

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN SERBIA AND FINLAND

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Abstract: *The Finnish education system is one of the best in the world. In measuring the success of their education systems, many countries compare themselves to Finland. Quite a few countries have tried to copy a part or all of this education system into the education systems of their countries. In general, it was not a proper way, because every country has its own specificities and it is precisely these that should be a factor in developing the education system of every country. This also applies to our education system in Serbia. The paper analyzes the importance of education and science for the development of society, specificities of the Finnish education system, extent of differences and similarities between the primary education systems in Finland and in Serbia.*

Keywords: *primary school, education system, society, pupils, Finland, Serbia*

It is a well-known fact how important knowledge, science or education are for the development of each country. They have an enormous importance in achieving sustainable development of a country, because they enable professional training and development of individuals - individuals who will be an important factor in raising the level of quality of life and well-being of the society as a whole. Experts agree that the continuous improvement of skills and abilities of people and taking actions and measures that enable the creation of an innovative society and a society based on knowledge are becoming an imperative in the contemporary society. Quality education that is the basis of knowledge appears as a priority of social development, strategy and organization of the society. The time in which we live today and the time that is coming is based on science, knowledge and information. Education and society are interdependent. Societies that can not or do not want to invest more in science, can not keep up with developed economies, rich countries and, consequently better life of their citizens. The degree and quality of education system of a certain country is conditioned by several factors. One of the most important factors is the degree of economic development of a country. Rich countries, with a developed economy, have greater opportunities for good education systems. This is because they provide better conditions for development. However, the economic factor is not the only decisive factor in this important field. Technical development of a certain country affects education – knowledge. It stimulates innovation and, consequently, social changes. Its importance is in developing all forms of communication

in the society. The contemporary society is the society of technology and particularly computer science, information and communication. However, the social conditions are equally important for the education system of a country. If there is a small number of rich people who hold monopolistic positions in the society and their wealth has a dubious origin, this will adversely affect the education system and knowledge as a whole. One of the problems that are among social factors is the hypothesis that science will make less progress in the event that the society does not have a developed middle class, since the middle classes hold creative, entrepreneurial and creative forces of a society. It is likely that a society with a high percentage of lower classes, routine work and jobs will not create a positive climate for science and scientific achievements, in other words, it will not understand the importance and role of science and education in the society. Today, the undeveloped countries are experiencing the phenomenon called 'Brain Drain'. This is happening in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Young and talented, educated people migrate to rich countries. All these factors cause the phenomenon that the undeveloped countries, which have invested considerable resources in education of such professionals are facing a lack of staff and rich countries obtain ready-made workers without any investments in their education. All of this makes poor countries even poorer and rich countries richer.

Cultural conditions are the next important factor for education and science. They mainly include tradition and traditional attitude to knowledge, education, culture and progress. It is understood that the rich and strong culture of a country should stimulate the development of science, scientific research and their use, and hence the overall progress of society. If we look at it the opposite way, then the education is a key moment in cultural conditions for the development of science and scientific achievements. This means that education and science are directly interrelated.

Last, but not least important, are the political conditions. Politics can have a major impact on education and knowledge. This impact can be negative, but it may also be positive. If politics interferes too much in the field of education and knowledge, if it dictates, suppresses this field to the periphery of the society, considers it competitive, then the impact will be negative. If politics respects the autonomy of education and provides support to knowledge and education, then it will certainly have a stimulating effect.

Countries that have properly understood and applied the action of all factors in the society and their impact on education have built up such education systems that are a driver of progress in every respect. One of these countries is Finland. It chose the right path, often referred to as the "Finnish Way". The Finnish education system is considered by experts around the world to be of high quality. It is a model for many countries, because their students have been achieving top results in PISA testing for many years and they have often been the first in the world. The government invests heavily in education. That is about 5.9 percent of GDP, with slight deviations in certain time periods. Finland is therefore considered to be one of the most developed countries in the world and there is no brain drain. Finnish experts remain in their country in high percentage, in order to help to their country, since it made an investment in them.

The Finnish education system is one of the best in the world. It is important to emphasize that this has not always been the case in the last thirty years. Until the 1990s, the Finnish education system did not show particularly good results. In many segments the educational policy was not significantly different from the educational systems of most European coun-

tries. This country has been continuously building the current, very successful result and a high place on the world list of quality education systems for many years.

Every new government has continued with further development of the existing system. They have not introduced radical changes or denied previous models. It is also important that every government has strictly enforced and implemented all laws, regulations and procedures. School legislation has not undergone frequent changes, new rules, standards and the like. An important turning point for Finnish economy and society came in the 1990s. Then the focus of the Finnish national industry was high technology and innovation. The significance of the society of knowledge was properly recognized, which was followed by rapid growth of information technology and high-tech industry. All of these required highly educated professionals. One of the best examples is 'Nokia', as a symbol of a small country that, using knowledge and quality education, has gone to the very top of the world.

Finland has achieved a national consensus and thus strengthened the national potential of the country. It has created social cohesion and high trust in government and public institutions. All of these resulted in easy implementation of all national strategies and reforms.

With regard to the degree of decision-making, in Finland the Government determines the general goals and the number of teaching hours, the Ministry of Education proposes laws related to education and the National Education Board determines specific goals and key contents and sets the national curriculum. Local education authorities together with teachers prepare the basic local curriculum.

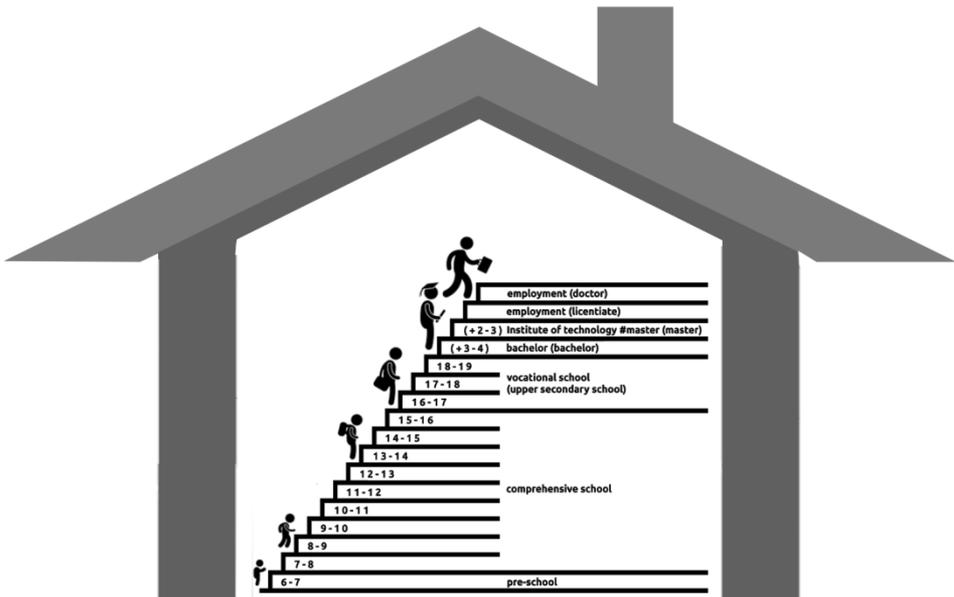


Fig.1 Finnish education system scheme

PRIMARY SCHOOL IN FINLAND

Finland has about 3700 primary schools. They are mostly public and about 30 are private. Both public and private schools are financed by local governments. Elementary school lasts 9 years (6 + 3). Children start school at 7 years of age. At the age of 6 they start pre-school, which is mandatory. In Finnish schools, in the first years of their schooling, pupils are taught how to study. Priority is also given to early detection of possible difficulties in learning, remembering or behavior. There are a number of special programs in which such children are included, in order to realize the cognitive potential of early childhood and reduce the gap between their achievements and achievements of other children as much as possible. The school year lasts 185-195 days. It starts in mid-August and ends in early June.

Students have 222 school lessons a year. Younger students have fewer lessons than older students. 1st year students have 19 lessons a week and 9th year students have 30 lessons a week.

Each subject should teach different skills to children. In the last reform, the Finns reduced the religious education and ethics by one lesson, while increasing the number of lessons in music, art and physical education.

As far as foreign language learning is concerned, Finnish students generally choose French, German and Russian as elective subjects. From the 6th year until the end of secondary school children have some mandatory subjects, but they choose most of the subjects on their own and make their own schedule, namely, all the important subjects must be attended, but they themselves determine whether they want a lower or higher level, depending on their interests. One of the compulsory subjects is "Finland", where they learn about the people, society, economy of Finland, values, parties, etc. They have various projects.

There is no national testing at the end of primary education.

SPECIFICATIONS OF THE FINNISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

In Finland education is free for all and at all levels of education. Students have unpalatable free meals, social and health insurance. Children are deployed in schools by their place of residence to avoid socio-economic differences. Finns have the possibility of lifelong permanent training because education at all levels is free and even in private schools that are also free and work on the same plan and program as state schools. In schools, besides regular classrooms there are also libraries, recreational facilities, rooms with music facilities, studio for acting, rooms for the folk handicrafts room, scientific research rooms, gymnasiums, lounge chairs where students are resting while reading, chess tables and much more. The specificity is that schools also have different animals that pupils feed: fish, turtles, bunnies. The pupils also take care of the many plants by watering them. Thus, the responsibility and love for nature is taught. Ecological awareness is built by collecting recycled materials. Children are allowed to help the cleaning ladies or in the kitchen if they so wish, and thus overriding the hierarchy. When it is time for rest, children are allowed to go outdoors whether it is raining or snowing. Great attention is paid to the didactic material and therefore the pedagogical experts consider it excellent. The use of computers has been customized, and many textbooks are also published in electronic form. The pupils at elementary school get free textbooks, and in the fifth grade school even pay for excursions, theater, camping and the like. No money is needed from parents. Children with special needs go to the same school

with other children. Only one child with special needs can be in the classroom. There is a special teacher assistant assisting him in learning. In Finland it is precisely the fact that work ethic has always been at the highest level and that the Finches were convinced, both in the past and in the past nowadays, that only continuous work and learning can bring benefits, both on a personal level and on the society's development.

School usually ends between 12:00 to 14:00h depending on age. As parents of many children work until 17:00h Finnish schools successfully solved this problem. Children of younger age have the opportunity to stay in school, and for children of older age many playgrounds were built near the school.

Primary school does not apply standardized tests, but they are applied individually from grade to grade. Such an approach is due to the fact that standardization neglects the student's individual potential. But this does not mean that the Finnish pupils are not achieving good results on international standardized tests. In fact, the opposite. At OECD PISA tests that are highly standardized to allow for an adequate comparison between individual countries, Finnish students are among the best, and not the small number is the best. Despite the smallest number of classes and the smallest homework assignments.

Every seven weeks, all the students write what was good, what they think is not, what should be improved in the curriculum. It is a kind of self evaluating of the school system. One of the things Finnish are the most proud of is that children gains new knowledge with enthusiasm, which is not burdened with homework, but spending time on courses in the field they are interested in, because the application of practical knowledge is highly appreciated.

TEACHING STAFF

One of the foundations of the success of Finnish education is the quality education of teaching staff. From the teaching staff, the state requires the highest education. The faculties decide independently on receiving students and the content of teacher education. A large number of students apply to these faculties but only 10% will be admitted. This is because this is an attractive, respected and well-paid occupation. Teachers must, besides pedagogical studies, complete their master's degree and have a professional practice. Teacher education is based on research, which provides teachers with the expertise and the ability to develop their own work. They need to work in multicultural environments. They need to go through training to learn how to work with children with special needs. It is also important for them to use modern technology. In addition to extensive experience in learning and teaching, the qualifications of teachers include social, ethical and moral skills. The teacher should research and write scientific papers. They are independent experts and are acquainted with the needs and capabilities of their students and respect the goals of the national curriculum. They are given a broad professional freedom and autonomy. They decide on the choice of methods, teaching materials, and even finances. They are active participants in the development of local curricula. They also work in expert groups preparing educational reforms. This way they influence the development of education at the national level. Profession enjoys a high status in society. The complete system of teacher work is based on trust rather than on inspections and other controls.

The Trade Union of Education in Finland represents 95% of Finnish teachers. There are no strikes, termination of work and shortening of classes. The union is a key bearer of interest in Finnish education.

According to OECD research, more than 90% of teachers in primary, secondary and vocational schools in Finland love their work. Only 2% of high school teachers regret becoming teachers. These figures show great satisfaction and motivation in international comparisons.

SIMILARITIES, BUT MAINLY DIFFERENCES

Serbian educational system is in the process of transition, as well as a complete Serbian society. When we speak about similarities about Serbia and Finland, I have to point out that the similarity is in the size of the country and the number of students. That very similarity is the foundation for us to follow in the footsteps of Finland and Finnish educational system. Of course, not in the way of copying their way of work, methods and everything else regarding education. Many countries have copied the educational system of Finland and failed to achieve wanted results. Finnish experts from educational sphere have pointed that out, and they are of opinion that countries should not copy but find their own way.

Because of great success of Finnish students and the quality of educational system, Finland has widely opened its doors to experts from many countries to visit their kindergartens, schools and faculties. Our educational experts have also been in such visits. They have returned with great impressions and hope that something similar will be done in our country.

If we compare the society of Finland and Serbia and the status of educational systems, schools and science, the similarity is the realization that with knowledge and quality education we can improve the complete status of an individual and society as a whole. But, there is a big difference and it lies in the fact that the Finnish people have accepted this realization and it is being put into practice. In our country it is still wishful thinking. Finland is a country which greatly appreciates education. All their reforms have been thoroughly done, step by step, in continuity. Every new government have continued and improved the results of the previous. And the results are obvious. They have had a clear vision, mission and strategy. In our country, it has been done in a different way. Visions and strategies have changed with the change of the government and ministers. However, the last strategy has not been changed, but it has been criticized and rated by the Minister of Education as a list of nice wishes. In Finland there have not been any radical changes as we have had in Serbia. Educational system has been made familiar with all the changes in a proper way and that is why most new school years have not started with a strike. A great majority of their educational workers is involved in the syndicate that protects the rights of its employees. In our country, there are more syndicates, but they are not in unison, they do not always protect the rights of employees and it often happens that the employees of one syndicate are in strike and the rest are not. Instead of achieving their rights employees who strike are even sanctioned or threatened with sanctions. That is a recent case with the adoption of the new Law of standards of education.

In Finnish teacher faculties it is difficult to enroll and only the best can do it. That is because this profession is greatly appreciated, because of security, good salary and motivation for work. The situation is different in our country. Finnish students of education

spend a lot of time in practical work, which is of great quality and functionality. So, besides theoretical knowledge, they achieve practical skills and after studies are completely ready to work. Teachers in Finland are guides through learning, not lecturers. Their primary role in elementary school is to develop curiosity and wish for learning among children.

The treatment of the country towards education is based on trust not control. They do not have inspections and controls as we have. In our schools, besides regular inspection, external evaluation has also been introduced and inspections also come to school at a complaint of parents, children and the other parties. There has often been criticism that the inspection pays more attention to documentation and paperwork, and less on things of substance and teaching process. We are in a greater need of advisers who would come to class, control and analyze the shortcomings and then advise teachers how to correct them and improve their teaching. So, in our country the emphasis is more on control and less on the advisory function of the inspection. Besides that, the officials from the Ministry of Education (inspectors, advisers) should analyze and make their superiors familiar with the status quo and measures that should be taken. Considering frequent changes of rules and implementation of innovations, training and expert courses should be organized for teachers and professors, so that, in due time, they can be introduced to these changes and implement them in practice.

The difference between these two educational systems is also in the period of how long the elementary school lasts. In our country it is 8 years and in Finland 9. Children in Finland start school at the age of 7, and in our country at the age of 6.5 to 7.5.

Regarding pupils, primarily pupils in elementary schools, the differences are most obvious there. In our schools plans and programs are strictly followed, and in Finland development and improvement of pupils are followed and then plans. The relationship between teachers and pupils is more friendly and relaxed. Motivation of the pupil is on the first place, and not punishing. Great attention is given to early discovery of potential difficulties in learning, memorizing, and behavior of children. There are special programs where children are involved so that the cognitive processes of early childhood can be used to the best advantage and the difference of their achievements compared to the other children reduced as much as possible. The system of inclusive education is an integral part of mandatory education in Finland. Education is divided in two parts: regular-mainstream education and special education. Pupils are involved in special schools and classes only at a certain period of time.

The classrooms are different just like classes, and teachers have full autonomy. Our teachers do not have such autonomy, but still there is a certain level of autonomy. Finnish pupils receive functional knowledge, unlike ours. Play has a significant role in the education of every Finnish pupil. And that is not the play by the rules like in our schools, but the one developed by the pupils because in that way they will play what they like. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Pupils in Finland spend very little time doing their homework. The research done in 2014 around the world showed that Finnish pupils spend 2.8 hours per week on average doing homework. The Finnish people appreciate more free time and play. In their classroom it is important that pupils speak more than teachers both in class and in other activities. Teachers are not classical lecturers but they lead pupils through educational and non-educational content. There are also inter-subject matters that are connected so a little Finnish pupil does not learn about the First World war separately from history and separately from geography. It is assumed that the topics are

connected by time and content. Finnish children are happy children, they love school and they do not skip classes. It is devastating to know that in our country in the period 2013/1014 pupils skipped 4 million classes. When justified absence is added to this number we come to total of 50 million. Pupils in Finland, during their primary and secondary education do only one standardized test. Our pupils always do some tests, some of them standardized some of them not, in all subjects during a school year. At the end of elementary school they do a final test from seven subjects, also when they enroll at faculties and probably at the end of high school. It is a known fact that testing inspires fear, stress and other negative feelings in students.

Problems that exist in Finnish schools are different than ours. One of the problems in Finnish schools is inadequately active learning of foreign languages. They speak English excellently and they also have to know Swedish. Of course, they also have problematic student, but specially trained teachers who can deal with them work with these students. Specially trained teachers also work with pupils who are backward in learning. If we compare inclusion in our country, which is not introduced in a proper way, the difference is obvious. Our regular school has not been properly adapted for involvement of children with special needs. Often teachers who are not educated to work with these children have searched different ways how to deal with them, so that parents and schools managed this in different ways. The number of pupils in classes is too big so that in many cases individualized approach is often impossible. This is only a part of our problems, but almost a complete problem of Finnish education.

CONCLUSION

There are many differences and fewer similarities. Finland today achieves very high results in many other fields of social and economic development. So, it is regularly among world top countries in investment and research and development, and also in stimulation of innovation, quality of the business area, transparency of doing business and lack of corruption. Serbia, compared to it is far below. It is necessary to be familiar with the system of values that underlie Finnish and Serbian society, and that can be a basis for introducing good examples from Finnish education. Serbia cannot and should not copy most of social values from Finland but this country can be a good example of assessing our own values. If nothing else, "Finnish model of education" can teach us a lot and show us a right way towards success.

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