INTERNATIONAL AND COMPARATIVE EDUCATION: CROSS-CULTURAL APPROACH



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NATIONAL SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN FINLAND

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Chapter

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Introduction

Education is an irreplaceable instrument for building the human capital that fronts the development and growth in an economy. UNESCO (2000) defines education as the total process of developing human ability and behaviours. Education is therefore highly prioritised as a major instrument for national development and advancement and this is expressed in Finnish national system of education. Finland is a country in Northern Europe, bordering the Baltic Sea, Gulf of Bothnia and Gulf of Finland, between Norway to the North, Sweden to the Northwest and Russia to the East. Finland is a Nomadic country and is situated in the geographical region of Fennoscandia (Google for Education, 2016). The capital and largest city is Helsinki and its official languages are Finnish and Swedish, Christianity is the major religion in practice (Solsten & Meditz, 1988). The sovereign state is a parliamentary republic with a central government based in the capital city of Helsinki, local government in 311 municipalities and one autonomous region, the Alan's Islands. In 1906, it was the first to grant adult citizens the right to vote and the first in the world to give all adult citizens the right to run for public office. In 1908, Finland incorporated into Russia Empire as the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland (Solsten & Meditz, 1988).

Finland declared itself independent in 1917 after the Russia Revolution. A civil war broke out in 1918; it resulted to division in the State. After brief attempt to establish a kingdom, the country became a Republic; Finland strove to retain her independence during World War II, though some parts of Finland were lost to the Soviet Union (Kirby, 2014).

Finland was more of an agrarian economy until the 1950s when it advanced into industrialisation. After World War II, the Soviet Union demanded war reparations from Finland, not only in money but also in material, such as ship and machinery, this forced Finland to industrialize. It rapidly developed an advanced economy while building an extensive welfare state based on the Nordic model, resulting in widespread prosperity and one of highest per capita incomes of national economic competitiveness, civil liberties, quality of life and human development. In 2015, Finland was ranked first in the World Human Capital and Press Freedom Index as the most stable country in the world during 2001 - 2016 in the fragile states index, and second in the Global Gender Gap Report (Human Capital Press Release, 2016). Finland has had its own experience of tough times too, but an undaunted spirit not to relent has kept the economy strong, and enabled it to spring up in time, maximizing education as a major instrument.

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Basic Teacher Education in Finland

Basic teacher training programmes had been on-going in teacher training institutes, until 1974 when universities were charged with the training of teachers both for Primary Schools and Junior Secondary Schools. This began a new era for teachers at this level of education, (Santti and Salmien, 2015). Prior to this, in 1968, Finnish Parliament approved the basic outline for comprehensive school reform. Santti and Salmien (2015) posited that this meant nine years education for pupils, and it also required the renewal of teacher education. This covered six years Primary Education and three years Junior Secondary Education for all children across Finland. Basic education is compulsory for all children between the age of 7 and 16 (Kantar Public Education Policy Group, 2016).

The upgrade of the minimum qualifying standard for teachers in primary school to Masters' Degree took place in 1974. Hansen, Forsman, Aspfors and Bendtsen (2011) gave an insight into the essence of a research-based study which was aimed at assisting student teachers to internalise an open-minded and inquiry-oriented attitude towards their work. This notable move made an invaluable difference in teacher quality as well as students' quality. Niemi (2015) explained that this modification was to unify the core aspects of primary and secondary education, and to develop academically a high standard of education for prospective teachers. Basic school is also known as comprehensive school in Finland.

Basic Teacher Education in Pre-Independent Finland

Finnish teacher education is in two fold of development the first is the education of teachers in secondary while the second refers to education of teachers for elementary schools. The landmark for Teacher education in Finland started in 1852 at the University of Helsinki. The professor of pedagogy was given the task to develop teacher education, especially for secondary school teachers (Kansanen, 2003). The professor was responsible for the supervision of students who aspired to become subject teachers in secondary school, to oversee the practical part of their studies (training in subject departments).The students were given to further training by the Professor, this served as teacher education. The role of the Professor of Education redefined teacher education in Finland and gave it a different outlook and emphasis. To this end, teachers were given more importance, in the development of school systems (Iisalo, 1979; Kansanen, 2003).

The first teacher training college for the education of elementary school teachers was founded in Jyvaskyla in 1863. The method of the teacher seminary was based on patriotic and Christian values and non-academic culture which differentiated from universities (Santti and Salminen 2015, Kansanen 2003) The Swiss and German curriculum was adopted and later used as a model for many teacher training colleges.

Basic Teacher Education at Post Independence

After the independence of Finland in 1917, the Finnish economy was faced with lots of challenges, (Google for education, 2016). In 1920, the law of compulsory education was enacted and it covered children from ages 7 to 12. The need for educating teacher and expanding the educational sector became an unavoidable need. As an agrarian economy (Saniti & Salminen, 2015) with the urgent need to boost its economic advancement, education was considered a major instrument. To also recuperate from the adverse effect of the civil war that ended in 1918, education was adopted as a major means to cultivate into individuals, the spirit of patriotism (Merja & Kaarina, 2015). Teachers were therefore seen as models and means of passing on these values and also demonstrating it.

The education of primary/elementary school teachers was organized to serve the interests of the nation and the people (Santti and Salminen, 2015). The emphasis of basic teacher education during

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this period was to present teachers as the keepers and moderators of collectively cherished cultural values (Alasuutar 1996 and Rinne 1986). Research was not the focus but was used for reference and guidance in daily routines. The oldest colleges of education in Finland were turned into the Jyvaskyla College of Education in 1934, with professorship and the mandate to award academic degrees all the way to doctorate. Three provisional Colleges of Education were established in Helsinki (1947), Turku (1949) and Oulu (1953). While these institutions majorly focused on the training of secondary school graduates, Jyvaskyla was the only place with explicit research-orientation and had a Professor as their staff. Beside Jyvaskyla, others were under the control of the National Board of Education. They therefore did not have the university autonomy (Nurmi 1990, Salminen & Santti, 2013).

In the 1950s, there was contention between teachers' colleges and colleges of education over the mode of admittance and training of prospective teachers in the rural towns, by traditional teachers' colleges. Four Colleges of Education and leading educational scientist contrasted this view, by urging for the extension of teacher education. It was believed would profound more Professors' chairs and made avenue to additional options for teacher students to earn academic grades. These ideas emphasized the scientific approach. (Salminen & Santti 2013; Committee Report, 1956). The differences in opinion led to the deliberation by Finnish parliament in 1957 over the future of primary schools and teacher education. There was an argument over the traditional teachers' college system which was considered to be archaic while some social democrats wanted to associate teacher education question to comprehensive school reform which was emerging at the time (Autio, 1990). The university institution also, had its reservations on the development of teachers' colleges into academic institutions.

Another phase of modernization commenced in 1960 in the Finnish society towards the formation of an industrialized and urbanized economy. In view of this Finland abandoned the moral code for a planned economy which was based on thorough engineering and progressive attitude (Alasuutar 1996; Santti, 2007). The predominant work orientation for elementary school teachers became professionalism which was to be seen in Finland's teacher education (Jauhianen & Rinne, 2012). The comprehensive school reform in 1968 required also the renewal of teacher education to the committee reports of 1960s; the old teachers' college culture was to be buried. There was need of a reflection of the modern teacher image in social and psychological awareness with emphasis on didactical understanding. Steps were also taken to merge the teacher education of primary school and secondary school teachers (Autio 1993; Committee Report 1967).

Educational science was majorly incorporated into teacher training as a replacement for outdated culture. (Simola, 1995). As part of the teacher education, goal rationalization was emphasized in primary school and teacher education context. This was to prepare all primary school teachers to have specific orientation for goal setting. These ideas emanated professionalism, which was based on educational Science (Lahdes 1975 and Simola, 1996).To consolidate these changes, new academic posts were established and also educational science departments. The door to educational research was opened based on these developments. Professor KoskenniemiMatti from the University of Helsinki developed didactic process analysis. He believed in the possibility of fusing together scientific research and practical school work successfully, as this reflected planned economy perfectly. (Ahonen, 2000; Koskenniemi, 1978; Salminen & Santti, 2002).

In 1974, Universities were given the responsibilities of comprehensive schools and upper senior high school teacher education. With respect to this, Faculty of Education was established in all universities, with departments of education and departments of teacher education. The department of

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education basically focused on general educational research, issues related to educational administration and planning while the department of Teacher Education covers both teacher education and research in teacher education. The reform of 1979 eradicated the discrimination of degree obtained from teacher education and all other university subject degrees. Based on this reform, all elementary school teachers were to complete Master's degree programme. This was also applicable to Secondary School Teachers.

The Polytechnic also proffered their model, which was to merge theory with practice, this model also brought about argument (Committee Report 1975). The scientific approach to teacher education is meant to produce research-oriented teachers in every school, this was in line with the International Action Research Movement (Salminen and Santti, 2013; Toom et al 2010). Finnish teacher education is unique because of the requirement of a Master's degree as a qualification for the teaching profession in Elementary and Secondary Schools. With the foregoing, much attention is given to education and teacher education as the basis of all other progress in Finland.

Philosophy and Objectives of Teacher Education in Finland

The basic aim of every teacher education programme is to educate competent teachers and develop the necessary professional qualities to ensure life-long teaching careers for teachers. (Kansanen, 2003). There is a great trust that teaching profession bases on high moral and ethical principles in Finland. Finnish teacher education aims at achieving a balanced development of the personality of each teacher; a process in which the teacher's pedagogical thinking plays an essential role (Kansanen et al. 2000).

The underlying principles and general objectives of education in Finland are based on the consideration of education as a fundamental right of all citizens. Finnish's education is highly principled on equity and equality in accessing high quality education in all facets of the Finnish educational system. Traditionally, the main goal of Finland's policy has been to raise the level of education and offer equal education opportunities to all citizens, regardless of their place of residence, wealth, mother tongue or sex [World Data on Education, 2011].The objective of the Finnish basic education is divided into two;

a. Educational objectives: To offer children the opportunity to acquire general education and complete their educational obligations.
b. To furnish the society with tools for developing educational capital and enhancing equality and a sense of community.
    i. Provision of diversified growth, learning and development of a healthy sense of self-esteem, so that student could acquire knowledge and skills they need in life and become capable of further study and as involved citizens, develop democratic society.
    ii. Provide support for each pupil's linguistic and cultural identity and the development of his/her mother tongue.
    iii. To awaken a desire for lifelong learning (FNBE, 2004b).

The above outlined objectives capture the philosophy of Finnish teacher education as outlined below:

i. Life-long learning
ii. Knowledge and research based orientation
iii. Effectiveness
iv. Anticipation of future needs and competences in education (FNBE, 2013).

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All Finnish education reforms are a reflection of the objectives of the four points that governs Finnish teacher education, including basic teacher education. The upgrading of basic teacher qualification to compulsory Master's degree in 1974 as criteria for teaching in basic schools, virtually made teacher training institutes and institutions to be committed to the expectation of the national education policy.

Structure of Basic Teacher Education in Finland

Teacher education training programmes were solely offered in teacher training institutes in Finland until the 1970s, when universities were charged with the responsibility of training comprehensive school teachers (Kansanen, 2003).

Finnish teacher education is divided into two, they are

i. The Pre-service teacher education
ii. The in-service teacher education

Both forms of teacher education are important and compulsory for the advancement and professionalism of teaching profession in Finnish educational system. All education and training of comprehensive (basic school teachers) and upper secondary school teachers were transferred to the universities in 1973 - 1975. As part of the reform of the universities, a new degree structure in line with the Bologna process (i.e 2nd cycle) for all teachers, which implied that teachers must complete both a B. A 180 ECTS (three years) and M. A. (120 ECTS) 2 years training programme (World Data on Education, 2011). All together sums up to five years full time studies with 300 ECTS credits.

University faculties of education or other equivalent units called teacher education units provide class teacher training or education. Each education unit has teacher training school for teaching practice, experiment, research and continuing education. Teacher Training schools may have either 1-6 years of basic education or 7-9 years of basic education and general upper secondary school or all of these.

Subject education is provided by university faculties of different subjects. Pedagogical studies are provided by teacher education units within faculties of education. The university teacher training schools organises periods of teaching practice, included in pedagogical studies with affiliated schools. Class teachers teach most or all subjects in year 1-6, i.e. Primary One to Primary Six. The pre-service programme comprises of basic studies in several subjects, specialisation in one or two teaching subjects, subsidiary subject studies and period of practical teacher training. Subject teachers are regarded as subject specialists who teach one or two subjects mainly in years 7-9. Some schools employ the services of subject teachers in year 1-6. The qualifying criteria for subject teachers is a Master's of education degree in relevant subjects, this includes studies in pedagogy and periods of practical teacher training (Reijo, 2013).

The structure of teacher degrees is designed to accommodate teacher's advancement of formal qualifications after graduation by studying university modules for specific subjects' pedagogies or multi-disciplinary topics. By the foregoing, elementary teachers can extend their qualification to secondary school teachers' competence, by participating in a one-year additional university studies (Hansen, Forsman, Aspfors, and Bendtsen, 2011; Niemi 2015).

The basic criterion for subject teacher education is the application of prospective students to study a particular subject at the relevant university faculty for the duration of one or two years. At the end of this, the student may apply for subject teacher education. Applicants for class teacher

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education are selected on the basis of an entrance examination. Intending subject teachers apply to the respective university faculties and departments of their main subject, after which a separate application is sent to the faculty of education for subject teacher education. Admission to subject teacher education is based either on aptitude tests alone, or an aptitude tests and the applicant study record. Admission of applicants into teacher training schools by Universities is based on the agreed number of degrees negotiated with the Ministry of Education (Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen, 2007).

Teachers are obligated to participate in in-service training; this is partly defined in various statutes and collective agreement governing the teaching profession in Finland. The in-service training of teachers could be for one or five days in a year, according to the relevant statutes and agreements. Teachers have the right to participate in this obligatory training with full salary benefits; on the other hand, employers have the right to assign all full-time teachers to training. Continuing or in-service teacher education is organized by state-owned training centres, university continuing education units, vocational teacher education colleges, university departments of teacher education, teacher training schools, summer universities and various private organizations. The idea of in-service is to support the individual professional development of teachers. (Kansanen, 2003; Reijo, 2013).

Curriculum of Basic Teacher Education in Finland

All subjects offered in Finnish teacher training institutions are positively correlated with the objectives of Finnish education, especially basic education which lays the foundation for a complete and well-rounded citizen. Curriculum design in universities and polytechnics is guided solely by legislation, the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) decides on National Core Curriculum. It is responsible for the implementation of the national framework curriculum. The aims and objectives of the curriculum describe core competencies to be learned in each subject, and cross-curricular themes. Listed in the curriculum are the basic concepts of each subject (Lavonen, 2016). Basic school teachers are required to have a Masters' degrees, a total of 300 credits at the end of the programme. This implies Bachelor's degree in education and Master's degree in education.

Using the University of Jyvaskyla primary school teachers' curriculum, in accordance with the national core curriculum framework as an illustration of primary school teacher education programme for a master's degree consists of the following studies; Asunta, (2006) cited in Reijo, (2013).

Language communication studies	25 credits
Basic studies in education	25 credits
Intermediate in education	35 credits
Advanced studies in education	80 credits
Multidisciplinary school subject studies	60 credits
Minor subject studies	60 credits
Elective courses	15 credits
	300 credits

The curriculum of teacher education in Finland consists of theory of education, pedagogical studies and some subject's didactics. Education is looked into from several perspectives; education sociology, education psychology, curriculum theories and practices, student assessment, pedagogical

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approaches and special needs education. This is purposed to ensure prospective teachers possess a balanced knowledge and skills both theory and practice (Sahlberg, 2010).

Teaching practice is meant to integrate theory and practice, it aims to develop professional skills in students. Areas in perspective during teaching practice of students teachers includes how to reflect their aim daily, how to handle social situations, how to put into practice the research and evaluation theories that they have learnt. This process progresses step by step, giving the student teacher gradually more and more responsibility of the process. Universities are independent to decide on the contents of their teacher education curricular, but because of the Bologna process planning that changed the system, all universities share a common understanding of the teacher education structure.

All universities in Finland have their own teacher education strategies and curricula that are nationally coordinated to ensure coherence but locally designed in order to maximise the use of the university's resources and others nearby (Sahlberg, 2010). Also, all universities see quite similarly the philosophical basis and contents of teacher education as specified by the Finland National Board of Education in the core curriculum (Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen, 2007).

Administration and Funding of Basic Teacher Education in Finland

The legislative framework for general principles of education policy is enacted by Parliament. The Federal Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education in Finland are responsible for implementing this policy at the national level. The Ministry of Education prepares education legislation and makes the necessary decisions for submission to the government, which comprises of education and training, preparation of education and culture main class for the state budget proposal and draft government decisions relating to education (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2006). The purview of the Ministry of Education includes education and research: Compulsory school, upper secondary school, vocational schools and colleges and universities. All universities are maintained by the state, they enjoy a high degree of autonomy in organizing, teaching, research and other internal matters. The control, management and funding of education is decentralized to provinces and municipalities.

In higher education, the Ministry of Education steers implementation of education through performance management. A performance agreement stipulates specific targets for higher institutions for a period of three-years which is adhered to. Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, under the Ministry of Education is responsible for evaluation of higher institutions of learning in Finland (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2006). Curriculum design in universities and polytechnics is guided solely by legislation. All universities are maintained by the State, they enjoy a high degree of autonomy in organizing teaching, research and other internal matters. At the university level it falls within their autonomy to organize or form advisory bodies. The decision-making bodies are regulated in Acts and Decrees and there is separate legislation established in each university. The legislation varies from university to university but there are generally decision-making bodies at three levels: central administration, faculty (by science) and institute (by subject) levels. At each level at least professors, other personnel and students are represented (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2005).

The responsibility of financing of education is divided between the state and local authorities. Universities are financed directly from the state budget. The government support secondary and university-level students through grants, study loan guarantee and interest subsidies (Ruzzi, 2005; National Center on Education and the Economy, 2005). Polytechnic education, Research and Development (R &D), university education and research, continuing vocational and professional

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education, liberal and adult education are financed by the Ministry of Education with allocation received from the government. Direct government funding covers 64% of university budgets. This is disbursed among various fields of study by the formula termed Core Funding Formula; it is based on criteria relating education and research and interaction with society. Performance-based fund is awarded to universities as a compensation for quality, effectiveness and efficiency of their operations (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2006).

Lessons for Nigeria and Other Countries

The following are lessons learnt from Finnish Basic Teacher Education which could serve as

- To improve the quality of education and offer equal education opportunities to all citizens, regardless of their place of residence, wealth, mother tongue or sex, the Finnish government adopted a uniformed qualifying high standard of training for all intending basic school teacher as a foundation for a sound and viable national education system.
- The importance of research, a research-based training that strengthens the pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge of the intending-teacher is greatly emphasized.
- Intending-teachers are trained to manage learning environment and materials to meet the peculiar need of the pupils/students in the society.
- Universities in Finland are allowed to design their own teacher education strategies and curricula that are nationally coordinated to ensure coherence but locally designed in order to maximise the use of the university's resources and others nearby and also to address specific needs within the society.

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