

## SECRET TO FINLAND'S EDUCATION SUCCESS: A REFLECTION FOR EDUCATION IN INDONESIA (A LITERATURE REVIEW)

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### Abstract

Finland has emerged as the top-scoring of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on the Program of International Student Achievement (PISA) assessment since 2000. Its secondary school students regularly achieve high scores in PISA tests. Finland has one of the world's best performing education systems. The gap between the highest and lowest students within schools is not significant. Many researches have been conducted by researchers from various countries to investigate the Finland's education success. As a developing country, Indonesia is one of the lowest-scoring OECD nation on PISA. Finland's education could be a model for Indonesia. This study is aimed to present the secret of Finland's education success and to compare with Indonesian educational system. Based on the analysis, the most probable factors as the key elements that has impacted Finland's education success are excellent teachers, and appropriate curriculum and educational system. The writers try to propose solutions for Indonesian teachers and Indonesian educational system policy makers to be used as a reference.

**Keywords:** Finland's Education, Excellent Teachers, Indonesian Educational System

### Introduction

With its high levels of educational achievement and attainment, Finland is regarded as one of the world's most literate societies. More than 98 % attend pre-school classes; 99 % complete compulsory basic education; and 94 % of those who start the academic strand of upper secondary school graduate. Completion rates in vocational upper secondary school also reach close to 90 % (Sahlberg, 2010; Statistics Finland, 2010; Välijärvi & Sahlberg, 2008).

Sahlberg (2010) and OECD (2014) add since it emerged in 2000 as the highest scorer of Organization for Economic CO-operation and Development(OECD) nation on the international PISA (Programme for International Student Assesment) which is held once in three years, researchers have been pouring into the country to study theFinland's education success. How did a country with an undistinguished education system in the 1980s surge to the head of the global class in just few decades? Research and experience suggest one element trumps all others: excellent teachers. This policy

brief examines the crucial role that teachers and teacher education have played in the dramatic transformation of Finland's education system.

The mind set of the society toward teachers pfofession is really good. Education has always been an integral part of Finnish culture and society, and teachers currently enjoy great respect and trust in Finland. Finns regard teaching as a noble, prestigious profession similar with medicine, law, or economics.

Until the 1960s the level of educational achievement in Finland was rather low. Only 1 out of 10 adult Finns in that time completed more than nine years of basic education; achieving a university degree was an uncommon attainment (Sahlberg, 2010; Sahlberg, 2007). At that time, the education level of Finnish was comparable to Malaysia or Peru, and left behind its Scandinavian neighbors like Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Today, Finland is publicly recognized the value of its teachers and trusts their professional judgments in schools. Without excellent teachers

Finland's current international success will be impossible.

## **Factors that impact Finland Success**

### **1. The Teacher**

Among young Finns, teaching is consistently the most admired profession in regular opinion polls of high school graduates. There are only eight universities which have Department of Teacher Education. Becoming a primary school teacher in Finland is a very competitive process, and only Finland's best and brightest are able to fulfill those professional dreams. They must have the highest scores and excellent interpersonal skills. Annually only about 1 in every 10 applicants will be accepted to study to become a teacher in Finnish primary schools, for example. Among all categories of teacher education, about 5,000 teachers are selected from about 20,000 applicants (Sahlberg:2010).

The entry requirement for permanent employment as a teacher in all Finnish basic and high schools today is a master's degree. Preschool and kindergarten teachers must have a bachelors degree. Salary is not the main reason young people become teachers in Finland. More important than salaries are such factors as high social prestige, professional autonomy in schools, and other social benefits.

All teachers hold master's degrees. Primary school teachers major in education, while upper grade teachers concentrate their studies in a particular subject, e.g., mathematics, as well as didactics, consisting of pedagogical content knowledge specific to that subject.

Candidates in primary teacher education study three main areas: (1) the theory of education, (2) pedagogical content knowledge, and (3) subject didactics and practice. Each student completes a master's thesis. Prospective primary school teachers normally complete their theses in the field of education. Secondary teachers select a topic within their subject. The level of academic expectations for teacher education

is similar for all teachers, from elementary to high school.

A broad-based curriculum ensures that newly prepared Finnish teachers possess balanced knowledge and skills in both theory and practice. It also means that prospective teachers possess deep professional insight into education from several perspectives, including educational psychology and sociology, curriculum theories, assessment, special-needs education, and pedagogical content knowledge in selected subject areas.

Educational theories, research methodologies and practice play an important part in preparation programs. Finnish students also learn the skills of how to design, conduct, and present original research on practical or theoretical aspects of education. Another important element of Finnish research-based teacher education is practical training in schools, which is a key component of the curriculum, integrated with research and theory.

Teaching practice is integrated into both theoretical and methodological studies. Over the five-year program, candidates advance from basic practice to advanced practice and then to final practice. During each of these phases, students observe lessons by experienced teachers, practice teaching observed by supervisory teachers, and deliver independent lessons to different groups of pupils while being evaluated by supervising teachers and Department of Teacher Education professors and

Finnish teachers who are master degree have the right to participate in post-graduate studies to supplement their professional development. Many teachers take advantage of the chance to get doctoral studies in education. For doctoral studies in education, students must complete advanced studies in the educational sciences. This means that subject teachers much change their focus from their initial academic concentration, e.g., biology to education, so that they not only understand their subject expertly, but also how the content of the subject can be better taught.

## 2. The Curriculum and Education System

The educational system in Finland today consists of an optional pre-school year at age six, followed by nine-year basic school (*peruskoulu*)—a six-year primary school and a three-year lower secondary school (junior high school)—compulsory to all. This is followed by voluntary three-year upper secondary education with two streams: general and vocational education. Content experts and subject-focused teachers provide instruction in the upper grades of basic school as well as at the upper-secondary level.

While the National Curriculum Framework for Basic School and similar documents for upper secondary education provide guidance to teachers, curriculum planning is the responsibility of schools and municipalities. The school-level curriculum is approved by local education authorities and teachers and school principals play a key role in curriculum design. Teacher education provides them with well developed curriculum knowledge and planning skills. Moreover, the importance of curriculum design in teacher practice has helped shift the focus of professional development from fragmented in-service training towards more systemic, theoretically grounded schoolwide improvement efforts.

According to *fillingmaps.com* (2014) there are some characteristic of Finnish education system as explained below:

### *Less Testing And More Learning*

The Finnish education system does not employ external standardized student testing to drive the performance of schools; neither does it employ a rigorous inspection system. Instead of test-based accountability, the Finnish system relies on the expertise and accountability of teachers who are knowledgeable and committed to their students.

The teachers have time to teach skills that allow students to develop into individuals who know how to start a project and work systematically to accomplish a

goal. They have time to teach craft education where students get to learn how to do real life skills like sewing, cooking, cleaning, woodworking and more! And while they are learning these amazing skills they are also learning math and problem solving and how to follow directions.

### *Do Not Use Standardized Test*

Finnish schools do not use standardized testing to determine student success. There are three primary reasons for this. First, while assessment practice is well-grounded in the national curriculum, education policy in Finland gives a high priority to individualized education and creativity as an important part of how schools operate. Therefore the progress of each student in school is judged more against his or her individual progress and abilities rather than against statistical indicators. Second, education developers insist that curriculum, teaching, and learning should drive teachers' practice in schools, rather than testing. Student assessment in Finnish schools is embedded in the teaching and learning process and used to improve both teachers' and students' work throughout the academic year. Third, determining students' academic performance in Finland is seen as a responsibility of the school, not the external assessors. Finnish schools accept that there may be some limitations on comparability when teachers do all the grading of students. Finnish teachers must design and conduct appropriate curriculum-based assessments to document student progress, classroom assessment and school-based evaluation are important parts of teacher education and professional development.

### *Fewer Topics And More Depth*

In Finland, teachers take their time. They look deeper into the topic and don't panic if they are a little behind. There are no tests. There is no need to rush through. The students get to actually understand the material before they are forced on to a new topic.

### *Fewer Instruction Hours And More Planning Time*

Teachers have shorter days as well. Also, teachers and students in Finland are not expected to be at school when they do not have a class. This system allows the Finnish teacher more time to plan and think about each lesson. It allows them to create great, thought provoking lessons. Although Finnish teachers' work consists primarily of classroom teaching, many of their duties lay outside of class. Formally, teacher's working time in Finland consists of classroom teaching, preparation for class, and two hours a week planning school work with colleagues. From an international perspective, Finnish teachers devote less time to teaching than do teachers in many other nations. For example, a typical middle school teacher in Finland teaches just less than 600 hours annually, corresponding to about four 45-minute lessons a day.

### *Less Time in School And More Rest*

Students typically start school between 9:00 and 9:45. Schools cannot begin before 9:00 am because research has consistently proved that adolescents need quality sleep in the morning. The school day usually ends by 2:00 or 2:45. This overall system allows both students and teachers to be well rested and ready to teach/learn.

### *Fewer Classes And More Breaks*

Students have several breaks/recesses/snack times during the day and these usually happen outside come rain or shine. These 15 to 20 minute gives them time to digest what they are learning, use their muscles, stretch their legs, get some fresh air and let out the "wiggles."

The teachers also have these breaks. In Finland these rooms are always full of teachers who are either working, preparing, grabbing a cup of coffee, or simply resting, socializing, and mentally preparing for their next class.

### *Less Homework And More Participation*

According to the OECD, Finnish students have the least amount of homework in the world. They average under half an hour of homework a night. Finnish students typically do not have outside tutors or lessons either. This is especially shocking when you realize Finnish students are outscoring the high performing Asian nations whose students receive hours of additional/outside instruction.

Teachers feel that what the students are able to do in school is enough. Again, there is not pressure to have them do more than what is necessary for them to learn a skill. Often the assignments are open-ended and not really graded. Yet, the students work on it in class diligently. It is very interesting to see what happens to the students when they are given something to do. The students who were not listening to the lesson at all put away their phones and start working on the task set before them. Even if it is just a suggested assignment, they give it their full attention up to the end of class. It is almost like there is an unspoken agreement.

### **The Comparison Between Finland and Indonesiain Education**

According to Khasya (2016) education in Findland and Indonesia is strongly different in many aspects. It can be seen from the very far PISA rank between the two countries, where Finland is the best and Indonesia is still below the international average of 500. Here are some comparisons between Finland and Indonesia in term of education:

1. Finnish students annually come to school 190 days. On the other hand, Indonesian students study study at school 230 days (it is one of the country with the highest amount of days used for studying at school). Indonesian thinks that the more students come to school, the smarter they will be.
2. Finland adopts the Humanistic learning system that emphasizes their students to combine theory and

- practice as well as placing students as independent object, but accompanied by a sense of responsibility, learning is conducted by using dialogical, reflective and expressive approach. So that they have ability of the problem solving. While the Indonesian education system is a theoretical behavioristic which emphasizes theory and learning with the stimulus-response method, and place students as an individual who is passive.
3. Finnish give lessons not through lectures, but by asking the participants to actively seek learning materials, teachers only give direction. So that participants know more in real about what they are looking for. In Indonesia, the lecture method is still used, and do not give more chance for students to be active.
  4. In contrast to Education in Finland, Indonesia still use standardized test that we call Ujian Nasional (UN). It's different with Finnish education system, good result in testing is the orientation of the learning process that determine the success and prestige of a school. It makes students always think how to pass the exam rather than their skill and knowledge mastery.
  5. Finland does not use the term ranking and promoted to the next grade because there will be psychological problems among those who get highest and lowest rank. There is no students left behind in Finland education system because they focus on the individual progress of the students. While in Indonesia, ranking and promotion to the next grade is used to motivate students.
  6. The atmosphere of education in Finland is more convenient and flexible. They do not oblige the students to apply uniform. They study with a cozy atmosphere. While in Indonesia, educated people are marked with a "uniform".
  7. Education facilities in Finland provide counseling for students who have special needs. While in Indonesia, the school did not want to be bothered by it. In addition, the nutritional intake of students in Finland very concerned to support the understanding of the materials and in Indonesia students mostly buy snacks only if they get a break time.
  8. Finland is very concerned about nutrition for their students. Schools provide a nutritious lunch, ranging from milk, bread, pasta, smoked fish, and soups. All are provided free by school. While in Indonesia, in break time, students mostly buy snacks even they usually buy them in untrusted food seller which is unhealthy and sometime dangerous.
  9. In Finland there is no segregation system, meaning all levels of society can feel the same facilities, free education starting from primary education to universities. Government even provide shuttle buses for primary school pupils. If there is no shuttle bus, a government subsidy money for students' transportation. While in Indonesia, the rich deserve better, while the less fortunate are not so considered, even drop out of school. Although the government has promoted a 12-year fair with the slogan "free" but still many other charges made by the school. So, the word "free" was deemed useless because still have a lot of money spent for other expenses.
  10. In Finland, there is no caste of school. Private schools get the same amount of funds to public schools. Meanwhile, in Indonesia there are grouping students in regular classes and class for clever child, the child class sluggish Indonesian language and bilingual classes (English as the

language of instruction) and make caste schools (national standard, national plus schools, and international schools.

11. In Finland, English is taught from the third grade of elementary school. On the other hand, English in Indonesia is compulsory taught in the first grade of senior high school.
12. Teachers in Finland have their authority to choose and plan their teaching materials. Whereas, in Indonesia teachers should follow the model provided by the government.
13. In Finland all teachers must have master degree and the 10 best graduates of the university, while we still confuse to improve teacher qualifications that are equivalent to undergraduate (S1), and still receive the prospective teachers who graduate with mediocre grades.
14. Finnish reduce the test to be as little as possible. While in Indonesia, students saddled with lots of tests.
15. Homework is still given but only takes a maximum of half an hour. In contrast, in Indonesia homework is very important to make students get used to discipline. Even in some schools, no day without homework.

### **Suggestions for Teachers**

Teachers in Indonesia can not adopt all what Finnish teachers do, because we have different society and government policy. But of course we are really possible to apply some of the ways done by teachers in Finland such as:

1. Focus on the students performance and progress, do not state students' testing achievement and curriculum as target. Because we serve students, not curriculum.
2. Create comfortable and save atmosphere in the classroom in order to raise students confident to actively involve in class activities.
3. We should not give too much homework and testing to the students

and give more time portion for learning process.

4. Do not judge students based on their achievement, but appreciate them based on their progress. So, they compete with themselves not their friends.
5. We should not deliver lessons through lectures only. Ask the students to actively look for the materials and we only give clear direction. So that students know more in real about what they are looking for.
6. We should teach skills that allow students to develop into individuals who know how to start a project and work systematically to accomplish a goal.

### **Conclusion**

Most researchers and analysts say that excellent teachers play a very important role in the success of Finnish in developing education. Some of the successful practices that can be taken from Finland are:

1. The government of Finland is really successful to create well organized education system.
2. The development of precise research based teacher education programs that prepare teachers in content, pedagogy, and educational theory, as well as the capacity to do their own research, and that include field work mentored by expert.
3. Significant financial support for teacher education, professional development, reasonable and equitable salaries, and comfortable and supportive working atmosphere.
4. The amount of universities that provide teacher education department is only eight. So, it is really possible to create similar standard of graduate and teachers' with strong competence.
5. The creation of a respected profession in which teachers have considerable authority including responsibility to design curriculum and student assessment, which engages them in

the ongoing analysis and refinement of practice.

6. Indonesian teachers are really possible to see Finnish teachers' success as a perfect model and try to apply the strategies which are possible to be applied by us.

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