

# Repurposing public education: governmental rationality of education export in Finland through public education problematisations

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## ABSTRACT

The Finnish government's education export (FGEE) programme, which was initiated in 2010, seeks to promote and coordinate education as an export product. Until recently, research on the Finnish education export has focused on individual education sectors, with only passing consideration of the governmental rationality of education export. Drawing on Bacchi's (2009) post-structural policy analysis, I use the FGEE documents as a material starting point, as 'practical texts' (Bacchi 2009, 34; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 34) to study how education export discourse problematises public education and produces a contextualised governmental rationality. Contributing to the growing body of knowledge on emerging global, national, and local public – private structures, the paper illustrates how minor policy strands such as the FGEE programme can be seen as production sites in which education practices and their governmental rationalities are constructed.

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## Introduction

More than a decade ago, around 2010, 'education export' became a theme – almost a buzzword – in Finnish public education policy. Initially confined mainly to framing the discussion of higher education (HE) tuition fees (Juusola 2020; Kauko and Medvedeva 2016), education export has since become the defining theme of several government documents, and it has also become an important theme in development policy (FORMIN 2018) and country branding (CBR 2010). These documents can be seen as 'serious speech acts' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 48) which outline a government-led education export programme (Schatz 2016a). The FGEE programme currently covers HE and vocational and secondary education, but in addition it has also several overarching measures that concern Finnish public education in general. Education export has been part of three consecutive government programmes, and the Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE) has been tasked with its coordination.

Publicly funded education has been the norm in Finland, and a government-driven commercialisation initiative across Finnish education sectors during several

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governments therefore builds an interesting case. Although previous research has established the FGEE programme as a driver of marketisation in higher and comprehensive education, the current paper proposes that the programme can be further studied with a post-structural Foucauldian approach to describe how problematisations construct the governmental rationality linking Finnish public education and education export. Although I argue that problematisation and governmental rationalities provide a meaningful framework for understanding education export, I acknowledge that Finnish education export can also be studied using other theoretical frames. Policy transfer/borrowing can be used as a framework to study how the FGEE interprets PISA<sup>1</sup> results as an indication of interest in and a demand for Finnish education export products. Yet the FGEE programme's use of reference countries such as Sweden, Denmark, and New Zealand would make an interesting case for a comparative education approach. Rather than studying the FGEE programme *de facto* as policy transfer, borrowing, or lending, I consider the use of global and international agents – whether countries, ideas, or other entities – in the data as part of the problem representations. Indeed, I see the use of PISA and reference countries as part of the discursive construction of the domestic education export policy. I understand policy translation (Steiner-Khamsi 2016) in Foucauldian post-structuralist policy analysis as part of the governmental rationalities at play in the FGEE programme. I wish to demonstrate how the programme, by problematising public education, produces partly conflicting discourses and governmental rationalities that are applied across the Finnish education sectors. Comprehensive and vocational education and HE are all constructed as part of what I tentatively call 'the basic production of a knowledge society', and although their roles and functions in the welfare society logic traditionally differ, they are conflated in the education export discourse.

This paper's research question is:

How is the governmental rationality in the FGEE programme constructed by representing education export as a public education problem?

## **Finnish education export and its earlier studies**

Although I subscribe to the claims that the marketisation of education in various forms as productisation, privatisation, and network governance very aptly characterise the Finnish education export phenomenon (Cai and Kivistö 2013; Juusola 2020; Kauko and Medvedeva 2016; Kiesi 2023; Nokkala 2007; Schatz 2016b; Seppänen et al. 2020, 2023) and the role of public education administration in facilitating education export (Kiesi 2023), I wish to illustrate the particular governmental rationalities at play in the FGEE programme and their treatment of public education's role in society. It is the 'kind of marketisation' and the governmental rationality that my claim concerns that underlie this. Problem representations are seen as part of the work – as part of the 'policy deeds' the study of which helps in understanding how it is proposed education export should be governed. The FGEE programme is therefore not only a collection of texts but belongs to the practice of conceptual harmonisation of public education for export. My study can be

seen both as an elaboration of the claim that there is a general marketisation of education in Finnish education and as a reinterpretation of the marketisation claims made about individual education sectors in Finland in earlier research.

Researchers have provided compelling evidence of different facets of Finnish education export. In her dissertation Nokkala (2007, 196) points out that the idea of an international market for HE was already visible in Finland in 2007. Nokkala sees the knowledge society as the empowering concept allowing the continuation and upholding of the value of education and the welfare state. I return to this idea in this paper's conclusions as I discuss how competition and the welfare society are united by the governmental rationalities of education export.

If we accept that the international market is an important contextual idea in Finnish education, and that the knowledge society is organised to compete effectively in the international market, Schatz's study of education export as part of nation branding (Schatz 2016b) aptly describes the early phase of education export and the birth of the FGEE programme. I interpret the connection of education and nation branding as part of the problem representation of public education: public education needs to be turned into education export products because branding is part of the toolbox in the global competition between nations. The untapped potential of public education is thus a problem and somehow a hindrance. Juusola's (2020) study, which focuses on the quality discourse in the HE export, identifies various hindrance discourses, which I reinterpret as problematisations of public education. In their study of internationalisation as marketisation Kauko and Medvedeva (2016) make several nuanced observations about global competition as an all-encompassing discourse in HE. I also revisit their observations on the externalisation of internationalisation in my discussion of the controllability of the domestic education market vis-à-vis the competitive global market. It is also important to consider that neoliberal terms have been observed to shape especially the HE policy discourse (Välimaa 2004). These studies, which approach Finnish HE from various angles, establish marketisation and commercialisation as an important phenomenon. I also claim that the discourses of branding, hindrances, and externalisation are not only relevant for understanding HE policy but for describing governmental rationalities relevant to other sectors of Finnish education in the FGEE programme.

The extension of markets to HE is a common theme in HE research (cf. Lewis 2011; Enders and Jongbloed 2015; Ideland and Serder 2023; Marginson 2004), and themes such as network governance (Ball 2009) and the comparative analysis of local forms of privatisation of education (Alexiadou 2013) have shed light on the multitude of local practices. Many of the results of HE marketisation studies can be partly applied to comprehensive education, as can be seen in Burch's (Burch 2009) analysis of education marketisation in the United States, for example. Similarly, I wish to demonstrate how the socially and culturally rooted individuality of different education sectors is weakened to maximise the potential for education export while claiming that this is how the welfare society can survive in the global competitive reality.

Seppänen (Seppänen et al. 2020, 2023) and Kiesi (2023) are theoretically closest to my study of governmental rationality, as their research illuminates the networks which blur the boundaries of the public and private and seem to be changing the role of public governance and the administration of education. I also understand FGEE boundary work as a construction of new identities which are not based on education alone as a profession

and activity and their traditional expertise. Finally, I take the work of Simola (2008) as an important source of knowledge about the marketisation development in Finnish education in general. Simola argues that a transition from a welfare state to a competition state has happened in Finland. Features like bureaucracy, professions, and inequality persist, but to be perceived and recognised as ‘problems’, they need to be formulated or represented as particular kinds of problems through prevailing discourses (399–400). My study can be seen as an examination of how this transition powers the problem representations connected with Finnish public education in the FGEE programme.

The theme of the welfare state appears to be intertwined with the theme of the marketisation of education in the Finnish context. Schatz (2016b, 15, 60), Cai and Kivistö (2013, 5, 7), Juusola (2020, 12), Kauko and Medvedeva (2016, 110), and Seppänen et al. (2020) all situate their analysis in the general context of the welfare state in which the marketisation of education in Finland occurs. I interpret the concepts of the welfare state and competition as two important complex entities which the FGEE programme discursively circulates and reproduces. It is the ill fit of the two which the FGEE programme attempts to resolve by representing Finnish public education as a problem. This generates the power of education export as a concept, practice, and discourse.

Studying the FGEE programme through the lens of governmental rationalities does not presuppose a separation of educational sectors as policy areas. The aim is rather to understand the discursive effects of constructed differences and similarities between higher, vocational, and comprehensive education as part of the governmental rationalities of education export. Sector-specific actions, for example, enabling HE tuition fees, granting vocational education provision rights through public sector companies combined with the introduction of business skills to the work of public educators, reduce sectors’ specificity to increase their potential for education export. In the current paper the Bacchian problematisation and the Foucauldian governmental rationality offer a framework for analysing how knowledge and power intersect to produce subjectivities and govern social life.

Following earlier research, I understand Finnish education export and the FGEE programme as a phenomenon of the marketisation of education in the local context of the Finnish welfare state. However, I wish to describe the discursive production of education export in the FGEE programme, which I believe contributes to our understanding of the governmental rationalities of Finnish public education. I see the discursive construction of education export through the lens of governmental rationality, where problematising public education makes education export a thinkable and doable practice of public education. I operationalise the study of governmental rationality with Bacchi’s ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) approach (Bacchi 2009).

### **Governmental rationality and post-structural policy analysis**

In this section I introduce Bacchi’s ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) approach, which I use to analyse how problems are constructed in the FGEE documents, as well as the specific theoretical notions which guide me in the analysis. Bacchi’s approach seeks to study how governing becomes possible by applying a set of operations to policy proposals. She stresses the acknowledgement of complexity and contextuality

and seeks to situate a policy as a discourse and art of government. The WPR approach takes its cue from Foucault, operationalising several of Foucault's concepts – most notably his notions of government – with a set of six questions that guide the analysis of policy texts (Bacchi 2009). Applying Bacchi's approach, I study how the notion of education export is discursively produced through problematising public education, and second, how the ensuing problem representations construct the governmental rationalities of education export.

Bacchi's (2009) policy analysis assumes that policies do not simply address pre-existing problems. Indeed, policies create the problems and then set out to solve them by proposing and implementing measures. It is the 'constructedness', or representations, of these problems that Bacchi's approach tackles. For example, when business training is offered to public education workers as part of the FGEE programme to increase education export, the problem is represented as public educators' lack of business skills. Starting with the questions of what a policy proposes, what its suggested measures are, and what changes are proposed, it is possible to work backwards to analyse what the problem is presented as. In the FGEE programme the increase of education export thus requires certain kinds of solutions, certain 'fixes' such as training public educators, which are constructed as natural and logical because they obviously fit very well with how the problem is constructed. In addition, both 'training' and 'public educators' are categories which are readily available in the policy discourse. How the lack of education export as a 'problem' and how the 'need' for it (apart from the obvious 'demand') is constructed are essential for the governance of education export. To continue with the example above, it is therefore interesting that education export 'requires' the training of public educators. What does this imply about the 'problem'? Although Bacchi's approach has been used in analysing problematisations in social policies (Beutler and Marianne 2018; Mertanen, Mäkelä, and Brunila 2022; Oster et al. 2023; Russell et al. 2022) and education (Lauritzen and Nodeland 2018; Tawell and McCluskey 2022; Woo 2022), education export has not been studied with this method. Many studies which use Bacchi's WPR approach also omit some of the questions and focus on selected ones (Mertanen, Mäkelä, and Brunila 2022, 265; Russell et al. 2022, 3874; Tawell and McCluskey 2022, 140; Woo 2022, 9).

I understand problem representations as tools which discursively demarcate the field to be covered by education export and as ideational tools with which consequent solution proposals construct governmental rationalities. This is where the notion of governmental rationality comes into its own. I use the term governmental rationalities instead of governmentality to refer to ways of thinking about 'the nature of the practice of government' (Gordon 1991, 3; see also Rose, O'Malley, and Valverde 2006 for parallel and similar concepts to 'governmental rationality') in the discourse of education export as it happens in the data.

Problem representations are elaborated in *discourse* (Bacchi 2009, 35). In the context of the current paper I wish to draw attention to how problem representations discursively produce public education 'problems'. In this production how education export is defined – how it is connected to different contexts and discussed in the FGEE documents – defines what is 'relevant', what counts as 'knowledge', and what kinds of 'truths' construct the governmental rationalities of education export. It is useful to remember that *koulutusvienti* – education export in Finnish – is a relatively new term, but the intersecting discourses in the FGEE programme have longer histories. In addition, many

of the practices which the FGEE programme collects under the notion of education export pre-date the term. It is therefore possible to say that education export is a creation that different ways of talking, thinking, and doing have discursively produced. As should be apparent, education export is not just a linguistic creation: it is not brought into existence merely by an authority uttering the words ‘education export’. The FGEE programme is an important production site where various discourses construct the notion of education export and its connection with Finnish public education.

Policy research using WPR has produced insights, some of which I wish to employ in this paper. Etienne Woo analysed the HE internationalisation policy in China (Woo 2022). He argues that China’s world class university policy is represented as a ‘technical, managerial and organisational issue’, thus highlighting certain practices and defining certain kinds of identities (Woo 2022, 17). In their study Mertanen, Mäkelä, and Brunila (Mertanen, Mäkelä, and Brunila 2022) define governing not only as comprising acknowledged institutions but discover incongruous rationalities in their youth policy data. To characterise the governmental rationalities of education export, I identify the formation of practices and the assigning of roles and identities, and highlight incongruous rationalities.

In summary, problem representations are the material entry point into studying how education export produces governmental rationalities. The WPR approach asks what enables problems to be formulated as they are set out (Bacchi 2009, 5) in a policy. The approach views the construction of problems as particular kinds of problems as an integral purpose of the policy process (Bacchi 2016). When a policy constructs the problem as a particular kind, it also constructs the knowledge required for the solutions. It is this knowledge that is not the product of ‘unbounded reason’ (Jones and Ball 1990, 80) but is contextual and specific which also partly constructs the governmental rationality. Several discourses can be at play in this process, and they can be incongruous. Bacchi’s WPR approach guides how to probe problem representations and analyse how they are made.

## Data and methods

The first major Finnish policy document that extensively addressed education export was the 2001 strategy for international activities in HE (MINEDU 2001). A few years later the government’s Education and Science Plan 2003–2008 (MINEDU 2004, 13) stated that removing trade barriers in education would threaten free education and that ‘Finland has not entered, nor intends to enter, into commitments under GATS<sup>2</sup> concerning free access to markets or national treatment in education and training’ (MINEDU 2004). In the same year a government document dealing with globalisation and economy argued for education export (Government Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2004), and a report of the working group on tuition fees for foreign HE students was published in 2005 (MINEDU 2005). The internationalisation strategy for HE published in 2009 (MINEDU 2009a; MINEDU 2009b) also covered the theme. Government documents appear to implicitly distinguish between what was intended by the far-reaching marketisation of education as promoted by GATS, and how marketisation was conceived or conceivable in Finnish HE in particular.



Since 2010 education export has been the thematic focus of five strategy and action plan documents: MINEDU (2010); MINEDU (2013); MINEDU (2016a); MINEDU (2016b); and FNAE (2020). Despite the implied specific focus on HE in the 2013 working group document (MINEDU 2013) and on secondary education of the 2016 working group document (MINEDU 2016b), the five documents discuss all Finnish public education sectors. These documents are listed in [Appendix 1](#) and they are the practical texts of this article.

The FGEE programme defines education export in broad terms. A questionnaire (MINEDU 2016b) sent to organisations involved in financing product development and export defines education export as follows:

Education export means international business in which services and products related to education, skills/knowhow or to the education system are sold to a foreign individual, private or public organisation or other sponsors/financier. Traditional education export products and services include the sale of education leading to a degree (or parts of a degree) (e.g. tuition fees for foreign students), consultancy services related to education systems, education sector projects (including evaluation), and electronic and other learning-related materials, games supporting learning, and physical and electronic learning environments (e.g. school furniture or electronic teaching platforms). Increasingly, knowledge and training services can also be integrated into other traditional exports. (e.g. training for lift technicians à la KONE<sup>3</sup> or continuing education for dentists à la Planmeca<sup>4</sup>)

Finnish education export is also defined as covering ‘services and products to all sectors of education from early childhood education to HE, life-long learning and staff training’ (FNAE 2020, 6). In her study of quality in the context of education export of Finnish HE, Juusola classifies education export as transnational education, but also points out how the definition of education export is unclear (Juusola 2020, 18). The definitions and conceptualisations of education export and its separation from and alignment with other concepts are part of the discursive production of education export and are related to the governmental rationality which is this paper’s focus. In short, what interests me about the definition of education export in the framework of the current paper is the relationship of what could be called the ‘discourse of defining’ to other discourses of the FGEE programme, relating the definitions of education export to the ‘practical field in which it is deployed’ (Foucault 1991, 61). Admittedly, the fact that academics are also interested in and seek to amend the lack of clarity of terms referring to education as international business, as well as the definition of ‘internationalisation’ (Knight 2015; Marginson 2023), can be understood as knowledge construction (cf. Bacchi 2009, 234) and as part of the discursive production of education export. In the current paper, however, with the acknowledgement of the need for further study of the role of academic knowledge in education export, this aspect is pursued to a limited degree.

The five strategy and action plan documents mentioned above form the core of the ‘practical texts’ (Bacchi 2009, 34; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 34), the starting point for the WPR analysis. Practical texts are typically policy documents which outline a particular policy problem and often define the measures to be taken to effect change. The FGEE documents describe what should be done and why in education export, and this provides an entry point to the ‘... problem representations that require scrutiny’ (Bacchi 2009, 34). Although an understanding of the problematisations can be achieved by delimiting the analysis to the practical texts, WPR is an approach which traces discourses, and the

studied data are expanded after the problematisations are identified in the practical texts. In this paper I expand this by tracing problem representations back to other government documents, and earlier research is also used to map the problem representations' origins. This serves as a limited genealogy of education export as discursive practice, and how it has come to be understood and even accepted as a component of public policy (cf. Foucault 1994, 223–226). The practices and modes of operation related to education export in the public education sector are also traced by following whether and how the measures suggested in the FGEE programme documents have been realised. In this connection I find it interesting that there is no research on Finnish vocational education export from the policy perspective, even though the FGEE programme also covers vocational education, and as with HE, the law on the provision of degrees in vocational education had to be changed to enable fees to be charged (Government Bill 2021). The provision of vocational education as an export has a system of licensing, and the providers must offer the education export activities through a separate organisation (cf. FNAE 2023). This is why several public vocational institutions have founded education export companies as part of their organisation.

Bacchi's six 'What is the problem represented to be?' questions (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016) were applied to the five practical texts. Table 1 below presents the questions adapted for this paper. In the following I refer to Bacchi's list's questions as Q1 to Q6 to indicate which question is connected in each case.

The first step in the preparation of data was the reading of the FGEE programme documents, which produced the observation about public education's role in education export. To scrutinise the material from this perspective, I identified two kinds of sequences: first, sequences which explicitly addressed public education; second, sequences which made general reference to education. This further confirmed the observation that public education was a recurring theme but also indicated that the FGEE document did not always address a particular public education sector. In the second phase I matched these sequences with the tangible measures proposed and the more general recommendations and milestones of the programme documents. In the third round of data preparation I chose the combinations of the measures, recommendations, and milestones involving public education, and the sequences identified in the first round of data preparation for the analysis. I then listed the main problem representations. At this point I engaged more with earlier research for two reasons: first, to chart other potential discourses identified as part of the education export discourse; second, to draw an abbreviated genealogy (Q3) of education export, which I integrated into the analysis.

**Table 1.** What is the problem represented to be? – approach.

Question 1:	What's the 'lack of education export' represented to be?
Question 2:	What presuppositions or assumptions underlie these representations of the 'lack of education export'?
Question 3:	How have these representations of the 'lack of education export' come about?
Question 4:	What is left unproblematic in these representations of the 'lack of education export'? What are the silences? Can the 'lack of education export' be thought about differently?
Question 5:	What effects are produced by these representations of the 'lack of education export'?
Question 6:	How/where are these representations of the 'lack of education export' produced, disseminated, and defended? How can it be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?

Adapted from Bacchi 2009.



It is from these measures and proposals that the analysis proceeded ‘backwards’ to analyse the implicit problem representations.

The selection of the data creates certain limitations. A detailed analysis of the full intertextual scope and social practice nature of the problem representations is impossible in this paper. The historical developments and contexts in which public education problematisations have developed are addressed by examining earlier research on Finnish education export and analysing the sources to which the FGEE programme itself refers. Two additional documents in particular illustrate how the notion of education export has spread to other policy fields: the country branding report (CBR 2010), which Schatz (2016b) has thoroughly analysed; and the ‘Stepping Up Finland’s Global Role in Education’ report (FORMIN 2018) commissioned by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The data are thus expanded beyond the practical texts to further strengthen the analysis by discussing the governmental rationality for education export.

Atlas.ti was used for a close reading of the notation of the documents and structuring of the analysis.

I now briefly discuss my own position and problematisation as a researcher. Instead of proposing solutions to problems or evaluating them, I wish to open new ways to understand education export as a phenomenon linked to the institution of education in Finland. My own position as a practitioner of education export in public HE coincides with my role as a researcher. This creates a situation where I need to be particularly alert to how I approach the data and the basis of my interpretations. I am thus acutely aware of the potential bias and reliability problems which my role in the phenomenon I study can cause, as well as the hazy borderline between the public and business – one might say I create and embody that borderline every day in my work.

## Analysis

Table 2 presents a summary of the coded data. The problem representation arrived at by asking ‘What is the proposed change?’ in conjunction with each measure proposed, is broken down into six subproblems (the first column on the left) found in the data. I have also indicated if a problem representation is connected with a particular part of the education system. The headings in bold in the other columns correspond to questions 2 to 6 in Bacchi’s (2009, 48) approach. A condensed keyword summary is presented for each of the six subproblems under each of the questions.

In the presentation of the analysis I follow the integrated model, where the specific question applied is indicated by Q1 to Q6 when the analysis occasions it (Bacchi 2009, 128). The main focus is on Q 5 – especially the dividing practices and different effects (Bacchi 2009, 48) in connection with the interpretation of the global context, skills, careers, and domestic market. Finally, the three subsections under ‘Analysis’ describe how the elements of the governmental rationality of the FGEE programme are constructed through different problematisations. These elements are discussed further in the conclusions.



**Table 2.** What is proposed as a change?

Sub- problematization	Presuppositions & assumptions (binaries, key concepts and categories)	History of the 'problem'	Silences	Effects produced	Production & dissemination
<p><b>Quality, financing &amp; internationalisation</b>            lack in quality            lack of money            lack of international</p>	<p>how quality is improved and what quality is            accountability discourse            internationalisation as quality and resource (financial)</p>	<p>role of quality in education for internationalisation and competition</p>	<p>contradiction: ranking success vs argued lack of quality</p>	<p>quality labels &amp; standards as an 'interpretation' of quality (PES)            circulating existing education policy discourses</p>	<p>FNAE, KARVI, national budget debates, education budget negotiations</p>
<p><b>Demand</b>            inability to supply</p>	<p>obligation to respond            demand as potential for business</p>	<p>economic theory            tuition fees (HE, VE)</p>	<p>possible other responses (than selling education)</p>	<p>productization            PES as unable 'demand' as national concept in education</p>	<p>FGEE documents, HE budget negotiations, government funding formulas</p>
<p><b>Products</b>            lack of products</p>	<p>education can/should be seen as a product, products should be scalable            education is a too integral system of welfare state            product vs system            outdated laws            the world has changed            PES inability to separate public &amp; private operations            law as enabling vs hindrance</p>	<p>commercialisation            development in the public sector</p>	<p>potential effects            Finnishness            over-simplification of education complexity</p>	<p>redefining the context of education            skills needs (PES)            creating practices</p>	<p>training programmes            products labelled as education export</p>
<p><b>Hindrances</b>            laws as hindrance (HE, VE)</p>	<p>less laws, more flexibility            state role            deregulation (Government 2015)</p>	<p>rule of law, reasons behind laws, laws as part of the education system</p>	<p>'we' as a problem, 'we' as barrier removers            self-restraining state            locality restrictions removed (VE)</p>	<p>parliament, FNAE, EF, PM            Sipilä's government (Government 2015)</p>	
<p><b>Skills</b>            lack of skills</p>	<p>new/different skills requirements</p>	<p>the notion of education as a business            education as producer of workers</p>	<p>other skills required than business skills            professional identities</p>	<p>careers            job descriptions            professionalisation and governing through training            buying services (PES)</p>	<p>training, FNAE</p>

(Continued)

**Table 2.** (Continued).

Sub- problematization	Presuppositions & assumptions (binaries, key concepts and categories)	History of the 'problem'	Silences	Effects produced	Production & dissemination
<b>Domestic market</b> closed/protected public system	education as business public vs private ecosystem	public – private division of roles in education, GATS	effects on public education, symmetry/asymmetry in PPP domestic 'quasi'-market vs open market	careers, jobs, networks	funding instruments FNAE support EF e.g. 'Koulutuspoliittinen selonteko' 2020

(HE=higher education, VE=vocational education, PES=public education system, EP=education policy, FNAE=Finnish National Agency for Education, KARVI= Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, EF=Education Finland, PPP=public-private partnership).

### ***What is the proposed change in the FGEE programme?***

The fundamental change which the FGEE programme seeks to affect is that Finland should become an exporter of education. This is the policy problem that the FGEE programme attempts to solve. It entails at least two basic assumptions (Q2). It is assumed that Finland – the FGEE speaks partly in very general terms about Finland – is not currently exporting education, and that the assessment of the market is correct – that is, that there is an international market that Finnish education can and should enter. The first FGEE document, MINEDU 2010, lays the foundation of the interpretation of the compatibility of education and markets. The broad definition of education export in the FGEE documents constructs education as a product in several ways (see the quotation on page 7) and places education in the category of industry. The measures and interventions which the FGEE programme proposes to effect education export reveal more about the policy problem’s representation. I discuss the notions of products and the construction of education export as an industry in the next two sections.

### ***The global, PISA, and the problem of demand as relevant***

The FGEE documents’ foundational claim (Q1 and Q2) is that even though the purpose of public education has not changed, the methods and work required to fulfil that purpose must be. Education export is used to illustrate the problem with public education. It is seen as driven by the global competition for talent. Education is simultaneously a central component of a nation’s competitiveness, which is based on the strength (competitiveness) of the knowledge society in the education market. The FGEE documents interpret this as an opportunity but also as an imperative that the public education sector needs to address. Opportunity in this context refers to financial opportunity, but as I discuss later, it also means the opportunity to uphold the welfare state. The demand/supply conceptualisation is also captured in the title of the first Finnish education export strategy:

*[From interest to demand and products. . .]* (MINEDU 2010b, translations by the author unless otherwise indicated).

The FGEE documents refer to the ideas of interest and demand, inability, and the need to respond to the demand on several occasions in the documents’ introduction:

*[There is an evident demand for Finnish expertise in the international education market. Despite significant international interest in the Finnish education system, no ready-made products exist, or none at least have been identified yet. In response to this interest. . .]* (MINEDU 2010a)

*[We are not fully exploiting these strengths and competitive potential]* (MINEDU 2013).

*[International interest in Finnish educational expertise is strong. Tuition fees for post-secondary education will open new opportunities for education export. . . Success will require the provision of education that meets demand, as well as marketing in countries with the ability to pay and as part of country brand work]* (MINEDU 2016a).

One of the foundational assumptions in the FGEE documents is that the international interest shown in Finnish education indicates a demand with ‘natural’ characteristics

(Q2). To accept many of the proposals which the FGEE documents make, it is important that the reader accepts the idea that demand is best served by selling something (cf. Bacchi 2009, 5). Combined with the global competition in which nations participate, demand constructs the discursive effect of the global contextual forces and the 'logic' which education export in the FGEE programme needs to follow (Q5).

The FGEE programme is explicit about education as a global trade of services (MINEDU 2010, 4) (Q2). The application of the logic of global trade to education is thus made a viable option. However, the FGEE programme does not indiscriminately open Finnish education to global competition. It merely wishes to export Finnish education globally (Q4). Throughout the FGEE programme the boundaries of Finnish education export are discursively produced. This discursive effect is pursued further later as I discuss the discourse of the 'domestic education market'.

The FGEE documents argue that Finland's PISA results have prompted the observed interest. The attention brought by the PISA 'success' is interpreted as offering potential for all the Finnish education system's sectors. Both Schatz (2016b) and Seppänen et al. (2019) have discussed this potential, linking education export and nation branding. The measures proposed, especially in the first two FGEE documents, MINEDU 2010 and MINEDU (2013), however, relate to HE. A considerable leap of faith is needed when using PISA results as an indirect argument for HE tuition fees (Q4). Furthermore, PISA results relate to Finland's entirely publicly funded and organised comprehensive education, but the logic of education export is to make a profit. In addition to the concept of demand, this problem representation builds on potential, a possible future and an opportunity, which is another discursive effect (Q5). How could we not agree that education has export potential? Schatz has problematised the use of PISA as an argument for the superiority of the entire education system and for inferring overall brand arguments (Schatz 2016a). Although Schatz studies education export through the branding lens, I also understand the use of PISA results as part of the background assumption of how the FGEE programme claims it is possible to interpret interest and demand. The FGEE presents good PISA results as a cause of the interest and infers from them the demand for Finnish education products. PISA is used here to further construct the onto-epistemological basis of demand, thus creating a profound knowledge claim (Q2). The 'problem' that Finland does not respond to the demand is forced onto public education. PISA is used to construct the Finnish education export's 'business case'. The PISA results are therefore both depicted as pressure on public education and as a marketing tool for education export. What can be seen is a particular use of PISA results in which they are employed not to understand education but to market it and to underline the inability to see the obvious: ranking success as an opportunity for education business. The thematic and domain of public education becomes intertwined with business. This problem representation sets the scene of the global reality to which the domestic system is supposed to adapt. The adaptation process is what the governmental rationality of education export underpins.

Although the FGEE documents construct demand as coming from outside Finland, the need for education export also has an internal or domestic imperative. This imperative is related to several themes which earlier research has also identified and analysed in Finnish education policy: internationalisation (Kauko and Medvedeva 2016; Nokkala 2007), quality (Juusola 2020), and financing

(Kauko and Medvedeva 2016). These themes can be seen as problems in need of a solution (Q1). Education export is presented as a partial solution, having several positive effects such as enhancing competitiveness (MINEDU 2020, 6), boosting vitality, helping stay on top (MINEDU 2020, 5), offering work opportunity, creating export income, financing the welfare services (MINEDU 2013, 9), and improving quality (MINEDU 2013, 10). These themes further construct the future-oriented discourse of the FGEE programme (Q5). This orientation can also be thematised as opportunity talk, which Jokila et al. (2019) have identified in international student recruitment, but also as a reform agenda, which Cai and Kivistö (2013) have proposed to characterise the revenue generation goal of education export in HE. The reform of vocational education (MINEDU 2016b) and the reorganisation of the National Board of Education as FNAE (MINEDU 2016a) are also considered an opportunity to advance education export. The discourse on laws as a hindrance (cf. Juusola 2020) and the representation of laws as fragmented are also reformist in nature. Laws as security or a system of guarantee of rights are absent (Q4). With the aforementioned ‘old problems’, which have already previously been connected with the general idea of national competitiveness (Q3), laws and regulations as a problem (see also the analysis of public procurement later in the paper) are now connected with the idea of educational commercial activities, selling education, and making a profit. With the combining of older features of the public education problem discourse with the opportunity and potential discourse and situating them all as bound by the abovementioned ‘facts’ of global competition, the commercialisation discourse of education in Finland is gathering momentum.

Revenue generation is linked to the lack of products which FGEE documents describe. The documents attribute this lack to not knowing the market, the inability to identify products, and in the more recent documents, their scalability. Turning education into products is thus seen as a technical operation requiring mainly business skills and better market knowledge (Q2). Education export products are defined as ‘services’ (MINEDU 2016b) which include both degrees, consultancy, and projects and electronic and other learning-related materials, games, and learning environments (e.g. school furniture or electronic teaching platforms). The training required to install, operate, and service a product or system from another branch of export industry can also be considered education export.

Although the FGEE documents refer to the success of Finnish society as strongly related to education, the implied embeddedness of education in other societal fields and processes is not seen as a challenge to the development of export products (Q4). This is one of the silences in the FGEE programme’s commercialisation discourse. Considered with how the FGEE programme defines the skills needed to productise education (discussed next), this silence is part of how education export reduces education’s complexity. The notion of product makes certain kinds of training natural for training education exporters. The product and skills discourse produces subjectification and lived effects, which I discuss next.



## **Skills, careers, and the domestic market: the resource management of education export**

Although some of the measures in the FGEE documents recognise the particularities of comprehensive education, secondary education, and HE, others conflate the different sectors. The interpretation of demand as a business opportunity (Q2) in the data is linked to the question of the kind of skills needed in the education sector. The FGEE documents define these skills as business skills. The data excerpts below exemplify FGEE programme documents' formulations that refer to a lack of skills and preferred career options.

*[It is difficult to detach staff from national tasks. Working as an international expert is not seen as a natural part of one's career development in the education sector and is not supported in studies]. (MINEDU 2010, 7)*

*[There's a lack of business skills among Finnish education export specialists] (MINEDU 2016a, 23).*

*[The lacks in competence in education export persist in education institutions] (MINEDU 2016b, 25).*

*[Skills in the sector have been promoted, for example, by launching specialisation training in education exports to attract new talent and benefit those already working in the sector] (FNAE 2020, 10).*

The lack of skills and inflexible staff policies are mainly connected with public education institutions (MINEDU 2010, 7) (Q1).

The proposed measure to solve the 'problem' of a lack of skills has materialised in publicly funded 30 ECTS credit specialisation programmes ('erikoistumiskoulutus'), the first of which was launched in 2018 (OAJ 2018) at the Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK 2018). The most recent professionalisation programme geared for education export opened in 2022 (Q6) (OMNIA 2022). These programmes have mainly targeted public sector education organisations, from preschools to universities and adult liberal education. The Ministry of Education defines the participant profiles in this training and finances the programmes.

Building professions through skills training is a standard process in governing states (cf. Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, 36). Skills training in the FGEE programme's proposals presents education export as part of individuals' professional qualifications, work, and professional identity, but also builds a field of specialist knowledge. The kind of specialisation training which the FGEE programme proposes has similarities with professional and vocational further education for workforce creation. Combined with the notion of a domestic market, the FGEE programme's skills discourse is not solely based on the traditional education policy field. It can be seen as a hybrid of education and industrial policy (cf. Warwick 2013 for features of industrial policy). Subjectification effects in this problem representation produce workers who are tasked with learning new skills to work in education export.

Even though the FGEE programme is in many ways a top-down policy, individual education workers can interpret the opportunities the programme creates in their own ways. In their case study Juusola and Rähkä (2018) have shown that teachers see the opportunity created by an education export project as career enhancing. From the governmental rationality perspective careers are a discourse that integrates the goals of the state, the employer, and the worker. The FGEE programme produces the option of an ‘education exporter’ as a category in public education (Q5), which can be seen as the production of flexible professional self-governance. Training in this context is a practice in which the production of a particular kind of career identity is structured through specialist knowledge of business skills and an opportunity for the participants to form communities and networks.

The proliferation of education export creates teachers with varying types of work contracts, salary systems, social security arrangements, pension plans, and so on. Bearing in mind the FGEE programme’s concern about the success of Finland in global competition, the training of education export specialists prepares the public educator to participate in the global education market which the FGEE programme deems the relevant context in which nations compete. Success in this competition thus becomes a shared responsibility to which an individual education worker also contributes – or, in the event of failure, in which they are implicated.

The notions of competition and market form the overarching context of the problem representations related to public education in the FGEE documents. Measures connected with the creation and support of a domestic market become more tangible as 2020 approaches.

*[A well-working home market is a precondition for successful exports]* (MINEDU 2010, 9).

*[One challenge for export companies that aren’t part of an education institution has been that there hasn’t always been a demand for their new products in the domestic market. . .]* (MINEDU 2013, 32).

*[However, there should be more opportunities to experiment and test new education services, products, and approaches in the domestic market]* (MINEDU 2016a, 20)

*[. . . often require a national reference from the home country. Without such a track record in the domestic market, it is difficult to gain confidence in products or services offered elsewhere]* (MINEDU 2016b, 23).

*[Without activity in the domestic market the need for capital from export-oriented firms will be a problem]* (FNAE 2020, 10).

The FGEE documents’ focus on the domestic market assumes that education export cannot be considered as something separate from domestic public education (Q2). Although this may be a normal situation in many societies, Finland’s long free public education tradition has not produced transparent governance structures capable of organising public – private participation in education, apart from the provision of early childhood education (FNAE 2022) (Q3).

However, the FGEE programme is articulate and explicit about the idea of creating a domestic market with features such as public involvement in educational product development (MINEDU 2016a, 6), education institutions assuming risks of business operations

(MINEDU 2010, 14), public procurement to assist education export companies in acquiring references (MINEDU 2016a, 20), and public- and private-sector cooperation to ensure the capital investment required for the growth of education companies (FNAE 2020, 10). As mentioned in the previous section, the FGEE programme also makes suggestions for how public education institutions should accommodate education export to their employees' careers and work plans (MINEDU 2016a, 18). These measures resemble traditional industrial policy measures (cf. Warwick 2013 for features of industrial policy) (Q3). Furthermore, the generalising nature of the statement in the first data sample above seems to indicate that the proposed rule – *'A well-working home market is a precondition for exports'* – is a general rule applying to any exports. It is claimed that education as export follows the same rules as any export industry (Q2). In this sense education export is one of the tools in a small trading nation's toolbox, and the governmental rationality of export industries becomes relevant. Exports and export industries play a particular role in the Finnish economy. They receive government support in various ways, and the national economy depends strongly on it. Export industries also typically set the roof for the possible pay rises across all industries and services, including the public sector, as a result of collective bargaining. The relative autonomy, self-governance, and research base of education and teaching can become a problem in a field which is part of an export industry – part of global competition.

The financial mechanisms which the FGEE documents also deal with merit attention, as they are connected with the programme's governmental rationality. The FGEE documents present public procurement rules as a problem for Finnish education export companies' financing and for acquiring much-needed references for the international market. This can be seen as part of the governmental rationality of education export: the state can open public education through public procurement to new functions such as the function as a platform, laboratory, and raw material for education export. How public education as a laboratory or testing ground is conceived was also present in the action plan for key projects and reforms of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's government (Government 2015: 26–27) and in Finland's digitalisation agenda (cf. Seppänen et al. 2023, 137–155). Public education providers procuring services and goods with the purpose of boosting education export companies can be considered an indirect subsidisation of private companies (Q5). Although the FGEE documents do not consider the public procurement of privately produced goods and services problematic, they are also concerned about keeping public education institutions' public and export finances strictly separate (MINEDU 2016b, 25) (see also Kauko and Medvedeva 2016, 103). An important division is made here: the state has the authority to decide whether public money is used to support the private accrual of profit, but the public money allocated to a public institution must not be used in this way (Q2). Finally, public education institutions should also not gain an undeserved advantage over private providers in the international education market, and nor should they create market anomalies and strive for an unprofitable business which will eventually burden taxpayers (MINEDU 2016a, 30). The interesting notion of a level playing field or fairness is also at play here (Q2). The FGEE programme constructs a problem of trust in public education institutions' capacity to manage the finances of education as export. This underlines the state's oversight or control role and the accountability responsibility of public education (Q2).

It is the problem representation of inflexibility that unites the themes of careers, skills, and the domestic market. The governmental rationality underpinning this is the relative withdrawal of the traditional regulation, oversight, and ensuring of government. Instead, the role

of public government and administration is to ensure the public education system does not cause problems to business, and that it actively supports education export.

### **Conclusions: governmental rationalities of export and education**

Education export in the form it is understood and established in the FGEE programme is based on representing the public education system as having particular kinds of problems. Whereas globalisation was used in the past to point out ‘... the discrepancy between the national situation and international trends’ in HE (Kauko and Medvedeva 2016, 101), in the FGEE programme this discrepancy argument is also applied to other parts of the Finnish education system. The management of this discrepancy can be understood as a governmental rationality which in the FGEE programme is powered through the discursive constructs of the public – private and global – national. In the FGEE programme discourse public education maintains the welfare state especially by creating the competitive potential of the country and acting as a feeder for education business. It feeds labour, ideas, and testing opportunities for businesses. These roles are subordinate to business. Governmental coordination is tuned to deregulation, and new public education sectors are incorporated into education export. Established governmental bodies – FNAE, embassies, working groups, and foreign trade promotion trips – and existing practices – targeted specialisation training, budget allocations to educational organisations, top-up bonuses for foreign graduates, and regional development funds – are repurposed for the promotion and facilitation of education export. As Kiesi (2023) has also shown, public and private sectors increasingly collaborate as a network. The loose and broad definition of education export can be understood as a source of power. It produces differences such as how HE export income (tuition fees) and vocational education export income (commissioned degree education) are dealt with through very different regulations.

The global market and competition are constructed as facts in the education export discourse. In contrast, the domestic market is something which can be influenced, which the FGEE programme seeks to do. As a resource, public education must be replenished and cultivated to enable education to be exported. A governmental rationality targeting different education sectors – comprehensive, secondary, and HE – with specific measures thus conflates different education sectors into what I tentatively call the ‘basic production of a knowledge society’ which is needed to participate in the global education market with education products. In this rationality the problem of laws and tuition fees, the lack of products, networks and skills, and the non-functional domestic education market can and must be solved because they are connected with the basic production in the national ecosystem, which is in turn connected with the global education market. In the discourse of the FGEE programme the global economy is the relevant context which an individual society must navigate. With these considerations in mind the argument that education has become an economy in itself (Cone and Brøgger 2020) appears an interesting research agenda to pursue next.

### **Notes**

1. The Programme for International Student Assessment is a programme run by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, <https://www.oecd.org/about/>). It measures the use of reading, mathematics, and science knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds. See: <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/>.)

2. GATS: The General Agreement on Trade in Services.
3. KONE Corporation, <https://www.kone.com/en/>
4. Planmeca, <https://www.planmeca.com/>

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## Appendix 1

The policy documents analysed as “practical texts”

ABREVIATION	DOCUMENT
MINEDU (2010b)	From interest to demand and products. Finnish education export strategy. Publications of the Ministry of Education and Culture. 2010:11. Helsinki: Ministry of Education and Culture.
MINEDU (2013)	International education markets and Finland. Report of the working group for promoting education exports. Reports of the Ministry of Education and Culture. 2013:9. Helsinki: Ministry of Education and Culture.
MINEDU (2016a)	Roadmap for education export 2016–2019. Publications of the Ministry of Education and Culture. 2016:9. Helsinki: Ministry of Education and Culture
MINEDU (2016b)	Measures to promote education export in secondary education. Publications of the Ministry of Education and Culture. 2016:9. Helsinki: Ministry of Education and Culture. Helsinki: Ministry of Education and Culture.
FNAE (2020)	Roadmap for education export 2020–2023. Reports of the Finnish national agency for education 2020: 8. Helsinki: Finnish National Agency for Education.