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Current trends in school reform in the Republic of FINLAND

Tendencias modernas de la reforma de la educación escolar en la República de FINLANDIA

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Written by:

Yuliia Kosenchuk²⁸<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8069-7375>**Iryna Androshchuk**²⁹<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3557-793X>**Nataliia Bakhmat**³⁰<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6248-8468>**Olha Kosenchuk**³¹<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1733-5937>

Abstract

School education in Finland is considered to be one of the most progressive in Europe, so using the experience of local teachers is a relevant task for the study. The article aims to characterize the main modern trends of school education reform in Finland, based on the main globalization vectors of education system development. The study uses theoretical methods of scientific knowledge. The results analyze the main aspects of Finnish education reforming (tendencies of independence, consistency, flexibility), digitalization of Finnish school education, emphasis on practicality, personality-centered approach of learning. The conclusions note that a fundamental aspect of the Finnish education system reform is the autonomy and autonomy of teachers.

Keywords: Finland, school education, transformation, digitalization of the educational process.

Introduction

Finland is a high performer in the school system in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). It has also become almost the only European state to be among the top countries extremely attractive for research on the

Resumen

La educación escolar en Finlandia se considera una de las más progresistas de Europa, por lo que utilizar la experiencia de los profesores locales es una tarea relevante para el estudio. El objetivo del artículo es caracterizar las principales tendencias modernas de la reforma de la educación escolar en Finlandia, basado en los principales vectores de globalización del desarrollo del sistema educativo. El estudio utiliza métodos teóricos del conocimiento científico. Los resultados analizan los principales aspectos de la reforma de la educación finlandesa (tendencias de independencia, coherencia, flexibilidad), la digitalización de la educación escolar finlandesa, el énfasis en la practicidad, el enfoque centrado en la personalidad del aprendizaje. Las conclusiones señalan que un aspecto fundamental de la reforma del sistema educativo finlandés es la autonomía y la autonomía de los profesores.

Palabras clave: Finlandia, educación escolar, transformación, digitalización del proceso educativo.

effectiveness of educational reforms, which are widespread in the European community as the most effective. Consequently, an analysis of the main trends in Finnish school reform is important in view of demonstrating the main solutions that

²⁸ Postgraduate Student, Department of Educology and Psychological and Pedagogical Sciences in Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University (Kyiv, Ukraine).

²⁹ Professor, Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Department of Labor Pedagogy and Andragogy Institute of Pedagogy in Academy of Special Pedagogy (Warsaw, Poland).

³⁰ Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor, Head at the Department of Elementary Education Theory and Methods Faculty of Pedagogics in Kamianets-Podilskyi Ivan Ohienko National University (Kamianets-Podilskyi, Ukraine).

³¹ Associate Professor, Department of Pedagogy and Psychology of Vocational Education, Faculty of Linguistics and Social Communications in National Aviation University (Kyiv, Ukraine).

can be useful in European education as a whole. At the same time, current trends in educational development demonstrate that the educational process is becoming increasingly globalized and digitalized, however, Finnish teachers use their own methods of educational organization based on basic both traditional (time-tested) forms of organization of learning activities and innovative ways of conducting the educational process in order to improve students' motivation and curiosity. The article aims to characterize the main current trends of school reform in Finland based on the main globalization vectors of education system development.

Literature Review

The methodological basis of this article is the work of Finnish scholars, who have highlighted in detail the main changes and transformations in Finnish school education. In particular, Korhonen et al., (2021) described the main changes in Finnish education during the period of distance learning. The scholars characterized the features of e-learning organization and conduct and described the key pedagogical methods used in these processes. Korhonen et al., (2021) focused on the fact that there was a trend in digital schooling in Finland to support students and their parents through weekly communication with teachers. At the same time, the authors noted that many Finnish teachers found it difficult to understand modern E-learning technologies. Therefore, Korhonen et al., (2021) believe that the main direction of pedagogical excellence is to increase digital competence and develop digipedagogical skills.

Saari & Sääntti (2017) studied the problem of digital transformation in education management. Lavonen (2020) highlighted the key aspects of the organization of the Finnish Kirikulum, the main educational document regulating the provision of educational services. Niemi & Kousa (2020) explored the use of the case method in the Finnish educational system. O'Leary et al., 2019 described the key principles of special education reform in Finland and described the impact of these changes on the emergence of the main educational trends of the 21st century. Vahtivuori-Hänninen et al., (2014) analyzed the new curriculum for basic school education in Finland. The work of other European scholars is also important for this study. Lemeshchuk et al., (2022) identified European practices to improve inclusive education through the prism of experience for Ukraine. Sork (2020) analyzed the problem of

creating classrooms through the use of innovative technologies and STEM education. Zhang & Aslan (2021) analyzed the main technologies used in education through the prism of analysis of modern scientific achievements. At the same time, Prokopenko (2021) characterized the main technological challenges of future digital education. At the same time, Rak-Młynarska (2022) conducted a comprehensive analysis of current trends in the development of the educational environment. Skakun (2021) explored key aspects of future teachers' digital literacy. Babych et al., (2022) used empirical analysis to identify features of improving teaching methods. However, the future perspectives of the Finnish school model through the lens of borrowing experiences in responding to globalization challenges remain understudied aspects of the problem.

Methodology

Pedagogical theoretical methods of scientific knowledge were used to write this article. In particular, based on the dialectical method of reforming school education in Finland is considered as a dynamically developing and improving process. At the same time, as a result of using the deductive method the transition from general statements to the formation of our own hypotheses and judgments was carried out. Based on concretization the main trends of reforms in Finnish education were characterized. The main method was the method of abstraction, with the help of which the main value principles of the modern Finnish school education system were defined. The methodological basis of the article is also based on the content analysis of modern pedagogical literature. The research is also formed on the principles of objectivity, systematicity, and abstraction.

Results

Key aspects of the Finnish education reform system: trends toward autonomy, coherence, flexibility

The Finnish primary and school education system is showing strong results in the effectiveness of the reforms implemented (Lavonen, 2020). Finnish education policy is based on several strong principles that define the key strategic directions of Finnish education: trust, responsibility, autonomy, autonomy, coherence, fairness, flexibility of standardization, etc. (See Figure 1).

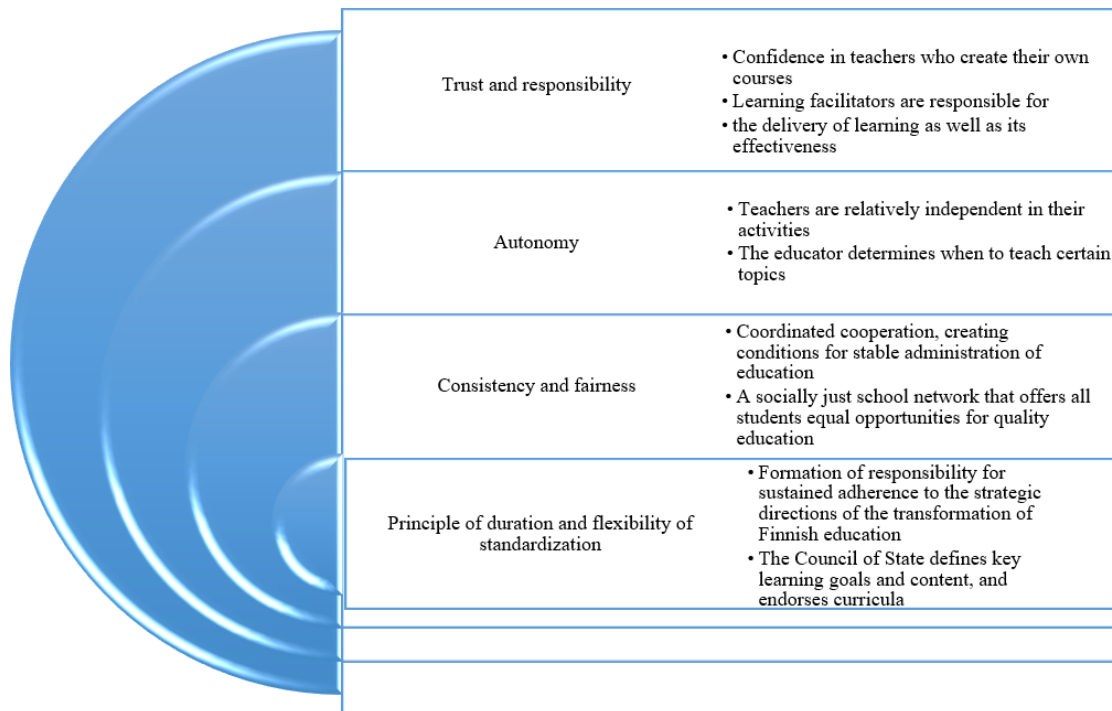


Figure 1. Basic Principles of School Reform in Finland.
Article authors' development

In particular, trust and responsibility are central foundational aspects. Particularly in Finnish secondary and elementary school, the programs and their own courses are created by the teachers themselves, taking into account local criteria (community history, nature, etc.) (Korhonen et al., 2021). Such courses and programs are not approved at higher levels. The key is the responsibility of the educator, who divides the topics into three years, adding his own courses, deciding when and what students will study in his discipline. The above system works at all levels of schooling. Despite this, teachers can team up to discuss different programs so that a logical schedule can be formed (O’Leary et al., 2019). Another principle of school organization in Finland is autonomy. It refers to the fact that learning organizers are generally responsible for the learning process as well as for its quality and effectiveness (Lavonen, 2020). In particular, there are no mandatory guidelines that relate to the number of students in a class, for this reason, the teacher-organizers are free to form and determine the composition of the student group on their own. At the same time, local governments determine the amount of authority delegated to schools: the latter have the right to provide educational services in accordance with their administrative and organizational frameworks and concepts for the development of future education, subject to the basic responsibilities and functions stipulated by law

(Lavonen, 2020). Many organizational situations (expenditures, recruitment) are the responsibility of the educational institutions themselves. As noted above, teachers have a great deal of autonomy when conducting classes. In addition, they can decide for themselves which methods, forms of work, or technologies to use in teaching. Teachers have the right to choose textbooks, manuals, and other teaching materials.

The coherence factor is an important aspect, which provides for the coherent interaction of the sectors and forms the basic conditions for stable education management. The Finnish educational system is seen by the government as an important part of society's activities, so that quality education is essential for solving basic problems such as eliminating inequality, reducing poverty, improving sustainable economic development, and the competitiveness of the state (Lavonen, 2020). A key strategic underlying aspect of educational reform in Finland is the principle of equity. It is about shaping and supporting a socially equitable school network that offers all students equal opportunities for quality education (Maier & Schmidt, 2015). Primary and secondary schools offer all children not only excellent educational services, but also psychological counseling, health and nutrition care, and various special or inclusive education services (Korhonen et al., 2021; Bešić, 2020). At the same time, the criterion of duration is aimed

at the formation of responsibility for the stable observance of the indicated strategic directions of the transformation of the Finnish educational system. This principle also influences the formation of long-term development perspectives, a strategic vision (Sork, 2020). The management process cannot be limited to day-to-day management and administration but aims at the formation of responsibility for the observance of the selected guidelines and directions of the educational system transformation in Finland. The last important principle is the flexibility of standardization. It means that the State Board of Education forms and determines the key goals and content of education, approves the national curriculum, and the school can choose its own methods of implementing the goals.

Modern practical implementation of educational reforms in Finland in the dimension of paradigmatic change: practicality, person-centered approach, a game form of learning.

Educational reforms have been underway in Finland for more than 40 years. The first results were obtained back in the early 1990s (Sahlberg, 2010). Among others, the figures of the founders of the reform stand out. For example, educational advisor Ari Markus Pokka now is working as the CEO of the Finnish Education Institution. He is a prominent teacher and author of “Top Class : Finnish School Leadership and Management”. Another founder of Finnish educational reforms was Pasi Sahlberg, an education expert, author of the book “Finnish Lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?”, professor at the University of New South Wales in Australia. Also he worked at Harvard University and at the World Bank, he was the director of the Centre for International Mobility in Finland.

Ari Antikainen is a professor emeritus of educational sociology at the University of Eastern Finland and a non-fiction writer with coauthor Anne Pitkänen described history of Finnish education reforms (Antikainen, 1990).

The high quality of education is shaped by many factors. Note that every child receives free schooling (Bohuta, 2022). Despite this, all educational institutions in any part of Finland are well equipped and equipped. This contributes to the development of digital competence in both teachers and students (Kosenchuk, 2022). At the same time, the teaching profession is not only prestigious but also well-paid. The most important factor is that the school system has a

strong practical orientation that meets international standards (Lavonen, 2020). Consequently, teachers in Finland are not based on students learning a lot of information, as is the case in other countries, but on acquiring practical knowledge and the ability to use it in life.

In schools, education begins at age seven and lasts nine years. Schooling is a compulsory level of education for the entire population. The first six years of elementary school are taught by a single teacher, the other three years by specific subject teachers. After its completion, students take the so-called matriculation examination, a nationwide test for pupils. After high school, oral students can enter a lyceum or a specialized college. After completing high school, students take examinations and are eligible to continue their studies at universities (Lapada et al., 2020). Most upper secondary school graduates go on to universities. Note that Finland has no specialized secondary education, a fact that makes the transition to the Bologna model of unifying the status of higher education institutions much easier. Besides, in Finland, there is no strict division into the public and private sector of education, because there are very few non-state educational institutions.

In this system, the state holds the key by issuing the so-called curricula, which contain obligatory questions, topics, hours, and performance criteria (Vahtivuori-Hänninen, et al., 2014). Such documents are frameworks because they form the strategy of the educational movement. The curriculum entails describing the teaching of topics rather than subjects. This is done in order to explain certain processes, phenomena through the prism of different sciences to the student. This helps to make learning more focused on the formation of critical thinking, becoming more practical, taking into account the specifics of the terrain. The learning process itself is organized as a “spiral,” that is, each new topic (new knowledge) is based on the previous one (Fromm et al., 2021). When organizing education in Finland, it is taken into account that the most effective format of education for children is the direct play form of learning. In the first three years of education, teachers focus on learning games. It should be noted that before the sixth-grade students are not evaluated (there is any assessment of academic performance) because in one class children with high mental abilities and children with better physical skills can study (Niemi & Kousa, 2020). Thus, the Finnish school system (including elementary education) focuses more on the development of students' creativity, critical thinking, social skills, and thinking

outside the box than on the acquisition of specific theoretical knowledge (Niemi & Kousa, 2020).

So, a key trend in the Finnish educational system is the process of objectification of education, the content of which was the integration of children with different conditions in a single school with the aim of full internal differentiation of learning (Korhonen et al., 2021). It is about the fact that the student enters the school of residence, thus eliminating the criterion of “statutory” schools because all educational institutions are equipped with the same material and technical base (which is based on innovative technological innovations). One of the objectives of school education is to develop students' self-esteem and critical thinking skills. At the same time, the goal of providing increased self-awareness and learning skills through an understanding of the importance of academic progress in students' mastery of academic topics is realized.

The trend toward digitalization of education began with the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic (Honcharova, Kutishchev & Berezovskaya, 2020). Teachers in Finnish schools were given basic digital tools to organize distance learning: phones and laptops. Devices, software is important for the structure of the digital school day. Teachers described the use of different ways of communication, in particular chat rooms such as Wilma, WhatsApp are common in Finland. At the same time, distance learning was organized on the basis and online platforms, in particular: Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Pedanet, etc. (Korhonen et al., 2021).

In Finland, there are several forms of digital learning in primary and secondary schools: in particular, teacher-led learning, which includes videoconferencing with various innovative educational tools. Teachers predominantly follow the typical lesson structure, which starts with a homework check (Lapada et al., 2020). A

key feature of digital education in Finland is that teachers use many game resources and tools, which improves students' attention and motivation to learn, especially at the elementary level. A special feature of Finnish distance schooling is that teachers set special tasks for students to reflect on, after which they were allowed to leave the collaborative session and reflect on the solution of an issue on their own or to stay online and get help from the teacher.

A separate important part of digital education is student independent work. Teachers guided students to work independently using daily tutorials and guidance in core subjects (Cavalcanti et al., 2021). In doing so, older students are allowed to choose a topic for independent work to be presented later in an online meeting. The importance of independent work in art and work-based learning is particularly important. Basic guidelines for independent tasks are posted on a platform accessible to students. Note that the same guidelines and instructions were usually also communicated to parents via the Wilma platform (Korhonen et al., 2021).

A separate form of digital work organization is individual guidance. The main goal of individual guidance is to “befriend” the students and to notice everyone's individuality. In Finland, there are several methods of providing individual guidance, in particular, it can be implemented by personal tutoring at the end of online classes. Another type of individualized guidance is when students can call the teacher at a specific time. Individual guidance can also take place at the teacher's initiative: when the teacher notices that a student needs support (Korhonen et al., 2021). In Finland, the practice of teachers calling students weekly for the duration of quarantine restrictions was in effect, so that they would know about possible needs for counseling or support (See Figure 2).

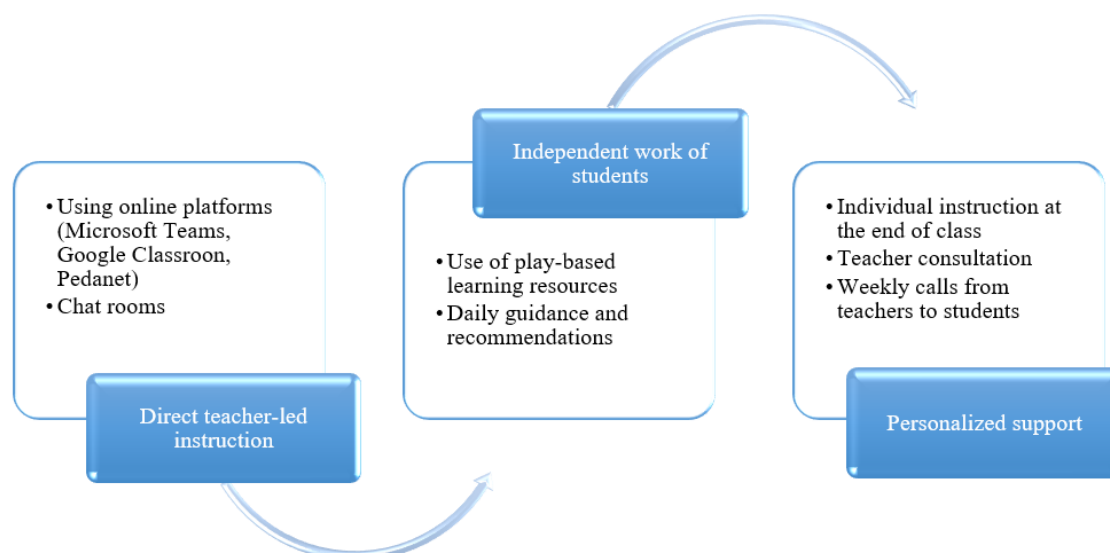


Figure 2. A model for the implementation of digital learning in schools in Finland.
Authors' development

At present, the organization of stable digital education on online platforms is not active (compared to the period of quarantine restrictions). However, the digitalization of school education in Finland has received several other manifestations, in particular, teachers often set different tasks using modern educational-game resources. The practice of digital communication between student and teacher is also relevant (Fromm et al., 2021). In Finland, the digitalization of educational space, organization of digital workflow, and implementation of digital management in the education management system are actively taking place.

Discussion

As has been demonstrated in the results, modern Finnish teachers have broad autonomy and autonomy in their teaching. Many European and, importantly, Finnish researchers agree with this statement (Korhonen et al., 2021; O'Leary et al., 2019). This, in turn, affects the formation of the trend of decentralization of the educational system in Finland. According to Lavonen (2020), decentralization directly allows teachers to address issues at the local level in the global context of the national curriculum, strategy, and program implementation. Note that the processes of centralization and autonomy are closely related to the Finnish model of explaining teacher professionalism as well as the status and importance of teachers and education in Finnish society. However, let us agree with Lavonen (2020) that decentralization and the relative autonomy of teachers influences the fact that the preparation of national strategies is difficult.

Vahtivuori-Hänninen et al., (2014) demonstrated that in the Republic of Finland, the core competencies of the 21st century have been introduced into the school system through the development and implementation of a common national educational program. However, studies by Finnish scholars have pointed out that despite current trends in the development of digital education, there is still a need to develop digipedagogical skills in Finland. This requirement requires the updating of curricula. However, now in Finland the digitalization of education takes place not at the level of the learning environment, but at the level of organization and management of educational services. Nevertheless, the current curriculum does require teachers to develop digital skills. According to Lavonen (2020), this curriculum is prepared at the national level, but it is implemented at the local levels. Consequently, teachers improve their digital skills through participation in international educational projects, internships, and digital and information literacy courses.

Note that the major teaching institutions are responsible for overseeing the professional training of teachers. Mandatory secondary education is supported in many ways. First, teachers are involved in preparing the curriculum and influencing the development of teacher education in general. They can also organize professional learning through the mentoring system and the organization of various pilot projects. In addition, teachers can participate in many meetings, conferences at the national and local levels, they can also organize special seminars to support communication between

teachers and the development of school education in general. Consequently, we believe that modern educational reforms in Finland are aimed at creating a favorable environment for teachers to develop competencies of the 21st century: digital literacy, social skills, critical thinking, logical thinking, etc. Accordingly, modern curricula are aimed at developing and shaping these skills in both teachers and students.

Conclusions

Thus, the main fundamental aspects of the reform of the Finnish educational system are the autonomy and autonomy of teachers, which is manifested in the fact that teachers independently form courses and programs of subjects, independently decide when and how to study a particular topic. Teachers also choose their own textbooks, manuals, and other teaching materials. The trend of consistency in school education implies the coordinated activity of educational spheres, which forms the basic conditions for stable management of education. In spite of this, all of the changes that have taken place in Finland's educational reform system have taken into account the principle of equity: in all periods of reform, the creation and support of a socially equitable school network has taken place.

Since the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been trends toward the digitalization of all learning in Finnish education. What distinguishes this country's digital schooling from other European countries is that educators, despite the online format, have managed to implement play-based activities using a variety of learning and game resources. A separate trend in the development of Finnish digital education is a person-centered approach implemented not only in the learning process but also in the psychological adaptation of students and their parents to the new digital environment.

An important trend in the Finnish educational system is the individualization of learning, the essence of which was the process of integrating students with different data and conditions in a single school. This is implemented in order to complete the internal differentiation of learning. At the same time teachers use different teaching methods in order to improve the attention, motivation of students. Despite this, the main factor in the reform of Finnish education is the factor of practicality: Finnish teachers are based not on the assimilation of theoretical knowledge by students, as it happens in other countries, but on getting practical skills, which will be useful for them in adult life.

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