



GINTL INSIGHTS ON Doing Right with International Students in Educational Sciences Degree Programmes – Experiences from Finland

- Educational sciences is a challenging field for student integration in Finland.
- We recommend scaling up attention and investment in this area.
- Potential measures include student networking and multilingual pedagogy.

Background

There were relatively few GINTL activities that engaged international students or aimed to improve the capacity of Finnish higher education institutions (HEIs) to become better in supporting and integrating these students into the academic and social fabric of their institution.

However, in all preparatory meetings to the GINTL Insights, participants identified the situation of international students as a topic warranting special interest in the context of internationalisation.

Most Finnish universities with educational sciences programmes run separate degree programmes

in English, in addition to those available in Finnish and Swedish. Their combined annual intake of students from outside the EU/ETA is about 100 each year. Some study on scholarships, while others self-finance their studies. In other words, self-financed students study alongside those who receive free education. This creates an unequal situation, leading to different expectations regarding the study programme and students' opportunities.

While this Insights brief focuses on universities, universities of applied sciences, too, are facing their own challenges related to doing right with international students, who enter into their study programmes.

These insights are based on the participatory Lessons Learnt process organised for higher education practitioners active in the Global Innovation Network for Teaching and Learning (GINTL). GINTL was a 2021–2024 pilot network of 20 Finnish higher education institutions and their partners in India, China, and the African continent.

The document was compiled in November 2024 by GINTL coordination teams at University of Helsinki and University of Jyväskylä.

Specifics of the Field

Compared with many other subjects taught in Finnish universities, educational sciences is one of the more difficult fields in view of international student integration.

- 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 usually qualify students to work as teachers in Finnish schools. The specific programme must include teacher education components that meet Finnish qualification standards.
- 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 (Basic Education Decree).
- 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 (Huusko & Nurkka, 2024).

Challenges Identified

There are several factors over which faculties, individual universities, or even universities collectively have little influence. For example, the general employment situation in the country, or laws regarding immigration or language requirements. Below is a list of challenges identified, which universities can influence:

- A mismatch between student expectations and reality - country branding by nature is overtly positive and does not communicate openly about potential challenges.
- Clashes of study cultures. Finnish system relies heavily on independence.
- Scarcity of work and internship opportunities during and after studies.
- Siloing between international and Finnish students.
- Students do not have opportunities/resource to develop their Finnish/

Swedish skills during the MA program as the programs are already filled with subject-specific course, research method courses and MA thesis.

- Insufficient encouragement for the development of bilingual teaching and pedagogy at Finnish HEIs.

For Consideration

A key consideration for Finnish HEIs seems to be how they can respond constructively to challenges like those mentioned above. Below are some suggestions collated from discussions with GINTL stakeholders in Finland and their partners in China, India, and the African continent.

- Integration to Finnish society (e.g. through supporting study-related travel, internship opportunities and exploring synergies with Finnish student associations).
- Supporting integration with fellow international students in other Finnish HEIs to form a community of peer support. This could also involve the HEIs keeping in touch with international alumni, seeking their advice, and connecting newcomers with them.
- Internationalisation of the education sciences curriculum (e.g. through increased collaboration between Finnish and international students, widening the literature base, supporting multilingual pedagogies).
- Encourage internationalisation of Finnish students beyond the Western world (e.g. through supporting student exchanges outside the EU). For example, University of Helsinki and University of Eastern Finland piloted a short student exchange to Malaysia (Malinen et. al., 2024) and University of Jyväskylä with the Nordic Centre in India piloted a 6-week training placement in India (see Salminen et. al, 2023), and University of Oulu and University of Namibia made reciprocal 2-week visits on childhood development and sustainable pedagogies (University of Oulu, n.d).
- Open doors in private connections. Invite people for dinner!

EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES

Below is a list of some of the GINTL activities relevant for the integration of international students.

- GINTL research seminar (2023 and 2024) online and onsite to encourage students to discuss their Master's thesis work and form networks.
- Support for students and presenters to participate in the annual SDG4 seminar at JYU (2022, 2023, 2024 – and UH).
- Projects and coordination involving employment for alumni, internships and short-term assignments for international students (all HEIs).
- Courses, lectures, and workshops. E.g. Educational change and School Transformation (JYU).
- [Cultivating Change through Global and Sustainable Education](#) (GloseNet) lecture series (JYU).
- Small grants for a variety of activities (UH, JYU).

FURTHER READING

ARENE & UNIFI, 2024. [Finnish International Education Agent Code Of Conduct \(Acoc\)](#)

Malinen, O. S., Äikäs, A., Uusitalo, L., (2024). [Opetusharjoittelu Kuala Lumpurissa auttoi näkemään myös kotimaan koulujärjestelmän vahvuuksia ja kehittämistarpeita](#). University of Eastern Finland and University of Helsinki blogs

Marchenko, A. (2024). ["Proving never ends": foreign origin and its impact on international students' wellbeing behind internationalization of higher education](#). University of Oulu MA thesis.

Huusko, M. & Nurkka, N. (2024). [Kansainvälisyysosaamisen kehittäminen korkeakoulutuksessa](#). Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus (KARVI)

Conolly, J., Lampinen, J., & Lehtomäki, E. (2021). [Finnish teacher education students' practical training and exchange in developing countries: A commissioned study for the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs](#). University of Oulu.

Salam-Salmaoui, R., & Ali, R. (2024). [Global encounters, local identities: autoethnographic reflections on University of Jyväskylä's internationalization policies and practices](#). Cogent Education, 11(1).

Salminen, S., Markkola, E. and Keränen, S. (2023) [Student reflections on training placement in Kolkata: Intercultural learning experiences and kindness of staff members](#). GINTL blog.

University of Oulu. (n.d.) [Co-designing Teacher Education through North-South Partnership](#).

