

## TEACHER EDUCATION PRACTICES IN INDIA AND FINLAND: A PRESPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

An educational institution has a significant role towards imparting knowledge to students and key personnel, with an educational institution, who spearheaded this transformation are, the teachers in that institution. A well trained and efficient teacher leads to a better future, of the country. Finland has been recognized world-wide, for its education system, including teacher education. This paper researched on, the education for teacher, with respect to Finland and India. India has the highest count of young population. There was a comparison between the two countries' teacher education practices and policies, as well as, an attempt to see some of the best practices, that can be implemented from Finnish education system.

**KEYWORDS:** Teacher, Education, Finland, India, Comparison, Research & Practices

### INTRODUCTION

The last part of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, have already seen dramatic changes brought about by globalization. Education, being a potential instrument for human kind, to keep pace with such unprecedented growth and development, cannot remain static and indifferent, to these developmental changes. With this serious evolution in education, all teachers need to evolve likewise. Discussion on Teacher education is critical to ensure that, future of education evolves as per changes required, in the near future.

Teachers being “the pivotal around which education revolves”, the teacher education is identified and understood as the “most challenging sector” for systemic reforms, in school education. The implication of this, is to give due emphasis to developing reflective teachers, with positive attitudes, values and perspectives, along with skills for the craft of teaching. Any transformational change requires the ability to assimilate and then, to accommodate new knowledge which requires constant attention on learns, unlearn and relearn. Teacher educators need to undergo this transformational journey to equip themselves with right knowledge, skills and attitude, to be able to meet future requirements of the modern society. Teacher educators need to concern themselves with this matter, more seriously than others, as they have an obligation to the young children, through their work of preparing teachers.

Recently, the role and nature of teacher's pedagogical knowledge has been emphasised as, an important factor in developing teacher education (e.g. Totterdell et al. 2011; Gray 2010; Gholami 2011). For instance, when discussing the relationship between theory and practice, Korthagen (2010) has highlighted the importance of prior knowledge in teacher's learning and the dominance of preconceptions, among both student teachers and practising teachers. Korthagen basically adopts the viewpoints put forward by Dolk (1997) and Eraut (1995), that much of the teacher's behaviour is immediate, occurring without reflection and is grounded in unconscious and often intertwined images, feelings, values and needs. However, he maintains that through reflection, one 'may become aware of at least some of these sources' and develop conscious cognitive schema for describing practices.

In 2007, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), referred to Finland as a “superpower of education”. BBC was not the only one, but Finnish basic education has received similar praise in various rankings and publications across the globe. Finnish basic education has received similar praise in a variety of rankings and publications, few being A) Better Life Index 2014 B) Top 10 countries of the world 2012. Not only globally, but these praises have been showered by many local educational researchers, describing Finnish educational system as a “MODEL OF EXCELLENCE”. Finland is one of the most literate nations of the world, as per statistics from UNICEF. Primary school enrolment for 2008-11 was 98 % and secondary school enrolment for 2008-12, being 93%.

In India, we have a population of 1.2 Billion, with the majority of the youngest population in the world. With such a young population comes the added responsibility of their education. It does put a lot of pressure on teacher education. This paper, tried to understand fundamental differences between Teacher Education in India and Finland. Mainly finding out some of the key policies and practices followed across Finland, rated Best country for Education and what can India learn from Finland, in terms of teacher Education and implement.

### **TEACHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: HISTORY, POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

Teacher education has a long history. It all started with Gurukul style of education in India, which went through its modifications, over period of time. With the arrival of Mughals, another parallel teaching style started. This continued and got modified with Britishers in India. The major transformation started post-Independence, with the establishment of University Education Commission in 1948, which gave valuable suggestions, towards in-service and pre-service teacher education. It was not until 1966, when the Education Commission submitted a comprehensive report on, the major overhaul in teacher education. The Education commission emphasized the need and importance of practice in teacher education and role of, in-service education. The result of the recommendations was more allocation for teacher preparation funds, better salaries and better service conditions. Also, National Policy and education was formulated in, 1968.

India, like many other nations, continues to work with variants of education models, introduced by the colonial rulers. Qualitative improvement of teacher education has been the concern of various commissions and reports, such as, the Education Commission Report (Government of India [GoI], 1964), the National Commission on Teachers (GoI, 1985) and the National Policy of Education (GoI, 1986).

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT], 2005), has identified significant gaps, in the education of teachers: absence of linkages between theory and practice, content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge; assumptions about knowledge as given; dearth of opportunities for reflection; lack of critical examination of syllabi, textbooks, curriculum and short duration of teacher preparation programmes.

#### **Schooling Cycle**

Schooling cycle in India starts, as soon as, the kid attains the age of 3 years. In India, we follow a 10+2+3 cycle for student’s education. It starts with pre-primary education.

Pre-primary stage is the foundation of child’s knowledge, skills and behaviour. On Completion of pre-primary education, the child is sent to primary stage but, pre-primary education in India, is not a fundamental right. In rural India, pre-primary schools are rarely available in small villages and urban area, on the contrary. But in cities and big towns, there

are many established players in pre-primary education sector. The Indian government lays emphasis on primary education, also referred to as elementary education, to children aged, 6 to 14 years old.

In India, secondary education covers children in the age group of, 12 to 18 years. The last two years are often termed as Higher Secondary or Senior Secondary education, or in some cases only +2. It is critical to pass this and obtain certification, from the central board (under HRD ministry), before one can commence pursuit of higher education / professional degree course or, other courses. Some of these courses can be Bachelor's degree in Arts, commerce or science or enrol in degree programs such as, law, medicine or engineering.

Primary focus, in each of the stages of schooling is primarily towards, marks attainment and merits and credits. Only recently, a few international schools are considering the concepts being taught, in other foreign countries, such as USA, Finland, etc. has the focus come on child's creativity and learning, rather than only marks. The focus is, towards giving school homework and driving that, to keep students busy and engaged.

### **Private v/s Government Schools**

India has been following a model, wherein there are government schools, which are completely funded by Government and few are private schools, which are either partially funded by State Governments, in India or, run by various trusts in India. Considering that, these policies are laid down top-down in Indian Education, there should have been minimal difference in teaching standards; however, the government run schools are in a bad state, in many states. The teaching staffs are mostly, under qualified and the no. of teachers are also, insufficient. Leaking roofs, students cramped up in tiny classrooms, makeshift classrooms, insufficient funding and scarce facilities, make the situation even worse. On the other hand, the private schools are well-equipped in terms of infrastructure and are doing no good, in terms of quality.

In the Indian context however, there are too many loopholes, which prevent the government schools from developing and becoming strong and efficient educational institutions, which will play the role of imparting education, to almost 60% of the Indian population that lives in rural areas. In both private and government schools, teaching quality is a matter of concern. Private schools are still better in many areas, in comparison to government schools.

### **Centralized vs. Decentralized**

Indian education system is primarily centralized with a top-down approach. The curriculum across teacher education and schools are decided, by central committees. The state level educational bodies, as well as municipal committees, have little to no power, in deciding the curriculum or empowering teachers with curriculum changes, to suit the students' need.

### **Teacher's Education**

To become a teacher's instructor, it requires clearing out of two steps.

- A written paper for qualification to becoming a teacher, who's pre-requisite, is an, Under-graduate and a post-graduate.
- A round of interview, for selecting the desired candidates may or may not be there.

After selection as a teacher, as soon as he/she enters a college, is asked to teach a paper. There is a sudden transformation in his role, as a teacher. There is no pre-service training. There is no mentoring, during the period of one or

two-year probation, or on the job training. Teacher has to follow a text book, syllabus and give lectures topic wise progressively, with a view to enable students to answer few descriptive type questions, in an annual examination. Few staff motivated teachers, might take this limited task rather challenging and motivate students, with quality instruction, answering queries in tutorials and engaging them in a discourse, with additional extra-curricular activities, such as debate, seminar and quiz competition. For many teachers, instructing students in a class, for a limited period, as per syllabus is the end objective of the job, for which they are paid. This is the mind set and the culture of practice that has been developed, over a period of time.

With the process, being followed across multiple states and municipalities, mediocrity creeps in, which impacts the quality of teachers being inducted, which eventually impacts teacher's education and final quality of the new set of teachers passing out.

### **Creative Thinking**

Some of the key areas that Indian school system imparts to students are, namely - Pedantic methods, old and traditional modes of teaching and learning, poor quality of content, emphasis on rote learning and memorization. In short, there is no scope for the students to, think creatively and independently.

There have been significant improvements in teacher education in India however, lot of areas still need to be improved. Some of them being the pay scales being less in many private schools or problem not too many good institutions for teacher education which leads to India teachers not being of the highest calibre. This causes a serious problem, in terms of inducing creative thinking in students and focus becomes, more on marks. This, in turn also starts impacting teacher training, where results and marks takes precedence that, inducing teachers to think creatively, or follow an approach, which is based on research.

## **TEACHER EDUCATION IN FINLAND: HISTORY, POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

Finland is regarded as, one of the best in education, across the world. This also gets reflected in the respect that, teaching as a profession gets in Finnish society, on similar lines to medicine, law or engineering. This has further propelled Finland, to lead internationally, in literacy, science and mathematics. However, in the early 60's, Finland was no better than Malaysia, or Peru or worse, than many of its neighbours, such as Denmark, Norway, etc. However, there was a complete transformation, within Finland and as a result; it has seen great international success. All these accomplishments are further amplified, given that; Finnish children do not start, until the age of seven, their primary education.

In Finland, the emphasis is on creating the interests of students and not merely imposing boring content on them.

Economic, social and cultural changes, also have some impact on the activities of teacher's training schools have a keen interest, on not just on educational attainment of students, but to come up with solutions, to social issues as well as making inclusive set up, by including the children with special needs, the social mix, equality of opportunity for disadvantaged pupils and the integration of immigrant children. Where in the past, these issues were resolved, via a range of different paths, through school, the adoption in many countries of the single structure model, or the common core curriculum, throughout the whole of compulsory education, now to oblige schools, to develop social responsibilities with which they are not wholly familiar.

## **Schooling Cycle**

The educational system in Finland consists of:

- Optional pre-school till age of seven
- Basic school for a period of 9 years (6 years of primary schooling, 3 years junior high school ) - compulsory to all.
- Voluntary 3 years upper secondary education, across either General Education or, Vocational Education

The main difference arises from, in terms of not relying on external standardized testing, to drive performance or inspection system. Their belief is that, teachers are knowledgeable and committed to students would do what's best for students, in terms of performance.

Finnish schools do not use standardized testing, to determine student success, are the three primary reasons. First, while assessment practice was well-grounded, in the national curriculum, education policy in Finland, gives a high priority to individualized education and creativity, as an important part of how schools operate. Therefore, the progress of each student in school was judged more against his or her individual progress and abilities, rather than against statistical indicators.

Second, education developers insist that curriculum, teaching and learning should, drive teacher's practice in schools, rather than testing. Student assessment in Finnish schools, is embedded in the teaching and learning process and used to improve, both teacher's and student's work, throughout the academic year.

Third, determining student's academic performance in Finland was seen as a responsibility of the school, not the external assessors. Finnish schools accept that, there may be some limitations on comparability, when teachers do all the grading of students. At the same time, Finns believe that, the problems often associate with external standardized testing — narrowing of the curriculum, teaching to the test and unhealthy competition among schools— can be more problematic. Since Finnish teachers must design and conduct appropriate curriculum-based assessments, to document student progress, classroom assessment and school-based evaluation, are important parts of teacher education and professional development.

The system in Finland has no examinations at all, for the first few years, the first main example, being at the age of sixteen. Children are then able to learn, without having to limit themselves, to a syllabus though of course, standards are delineated. Rather than pushing rote memorization of letters and numbers, the Finnish public education system, gives less homework tries, to foster creativity among students.

## **Private v/s Government Schools**

Finland provides equal access, to educate all the students. Another very distinctive aspect of the Finnish education system is that children starts going to school, only when they are 7 years old. Not only that, education is free for all students, be it from government schools, or private schools and yet, the quality of content is exactly same, for both the government and private school students.

## **Centralized v/s De-Centralized Control**

Finnish schooling system has thrived primarily, be entrusting a lot with teachers and local education authorities, which has resulted in good outcomes and increasing quality, with ever improving standards.

Teacher education became part of University studies, starting 70's and since then, has been on an upward trend. It started with teachers, demanding more autonomy and professional authority. Over a period of time, Finnish education system, along with Finnish National curriculum framework, for Basic School & upper secondary education has restricted from imposing their rules in schools, to providing guidance to schools that in turn do the curriculum planning. This has led to greater autonomy, with curriculum planning, being the responsibility of schools and municipalities. The Finnish education system empowers the teachers, by providing them good curriculum knowledge and planning skills, during teacher education training, which gets further enhanced, with in-service systematic theoretical and practical training. No doubt, for Finnish population enrolling as a teacher is one of the most admired jobs.

### **Teacher's Education**

Teacher education programme's enrolment is very competitive, in Finland. Only the best and the brightest, who are able to enrol and finally join the fraternity, of the most admired profession – teaching in Finland. Thousands of high school graduates submit their application to one of the eight Finnish universities, offering courses in Education. With a 10% chance of being qualified, to study in one of these universities, not only high scores, but also great interpersonal skills, come into picture during the selection of applicants.

Unlike other countries, Finland prides itself in the following two phase selection process, for primary school teacher's enrolment.

- Basis Examination results, the shortlist is prepared by the universities.
- Phase 2 in itself is a three-step process
  - Completion of written examination, on pedagogical assigned books
  - Behavioural examination, where candidate's social interaction and communication skills were observed, in simulated school situations.
  - The final step is the interview of the top shortlisted candidates, where they are asked to explain why they want to become a teacher and finally the selected candidates complete, at government expense, a rigorous teacher education program, at these universities.

The process of becoming a teacher is very stringent and only good candidates are able to make it to the list. For pre-school and kindergarten, unlike a master's degree at least a Bachelor's degree is a must.

### **Creative Thinking and Research Based**

Finland was one of the few countries, in the world to move all their teacher education programs, to university based education in 70's. As with most universities in the world, the focus on following a scientific content and research methodologies kept increasing. Currently, teacher education programs are highly research based and focus is on building thinking and cognitive skills, by using research based approaches. The eligibility of a teacher, in a Finnish basic and high schools is master's degree, whereas for the preschool and kindergarten, it is bachelor's degree.

Teacher education aims at balanced development of the teacher's, personal and professional competences. Particular attention is focused on building pedagogical thinking skills that enable teachers to manage the teaching process, in accordance with contemporary educational knowledge and practice (Westbury et al., 2005).

The teacher education curriculum is a broad-based curriculum, which helps to develop knowledge and both theoretical and practical skills. With such an approach, it ensures that, teachers possess deep insights in teacher education areas, such as psychology, sociology, curriculum theories, pedagogic content knowledge, in subject areas, special needs education, etc., to name a few.

Another distinctive feature of the Finnish model, which is increasingly being adopted in Estonian universities, is the concept of research-based teacher. According to Kansanen (2006), the aim of research-based teacher education, is to be able to make educational decisions, based on rational argumentation, in addition to everyday or intuitional argumentation. Research-based pedagogical thinking, as a concept is meant to convince teacher students, to understand the reciprocal interaction of subject didactics, educational theory and teaching practices and to understand that, teaching practices should be based on scientific methodology and research (see e.g., Westbury et al., 2005).

Finland is characterised by its research orientation, which means that, teaching students, learn to justify their decisions and actions, on the basis of both experience and theory.

## TEACHER EDUCATION: COMPARATIVE PRACTICES

Below is a table that compares India and Finland on various parameters.

**Table 1**

Indicator	India	Finland
Public expenditure on education (% of total Govt spending)	11.33	12.24
Human Development Index	0.59	0.8
GDP per capita	\$5460	\$38221
School Life expectancy in years (Primary to tertiary)	11.70	17.07
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	35.15	13.56
Labor force with tertiary attainment (%)	9.80	38.20
Literacy Rate (15+ years in %)	74.04	99.75

(Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2008)

Clearly one thing that comes out is that, higher public expenditure on education, leads to higher literacy rates, which in turn leads to better life quality and to higher GDP, per capita.

The Human Development index is another important criterion. It is a composite measure, of achievement in three basic dimensions: a long and healthy life, access to education and a decent standard of living. It is an average value across these three parameters, on a scale of 0 to 1. The higher the value, better it is, for a country. In this index as well, Finland fares better than India.

The above indicators set up, the content for differences in Practices of teacher education, across India and Finland. One thing that can't be discounted in this comparison is the population difference across India v/s Finland. Finland's population is, 1/200th of India's population. That is, Finland population is a few millions; whereas India's population is almost 200 times. Such a large population has its own challenges. However, let's look at comparison between Indian and Finnish system, of teacher education, across various parameters.

**Table 2: Indian vs. Finnish System**

<b>The Indian System</b>	<b>The Finnish System</b>
<i>Standardization:</i> Little or no flexibility with curriculum being driven top-down	Flexibility and Diversity : School based curriculum development
<i>Evaluation:</i> Emphasis on Marks and who can be top of the class instead of developing an individual	Emphasis on broad knowledge and individual growth, personality, knowledge and skills.
<i>Consequential Accountability:</i> Evaluation by inspection	Trust through profession: culture of trust in knowing what is best for students and implementing it.
<i>Research:</i> More focus on theoretical knowledge and fewer avenues to build out research based learning	Focus on research based learning and how it can further augment the theoretical and practical divide.
<i>Creativity:</i> More focus on evaluation and meritocracy	Focus on building creativity and how to build a better individual
<i>Centralization:</i> Heavy centralization with less decentralized controls for curriculum and other changes	Broad frameworks definitions at central level and full autonomy at decentralized level to define curriculum which benefits
<i>Private Schooling:</i> Private schooling being better than government schooling in terms of quality and facilities	There is hardly any difference in the two and mostly parents prefer to send their wards to government schools. Also teacher education expenses are borne by the government

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we do see a lot of differences in how teacher education and school education, in general works between Finland and India. This also, has a lot to do, due to the difference in population size, across two countries. One of it being few million and other almost 200 times more, in terms of population and not any less in area of country. At the same time, Finland has done exceptionally well, which can be looked at, by India for adoption, to improve the education across the country. Some of the suggestions for future, being:

- Responding to the changing society. Declining age cohorts and growing retirements create a challenge for preparing enough new teachers for the future. Teacher education must continue to adapt to prepare educators, for work in a changing social and cultural world. Building out social and cultural connect in the Indian education system, such that teacher's are trained considering, these in mind.
- Offering systematic professional development for all teachers. Teacher education and teacher professional development should form a stronger continuum, with induction available to all teachers and included as part of lifelong professional development. Municipalities should be required, to ensure that, each teacher has access to relevant professional development. This would require in-service teacher training, to be completely de-centralized and each state/municipality, having control and budget, to decide on, what's best from in-service teacher training perspective.
- Creating a teacher education strategy, for government empowered teacher training institutes. Each of them offering teacher education should have an updated, comprehensive teacher education strategy, coordinated among various units and guaranteeing rigorous, research based teacher education programs, that prepare teachers in content, pedagogy and educational theory, as well as the capacity, to do their own research and that include field work, mentored by expert veterans. This needs to be driven top-down, by revising curriculum for teacher's education.



The goal of teacher education is that, Pupil must learn skills, needed for their own learning at school and for their future learning, outside of school. Learning skills are generic such as, thinking and problem-solving skills, collaboration and interaction skills, self-knowledge and responsibility and participatory and active citizenship skills. It is imperative that, teacher's education helps in building such teachers for tomorrow.

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