

## GINTL LESSONS LEARNT

Preliminary update from the “GINTL Lessons Learnt” process

GINTL Coordination | 5 September 2024

In November 2024, the GINTL coordination will publish the “GINTL Lessons Learnt,” a series of concise documents aimed at informing future internationalisation efforts within Finnish higher education institutions, particularly in educational sciences and related fields.

In this update, we summarise the input received during the GINTL Dialogue held in June 2024 and outline the upcoming schedule. We appreciate the valuable insights many stakeholders have already provided and encourage you to continue contributing, either during the ongoing drafting process or when the final drafts are circulated for review in October. Your continued input will help ensure that these lessons are comprehensive and reflective of our shared experiences.

### THE LESSONS LEARNT PROCESS SO FAR

One of the Finnish Ministry of Education’s aims, when earmarking funding for [the eight global networks](#) for the period 2021–2024, was to strengthen the internationalisation work done by Finnish higher education institutions. To ensure that the insights gained from this initiative would effectively inform future endeavours in educational sciences and related fields, the Global Innovation Network for Teaching and Learning (GINTL) launched a participatory [lessons learnt process](#). The process began with an online survey conducted in November 2023, followed by a kick-off meeting and two hybrid workshops. Altogether, four key themes were identified and further explored.

The latest step in the process was a hybrid GINTL Dialogue event in Helsinki on 17 June 2024. Approximately 70 participants representing Finnish higher education institutions and partner organisations from India, China, and the African continent provided their input on the four themes. The discussions were held in group settings, with participants rotating through thematic tables. Each group spent 20 minutes on each theme, building on the notes left by the previous group. This approach allowed for a focused exploration of each theme.

### GINTL – Global Innovation Network for Teaching and Learning

Spark cycles of learning for quality education



In this update, we present a thematised summary of the inputs received at the GINTL Dialogue event. The summaries do not entail any analysis beyond thematisation, so they should not be read as concluding recommendations. The next step in the process will be analysing all inputs received and using the results to draft lessons learnt documents that will be shared for comments in October.

The four lessons learnt themes are listed below. You can click on a theme name to jump directly to inputs received for a specific theme – but please read first how you can contribute to the lessons learnt.

## LESSONS LEARNT THEMES

1. Future collaboration
2. Internationalisation
3. Global education crises
4. International students in educational sciences degree programmes

### LESSONS LEARNT THEME 1: FUTURE COLLABORATION

#### **The theme and the inputs received prior to the GINTL Dialogue event**

Under this theme, we began exploring whether there is a need for a coordinated approach among Finnish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to enhance collaboration in global education development, particularly with HEIs outside the Western sphere (including the current GINTL focus areas of China, India, and the African continent, but not limited to these regions). Early discussions centred around the needs and benefits related to a collaborative actor, the alternatives that might exist, potential funding mechanisms, and key areas such an actor might focus on. Several potential purposes for collaboration were identified at this stage. For example, some participants said Finnish HEIs would benefit from a network to effectively identify, and secure external resources needed for partnerships with institutions in the global South. Others emphasised that collaboration can play a vital role in facilitating broader knowledge creation, sharing, and learning, while promoting global partnerships that align with educational priorities both in Finland and abroad.

#### **Inputs received for this theme at the GINTL Dialogue event**

The GINTL dialogue participants were asked: *Can we build a platform that is rooted in individuals' interest in global education development and sustained by higher education institutions?* Conversation was divided into future visioning and reality check. Future visioning continued to circulate around and deepen knowledge on the need and function of collaboration of an actor such as GINTL and the practical side of how GINTL activities are linked to HEI's overall work. Reality check looked more into how the network could function in the future in practical terms.

Below is a thematised summary of the inputs that were received:

### ***Connectedness is a key quality***

- A key quality of the current GINTL network is that it is a connector.
- For example, the network is currently a connector for:
  - Dialogues connecting its geographic branches (Africa, China, India).
  - To some extent, the network is also being used as a platform for connecting with the business community and extending the collaboration.
- Examples of aspects of connectedness that were experienced as useful included:
  - Hearing people online, creating materials/courses/webinars/events together.
  - Network can offer connections to other institutions that we otherwise would lack

### ***“Fuzziness” of the network and freedom are accepted and valued***

- The GINTL network currently encompasses many different actors, goals, and activities. This “fuzziness” is generally accepted and valued.
- However, there is a core strategic field, which can be broadly defined as *education*.
- A future actor would need some shared goals. However, it should also serve as a broad base for collaboration.
- Identifying specific thematic areas within GINTL would probably help build new partnerships.

### ***Coordination is needed for better collaboration***

- Currently, GINTL network is being coordinated (universities of Helsinki and Jyväskylä). Participants highlighted the following benefits from coordination:
  - The network has started becoming a community.
  - GINTL is seen as a contact point for external stakeholders to reach out to higher education institutions working with international education and development.
  - GINTL has been able to form a collective voice / seat on a table when higher education collaboration is being discussed in the international context.
- Participants said functions and actions of coordination may vary in the future. In any case, also future collaboration would benefit from being coordinated. Coordination was considered important because:
  - It can serve as an enabler of connections and activities, sharing and learning.
  - It has the potential to enhance institutional collaboration – for example, in research, teaching and supervision. Individual collaboration between staff members representing different HEIs would not have the same effect.

The dialogue inputs above feed both into the lessons learnt document, and on the [concrete plans for possibly continuing the GINTL network beyond 2024](#).

## **LESSONS LEARNT THEME 2: HEI INTERNATIONALISATION IN EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES AND RELATED FIELDS**

### **The theme and the inputs received prior to the GINTL Dialogue event**

Under this theme, we have explored two questions. 1) How do stakeholders understand the goals and means of internationalisation in educational sciences and related fields? 2) How a

network could facilitate the kind of internationalisation that is relevant for educational sciences and related fields and supports HEI core duties instead of being an add-on?

Guidance for HEI internationalisation exists at both national and university levels. These guidelines are typically broad, allowing for interpretation and a high degree of academic freedom. For instance, the original goals set for GINTL by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, in collaboration with participating Finnish HEIs, encouraged the network to develop solutions to educational challenges, to create sustainable partnerships, as well as to attract international students and talent to Finnish HEIs.

Initial discussions in the lessons learnt process demonstrated that a wide range of understandings on the goals and means of internationalisation in educational sciences and related fields indeed exists within Finnish HEIs. These understandings are often tied to the role of the participant. For example, students tended to emphasise activities for students. A researcher might emphasise research collaboration, often highlighting ethical viewpoints connected to it. A dean, on the other hand, might bring up challenges in international student attraction. Understandings also seemed to be influenced by personal interests as well as external pressures and expectations towards the HEIs by other stakeholders in Finland and abroad (e.g. boosting Finnish education export, or performing a role akin to development organisations, which provide funding and expertise for activities, whose direct aim is to effect positive change on the ground).

During the initial discussions, it also became evident that most participants perceived internationalisation within the context of educational sciences and related fields as Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) engaging in *global education development*. This concept was understood as initiatives aimed at enhancing educational systems and ensuring quality education for all, as initiatives focused on integrating global perspectives into education, or as a combination of both. Far fewer participants emphasised internationalisation in the context of universities' revenue models, for example.

The observed understandings of internationalisation all shared a common emphasis on collaboration. There was also broad agreement that for HEIs, internationalisation or collaboration should not be discussed solely in terms of quantitative metrics, such as funding received or the number of co-authored articles. Instead, the quality of collaborations was seen as equally, if not more, important. However, the criteria for evaluating this quality varied depending on the perceived goals.

Initial discussions also identified obstacles and prerequisites for networked collaboration amongst Finnish HEIs. Obstacles at institutional level included competition fuelled by the current HEI funding model, differences in rules and practices (related to for example work time allocation and possibility to allocate funds to actors external to the specific HEI). Prerequisites for networked collaboration included that network activities, whatever they may be, should be economically viable and have sufficient interest and engagement from individuals willing to participate.

### Inputs received for this theme at the GINTL Dialogue event

At the GINTL Dialogue event, participants were asked: *It is year 2034 and faculties of education in Finnish HEIs have done really well in internationalisation. Describe what their internationalisation looks like.*

Below is a thematised summary of the inputs that were received:

#### ***The role of Finnish higher education institutions in global education development needs to be clarified.***

- It could well be that the most relevant framework for internationalisation in the context of educational sciences and related fields is global education development. Even with this limitation, Finnish higher education institutions would do well to clarify their role. In particular, it seems important to highlight that HEI engagement in global education development cannot be driven by the agenda of creating solutions. Collaboration must be driven by bringing together people from different realities to create understanding and shared realities. This can happen only by combining different perspectives and research from various contexts.
- It is equally important for all parties in international collaborations to clarify to each other what kinds of actors they are. All parties need to understand the nature of the other actors. For example: What domestic constraints limit their actions and capabilities? What is their operational logic, what benefits them, and what does not? What activities are already being undertaken by other actors? What is the scale and type of resources they command or have access to?

#### ***There are many different motives associated with internationalisation of educational sciences and related fields, some of which may also be in conflict with each other – and so be it.***

- Among its various motives, internationalisation can be seen as a tool for publishing in top journals, learning about other ways of understanding, or generating revenue. If the current or future network activity is intended to address different motives, it can be challenging. On the other hand, it may also be the case that a necessary dialogue arises from the multiplicity of motives, which at best could lead to a new kind of cooperation – both among the Finnish actors and between them and their international partners.
- Another point to consider with the multiplicity of motives within a HEI network is that such a network generally cannot dictate what kinds of collaborations HEIs should practice and what kinds of actors they can and cannot partner with.
- Although it may be challenging for one network to address endless different agendas, and some focus would therefore be necessary, the network may still serve as an important forum for articulating the different agendas and becoming aware of their diverse perspectives and priorities. Initiatives and people representing different agendas may also benefit from each other through this collaborative environment.
- One of the Ministry of Education's original thoughts with GINTL and other global networks was to encourage joint actions by Finnish HEIs. However, the current HEI funding model does not encourage joint actions. For example, research collaboration between researchers working at different Finnish HEIs is typically based on shared interests, not on a specific wish to do "joint research".

## LESSONS LEARNT THEME 3: GLOBAL EDUCATION CRISES

### **The theme and the inputs received prior to the GINTL Dialogue event**

The 'Global education crises' theme was ideated at the Lessons Learnt kick-off meeting. Under this theme, we set to gather experiences on what has been learnt about education crises through GINTL-funded activities and collaborations.

Discussions in the thematic workshops underscored the importance of contextual understanding of different educational landscapes and mutual learning as core elements in North-South partnerships. Participants emphasised that engaging in meaningful dialogue with partners and dedicating sufficient time are essential for establishing partnerships aimed at addressing various educational challenges on the ground.

### **Inputs received for this theme at the GINTL Dialogue event**

At the GINTL Dialogue event, the participants were asked: 1) *How have GINTL related activities shaped your understanding of challenges that emerge in education globally?* 2) *How do you think future GINTL network should address global education challenges through HEI collaboration?*

The discussion focused on things that participants had learnt from working with a Finnish HEI partner or regional partner from an African country, India or China.

Below is a thematised summary of the inputs that were received:

#### ***Understanding and Recognising Different Educational Knowledges and Contexts***

- International partnerships and a network of higher education institutions can support voicing issues from around the world.
- Participation in joint discussions can bring people closer to addressing critical issues in education.
- There is value in understanding the local realities and issues.
- It is important to identify the relevance of partnership for all the partners in the HEI collaboration.
- Identifying and clarifying key concepts is essential before beginning any collaboration.
- Project funding in GINTL has enabled visits that have supported an understanding of local challenges. Being part of a network has opened doors to educational institutions that would otherwise be closed.

#### ***Benefit of international HEI collaboration and policy development***

- The GINTL projects cannot affect policymakers, but they can affect teachers and other educational actors as changemakers.
- A solution to an educational challenge is relevant to local conditions but informed by global best practices.
- Discussions on educational challenges support understanding and learning that can lead to solutions.

- Administrative processes at HEIs can sometimes cause delays in carrying out the project. International collaboration is often creative problem-solving where flexibility is needed on both sides.
- Aim of education is different for policymakers and educators. Policymakers, e.g. governments see education from an instrumental point of view, e.g. as a tool for GDP growth. Whereas educators active in GINTL have aimed towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 4: “Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.
- Although visiting partners and local contexts support the understanding of different educational landscapes, different digital tools and technologies can be used as part of educational projects and ease the collaboration between partners.

Above all, we need empathy and understanding in collaboration. We should trust the process: things can progress even if they never become ready. The formed connections and partnerships can live on even after the current GINTL funding comes to an end.

## **LESSONS LEARNT THEME 4: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES DEGREE PROGRAMMES.**

### **The theme and the inputs received prior to the GINTL Dialogue event**

This theme was originally framed to address the broader issue of ethics in internationalisation, serving as an educational sciences-specific adaptation of the newly published [UniPiD Ethical guidelines for responsible academic partnerships with the Global South](#). As the other three themes already seemed to encompass a variety of ethics-related discussions, the kick-off meeting proposed that concentrating on the situation of international students studying in educational sciences degree programmes in Finnish universities is a more specific and urgent ethical concern that should be prioritised. (It should be noted that these programmes are specific to universities. However, universities of applied sciences face similar challenges related to doing right by international students.)

In the subsequent thematic meetings, various ethical concerns in this domain were highlighted. Observations included the scarcity of work opportunities for international education students, with GINTL activities having been a rare opportunity to provide such work. Additionally, there was a noted mismatch between expectations and reality, the siloing between international and Finnish students, and insufficient encouragement for the development of bilingual teaching and pedagogy at Finnish HEIs.

Although many of these challenges are similar to those in other academic fields, educational sciences is one of the more difficult fields in view of international student integration. Firstly, although students may expect that a master’s degree in education would qualify them to work as teachers in Finland, the degrees provided in international programmes do not automatically qualify students to work as teachers in Finnish schools. The specific programme must include teacher education components that meet Finnish qualification standards. Secondly, the language requirements for teaching in Finland are stringent; teachers must demonstrate proficiency in Finnish for Finnish-speaking schools and in Swedish for Swedish-speaking



schools. Lastly, compared to many other academic fields, fewer Finnish educational sciences students participate in student exchanges, and their education generally occurs in Finnish or Swedish, preparing them specifically for working in a school context in Finland (see for example [Huusko & Nurkka, 2024, Kansainvälisyysosaamisen kehittäminen korkeakoulutuksessa](#) and [Connolly & al. 2021, Finnish teacher education students' practical training and exchange in developing countries](#)).

Throughout the GINTL Lessons Learnt workshops, it was noted that the chosen focus on international students was somewhat problematic for several reasons. Firstly, there had in fact been relatively few GINTL activities that engaged international students or aimed to improve HEI capacities in their integration. This in itself is a relevant observation regarding priorities in the use of internationalisation funding, but it is difficult to draw lessons learnt from a very small pool of activities. A proper reflection on this theme would have required engaging a stronger representation of both international students (see for example [Marchenko, 2024, "Proving never ends"](#) and [Salam-Salmaoui & Ali, 2024, Global encounters, local identities](#)) and HEI staff whose work actually involves and HEI staff whose work actually involves supporting and integrating these students into the academic and social fabric of their institution. Secondly, discussions on the theme were complicated by the fact that they often drifted towards issues over which faculties, individual universities, or even universities collectively have little influence. Such issues include, for example, the general employment situation in the country, or laws regarding immigration or language requirements. Lastly, it sometimes felt challenging in the discussions to balance ideal scenarios for the integration of international students with the practical considerations of funding such measures.

### **Inputs received for this theme at the GINTL Dialogue event**

At the GINTL Dialogue event, participants were asked the following question: *Feedback received by GINTL suggests that Finnish HEIs could do more to advance integration of international students studying educational sciences in international programmes. In particular, students hope for social integration and future employment. What are some concrete activities that HEIs could do to advance these goals as a network?*

Below is a thematised summary of the inputs that were received from event participants:

#### ***Towards state authorities***

- With relevant decision-making bodies, lobby for liberal residence and visa regulations and language requirements that are flexible, fair, and equitable.
- Work together with Finnish embassies abroad to inform applicants about study programmes, required funds, employment prospects, and to expedite the visa process of the candidates who have been accepted to study in Finland.

#### ***Opportunities specific for international students***

- Ensure that international students do internships and counselling already at the beginning of their studies.
- Establish support groups
- Make students travel and integrate in all Finland



***For more internationally minded faculties***

- Establish student exchanges outside the EU and encourage students to participate in these.
- Integrate internationalisation in curriculum. For example, widen the literature base, offer courses in different languages, make Finnish and international students work in collective projects, enable multilingual studying conditions.
- Develop international joint programmes.
- Obtain a diverse faculty, staff profile (promote international students to future employers).
- Have integrated international programmes. These could be multidisciplinary international programmes, or international educational science programmes integrated with the Finnish / Swedish language ones.
- Establish language groups.
- Support shared social / intercultural activities.
- Have students organising activities for other students, e.g. opiskelijajärjestöt for social support and collaboration. For example, having a buddy programme is a good idea.
- Keep in touch with the international alumni, seek for their advice and connect newcomers with them.

***For individuals***

- Open doors in private connections. Invite people for dinner!