scope that contributed to answering the research questions (Yin, 2012).

Researchers support the practicality of case study research (Yin, 1984, 2003; Starman, 2013). For example, case study research is flexible in its ability to choose a topic, collect data from multiple sources, change methods or subjects as needed, and be conducted as a singular study or within a wider design (Starman, 2013; Zainal, 2017). Yin describes several advantages to case study research including the data context and generalisability. This research design lets the data be contextualised within its environment of activity, providing a comprehensive understanding of the data within its surroundings that is important when examining export marketing for HEIs as they operate in public and commercial domains. This allows the case study approach to be generalisable in applying activity theory and export marketing comparisons to HEIs. This approach is in contrast to an examination in an isolated environment with a narrow range of variables (Yin, 1984). Yin also explores the ability of case study research to be adaptable to either quantitative or qualitative analysis of data. In this way, using data from different sources is beneficial such as documents, and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data in this study (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, case study research is suited to examining real-life context such as international student recruitment. This real-world approach means that the research can capture and provide detailed accounts of data complexities not found in other types of research that can contribute to understanding the recruitment of international students and export marketing in HEIs (Yin, 2003).

Within higher education operational management, there also have been many appeals for empirical research (McCutcheon & Meredith, 1993). More field-based data would improve information about operation management systems in a real-world context. Case study research, although criticised by some for lacking objectivity or rigor, supports the investigation of international student recruitment, as a real-world construct (McCutcheon & Meredith, 1993). Case study research is useful for institutional management as it allows for several data sources in real-world contexts, where there was no previous research before (Jensen & Rodgers, 2001). There are few empirical studies on HEIs and export marketing, and the case study approach provides the flexibility to examine multiple sources and to gather appropriate qualitative data for the study. By using the case study method to explore strategic practices, this study takes a different approach to examining international student recruitment and export marketing at HEIs by using activity theory to delve deeply into the specific nodes or constituencies involved in international student recruitment aiding in a rich understanding of individual HEIs in a cross-case study analysis.

### *Recruitment of Case Studies*

The case study institutions were selected using purposive and convenience sampling based on three criteria; 1) diversity in enrolment size (UPEI < 5000 students, HKU >25000 students; and Lancaster University > 12000 students 2) geographic differences that generate international perspectives from the participants and provide unique settings for each of the institutions from a national policy perspective; and, 3) history and experience in conducting student international

recruitment. The University of Prince Edward Island and Lancaster University are relatively young institutions established in the 1960's while the HKU is over 100 years old. The institutions all share relatively high percentages of international students compared to their overall enrolment (See Table 3.3). The differences in history and settings create unique cases to explore the practice of international student recruitment and to compare the various case study systems.

In choosing these case studies, searches of HEIs around the world were conducted by examining their institutional websites, rankings, articles, and on-line topics. Also, informal discussions occurred with individuals who are involved in student recruitment to assist in identifying potential case study sites. International offices at several institutions were contacted, and a list of potential institutions to sample was drafted. Over several months, based on the guiding criteria above, three institutions agreed to participate. Choosing appropriate case sites was a difficult task, given the competitive and proprietary nature of institutional student recruitment, institutions were somewhat reluctant to participate. Ultimately the three case studies chosen offered diversity by being located in three different countries that has different national policy frameworks. Also, the case study sites varied in the size of their student population, but each had established teams and resources dedicated to recruiting students internationally. Ultimately the settings of Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK provided rich comparisons that reflected the study's intent.

The case study sites include the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada; the University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong; and Lancaster University, United Kingdom.

Each of these institutions actively recruits international students (both graduate and undergraduate). Table 3.3 highlights key characteristics of these sites. An important factor in choosing the case studies was the different national and historical settings that shape international student recruitment and export marketing behaviour presenting opportunities to compare institutions. Each institution has high enrolments of international students, varying between 18 – 26% of their student population (Table 3.3). However, enrolments alone do not explain practice and practitioners may face similar or different challenges in their practice.

#### *Sampling Procedures for Participants*

Interview participants were chosen purposively for their role and position in the hierarchy of the recruitment of international students so that only those who were identified as recruiters, support staff, administrators, and senior leaders were included (Patton, 2005). These differences in roles and participation required a thoughtful approach to the selection of participants, the interviews, and the analysis. Senior leaders are those who were responsible for strategy development and resource allocation while administrators were responsible for oversight and implementation. Recruiters regularly interacted with prospective students while support staff supported these efforts through tasks such as research and marketing.

The sampling procedure identified the participants through contact with the office responsible for international student recruitment at each institution. The contact information is available publicly on each institution's website. In one institution, the

initial contact provided an introduction to participants via email, and then a follow-up information letter was sent directly to each participant. In two other institutions, one person was contacted, based on their role in international recruitment that, in turn, provided the email invitation and invitation letter to those involved in international student recruitment. Once individuals responded to the request to participate, a final review of the organisational chart was conducted to clarify the roles and responsibilities with the initial contact to finalise the sample. This resulted in a snowball sampling approach that was purposive and necessary to achieve the research aim of investigating actors from various positions in the hierarchy of each institution (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). The size of the sample varied according to the number of individuals involved in international recruitment in either a strategic, implementation or support role until a saturation point was reached, meaning a sufficient number participants representing the functional areas of the collective activity were interviewed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This point was measured in all institutions, as there were a finite number of potential participants. As such, the study involved eight interviews at the UPEI case study (population eleven); five interviews at the University of Hong Kong case study (population five); and fifteen interviews at Lancaster University (population twenty-two). This variation in size was reflective, not only of the level of effort and resources dedicated to international student recruitment but also how the institutions assigned responsibilities. In total, the study involved twenty-eight interviews across the three case study locations. The interviews were conducted in-person and audio-recorded. Table 3.1 outlines the titles of the participants interviewed at each case



study site, their role in the activity system, and the primary data provided to answer the research questions.

<b><u>PARTICIPANTS</u></b>	<b><u>RESPONSIBILITY</u></b>	<b><u>STRATEGY PRACTITIONER ROLE</u></b>	<b><u>PRIMARY INFORMATION</u></b>
<b><u>LANCASTER UNIVERSITY</u></b>			
Pro Vice Chancellor International	Implements the University's international strategy	Senior leader	Strategy and policy and resource allocation
Director of Recruitment, Admissions & International Development	Directs international student recruitment and international development	Senior leader	Strategy and policy and resource allocation
Head of Overseas Programmes	Directs international partnerships and transfer programmes	Administrative role	Programmes and activities
Associate and Assistant Deans responsible for Internationalisation (4)	Responsible for internationalisation agendas within faculties	Administrative role	Implementation of strategy within the Faculties
Head of International Office	Overseas international activities including partnerships, recruitment, and programmes	Administrative role	Implementation, programmes, and activities
Chief Administrative Officer	Administrative leader of Recruitment, Admissions & International Development	Senior leader	Strategy and policy and resource allocation
Head of International Development	Overseas international plans for Management School	Administrative role	Strategy and implementation within Management School
Recruitment & Operations Manager	Recruits students within Management Faculty	Recruiter and support	Implementation within Management School
Regional Officer	Recruits students	Recruiter	Recruitment activities
Regional Managers (3)	Recruits students	Recruiter	Recruitment activities
<b><u>UNIVERSITY OF PEI</u></b>			
Associate Director of International Student Recruitment	Develops plans for student recruitment and recruits students	Administrative role	Planning and implementation of recruitment activities
Vice President Academic & Research	Sets direction on international strategy	Senior leader	Strategy and policy and resource allocation
Recruiters (2)	Recruits students	Recruiters	Recruitment activities
Registrar	Overseas policies related to international students	Senior leader	Policies and planning for international students
Associate Director of Admissions	Provides admissions and support services for international student recruitment	Administrative role	Policies and planning for international students
Institutional Research Officer	Provides data, analytics and reporting on students	Support	Planning and information generation
Director of International	Oversees all international programs and student recruitment	Administrative role	Strategy, planning, and implementation and resource allocation
<b><u>HONG KONG UNIVERSITY</u></b>			
Deputy Director of Admissions & Academic Liaison Section	Responsible for international student policies and direction setting	Senior leader	Strategy and planning and resource allocation
Programme Managers (3)	Conducts student recruitment overseas and	Recruiter and support role	Recruitment activities and information generation

	provides analytics and reporting		
Senior Programme Manager	Directs the activities of recruitment and support staff	Administrative role	Implementation of plans and activities

**Table 3.1 – Participants and their roles**

*The Settings – Bringing Context to the Case Studies*

The unique setting and experience with international student recruitment influenced the choice of case study locations. In Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK, higher education systems are publicly funded, however tuition fees from students contribute to their operations (Jones, 2014; Lo, 2016; Beech, 2018). Policies in each country have been described as neo-liberal, with tensions arising between traditionally public goods and those requiring competitive responses to attract students for talent and fees (Beech, 2018; Bray, 2017; Jones, 2014; Lo, 2016; Marginson, 2016). These diverse environments create opportunity for rich understanding of the practices within each HEI and how national policy and institutional strategy may shape the recruitment of international students for practitioners. Each setting has similarities and differences in their national policy context that is discussed in the following sections. It is important to contextualise these policies, as practitioners make meaning of their practice through rules and tools such as policy frameworks. Table 3.2 outlines a comparison of jurisdictional-specific policies related to the internationalisation of higher education including each jurisdiction's immigration policies and governance that influenced international student recruitment. The three case study sites in these countries demonstrated diversity in location, experience, and history in international student recruitment. Each of these institutions had strategic plans that were mindful of their national

policy frameworks but also sought to establish their international agendas in unique ways. These strategies were an important dimension of the research. The practitioners views of these plans were examined to uncover the nature of these plans mediating international student recruitment practice. To provide greater context to each of the case studies, Table 3.2 frames immigration policy in the jurisdictions and Table 3.3 outlines the three institutions enrolment statistics and programme offerings.

#### 1. University of Prince Edward Island, Canada: National Context

Canada's internationalisation of education, through the attraction of students, presents as a mainly economic agenda (Foreign Affairs Trade and Development, 2014). It focuses on attracting students for economic benefits through spending and the retention of skills for the labour market. This neo-liberal approach to higher education is somewhat consistent with other English-speaking jurisdictions around the world as countries seek to grow their economies through human capital strategies (Cudmore, 2005). The Canadian higher education system is funded indirectly by the federal government, through transfer payments to the provinces and from the provinces' direct expenditures on higher education. In Canada, the provinces have the responsibility and authority for education, including higher education. However, immigration, the main policy-driver for student mobility, is a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments, nonetheless, the federal government exercises much control over this domain (Geddie, 2015). The provinces exercise full control over the operating and capital grants for their

institutions in their jurisdictions (Geddie, 2015; Jones, 2014). Within Canada, there has been a decline in domestic enrolments giving rise to concerns amongst HEIs regarding revenue streams from students and sustainable funding from government (Jones, 2014). This creates a multi-layered policy system in Canada for HEIs as they need to address both federal and provincial government policy imperatives.

One key policy of the Canadian government is to be a global leader in international education (Foreign Affairs Trade and Development, 2014). Higher education decentralisation leads to Canada's overseas promotion being fragmented and contentious between the provinces and the federal government (Geddie, 2015). Despite the lack of clarity for responsibilities for overseas promotions, the federal government has invested in establishing a brand for attracting international students called "Imagine Education au/in Canada" in 2008, signaling its intentions to compete on a global scale (Lewington, 2011). Further evidence of this competitive stance, is the establishment of an advisory board to the federal government to make recommendations on international education strategy to maximise economic opportunities in education. These policies are designed to increase the number of international students in Canada by enhancing its relationships abroad to improve and expand the perception of the quality of education in Canada (Foreign Affairs Trade and Development, 2014). While this policy is under the purview of the Canadian federal government, many provinces and institutions also have their plans to increase international students, contributing to some complexity in the international market with multiple Canadian actors involved in the attraction of students (Geddie, 2015).

In 2016, 495,000 international students contributed \$15.5 billion to the Canadian economy (Foreign Affairs Trade and Development, 2014). Between 2008 and 2016, international student numbers increased from 184,155 to 495,000 (Global Affairs Canada, 2017). This has been attributed to Canada's focus on attracting international students through overseas marketing efforts and by simplifying the student visas process and allowing post-study employment for international students (Geddie, 2015). Compared to some other top education destinations for international students, Canada's visa policies have become increasingly favourable (Foreign Affairs Trade and Development, 2014). The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) replaced the Immigration Act of 1967 in 2001 and set the foundation for the programs that facilitate international students to Canada (see Table 3.1). Since 2014, Canada has made additional changes to their immigration policy that aim to support its interests to attract more international students to achieve labour and skills demands in Canada (Geddie, 2015).

#### UPEI: History and importance of international students

UPEI is located eastern Canada in Canada's smallest province and is the only university in the province, created in 1969 following the amalgamation of Prince of Wales College and St. Dunstan's University ("About UPEI," 2016). The institution primarily focuses on undergraduate programs. UPEI has five faculties (Arts, Business, Education, Science, and Veterinary Medicine) and three schools (Nursing, Sustainable Design Engineering, and Mathematical and Computational Sciences). Approximately 4,400 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students attend the

institution (“About UPEI,” 2016). Recruitment of students has become challenging in recent years with declining domestic youth population; undergraduate students decreased from 3,722 in 2011 to 3,588 in 2013 (“UPEI by the Numbers,” 2016). The institution has been steadily growing the number of international students to fill the void. Over the past five years, UPEI has grown international enrolments at five times the rate of its regional counterparts, mainly due to a more aggressive recruitment effort that has increased international students by 259% in comparison to 118% throughout the region (“MPHEC Enrolment,” 2016). The rapid increase in growth of international students stems from the institutional strategic priorities that establishes the importance of these students to the institution (“UPEI Strategic Plan,” 2013).

#### UPEI’s International student recruitment structure

UPEI’s International Relations Office (IRO) is responsible for the recruitment and admissions of international students to the institution, as well as all internationalisation activities such as MOU partnerships with other institutions, articulation agreements, student and faculty exchange programs, and English as a second language courses. UPEI’s short-term enrolment plan identifies the following primary international markets: China, Africa, the Middle East, and South America (“Short-Term Enrolment Plan,” 2013). UPEI intends to compete in these markets by improving incentives and processes, combined with a targeted marketing strategy. One specific effort to improve international enrolment is the reconfiguration of the IRO to combine international and domestic recruitment; this occurred in January 2017. The institution deploys recruiters to reach over twenty-four primary

geographic markets around the globe. Also, they reach an additional fifteen secondary markets through the use of educational agents. The institution attracts students from over sixty-nine countries. In 2016, 22% of the student body comprised international students. The institution is continuing to strive to increase international enrolments to counteract declining domestic demographics in high school enrolments. This need for students places importance on the recruitment of international students to financially sustain the institution ("Short-Term Enrolment Plan," 2013).

## 2. The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong (HKU) National Policy Context

Hong Kong has strategic interests in becoming an educational hub; recent changes in policy, and its unique governance framework as a special administrative region within China that made it an intriguing case study site (Lee, 2014). Policy-makers traditionally recognised the importance of attracting and retaining an international cohort of students to live and work in Hong Kong, yet the operating environment for higher education institutions is challenged by the mandate to serve mainland China and to maintain adherence to the University Grants Committee (UGC) policies on student admissions (Lee, 2014, Lo, 2016). One main area of policy for the UGC is admissions whereby the UGC establishes enrolment requirements for their institutions allowing 20% of the student population to be deemed international (Lo, 2016; UGC, 2017). As part of the governance of higher education in Hong Kong, the Universities Grants Committee (UGC) was formed in 1965 by the government to assist in the development of policies and strategies for higher education institutions recruitment and retention of international students (Lee, 2014; Lo, 2016) It is

responsible for determining the funding of the government subsidised academic degree programs in eight Hong Kong universities. The UGC works with institutions, administration, and the community to promote excellence in the higher education sector, with a mission to establish Hong Kong as the education hub of the region ("Mission Statement of the University Grants Committee," n.d.).

Hong Kong is uniquely different from most other places in the world, in that it is not a nation (C.C., 2017). Consequently, it is considered to be a "special administrative region" of China (C.C., 2017). Operating under the principle of "one country, two systems," Hong Kong maintains a separate political and economic system from China. Except in military defense and foreign affairs, Hong Kong maintains its independent executive, legislative, and judiciary powers (C.C., 2017). According to the Basic Law of Hong Kong, all education institutions are allowed to preserve institutional autonomy and academic freedom (Nation People's Congress, 1990). While policies state independence for education in Hong Kong, there are shifts occurring that create instability for the future of higher education in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is going through a "paradigm shift" as it traditionally sought to manage and benefit from globalisation, internal tensions between Hong Kong and China question this independence (Bray, 2017; Lee, 2014; Lo, 2016). This places pressure on HEIs in Hong Kong as they seek to improve their global competitiveness while facing constraints in the quota and changing policy perspectives from government.

Hong Kong's competitiveness agenda rests in attracting non-local students for their talents and economic benefits (Lee, 2014). The internationalisation of education is a



strategy designed to position Hong Kong a regional education hub (Lo, 2016). To reach this goal, Hong Kong articulates core elements of this strategy such as the exchange of academics, students, and knowledge across national boundaries; the recruitment of non-local and local students; the export of higher education by local institutions outside Hong Kong; and the import of higher education from overseas universities in Hong Kong (University Grants Committee, 2017). Seventy- six percent of all non- local students is from Mainland China representing the most important market of higher education for the eight UGC institutions (UGC, 2017). Local universities in Hong Kong are creating partnerships with schools in Mainland China in the form of joint teaching and research projects as well as academic exchange programs (Lee, 2014). As important as it is to maintain this relationship with Mainland China, it is also important that they focus on recruiting students from other parts of Asia and other parts of the world to ensure diversity of nations and cultural backgrounds and increase Hong Kong's chances of becoming an educational hub (UGC, 2017).

Hong Kong's visa policies are reflective of the globalised position in the world (Lee, 2014; Bray, 2017). Student visas and post-study work visas are quite flexible in Hong Kong to attract international students but also to retain them in the labour market, post-graduation (Lee, 2014). HEIs coordinate visas for international students. Non-local students who wish to stay and work in Hong Kong, post-graduation, may stay or return to work under the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates (IANG). Non-local graduates who submit applications to the Immigration Department within six months after the date of their graduation are not required to have secured an

offer of employment upon application. See Table 3.1. Hong Kong presents an interesting setting to explore the attraction of international students, as they seek to compete for global talent while facing “paradigm shifts” in national and local policy (Lo, 2016).

#### HKU: History and importance of international students

HKU is the oldest institution in Hong Kong opening in March 1912 and has become one of the leaders in international student recruitment and is recognised by "Times Higher Education" as one of the most international institutions in the world ("About HKU," 2017). The university's strategic plan "Strategic Plan 2015 – 2020" (2014) focuses on internationalisation that seeks to establish the institution as the top international university in Asia. The university's diverse student body is reflective of this international approach and represents six continents (including students from the US, Australia, Chile, Estonia, Germany, India, Japan, Singapore, Britain, Korea, Portugal, and Pakistan) and 108 nationalities ("Global Admissions Profile", 2016). HKU offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs in 10 faculties including Arts, Business and Economics, Dentistry, Education, Engineering, Law, Medicine, Science and Social Sciences. It partners with businesses, non-governmental organisations, and social enterprises across the world to give its students opportunities to test their knowledge and work alongside people in their field of study ("About HKU," 2017). The university has almost 28,000 students, 39% of which are international students. HKU is ranked 40th in the "2018 World University Rankings" (Times Higher Education, 2018).

### HKU: International student recruitment structure

International recruitment at the HKU is the responsibility of the Admissions and Academic Liaison Section of the institution, which includes Admissions and the Office of International Affairs. This department directs the recruitment, admissions, and advisement of international students. Recruiters report to the Admissions division, but the team works within the entire section on recruitment, analytics, admissions, and enrolment efforts. The institution's strategy is to ensure high caliber students and internationally diverse campus. Within this context, HKU employs the use of several recruiters who visit thirteen countries plus Mainland China in 2016. For HKU, China is viewed as a domestic market but is subject to the quote established by the UGC. HKU purposively does not use educational agents to reach its markets to maintain control of the brand and admissions standards and relies predominantly on face-to-face recruitment efforts. For HKU, they define non-local students as international students (for comparison purposes). It is important to note that the term "international" is viewed broadly at HKU as local students, whose nationality is non-Chinese, are considered international. However, to compare "internationally recruited students," the term "non-local" is used to compare similar students across the three institutions. As such, 20% of HKU's undergraduate study body is international, and international students represent 14% of all programs ("Global Admissions Profile", 2016).

### 3. Lancaster University, United Kingdom, National Policy Context

The United Kingdom has a long history in international education and has experienced recent policies shifts that affect the international student recruitment domain that makes it an interesting case study choice. As a nation, the UK is facing many challenges that shape institutional strategies. The UK, once the leader in international student enrolments, is experiencing stagnation in the attraction of foreign students that have not increased beyond 500,000 since 2012, while other countries such as Canada and the US continue to experience growth (UK Council for International Student Affairs, 2017). This lack of growth and loss of market share suggests unique dynamics are occurring within higher education environment in the UK and around the world.

In the UK, the national policy context is centralised, more so than in Canada, and different than the UCG controlled environment in Hong Kong. The UK system officially devolved in 1999 with England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland establishing their responsibility over higher education, however, the central government continues to exercise control for national interests such as immigration, innovation, and international student mobility (Geddie, 2015). The UK is also highly organised as a country in its approach to international students, compared to Canada and Hong Kong. The British Council, established in 1934, is the UK's international education promotional agency that works with HEIs and other stakeholders to promote UK's educational opportunities around the world (British Council, 2017). The UK's centralised governance and collaboration of stakeholders

to attract international students demonstrate an organised and experienced approach to international student recruitment.

Beech (2013) described the UK's higher education environment as highly marketised with institutions operating as "migration entrepreneurs". With neoliberal reforms occurring since the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, policies have aimed at increasing efficiency and consequently, competition amongst HEIs (Marginson, 2017; Tindal, Packwood, Findlay, & Leahy, 2015; Walker, 2014). In combination with the Blair and subsequent administrations' policies that viewed immigration as a means to attract labour and skills to the UK, international students were important policy considerations due to their economic benefits (Beech, 2018). However, more recent restrictions on UK's immigration and post-study work visa policies suggest that attracting international students may be more challenging for institutions (Geddie, 2015). These changes began in 2009 when the government announced a reduction in net migration to the "tens of thousands" (Grice, 2017). This change in policy has arguably made the application process more tedious with the introduction of the point-based, tier system in 2009. In 2012, prospective international student interviews were introduced to the application process, in an attempt to recruit only "genuine" international students who study and contribute economically, socially, and culturally to UK society (Grice, 2017). The level of English proficiency requirements increased as well, enabling the Home Office the power to grant or refuse entry to applicants. At the same time, the government removed post-study work permits. (See Table 3.1) Institutions and educational advocacy groups were quick to vocalise their opinions on the policy changes and collectively view the

changes as negative. Some academics and institutional administrators believe that these requirements may negatively impact UK brand as a destination for international students making it more challenging for institutions to compete for and attract international students (Walker, 2014).

These changes appear to bring challenges to institutions in the UK as the government attempts reduce net migration and while increasing economic growth. The education export industry is worth £17.5 billion to the UK with international students accounting for half of all immigration to the UK, placing significant importance on the attraction of international student (Sarchrajda & Pennington, 2016). The inability to work post-graduation, the on-going Brexit negotiations, and future of European Union students creates uncertainty for the future HEIs in the (Minsky, 2016). Although the state of higher education is in flux, the UK's reputation is well established for high-quality education. There is continued belief that the UK is still well-positioned in international markets with its long history and experience in recruiting students (Bothwell, 2017). It is in this context that this thesis explores how practitioners perceive these policies and their responses to the higher education environment and how these views may differ in Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK.

#### Lancaster University: History and importance of international students

Lancaster University, located in the city of Lancaster, England admitted its first students in 1964 ("History of Lancaster University," 2016). The institution has a growing reputation for excellence, based on its relatively high ranking in many

university ranking tables, such as Times Higher Education, the Times/Sunday Times, the Guardian, and the Complete University Guide (“Facts and Figures,” 2017). Times Higher Education ranks Lancaster University 6th in the UK and 150th in the world and reports it to be one the best student value universities. These rankings are primarily due to the university’s international outlook, which receives a score of 91.1 (Times Higher Education, 2018).

Lancaster University has a diverse student body represented by more than 100 countries. The Lancaster University has over 12,000 full-time students studying in undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate programmes in Arts and Social Science, Health and Medicine, Science and Technology, and Management (“Data Analytics Unit,” 2016). Approximately 26% of Lancaster University students are international students, and 52% of all students are female, creating a diversified campus (“Data Analytics Unit,” 2016). The university has four international universities: Lancaster University College–Beijing Jiaotong University, Lancaster University Ghana, Goenka World Institute India, and Sunway University Malaysia. There are currently over 2000 Lancaster University students studying abroad (“About Us,” 2016). Lancaster University also partners globally, with many partnerships in Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand, and Asia.

#### Lancaster University: international student recruitment structure

International recruitment at Lancaster University is the responsibility of the International Office that manages most facets of international activity including recruitment, overseas partnerships, and study abroad programmes. The Head of

International manages the recruiters that include a team dedicated to geographic markets, in-market representatives, agents, and student ambassadors. The institution's strategy is committed to achieving a higher ranking in the league tables while ensuring global relevance in teaching and research ("Our Strategy 2020," 2013). Lancaster University actively recruits in twenty-seven different countries and maintains extensive agent partnerships in an additional thirty-six countries. There are over 146 nationalities represented at the institution with 26% of the student body classified as international ("Data Analytics Unit," 2016). This large population represents a significant international focus with breadth in nationalities and the geographic scope of international recruitment. Lancaster's effort reaches more countries than the other two case studies and includes international student recruitment strategy that focuses on overseas partnerships and other programmes.

#### *Summary of three case studies*

There is a critical distinction in government policy for each case that should be noted (See Table 3.4). The UK and Canada consistently report the economic impact and value of international students to their countries through various reporting entities responsible for higher education and economic development (Global Affairs Canada, 2017, Universities UK, 2017). The importance of international students is demonstrated through this tracking and reporting of the impact of these students on their economies, both as exports and in GDP, suggesting an economic imperative towards international students. However, Hong Kong does not. While Hong Kong does articulate the importance of human capital to the jurisdiction and a competitive approach to attracting students and talent by becoming an education hub, it does



not articulate the economic impact of international students to Hong Kong (Lee, 2014). Their competitiveness and human capital approaches denote a neo-liberalism approach to higher education, but the government does not communicate the economic impact in the policy literature. These distinctions in jurisdictional policy and program are used to contextualise each HEI and participant responses and to be sensitive in the analysis to the policy frameworks that shape export marketing behaviour for each of the case studies. These unique circumstances contribute to our understanding of export marketing behaviour in each case by recognising that internationalisation is occurring differently within each of these case studies. This context for international student recruitment at the case study level is an important dimension in understanding export marketing behaviour.

The three case study sites of Canada (UPEI), Hong Kong (HKU), and the UK (Lancaster University) provide rich comparisons of the practice of international student recruitment. The national contexts are similar, in that each country has centralised government policies that shape their practice, and each institution exists in a publicly funded arrangement. Furthermore, these policies have not been static, and present opportunities to examine practitioners views of these changing policies in the context of their recruitment practices. The three institutions also share similar aspirations to internationalise their campuses as articulated in their institutional strategies ("Our Strategy 2020," 2013; "Strategic Plan 2015 – 2020", 2014; "UPEI Strategic Plan," 2013). They have increased their international student cohorts over time, organised recruitment teams, and invested in recruitment efforts in multiple countries to attract students to their institutions. This context shows these

institutions operating in public and commercial environments and provides an opportunity to compare institutions in three different countries. Furthermore, the perspectives of different actors in the hierarchy of each institution provide insights into the similarities and difference in the practice of international student recruitment.

	<b>Hong Kong</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>UK</b>
National bodies	University Grants Committee	Federal government; CIC; Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade	UCU; UK government; Universities UK
Local government bodies (if applicable)	Individual, institutional governing bodies have autonomy over curricula and academic standards, the selection of staff and students, initiation and acceptance of research, and the internal allocation of resources	Council of Ministers of Education Canada	n/a
Duration of student visa	Length of program up to a maximum of six years	Length of program plus 90 days	Depends on type of course and previous studies completed
Post work study policy	<p>Applicants who are/were non-local students and have obtained an undergraduate or higher qualification in a full-time and locally-accredited local programme in Hong Kong may apply to stay/return and work in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) under the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates (IANG). Non-local graduates who submit applications to the Immigration Department within six months after the date of their graduation are not required to have secured an offer of employment upon application. They may be granted 12 months' assuming normal immigration requirements are met. Those who intend to apply to stay and work in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) but have not yet secured graduation results may apply for extension of stay to wait for their results. Non-local graduates who have not yet obtained their graduation certificate could apply to stay and work by producing proof from the institution confirming that they have graduated.</p> <p>Non-local graduates who submit applications to the Immigration Department beyond six months of their graduation are required to have secured an offer of employment upon application. They may be granted 12 months' assuming normal immigration requirements are met.</p>	To be eligible for a post-graduate work permit applicants must be: 18 or older have continuously studies full- time in Canada in a program at least 8 months long have proof of successful completion of program have graduated from a school complying with the rules of CIC and have applied for a work permit within 90 days of when program completion was confirmed and have a valid study permit when applying for a work permit. Length of stay depends on the length of the study program. If the study program is less than eight months, applicants are not eligible to apply to the PGWP. If the study program is more than eight months but less than two years, the post- graduate work permit may be valid for the same length as the program (i.e. 1 year program = one year work permit). If a program is two years or more or complete more than one program, a work permit may be issued for three years.	The Post- Study Work visa route was closed after changes to the UK Immigration policy too affect in 2012.
Tuition fee policy – if any	Both local and non-local students must pay tuition fees – established by institution	Both domestic and international students must pay for tuition fees – established by institution	Tuition fees for international students introduced in 1979. Tuition fees established by institutions
Date current policies took effect	Quality Assurance Council – 2007 Matching Grants Scheme – 2003 Enhancing internationalization – 2009/2010 Research Assessment Exercise - every six years (started in 1993) Implementation of four year curriculum – 2012	Post graduate work program – 2006 Off- campus work program – 2006 Edu – Canada - 2007 Canadian Experience Class – 2008 Student Partners Program – 2009 Advisory panel - 2011	Points based immigration system phased into the UK between 2008 and 2009. Reduction in net migration – 2010 Introduction of border interviews - 2012
Direct spending by students	n/a	\$15.5 B Canadian dollars (2016)	\$6.1 B British pounds (2014/2015)
Contribution to GDP	n/a	\$10 B Cdn (2016)	\$13.8 B (2014/2015)
Export earnings	n/a	\$12.8 B Cdn (2016)	\$10.8 B (2014/2015)

**Table 3.2 Policy comparison amongst Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK.**

Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Canada. (2016). Canada's International Education Strategy. Retrieved from <http://international.gc.ca/global-markets-marches-mondiaux/assets/pdfs/overview-apercu-eng.pdf>

Global Affairs Canada. (July, 2017). Economic Impact of International Education in Canada 2016 Update. Retrieved from <http://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2017/index.aspx?lang=eng>

Lee, M. H. (2014). Hong Kong higher education in the 21st century. Hong Kong Teachers' Centre Journal, 13, 15 – 34

"UK Study Visa (Tier 4) Requirements." (n.d.). Study London: Official University Guide. Retrieved from <http://www.studylondon.ac.uk/application-advice/uk-student-visa-information>

Universities UK (March, 2017). The Economic Impact of International Students. Retrieved from <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2017/briefing-economic-impact-international-students.pdf>

	<b>University of Prince Edward Island</b>	<b>University of Hong Kong</b>	<b>Lancaster University</b>
Location	Charlottetown, PEI, Canada	Pokfulam, Hong Kong, China	Bailrigg, Lancaster, UK
Date of establishment	1969	1911	1964
Programs offered	Arts Business Education Nursing Science Veterinary Medicine School of Graduate Studies Sustainable Design and Engineering Mathematical and Computational Sciences	Architecture Arts Business and Economics Dentistry Education Engineering Law Medicine Science Social Science Graduate School	Arts and Social Sciences Health and Medicine Science and Technology Management School
Size of staff	751 (2015)	Over 3500	3025
Student population (International)	778 (2015)	4003 (non-local) (2016/2017)	3107 (2015/2016)
% international students	18%	21.2% - undergraduate 14% of all programs	26%
Active markets	24 + additional agent representation in 15 countries	13 no agents	27 + additional agent representation in 36 countries
Number of countries represented	69	100+	142
Total enrollment	4,317 (2015)	28,744 (2016/2017)	11,986 (2015/2016)

**Table 3.3 Case study characteristics**

Sources:

Information retrieved from: UPEI By the Numbers 2015  
[http://files.upei.ca/president/upei\\_by\\_the\\_numbers\\_2015.pdf](http://files.upei.ca/president/upei_by_the_numbers_2015.pdf)

Student Statistics - <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/vc/data-analytics/studentstatistics.html>

Student Profiles 2016/2017 - <http://www.cpaohku.hk/qstats/student-profiles>

## **Data Generation and Collection Methods**

The primary data for this study considers the views and perspectives of the participants involved in international student recruitment and how they view export marketing behavior in their institution. Therefore, semi-structured interviews with strategy practitioners were the primary data generation method in this study while document analysis was used to inform the interview guide and contributed to understanding the settings, strategies, and various nodes within the activity systems. The thesis employed activity theory and export marketing theory in a qualitative research design that required careful attention to ensure the findings were representative of the participants' perspectives and experiences. An important consideration in using activity theory is that it required significant reflection in both data generation and analysis to uncover the complexity of the participants' practices. This was critical in discovering the views of the participants and more importantly, how these views compared so that improvements to practice were identified.

### *The Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method to collect data. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility while exploring the nature of the activity and the various perspectives of the participants involved in the practice. The interview guide was constructed based on the conceptual framework of activity theory and export marketing behaviour (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Cadogen et al., 2002; Engeström, 2005). The literature on semi-structured interviewing was reviewed before the data generation and collection to learn the theories, observe

previous results, and understand the nature of interview guide design (Fylan, 2005). A pilot study was conducted to test the interview guide in advance of the data generation and collection, and this study helped to amend the questions to improve the quality of the data collected (Doody & Noonan 2013). See Appendix 1 for the interview guide. Janesick (1994) defines an interview as: “a meeting of two persons to exchange information and ideas through questions and responses, resulting in communication and joint construction of meaning about a particular topic” (p. 30). The interviews were designed to elicit the subjects’ perspectives and obtain an in-depth view of the tensions in the system and understand their views on export marketing behaviour. As there are different types of strategy practitioners within each institution, the interview guide was left flexible to be relevant to the various roles. Activity theory required special skill in the design and implementation of interviews as it was necessary to uncover the nuances of institutional culture that are not evident in just roles and functions. Previous studies suggest that a potential limitation of semi-structured interviews may be that they reveal more explicit aspects of participants’ actions, plans, or daily activities rather than their complex behavior and motivations that is the aim of this thesis (Nardi, 1996). Therefore it became important to structure the questions and interviews to unearth the complexity of behaviours occurring within the system and between actors in the system. Identifying more complex behaviours was accomplished by allowing for fluid and open dialogue or discussion tone with the participants and by probing areas that appeared to identify conflicts. One way this was accomplished was by asking questions about problems in practice and relationships to other actors (Nardi, 1996). In this study, the focus was to explore the perspectives of subjects and the

tensions within the activity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the practice. Throughout the interviews, based on the opinion or perspective of the participant, attention was paid to those areas in which the participant identified as problematic while ensuring the interviews addressed the activity and the dynamics of the practices.

### Interview Guide

The interview questions were structured to flow from uncomplicated, role-related questions to more critical questions regarding practice. See Appendix 1. This approach established trust and understanding with the participants. Initially, participants discussed their role within the structure of the institution and international student recruitment. The introduction contextualised the topic and framed the interview. Once role and function were established, the interviews flowed from structure and process questions to discuss the strategic plan and their understanding of goals or targets for the institution and the participants' understandings of the plans and goals. The responses to these questions provided a means to identify objects within the system and to evaluate the mediation of the strategic plan on practice. Furthermore, it assisted to understand export marketing behaviour in each case. From this point, the interviews focused on the tenants of export marketing such as planning, meetings, immigration policies, courses and offerings, marketing, internal communication, and coordination. These questions were designed to determine the nature and extent of export marketing behaviour and served to frame export marketing as international recruitment. Within each question, the participants engaged in a discussion about the strengths and



weaknesses of their recruitment practice. The participants were then probed on their understanding of these strengths and weaknesses and reflected on their applicability and understanding to strategies and policies related to international student recruitment to uncover tensions in their practice.

An important part of the interviews were to identify tensions in practice. Tensions were derived from the interviews in three ways, by focusing the interviews on areas identified by the subjects as problematic, by uncovering individual motives, and by discovering their views on the purpose of the practice. These areas were explored with the subjects to discover potential differences in interpretation and understanding. When the interviews were analysed and coded using activity theory, the analysis discovered different objects in each system that shaped practice differently for the subjects. For example, at HKU senior leaders viewed the admissions process as an object, in particular, meeting the needs of faculty throughout the recruitment process. However, other subjects did not view this in the same manner, and found the admissions process and the faculty constrained their ability to recruit students internationally. These different perspectives and the analysis of the data assisted to uncover tensions in the practices.

The interviews were designed and adjusted to ensure questions were relevant to the participant's role in international student recruitment (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Penner & McClement, 2008). For instance, some participants were not involved in strategy or planning while others were not privy to certain tasks or information. The senior leaders' interviews focused on strategy development and policy-type

questions. The interviews explored participants' perspectives on strategy development, goals, and outcomes of these strategies and their perceptions of the challenges and opportunities in their practice. For those participants involved in the implementation of international student recruitment such as administrators, recruiters, marketing, or institutional research, the interviews focused on the activities and tasks of their roles and how their roles contributed to or were influenced by institutional strategies and goals. The participants in these roles also described the outcomes, challenges, and opportunities in their practice.

This study followed ethical procedures and steps were taken to ensure the quality of the data. Ethical approval was received from the University of Prince Edward Island, the University of Hong Kong, and Lancaster University to conduct these interviews. See Appendix 1 for the interview guide. Following ethical procedures, an information sheet and a consent form were sent to each participant in advance of the interviews. All participants signed consent forms. To maintain confidentiality and follow ethical procedures, each institution or participant provided a quiet, private room to conduct the interviews.

### *Documents*

Documents are highly useful in conducting case study analysis to provide context, generation interview questions, verify findings, and track changes and developments (Bowen, 2009). In this thesis, documents were used as a source of data to provide context to the settings of each case study, to create the interview guide, and to assist in understanding the nodes within the activity systems. Document analysis is

often used in activity theory, particularly when examining strategy practices such as export marketing or the recruitment of international students (Jarzabkowski, 2003, Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, 2012). A consideration in this research is the identification of particular nodes within the activity system such as tools, rules, and objects. It has been found that the “examination of artefacts can render explicit the more tacit elements of an action” (Hashim & Jones, 2007, p. 10). The documents served to validate these nodes and were an important step in using activity theory, as many of the mediating tools and rules were identified and verified through the documentary analysis. In particular, the strategic plans were explored with practitioners to assess mediation on practice. The strategic plans, government policies on immigration, and enrolment statistics also provided context for the interviews and helped to understand potential export marketing behaviour. The documents contained data that suggested export marketing behaviours and this data considered in the interviews with practitioners.

#### Document sampling procedures

In selecting and choosing the documents, publicly available documents were reviewed and analysed. Guiding the selection of the documents was the view that internationalisation acts as a strategy for governments and institutions. This meant those documents that contained strategic information, institutional or government policy information, or enrolment statistics were selected. The documents reviewed were 1) institutional enrolment statistics, 2) institutional strategic plans, 3) national statistics on international students, and 4) national policies on international

students. As this thesis specifically explores the mediation of the institutional strategic plans, these were critical documents for the analysis and interviews.

Several steps were taken to produce the documentary evidence and to ensure consistency in nature and types of documents chosen between the case study sites. Institutional websites were reviewed to find publicly available documents related to strategic plans and enrolment history. Each institution had recently developed institutional strategic plans that focused on internationalisation, which was a basis of comparison in the study. Other reports were available at each institution such as research or performance related documents. However, these reports were not included, as they did not relate to the study's aim rather the available enrolment statistics were used and were analysed over a five-year period to understand trends and changes in international student enrolment. Institutional statistics were compared based on the institutional definition of an "international student". For example, HKU used the term "non-local" for international students. There are minor variations in reporting periods and these are noted in the tables, but the overall trend and percentage of international student populations for each case were comparable. In the end, the appropriate materials for comparison were available to study and were confirmed during the analysis.

The study also involved reviewing government websites for policies on higher education, immigration, and visa policies, and statements or publications related to the higher education sector from the period of 2010 – 2017. Specifically, searches were conducted in different ministries in each country as responsibilities for higher

education and immigration varied between countries. In Canada, the Department of Workforce and Advanced Learning, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development, and Canadian Immigration and Citizenship were searched. In Hong Kong, the Education Bureau and the University Grants Committee were the primary websites. In the UK, the Home Office and Department of Education were used. These websites were manually searched using search terms for student visas and immigration, and statistical data on international student enrolments. These documents provided insights into national policy and institutional activity related international student recruitment such as enrolment results, rankings, processes, structure, and organisation. The documents are outlined Table 3.4 and include the document publication date, type, and coding used in the analysis.

<b><u>Document name and publication date</u></b>	<b><u>Document type</u></b>	<b><u>Accessed</u></b>	<b><u>Theme/Coding</u></b>
University of Hong Kong Global Admissions Profiles (2016)	Institutional enrolment statistics	September 27, 2016	Contextualise enrolment & outcomes
University of Hong Kong University Enrollment (2016)	Institutional enrolment statistics	October 1, 2016	Contextualise enrolment & outcomes
University of Hong Kong, Strategic Plan 2015 – 2020 (2014)	Strategic plan	October 1, 2016	Contextualise tools, rules, & subjects roles
Lancaster University Our Strategy 2020 (2015)	Strategic plan	October 14, 2016	Understand tools, rules, & subject roles
Data Analytics Unit, Lancaster University (2016)	Institutional enrolment statistics	October 2, 2016	Contextualise enrolment & outcomes
Lancaster University Annual Review (2016)	Institutional enrolment statistics	September 27, 2016	Understand tools, rules & outcomes
University of Prince Edward Island Strategic Plan (2013)	Strategic plan	August, 2016	Contextualise enrolment & outcomes
University of Prince Edward Island Short-Term Enrolment Plan (2014)	Institutional enrolment statistics	August 3, 2016	Contextualise subjects' roles, rules, & tools
UPEI by the Numbers, University of Prince Edward Island (2016)	Institutional enrolment statistics	February 22, 2017	Contextualise enrolment & outcomes
Canada International Enrolment 2006 - 2016 from Statistics Canada (2017)	National statistics on international student enrolments	March 30, 2017	Contextualise enrolment & outcomes
Hong Kong International Students 2010 – 2016 from University Grants Committee Statistics (2016).	National statistics on international student enrolments	February 28, 2017	Contextualise enrolment & outcomes
UK International Student Enrolment 2006 – 2015 from UK Council for International Student Affairs (2017)	National statistics on international student enrolments	May 22, 2017	Contextualise enrolment & outcomes
Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Canada. (2014).	National higher education policy – international students	October 2, 2016	Contextualise rules & outcomes
Canada's International Education Strategy. Global Affairs Canada. (July 2016).	National higher education policy – international students	September 20, 2016	Contextualise rules & outcomes
Economic Impact of International Education in Canada 2016 Update. (2016)	National higher education policy – international students	January 7, 2017	Contextualise enrolment & outcomes
UK Study Visa (Tier 4) Requirements. (n.d.). Study London: Official University Guide. Universities UK (March, 2017). The Economic Impact of International Students.	National higher education policy – international students	October 14, 2016	Contextualise rules, tools, & outcomes

**Table 3.4 – Documents analysed**

### Document analysis

The document data were analysed to identify potential nodes of the activity systems; to inform the interview guide; and present potential export marketing behaviour and outcomes (Bowen, 2009). The documents were downloaded in PDF and analysed inductively. A thematic approach was used in analysing documents, which is useful when using documents to provide context to case studies and to develop interview questions (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The strategic plans were analysed for themes and content that demonstrated internationalisation, direction setting, coordination or other mediating factors that may shape international student recruitment. The government documents were analysed for themes related to internationalisation, exports, and international student policies. As such, the analysis of data was approached in two ways; the documents were read and text highlighted to provide context to each case study site using content analysis and then coded if a document contained information, in part or its entirety, as a potential node in the activity system or export marketing behaviours (Bryman, 2004). The documents were referenced and discussed in the interviews to establish their importance and relevance to the activity systems. The participant responses assisted in clarifying the role of the documents within the practice. Ultimately, the documents primarily served to contextualise each institutional practice and setting in advance of the analysing the interviews (Corbin, Strauss, & Strauss, 2014; Rapley, 2007).

## **Data Analysis and Coding**

Activity theory and export marketing theory were used side-by-side to analyse the data in this study, not only to describe how the subjects may adopt export marketing behaviours but to uncover the unique tensions and problems occurring in the development and implementation of international student recruitment practice. The research questions were crafted to examine these understandings and were based on the use of activity theory to examine the perspectives or views of those who contribute to and shape international student recruitment practice. This understanding of the system was then used to inform the nature and extent of export marketing behavior in each case study. Table 3.5 outlines the research questions and identifies when activity theory and export marketing theory were used to answer the questions.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the approach the analysis. The first stage of the analysis framed the activity systems, and identified tensions when subjects did not share the same objects, resulting in tension in practice (System B). Once the activity system analysis was completed, export market behaviours were analysed using five constructs of export marketing; coordination and communication, information generation, dissemination, and responsiveness, and attitude towards government funding. Using data generated and discovered in Step 1 of Figure 3.1, such as the tensions in practice of “professionalising the practice” at Lancaster, the export marketing behaviours were analysed at Lancaster by understanding the extent of professionalising the practice and the investment in intelligence gathering, dissemination, and responsiveness. However, the tensions uncovered issues in



communication and understanding as roles and expectations were evolving at the institution. The tensions linked the analysis of the activity system to the analysis of export marketing behaviours. Figure 3.1 demonstrates how the two-stage approach the analysis connects these two approaches.

Recognising activity theory is “primarily a descriptive tool rather than a prescriptive theory” (Jonassen, 2000, p. 110) this study focused on one particular environment, international student recruitment as export marketing behaviour. International student recruitment was viewed as a participatory activity in this research and understanding and reflecting on the motives, objectives, and outcomes that shape the activity for the subjects is the “real-world” within this domain. However, it was necessary to balance the individual perspectives with the collective activity. That is, the goal was not to examine the lived experiences of the subjects, but to identify shared objects and tensions and “roll up” the data to a collective view. This view required defining and identifying the mediating forces within each system and analysing the data within this context. Therefore, analysing the mediating factors of each system underpinned the data analysis because it showed the strategic practitioners views of practice differently and these different views may affect the outcomes of their practice.

### *Step 1 of the Analysis*

Figure 3.1 outlines the stages of analysis using activity theory and export marketing. The research recognised that activity theory purposively constrained the subjects’ focus on their perceptions and not the perceptions of others or even a broader

perspective of the activity as a system (Engeström, 2005). The subjects' perspectives of the strategic plan answered the first research question by discovering the perceptions of the institutional strategic plan on their practice. The interviews and documents were coded for themes and working back and forth between the data sets; the strategic plan was framed within each activity system. The analysis showed that subjects' vantage point in the activity system and institutional differences lead to the strategic plans mediating practice differently in each case. The data was then analysed to uncover the objects, the true meaning of the practice (Engeström, 1989, 2001). The interview data primarily informed the analysis but the document data assisted in coding for themes. The analysis showed different subjects attached different meanings to their practice. That is, some practitioners viewed the object or meaning of international student recruitment differently creating multiple objects for each system (Engeström, 2001).

It was incumbent to address these individual perspectives by ensuring appropriate subject groupings, that is, the subjects shared the same object. As discussed above, the data demonstrated that the subjects shared some objects in common, but not all, hence Engeström's third generation of the theory was used. For example, recruiters and senior leaders did not share all objects but did demonstrate shared objects within the system. Hence, those involved in strategy practice were categorised according to their objects of the activity, thereby using the third generation model of activity theory. In choosing and defining the subjects within the system, activity theory presented challenges. The tensions between subjects (subject to subject) were not identified within the theory specifically. However, the

division of labour, community, and an examination of the individual subjects' motives served to identify tensions in the system that supports the use of the third generation of activity theory to answer research question two. These tensions were important to answering research question two, as they show opportunities for practice improvement.

Research question	Activity Theory or Export marketing Analysis	How was this question answered?
1. How do practitioners view the role of institutional strategic plans in shaping international student recruitment?	Activity Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subjects were identified by defining shared and different objects</li> <li>Subjects' motivations shaped their views</li> <li>Subjects' perceptions of outcomes brought understanding of their view of the practice</li> <li>By combining the subjects' views of their motivations, objects, and outcomes their views on the practice are articulated.</li> </ul>
2. What are the perceived tensions in international student recruitment practices at these HEIs and how do these tensions compare in each case study?	Activity Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subjects identified changes and challenges in their practice</li> <li>Subjects discussed barriers to effective practice</li> <li>Within each case, the tensions were categorised</li> <li>Comparisons were made between each case study</li> </ul>
3. How do strategy practitioners describe and perceive the export marketing behaviours of their institution and how do these behaviours compare between Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK?	Export marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Documents were reviewed for export marketing language</li> <li>Interviews identified existence or lack of export marketing behaviours</li> <li>Each case study analysed against export marketing behaviours</li> <li>Comparison between each case study identified differences and similarities</li> </ul>
4. How can the lessons learned from these case studies assist in informing export marketing strategy and international student recruitment practice for these HEIs?	Export marketing and activity theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Literature on strategic practices in export marketing and international student recruitment provided insight into improvements</li> <li>Activity theory highlighted tensions to improve practice</li> </ul>

**TABLE 3.5 Analytical framework answering the research questions**

In each case study, the analysis found four different objects that were similar and different. The objects defined the purpose and scope of the activity for the subjects. In each system, the recruitment of international students was an object. However, there were other purposes for the system depending on the subjects. Senior leaders in each case described a different object that was unique to each case study site. For UPEI, international student recruitment was described by senior leaders as a means to partner with government and the importance of government was described extensively by these subjects. At HKU, international student recruitment was viewed by senior leaders as a means to achieve admissions goals by balancing the needs of various faculties with the appropriate caliber of students while maintaining diversity. For Lancaster, the senior leadership team viewed professionalising practice in the institution to further enhance revenues as a main object. These different objects created two different, intersecting activity systems presented in Chapter 4.

### *Step 2 of the Analysis*

In the next step of the analysis (Figure 3.1), the subjects' understandings and descriptions of their activity and the documents analysed were used to inform the nature and extent of export marketing behaviour, answering research question three. These behaviours were analysed using the antecedents of export marketing; export coordination and attitude towards government funding, and export marketing behaviours; information generation, market information dissemination, and responsiveness to export markets (Asaad et al., 2015). In this step, the participants' views were primarily analysed to understand the attitudes and behaviours that presented as export marketing behaviour. While other outcomes

and factors may suggest export marketing behaviour, this thesis argues the perspectives of the strategy practitioners (or participants) provided greater understanding of why and how institutions behave towards international student markets. This analysis required both deductive and inductive approaches. Working with activity theory, data were analysed utilising a deductive approach. However, in some instances, data were analysed inductively as the analysis exposes themes in interpretation and concepts that provided new or enlightening understanding of export marketing behaviour at HEIs through the identification of tensions within the systems. These insights assisted to answer research question three. Research question four was answered by using both stages of the analysis to identify common themes for opportunities for practice improvement.

### *Coding*

A combination of computer-based qualitative analysis and manual methods were used to analyse the data. The analysis used NVivo 11.40 for Mac (QSR) for data storage, organisation, and analysis. The analysis of the cases took place in three stages:

1. an analysis of each case study (separately) using the data from the documents and interviews;
2. an analysis of the similarities and differences, or cross-case analysis, between the three case studies (Stake, 2013); and
3. a comparison of the export marketing behaviour across the three case studies in Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK.

In each stage of the analysis, open coding was used to identify themes in the data. For example, the analysis uncovered themes related to the strategic plans and their use in practice. This thematic approach continued throughout the analysis using the activity system as a heuristic device to deductively code and analyse the various nodes in the system. This approach to the data uncovered tensions in the practice that identified two interacting activity systems. Using the concepts from Figure 3.1, export marketing behaviours were coded selectively from the interviews and documents by examining for coordination and communication, information gathering, dissemination, and responsiveness and attitude towards government funding. The tensions from each system were also used to code for the level of export marketing in each case using Cavusgil's framework (1980). For example, the tension from the UPEI case "alignment with government" was examined to determine its effect on export marketing behaviours and presented both positive (incremental resources) and negative (lack of coordination and understanding) aspects to the adoption of export marketing behaviour.

This process presents a somewhat linear approach to the analysis; however, each step involved reflexivity and fluidity, and there were many steps taken back and forth. In all cases, the data were coded to identify the nodes of the systems, the tensions, and export marketing behaviours. The analysis first constructed the system of international student recruitment and identified the role of the strategic plans and constructed the various nodes. Tensions were then coded. Upon completing each system, a comparison was made based on tensions experienced in

international student recruitment practice and export marketing. The data was then analysed comparing each institutions' practice.

The analysis of the data acknowledged that different nodes of the activity system may be interpreted differently by different researchers (Ashwin, 2009). This research recognised that some assumptions on the meanings attached to the various nodes are necessary, based on the data. These assumptions posed challenges in defining the nodes within the system to appropriately interpret the data and to define certain aspects of the system – as they were not mutually exclusive. This research was reflective of the reality of the subjects and required examining the components of system appropriately and recognised the overlapping nature of the components was an integral part of the data analysis (Ashwin, 2009). Specifically, there were several communities within each system; students, academy, and government that also imposed rules and artefacts that are important to understand in a comparative case study approach. For HEIs, governments created rules, tools, and may arguably be a community member, all at the same time. Activity theory is designed to explore the system or localised level of activity, but other processes may structure the activity (Ashwin, 2009). In this study, government policies tended to be external to the system itself yet impacted the system. As such, the policies were coded as rules to address the government's influence on the process. Furthermore, for consistency, the government was coded in the rule-making or tool-producing context and not as a member of the community. Furthermore, in the Lancaster University case, some subjects were academics that had administrative and leadership roles in international student recruitment - essentially these subjects had

dual roles. However, the study included these administrators based on their administrative responsibility and leadership within the system and they were interviewed as subjects in this context. The coding identified other academics and faculty as members of the community.

### *Ensuring Reliability in the Data Analysis*

The data was analysed side-by-side using activity theory and export marketing behaviour to present the results in Chapter 4. Therefore, there are four main sections in the results; 1) the role of the strategic plans in mediating practice, 2) the tensions in each system and a comparison of the tensions across the case studies, 3) the export market behaviour findings of the case studies and comparison, and 4) common themes to improve international student recruitment practice. The content analysis of the interviews, documents, activity systems, and export marketing behaviour enabled the analysis to apply “meanings, symbolic qualities, and expressive contents” (Krippendorff, 2002). The combination of document analysis and semi-structured interviews answered the research questions by exploring international student recruitment using activity theory and export marketing theory whereas one method alone would not provide sufficient quality for the research (Silverman, 2013). The use of the data from the cases, documents, and interviews also improved the validity and quality of the data through triangulation. According to Eisner, triangulating the data provides “a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility” (as cited in Bowen, 2009). To be able to reduce potential biases and corroborate findings of tensions within international student recruitment and export marketing, it was important to examine data through different lenses or

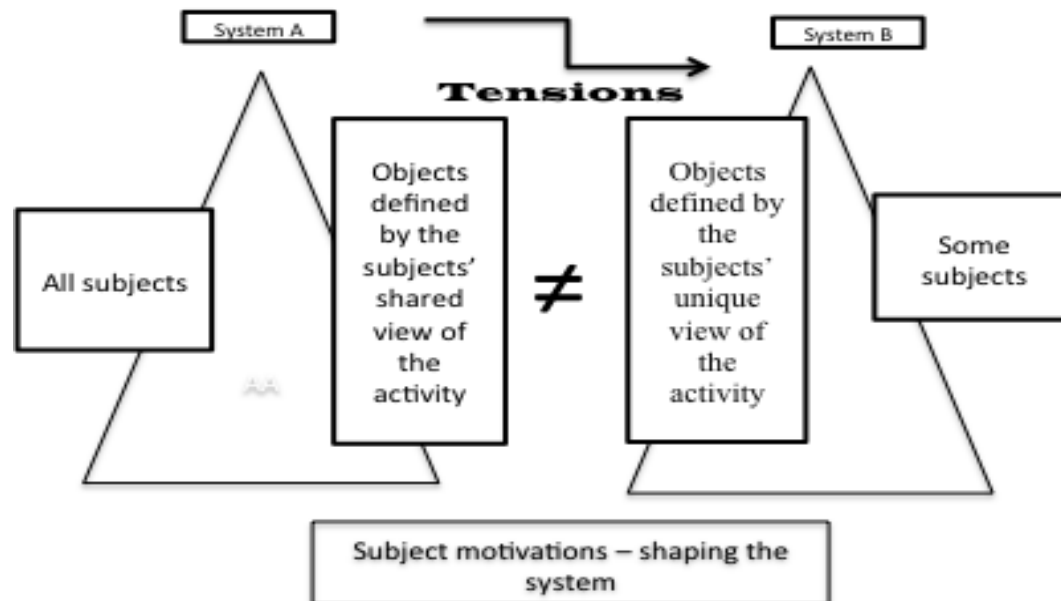


methods which case study, documents, and interviews provided in this research (See Table 3.6). Triangulation acted as a guard against findings that were only artefacts of a single method, source, or investigator's bias (Patton, 2005). Given the complexity of the national systems between the Canadian, Hong Kong, and UK case studies, extensive interviews and the two main approaches to the data, activity theory and export marketing behaviour, triangulation was critical. This combination of data analysis improved the reliability as the data was analysed several times, from multiple perspectives, to ensure consistency in interpretation within and across each case study site using both activity theory and export marketing orientation theory.

Research question	Semi-structured Interview	Document analysis	How instrument addresses issues
1. How do practitioners view the role of institutional strategic plans in shaping international student recruitment?	Yes	Yes	Reliability and validity confirmed by triangulating across both instruments for each individual case
2. What are the perceived tensions in international student recruitment practices at these HEIs and how do these tensions compare in each case?	Yes	Yes	Reliability and validity confirmed by triangulating across both instruments for each case. Triangulation, audit trail—detailed description with content analysis
3. How do strategy practitioners describe and perceive the export marketing behaviours of their institution and how do these behaviours compare between Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK?	Yes	Yes	Reliability and validity confirmed by triangulating across both instruments for each case. Triangulation, audit trail—detailed description with content analysis
4. How can the lessons learned from these case studies assist in informing export marketing strategy and international student recruitment practice for these HEIs?	Yes	Yes	Reliability and validity confirmed by triangulating across both instruments for each individual case

**Table 3.6 Research Questions: Reliability and Validity**

### Step 1: Activity System Analysis



Activity System analysis contributes to understanding of export marketing behaviours



### Step 2: Export Marketing Analysis



Figure 3.1 Approach to the Analysis

## **Limitations**

This study recognises that the “moderatum generalization” (Williams, 2000) is highly applicable when utilising activity theory to represent the phenomenon of export marketing and the recruitment of international students. These settings position the research to examine international student recruitment and export marketing uniquely in each HEI, yet qualitative methods suggest these case studies are not generalisable but rather can provide insight into practice and export marketing for higher education in different national contexts. While the data may not be representative of all HEIs and their export marketing, the use of activity theory, content analysis, and triangulation assisted in providing a representation of the activity through the detailed description and contextualised data. Therefore, the findings are generalisable in the sense that the interpretative meaning may be transferable to other similar phenomena or settings (Schofield, 2002). Transferability means the findings may be used by other researchers exploring institutional activity such as export marketing or recruitment or by other researchers seeking a new methodological approach to examining institutional activity utilising activity theory and case study approaches. This study adds to the theoretical concepts related to export marketing at HEIs and higher education practice. As Engeström (2001) argues, theoretical concepts grounded in practice are critical and useful for practitioners when documented and implemented. This research can further assist practitioners in enhancing international recruitment and export marketing policy.

## **Chapter 4 Findings**

This study aims to explore the practice of the recruitment of international students as export marketing behaviour in three HEIs. It compares the strategy practitioners' perspectives to identify tensions that may improve the practice of international student recruitment and export marketing. The research questions guided the methodology, and the results are presented in this chapter to answer each question:

1. How do practitioners view the role of institutional strategic plans in shaping international student recruitment?
2. What are the perceived tensions in international student recruitment practices at these HEIs and how do these tensions compare in each case?
3. How do strategy practitioners describe and perceive the export marketing behaviours of their institution and how do these behaviours compare between Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK?
4. How can the lessons learned from these case studies assist in informing export marketing and international student recruitment practice for these HEIs?

### **Contextualising International Student Recruitment**

Engeström (2001) finds that exploring the perspectives of the subjects can assist to identify the objects of their practice, the true meaning of the system (Engeström,

2001). When different objects exist amongst practitioners, tensions occur that can provide opportunities for learning and growth (Engeström, 1989, 2000, 2001). Using Engeström's approach, the perspectives of the strategy practitioners were explored to identify the meaning of international student recruitment. This study supports Engeström's method of examining practice by finding the strategy practitioners in each case study accounted for their practice of international student recruitment in similar and different ways. For example, the attraction of students was a significant dimension of the practice, yet the purpose and meaning of attracting students were distinctive for different subjects. Administrators, support staff, and recruiters demonstrated similar purposes for the activity of recruiting international students, describing competitive environments for institutions that must compete for volume, diversity, and quality in their applications. While senior leaders had discrete purposes for the practice, relating strategic imperatives such as financial sustainability, brand, rankings, partnering with government, and managing admissions.

In the results, the analysis of the semi-structured interviews and documents contributed to categorising the nodes within each activity system and presented opportunities for learning and improvement in the practice. The strategy practitioners' views of their practice were primarily used to answer the research questions. The documents, as outlined in the methods chapter, were used to inform the interview guide and contextualise mediating factors such as the strategic plans. The practitioners' interviews verified the relevancy and purpose of various documents such as strategies, goals, or plans.

The role of institutional strategic plans in the practice is identified first, followed by Engeström's third generation of activity system that shows the tensions in practice and then compares these tensions to one another, thereby answering research question two. Export marketing concepts are then used to analyse and compare the findings on the nature and extent of export marketing behaviour in each institution. This approach answered research question three. Finally, the opportunities to improve practice are presented to answer research question four.

**Research Question 1:** *How do practitioners view the role of institutional strategic plans in shaping international student recruitment?*

Twenty-eight people were interviewed for this study and these interviews found four different subjects identified in each system – senior leaders, administrators, recruiters, and support staff. These subjects worked as part of a larger team across different departments and were involved, more or less directly, in the development and implementation of international student recruitment. The participants' accounts of their practice and an analysis of the documents framed the activity systems by identifying the various nodes of the system. To answer the first research question, participants were asked to describe the use and relevance of their institution's strategic plan to their practice. Other tools may mediate practice, but this thesis specifically explored the role of the institutional strategic plans in the mediation of international student recruitment and export marketing behaviour.

*The Senior Leader Context*

One of the questions that engaged many of the subjects was the question regarding their relationship to the role of the strategic plan and how it contributed to the activity of international student recruitment at their institution. The senior leaders described the strategic plans as vital to their roles as leaders in the institution, and they viewed their roles as stewards of these plans to ensure successful implementation. In the context of international student recruitment practice, the senior leaders at Lancaster and HKU portrayed their plans as guiding the practice of international student recruitment. Lancaster University senior leaders depicted the



strategic plan as embedded in the practice of international student recruitment by framing the importance of internationalisation strategies and translating those strategies into oversight and implementation committees that included recruiting international students (“Our Strategy 2020,” 2013). A senior leader at Lancaster expressed importance of collaboration through a committee-based structure tasked with achieving the targets and strategies within the plan by engaging various levels of staff and departments.

*We've got a global committee, it's better thought of as an international committee which then looks at all the different dimensions of internationalisation: recruitment, teaching partnerships, research partnerships, study abroad, internationalizing the student experience, and it will have members, from the faculties and the professional services that effectively know about all of this stuff and can try and formulate policy and implementation. (Interviewee 20, senior leader, Lancaster)*

For the senior leader at UPEI, the strategic plan was important to the institution but was considered unrelated to international student recruitment practice. Senior leaders depicted the plan as a management endeavour that was important for the work of senior management. This was illustrated in the processes to create the plan (“UPEI Strategic Plan,” 2013):

*From the standpoint of the strategic plan, that was developed when everybody from administration had consultation from the Deans. Then,*

*presented to the Board of Governors for their input and approval. With respect to the recruitment that's not part [of the strategic plan] but included in the academic planning process. (interviewee 1, senior leader, UPEI)*

At HKU, the senior leaders viewed the strategic plan as the “big strategy” and internationalisation was the primary mandate of the plan with international student recruitment contributing to the wider agenda to internationalise the campus. The senior leader’s description of the strategic plan, “*Strategic Plan 2015 – 2020*” (2014) and the process to create it, was considered to be an inclusive, iterative process:

*Student internationalisation is one of our mandates. So, recruiting international students is part of the strategy. We talk to the faculties and if they agree, we move forward. It's not a very top-down decision, but you know the international market is always changing. You can't have the strategy for three years, it's impossible. (interviewee 13, senior leader, HKU)*

The strategic plan was described as a key part of the responsibilities for senior leaders and, not surprisingly, was a focus for their work. The interviews showed that the strategic intent for senior leaders was to implement an internationalisation program for their institutions that focused on recruitment and growing their institutions’ reputations as international campuses.

### *The Local Context*

Senior leaders appeared to engage with the strategic plan of their institution based on the role and position within the system, that is, their proximity to the creation of the plan. However, the strategic plans carried a local context that was unique to each institution and the other subjects, administrators, recruiters, and support staff. These other subjects interpreted the purpose and role of their institutional plans differently, based on the local dynamics and institutional history. UPEI did not have strategic plans in the past (Interviewee 6), and the documents and the processes to create them were challenging:

*We did not have a strategic plan until we had a plan created in 2013. I think it was a new process to the university and it was difficult to get the leaders of the various areas thinking about their faculties and schools, their curriculum, their capacity (in terms of bringing in students). (Interviewee 6, administrator, UPEI)*

Administrators' at UPEI observed the strategic plan as creating importance for international student recruitment at the institution but from a distance. That is, they did not portray any involvement in the creation of the plan nor did they view it as guiding their practice. Rather, the establishment of the plan instilled importance in internationalisation and international student recruitment.

*It came from senior leadership. By the institution taking some efforts to have a long-term strategy, overall, for how the university was going to function*

*and change over, say, a five-year period. That just lead to things like recruitment and enrolment targets becoming part of that strategy. So, you know I think everybody institutionally thought a bit more specifically about what we meant by those kinds of plans.* (interviewee 6, administrator, UPEI)

However, recruiters and support staff at the institution portrayed very little appreciation for the strategic plan or how it guides the institution or their work. *I don't have a good sense about how that was used to inform recruitment activities. I don't know whether that was used to monitor our progress, performance or anyway* (interviewee 3, support staff, UPEI). There was a striking difference in the level of understanding and awareness of the strategic plan at UPEI depending on the subjects' vantage point in the system. The recruiters and support staff did not claim the strategic plan as influencing to their practice, while administrators described it as a motivational tool that acted to show the importance of international student recruitment to the institution.

The institutional context at Lancaster University was much different from UPEI and HKU. Administrators, recruiters and support staff had an appreciation of their strategic plan and understood it to lay the foundation for priorities for the institution and within the practice of recruiting international students. The strategic plan was a goal setting instrument, creating enrollment targets for international students and for the types of international activities that should occur in the institution.

*The institution is quite a diverse international activity. The institution has quite a diverse activity as an international campus is in a number of countries. So on campus and across the institution, we've got a lot of [international] students ... based outside of the UK. So in that sense, that was always a strategic goal. (interviewee 23, administrator, Lancaster)*

Respondents at Lancaster described a coordinated and controlled approach to implementing the strategic plan. They outlined a strategic planning process that involved faculties and departments, and committee structures that were designed to implement the strategic plan and allocate resources accordingly.

*We are basically given target aspirational targets and budget, and as far as the strategic planning is concerned. We've got a couple of committees. We've got one that is the International Strategic Implementation Group that's looking at more of where we want to go. Within our team [recruiters], we look at more of an operation and some of the ideas that come from the strategy, we're trying to look at diversity, so our students outside of China. Our team is mostly operational in where we're going to be active in the recruitment. (interviewee 15, administrator, Lancaster)*

Recruiters and support staff reinforced the accounts of the administrators by recognising that the targets are somewhat aspirational and that resources are allocated based on strategic priorities within the institution and negotiated within their practice to achieve those priorities.

*The budget is kind of above us, so the budget comes to our manager and we will all sit down and decide allocations of certain budget. So we will all kind of come with an idea of markets we might want to drop, markets we want to increase activity in and then it just because kind of a give and take.*  
(interviewee 16, recruiter, Lancaster)

Administrators, recruiters and support staff described the strategic plan at HKU in a different way. They saw the plan as important to internationalising the campus and seen as essentially controlling and directing the efforts of the institution towards various facets of internationalisation. *“I’m working with bits and pieces of the strategic planning- or part of the strategic planning document, but it’s very small part of it and how that got translated and interpreted, then that gets translated to me”* (interviewee 12, recruiter, HKU). These subjects provided an account of controlled implementation of the strategic plan. That is, it appeared that the strategic plan flowed from development at the senior management level and resources allocated and labour divided to achieve strategic intent:

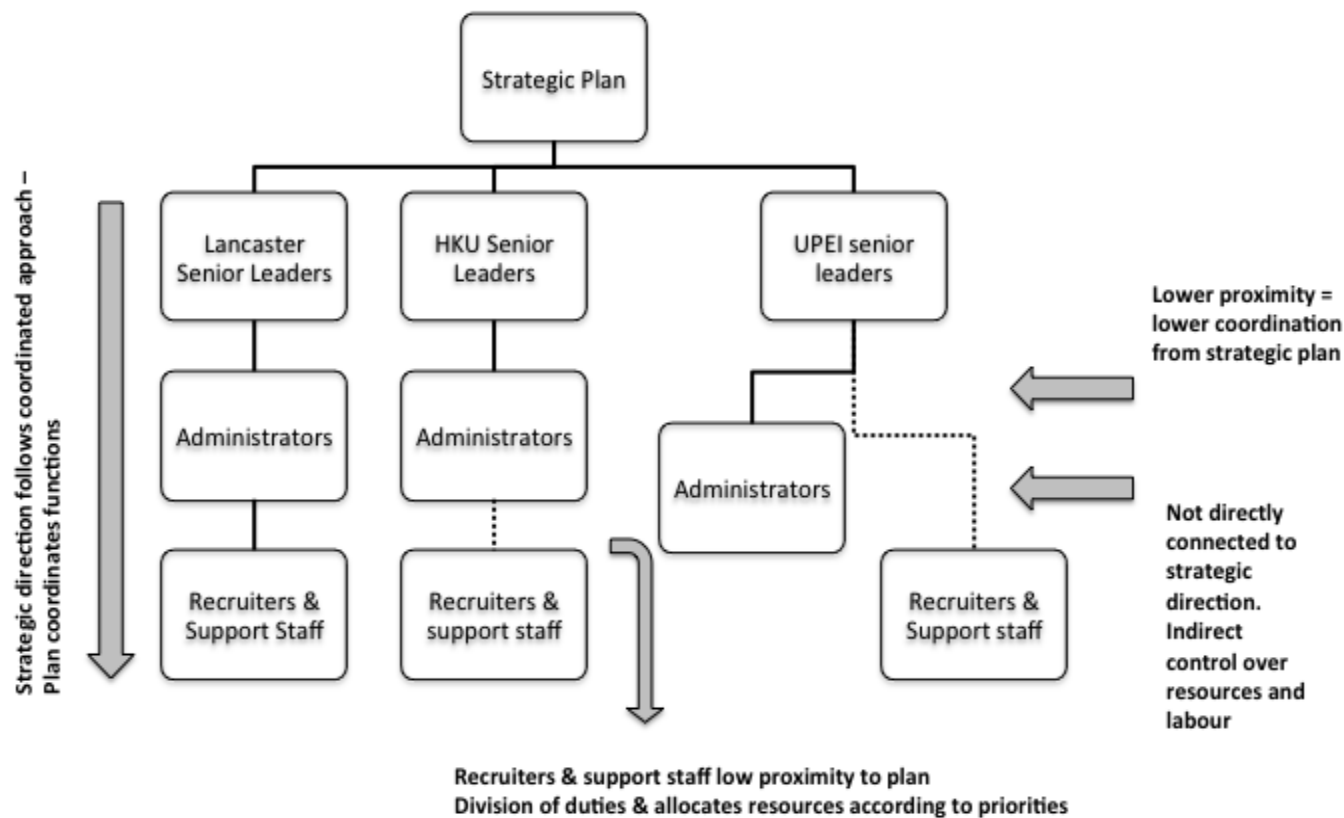
*We serve all of the people who really say “yes” and check the boxes for those who control the resources and also policies. It is quite important to make sure that while the Senior Management or the Chairman or whoever think about these policies or the directions, that we’ll make sure that it’s workable at the outreach frontline.* (interviewee 9, administrator, HKU)

The strategic plan mediated the practice of international student recruitment differently based on the subjects' vantage point in the system and the local context. Both of these considerations are necessary to understand the role of the strategic plan in the practice and the extent it provided coordination. Figure 4.1 illustrates the mediating influence the strategic plan had on the subjects' practice in each institution. The proximity to the strategic plan, meaning the location of the subject in the systems' hierarchy, suggested the nature of influence the plan had on practice for each subject. Not surprisingly, the proximity to the plan followed the hierarchical structure of each institution. However, the plans mediated activity differently based on the level of cooperation and collaboration between the levels of hierarchy in the systems (Engeström, 2000, Daniels & Warmington, 2007).

Figure 4.1 illustrates the analysis of the strategic plans to show the nature of strategic plans in developing and managing international student recruitment as export marketing behaviour. The figure depicts the strategic plans as an instrument or tool in the practice and the activity system view of mediation was used to assess the role of these plans within the system. In the Lancaster case, the figure illustrates the strategic plans in a coordinated and hierarchical way, acting as a coordinating mechanism for the practice. In the HKU case, the strategic plan had less influence on the practice for recruiters and support staff and the figure shows the plan as tool that divides duties and allocates resources to the practice. In the UPEI case, Figure 4.1 illustrates that the senior leaders viewed the strategic plan as influential on their practice compared to the other subjects. This limited the scope of influence of the strategic plans directly to senior leaders, resulting in the UPEI strategic plan having

indirect control of resources and labour in the international student recruitment practice and limited direct impact on other subjects.

### *Differences in Mediation*



**Figure 4.1 The Strategic Plan: Contextualising Mediation**

These findings show that these strategic plans had different purposes for the practices and their mediation was unique from the subjects' vantage point and within the institutional culture (Jarzabkowski, 2003).

Figure 4.2 uses the activity system approach to position the strategic plans within the practice. This study found that strategic plans are mediating tools for the practice of recruiting international students by allocating resources, dividing labour, and establishing rules. Figure 4.2 presents the strategic plans in the context of the



activity system as coordinating mechanism (position A), establishing targets or rules (position B), and allocating resources and labour (position C). This frame of analysis shows that strategic plans can play one or multiple roles within the practice and need to be understood in context of how they shape international student recruitment practice. This is important to understanding the development and implementation of international student recruitment as export marketing and helps to define coordination, resource allocation, goals, and roles that are important for export marketing analysis. Lancaster University respondents showed that the strategic plan represented a coordination mechanism that set direction, monitored performance, and controlled resources. This was evidenced in strategic goals and by engaging the subjects in implementing strategies through committee structures, establishing targets, and allocating resources. As Asaad et al., (2015) and Jarzabkowski (2003) found coordination through direction setting, resource allocation, and monitoring and control can provide extensive mediation to strategic practice. This was not the case at UPEI, where recruiters and support staff did not demonstrate an appreciation for the plan as an instrument within their practice. However, the administrators at the institution suggested the establishment of a strategic plan introduced importance to the recruitment of international students to the institution. The administrators did not see the plan as contributing to coordination but rather established direction and prioritised resources to the practice. The respondents at HKU portrayed the strategic plan as highly important to coordinating institutional goals, including the recruitment of international students through resource allocation and control mechanisms such as committee structures. However, the level of understanding of these goals was limited to senior

leaders and administrators. Recruiters and support staff followed the direction set by their administrators with little appreciation to how the strategic plan contributed to their practice.



**Figure 4.2 – Strategic Plans Mediating Practice**

Analysing the strategic plans as mediation identified the influence of these plans on the practice through direction setting, resource allocation, and control and monitoring mechanisms that contributed to or established coordination within the practice (Asaad et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski, 2003). This understanding of the use of strategic plans provided insight into culture and history of the practices at each

institution and shed light on the subjects' perspectives of their practice. These findings show that these strategic plans mediated practice in different ways, depending on the subjects' vantage point in the system and the institutional history and culture that shape strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2003).

### *Summary of Findings*

Strategic plans shaped the activity of international recruitment differently for subjects and were used differently within each institution (Figure 4.2). Not surprisingly, the strategic plan had greater impact on the subjects based on their position with the hierarchy. However, there were institutional differences in the role and perception of the strategic plan from the level of engagement with the strategic plan process. That is, there was greater understanding of the goals of the strategic plan where staff were engaged in the process of strategic planning such as the case in Lancaster. This was not the case in the other two case studies showing that strategic plans played different roles depending on institutional approach to creating the plans and the subjects' position within the hierarchy.

**Research Question 2:** *What are the perceived tensions in international student recruitment practices at these HEIs and how do these tensions compare in each case study?*

This research question focuses on comparing the perceived tensions in the practice of international student recruitment. The findings for this question are presented in three stages. The first stage describes the activity system of each institution to contextualise the tensions identified through the subject – object interaction or true meaning of each system (Engeström, 1989, 2000, 2001). Figure 4.3 presents the

activity systems of the three case studies, UPEI, HKU, and Lancaster University. The second part of answering research question two compares the strategy practitioners views. Finally, a typology of tensions in the practices is presented and comparisons made between the institutions. This answers the research question by outlining the tensions in each practice and how these comparisons are different, resulting in a typology framework.

The first part of the findings for research question two is illustrated in Figure 4.3 with two activity systems in each institution – System A and System B. System A depicts the administrators, recruiters, and support staff objects (objects 1 – 3) which are all shared objects for the subjects. System B presents the senior leaders’ vantage point that is different from the other subjects, adding object 4 for senior leaders. This results in two interacting activity systems in each case and represents tensions in the practice (Engeström, 2001). These objects were analysed from the subjects’ perspectives as the practice was learned and understood by those who do the work rather than constructing the practice through mere description or documentation. “The theory of expansive learning cannot be reduced to the learning of abstract organizations without concrete human subjects” (Engeström & Sannino, 2009, p. 6). This approach to practice places importance on the subjects’ collective views and understanding of the purpose of their practice. The interviews provided the basis for analysing and defining the objects from the perspective of each subject. Furthermore, the subjects’ perceptions of the outcomes of their practice introduced possibilities for new learnings that answered the final research question of this study. “Reflecting on and evaluating the process and consolidating its outcomes into

a new stable form of practice” (Engeström & Sannino, 2009, p. 7) represented opportunities for expansive learning and transformation through the subject-object tensions (Engeström 1989, 2000, 2001; Engeström & Sannino, 2009).

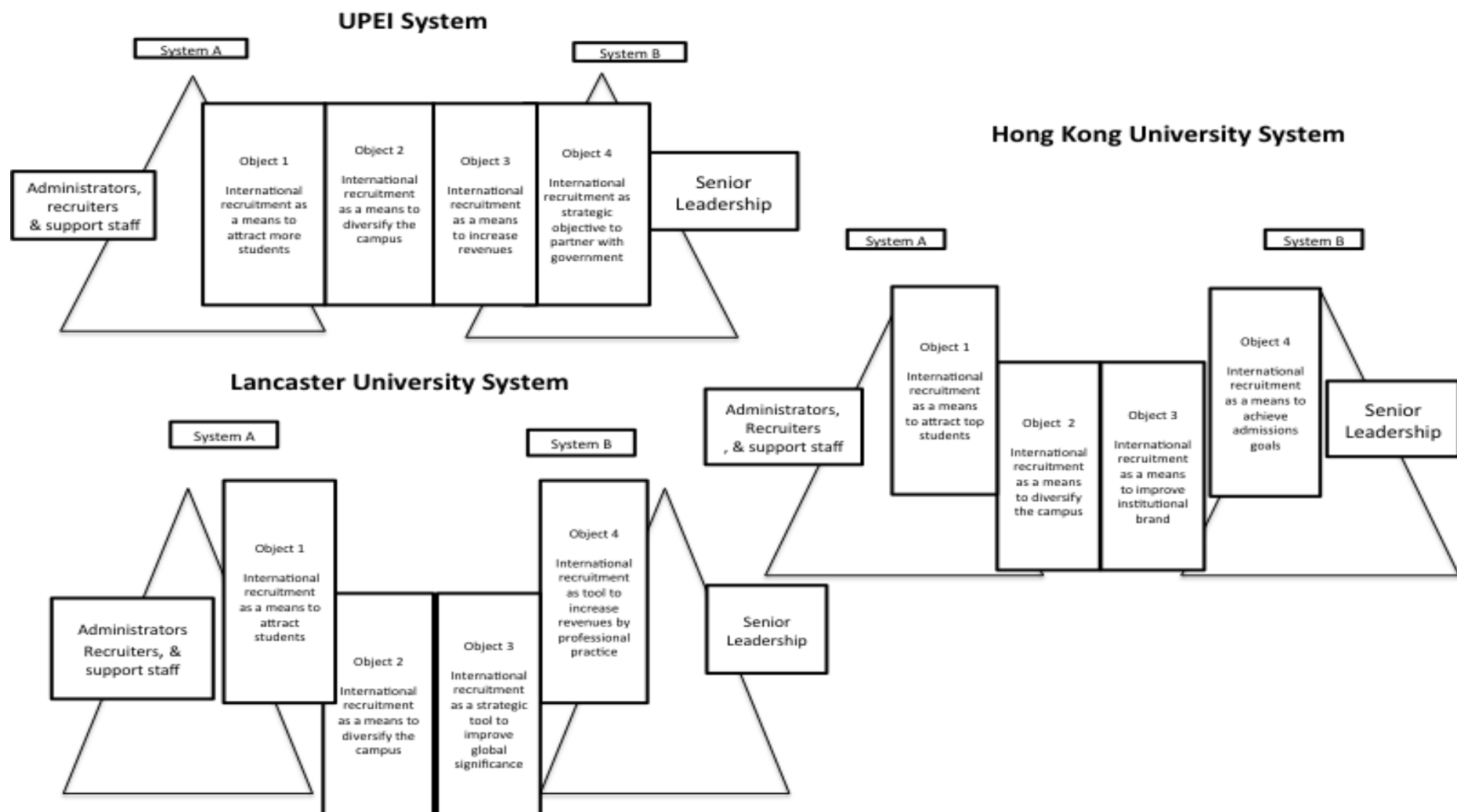


Figure 4.3: Interacting Activity Systems

### *UPEI's Activity System*

UPEI's respondents were enthusiastic about their practice and provided detailed accounts of the recruiting of international students. There were eight different practitioners that uncovered different ways in which the practice was interpreted by the subjects resulting in four objects of the practice, viewing international student recruitment as a means to 1) attract more students, 2) diversify the campus, 3) increase revenues, and 4) partner with government. The four subjects – administrators, recruiters, senior leaders, and support staff shared objects one, two and three. However, only senior leaders viewed international student recruitment as a method to work with the government (Engeström, 1989, 2000, 2001).

The differences in objects occurred between senior leaders and other subjects. Senior leaders viewed the recruitment of international students as mediating institutional activity by responding to government policy direction and faculty and student needs. International student recruitment at the institution had received incremental funding from government at the provincial and federal levels to pursue attracting international students for the labour market and human capital purposes. This is supported by the enrolment plan that specifies that importance of achieving a growing labour force for the province (“Strategic Enrolment Plan,” 2013) and through the federal government programme to attract students for post-study work (Foreign Affairs Trade and Development, 2014). This resource allocation to the institution broadened the purpose of recruiting international students and raised the interests of senior leaders to ensure the practice was prioritised to align with the

agenda of the two-levels of government. This impacted practice by increasing resources to attract more and more international students to the campus.

*You hear from the Premier, you hear it from the Board of Governors, you hear it from senior administration, we need to import talent, train them, and encourage them to stay on the island, develop businesses and contribute to the economy.* (interviewee 1, senior leader, UPEI)

As one senior leader noted, the size of international recruitment team expanded as a result of this interest by government to attract international students to the jurisdiction, *“In part, due to the fact that adequate resources (in terms of personnel and recruiters) came from substantial funding from [government]”* (interviewee 1, senior leader, UPEI). As such, the subjects showed the object of international recruitment expanding beyond merely attracting students and were constructed through different interactions with subject and tools, as seen in Figure 4.3. In this case, the object of activity is reconceptualised beyond merely attracting international students,

*One of the primary goals of international student recruitment has been to ensure a diverse campus, at the same time, attracting a group of students that brings us up to our overall enrolment targets that we might not be able to achieve domestically.* (interviewee 6, administrator, UPEI)

This object created pressure on the practice to grow revenue and to meet expectations of governments for their labour market purposes while at the same time, helped to offset declines in domestic enrolments. This meant that attracting



the quantity of students became an imperative, over quality. These potential incongruities lead to discussions with participants about the type of students that the institution needed to attract. The subjects believed student academic qualifications were vital considerations in the attraction of the appropriate students, but within the “reality” of the institution’s capability to attract certain student due to location and lack of ranking.

*We want the best quality, but in the meantime, we have to look at our own reality. Students, if they like Toronto or they like Vancouver, that’s something we cannot simply change. We want the smart students, but we want the smart students who can pay.* (interviewee 3, support staff, UPEI)

Therefore, the objects of the activity were interpreted differently from the perspectives of recruiters, support staff, and senior leaders in one main area, the partnership with government. This context created a different object for the senior leadership creating conflict in the system. Administrators, recruiters, and support staff were attempting to grow student numbers and diversify the campus and achieving these goals was a difficult challenge. However, senior leaders viewed satisfying government as critical to their relationship and increased pressure on other subjects to continue to grow the volume of international students. Therefore, in Figure 4.3 the common objects were identified between recruiters and support staff (System A) and senior leaders (System B) in objects (1-3); viewing international student recruitment as a tool to “attract more students,” “diversify the campus,” and “increase revenues.” Activity System B represents the senior leaders’ vantage

point, which encompassed Objects 1-3, but added Object 4, “a means to partner with government.”

### *HKU’s Activity System*

There were five respondents at HKU who had different roles in the hierarchy. These team members all worked as part of a larger team of admissions and recruitment people and were involved, more or less directly, in the development and implementation of international student recruitment. These individuals are the subjects of the activity system; senior leaders administrators, recruiters, and support staff. The interviews uncovered four main objects that showed international student recruitment was more than simply attracting students by positioning the institution as international and top quality. The objects uncovered in the interviews showed the practice as a means to; 1) attract top students, 2) diversify the campus, 3) improve the institutional brand, and 4) achieve admissions goals and manage the quota. International recruitment objects, for the subjects, focused on achieving the top academically qualified students, while at the same time adhering to government policy. For HKU, the activity of international recruitment was constructed through different interactions with subject and object, as seen in Figure 4.3.

For senior leaders (Figure 4.3 HKU System B), the object was extended to balance the interests of the various faculties and to achieve admissions goals (Object 4). This object was different from the other subjects. While all subjects understood the quota, it was an object for the senior leaders that gave purpose to their work in international student recruitment.

*We have to be accountable to meet the quotas that are set aside by our Government. So we kind of have to work, have strategies to make sure we meet the quota and make sure we don't over enrol or under enrol. To make sure we fit all the policies.* (interviewee 13, senior leader, HKU)

This also meant attracting top students was an object, but at the same time, managing faculty expectations and closely monitoring admissions was a key responsibility of the senior leaders.

*That is why we are very careful in, not just how many students we recruited, but also on a number of nationalities. Which schools are we recruiting from, and what kind of students-- what calibre of students we are going to recruit or attract to apply to Hong Kong?* (interviewee 13, senior leader, HKU)

The institutional goal to brand HKU as a top institution in Asia and to be viewed as an international institution was important to all subjects. The subjects believed it was vital to communicate the brand to prospective students. *"Because for us, student recruitment is just the means to market Hong Kong U"* (interview 9, administrator, HKU). All subjects shared this object as they viewed the importance of the brand as a means to attract top students and their collective roles were to contribute to that brand. *"[My role is to]...represent the university branding as a whole because that contributes to generation of interest in the university"* (interviewee 10, recruiter, HKU).

Figure 4.3 HKU system shows the contact zone between senior leadership and other subjects (System A) occurs within Objects 1–3. The object of activity was then

reconceptualised to “attracting top students” (Object 1), “means to diversify the campus” (Object 2) and “means to improve international rankings and brand” (Object 3). There was an alignment of subjects’ motives within these objects, and the relatively smaller size and scope of the activity of international recruitment within HKU may have contributed to this alignment. *“Through the student recruitment activities and admissions of the top students, we can brand ourselves as one of the top universities in Asia”* (interviewee 10, recruiter, HKU). However, there was tension in the practice as recruiters and support staff viewed the admissions process as a more important function than recruitment and this was reinforced as senior leaders described the importance of admissions for faculty and to meet the quota. This created conflicts for recruiters and support staff who faced intense competition in the marketplace for both quality and quantity of students.

#### *Lancaster University’s Activity System*

There was a larger team engaged in the practice at Lancaster University that involved fifteen interviews with senior leaders, administrators, recruiters, and support staff. Faculty administration was included in the interviews as they shared administrative responsibility for international student recruitment. This approach to international student recruitment at Lancaster was indicative of the manner that they organised and viewed international student recruitment. The people within the system were from different levels of hierarchy within the institution and involved in different stages of the recruitment process. They were all, in part, involved in the development and implementation of the recruitment practice.

The interviews discovered four objects in the system of international student recruitment at Lancaster; 1) to attract more students, 2) diversify the campus 3) become a globally significant university and 4) increase revenues to sustain the institution through professional practice. The Management School shared similar objects with the other subjects in the system. However, the School demonstrated different motivations. The Management School and other faculty administrators shared the same objects of attracting the best students, enhancing global significance, and diversifying their international cohort. Nonetheless, it is important to note that subject-to-subject tensions existed between the Management School and other subjects due to motivations and these are presented later in this chapter (Ashwin, 2009).

The institution's central strategy guided the work of international student recruitment with specific goals that focused the practice on rankings and growth. *"It is about wanting numbers, because we've got quite ambitious targets by 2020"* (interviewee, 16, recruiter, Lancaster). Beyond the numbers, diversity was an important consideration in demonstrating internationalisation of the institution that assisted to achieve the goals established by the strategy. This internationalisation agenda underpinned the activities within the strategy, and subjects demonstrated the importance of internationalisation through their understanding of the strategy and goals within it. The subjects' understanding contributed to two objects, diversification and global significance. *"The university strategy is very straight-forward, we want to be a globally significant university"* (interviewee 26, senior leader, Lancaster). This global significance was shown as important through

rankings: *"If you do desegregate the international league tables, where we rank highest, it's our internationalisation efforts that set us apart, the diversity there, contributes [to the ranking]. It really vaults us forward"* (interviewee, 20, senior leader, Lancaster).

For senior leaders, the object was expanded to include increasing revenues to sustain the institution through professional practice (Object 4). The professionalisation and centralisation of international student recruitment was a strategic reorganisation by senior management designed to achieve growth and competitiveness in international student recruitment. *"For the university, it is more money and more income"* (interviewee 16, recruiter, Lancaster). The subjects viewed the institution relying on self-sourced revenues to sustain the operations, and international student recruitment was an important contributor to financing the institution.

*There is a sense of trying to kind of professionalise, certainly the side of recruitment and marketing, which often was done by a junior member of clerical stuff. We've done quite a lot on that, a lot more coordination, a lot more sophistication around our marketing approaches, materials, branding, etc., its been a big step and change in the last four years... and, much more focused on not just leaving departments to do it, but you know giving them support, to add sort of different expectations".* (interviewee 27, senior leader, Lancaster)

These objects suggest that all subjects within the system share Objects 1, 2, and 3 (System A). For senior leaders (System B), Object 4 was distinct, as it was a focus for the leaders that was understood within the system but not shown by the other subjects. These divergent objects created two interacting activity systems for international student recruitment depicted in Figure 4.3. Professionalising international student recruitment created tension in the practice through the centralised managerial approach that threatened historically rooted functions in some faculties. At the same time, senior leaders delegated some responsibilities for internationalisation and student recruitment to departments and these responsibilities were still unclear and under negotiation as these expectations were relatively new.

### **How Do Strategy Practitioners views Differ in these Three Institutions?**

The analysis of the activity systems in each case study identified four ways that international student recruitment was viewed differently in the case studies. These views were, 1) the role of government, 2) targets and goals, 3) brand and rankings, and 4) institutional culture impacting structure.

Senior leaders at UPEI understood that government played a central role in funding the jurisdiction's only university. These leaders viewed the opportunity to partner through recruitment efforts as a means to align their goals with government and to produce incremental funding for the institution. In this case, the leaders viewed the government as an enabler of international student recruitment. The other two institutions viewed government and their policies as a constraint and subjects

viewed government as negatively impacting their practice through policies. The subjects at HKU and Lancaster believed the policies inhibited international student recruitment efforts through the quota for HKU and immigration policy for Lancaster University. These views of government were unique to each case study as the policies and relationships with government varied in each setting (Beech, 2018, Findlay et al., 2017, O'Connor, 2017).

At UPEI, recruiters viewed generating applications as the most important factor in their roles, which differed from the other two case studies. *"I hear we will never cap it. We want as many international students as we can have but I don't think that's a right answer"* (interviewee 4, recruiter, UPEI). HKU felt constrained by the demand in applications and sought quality of student applications rather than quantity. HKU, due to the quota and limited space, did not have increasing applications identified as an object. HKU's subjects described international student recruitment as "admissions" dominated with emphasis on qualifications. Lancaster University was focused on applications but showed an emphasis on conversion activity as well. Targets were a focal point for subjects at Lancaster University whereas UPEI did not articulate targets, but rather growth without stated limits or annual targets. *"For example, in a couple weeks I'm going to go to Spain and do a whole three days that's just about conversion because for me, we're judged on the registration numbers in the end"* (interviewee 16, recruiter, Lancaster). Lancaster's view of the practice focused on return on investment that was cognisant of the need to achieve enrolments.



At the same time, HKU and Lancaster University shared similar perspectives of international student recruitment as a means to enhance the brand and reputation (Farrell & Van der Werf, 2007; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; O'Connell & Saunders, 2013). For HKU recruiting international students contributed to being globally recognised as an international institution and served to represent the brand to prospective students. For Lancaster University global relevance and league table rankings were viewed as critical to the institution and recruiting international students contributed to these goals. Both of these institutions utilised international student recruitment as a means to achieve the brand positioning and improve global rankings while UPEI did not demonstrate objects associated with brand or rankings. For HKU and Lancaster, subjects reflected on the strategies within their institutions and what it meant to their roles and departments. The subjects' understanding contributed to greater goal understanding for the subjects than in the UPEI case (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014; Cadogen et al. 1999; Naidoo & Wu, 2011). This awareness shaped the adoption of the strategy within each system and directed the subjects' focus to achieve the goals in the plan through international student recruitment.

UPEI		HONG KONG UNIVERSITY		LANCASTER UNIVERSITY	
<u>Tension</u>	<u>Issues</u>	<u>Tension</u>	<u>Issues</u>	<u>Tension</u>	<u>Issues</u>
<b>Communication and coordination within the system – lack of role clarity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of coordination with other neighbouring activity</li> <li>Rules and tools not fully understood or utilised</li> </ul>	<b>Government and recruitment: Rules of internationalisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government constraints</li> <li>Indeterminate state between Hong Kong and Mainland China</li> <li>Lack of government policy outside of quota</li> </ul>	<b>Centralisation of strategy – role clarity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of understanding of new roles</li> <li>Accountability frameworks changing</li> <li>Culturally independent faculties</li> </ul>
<b>Faculty &amp; students - changing culture on campus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perceived resistance to change</li> <li>Changes to campus culture</li> </ul>	<b>Faculty and students – changing culture on campus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changes/lack of change in campus culture</li> <li>Expectations of faculty</li> </ul>	<b>Government rules – policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visa limitations on post-study employment</li> <li>Political environment</li> </ul>
<b>Rapid change - investment in resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources strained</li> <li>Demand creating pressure</li> </ul>	<b>Rapid increase in demand - Resource allocation and adoption of strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demand/tools not keeping pace</li> <li>Balance of diversity versus “top” students</li> <li>Admissions dominated</li> </ul>	<b>Resource allocation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faculty with resources and independence</li> </ul>

Table 4.1 Tensions impacting practice for each case study.

At Lancaster University, the organisational structure and historical context for international student recruitment differed than the other case studies. The faculty administration at Lancaster played an administrative role in recruiting students through delegated responsibility from central administration for internationalisation strategies that included addressing student recruitment. This centralised structure, combined with delegated authorities was relatively new and represented change for the subjects. This change disrupted the system as faculties and departments sought to understand their role, while the Management School, with history and experience in recruiting internationally, pursued their independence within the structure. UPEI and HKU experienced organisational restructure. However, the subjects in these institutions did not view the extent of structural change as disruptive as compared to Lancaster. HKU and UPEI, through their strategies, did not involve faculty directly in the administration of international student recruitment or impose new expectations on faculties or departments. As a result, the change in structure was not as impactful. However, all the case studies experienced pressure with an increasingly competitive environment that was viewed as straining resources and changing the subjects' work (Jarzabkowski 2003; Jarzabkowski et al., 2012).

### *Typology of Tensions: A Comparison of the Three Case Studies*

The analysis of the activity systems' tensions provides the opportunity workplace learning and transformative change (Engeström, 2001; Jarzabkowski, 2003, Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). A comparison of the tensions experienced in international student recruitment practice from three case studies is examined to provide opportunities for transformative change and learning within the institutions (Engeström, 2001; Jarzabkowski, 2003, Jarzabkowski et al., 2012). Table 4.1 depicts the tensions identified by the subjects in their interviews and compares the tensions experienced by each case study. These tensions involved communication, coordination, institutional culture, resource allocation, rules imposed by governments, and structure and organisation of the practice.

In the UPEI case study, the activity experienced change, as identified by the subjects through the increased demand in student applications and non-domestic student enrolment. These changes created tensions in three primary areas of the system 1) communication and coordination, 2) changing culture on campus, and 3) investment in resources and expansion. The subjects described a lack of communication or understanding of institutional strategies that related to their practice and how these strategies informed the overall direction of the activity and their roles within it. All the subjects, regardless of their role within the system, shared the perspective of lack of coordination and communication. While the subjects understood their roles and the expectation to achieve increased applications and revenues, they lacked understanding of how the strategy and processes connected to their work,

demonstrating an implementation gap. *“Right now we’ve got too many groups doing things on their own that are uncoordinated, that are overwhelmed, and that’s a bad recipe”* (interviewee 1, senior leader, UPEI).

The UPEI subjects viewed the capacity to manage increasing enrolments of international students as stretching resources. As a result, they perceived a potential negative impact on services offered to students and the overall student experience. In particular, the subjects perceived that the campus did not always embrace the increasing enrolments within the institution and that faculty may not be prepared or understand potential adaptations to teaching or learning that may be necessary. The institution, until the recent leadership change, predominantly served local and domestic students.

*That's not an issue we've had to deal with very often in the past. Not to the extent that we're dealing with right now. I don't think, frankly, that the faculty... that we have a plan for the faculty. There's nothing that I'm aware of where we have a concerted effort to educate faculty in terms of what to expect when they have different kinds of students in their class* (interviewee 1, senior leader, UPEI).

There was a perception amongst subjects of a lack of understanding regarding the activity within the greater campus community and how that impacted the entire campus. *“I would probably say that across campus there’s not a great understanding of what recruitment is; what their mandates are by programme, by level, by way of*

*strategy directs them*” (interviewee 6, administrator, UPEI). This change in institutional practice and culture created tension in the system.

Subjects discussed the rapid increase in investment in international student recruitment and the history of a more “passive approach” to the practice. That is, it was not a focus in the past. The change in focus introduced by new leadership created a feeling of importance as it pertained to international student enrolments. With the new organisational attention, there was recognition amongst the subjects that the higher education was increasingly competitive and the institution needed to evolve their practice to compete at an international level. *“That [recruitment] is becoming more competitive across the world or North America”* (interviewee 4, recruiter, UPEI).

The subjects described a change in practice illustrated by the introduction of new tools such as increased travel, an expanded agent network, and social media and restructuring to leverage resources in international recruitment. The subjects did not fully understand the impact of these changes.

*If we looked at application numbers, conversion rates, and exponential growth in the international area, how many reports have been run to show how successful we are actually are in Nigeria? How successful are we in our hopes of making a difference in Brazil? I mean, maybe this conversation is happening somewhere, but I don't know that the data is informing the decision-making.* (interviewee 5, senior leader, UPEI)

From the subjects' vantage point, there was uncertainty regarding the increased resources and expansion of the practice, and how the new resources are expected to change the practice. These resources and lack of understanding created tension for the practice.

At HKU, subjects identified tension occurring in different ways that were unique to their setting; 1) government and international student recruitment 2) changing culture on campus, and 3) resource allocation and admissions. Government through the UGC established the quota for the institution and monitored compliance. The quota served to mediate international student recruitment by limiting the number of students who can attend the institution. As such, government controlled the nature and extent of international student recruitment at HKU. The institution recruited students by focusing on enhancing the brand and attracting "top students". At the same time, the quota limited the scope of international student recruitment for the institution, both in financial and human terms. There was less incentive to dedicate resources to actual recruitment practice when the quota limited capacity and financial gains (Asaad et al., 2015). The quota also constrained the choice of markets that the recruiters visited and forced the recruiters to direct resources to China, limiting diversity and choice of top students. *"Mainland China is not international, but it's not local"* (interviewee 10, recruiter, HKU). This view of international students changed markets and divergent priorities for HKU. *"You have to prioritise and you're obviously trying to get as many representation as you can within the 600*

*number, this magic number that's been hanging over our head"* (interviewee 12, recruiter, HKU).

Other than the quota system, the government had been fairly silent on international recruitment related Hong Kong higher education. There was a perception of disparity between Mainland China and Hong Kong, with the government policy focusing on enhancing Mainland China's internationalisation agenda rather than on Hong Kong's. For recruiters, this placed the institution and Hong Kong at a disadvantage globally.

*There's no government cohesive support, and we're in a very weird place where we aren't exactly China. We're Hong Kong. So we don't really have the resources of the Chinese embassies. They're pushing their local universities.*

(interviewee 12, recruiter, HKU)

The recruiters viewed the appropriation of resources to admissions as a source of tension within the activity. The institution experienced significant growth in international applications, yet the infrastructure and support considered necessary by recruiters did not keep pace. As a result, resources were viewed as strained, leading to multiple roles for subjects in the system and emphasis placed on admissions rather than recruitment. While the strategy stressed internationalisation, the division of labour and tools did not appear to align to the expectations of recruiters.

*Everyone is half a role or quarter of their role. For instance, one person is doing marketing, and then a quarter of their role is on something else. It*



*becomes a little bit difficult to define who does what...because here, everyone has multiple roles. (interviewee 12, recruiter, HKU)*

Multiple responsibilities created pressure on the recruitment practice, at the same time, limited resources also constrained the practice.

*If we need to make changes to the application system, we have to ask central IT and I think the wait list is about 5 years long. So anything you need to get done, you basically put it in and wait and it comes outdated already by the time they update. (interviewee 10, recruiter)*

This contradiction suggested a lack of resources contributed to tension within the international student recruitment activity. As depicted in the activity system (Figure 4.3), managing admissions and faculty expectations was a separate object for senior leaders, and the recruiters and support staff viewed admissions as constraining the activity. The increase in demand (applications) also placed subjects under pressure to review and admit the top students, limiting focus on recruitment. As one recruiter stated:

*I think our target might be different from theirs [faculty] because their target is not in internationalisation. Their job is to have a good teaching and learning experience for the students, make sure the students get a good GPA, and then graduate. I think that's their target, but our target's very different. So, I think what we need to do is try to bridge the gap. (interviewee 9, administrator, HKU)*

Recruiters perceived international recruitment to affect the cultural landscape for students as social integration was not occurring in the manner that they believed reflected an international campus. *“At the end of the day...we still have 80% (roughly 80%) that’s still very local, and those students are not that open to interaction with the non-local students because they don’t have to”* (interviewee 10, recruiter, HKU).

The recruiters presented institutional response to increased demand as a main area of tension within the system as prospective student demand, through applications, created pressure on traditional systems. At the same time, recruiters were attempting to respond to competitive markets and institutional expectations for rankings and brand, yet feeling constrained by the government policies.

The subjects of Lancaster University’s international student recruitment practice presented three areas of tension, namely 1) centralisation, 2) government policy, and 3) resource allocation. The subjects viewed the change to a centralised administrative approach for international student recruitment creating tension within their practice. As the institution advanced the adoption of the “Our Strategy 2020”, the subjects’ presented an understanding and appreciation of the goals of the plan. This acceptance of strategy and central planning was demonstrated through the subjects’ understanding of the goals and strategies throughout the interviews and the faculty administration discussing the process of strategic planning for internationalisation and recruitment practices within their various departments. Nonetheless, there was a lack of understanding from faculty administration on what

internationalisation and centralised international recruitment meant for their departments.

*We're challenged by a centre (administration) to basically say, 'well we should really be growing our student numbers by somewhere around 5% year on year.' Whether that's going to be a university aspiration that obviously has to somehow reflect down to the faculties and departments. The university departments will grow, some of them won't, but somehow we have to be able to be accountable to the centre.* (interviewee 14, administrator, Lancaster)

As the system changed to a somewhat centralised model of planning, there was tension and conflict as the new processes attempted to define roles and expectations related to objectives for administrators and senior leaders that was not understood.

The subjects identified another conflict within the system between government policy and international recruitment for the UK and its impact on the institution. The discourse on immigration and Brexit shaped the subjects' perspectives of an unstable international student recruitment environment. The subjects believed the lack of post-study work visas and viable employment for international students was detrimental to international student recruitment for the institution. As an administrator stated, *"UK is not open to international students."* This perception generated conflict within the system as these policies appeared to restrict the strategy of the institution. Government policy and regulation existed as a highly important context for the institution's goals. The institution was highly engaged and

reliant on international strategies that aim to position Lancaster as a globally relevant university. The conflict posed challenges to the recruitment system.

Within the system at Lancaster University, there was an appreciation that the Management School had a long history and experience with international recruitment than the other faculties and the central administration. As one recruiter stated, *“The Management School has a bigger brand than the university.”* This history and status enabled the recruitment system and structures to continue in the Management School, while the rest of the institution was centrally organised and coordinated. This created a unique position for the Management School within the system that was historically and culturally embedded. *“Culture trumps strategy sometimes. There is an appreciation for what's better provisioned from the centre. What's better supported from the centre versus local”* (interviewee 26, senior leader, Lancaster).

International student recruitment as a function, outside of the Management School, was centralised with autonomy given to faculties to support recruitment efforts. This functional approach translated into different relationships and activities occurring within the system. For example, some faculties may work more closely with the centralised recruitment team to coordinate visits to countries, fairs, etc. and to join the central recruitment team on these visits. Other faculties used their resources to visit locations and recruit independently from the central international recruitment activity.

*[We] don't really have any control over what they [faculties] do. They go out and it's their visit, they paid for it. We have had some leads back, but also if they decide not to gather any leads, that is really their choice.* (interviewee 17, recruiter, Lancaster)

This lack of control created conflict between the international recruitment office, faculties, and the Management School related to roles, tasks, functions, and resources. The centralised planning process proposed international student recruitment as a central activity. As such, the subjects in central roles viewed the activity differently than those in the Management School. *"What we'd like to get to is where the central international office does recruitment and the faculties do the conversion. Right now, the Management School does its own thing"* (interviewee 15, administrator, Lancaster). The Management School's independence and faculty resources for recruitment represented tension—at a cultural level—between the newer, centralised approach and the historically entrenched within the Management School and faculties.

### *Summary of Findings*

The comparison of tensions within each system highlighted the underpinning influences of tension within each system, *culture and competitiveness*. Each system was experiencing change within their international student recruitment practice that affected culture, and historical structures and processes. For UPEI, the rapid growth in resources dedicated to the activity, the expectation for growth, and market demand combined to render the system dynamic and evolving. In HKU, the institution's desire for international reputation, a global brand, and growing market

demand was shaping the activity. However, given the government rules restricting their ability to expand the activity, this posed challenges to the system. Lancaster's adoption of the strategic plan and institutional restructuring created instability in the system, as subjects begin to learn and adapt to a new administrative approach. Their globally relevant agenda and financial interests appeared to be at odds with recent political discourse related to international students in the UK (interviewee, 22, administrator, Lancaster). This discourse placed Lancaster in a state of unpredictability as they seek to make sense of the new strategy internally while adapting to external forces. These tensions experienced by each of the case studies provide opportunities for workplace learning by identifying conflicts within the practice and between other practices within each institution (Engeström, 2001; Jarzabkowski, 2003, Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, 2012, 2015).

**Research Question Three:** *How do strategy practitioners describe and perceive the export marketing behaviours of their institution and how do these behaviours compare between Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK?*

Export marketing theory outlines a framework for adoption (Leonidou, 2011). Although there are various steps and phases involved in organisational adoption, the theory suggests an activity or process that is learned and adopted. Using aspects of the export marketing model for HEIs by Asaad et al., (2015) the export marketing behaviour of the case studies was analysed for three main behaviours; information generation, market information dissemination, and responsiveness to export market information. The cases were further analysed to examine the antecedents of export

marketing for HEIs, namely export coordination and attitude towards government funding (Asaad et al., 2015). Each setting was analysed through the interviews and supporting documents to determine if export marketing behaviours were present. Competitive environments suggest behaviours such as strategies, branding, research, marketing, and goal setting. Table 4.2 outlines the export marketing factors examined in this thesis and show the behaviours discovered in each case. The findings consider the behaviours in the context of the stage or level of experience in export marketing demonstrated by the practitioners in their international student markets. In this section, the analysis was done separately and then compared to one another.

<b>Behaviour and Antecedents</b>		<b>UPEI</b>	<b>HKU</b>	<b>Lancaster</b>
<b>Information Generation</b>		Strategy and enrolment plans, Admissions data, recruitment data, third-party research, new analytics	Strategy, admissions data, third-party research, historical systems for reporting	Strategy, British Council, internal reports, third-party research
<b>Information Dissemination</b>		Direction setting, meetings, reports Isolated to functional areas	Strategy, meetings, committees, reporting Shared through committee structure	Committees, meetings, KPIs  Structured through functional areas, process and committees
<b>Responsiveness to information</b>		Fairs, agents, recruiters, CRM, social media Flexibility deemed important	Admissions focused – recruiters Not focused on traditional fairs or agents Flexibility deemed important	Market plans, agents, marketing, fairs, rankings Flexibility deemed important
<b>Coordination – communication &amp; understanding</b>		Fragmented – lack of clarity Resource allocation and resource distribution, meetings, policy direction	UAC and committees, recruiters Highly controlled – due to quota and admissions policies	Vice-Chancellors through committees and delegated authorities. Delegation to faculties. Key performance indicators  Dualistic – centralised recruitment – yet autonomous faculties  Understanding of goals, issues, and challenges
<b>Attitude towards government funding</b>		45% of operating budget* Viewed as important but self-sourced revenues more important	60% of operating budget** Viewed as the main financial support	12.4% of operating budget*** self-sourced revenues viewed as most important

**Table 4.2 Export marketing comparison of the three case studies**

\*\*[http://files.upei.ca/finance/operating\\_budget\\_2016-2017.pdf](http://files.upei.ca/finance/operating_budget_2016-2017.pdf)

\*\*<https://www.hku.hk/about/university-today/finance.html>

\*\*\*<http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/about-us/income-and-expenditure/>



### *UPEI – International student recruitment as export marketing*

By examining international student recruitment at UPEI, this thesis identified an experimental to an active form of export marketing behaviour within the institution (Cadogen et al., 2002; Cavusgil & Nevin, 1980). The adoption of export marketing behaviours was occurring fairly rapidly at UPEI through mediating tools, primarily 1) strategy and direction setting, 2) expanded funding for recruitment, and 3) self-sourced revenues becoming increasingly important (Asaad et al., 2015). Subjects viewed the adoption of these behaviours as inspired by a change in leadership at the institution and the need for revenues and viewed the institution as quickly adopting behaviours that considers export marketing adoption as experimental to active (Asaad et al., 2015; Cadogen et al., 2002; Cavusgil & Nevin, 1980).

*I think a lot of it probably came from the administrative leadership. By the institution taking some efforts to have a long-term strategy, overall, for how the university was going to function and change over, say, a 5-year period for a strategy...That just lead to things like recruitment and enrolment targets becoming part of that strategy. I think everybody in the institution thought a bit more specifically about what we meant by having those kinds of plans.*

*(interviewee 6, administrator, UPEI)*

The recruiters were able to appropriate resources and adapt practice without hierarchical approval processes enabling flexibility and responsiveness to market demands. *“Some people, some administrators, at some [other] universities, are very regimented- they say this is where we are going. They’re not open. They work*

*differently*” (interviewee 2, recruiter, UPEI). The flexible resource allocation permitted the recruiters to collectively evolve the activity to become more export market focused on choosing and expanding markets, investing in agents, and attending more fairs. The flexibility appeared to be contributing to an increase in applications to the institution. However, the growth in attracting international students and expanded international recruitment efforts had created instability within the system. The level of coordination, communication, and intelligence gathering did not keep pace with the expanding resource allocation or the strategic intent. The change in policy direction, through the creation of strategy and objectives, was evolving the practice at the institution but also highlighted the lack of clarity in connecting individual performance to the strategic plans and goals.

*I think it was a surprise that the strategic plan was being developed. I think that the Deans and others had difficulty trying to assess what that might look like and fair enough. If you’ve never done that process before, then it might be very difficult.* (interviewee 5, senior leader, UPEI)

The adoption of the strategy created interest in market intelligence from senior leadership and the adoption of new technologies (marketing and CRM), branding, and marketing efforts. The institution invested in new technology to enhance intelligence on prospective students and to develop its market responsiveness capability (Asaad et al., 2015). This investment was to enable recruiters to automate and customise responses to prospective students and profile prospects by their interests. The new technology implementation required the recruiters and support staff to adopt its capability to improve their practice. “[The new technology] is going

*to be very significant. It will provide more capacity to do the work that we want it to do, but the transition period is going to be very challenging”* (interviewee 5, support staff, UPEI). This investment in customer relationship management (CRM) tools and analytics suggested a view towards market responsiveness and improved market intelligence for UPEI with the expansion of international student recruitment resources in other areas including agents and marketing that were motivated by competitive and financial pressures.

*Analytics and empirical data are very important to us, both internal university data and also from the outside because we cannot bury ourselves just in our own data without looking at the bigger picture - the larger international context.* (interviewee 7, recruiter, UPEI)

*Working with agents is frequently important for smaller universities like us. You know we talk about resources, it’s very challenging, you know, in this globally, fiercely, competitive environment – we’ve expanded.* (interviewee 7, recruiter, UPEI)

The findings show the institution has been adopting behaviours associated with export marketing, with a focus on international student growth by investing in marketing intelligence and expanding resources to enhance market reach and responsiveness (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Ross et al., 2007, 2013). Interestingly, UPEI placed importance on two revenues to sustain the institution, government, and students. The institution appeared to try to balance both funding sources in their sustainability agenda. Asaad et al. (2015) found, attitude towards

government funding is an antecedent to export marketing, and UPEI showed a favorable reliance on both streams of revenues.

The institution was learning and adapting to new strategies and direction; however, subjects identified issues of coordination and information dissemination. There was a lack of understanding of the recruiters' activity and the broader strategic plan. Senior leaders also suggested there was as a lack of communication between international student recruitment office and other departments and teams within the institution (Cadogan et al., 1999, 2002; Slater & Narver, 2000). *"I would not know what the goal was, where the countries were, how many people are we recruiting? I'm not sure who is coordinating and leading"* (interviewee 5, senior leader)? These gaps in communication between senior leadership and the recruitment team appeared to be from the top-down and bottom-up, leading to conflicts in the practice.

The lack of coordination and communication system potentially limited the extent of export marketing for UPEI (Nagy & Berács, 2012). The institution demonstrated information generation and market responsiveness and a need for revenue to replace government funding. These factors placed export marketing in the early/active stage of adoption for UPEI as the strategy practitioners learned and responded to internal change and the need to generate incremental revenues to sustain the institution (Asaad et al., 2015; Findlay et al., 2017).

By examining international student recruitment at HKU, this thesis found limited export marketing adoption by the institution (Asaad et al., 2015; Cadogen et al., 2002; Cavusgil & Nevin, 1980). The use of tools, primarily strategy, brand, and recruitment, suggested the institution adopted aspects of export marketing, but this adoption was in the early or experimental phase due to; 1) government policy, 2) lack of financial motivation, 3) rankings, and 4) demand for seats. It is suggested that rankings might limit the adoption of behaviours associated with export marketing (Asaad et al., 2014) as there is less need to rely on marketing efforts as rankings serve to promote the institution. With substantial demand for seats in programmes and adequate government funding, this also limited the need to adopt export marketing where there was little financial return for HKU when investing in marketing resources (Asaad et al., 2015; Findlay et al., 2017).

The subjects showed motivation to compete as a top-ranked institution with an international focus. However, they believed the institution was restricted in its capability to compete. The system was highly coordinated, an antecedent of an export marketing orientation (Asaad et al., 2015). However, the coordination focused on the quota and managing faculty expectations for top quality students. This restriction emphasised coordination of admissions rather than recruitment activity.

*We have regular meetings on a weekly basis but during peak season we have more meetings. We collect the application admissions data from the students*

*and put a lot into handling the data so we can do all the analysis but our data is more focused the admissions and application numbers.* (interviewee 11, support staff, HKU)

As such, the University Admissions Committee (UAC) acted as the coordinating mechanism for international recruitment across the campus community yet that focus is internally motivated rather than market focused.

Nonetheless, the institution demonstrated market responsiveness by delegating authority to the recruiters to choose markets enabling flexibility within the system. However, this effort was relatively minor, again a consequence of the quota system and high demand. One recruiter stated, *“We don’t do fairs because we already get a lot of attention from the market”* (interviewee 12, recruiter, HKU). The limited need to invest in international student recruitment beyond branding suggested the institution was experimenting with international student recruitment as a means to build their brand in export markets and respond to competitive pressures. Another recruiter noted, *“the flexibility within the bureaucracy is not there to support the flexibility that we have within international student recruitment. The university is not going to change a policy just for the 600 when it has a class of 3000”* (interviewee 10, recruiter, HKU).

The strategic plan initiated the international agenda for HKU that gave importance to the brand and international student recruitment. However, within the context of recruitment, a lack of clarity exists that impacted the understanding of goals and

individual roles within the practice. The lack of understanding by recruiters and staff signaled the institution was drawn to market competition but lacked the fiscal motivation to adopt further export marketing (Findlay et al., 2017; Naidoo & Wu, 2011; Asaad et al., 2014).

*Sometimes I don't know if it's my goal to diversify or if it is the university's goal to keep very high standards? If I'm going to keep very high standards, I'm going to recruit at very different places than those that are going to diversify the student population. That wasn't communicated to our level. We are working with bits and pieces of the strategic planning or part of the strategic planning document, but it's a very small part of it. (interviewee 12, recruiter, HKU)*

The institution showed experimental aspects of export marketing through the practice of international student recruitment by gathering intelligence, responding competitively to the market, and coordination capabilities that may enable further behaviours. The goal of becoming a recognised leader in international higher education and responding to market forces through intelligence, lead to adopting some aspects of export marketing. However, internal and external constraints continued to restrict HKU from adopting more advanced export marketing behaviours (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Ross et al., 2007; 2013).

*Lancaster University - International student recruitment as an export marketing*

Lancaster University illustrated an active-to-committed export marketing as shown through 1) monitoring and control mechanisms such as market research and performance indicators, 2) communication and coordination through a centralised approach and delegation to faculties, 3) market responsiveness through market plans, agents, and fairs. In combination, these attributes rationalised the strategy within the institution and created an EMO (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Cadogen et al., 2002; Cavusgil & Nevin, 1980).

There was an appreciation for the importance of the strategic goals amongst the subjects within the activity. This understanding mediated the activity and established role commitment within international student recruitment, although role clarity was lacking in some instances. The senior leadership's new direction to centralise strategy and practice created some confusion within the system. The evidence suggested that communication within the activity was occurring through the strategic planning process, committees, meetings, and reports. Communication was also happening in the areas of information gathering and intelligence. The subjects' level of awareness and understanding of the global marketplace appeared high. This awareness was reflected in the subjects' in-depth knowledge of government policies, market research, and data from third-party sources.

*We look at intelligence from organizations like the British Council. Networks that we are also in, so this one called BUIA (which is British Universities International Liaison Association) - it's all over the UK and share information.*



*So we got the British Council (BUILA), we get information from an organization called NARIC which looks at all the qualifications. There's also an organization in UK called the Universities UK International think is branched for international. So we do a lot of looking at the information that's out there, so to find out whether or not it's worth us being in the market". (interviewee 22, senior leader, Lancaster)*

This intelligence lead to the pervasive understanding of the goals, the issues, and challenges related to the strategy - a key component of export marketing. As noted previously, senior management developed coordination through centralisation yet respected the culture and history of the institution. As a result, management purposively allowed faculties and departments flexibility and independence in implementing the strategies, subject to faculty and departmental resource capability. This, in turn, contributes to market responsiveness by adapting and adjusting markets and resources based on intelligence that suggested further investment in specific markets would reap returns for the institution.

*We only had a few agents in market. We've significantly increased those agents and how we work with those agents over the last couple of years, and that's purely because of the diversity. So we're trying to get... it's getting those extra agents, extra information in country, then consequently extra students. (interviewee 22, senior leader, Lancaster)*

There was a suggestion that the academic environment and the marketing environment could co-exist in a better fashion. There was no explicit solution to this

co-existence, but recruiters believed that recruitment performance may improve by taking into account the student experience and curriculum.

*I think that's been the gap in the conversation sometimes. It's like, for me, what is it like to be a student here, and how good it is, and how we make it better? It is really important. What lies behind things like internationalising the curriculum? It's not simply to make a curriculum more attractive for more students so we can count more people getting in their fees, but it's so that actually the student experience is a rich one when they're here. (interviewee 28, recruiter)*

The practice of recruiting international students demonstrated an active/committed approach to export marketing, initiated by the creation and deployment of a new strategy that focused on targets and rankings. These export marketing behaviours were established through the reliance on revenues from sources other than government and coordinating mechanisms of leadership, communication, organisational structure, and change management (Asaad et al., 2015). The plan engaged the faculties to improve communication and to create an “embedded” strategy within each department. The practice of international student recruitment employed information generation, dissemination, and used this intelligence to respond to markets and to improve their outcomes as shown by their extensive agent network and the geographic market coverage of the recruiters.

### *Summary of Findings*

These findings show factors contributing to or hindering export marketing adoption at these HEIs. In each case, market demand and internal pressures caused tension within the international student recruitment practice. Each institution's capacity to respond to these changes informed the extent and nature of export marketing within the institutions (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Findlay et al., 2017; Ross et al., 2007; 2013). The results showed that Lancaster University demonstrated the most advanced export marketing of the three institutions while UPEI was advancing their export marketing activity quite quickly. Both of these institutions appeared motivated by financial interests. HKU, who had high levels of demand for seats and little financial motivation, demonstrated preliminary export marketing behaviours that appeared to be motivated by competing for the best students and positioning their institutional brand.

Cavusgil (1980) outlines a theory of internationalisation for export marketing firms that shows that firms demonstrate varying levels of export marketing activity from domestic-only, experimental, active, and committed exporters. Figure 4.4 outlines each of the case study's stage of export marketing using this framework. Cavusgil identifies the stages of export marketing behaviours through characteristics such as reliance on profits or revenues from foreign markets, their national policy environment, the nature of involvement in international markets, and an organization's market intelligence practices (1980). Figure 4.4 considers Cavusgil's internationalisation framework to analyse each case study's adoption of export marketing behaviour. HKU has little financial motivation. However, they have

entered foreign markets and developed marketing approaches to these markets suggesting an experimental approach to export marketing. Meanwhile, UPEI has an increasing reliance on international student revenues and is investing in foreign markets, however, they lack formalised market intelligence within the institution, and results in an experimental to active form of export marketing. Finally, Lancaster has significant reliance on international student revenues, developed extensive marketing intelligence gathering, dissemination and responsiveness to foreign markets, suggesting an active form of export marketing.

#### *UPEI Summary*

Interviews with the subjects and a review of the enrolment statistics at UPEI portrayed an institution undergoing significant growth in student applications and enrolments. This growth established pressure between neighbouring systems with the rapidly changing volume and cohort of students. Through changes in administrative leadership, the institution adopted strategic direction that led to a focus on international recruitment of students to address declining enrolments in Canada. The subjects continued to learn their roles and expectations created by the new institutional direction that empowered additional resources and capabilities within the international student recruitment practice (Engeström, 2001; Jarzabkowski, 2003, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2007). These changes identified newly adopted behaviours and outcomes; a) the use and dissemination of information to respond to markets, b) the adoption of strategy and role commitment, c) growth in enrolments, d) investment in monitoring and control and e) restructuring improve coordination and communication. These learned behaviours suggested the

institution adopted aspects of export marketing which categorised it in the “experimental to active” phase of global export (Cavugsil & Nevin, 1980). See Figure 4.4.

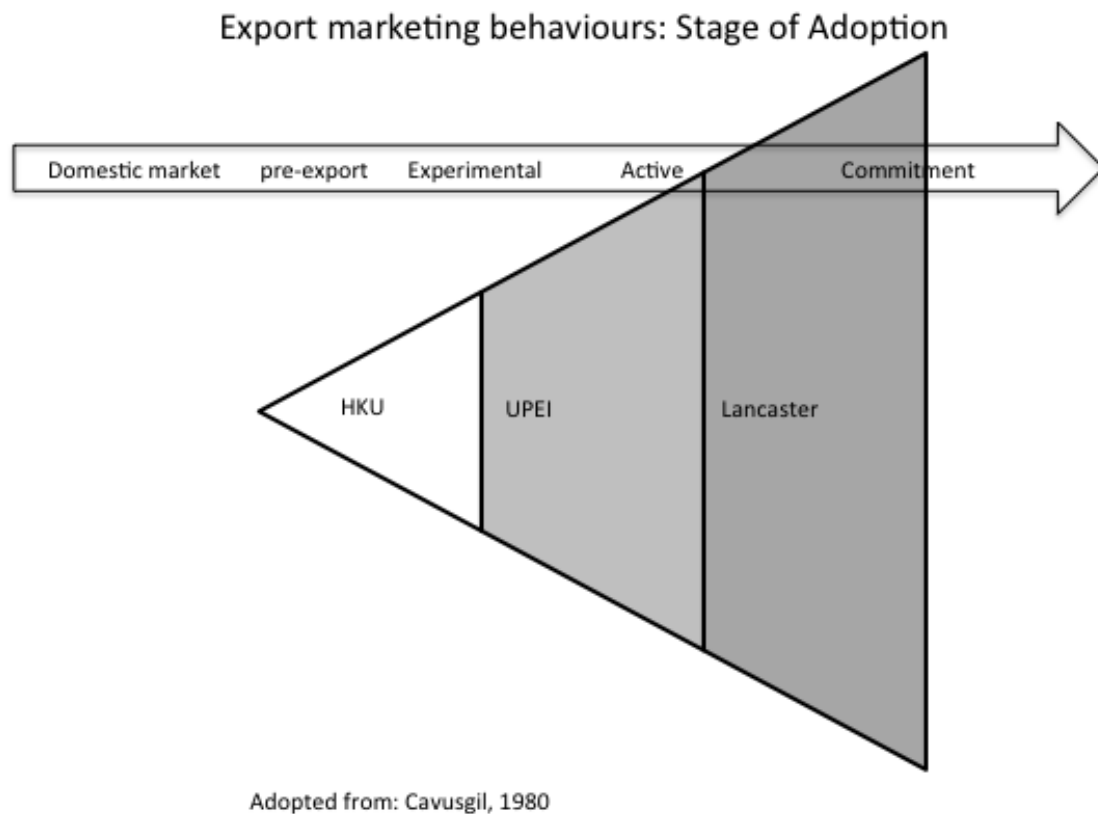
#### *HKU Summary*

The Hong Kong University case study displayed learning of export marketing behaviours through a) development of strategy and role commitment b) the importance of the brand, and c) level of coordination within the system. This system demonstrated the tension between the resource allocation and the division of labour within the practice. However, the quota system and reliance on government funding provided little incentive to the institution to employ behaviours associated with export marketing. The subjects suggested this caused tension between international student recruitment and the rest of the institution. The high level of market demand and the competitive environment for student recruitment conflicted with the constraints imposed in operations of the institution. Recruiters felt under-resourced compared to the competition and felt pressure to adopt more commercial-like practices but the institutional and government constraints limited this practice. This institution, through a strategy focused on rankings, goals, and a recruitment effort, was experimenting with some export marketing as shown in Figure 4.4 (Cavugsil & Nevin, 1980).

#### *Lancaster Summary*

Lancaster University illustrated the learning of export marketing behavior and the outcomes through international student recruitment in several ways: a) historical

growth in enrolment at the home campus and reliance on student revenues, b) market responsiveness in expansion of overseas campuses, geographic markets and agents, and programmes, c) establishment of strategy and focus on key performance indicators, d) restructuring of resources for coordination and communication, and e) use and dissemination of market intelligence. These activities expanded international student recruitment at the institution and categorised their export marketing in the “active to committed” phase, as outlined Figure 4.4 (Cavugsil & Nevin, 1980). The subjects understood and appreciated the goals of their institutional strategy and saw their roles as important. The recruiters viewed the creation of the international student enrolment targets as “top-down” and suggested “no one would expect less growth” as the financial benefits were necessary. All subjects in the system were cognisant of the growth agenda, yet there was tension between the various subjects (faculty administration, professional staff, senior leaders) as they sought to learn their roles within the new structure and to protect their identity and authority within a changing system (Engeström, 2001; Jarzabkowski, 2003, Jarzabkowski et al., 2007).



**Figure 4.4 Stages of Export Marketing Adoption of the Case Studies**

**Research Question Four:** *How can the lessons learned from these case studies assist in informing export marketing and international student recruitment practice for these HEIs?*

The final section of this chapter reflects on the learnings associated with international student recruitment practice in the three case studies. These findings are based on analysis of the responses from all three case studies and synthesis of the literature on export marketing for higher education, internationalisation, and

international recruitment (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Beech, 2018; Choudaha et al., 2013; Findlay et al., 2017; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2011; Onk & Joseph, 2017).

### *1) Coordination and communication – defining goals and roles*

Each of the case study practitioners discussed issues with coordination and communication within their practice. Coordination, through communication, is a key antecedent of export marketing adoption and, arguably, represents a critical element of international student recruitment (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015). In each of the case studies, there were actors engaged at different levels of the practice, strategy, and implementation who suggested there was lack of coordination and understanding of the various roles, resources, and the objectives of the activity. In particular, those in recruiter roles lacked understanding of their roles within the broader strategy. *“Communication is number one thing that we have to do and then it’ll help the team to achieve better goals”* (interviewee 2, recruiter, UPEI). Within the systems, organisational charts, reporting functions, and committees provided various structures and processes that assisted in coordination and communication. However, gaps remained as role clarity was complex in both larger systems (Lancaster), and smaller systems (Hong Kong) due to power relationships or lack of awareness. Lack of clarity and voids in some communication created disconnection within some systems (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Naidoo & Wu, 2011).



## *2) Culture is an important context: aligning academic and administrative agendas*

Lancaster University case study showed an advanced approach to international student recruitment by embedding responsibility for internationalisation within the faculties. In this case, the engagement of the faculty recognised, to a certain extent, the importance of the culture and history of the institution and its practices. *“We have to negotiate. They [faculties] may want us to do activities in certain markets that’s good for them but may not be a priority for us* (interviewee 16, recruiter, Lancaster). The recognition of historical roles appeared to permit a greater appreciation for the institutional goals by the subjects. The engagement of the academic faculties in strategy and execution assisted the institution to advance its centralised agenda to professionalise international student recruitment. The combination of autonomy and centralisation supported the expansion of programmes, offshore campuses, and international recruitment efforts. This suggests that aligning agendas (or objects), to the extent possible, within systems may advance international student recruitment goals.

## *3) International student recruitment driven by political and market realities – flexibility*

Internal and external forces impacted international student recruitment at the case study sites. The important lesson in these findings is the level of flexibility that devolved to the recruiters. In each case, senior management purposively delegated the decisions on priority markets, market partnerships, and the types of recruitment tactics (fairs, agents, etc.). This flexibility appeared to be reasonable given the dynamic political and market realities facing recruiters and institutions. The dynamic

forces for recruiters—currency fluctuations, political discourse, changes in scholarship policies, acts of terrorism, disease, and visa issues were among a myriad of possible factors that may disrupt international student recruitment activity (Farrell & Van der Werf, 2007; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Marginson, 2011). As such, the flexibility emboldened by international recruitment teams enabled market responsiveness. As one respondent stated, *“I was thinking maintaining market share is the hardest (thing to come)”* (interviewee 16, recruiter, Lancaster) and pressures were increasing to remain competitive and flexible. The increasingly competitive environment does not negate the need for medium-to-long-term planning but rather suggests that flexibility and market responsiveness are important considerations when seeking to attract market share (Asaad et al., 2015).

#### *4) Commodification and rankings*

The recruiters expressed similar issues in competing for international students namely, commodification. In each case study, recruiters discussed the challenges of attracting students to their institutions by describing it as *“everyone is saying the same thing”* (interviewee 10, recruiter, HKU). This lack of differentiation is further noted in the challenges of promoting the institution to students. *“How do I promote the university? It’s a tough question. Everyone is offering internship or co-op, everyone is offering exchange, everyone has got undergraduate research. So really what sets us apart from the others”* (interviewee 10, recruiter, HKU)?

Arguably, rankings serve as a point of differentiation where programmes, research, and services tended to blend in the higher education landscape. However, as noted

previously, the distinguishing factors between institutions became apparent when recruiters felt they had the opportunity to discuss attributes beyond the rankings and provide specific details on an individualised level to prospective students and parents.

*You struggle with the concept of this aggressive sales idea, which I think is what we're definitely going towards. Families are spending so much money and it's their education and at the end of the day it's your email address and your name that they've got, and when they don't like you, they want to drop out. I had a recipient family in the office crying. They brought the daughter here, she's dropping out, and it's me they come to because they've got my contact. So I think it's alright saying you know, aggressive sales just get them in, but it's an education (interviewee 28, recruiter, Lancaster).*

As the international student recruitment environment for these institutions becomes increasingly competitive, commodification is a risk. This competitive environment may contribute to a focus on rankings for some institutions. However, growth in applications and enrolments was still occurring for UPEI that has no international league table ranking. This suggests that commodification may occur with or without rankings and enrolments may also increase regardless of ranking status (Asaad et al., 2014). Recruiters further suggested that senior management needed to examine different measures for recruitment and that students' perception of quality extends beyond rankings. However, the goals and targets for UPEI and Lancaster, those employing more developed export marketing, appeared to be leaning further towards sales-type targets.

### *Summary of Findings*

These results show that institutions need to consider market forces in international markets, irrespective of government constraints. Each case study has adopted, to a certain extent, export marketing behaviour due to the demands and expectations of the global and domestic market. These institutions experienced commodification or lack of differentiation in their practice and recognized the need to be flexible at a market-level in order to respond to market changes. At the same time, the importance of institutional coordination and culture was shown to be important in all cases and that inconsistencies between the market and internal operations and culture may limit the effectiveness of international student recruitment efforts.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the results of the analysis of international student recruitment and the adoption of export marketing for the three case studies. The three case studies' subjects identified tensions that present opportunities for learning at these HEIs (Engeström, 1989 2000, 2001; Jarzabkowski, 2003, Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). The case studies shared similarities in the functioning of their systems, such as lack of coordination; tensions between government, faculty, students, and administration; and the adoption of competitive structures and actions. The results show differences in the level and nature of export marketing at each case study. UPEI, HKU, and Lancaster University present opportunities to improve practice by addressing practice issues such as role clarity, coordination, commodification, and adopting flexible responses to changing forces.

## **CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION**

This thesis contributes to the field of higher education's public and market orientations by showing how different strategy practitioners in HEIs develop, perceive, and manage the recruitment of international students in export markets. Using activity theory to explore the practice of international student recruitment at three HEIs in Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK this study shows that higher education institutions react and respond to market and global environments that are influenced by their unique location and internal cultures. This study shows that by examining strategy practitioners from different vantage points within the hierarchy of their institutions, HEIs can improve and respond to national policy, market forces, and internal dynamics in their international student recruitment practices. There are differences in national policy, institutional capabilities, and managerial approaches that shape the extent of export marketing behaviour uniquely in each of these institutions. However, institutional practitioners share much in common in their practice of recruiting international students in Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK. Practitioners share similar perceptions of lack of differentiation, lack of coordination, and increasing competition. The results show that coordination of the activity across departments and the hierarchical system is critical for practitioners. However, it is not merely to improve export marketing, rather it is necessary to address the dual public and market orientations occurring in the institutions and how duality contributes to tension in the practice. Furthermore, the perspectives of staff and senior leaders are different and show that recruiters and support staff who face the

daily challenges of competitive markets and attracting students, view the higher education landscape as more competitive and marketised than other practitioners.

This final chapter discusses the study's findings by highlighting the main implications of the study and how these implications can improve practice. This research adds insight into the challenges of adopting export marketing behaviours as institutions create activities designed to compete in the global marketplace such as their strategic plans, rankings, branding, coordination, and enrolment targets. As such, this chapter is structured to discuss the findings of each of the four research questions and some key quotes from the findings are used to support this discussion.

### **Main Implications**

One of the most significant aspects of this study is the use of activity theory and export marketing concepts side-by-side in generating and analysing the data. Activity theory assisted to examine practice in this study by uncovering the conflicts in international student recruitment as export marketing behaviour in the institutions. This is unique. Previous studies explore the existence and behaviour of export marketing and recruiting of international students (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Cadogen et al., 1999, 2000; Choudaha et al., 2013; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2012; Ross et al., 2007, 2013). However, this study provides a deep, rich understanding of the embedded historical and cultural distinctions in individual institutions. These discoveries show not only how institutions behave, but also why they behave as they do. This study enhances understanding of strategy, export marketing, and international student recruitment

by exploring the perceptions of a broad-range of actors involved in the practice. Previous studies focused on one specific group of actors involved in strategy making or implementation, for instance recruiters, senior leaders, or international managers (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Choudaha et al., 2013; Findlay et al., 2017; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Hulme et al., 2012; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2012; Ross et al., 2007; 2013). This thesis took into account and combined the perspectives of actors from senior leadership, administrators, recruiters, and support staff, providing an array of vantage points to reveal the complex environment of international student recruitment, from strategy development to the day-to-day challenges of recruiting internationally.

The methodological approach to the study revealed opportunities to improve practice by highlighting the tensions experienced in each practice (Engeström, 2001). The study identifies two main areas of tension within these cases, culture, and competitiveness. Firstly, the study showed different ways in which institutional strategic plans mediate practice along the lines of Jarzabkowski (2003) and Jarzabkowski et al., (2007) and (2012). This is an important consideration in both strategy and execution for HEIs and helps to shed light on the different benefits strategic plans may offer and how to improve their use in practice such as guiding priorities and informing recruitment plans, establishing targets, allocating resources, and promoting coordination.

Prior research suggests that some HEIs adopt export marketing orientations (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross et al., 2007, 2013).

However, this thesis goes further to explore public and market orientation that HEIs face that shape the nature and extent of export marketing that is more complex than simply examining the absence or presence of behaviours or conditions. This study shows that institutional capacity to align external policies with internal agendas can pose challenges to institutions. Institutions perceive national policies as a focus or constraint on their practice, but these policies alone do not give insight into the realities faced by practitioners. The combination of competitive forces and institutional culture create complexities for the practice of international student recruitment. Practitioners perceive resistance to change institutional operations and processes that may aid in improving the competitiveness of the institutions due to culturally and historically rooted beliefs and practices. These complexities can be described as historically public-oriented institutions participating in market-oriented practices (Marginson, 2010, 2016; Molesworth et al., 2011). While this complexity is similar for these HEIs, there are differences based on their history and culture. For example at UPEI, the institution is relatively new to the international student recruitment game and has structured the recruitment operations within a small team. In Hong Kong, the situation is similar, with a smaller, isolated team of recruiters. In both cases, regardless of goals, international student recruitment is viewed as the “job of recruiters.” This creates conflicts as the recruiters express growing competition for students, in volume and quality, and this causes frustration amongst recruiters as they seek to obtain more resources and credibility in their institutions. In Lancaster, there is a marked difference in the managerial approach to strategy and implementation at this institution. Lancaster’s approach to strategy implementation encompasses many departments and actors, creating an



understanding of the strategic goals of the institution. Nonetheless, recruiters at this institution suggest the pressure to attract more students is challenging and that the institution is not responding to the intense competition in the marketplace. This reinforces the view that competitive forces are drawing institutions into developing export market responses regardless of their national policy framework.

This thesis takes a view of the internal operations or the supply-side of HEI's rather than the student or consumer standpoint. It shows the unique perspectives of practitioners as they make sense of international strategies in their institutional culture and history that is shaped by government policy and market dynamics. This thesis builds upon Mosneaga & Agergaard (2012) work by advancing the concept that as HEIs further expand their "commercial activities" such as marketing and sales (recruitment), their settings and characteristics are highly relevant, and institutions need to consider the context of their external environments of national policy and market forces. Arguably, HEIs are not solely commercial enterprises but do exist within public and commercial environments (Findlay et al., 2017; Hulme et al., 2012; Molesworth et al., 2011; Marginson, 2011, 2016). Higher education institutions have a vested interest in sustainability, stakeholder management, and the deployment of resources to achieve goals and mandates. This study holds value for institutions as they seek to adopt business-like practices to maintain survival.

The findings highlight commonality between the case studies taking into account a wide-range of actors from universities in Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK. These accounts provide opportunities to improve the practice at HEIs by exposing the

limited use of marketing resources, lack of differentiation in educational offerings, and limited communication and engagement of recruiters and support staff in shaping the strategy. Choudaha et al. (2013) found that technology and research are instrumental for effective international student recruitment. Each case study suggests that research and technology are under-utilised within the systems. Recruiters describe their “effectiveness” as measured by achieving targets, generating applications, and managing the reputation of the institution. This definition of effectiveness is limiting and suggests that international student recruitment may be improved if greater recognition is paid to tools that enable effectiveness, namely marketing, research, and technology (Hulme et al., 2012; Choudaha et al., 2013). At the same time, recruiters describe commodification as a challenge while competition is increasing. The recruiters, in all cases, suggest the institutions appear to overlook the extent of commodification, regardless of location or policy environments. This means that recruiters believe institutions are not differentiating their value in a competitive marketplace and that greater attention to institutional differences may improve student recruitment. This is particularly important as institutions continue to invest in marketing resources such as advertising, social media, and agents. Institutions may be wasting these investments if no clear differentiation exists between institutions. Furthermore, it shows that recruiters have different perspectives than others in their institution and that their views need to be taken into consideration by institutional stakeholders, particularly by senior leaders.

These findings show that practitioners perceive conflicts on their campuses regarding the internationalisation of student cohorts. These perceived conflicts create tensions in these practices as there is a concern for the students' experiences on the campuses. This conflict shows that institutions may impede their ability to market themselves as truly international and that institutions need to consider student realities and the ability of recruiters to present the institutional experience authentically. Institutional stakeholders need to consider the extent and nature of the changing cohort of students on their campuses and to assess their ability to accommodate and welcome students. These sources of tensions within the practices identify opportunities to create a cooperative environment within HEIs that may enable mediation, not only international student recruitment but also other activity within HEIs.

**Discussion of Research Question 1:** *How do practitioners view the role of institutional strategic plans in shaping international student recruitment?*

In this section, the discussion focuses on research question one and the role of institutional strategic plans as agents of “doing” of internationalisation and how these strategic plans mediate practice differently.

This thesis provides a new perspective of international student recruitment by demonstrating how institutional strategic plans impact practice differently in these institutions. Institutional history, structure, and culture shape how practitioners interpret institutional strategic plans. While this thesis does not attempt to argue

that institutional strategies are solely responsible for international student recruitment, it finds that these plans mediate the practice uniquely in each institution. These differences in strategic plan mediation are primarily related to the level of institutional engagement in the strategic planning process and the position of the practitioner in the hierarchy. For example, at Lancaster University, the institution is adopting a centralised managerial approach to international student recruitment. At the same time, senior leadership attempts to mediate this managerial approach by encouraging participation in the strategy development and implementation and by involving various actors across the institution. *“I can see a big change in the degree of internationalisation. I think it's on agendas now, much more than it ever used to be”* (interviewee 20, senior leader, Lancaster). This change creates tension in international student recruitment as practitioners learn and respond to the adoption of marketised practices and centralised authority at the same time. Nonetheless, the level of engagement amongst various actors in the system at Lancaster is much greater than the other two institutions, and the respondents convey a greater understanding of the institutional goals as a result.

Not surprisingly, the closer an actor's relative position to the top of the institutional hierarchy, the more influence the strategic plan has on their practice. This study brings to light that strategic plans can influence international student recruitment activity at all levels of the hierarchy and can assist to establish the importance of goals in the internationalisation agendas in institutions (Asaad et al., 2015). Nonetheless, institutional strategic plans shape practice differently for various practitioners in institutions and the institutions themselves, and this understanding

shows that communicating goals within institutions may reduce tension. For example, in the UPEI case, senior leaders created the strategic plan that results in increasing resources (tools) dedicated to international student recruitment efforts. The creation of the strategic plan and its priorities forms contradiction by establishing new resources, structures, and goals for various practitioners involved in the practice (Engeström, 2001). However, some practitioners do not believe they fully understand the institutional strategic plan or how it shapes their work. Recruiters and support staff appear to be the most likely to lack this understanding. *"I don't know [the goals]...that's not my place"* (interviewee 4, recruiter, UPEI). Nonetheless, through resource allocation and direction setting established in these strategic plans, all practitioners react to and shape the practice (Jarzabkowski, 2007). For institutions, they need to be mindful of how they create and implement plans, and that it may be beneficial to consider all actors when establishing the strategic plan and developing goals (Asaad et al.; 2013, Ross et al., 2013).

The examination of the role of strategic plans in international student recruitment can help institutional practitioners understand the effects of their institutional strategies on practices. This thesis extends the literature on strategic plans and international student recruitment by taking into account a broader set of actors in the "doing of internationalisation" and considers the perspectives of staff and senior leaders, rather than focusing on one specific level of management or actors (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Johnson, et al., 2003; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2012). The institutional strategic plans in this study focus on internationalisation strategies, to varying degrees, which set direction, allocate resources, establish goals, and

implement control mechanisms (Jarzabkowski, 2003). Söderqvist (2002) and Knight (2004) both suggest that internationalisation is a change process for HEIs that involves the adoption of global practices. This thesis extends understanding of these processes and practices by showing how the strategic plans shape international student recruitment and view strategy as “doing internationalisation” for some institutions (Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2012). This study extends the literature by showing that strategic plans are relatively new plans to institutions and contribute tensions that arise between the old way of doing things and the new directions, resource allocation, and coordination fostered by senior management (Engeström, 2001). *“If you’ve never done that process before, then it might be very difficult”* (interviewee 5, administrator, UPEI). For institutional leaders, these findings aid in the implementation of strategic plans and uncover challenges such as different motivations or goals that affect implementing strategy. The perspectives of staff are not always well understood by those in senior positions and these findings illustrate various ways in which practitioners may perceive strategic plans in a system.

An area of interest in the findings relates to the nature of strategic plans to international student recruitment and how these plans can reflect an institutional attitude towards internationalisation. Qiang (2003) highlights four main ways in which institutions adopt internationalisation agendas, activity, competency, process, and ethos approaches. UPEI focuses its internationalisation agenda on programmes and results that are activity-based and isolated to activities such as international students leading to some fragmentation or lack of coordination of international strategies (“UPEI Strategic Plan,” 2013). Meanwhile, HKU’s institutional strategy

("Strategy 2015 – 2020", 2014) focuses on internationalisation that is competency-based and relies on advancing skills and knowledge of its community (Qiang, 2003). Qiang explains that competency-based strategies focus on programmes as a means of developing internationalised knowledge and skills and becoming more internationally aware (Qiang, 2003). Lancaster University's strategy suggests a sustainable design practice through process and programmes encompassing teaching, research, and programme design. Each case study takes a different approach to their internationalisation strategies, but none of these approaches exhibit an ethos approach to internationalisation. The ethos approach differs from the others in that it emphasises an environment of cultural diversity and intercultural views. It supports the creation of fundamental goals and practices to define higher education and other higher learning institutions while believing that for an institution to demonstrate internationalisation, it must have a strong and supportive cultural system (Qiang, 2003). The respondents in each case study identify both internal culture and the changing culture of student cohorts as tensions in their practices. There is a lack of understanding or identified approaches to addressing these cultural tensions in student recruitment practices that may contribute to unresolved conflicts. This extends the work of O'Connor (2017) by showing that there is tension in institutional internationalisation through student recruitment in different parts of the world and that institutional actors experience these conflicts in their operations. As institutions evolve their practices of international student recruitment, they must not "do internationalisation" for the sake of doing it – approaches to internationalisation such as the recruitment of students should consider the cultural factors that impact various stakeholders.

Other studies such as Geddie (2015), Findlay, et al., (2017), Mosneaga & Agergaard (2012), and Ross et al. (2013) demonstrate that internal characteristics and external policy environments help to structure institutions' strategies that shape international student recruitment. They argue that institutional systems and actors and their perspectives of international student recruitment as a "tradable service" is not well documented in the literature. This thesis furthers their work by shedding light on the understanding practitioners have of institutional strategy on their practices. In particular, this thesis extends these previous studies by situating institutional strategy within a national policy context and exploring, in-depth, different institutional practitioners views. An interesting observation in this study is that strategic plans are a cause and effect of internal and external environments that result in them guiding the practice differently. *"I don't know whether that [strategic plan] was used to monitor our progress or performance"* (interviewee 3, support staff, UPEI). This in-depth examination of three different case studies in different countries provides more evidence of the complexity of strategy development, and the effects strategy has on practices such as international student recruitment (Goralski & Tootoonichi, 2015; Jarzabkowski, 2003; Sood, 2012; West & Addington, 2014).

**Discussion Research Question 2:** *What are the perceived tensions in international student recruitment practices at these HEIs and how do these tensions compare in each case study?*



This section discusses research question two in the context of tensions in the practice. This is an important question that informs, to a large extent, the other research questions and enables the study to achieve its aim of providing greater insight and knowledge to how practitioners perceive their practice of international student recruitment.

The comparison of UPEI, HKU, and Lancaster University describes similar tensions in their practice in two main ways, culture and competitiveness that add complexity to their practice (see Table 4.1). While these tensions are similar, there are differences that need to be understood within the context of each institutional setting. At UPEI, the institution is relatively new on the international stage and has structured and managed their international student recruitment operations in a small team with little coordination amongst other departments within the institution. At HKU, the situation is similar with a smaller, isolated team of recruiters who are highly coordinated by admissions for control purposes. In both cases, regardless of the institutional goals, the managerial approach to the practice views it as “the job for recruiters”. That is, international student recruitment is narrowly defined within the recruitment teams and not viewed as connected to other practices, outside of admissions. This creates conflicts for the practice, as there are relationships with students, faculties, and other staff that practitioners view as important. Furthermore, competition for students is increasing, and recruiters describe difficulty in attracting the volume or quality of students that the institutions expect. Recruiters and support staff believe more resources are necessary to compete and that their roles demand more institutional weight. This causes frustration amongst

recruiters as they seek to obtain more resources and credibility within these institutions. At Lancaster University, there is a noticeable difference in the managerial approach to the practice with a centralised international student recruitment and institutional goals to professionalise the practice to compete globally. However, centralisation of the practice causes tension as the Management School continues to operate outside the established centralised structure. At the same time, other departments are seeking to understand their new responsibilities in this centralised management approach. Lancaster's practice is coordinated differently than UPEI and HKU, as their strategy development and implementation encompasses many departments and actors, creating an understanding of the strategic goals of the institution. This managerial approach allows international student recruitment to be relatively well-established with more resources than the other two institutions. Nonetheless, recruiters at this institution suggest the pressure to attract more students is challenging and that the institution is not responding to the intense competition in the marketplace. This reinforces the view that competitive forces are drawing institutions into developing export market behaviours.

The comparison between the three institutions reveals cultural and historical differences in the tensions in practice at each institution. However, there are common themes that propose opportunities to improve practice discussed later in this chapter. A significant finding in this study is how culture is perceived to impact behaviour and is viewed, by respondents, as an obstacle to achieving their goals. The respondents present culture, as a construct, in two ways, the culture of the

student body and the culture of the institution. Both create conflicts. In the first instance, frustration occurs for some actors who view the system as not responsive enough to changing cohorts of students. For example, recruiters perceive their institutions to be less “international” as they would like to present...*“I stopped talking about how International we are when I’m on the road. Because I don’t think it’s fair* (interviewee 12, recruiter, HKU). This highlights potential problems for institutions and students. The student experience is undoubtedly critical for institutions, students, and their families. The manner in which institutions portray themselves, particularly as they position themselves in international markets, is also highly critical. HEIs need to address the realities international students may face when attending their institution to ensure a positive experience for students. At the same time, HEIs should consider the perspectives of recruiters and staff when developing approaches to prospective students as these practitioners have valuable insights into the market and their institutions. These findings consider previous studies on student choice and the importance of institutional alignment with student expectations (Eder, et al., 2010; Findlay et al., 2017; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; O’Connor, 2017). However, this study extends the literature by comparing three different institutions and considers the views of a wide-range of actors. It shows complexity of practice and the challenges for practitioners as they attract students from other countries. This study points to the significance for HEIs to balance their efforts and consider both internal actors and prospective student views when attempting to attract students.

Competitiveness also creates tension in the system, particularly for recruiters who face unique pressures compared to other actors in the system. These tensions show that resource allocation is not keeping pace with strategic intent or goals of each institution. This causes frustration amongst recruiters and staff, as they seek to achieve apparent expectations *"I think summing up for me, it's getting increasingly competitive, globally. Competition is very aggressive and the dynamic is going to change in a few years. This job won't be anything like what it is right now* (interviewee 16, recruiter, Lancaster). As stated earlier in this section, senior leaders in institutions should take into account the recruiters and staffs' perspectives and insights into the changing global landscape. This intelligence is worthwhile to consider as they balance their public and commercial interests. These findings build on previous studies on marketing intelligence and responsive for HEIs (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Choudaha et al., 2013; Findlay et al., 2017; Hemsley-Brown & Optlaka, 2010; Moogan, Baron, & Bainbridge, 2001; Payne, 2003; Soutar & Turner, 2002) and offers further insights into the different perspectives of staff and recruiters on the pressures to compete and the internal conflicts it poses to institutions.

Institutional competitiveness (and competition) combine with changing cohorts of students to create conflict in these systems. However, this study shows that senior leaders appear to recognise this contradiction and seek to manage the challenges of a dualistic public and market orientation for HEIs. Senior leaders temper the institutional strategies to achieve certain strategic goals and attract international students by striking a balance between strategic intent with internal agendas. One

senior leader remarked, “*culture trumps strategy sometimes*” (interviewee 20, senior leader, Lancaster). This is not an easy task. Previous studies show how senior leaders attempt to implement strategy and find that exploring micro-level activity contributes to the understanding of institutional strategy and positioning (Jarzabkowski, 2003). In this study, examining how various actors at different levels of the hierarchy perceive and manage their practice expands existing research to show that respondents experience competitive pressures differently based on their institutional history and culture. It further highlights that HEIs need to make connections between their public and market orientations, particularly as some actors face different demands in their roles.

**Discussion Research Question 3:** *How do strategy practitioners describe and perceive the export marketing behaviours of their institution and how do these behaviours compare between Canada, Hong Kong, and the UK?*

This next section discusses export marketing behaviour in these case studies by examining the internal dynamics and culture that shapes export marketing behaviours. The discussion concentrates on aspects of export marketing that are considerations for higher education institutions namely marketing capability, coordination, and role clarity.

These case studies demonstrate differences in export marketing behavior that vary due to national policy, market demand, and internal factors. As a result, each institution’s capacity to respond to these factors informs the extent and nature of

export marketing within their institution (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Cadogen et al., 2002; Cavusgil & Nevin, 1980; Ross et al., 2007 2013). An interesting finding in this study suggests that many of the internal factors that contribute to or hinder export marketing behaviour relate to the institutional culture in each institution and the nuances embedded in their systems, structures, and beliefs such as their managerial approaches, national policies, and marketing capability. This study uncovers the historical and cultural dimensions of the practice by using activity theory to explore the perspectives of a wide-range of international student recruitment practitioners such as senior leaders, administrators, recruiters, and support staff. This finding is different than other examinations of export marketing in higher education (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross et al., 2007, 2013) by taking into account the challenges faced by practitioners internally and how their culture shapes their practice.

All three of the case study sites show aspects of export marketing behaviour as their activity is long-term and their outcomes linked to commercial goals such as income generation and brand, even though HKU is motivated to a lesser extent, by income (Findlay et al., 2017). Lancaster University demonstrates the most advanced export marketing of the three institutions and shows a significant change in their approach to international student recruitment. *"I remember a period where we didn't talk about recruitment. That was a dirty word. We talked about admissions- we weren't supposed to be seen as an institution that actively recruits students. We should just admit them. That has totally changed"* (interviewee 25, administrator, Lancaster). Meanwhile, UPEI is advancing their export marketing activity quite quickly. Both of

these institutions appear motivated by financial interests. HKU, who has high levels of demand for seats yet little financial motivation, demonstrates preliminary export marketing behaviours that appears motivated to compete for the best students and position their institutional brand. This is evidenced in their practice as they do not use agents while they focus on their rankings by seeking to attract only the top academic students. Branding and financial motivation can be considered commercial-like goals. In each case, the combination of market, government, and internal forces, such as their strategic plans and institutional cultures influence the activity of international student recruitment. These findings extend the literature in this field by showing how internal dynamics may affect export marketing behaviour even if antecedents are in place, by taking into account the perspectives of various actors involved in strategy making and implementation of export marketing (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Cadogen et al., 2002; Cavusgil & Nevin, 1980; Ross et al., 1007, 2013). Furthermore, by situating the case studies in three different national policy frameworks to compare and contrast export marketing behaviours from the perspective of strategy practitioners, this thesis shows that institutional culture shapes export marketing and poses challenges to advancing export marketing behaviours in institutions. Previous studies focus on specific national policy environments, academic perspectives, or the necessary behaviours to adopt export marketing (Asaad et al., 2015; Findlay, et al., 2017 Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Ross et al., 2013; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2017) However, they do not uncover individual institutional cultures and the challenges that international student recruitment practitioners face as public institutions in marketised environments. These findings have practical implications for HEIs as they manage institutional changes in light of

government policy and market forces. It is important that academic research examines and evaluates the impacts of external forces on internal culture for institutions.

Marketing capability is an important construct for export marketing and contributes to market responsiveness and is demonstrated through institutional programme design, promotion, fees, and services for international students and includes the deployment of resources, financial investment, programme alignment, and creation of marketing plans (Asaad et al., 2014, 2015). This thesis shows that the institutions are developing these marketing capabilities such as fee structures, English preparatory courses, international offices, overseas campuses, and marketing communications tactics. Following Mazzarol and Soutar's example, these institutions are customising and reacting to the market needs of students as consumers (2001). In the case of the Lancaster, it appears to adopt many aspects of export marketing such as strategic intent, market intelligence, and expanded programmes overseas, that show advanced export marketing compared to the other two cases. These actions expand their marketing capabilities beyond promotional activity and suggest they have learned and responded to market intelligence (Asaad et al., 2015; Cadogan et al., 2002). As noted in previous studies (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015) HEIs may adopt some aspects of export marketing more than others. By comparing these three case studies on export marketing factors, it shows that Lancaster is more advanced in the adoption of these capabilities. This supports previous research finding that as HEIs develop their strategies, their marketing capabilities are growing and expanding (Sickler, 2017). Interestingly, the



respondents do not define these pathway programmes and overseas campuses as marketing activity, but rather describe them as part of the overall strategic direction or course offerings. The recruiters, in all cases, describe marketing as advertising, social media, etc., and identify marketing promotions as a weakness in their practice compared to the competition or other institutions. However, institutions need to pay attention to the types of programmes and offerings they develop and be more explicit to other actors about the purpose and intent of these programmes. Institutions may be developing strategies and programmes that address both public and market domains, but understanding the intent of these programmes may help to address internal conflicts by clarifying expectations for international student recruitment practitioners.

In each case study, the findings show there is some lack of understanding of institutional goals, and these goals inform international student recruitment practice. This misunderstanding exists between recruiters and senior leaders as recruiters lack clarity on expectations to recruit for diversity, quality, or volume of international students. Furthermore, the institutions do not appear to share information about competition, markets, and other intelligence between different levels of the hierarchy. This is an important finding as coordination is deemed to be a critical capability for export marketing institutions and goals contribute to coordination. Asaad et al. (2013, 2014 2015) illustrate coordination as an antecedent of export marketing and the sharing of the same work-related goals as an important factor in export marketing. Furthermore, sharing work-related goals reduces dysfunctional conflict that enables successful export marketing (Asaad et al.,

2014). As Murray et al. (2011) suggest cooperation, teamwork, common work-oriented goals, and communication are essential ingredients to coordination. The literature suggests information sharing as underpinning coordination, and this enhances marketing capabilities (Asaad et al., 2015; Ross et al., 2013). Coordination is occurring in each case study at different levels of the recruitment practice but lacks consistency in applying coordination mechanisms throughout the systems. For instance, other departments, functions, or faculties do not appear to be involved or contribute to the practice at UPEI and HKU. In all cases, various actors have different types of intelligence that may inform decision-making for the practice. However, this information is not necessarily shared or understood. Jarzabkowski et al., (2012) found that coordination is a learned function and organisations may learn and react to the gaps in coordination and coordination mechanisms. These findings extend knowledge about export marketing for higher education institutions by finding that the lack coordination and the sharing of work-related goals may hinder export marketing for some institutions due to internal culture (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Murray et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2013). Institutions should create linkages between senior leadership and recruitment activity to improve export marketing and institutional practice. These findings may serve to improve processes, increase staff and faculty morale, and develop approaches to programmes that take into account cultural differences that welcome international students to campuses. The introduction of new tools, rules, and division of labour to their recruitment practice suggests export marketing behaviours are evolving and improvement in coordination can advance these behaviours.

Role clarity, another important dimension of export marketing, creates tensions in each case study that present opportunities to improve institutional practice (Engeström, 2001; Jaworski & Kohli 1993; Slater & Narver 1999, 2000). At HKU and UPEI, the recruiters “wear many different hats” and manage multiple responsibilities. At Lancaster, the accountability for the activity is still under negotiation with uncertainty in the division of duties between central administration and faculty administration. This may work to manage scarce resources, share responsibility, and mitigate potential problems posed by changing institutionally entrenched structures. However, it also adds confusion when duties and authority are unclear. Communication and sharing of information is arguably a critical contributor to role clarity and represents a coordinating mechanism for export marketing (Asaad et al., 2015, Ross et al., 2013). In each case, the respondents understand that enrolments and further enhancing the reputation of the institution is critical. However, responsibilities are not always clear. Studies by Asaad et al., (2014) and Cadogan et al., (1999, 2000) view effective communication amongst departments in HEIs as a critical construct of export marketing. At HKU, committees, and reporting is controlled and planned due to the quota system and faculty expectations. These control mechanisms create ongoing dialogue and communication that appears necessary to achieve the balance in quota and admissions and to maintain continuity in management processes. In contrast, at Lancaster, the scope of international student recruitment is larger and involves more actors in the system. This size and scope add complexity to communication and information sharing. In this system, communication is most evident in specific departments or functional areas. Nonetheless, the organisation-wide responsibility

suggests a positive approach to coordination and export marketing, but further inter-departmental communication appears necessary to clarify roles. UPEI's communication activity is primarily within the functional recruitment team rather than between other departments in the institution. This shows that communication may be impeding more advanced export marketing and may also impact negatively on market responsiveness, a key component for effective export marketing (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015). While sensitivity to historical structures and culturally embedded processes is pragmatic, it also contributes to confusion in responsibilities. Regardless of size and complexity, institutions can improve practice by clarifying roles.

This thesis finds that the market, government, and internal forces shape the export marketing and shows that attention needs to be paid to the institutional setting to comprehend fully export marketing as institutional behaviour. These findings show that institutional settings are critical considerations in adopting export marketing behaviours. Understanding the external environment is a critical component for managing the complexities in these systems (Cadogan et al., 1999). However, studies on higher education export marketing need to go further and examine the underpinning dynamics of individual institutions to shed light on the complexity faced by HEIs as they operate in dualist public and commercial domains.

**Discussion: Research Question 4:** *How can the lessons learned from these case studies assist in informing export marketing and international student recruitment practice for these HEIs?*

Comparing these institutions from different parts of the world sheds light on HEIs' practice by taking into account the unique vantage points of practitioners in each system. Each of the case studies faces similar market demands and pressures that present different reactions from the recruiters and staff compared to senior leaders. This research finds that these institutions share complexities in the recruitment of international students regardless of their location. Institutions may address these difficulties by aligning internal agendas between academics, administration, and in the hierarchy; coordinating and communicating roles and goals; enabling flexibility to respond to political and market realities; and recognising the potential commodification in higher education.

This study finds different understandings of the goals and roles that occur between senior leaders, recruiters, and administrators can be clarified by aligning agendas through communication and coordination. Recruiters, being close to the marketplace, have different perspectives and insights into the challenges of the market than senior leaders, *"I don't necessarily agree that a big university will make as a better university. I think what we do now, we do really well. I'm not really sure, apart from financially, if that's a good thing"* (interviewee 16, recruiter, Lancaster). At the same time, some senior leaders view the academic community as somewhat resistant to certain international student cohorts...*"that's a little unsettling to some of the faculty"*. These organisational challenges are not surprising. However, given

the complexity of public and market orientations for higher education, these different agendas become somewhat more difficult for HEIs than other organisations (Albatch et al., 2009; Marginson, 2011, 2017; Molesworth et al., 2011). This study expands knowledge by showing the complexities faced by HEIs as they seek to attract students from export markets while operating in a public domain (Molesworth et al., 2011). It is imperative that HEIs begin to address this duality openly and to collaborate internally to add clarity to institutional roles and agendas. These findings do not suggest this is a simple task but rather highlight the importance of clear communication and collaboration to deal with the complex higher education environment.

The case studies exist in different government policy contexts that influence their practices of attracting international students. In Hong Kong, international student recruitment is highly controlled with a quota system while in Canada it has become progressively more flexible to attract international students to study and work post-graduation. At the same time, the UK is experiencing a shifting policy environment in immigration that respondents describe as impacting the recruitment of international students (Table 4.1). The findings show that the institutions do not exist in a vacuum and regardless of their location, government policy shapes perceptions for practitioners who believe that national policies contribute or hinder their practice. All of the respondents, regardless of their position in the hierarchy, show a high level of awareness of government policy that greatly shapes their strategies. *“Key export trends (e.g. competition, regulation) should be constantly monitored...to formulate marketing strategies that are aligned to changes in export*

*market conditions*" (Asaad et al., 2014, p. 156). This study provides insight into how practitioners from various positions in institutional hierarchy perceive government policy impacting their international student recruitment practice. These findings confirm the importance of close monitoring of government policy for international student recruitment (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Marginson, 2011, 2016, Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018) and further suggest that the impact of policy be discussed and understood amongst all actors involved in the practice. This should assist institutions to contextualise to national policy changes on their practices thereby enhancing internal communication and improving service to prospective students.

Interestingly, respondents experienced a lack of differentiation when recruiting students face-to-face, that is when recruiters interact with prospective students. Recruiters in the institutions experience comparable competitive pressures to achieve sufficient numbers of students (in quality or quantity). For example, as a recruiter from Hong Kong explains, *"...you're obviously trying to get as many representations as you can within the 600 number, this magic number that's been hanging over our head"* (interviewee 12, recruiter, HKU). This suggests that international student recruitment practitioners are facing pressure from the market and internally and this is common amongst the case studies, irrespective of location or strategies. Recruiters feel challenged to differentiate their institutions, programmes, and offerings from other institutions. The promotion of education may be somewhat homogenous for some institutions or students (Molesworth et al., 2011; Schwartzman, 2013). This perception of commodification exists for primarily

for recruiters, yet institutions are expanding recruitment through investment and professionalisation. *“Fundamentally, all colleges and universities do the same things and deliver the same things. This sets up a race to build more and grow larger”* (Sickler, 2017, p. 4). In the case studies from the UK and Canada, the respondents describe pressure to grow, and their plans and targets suggest growth is a priority (“UPEI Strategic Plan,” 2013; “Our Strategy 2020”, 2013). For HKU, the quota system, again, acts to restrict growth. However, all recruiters perceive commodification in their promotional efforts. This perception may be a result of changing markets for education from a social good to a commercial good (Marginson, 2016). Regardless, all institutions need to pay attention to the perceptions of students and recruiters as HEIs attempt to present their educational offerings to ensure there is appreciation and understanding value. Interestingly, the findings also suggest that rankings are not a necessary ingredient to achieve growth in international student enrolment for these institutions. The rankings serve HKU and Lancaster as a means to strive for the “best students” and to position themselves globally, both regarding the quality and quantity of students. UPEI is an unranked institution that experiences relatively significant growth in international student enrolment (“Short-Term Enrolment Plan,” 2013). This is an interesting finding as it suggests that not all students are influenced by rankings. UPEI shows that institutions may achieve growth in international student enrolments without rankings. This study supports previous studies that show factors, outside of rankings, appear to influence prospective students (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010; Marginson 2011, 2016; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007a, 2007b; Szekeres, 2010; Vrontis, et al., 2018).



Nonetheless, these findings show that differentiating institutional offerings is becoming more challenging.

This study of strategy practitioners discovered common challenges facing institutions as they seek to attract international students. By examining different institutions and different recruitment roles within the practice, this thesis expands the literature by showing the multiple perspectives of actors and their perceptions of their **practice**. International student recruitment activity is remarkably similar for recruiters in all three case studies. A key challenge to international student recruiters is the potentially commodified markets facing HEIs. Institutions should consider this in their approaches to student recruitment to successfully communicate the value they offer, whether as a social or commercial good (Choudaha et al., 2013; Cudmore, 2005; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatak, 2010; Mosneaga & Agergaard, 2012). This finding confirms previous studies on the challenges of differentiating higher education offerings but highlights the unique perspectives of the recruiters compared to other actors in the system, namely senior leaders. The commodification perspective is more pronounced at the recruiter level, and senior leaders and other actors in the system need to consider these views. These views provide insights into how higher education institutions and their offerings are perceived by students, staff, and society that are important to shaping decision-making for institutions.

## **Limitations**

The use of activity theory to examine international student recruitment as export marketing was highly useful, but had limitations. The tensions between subjects (subject-to-subject) were not identified within the theory specifically. However, the division of labour, community, and an examination of the individual subjects' motives within the analysis assisted to identify potential tensions. Also, the externalities such as government and market forces were somewhat minimised within the activity system framework. While the respondents identified market and government forces as critical, these were analysed as members of the community and rules and explored within the context of how they shape the practice for the subjects. Analysing the data further with export marketing assisted to contextualise these externalities in the study that enhanced the findings.

Some limitations of this study occurred during the sampling. Initially, the difference in the number of participants raised concerns in the sampling. However, upon reviewing the organisational charts and visiting the institutions, the differences in the number of participants was reflective of the scope of export marketing and international student recruitment within each institution and served to inform the findings. This, in the end, proved to be beneficial as it highlighted the unique differences export marketing behaviours in each institution and the cultural and historical differences that shaped international recruitment practice.

Obviously, qualitative research has limitations on generalisability. As such, the findings provided implications rather than generalisability and suggest further

research to validate the findings as they relate to HEI strategy, export marketing, and international student recruitment. The research was limited based on the size of the sample and, as such, was not representative of all HEIs or all the HEIs in each country (Canada, Hong Kong, or the UK). The research aim was not to address HEIs export marketing outcomes but to examine three cases in-depth. As Yin (2009) described, case study is useful to compare similarities and differences between each case while recognising the limitations on generalisability. However, the sample supported the generalisable application of activity theory and export marketing, and given the different settings—country, institutional size, rankings, and culture; data reflected the factors that impacted international student recruitment. These findings are of value to policy-makers, administrators, and researchers, regardless of country or HEI. The data was extensive as it involved twenty-eight participant interviews in three case studies. All data has its limitations based on participants' recollections and perceptions of their experiences. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews enabled the research to respond and adapt to responses and probe where necessary. This flexibility contributed to the uniqueness of the research as it explored in-depth each participation's vantage point and their perspectives.

### **Directions for Further Research**

There are some possible directions for further research. This study showed that there is value in examining institutional culture and how it shapes practice. Further studies that shed light on how institutional culture shapes different types of practices may help institutions improve. Previous literature shows there is little research examining export marketing in institutions from different jurisdictions and

the lack of different actors' perspectives on international student recruitment practice (Asaad et al., 2013, 2014, 2015, Ross et al., 2007, 2013). Expanding the research to different jurisdictions and including a broad range of actors will improve understanding of export marketing but more importantly, add insights into the complexity facing higher education and its practitioners as they operate in public and market domains.

Not surprisingly, respondents in the study mention students, both prospective and active. The study purposively did not explore students' perceptions of recruitment activity or their on-campus experience. Given the extensive research on students and their decision-making processes and the review of the literature (Briggs, 2006; Eder, et al., 2010, Findlay et al., 2017; Mazzarol, Soutar, & Thein, 2001; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Rindfleish, 2003) the research aims were to explore the perspectives of the subjects involved in the strategy as practice. However, the tensions in student decision-making, commodification, and experiences on campuses as international students are useful to help to create linkages between student experiences and the activity of the professional staff. Examining students would be a separate activity system and would be more complex and multi-dimensional. However, it presents an opportunity to validate and test these findings.

In this study, those in administrative or professional roles are the subjects or strategy practitioners. In one case, this also includes faculty who are involved in student recruitment as a part of the administrative function in their institution. This is a different institutional structure than presented in Canada and Hong Kong and

provides evidence to suggest there are differences in defining the scope of practice and export marketing behaviour in HEIs. Nonetheless, this research does not explore how academics, in their roles as teachers and researchers, view international student recruitment activity and their roles within it. This presents opportunities to explore the differences practice at the micro and meso levels and to extend the research to encompass the views of academics in combination with other actors (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010).

Finally, this research examines international student recruitment as export marketing behaviour, as opposed to solely the activity of international student recruitment that can be defined and described as institutional promotion to prospective students by recruiters and agents. Examining the activity of recruiters and agents as “promoters” may provide more detailed documentation of promotional activity, and perhaps provide further insights into improving international student recruitment for practitioners.

### **Surprises and Reflections on the Data**

Several areas within the data in this study were surprising, mostly by their absence. The lack of data on promotional activity and the lack of discussion by the practitioners on this topic came as a surprise. This lack of data does not mean it was completely missing or not used by the participants, but the practitioners view other tools and rules as influential in their practice. The practitioners suggested research and data as impactful to their practice yet these tools were not fully employed. These findings were somewhat surprising considering HEIs are research institutions.

The differences in the role of the academy (faculty) in each case study came as a surprise. In each case study, the role of faculty had cultural nuances that were more profound than anticipated. At UPEI, faculty was not a dominant community within the system, while in both the Hong Kong and UK case studies they featured prominently, but for different reasons. In the Hong Kong case, faculty exercised much power over the recruitment process through a highly controlled gatekeeping role. In the UK case study, senior leadership centralised international student recruitment, but at the same time recognised the culturally and historically entrenched roles of some faculties and continued to negotiate the roles within the activity. This uniqueness required the study to define the scope of international student recruitment differently in each institution. As a result, the number of subjects varied in this study.

The data also surprised in ways that were quite similar. The recruiters within each system used language to describe the recruitment practice in remarkably similar ways. At first glance, it was not surprising that international recruiters were experiencing a similar landscape in a global context. The view of commoditisation was strikingly similar, to the extent that there was recognition amongst recruiters that promotional messaging to prospective students was interchangeable, and even indistinguishable, amongst institutions as they attempt to recruit. This perceived lack of differentiation came as a surprise in the analysis of the data.

## **Conclusion and Final Comments**

The findings of this study provided context and discussion on international student recruitment as strategy practice and how this practice may show export marketing in three separate case studies. The views of practitioners of international student recruitment contextualise government, market, and institutional influences shaping their practices. The research supported the literature on the importance of coordination within the strategy practice of international student recruitment (Asaad et al., 2014, 2015; Ross et al., 2007; 2013) and extended the literature by highlighting differences and similarities in these case studies' export marketing behaviour and international student recruitment efforts. The study suggested a number of practical implications for HEIs and international student recruiters.

The main interest of this study was to explore the public and marketised domains of HEIs through the lens of international student recruitment and export marketing. The use of activity theory assisted to contextualise and document this activity. Through this approach, the field of strategy development, international student recruitment, and commercial practices of HEIs has been expanded to capture the historical and cultural perspectives of each case study. A key strength of this study was the attempt to engage with the complexity of these HEI environments by taking into account a broad-range of actors as they managed public and commercial orientations. Engaging with studies such as this supports further learning and understanding so that researchers, students, professional staff, academics, and governments may achieve a greater understanding of these complex environments.

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## Appendix 1

### Interview Guide – Export Marketing – International Recruitment

1. Please outline your role within the institution? How does your role impact international recruitment?
2. Are you aware of the strategic plan for your institution? How was it created? How does it guide your work international recruitment?
3. Your institution has been active in international recruitment, what do you believe your institutional strengths to be in this area? What are the weaknesses?
4. How have the policies and programs related to international recruitment helped you in your work? How have the hindered your work?
5. Do you believe institutional goals are being achieved? Which objectives are being achieved? Why do you believe this to be successful? Which objectives aren't being achieved? Why do you believe they aren't being achieved?
6. How do you determine success or failure?
7. How your daily work planned and organized?
8. How often do you meet with colleagues regarding international recruitment? What is the nature of the discussions?
9. What is your level of understanding of immigration visa policy and how it impacts recruitment?
10. What research or data do you use or are aware of, that helps inform international recruitment strategy?
11. What programs or supports does your institution offer for international students?
12. Do you know of any courses or changes to courses that were developed to assist international students?
13. Do you have any insight into what other institutions are doing to recruit international students? How do you believe your institution performs relative to these other institutions?

14. Are you aware of marketing and promotional efforts related to international recruitment? What do you believe is effective? What could work better?
15. Who or what department is responsible to coordinate international recruitment? Who or what department is responsible to coordinate recruitment?
16. What aspects of this coordination are working well? What could be improved upon and why?
17. Do you have any further insight or comments related to international recruitment?



