
Finland Education Success

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

DOI:

[10.30595/pssh.v8i.608](https://doi.org/10.30595/pssh.v8i.608)

Submitted:

August 25, 2022

Accepted:

December 23, 2022

Published:

January 26, 2023

Keywords:

Finnish Education, Starts
from Preliminary, Principle

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ABSTRACT

The success of Finnish education has been recognized worldwide and has become an interesting study material from planning to implementation. This paper explains how the Finnish education system starts from preliminary to higher education and the outputs and outcomes it produces.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Finland is one of the northern European countries that has a tradition of the highest quality education in the world. Finland is ranked first for the *Human Capital Index* based on *The Human Capital Report 2015* issued by the *World Economic Forum*. An education system that has been tested for 150 years proves that the progress of the education system is coherent with economic and scientific progress. This paper will show about:

- Finnish educational principles and policies
- Finland's education system
- The impact of Finland's educational and economic systems and policies.

2. FINNISH EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Education is a basic human right for all Finnish citizens. The main objective of Finland's education policy is to ensure that all its citizens have equal educational opportunities regardless of age, domicile, financial condition, gender or language.

First, every province in Finland provides full guarantees for every citizen (including immigrants) to get basic education for free; each province also implements compulsory education. Second, the competent authorities also ensure equal education guarantees for every resident to receive special education based on their physical and psychological abilities as well as those with special needs to develop for those who have economic constraints other than basic education.

The competent authorities are obliged to provide the necessary education for every resident of Finland including those who speak the Swedish language to obtain the same rights. The education provided uses the language of instruction based on the *mother language* each. The use of the language of instruction is regulated by law based on the level of education. Especially for the Province of Åland, whose entire population speaks Swedish, it has its own Education Law

Finland's education development policy is *lifelong education*. The principle of education implies that every resident has the same skills and learning opportunities to develop knowledge and skills in a diverse environment throughout life. Based on this point of view, education policy is integrated with public policy, especially with regard to education and training. This aims to align with the government's goals for equal distribution of education and education levels for the entire population.

The keys to Finland's education policy are quality, efficiency, equity and globality. This is directed at increasing the nation's competitiveness and the welfare of its population. Education is one of the main keys to achieving this goal. In addition, Finland's education policy is in line with the 2020 EU policy strategy.

Decisions on the content of the law on education and research are made by the legislature based on government proposals. The Government and the Ministry of Education and Culture, are responsible for preparing and implementing education and policies related to the development of science.

Government program is an *action plan* that is agreed upon by all education stakeholders, as policy makers. In the *action plan* it was agreed that the competitiveness of the workforce requires a *well-functioning education system*. The world's best comprehensive education system will be strengthened to ensure that benefits are equal for every citizen. The Finnish education system aims to make its population highly professional, in the fields of higher education and research, through research and development and innovation.

The education guarantee for youth is part of the guarantee from the government for youth to continue their education or training after taking basic education. Skills programs are regularly provided to them. It is intended that youths aged less than 30 years not only get basic education, but also have *vocational qualifications* needed by the world of work. This program has been implemented since 2013 as a form of equality in education.

3. FINNISH EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SYSTEM

An important key of educational development planning is to introduce equality of education at every level of education. One of the efforts made to reduce the differences between schools, for example by developing a financing system. The Education and Research Development Plan promotes equity and is an important document of Finland's education and research policy. The development plan is adopted by the government every four years, and directs the implementation of educational and research policy objectives in the development of the Government Programme. The Development Plan covers all forms of education from early childhood to higher education as well as research conducted at universities and polytechnics.

The main objectives of the Development Plan include:

- a. Promote equality in education,
- b. Improving the quality of education at all levels and;
- c. Supports lifelong learning.

One of the basic tenets of Finland's education policy is that all residents should have equal access to high-quality education and training. Equal educational opportunities should be available to all. The focus in the 2011-2016 period is on alleviating poverty, socio-economic inequality, stabilizing the community's economy and promoting sustainable economic growth, employment and competitiveness of citizens regardless of their ethnic origin, age, domicile and social level.

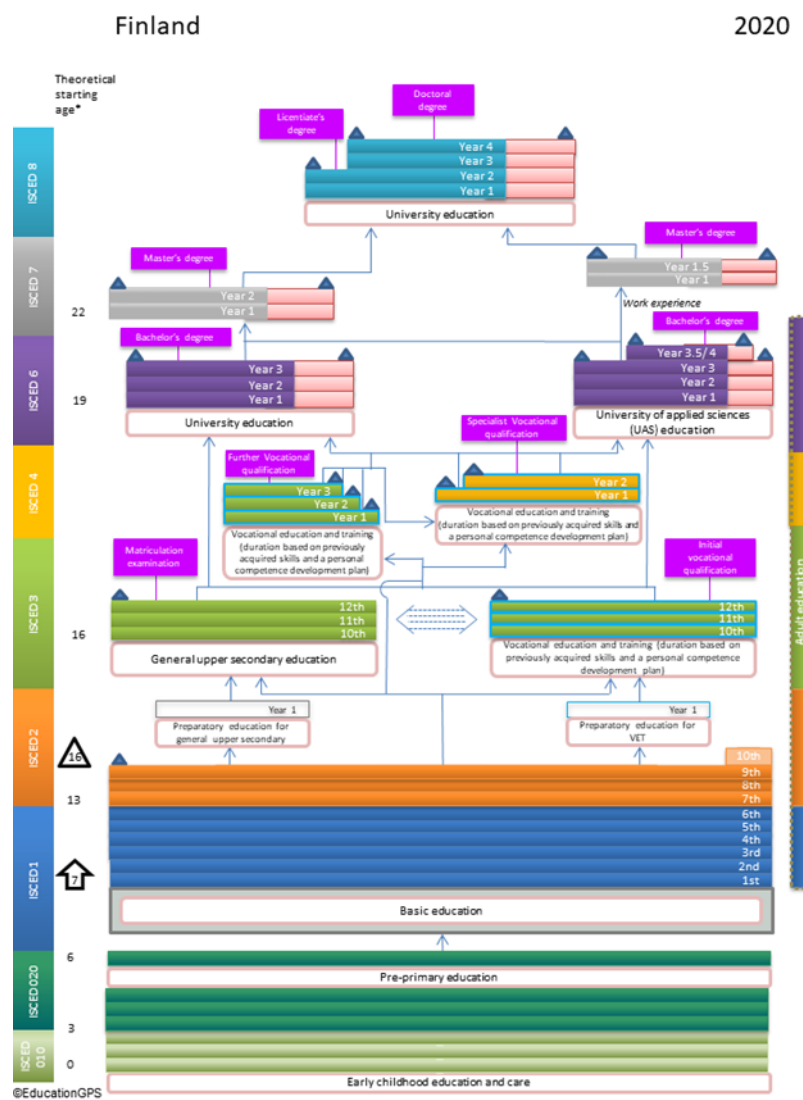
4. PRE-PRIMARY AND ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Pre-primary Education

Pre-primary education is compulsory education given when children are 6 years old. Pre-primary is provided in day care centers and in schools. In pre-primary education, children will gain basic skills, knowledge and learning abilities that are different from early childhood education and adapted to their age and abilities. In this phase learning through play is very important.

Compulsory education begins when a child is seven years old. For one year before *compulsory education* begins, children can participate in early childhood education. Local authorities may provide early childhood education in schools, day care centers, and family care homes or at other appropriate places. Participation in early childhood education is voluntary but the city government is obliged to provide early childhood education. 99.4% of children aged 6-7 years who entered early childhood education were recorded in 2009, while around 70% of these children also attended *day care*.

The aim of early childhood education is that the child enhances learning abilities to learn skills and positive self-image, acquire basic skills, knowledge and abilities from different areas of learning according to their age and abilities.



Basic education

Compulsory education begins when a child has the seventh birthday, except for children who need special education. The scope of the basic education syllabus is nine years, and almost all children complete their education by attending comprehensive schools. Basic education is provided free of charge. Similarly, textbooks and other teaching materials and students get free food every day. In addition, health checks and other services are provided free of charge as well. For students whose homes are far from school (more than 5 km) or travel is considered dangerous, they are entitled to free transportation services. If the daily commute time exceeds three hours, students are entitled to use a bed and stay in a dormitory. The local government assigns a school location for each student based on the distance from their home, but parents are free to choose a comprehensive school according to their preferences, with some restrictions.

Finnish primary education uses a single structure, ie there is no division of primary and junior secondary education. Lessons are usually given by the same grade teacher for most of the subjects in the first six-year grades and by subject teachers in the last three years. The school year consists of 190 days between mid-August and early June. Schools run five days a week, and the minimum number of lessons per week varies from 19 to 30 hours of lessons, depending on the level and number of optional subjects taken. The schedule of daily and weekly activities is decided by each school. In addition, there is regional autonomy regarding additional holidays.

The aim of Finnish primary education is to support the growth of students' humanity and sense of responsibility to society and to provide them with the knowledge and skills they need in life. Education should promote learning and equality in society and acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for their future development. Education also aims to ensure equality in education across the country.

The thinking held by education in Finland is that the potential of each student must be maximized. Therefore, educational guidance is seen as important. Guidance and counseling aims to support, assist and guide students and students so that all of them can do their best in their studies and are able to make right and right decisions regarding their education and career.

Guidance and counseling is seen as the job of all education personnel. Thus, teachers are required to guide children and adolescents as individuals and help them to continue their education according to their own abilities. Students must also feel success and happiness in learning. Today all students have the right to educational support. This support can be in the form of remedial or support for students with special needs.

Education of children with special needs is generally provided in conjunction with general education (inclusive education). The education policy in Finland is to provide special needs education, especially in general education. If students cannot study in regular learning groups, then the person concerned has the right to attend the education of children with special needs. This education is provided in regular schools wherever possible. All school-age students must have the right to high-quality educational support and guidance and support. Intensive support should be given to students who need special treatment in order to be able to learn well. The goal is to prevent existing problems from becoming more serious or widespread. If these children are not adequately educated in general, they should be given special support. The main purpose of this special support is to provide equal opportunities with others to complete compulsory education and have the right to continue on to senior secondary education. Support for students with special needs is also provided in senior secondary education. In vocational education and training, students need that special needs education is provided on an individual basis. In the plan, the details of graduate qualifications, certain observable requirements and support measures are provided for students.

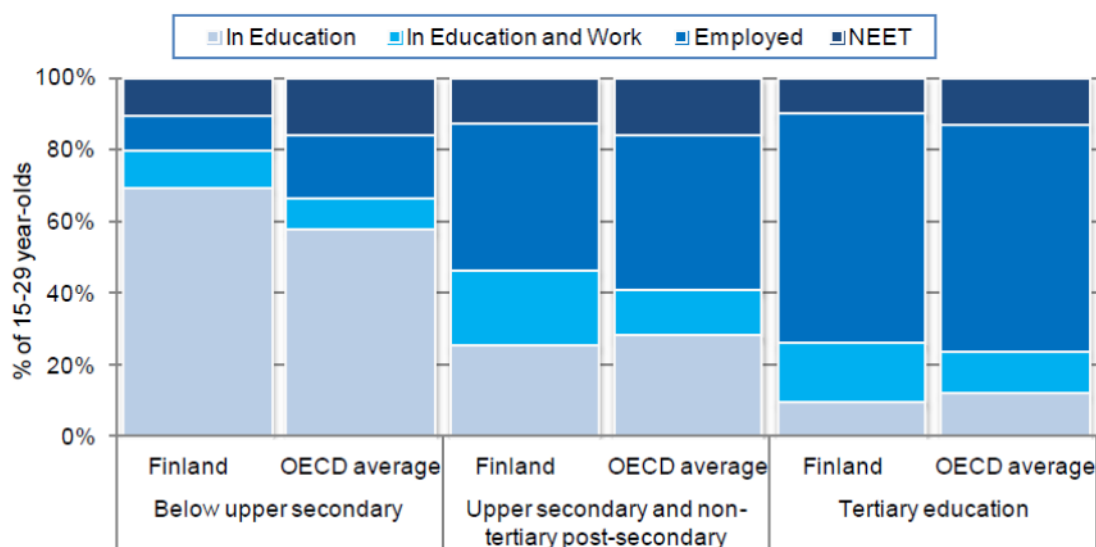
Efforts made to support minorities and immigrants, are the use of the two official languages, namely Finnish and Swedish. About five percent of students in primary and upper secondary education attend schools that use Swedish instruction. Both groups have their own language institutes included in higher education levels. In addition there are educational institutions where all or at least some of the instruction is given in a foreign language, most commonly in English. The local government was also asked to provide education in the Sami language in the Province of Lapland. Language preservation was taken to ensure educational opportunities for Roma residents and other minorities as well as for people who use sign languages. Educational institutions can for example apply for additional funds to organize instruction in the official national language for Roma, Sami and migrant children and for the learning process in students' mother tongues. Educational institutions also provide preparatory education for immigrants to enable them to enter primary or senior secondary education.

5. LIFELONG EDUCATION

The Finnish education system lasts a lifetime. Students can always continue their studies to a higher level of education, whatever their choice. To support this, the government has developed a system that recognizes previous learning outcomes to avoid unnecessary overlap in continuing studies. Finland has a long history of participation and promotion of adult education. Senior secondary education was introduced in 1889. Adult education is very popular, as evidenced by the statistically high participation rate internationally.

The main objectives of adult education policy are to ensure the availability and competence of the workforce, provide educational opportunities for the entire adult population and strengthen social cohesion and equity. These goals should support efforts to extend productive working life, increase productivity, create conditions for lifelong learning and promote multiculturalism. Educational institutions provide education and training aimed at adults at all levels of education. Efforts have been made to make provisions as flexible as possible to allow adults to learn along with work. Adult education consists of education and training leading to the award of a degree or certificate. They follow the core curriculum and national qualification requirements.

Figure 4. Percentage of 15-29 year-olds in education and not in education, by educational attainment and work status, 2011



NEET: Neither Employed, nor in Education and Training

Source: OECD (2013), *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eaq-2013-en>.

6. EDUCATIONAL AUTONOMY IN FINLAND

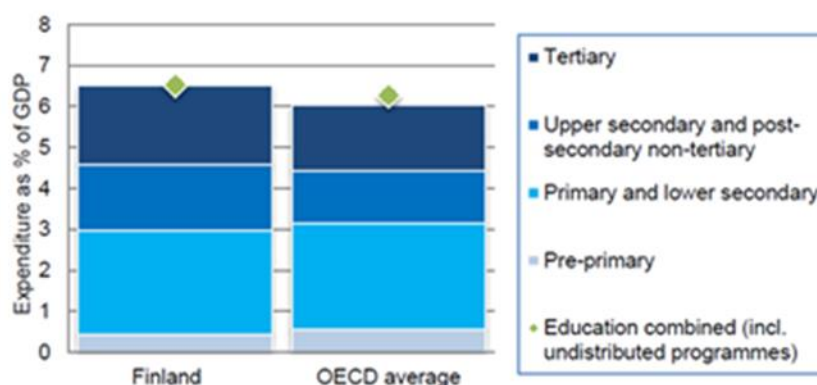
Education in Finland is the responsibility of the government from *pre-primary* to higher education. For *pre-primary* and basic education, textbooks, daily meals and transportation for students living far from school are provided free of charge. While in secondary education and higher education, students or their parents buy their own textbooks. In secondary education students have the right to free food and higher education is subsidized by the state.

Adult education is the only form of education that may require payment. To ensure learning opportunities for everyone there is a well developed system of research grants and loans. Financial aid may be provided for full-time study at a high school, vocational institution or higher education institution.

Pre-primary education to higher education in Finland is free, mainly using government funding sources. Most secondary, primary and general education institutions are funded by state and local governments. City governments receive funds according to a formula that balances the proportion of the population and socio-economic status; they decide democratically how to distribute funds in different areas, including education. Private institutions also receive public funding (with enrollment of 5% or less of primary and secondary students and 18% of senior secondary students). Funds for early childhood education and basic education are included in the transfer of basic services from the central government to the city, and the city government can decide how the funds are allocated. Funding for senior secondary education and VET is available based on the number of students in each school and the unit cost per student.

For higher education, there is no tuition fee. The university receives funding from the central government and also conducts external fundraising. With the Ministry of Education and Culture, the University agrees on operational and qualitative targets that provide the basis for the required resources. Polytechnics are funded by the government and local and also have external funding sources. The core funding provided by the government is based on a unit fee per student, project funding and performance-based funding.

Figure 8. Expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP, by level of education, 2010



Source: OECD (2013), *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en>.

To ensure everyone has educational opportunities, student financial aid is designed to benefit the most students. Financial assistance includes primarily study grants and housing supplements. Scholarships and/or other grants to households account for 14.9% of public spending on tertiary education, above the OECD average of 11.4%. More than half of national students in first degree programs in tertiary-type A education (54%), earn scholarships and/or grants.

Most institutions that provide primary and secondary education are managed by local or municipal governments. Responsibility for funding education is shared between the central and local governments. Finland's investment in educational institutions is similar to the OECD average. Expenditure on educational institutions at all levels is 6.5% of GDP, slightly above the OECD average of 6.3%. Between 2005 and 2010, Finland increased spending by 0.5 percentage point (slightly above the OECD average of 0.4 percentage point). Almost all educational institution spending is from government sources (97.6%, compared to the OECD average of 83.6% in 2010). The use of family funds is very small at all levels of education (except at the pre-primary level where it accounts for 9.9% of expenditures), and it constitutes 4.1% of expenditures at the tertiary level.

Finland provides a relatively higher education budget per regular student than other OECD countries in secondary and higher education, but relatively less per student at other levels of education. Annual expenditure per student at all levels (from elementary to higher education, including R&D activities) is USD 10,157, or above OECD countries' average USD 9,313. From 2005 to 2010, spending per student increased by 12% on primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (compared to the OECD average of 17%), while enrollment remained the same. In higher education, spending per student increased by 18% (compared to the OECD average of 8%) while enrollment decreased slightly by 1% (compared to the OECD average of 13%).

Early childhood education and basic education are part of the basic services of local/municipal governments that receive funds from the central government. Transfer of funds from the central government for compulsory education is based on the number of years children aged 6-15 years living in the region/city and the special budget from the regional/city government. Local/city governments can decide for themselves how to allocate these funds. Mandatory government transfers for basic municipal services account for about a third of the education budget.

Funds for senior secondary education and vocational education and training are based on the number of students reported by schools using the unit cost set by the Ministry of Education and Culture. For polytechnic funding, the government allocates resources in the form of core funding, which is based on unit cost per student, project funding and performance-based funding. For example, the number of graduates becomes a reference for performance-based funding. Polytechnics also have private funding sources. Vocational training institutions as well as polytechnic education providers are encouraged to improve their outcomes through performance-based funding.

Universities in Finland are independent institutions under the laws of the country or are legal entities. Each university and the Ministry of Education and Culture set operational and qualitative targets every three years for each university and obtain the necessary human resources or workforce. The agreement also defines how these targets will be monitored and evaluated. Universities receive funding from the central government, but they are also expected to increase funding from external parties.

7. CONCLUSION

The success of the Finnish education system is determined by several key factors such as:

- a. Broad education autonomy for local/city governments and schools
- b. Professional, competent, highly dedicated and highly educated teachers
- c. Coherence between education and economic development policies
- d. Community culture that is very aware of the importance of education for personal and national development
- e. A high level of public trust in the education system and close and sustainable cooperation between the government, the business world and the community

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