



GINTL INSIGHTS ON The Importance of North–South Partnerships in Educational Sciences for Addressing the Global Education Crises

- North–South partnerships foster insight and learning that contributes to solutions.
- Understanding on different knowledges and educational landscapes is a key outcome.
- We recommend continued building of partnerships based on empathy, understanding & trust.

Crises and Their Solutions

The original goals set for the GINTL network by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture included the co-development of *solutions* for the *global learning crisis*. The two concepts are challenging in many ways (see p. 2). In this brief, we use the term *global education crises*. Many GINTL participants highlighted that a variety of different crises exist, not just with learning, but also with the educational systems across the globe.

The GINTL timeframe of 3.5 years was short for co-developing solutions – and in general the term *solutions* may obscure the need for interaction, research, understanding, and learn-

ing, which in many cases precedes any solution for a complex challenge.

This brief therefore draws attention to the benefits that can be accrued from partnership-building. Partnerships can foster a starting point for developing educational solutions that can eventually be part of the many solutions and actions required for solving any of the global or local education crises.

Activities and Results

With their GINTL funding, the participating Finnish HEIs and their Global South partners undertook collaborative projects, activities and research that focused on knowledge exchange and dialogue. Some partners were able to visit each other physically,

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.

while others used different digital tools and technologies to support collaboration online or combined face-to-face meetings and online platforms.

Regardless of their type, all activities brought participants from Finnish higher education institutions and their Global South partners together and provided opportunities to:

- share and discuss different educational contexts and concepts.
- reflect on how education challenges could be addressed.
- build trust that has supported the realisation of specific projects.
- pay physical visits to each other's contexts.

As a result:

- Perspectives on local challenges and topical issues from different parts of the world were voiced.
- Empathy, understanding of local contexts, educational landscapes and complex local and global challenges in education increased.
- Understanding on each partner's institutional cultures and limitations increased.
- Joint discussions brought participants closer to addressing critical issues.
- Connections and friendships were built between educational scientists and practitioners in different countries.
- Several GINTL activities supported teachers' and other education actors' agency in becoming change makers in their own environment.
- Being part of a network opened doors to educational institutions that would otherwise have remained closed.

Learnings on Education Crises

- A variety of different crises exist, not just with learning, but also with the educational systems across the globe.
- Local realities and issues must be understood. A solution to an educational challenge is relevant to local conditions but may be informed by instructive practices elsewhere.
- Identifying and clarifying key concepts in education is essential

before beginning any collaboration. Some concepts are understood differently in many different educational settings.

- There is often a tension between the intended solutions for responding to educational challenges, as research and evidence may suggest different solutions than those preferred by policymakers.

For consideration

Funding agencies and HEI leadership

- Consider that the potential of HEIs is not only or mostly in the development of "solutions" but also in their capacity to generate understanding on different ways of knowing and complex issues in their local contexts. Scholarship has repeatedly identified such understanding as key for successful innovations (see e.g., Serdyukov, 2017).
- Continue funding and enabling activities that support networking and dialogue between academics from different countries.
- Accept that quality partnerships take time. There must be sufficient time for building collaborations with trust (see e.g., Khatkhedkar, 2023). Connections resulting from partnerships are investments that live long beyond any funding span.
- There are usually delays in projects related to institutional cultures, especially in administrative processes.

Academics engaged in activities

- Identify the relevance of the partnership for all the partners in the collaboration.
- Empathy and understanding are key in international collaboration. Emphasise meaningful dialogues between partners and dedicate sufficient time to establishing partnerships (Eta & al., forthcoming).
- Seek regular feedback from all partners.
- Trust the process: things can progress even if they never become ready.

THE GLOBAL LEARNING CRISIS

First mentioned in 2013, *global learning crisis* describes the situation in which many children have access to schooling, but their learning results have not been improving (UNESCO, 2013). This is a complex challenge with several causes and effects in and out of school (Reinikka et al, 2018). However, the concept has also been criticised for diminishing the role of colonial history and racism in tackling the core issue of learning crises (see e.g. Sriprakash et al. 2020).

"SOLUTIONS" IN EDUCATION

The solutions-oriented terminology used in today's international development scene is problematic for educational sciences. Solutions for improving educational systems and practices are highly context dependent. This means educational sciences research requires a much deeper contextual understanding than research in many other fields. Moreover, the eventual success of any educational solution also depends on political decisions at many levels.

REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

- Eta, E. A., Tiensuu, M., Brito, K. S., Georges, A., Kontio, H., Lehtomäki, E., Matengu, M., Nghikembua, T., & Shingenge, F. (forthcoming). Co-constructing transformative partnerships in higher education: Dialogues among actors in the South and North. *Frontiers in Environmental Science*.
- GloseNet. (n.d.). [Cultivating Change through Global and Sustainable Education](#).
- Khatkhedkar, N. (2023). [Internationalising Higher Education through Global Innovation Networks: A Finnish University's experiences of India collaboration](#). University of Helsinki MA thesis.
- Reinikka, R., Niemi, H. & Tulivuori, J. (2018). [Stepping up Finland's Global Role in Education](#).
- Salas, K. B., & Avento, R. (2023). [Ethical guidelines for responsible academic partnerships with the Global South](#). Finnish University Partnership for International Development, UniPID.
- Serdyukov, P. (2017). [Innovation in education: what works, what doesn't, and what to do about it?](#). Journal of research in innovative teaching & learning, 10(1), 4-33.
- Sriprakash, A., Tikly, L. & Walker, S. (2020). [The erasures of racism in education and international development: re-reading the 'global learning crisis'](#). Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 50:5, 676-692.
- UNESCO. (2013) [The Global learning crisis: why every child deserves a quality education](#).