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Comparison of the U.S. and Finland's Educational Systems on Students' Academic Achievement

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LS 400 Capstone

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Abstract

This senior capstone research project compares Finland's and the U.S.' educational system through the use of literature review. In the U.S., after the passage of No Child Left Behind legislation, schools focus more on preparing students for test-taking rather than on what students may need to learn; whereas in Finland, their educational system focuses more on "teaching less, learning more," meaning that Finland focuses more on what students may want to learn. The finding reveals that, both the U.S. and Finland have designed their own system of education to meet the needs of their students. If the United States wants to adopt Finland's educational system, several critical factors, e.g. diversity, poverty, and culture (family/students' values) would need to be considered before adoption takes place.

Introduction & Background

Finland's education system has stood out in the 21st century. One of the main reasons for standing out is their reputation for having good test scores. Now, Finland does things differently from the United States. A few differences are: having shorter school days, having no homework, and focusing on learning, not teaching. This led me to wonder why they are rated higher if it seems that the obvious thing to do, would be to do the opposite. So how does Finland's education compared with U.S. education? Do they have some similarities and differences in teaching children whom have the highest scores?

Now, how come the Finnish schools teach less and students learn more? Well, students in Finland get more hands-on activities rather than testing. In Finland, the teaching average is about 20.6 hours per week, which means that the Finnish invest less time in school and more time in personal and professional development, curriculum planning, and various school improvement initiatives (Burg, 2018). Finnish schools focus more on children's needs, such as nutrition and health as well as on culture and poverty. Another reason why the Finnish schools learn more is that, Finnish school teachers receive more years of education than those in the United States. According to Shatlberg (2011), all teachers in Finnish primary, middle, and high schools must hold a master's degree; preschool and kindergarten teachers must hold a bachelor's degree. Besides having a degree, Finnish teachers must also pass examinations, and have good inside and outside of school with records of accomplishment, among other requirements. Overall, students in Finland do better academically because teachers get more academic preparation as well as having more experience when comparing to other countries, such as the United States. The focus of the Finnish education is students' needs and is not what the government wants.

Comparison of the U.S. and Finland's Educational Systems on Students' Academic Achievement

Whereas teachers in the United States teach more, but only focuses on what the government wants the children to do. An example of this is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation that is now implemented at all the schools, which focuses more on testing rather than on the child's interest or what they want to learn. Because of the NCLB, schools in the United States focus more on comparing the performances of schools, but not on the individual student in the area that they need to be successful. The NCLB only focuses on math and reading, but what about the subject, such as history, art and geography that schools ignore? Given this matter, the teachers don't give too much importance to those subjects. "For example, one of the significant failings of U.S. education research is the lack of systematic exploration, development, and testing of new programs" (Vinovskis, 2014, p. 40). All in all, the United States' education differs from Finland's in many ways.

By researching the educational systems in both countries, we could see the differences in education now. Finnish education focuses on less testing, but more on learning. Something important is that Finnish schools don't share their testing scores. In Finland, the testing score is needed to see whether or not the child may need more help to improve or not. On the other hand, the U.S. education focuses more on testing. The schools in the U.S. focus on teaching or preparing students for the next test, but not on what the child wants to learn. According to Vinovskis (2014), "Under the No Child Left Behind Act, all students in grades 3-8 would have to demonstrate proficiency in math and reading by the end of year 2014" (p. 38). This proves once again that the U.S. focuses too much on what the government wants the students to learn. Under those circumstances, the U.S. needs to change its educational system and think about other methods, such a Finland's system that will improve the students' scores.

Comparison of the U.S. and Finland's Educational Systems on Students' Academic Achievement

After coming up with the research topic for capstone paper and doing extensive research, this is the primary research question: *How does the educational system of the U.S. compare with Finland's with regard to their students' academic achievement?* The related or secondary research questions include: *What does the research say about the overall academic achievement of students in the U.S. as compared to those in Finland? How do the two countries (U.S. and Finland) prepare their teachers? (teacher preparation) How do teachers in the U.S. and Finland prepare their students for academic achievement? Are there any differences between the countries with regard to their goals, approaches, curriculum, and resources on teaching and learning? Of the two educational systems in both countries, which system best educate their students? Lastly, As a result, if Finland's students achieve higher in their academics, how come the U.S. has not adopt the Finnish educational system to be implemented in the U.S.? Therefore, should the US change its educational system and focuses more on the individual like the Finnish school system?.*

In sum, many pieces of research have been conducted in comparison to the Finnish and U.S. education. To seek the answers to these research questions, a literature review is needed to be done on both the U.S. and the Finnish educational systems. Based on the literature review, it will show how much information there is to answer the primary and secondary research questions. Finally, this will describe, compare, contrast, and evaluate the significant points of the research topic.

Literature review

The educational systems of the U.S. and Finland have been compared in the past few years. This topic has come up because of the test scores. What do the Finnish schools do to have their students score better than the U.S. Burg (n.d.) asserted that, "In terms of truly leaving no child behind the Finnish has done an admirable job of maintaining not only the quality of education but equity of educational achievement" (p. 3). The Finnish schools focus on meeting every student's needs. On the other hand, the U.S. has the No Child Left Behind Act that only focuses on what the government wants for the child to be able to do. According to Burg (n.d), "This act was a universal mandatory standardized testing for US students at several levels, starting with third grade" (p. 4). Overall, the two countries have a different view on education.

Through this literature review, a summary on the history of U.S. and Finnish education will be discussed as well as on the poverty and diversity rates that each country faces and how this may affect education. Also, why is it essential for Finland that children attend preschool and how will that help them later on their learning? It will then focus on the importance of education for both countries. Additionally, how does the No Child Left Behind Act affect education in the U.S.? Overall, I will be focusing on the pros and cons of education in Finland and the United States.

U.S. Education

The comparison between U.S. and Finland's education systems' is nothing new. This topic has come up because of the good test scores that Finland has achieved in schools as compared to the U.S. What do the Finnish schools do to have their students score better than the U.S? The United States' education has a long history. It all started in the 19th century with Thomas Jefferson, who created the public school system. Later on, more people got involved by

Comparison of the U.S. and Finland's Educational Systems on Students' Academic Achievement

wanting to have a better education. In the 1840s, education was only offered to wealthy people, but later on, it was noted that schooling could create good citizenship and would prevent crime and poverty. So, the main reason why the school was offered to all students no matter what their race, ethnicity, and status because “Jefferson believed that education should be under the control of the government” (Thattai, 2017, p. 1).

As a result of their efforts, free public education at the elementary level was available for all Americans children by the end of the 19th century. Massachusetts passed the first compulsory school attendance law in 1852, followed by New York in 1853. By 1981, all states have passed a law requiring children to attend at least elementary schools (Thattai, 2017, p. 1).

Because of this, the government passed legislation entitled the No Child Left Behind which led to testing on the school and that the school should compare their testing scores of their students to see which school is doing better. This led to the problem that schools are facing today.

President George W. Bush signed the NCLB act on Jan. 8, 2002, which purpose was to “significantly increased the federal role in holding schools responsible for the academic progress of all students” (Klein, 2008, p. 8). With this said, the schools are responsible for their students' performance and achieving a higher score in their tests, including the English-language learners and special education students. If the schools did not follow this act, they're risking losing federal Title I money. Title I money provides financial support for local educational agencies, but only for those whose students succeeded. This money is used for low-income families, so their children can meet the challenges of the state academic standards (Klein, 2018).

Another difference between Finland and the U.S. is that, school districts focus more on which school is doing better or which teacher has the best score instead of focusing on how to meet the students' needs. They don't focus on the individual, but rather comparing the scores of their students with one another. Overall, the NCLB act has affected all students in the U.S. Since

Comparison of the U.S. and Finland's Educational Systems on Students' Academic Achievement

the passage of the NCLB, the U.S. students have been failing further behind their classmates when compared with those in other developed countries (Miller et al., 2016)

In the U.S., the role of the state is to provide equal opportunity for the collective good of the nation, after which it is the responsibility of the citizens to achieve and succeed. (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003 as cited on Itkonen & Jahnukainen, 2007 p. 543).

It is noted that the U.S. tends to spend less money on schools with low- academic achievement. Besides, the U.S. doesn't care much about students living under the poverty line. As mentioned before, the government gives money to schools in which students have achieved a higher academic, and the schools used that money to support low-income students to help them make a higher level of education, but not for students' needs. Some students' needs may be clothes, food, and a place to live. Based on the article, Child Poverty in the U.S. (2013) shows that about 22-33% of students in the United States live in poverty which can lead to problems for the child? For example, children may face health issues, hunger, higher development delays, and learning disabilities. This does not only affect the child right now, but it could change his/her life.

Another factor that can affect education in the United States is the diversity of its student population. Something to take into consideration is that the student population in the U.S. is much more diverse in terms of their language, ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomics than in Finland (Itkonen & Jahnukainen, 2007). This can lead the U.S. to focus differently in education.

One common perception is that the Finnish population is more homogenous than the American society; this is only accurate when comparing Finland to the US on the whole, where 20.3% of the population is non-English speaking. (Burg. n.d, p. 1)

The U.S. has a much broader diversity of people. The United States is a country where a lot of immigrants have migrated to, more than any other country. This leads to different cultures and learning that students may face in the classroom. However, studies show that diversity can be beneficial to other students. According to The Benefits of Diversity in the school website (2019),

there are several ways in which diversity can help students. One way is that students learn more from others with different cultures. For example, it can help them to work harder. The Benefits of Diversity in the school website (2019) indicated that, diversity “enables them to concentrate and push themselves further when there are people of other backgrounds working alongside them” (p. 10). In addition, students feel safer in the classroom and at school as well. This does not only help students but the staff as well. Having teachers with different backgrounds will help students be more aware of the respect for one another no matter what their races are. Everyone deserves to be treated the same no matter what their color of their skin or culture. Overall, the U.S. cares about education, but because of the higher diversity and poverty, it has a different way of helping students in learning.

Finnish education

Finnish schools are much more different in many ways than in the U.S. For example, their system is different with less diversity, less poverty, and provides much more support for their students. On the other hand, in Finnish education, there is not much information on how it came together. But they have the Peruskoulu (comprehensive school) system. It was originated in the late 1960s and early 70s. Before this system, they had the parallel school system, which was a division of grammar and civic schools (Pollari, n.d.). The Finnish government allocated a lot more resources to its school system for its students to have a better performance in their academics. Burg (2007) asserted that “Finland has free universal education for all, including the highest level of university and personal studies” (p. 4). Finnish schools are very serious about their education in Finland, not only for their children inside of the school system as well as outside of the school.

Comparison of the U.S. and Finland's Educational Systems on Students' Academic Achievement

In Finland and many other European countries, the role of the states is not only to provide an opportunity but to support its citizens in their quest for a decent standard of living, work, housing, health, higher education, listed as a collective responsibility- (Itkonen & Jahnukainen, 2007, p. 542).

It's clearly stated that the Finnish schools take care of all their students. In Finland, the government takes care of a child when they are still in their mothers' belly. According to Dickinson (2019), women received maternity grant and a baby care box, so the mother can take care of their baby. Finland is the best country to raise children. Since the first year of the baby, their parents start thinking about their child's education. Children in Finland have the option to attend preschool, but if they choose to, they will have a higher chance to have higher achievement in schools. According to Itakonen and Jahnukainen (2007), "PISA (2003) results indicate that 15-years-old who attended preschool for at least one year had a statistically significant performance advantage over students who did not attend preschool" (p. 8). Since an early age, the children are required to attend school for them to have an achievement in school later on.

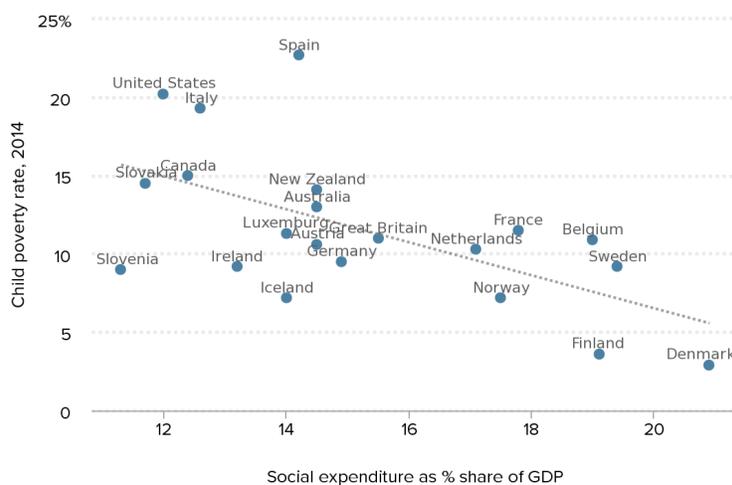
The main reason why it is optional for children to attend preschool is that, they can start developing their learning. However, at the age of 5 years old is when children will attend preschool. "The pre-primary education is organized with a daycare center, and kindergartners and their purpose are to prepare children for school life in terms of fostering their cooperative and social skills" (FNAE, 2014b as cited on Pollari, n.d.). However, Pollari (n.d) states that children in Finland start school at the age of 7, which is much older than children in other countries. Finnish education is based on two stages. The first one is called the primary school, which is from grades 1-6. The second stage is secondary school which is from grades 7-9. Then, at the end of 9th grade, students get their certificate, and their compulsory education is completed (Pollari, n.d.). Overall, the Finnish education system is different from the U.S.

Additionally, Finland is one of the countries with less poverty since the government wants a balanced life in their country no matter what their ethnicity or race is. According to Burg (n.d.), only about 5.3% of children in Finland live in poverty. There are some reasons why Finland has such a low rate of poverty. It is because the government spends more money on social programs, which help low-income families to have a stable living. Also, the Finnish government takes care of building low-income housing for families that don't have a place to live. As Wilson and Schieder (2018) state, Finland spent about one-fifth of its gross domestic products (GDP) and had the lowest post-tax to help child poverty rates. Overall, the Finnish government cares about each individual and their lives outside of school.

Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Poor People's Campaign

Countries investing more in social programs have less child poverty

Social expenditure as a share of GDP and relative child poverty rates in selected OECD countries



Notes: The relative child poverty rate is the share of children living in households making below half of the country's household-size-adjusted median income, after taxes and transfers. Social expenditure is the average government spending on social programs (2013–present), less the average value of public pension programs where data is available over the same time period.

Source: EPI analysis of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development data

Comparison of the U.S. and Finland's Educational Systems on Students' Academic Achievement

Furthermore, compared to the U.S., Finland has 10% diversity who does not speak Finnish, Swedish, or Sami (Burg, n.d. p. 2). By having a low diversity, Finnish schools have play a significant role on their education. Finnish schools don't have to spend time to help students who don't speak the language; instead, teachers have more time to educate their children. In contrast, the United States needs to have programs for students who are non-English speaking, and this leads teachers to have less time for teaching and learning because students do not understand what the teachers teach, so children will get behind. However, as mentioned before, sometimes diversity can help in school to give students morals and respect for one another no matter what their races are. In sum, it's clear that Finnish education has more advantage than the U.S.

Of Finnish PISA test-takers, 98% were born in Finland, seven percentage points above the OECD average of 91.4% for native-born test-takers children in the schools than the U.S. (Itkonen & Jahnukainen, 2007, p. 6)

Something that differs from U.S. education is that, in the Finnish school, they don't have standardized tests like the U.S. In Finnish schools, the government doesn't see if the students have achieved high success in those tests in order to get funding. In Finland, the government wants to provide equal education for everyone. According to Pollari (n.d.), the principles of Finnish education is that, all pupils and students must have the same educational opportunity, irrespective of their ethnic origin, social background, wealth, or where they live. An advantage that Finland has, is less immigration, so it is less diverse. With this said, the Finnish education operates differently from the United States. Both systems of education have their advantages and disadvantages.

Methods and procedures

As I had to start thinking about this research project, I didn't know exactly what to do, but I knew that I wanted to focus on the education of the United States, and what could change its educational system. For me, it is essential that the U.S. should improve its educational system, by focusing less on the testing of standardized tests, but more on the child's interest. Because of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), schools focus more on testing, rather than teaching, to improve students' learning. To conduct my senior capstone research project, whether the United States should adopt the educational system of Finland or not, I had to do a literature review online. After meeting with Professor Paoze Thao to frame my research topic and my research questions, I have a focus in mind. Due to my topic of research, this senior capstone research project only uses a literature review of peer-reviewed articles and books.

In my experience, it was easier for me to conduct a literature review. Other procedures, such as interview with teachers or surveys with students, could not be done. Most of my classmates had to conduct interviews and surveys to collect data for their senior capstone research projects. Since my research was a comparison of the educational systems of Finland and the U.S., it would not be easy for me to find any subject participants in Finland to get their perspectives. Therefore, my only option for this research project is to do a literature review in both countries.

Results and Findings

After conducting my research, I was able to collect useful data that will help me answer my research questions. The following paragraphs will be discussing the results and findings based upon the secondary or related research questions posed in the Introduction and Background section:

What does the research say about the overall academic achievement of students in the U.S. as compared to those in Finland?

To respond to this research question, "Since the publication of the 200 PISA results (NCES, 2002) highlighting Finland's school children raking first in the world for reading, and third for mathematics" (Burg, 2007, p. 1). The NCES reported in 2002 that the Finnish school has become the best educational system because of its highest test scores. This is based on the research done in the United States, stating that the U.S. system of education has some "disadvantages" on how to help children become more successful. Some of the main points of comparison are that, the U.S. has no control over poverty and a high rate of diverse student population as compared to Finland where its population is homogeneous. The U.S. has more issues with its almost "perfect" educational system. The United States has a role in providing students with the opportunity to attend school, but beyond that, the U.S. can't help students to perform well in school. The students' issues included working parents with insufficient resources and not having enough resources. Besides, the United States has a lot of teacher turnover, leaving its position that could affect children's learning. Around 40-50% of teachers leave their professions within the five years of their careers (Ikonen & Fahnukainen, 2007).

Failing schools" (i.e., schools that fail to demonstrate adequate yearly progress, as evidenced by students' scores on these standardized tests) are subject to sanctions. These sanctions range from relatively minor actions, such as providing tutoring, to significant actions, such as reforming the school staff and administration or having students transfer to other schools (Itkonen & Jahnukainen, 2007, p. 6).

In Finland, children have all the resources to become successful and achieve a higher expectation than those in the U.S. For example, the examination results that students take in one of the Finnish schools cannot be compared to the scores with other schools. But those results help to inform and improve the processes of teaching and learning in specific schools. Also,

Comparison of the U.S. and Finland's Educational Systems on Students' Academic Achievement

those results did not affect the funding of schools like in the United States. Something about the Finnish school systems is that it differs from the United States in that, in Finland, students attend fewer hours at schools, and they don't have homework. Overall, the Finnish schools demonstrate that they have better ways to help students with their academic achievement; In contrast, the U.S. has more obstacles as mentioned before. However, the United States has one advantage over the Finnish schools. The advantage that the U.S. has is a higher rate of diversity, not only in students but in the staff as well. Based on their diversity, it helps students to wanted to learn more about another culture. Overall the Finnish and U.S. education have a different academic achievement for their students.

How do the two countries (U.S. and Finland) prepare their teachers? (teacher preparation)

Both countries care about their education in their own way. The U.S. education is more about what the government wants for the child. For example, the No Child Left Behind Act requires all schools to do testing. On the other hand, Finland only cares more about the child as an individual, but not much about testing.

First, the Finnish takes teaching very seriously. In Finland, teaching career is more essential or comparable to a lawyer or a doctor profession. To become a teacher in Finland, one must obtain a master's degree, and to become a preschool or kindergarten teacher, one must have a bachelor's degree. According to Pollari (n.d.), to become a qualified teacher in primary education, one must get a master's degree of 300 ECTS credits, including 60 ECTS credits of pedagogical studies (see Figure 1). To become a teacher, the candidates must have not only high testing scores but also have excellent skills with a deep personal commitment to teach and work in schools. The selection process for teacher candidates is very selective. Only one out of every

ten applicants will be accepted to study in their credential program to become a primary school teacher. The teacher's salary could be negotiated. This is the rationale of why young people want to become teachers (Shatlberg, 2011).

More important than salaries are such as high prestige, professional autonomy in school, and the ethos of teaching as a service to society and the public good (Shatlberg, 2011, p. 35).

After the candidates are selected based on their high school records, examination results, and their records outside of school, they must complete other requirements. Some of these requirements include an exam on an assigned book on pedagogy, do service in a clinical activity that helps the school and the community, and in the end, the candidates will need to be interviewed for the rationale why they want to become teachers. These are not everything that is required; there is more. The final step is that the candidates will have to complete a teacher education program at the government's expense. To have a master's degree in teaching, it will take the candidates about five to seven years. With this being said, it's clear that Finland regards the teaching field very seriously.

Overall, Finland appreciates the teaching career. However, several requirements make the teaching professional hard to get into the program. On the other hand, in the U.S., the teaching profession is not as hard as Finland's. But it has its requirements to become a teacher. Finally, in both countries, the government have their requirements to become a well-prepared educator.

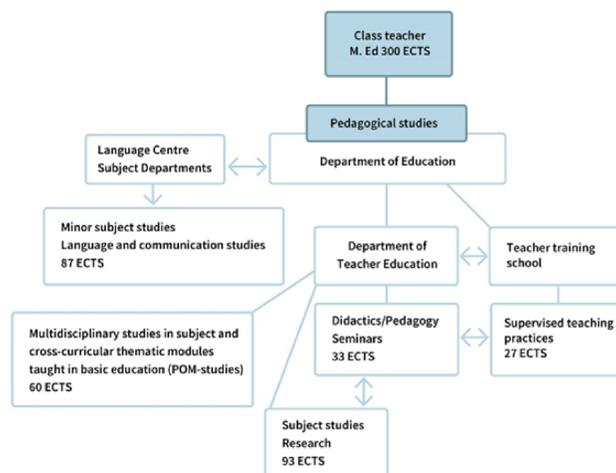


Figure 1. Structure of class teacher studies at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

In contrast, the U.S. cares more about education in many ways than Finland. The U.S. government has some limited role in schools. In the U.S., many students live under the poverty line in addition to their diversity. To become a teacher in the U.S., one must have a bachelor's degree to get into the credential program in teaching. The credential is required in order to work in a public school in the United States. For both countries, the U.S. and Finnish educators must complete a series of examination. Each state has their own examinations. In California, future teachers must complete the California basic educational skill test (CBEST) and the reading instruction competence assessment (RICA) test. It is also required that one must have some experience, such as "a certain number of hours of supervised educational experience to sit for licensure" (writers, 2019, p. 4). Something essential and helpful is that teachers in the U.S. develop a portfolio. The portfolio will help teachers to think more deeply about the teaching profession and about the subject matters that they teach. Besides, it will help them to get more experience by creating lesson plans that they will use in the classroom. Then, after fulfilling all these requirements, when applying for a teaching position, it is more likely that one will get the

job quickly, especially in California, where there is a great need for teachers. The United States differs from Finland in many ways. Each country has different opinions on the teacher training programs. Something to take into consideration is that the population in the United States is more diverse, and there is more population living under the poverty line than Finland.

These influences on the learning of teachers are thought to come from three areas: 1. The process of constructing a portfolio, 2. The mentoring and collaboration that is often associated with the process of portfolio construction, and 3. The feedback is given on the completed portfolio (Wolf, 1994 as cited in Zeichner & Wray, 2000, p. 614).

Overall, the credential program is a way for the future teachers to get some experience in working in a classroom. The program requires pre-service teachers to work in a school since the first day of school until the end of the school year. Some of the requirements are that, they must implement lesson plans in the classroom and get some experience in teaching in the field. Every day after spending the whole day from 8 am through 3 pm, students in the teaching program have their classes, where they talk about their experience and gain more knowledge in the teaching field. Overall, to become a teacher in either country, it is challenging.

How do teachers in the U.S. and Finland prepare their students for academic achievement? Are there any differences between the countries with regard to their goals, approaches, curriculum, and resources on teaching and learning?

The educational system in Finland is much different from the U.S. Each country has its own ways to prepare their students to become successful. The system of education in Finland follows pre-school, primary education, lower secondary school, and upper secondary school. During pre-school, children focus on play, not filling up papers. They also focus on preparing them for primary education. Following the primary education, this is where students in Finland spend more of their time learning, not on "what to learn," but on "how to learn it." During the

Comparison of the U.S. and Finland's Educational Systems on Students' Academic Achievement

primary years, students are encouraged, that is to stimulate the development of concepts and skills. According to the International School (2018), in Helsinki, Finland, some of the areas that children focus on, during this period are math, are language, art, PE, music, Finnish mother tongue, Finnish foreign language, and French language. Then, children will attend the lower and upper secondary school which is the next level of education. During this time, students must complete 75 courses (38 hours per session) along with 47 compulsory courses and ten specialized subjects. Therefore, Finland's curriculum is different from the United States'.

Teachers in Finland have different perspectives from those in the U.S. in their learning style. Finland's curriculum focuses more on skills. Their theory of teaching is to "teach less; learn more" (Burg, n.d., p. 6). In Finland, they believe that space is essential, as well as what the children are going to learn. This is important because they use beanball for children to sit or other methods for students to feel comfortable. It's essential for children to feel safe in the classroom, so they are ready to learn. There are several things to take into consideration about Finland's educational system. For example, it is more important for students to cooperate than to compete. The classroom is considered to be a community where everyone can learn. Teachers and faculty could adjust the furniture to accommodate children since space is the most critical thing for teachers and students. Finland is not afraid to experiment in education. It is easier for children to attend a university because college tuition is free in Finland. Finland provides students with everything to become successful (Brunila and Kallioniemi, 2018).

In Finland, teachers gave students recess for about 15 minutes. Based on Sahlberg (2010) research, break or recess helps children behave better in school, focus and to achieve better in their assignments. Compared to the U.S., free playtime is dwindling in kindergarten for the last two decades. The Finnish law requires teachers to give students 15 minutes of play for every 45

minutes of instruction" (Pollari, n.d., para. 6). In addition, teachers do not assign homework to Finnish children, so parents don't have to worry about their children's education. At schools, Finnish parents know that in schools, the teachers focus on their children's learning. Parents assume that teachers have covered everything that the child needs to know. Teachers and parents want the children to spend time at home or with their families. Overall, education in Finland has too many resources that help children learn in their education.

Grading is vital in the U.S. because the school districts compared their students' scores and see how their school is doing. Are they doing better or worse than others? Teachers evaluate their students based on their tests, homework, class assignments, and writing. In the U.S., teachers give homework to their children every night. Homework is essential for parents. Each day, the parents expect their children to do their homework and ask them to do their homework after school. In the United States, homework is important. It is believed that homework helps children remember and practice more.

Health is important in the United States. When a child wants to attend a public school, he or she must have their required vaccines to attend school. Some of the vaccines are polio, DTP (diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis or whooping cough), MMR (measles mumps and rubella or German measles), and tuberculosis. If a child doesn't have those vaccines before they go to school, they can't attend school and will miss school until their required vaccines are done. Furthermore, most of the schools provide free lunch to students whose parents have low incomes. But if they don't get free lunch, then the children can buy something to eat at the cafeteria or take their lunch to school. The issue of free lunch can be problematic for some children because some of them don't take money to the school, so how are they're going to

concentrate if they are hungry? Overall, the U.S. educational system cares and focuses more on what the teacher wants to teach and not on what the child wants to know.

After all, things are considered, the Finnish and U.S. education systems differ from each other. The Finnish school system is more child-centered, and the U.S. is more focused on direct teaching. However, we must take all the factors, e.g. poverty, diversity, and cultural beliefs into consideration when comparing the U.S. Finland's educational systems.

Of the two educational systems in both countries, which system best educate their students?

Based on the research Miller (2016) stated that Finland's system of education teaches its students to have higher academic achievement; they don't focus on the test. There are several issues why the United States can't use the same system as Finland. Based on the act, No Child Left Behind, in the U.S., all the schools focus on what the child must know how to take the tests, so schools could compare one with another on what school has the highest test scores. But the school district doesn't see what the child may need to learn and what are their possible ways to learn.

A school day in Finland

In most of the schools in Finland, the day starts around 8 or 9 a.m. and ends between 1 or 2 p.m. The students have 25 lessons a week. Each lesson is about 45 minutes in length, which means that there are about 3 hours and 45 minutes of instruction each day. During these 25 lessons, especially in fifth grade, nine of the 25 weekly lessons are arts, music, craftwork, and sport. In Finland, the school takes into consideration the arts and sports as well. Something important is that the students are provided with free lunch. According to Sahlberg (2010), since 1943, Finland serves a healthy and warm lunch for all the students. Having free meals for

students is important because some children live in poverty, and by having free meals, children are able to eat and ready to learn.

The curriculum in Finnish schools has a three-tier system. In Finland, children are not required to take standardized tests. The teacher uses school-made summative and diagnostic assessments to see where a student needs more help to be able to become successful. For teachers, it is essential to assess children. The teacher gives two report cards each year to children. "In grades 1 through 4, the reporting is based on a description of the pupil's strengths and all the areas which need more development. In Grades 5 and 6, progress is assessed using grades of 4 to 10" (Brunila & Kallioniemi, 2016, p. 545). Those are the primary assessments that teachers gave to their children to see where they have progress, how the child is doing, and to determine how to help children better.

Students in the U.S. schooling

In the United States, teachers care about their students, and they want the best for them. In the U.S., children start school in kindergarten or 1st grade. But students usually start at the elementary school level. Then, they will go to middle school and high school. In the United States, students attend school from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m. This is their typical day in elementary school. Students spend most of their time attending a school close to their home as their school district requires. Teachers in primary school prepared "lesson plans" each day. Each teacher must prepare themselves for the next day. Teachers must create their lesson plans, which they will cover; what he/she will be teaching the following day. The teachers must follow a curriculum based on their school district. This curriculum helps them to develop the lessons that they need to be working on during the week. For each grade level, all the teachers must be on the same page, which means that all of them must be on the same page book and lesson (Mason, 2013).

A lesson plan helps teachers to use their time wisely and know what to teach so that children can stay focus in class. A lesson plan has six key parts which are: lesson objectives, related requirements, lesson materials, lesson procedures, assessment method, and lesson reflection. The lesson objectives are where the teacher describes what the students will be able to do after completing this lesson plan. Next, the related requirements are national, state, or school standards that tell the teacher what they need to teach in the class. The lesson materials are the things that teachers would need to develop lesson plans, such as student handouts, textbooks, visuals, grading rubrics, activity packets, and computers/tablets. The lesson procedure is where the teacher explains to their students how the lesson will be and what students need to do. Then, the assessment method is where the teacher gives their students a quiz to show how much does each student understand the material. Finally, the lesson reflection is where the teacher reflects on what they need to improve the lesson after he/she is done. Overall, it's evident that teachers in the U.S. focus more on what they want the children to know, and not so much on the children's interest (Zeichner and Wray, 2001).

As a result, if Finland's students achieve higher in their academics, how come the U.S. does not adopt the Finnish educational system to be implemented in the U.S.?

According to research (Pollari, n.d.), children in Finland achieve higher in their academics than those in the U.S., but there are several reasons why the U.S. doesn't adopt the educational system from Finland. As the research (Burg, n.d.), shows, the Finnish school has more government support, less immigration problem which means less diversity in school and less poverty. In the United States, children face many more struggles to become successful when compared with Finland. As mentioned before, the U.S. has more immigrants than any other

Comparison of the U.S. and Finland's Educational Systems on Students' Academic Achievement

countries. There are children from Mexico, Africa, Japan, China, etc. Everyone has their own beliefs and their own culture about schooling.

For the U.S. to adopt the same educational system as Finland, a lot of structural change would need to be made, which is impossible to do, e.g., issues involving diversity, poverty, and students/family values. In Finland, everything is different from the U.S. In Finnish schools; students have different value systems. Their parents focus on their children's education from the womb since they are not even born yet. The Finnish government and parents focus on the child's status. For example, they would monitor what the child eats every day before going to school and be prepared to learn. Compared to the U.S., sometimes, the child may be hungry because they hadn't eaten for days. They must go to school and learn, but how does the child learn if they can't focus because he/she is hungry? Also, the United States has a higher rate of poverty. Itkonen and Jahnukainen (2007) asserted that "students who live in poverty have a dropout rate of 25% (and up to 50% in urban school systems), while students from high-income families have a dropout rate of 2%" (p. 7). That is a considerable rate because children don't have the resources to become successful. The main reason why the U.S. has the lowest achievement in education is due to poverty that makes it harder for children to focus on their learning. So, for the U.S. to adopt the educational system from Finland, it will need to have a major structural change in everything, starting from diversity, poverty, and culture. Based on the research (Itkonen and Jahnukainen, 2007), it would not be easy for the U.S. to adopt the educational system from Finland. With these being said, Finland has more opportunities to help children in schools than in the U.S.

Discussions

Looking back to the importance of my topic, I concluded that the Finnish education has significantly impacted schools. Since Finnish education receives higher rating, many other schools around the world are wondering how the Finnish culture has achieved this level of achievement? The U.S. is interested in Finnish education due to their highest-ranking on education. After doing this research, many factors, e.g. diversity and poverty must be taken into consideration before the U.S. could adopt the Finnish educational system. Overall, Finland has more advantages in teaching its students for higher academic achievement than the United States.

Now that I know what the data says, I think that the United States can change its educational system to be more child-centered rather than direct-teaching. As Finland's education has emerged as one of the best education system known for "teach less, learn more," which means that teachers work fewer hours in the classroom by letting the children do more exploring than the teacher talking all the time. I think that the United States should take the students' need into consideration for them to become successful. The Finnish school provides free lunch for every single student no matter what their race or status is. Mason (2013) stated that, when students have breakfast before going to school, they have a higher expectation for learning. Overall, the educational systems in the two countries have their advantages and disadvantages.

For the United States to adopt the Finnish education, many things should be taken into consideration, for example, diversity, poverty, and the No Child Left Behind act. As we know, the United States is one of the most diverse countries in the world. According to Burg (n.d.), forty percent (40%) of the U.S. population is diverse. In addition, poverty can affect children in education. According to Thattai (2017) research shows that there is about 33% poverty in the

U.S. education system. Moreover, the NCLB act has affected the children's education in the U.S. Because of this, the school focuses more on preparing students to pass their standardized testing rather than on learning. Overall, the U.S. school can make a better environment for children.

On the other hand, Finland's education has some advantages over the U.S.'. Some of these advantages include less diversity and less poverty. In Finland, there are approximately 5.3% poverty rate because the Finnish government spends more money on programs for low-income people. Furthermore, the Finnish schools have less diversity, which has some pros and cons. One advantage is that, by having less diversity, the Finnish schools don't have to worry about placing students to learn the Finnish language. However, the cons of having less diversity is that Finnish students don't have the opportunity to share and learn ideas from students from other cultures. Also, by having less poverty, Finnish education get their students well-prepared to learn without worries about food, housing, and clothes. Finally, both countries differ in their educational system, and each of them has their approaches in education.

Overall, the data that I was able to collect, helped answer my related or secondary questions. By doing only a literature review and peer review articles, I was able to answer each of the related research questions with regards to the educational systems of both countries. Also, this research makes me think that the U.S. could do something to change its educational system to become more successful. In this research, I found most of the information that I was hoping for to respond to my research questions. Overall, the data that I found was helpful, but I had some problems and limitations during this senior capstone.

Problems and Limitations

The obstacles I faced in conducting this senior capstone research project, are that I did not have sufficient time to do research. By taking more than four classes, it was hard to only

focus on my senior capstone research project as well as balancing my personal life. On the other hand, since my topic was about Finnish education, I couldn't do interviews or surveys with schools in that country. So, my professor told me that if I can't approach the Finnish schools, then I should not collect similar data from schools in the United States as well. In addition, sometimes I could not find much information in one source, I had to depend on several. Therefore, I had some problems finding specific information. Besides the scarcity of sources, I think I have been able to enough data and information to answer my secondary research questions. Now that I am done with my senior capstone, I feel that I could have used other methods and procedures to seek the answer to my research questions if I have more time. For example, I could have looked for books about each country specifically. Even though I did not have enough time, I was able to conduct research on my senior capstone.

Recommendation

After conducting this research, the U.S. should find a solution to change its educational system. In the United States, the NCLB has affected education in one way or another; for example, students in the U.S. are expected to achieve higher on standardized testing. Also, this has led children having less interest in schools because they could not learn and explore in fun ways. Overall, the Finnish education has impacted the U.S. educational system.

By completing this research project, the U.S. should change its educational system for children's academic achievement. One recommendation is the U.S. educational system can learn from Finland's approach to education. Due to the diversity and poverty in the U.S., these have affected the schools. Due to the fact that the U.S. can't adopt the Finnish culture, the U.S. can learn from the Finnish education to to seek a solution to these educational problems in the U.S.

Conclusion

This senior capstone research project examine the educational system of the U.S. compare with Finland's with regard to their students' academic achievement through the use of literature review. After all things are considered, the results indicate that Finland has become one of the best educational system known for its students highest test scores. This makes the U.S. to wonder why the United States has not adopted Finland's educational system. After observing the Finnish education there are several issues that could not be easily resolved. It is important to note that education borrowing takes place between different nations, but one size does not fit all. The United States cannot adopt the Finnish education due to many factors, such as poverty, diversity, and cultural beliefs. However, the U.S. needs a reform and change its educational system for higher academic achievement for its students.

One of the biggest issues in education in the United States is the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB). This has put some limitations on the U.S. schools. Because of the NCLB Act, schools are responsible for the students' learning. The NCLB Act requires all schools to do standardized testing to collect data for the students in their schools. Whereas in Finland, the Finnish government provides enough financial support and resources to their schools. In addition, the two countries have their own philosophy on education how to best educate the children in their own country. Finally, if the United States can't adopt the Finnish educational system, they can learn from Finland's approach to education. Afterall, the United States should reform or perhaps change its educational system to ensure that the next generation is well and fully educated.

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