

Overseas education development through HEI-ICI, transcript

Welcome to this podcast series on solving the global learning crisis. We'll discover how Ethiopia, Nepal and Mozambique are reshaping their higher education programs in response to the changing demands of the 21st century.

Graham:

Hello I'm Graham Burns and today I'm talking to Mr Pekka Seppälä from the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the Higher Education Institutions Institutional Cooperation Instrument program or HEI-ICI for short.

Can you first tell us the idea behind the HEI-ICI program?

Pekka:

Well, I think we all are familiar with some kind of a university-university - cooperation programs. And this is somehow typical form of a university-university cooperation, where people who have the same kind of a background are supporting each other and discussing issues related to advancing the university work. I think what we have done here in HEI-ICI is kind of a small programs which focus on curriculums better education and having sort of modern up to date courses for students available. So this is the basic idea.

Let me say something about the new phase of HEI-ICI that we have started recently, and this is slightly different, we are using more distance learning tools, more of E-learning materials and and that kind of tools. And there is some kind of a logic behind that. It's not because there are tools for their own sake. I would like to say that earlier we have had a very sort of a person to person relations in these programs, but they have reached kind of a fairly small group of people, in the end, so the target audience has been rather small. And we know that in many developing countries behind any student who was a student in university, there's always two or three who have never reached the university because the places to get into the university are too few and the costs are too high, so in order to get the costs lower and in order to make more efficient use of teachers, we need to move into this system where at least part of the teaching can be given through this kind of distance learning tools and using distance materials. So it is not an aim in itself, but it is tool to help more people to get high quality courses easily available, and we know there are technical problems here and there, but we think that this is really going to be the future.

It is definitely now coming up through COVID area. It is definitely coming also more and more in Finnish, US and UK universities. Universities tend to be rather conservative, slow moving, institutions, but I think there is now a kind of a shake up and there is kind of a possibility for universities to renew the ways of teaching. I think this is a kind of opportunity that we are trying to reach now. So yes, we are trying to have good courses for students, but to have good courses, which could treat easily more students, without sort of pulling down the the learning results. We cannot just use technology and think that it's an easy thing. It's not an easy thing and we have to see that learning results are there in the end. So that's the idea.

Graham:

Which countries are involved in the current program and how big is the overall budget?

Pekka:

Well, this is a program which is targeted to partner countries of Finland. So we have a less than a dozen countries, where Finland has an embassy presence, knowledge about some basic things and where the

Finnish universities have been working early, and these are also relatively modest income countries, because this is development cooperation. That's the selection of countries.

We have available 12 million euros or 14 million dollars in this four year period.

Graham:

OK, so how does the programme relate to Finland's overseas development goals in the education arena? And in the wider sense, the UN Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals?

Pekka:

Well, sustainable development goals is easy because almost anything, that we are doing, relates to one or two sustainable development goals. They are so wide. But the Finnish development policy is more narrow. We have certain thematic areas, and when we work with universities, we have selected three thematic areas which are important for us. These are, first education crisis in primary secondary education, second innovations and third, climate change. So we have three thematic areas. That's how we focus on it.

Graham:

When we speak about the education crisis, or solving the learning crisis, what are the expected outcomes of this program for Finland, for our partners also and their home regions?

Pekka: That's a good question. The Finnish education system is proud about, how teachers are able to do and provide good learning results in in schools. Now this is something that we can try to somehow duplicate in developing countries while we focus on teacher education. Having said that, we must know that teachers' circumstances in four countries are completely different. They may have a very low salaries, other commitments, low motivation due to negative peer pressure or many other reasons. Political unrest and many things in a society. So we definitely need to understand first what is the teachers' real situation, before we start to create this teacher education. Listening and then discussing about how make learning results. I think that's simply where we are. That's simply where we need to try to advance.

Graham:

OK. Thank you very much Pekka. That was very interesting!

Pekka:

You're welcome.

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