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SOME PECULIARITIES AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE FINNISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

Luciana BEZERIȚĂ (TOMESCU), Associate Professor, PhD

Athenaeum University, Bucharest, Romania

bezerita.luciana@univath.ro

Abstract: *This article explores specific aspects of the Finnish education system, which is recognized worldwide for its high performance. Specialized studies have revealed that Finnish education is based on holistic pedagogy and supported by high-quality teacher education. Finnish society mainly focuses on teaching and learning, and respect for education and learning is determined mainly by historical and cultural factors. An overview of the Finnish education system is provided in the interview with the Ambassador of Finland in Romania, where she talks about the “high quality of the education system”, the “level of technology used”, as well as the “future of education” and the reasons why “every foreign student chooses Finland.” Education is highly valued in Finnish culture, contributing to the perception of Finns as “the happiest nation in the world.” In Romania, some models of Finnish education have been implemented through educational development partnerships, as well as through the Finnish educational program based on Artificial Intelligence (AI), launched by the Embassy of Finland in 2020. Additionally, a transnational comparative study revealed the need to develop a literature on “the ethics of AI-based learning”, for a better life. This study confirms the need for international and transnational dialogue from ethical perspectives, to promote “a human-centered stance for a better understanding of AI in education.” Finland is recognized as one of the European countries with a strong focus on AI ethics, ensuring that everyone benefits from the ongoing technological revolution—“AI for all.”*

Keywords: *holistic pedagogy, teacher quality, joy of learning, artistic education, ethics of AI-based learning*

JEL Classification: *I210 Analysis of Education*

Introduction

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world,” said Nelson Mandela (DIGI24.ro, 2018). Given this statement, this article aims to explore answers and identify models for improving national

educational performance in the era of digitalization. To achieve this, we analyzed a series of sources that we consider relevant and current references for describing the existing situation and perspectives in the field, both nationally and transnationally. The findings have been structured as follows:

1. *Aspects regarding the Finnish educational system - in specialized studies,*
2. *Aspects regarding Finnish education - in the interview given by the Ambassador of Finland to Romania,*
3. *Models of Finnish education implemented in Romania,*
4. *Aspects regarding AI ethics in Finnish education - in comparative research.*

Beyond the historical and socio-cultural premises of the Republic of Finland, we turn our attention to common goals which are based on democratic principles and standards, in the context of the technological revolution - “**AI for all**”, in which the educational system in general and the academic environment in particular must rise to the level of current demands and challenges.

1. Aspects regarding the Finnish education system - in specialized studies

The education system of each country is based on a series of factors, of a historical, cultural, socio-economic nature, and one of the most efficient education systems in Europe is that of the Republic of Finland. Becoming a member state of the European Union (EU) since January 1, 1995, Finland is recognized worldwide for its high performance education system, which represents a basic pillar of Finland's reconstruction after World War II Government of Romania (Government of Romania, n.d.).

Specialized studies have shown that, in European countries such as Finland, the general purpose of education, as a whole, is to support **the development of the person**, and the specific purpose is to ensure **the development of the cognitive domain**, in accordance with the educational objectives in the national curriculum. (“*National Core Curriculum for Secondary School*”) (Tirri, 2012, pp. 55-66). According to the opinions expressed by Finnish teachers based on empirical data, at the secondary education level, the educational goals of teaching were divided into two categories: general goals and goals specific to the subject taught, the results showing a solid value base, which the “**holistic pedagogy**” is based on (Tirri, 2012, pp. 55-66).

The educational goal is considered **an important motivational factor** within the teaching-learning process, and **the importance of social and affective domains** is recognized in the teaching of students, having the role of developing intercultural competencies and skills, necessary for future

graduates to adapt to new and unforeseen situations, given the dynamism of the current context (Tirri, 2012, pp. 55-66).

The Finnish education system is recognized worldwide due to **the success of Finnish youth** in the OECD's PISA surveys (in 2000, 2003, 2006 and 2009), these results being generated by educational policy priorities and the **high standards of teachers**, as shown in specialized studies (Niemi, 2012, pp. 19-38). Based on research conducted in the field, Finnish educational policy aimed at *"equity in education and has promoted the common comprehensive school model"*, one of the most important decisions in this process being the training of all teachers (including those in primary school), at master's level (5-year programmes) (Niemi, 2012, pp. 19-38). Teacher training at the university level has been established since the 19th century, with the first teacher training seminar being established in 1863 (Niemi, 2012, pp. 19-38). Among the historical and cultural movements that influenced Finnish education, an important role was played by the 19th-century national movement, promoted by many university professors with expertise in their fields of activity, with the main message that: *"The power of the nation depends especially on... quality of civil servants and teachers"* (Niemi, 2012, pp. 19-38).

In the current international context, marked by challenges such as technological advances, increased migration and multiculturalism, the Finnish national curriculum reflects the priority given to **arts education** as part of the education system, at primary and secondary levels, considering that it can contribute to a creative learning environment if art subjects are integrated throughout the curriculum (Kairavuori and Sintonen, 2012, pp. 209-223).

One of the art forms that has always been part of the Finnish educational system is **drama**, although it has not occupied an official place in the National Curriculum, as shown in specialized studies (Toivanen, 2012, pp. 227-236). Currently, many **doctoral theses** confirm that the **use of drama in educational processes** helps with personal and social development, including the ability to assume roles, solve problems, and cope with stress. The Finnish school system has a historical tradition of **school drama**, dating back to 1550. Later, in the early 1970s, ideas of drama education spread widely in Finland, with personality development and free expression being considered priorities in education, with an emphasis on developing teaching methods for creation, expression, and group dynamics (Toivanen, 2012, pp. 227-236).

Concurrently, **drama education represents a challenge for teacher training**. The drama teaching in teacher training began at the universities of Jyväskylä and Helsinki in the late 1980s, and *"the drama-educator training programme for class and subject teachers started at the Open University of Jyväskylä and the Finnish Theatre Academy's Continuing Education Institute in*

the 1990's" and led to the emergence of the first **PhD students in dramaturgy and drama pedagogy**, graduating in early 2000. Thus, "**drama education has become an academic discipline in Finland**" (Toivanen, 2012, pp. 227-236).

The same study shows under the title „*Present: Drama education in Finland in the 2000's*“, that: *Drama in the Finnish National Core Curricula for Basic Education (2004) is placed within the subject “mother-tongue and literature”*; The curriculum does not have a precise description of the objectives and basic contents of drama education, but the objectives are mainly focused on interaction skills (Toivanen, 2012, pp. 227-236).

Considering the historical and cultural factors that have marked the evolution of the educational system, Finland is currently “*the country where 93% of high school graduates pass the baccalaureate exam, over 65% of high school students go to college, and where only 10% of those who want to become teachers will actually teach*” (NEW-EDU Institution of Education).

2. Aspects regarding Finnish education - in the interview given by the Ambassador of Finland to Romania

We selectively present below relevant aspects regarding Finnish education, taken from the interview given by the Ambassador of Finland to Romania, H.E. Mrs. Marjut Akola, for the online publication EdPost (questions - answers) (Voicu, no date):

I. “Overview of the Finnish education system”

— “One of the most effective education systems in the world...”

The high quality of the Finnish education system is based on a clear national vision that **people are the nation's most important resource**, and that the power of knowledge and trust in education are considered parts of the national identity. Over the years, Finland has been one of the OECD countries with the highest share of public funding for education, an excellent example of long-term strategic planning with the aim of developing a high-quality education system that offers equal opportunities for learning to everyone, regardless of their location or social and financial background.

— “The level of technology used in classroom activities...”

The Finnish curriculum emphasizes the use of digital materials, applications, and devices. At the higher education level, the admission exam has been digital since 2019.

— “What could other countries learn from the Finnish education system...”

The main approach to Finnish education is student-centered, and children with learning difficulties are additionally supported by specialized

teachers. The Finnish education system focuses on problem-solving learning, critical thinking, developing communication skills, improving the preparation of young people to cope with future challenges, and lifelong learning.

— ***“How is the private sector involved in education...”***

In the Finnish education system, there is close cooperation between the private and public sectors. Private companies are involved in the production of teaching materials and digital learning platforms. At the same time, there are Finnish companies specialized in offering Finnish expertise and educational models abroad.

— ***“About the future of education...”***

Digitalization, including artificial intelligence, is driving a major shift in learning and teaching processes. In these circumstances, Finnish education must support children’s mental and physical well-being, ensure the “*joy of learning*” and at the same time meet business expectations.

— ***“Why does a Romanian or any foreign student choose Finland...”***

Finland is known in Europe and around the world for its high-quality education. Finnish teachers are professionals both academically and pedagogically. In Finnish universities, students are allowed to structure their own academic education, with a lot of flexibility regarding optional courses and internships. At the same time, traditional student events are organized throughout the year. For citizens of EU member states, there is minimal bureaucracy to enroll in a Finnish university and there are no tuition fees. Students only need an EU residence permit.

— ***“What opportunities does the degree offer to graduates...”***

Degrees awarded by Finnish institutions are highly regarded both in Finland, in academia and business, and abroad.

For doctoral studies, there are several opportunities in all fields.

II. “General information about Finland and education” (Voicu, no date)

— ***“How did Finnish culture influence the evolution of the education system...”***

Education has always been highly valued by Finnish society, and children have been encouraged to study and learn, with equal opportunities for access to quality education and well-being, without class or regional differences. This is one of the reasons why it is considered that “*Finns are the happiest nation in the world.*” Another reason that has positively influenced the Finnish education system is reading, which is very popular in Finland, where there are 854 public libraries, considered “*the living rooms of Finns*”. In 2018, 1.9 million books were borrowed in a country with 5.5 million inhabitants.

— ***“How is student knowledge assessed...”***

As a general rule, assessment tests a student's understanding of the big picture in a given subject, not their ability to memorize small details. Summative assessment combines several types of testing, and teachers have a lot of autonomy to choose the best way to assess and are encouraged to assess students' knowledge according to various criteria, not just through exams.

— *“How are the principles of **“Lifelong Learning”** and **“Free Education”** implemented in education...”*

In Finland, at all levels of education, there is strong adult training and versatile lifelong learning opportunities, including adult education in higher education institutions and training in the labour market.

3. Models of Finnish education implemented in Romania

Currently, there are **development partnerships in education**, concluded between representative actors from Finland and Romania, to increase institutional capacity and train teachers, by strengthening the connections between education, research and innovation (ERI High School, 2024).

In Romania, the Romanian-Finnish School – ERI (2025) was established by the Didactica Foundation and operates in Sibiu, starting with 2016, and in Braşov, starting with the fall of 2022. At the same time, the Romanian-Finnish High School ERI (2025) opened its doors since the fall of 2024.

Since 2020, the Embassy of Finland has launched a **Finnish Artificial Intelligence educational programme** in Romania - *“Elements of AI Romania,”* together with Bucharest.AI and the Romanian-American University (Neagoe, 2020). The course was developed by the University of Helsinki in partnership with the technology company, Reaktor Education, and was funded by the Finnish government. On that occasion, the **Finnish Ambassador to Romania, Marjut Akola**, stated that:

“Education is a source of innovation, well-being and competitiveness for every nation;”

“Therefore, our mission in Finland was for everyone to have the opportunity to learn what AI is and how we can use it.” (Neagoe, 2020).

On the same occasion, **Teemu Roos, Professor of Computer Science (AI and Data Science), University of Helsinki**, stated that:

“When we understand the basic principles of AI, we will understand its opportunities and limitations. This is where Elements of AI comes in.”

“By focusing on those most often marginalized in technology discussions, we have democratized access to a level unmatched by any university computer science curriculum.” (Neagoe, 2020).

4. Aspects regarding AI ethics in Finnish education in Finnish education - in comparative research

In a transnational study (comparative research between China and Finland), it is shown that, since there are differences regarding the ethics of AI (artificial intelligence) in education, generated by factors related to the sociocultural context (Wei, Niemi, 2023, pp. 265-282):

“The Global Technology Governance Report (World Economic Forum 2021) urgently demands ethical guidelines for technology development in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.”

At the same time, the need for international and transnational dialogue from ethical perspectives is emphasized, in order to promote *“a human-centered stance for a better understanding of AI in education.”*

Since there is a lack of literature on *“the ethics of learning based on artificial intelligence”*, more studies are needed to provide answers about a better life with AI and what AI means in education. Most strategies are general, covering all areas in which AI can be applied, but ethical principles for AI in education remain largely unexplored and undiscussed in national and global guidelines, the cited study also shows.

In Finland, some policies on AI ethics are applied, already transposed into European or national legislation. In specific strategies, **Finland places a strong emphasis on democratic values**, equity and non-discrimination, human rights and how all citizens can use AI in their lives, so that everyone benefits from the ongoing technological revolution - **“AI for all”** (UNESCO, 2024). Despite the differences between countries the aforementioned study appeals to *“a human-centered or humanist stance upon AI”* (UNESCO, 2024).

Conclusions

Recent specialized studies describe historical and sociocultural landmarks of the Finnish education system, which have led to results for which it is considered one of the most efficient in Europe and the world. It is shown that Finnish education has as its general goal **personal development**, based on a strong motivational system and **solid values**, along with equity and ethics, on which **holistic pedagogy** is based. An important element is represented by the **quality of teachers**, who must follow master's studies (5 years) for all teaching levels. A specific aspect is represented by **drama education** in educational processes, for teacher training and for the personal and social development of students.

In an interview with the **Ambassador of Finland to Romania**, several keywords defining Finnish education are mentioned: “*child-centered approach, lifelong learning and teachers with higher education.*” These elements serve as potential models for other countries, adaptable to their national contexts. The interview also emphasizes that the future of education will focus on digitalization, ensuring that the “joy of learning” is maintained. Foreign students choose Finland, known worldwide for its high-quality education, minimal bureaucracy and the lack of tuition fees for citizens of EU member states. In Finnish culture, education and reading are highly valued and are reasons why Finns are considered “*the happiest nation in the world*”.

Currently, models of Finnish education are being implemented in Romania through development partnerships with representative actors in Finland, to increase institutional capacity and teacher training. Therefore, a multiplication of examples of the application of good practices is expected. At the same time, in recent years, the Embassy of Finland has launched in Romania a **Finnish artificial intelligence educational programme** - “*Elements of AI Romania*”, developed by the University of Helsinki, to expand access to AI.

In the recent transnational comparative research, previously cited, it is shown that artificial intelligence plays an increasingly widespread role in the global education system, Finland being one of the European countries that **places a strong emphasis on democratic values**, equity and non-discrimination, on human rights, in the context of the technological revolution - “*AI for all*”, however, education in general requires ethical guidelines for a better future in which “*teaching and learning can shape the future of humanity and the world.*” (UNESCO, 2024).

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