

An Analysis of Finland's Education System and Policy --Reflect on China Education Reform

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Abstract. Northern Europe has always been a desirable place to live, and its sound social security system is enviable. In recent years, more and more people intend to receive education in North Europe, especially Finland. Also, more and more experts in the field of education have started to be concerned about Finland's education. As for China, the government has been making efforts to improve the education quality that benefits the public, but there are still some obstacles in the implementation process. Therefore, studying the topic of the enlightenment of Finland to Chinese education reform not only conforms to the current research trend but also helps to explore the new path of China's education development. The outline of the thesis can be summarized by these three aspects: What are the apparent features of the education system of these two countries? Why does Finland's education have such great success? How does China make use of Finland's education reform experience on its own? The research found that education equality plays a determinant role in the success of Finland's education. Meanwhile, Finland's success is not accidental. It has gone through a series of attempts during the education reform process.

Keywords: comparative education, education reform, basic education, vocational education.

1. Introduction

With social development, Chinese education forms changed rapidly. To cater to people's growing materials demand and cultural needs, the education department makes every effort to expand the education scope so that more and more people will get access to it, to adjust the education structure that fit in economic and industrial transformation, pay more attention on quality education that developing students' interest and protection, cultivating them to be responsible citizens as well. However, policy reform often faces some resistance in daily life. One of the most prominent problems is that the expected effect has failed to be realized, and the lack of public support makes it hard to implement the policy. Also, due to the large population base, there is an unavoidable fact that competition in all fields is becoming more and more fierce. Some of the measures predict to relieve stress on the contrary increase the burden. Meanwhile, led by globalization, communication between countries has become more extensive and convenient, and understanding in many fields, especially education, has become deeper. Therefore, China can not only discuss education reform domestically but also be able to broaden its horizons, to learn from other countries. It is well known that social welfare in Northern Europe is all-sided, and educational supplements are also impeccable. Finland, in particular, is recognized as owning the best education system in the world. Finland's outstanding performance in PISA, the test organized by the World Economic and Cooperation to examine the capability of international students has also drawn lots of attention to Finland's education. In 2018, results of testing reading, math, and science ability showed that Finnish students got 20 to 35 points above the world average, the level of ability was higher as well [1]. Through comparative research on Chinese and foreign country's education patterns, one can obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics based on different education systems and compare the differences between them, also gives a deeper understanding of education policies and methods of implementation, which provides strong support for improving the current educational situation and improving the quality of education in China. Comparing the education pattern of China and Finland, especially since Finland has achieved remarkable success in education can provide valuable insights and references for China's ongoing educational reforms.

2. Current Situation Comparison between China and Finland Education

2.1. Highlight of Finland's Education System

The diversion system is a highlight of Finland's education and an important means to promote education equity, it manages to find new ways that notice the areas that have been ignored by other countries. It consists of two parts: The first diversion is after nine years of compulsory education. The other is in the second year of high school. In particular, the University of Applied Science (UAS) in Finland provides postgraduate school education for students just like a general university. The study on initial vocational education and training (IVET) in Finland, shows a large promotion of completion rate than other North Europe countries [2]. Finland has invested more in vocational education, so the result is satisfying. Regular and vocational education are treated equally. Students can choose their interests and own plans. It also focuses more on inclusive education to put lots of effort into teacher training and special education [3]. From this, it can be inferred that Finland's success is not accidental. Not only do they make lots of effort to improve the education system. The whole subject of teaching to training teachers is also a special part of Finland's education. The sample survey on eight universities in Finland points out that, not only can teachers get subject knowledge and teaching techniques, but also teaches them how to be a precise researcher and a responsible citizen [4]. The teacher training system in Finland is not just to meet job requirements and complete teaching tasks. It helps the teacher to master a different kind of knowledge and expand their thinking so that they can lead their students to obtain diversified perspectives and inspire the potential of each student.

2.2. Differences in Education between China and Finland

By comparing these two countries from education equality. China is focusing more on higher grades that ignore students' individual needs and suppress or even destroy students' motivation and creativity. China's education has always been dominated by traditional concept that has a strong connection with society and requires people to pay more attention to words and deeds, especially revolving around Confucianism [5]. It truly raises awareness of high moral responsibility, but it also restricts personal traits and brings peer pressure. People focus more on what other people think about themselves or themselves and easily feel anxiety when others obtain impressive achievements. To cater to the collective to suppress own character. Due to fierce competition in enrollment and employment, it aggravates the unbalanced distribution of education resources and practical reform is hard to put forward. Finland is focusing more on fostering talents that respect individual personality and nearly cover all aspects of education. Finland education doesn't mean raising students' scores, but students can still show excellent academic performance in PISA. This is because Finland education doesn't care about student's ranking in school and even test result is not published. What they care about is students' ability to deal with all kinds of issues and how much they can contribute to society. Therefore, it's necessary to clarify the logic behind Finland.

3. Reason on Finland's Education Achieves Great Success

3.1. Historical and Cultural Factors

From a historical perspective, Finland's outstanding achievements in education stem from its profound "trust gene", which makes citizens have firm trust in the education system. Besides, high-quality education made progress at the beginning of the 20th century, and women who studied at university accounted for one-third [6]. This historical fact indicates that the Finnish possess trust in government including the education department, so they are likely to show more respect to the education sector. Also, a high ratio of women entering university not only reveals gender equality in Finland's education but also reflects high participation and broad trust of citizens towards education. Meanwhile, Finnish people like to use the Finnish word 'SISU' to describe their traits which means brave and gentle and is also a crucial part of national consciousness and identification in Finnish

culture [7]. The 'SISU' is deeply rooted in Finland education and has become an indispensable part of the education system to support political reform and national cohesion. It not only cultivates the persistence of Finnish students but also enables them to keep calm and optimistic while encountering obstacles. Therefore, the unique culture of trust contributes a lot to the success of Finland's education.

3.2. Support from Society

The perfection of Finland's social welfare provides a solid foundation for education reform. The newly released World Happiness Report by the UN, states that Finland continually gets the first place in happiness level. In terms of education, during the nine-year compulsory education period, tuition fees, children's lunches, short trips, stationery, and textbooks are also free. There are no private schools here, and there is no urban-rural gap in education. The reform of Finland's education system also follows the features of different periods. In the 1970s, Finland's education focuses more on equality to maintain racial homogeneity for a long time. After the growth of the foreign population in 1995, Finland's education has become more inclusive to meet diverse needs [8]. Until now, equality and inclusion have been well combined in Finland's education system. In the face of an increase in the diversity of the student population, the Finnish education system recognized the need to be more inclusive and effectively address and accommodate the diverse educational needs that arose from having students from varied cultural, linguistic, and experiential backgrounds in Finnish schools. Finland also learned from other countries before it succeeded in education reform. Finland mainly learned from Britain and North America, including its education model, way of learning math, and developing leadership [9]. It demonstrates Finland's proactive approach to continually enhancing its education system by actively learning from countries at the forefront of innovative and advanced educational methods. Finland has shown a willingness to understand and adapt to global trends in education while simultaneously preserving and integrating its own historical traditions and practical operation, it has adeptly constructed an educational model that resonates with modern sensibilities, thereby positioning itself as high-quality education that leading and admired by the whole world.

3.3. Innovative Teaching Method

Observing the teaching method, phenomenal teaching is representative of Finland's education system. It's a determinate part of interdisciplinary teaching. The purpose is to have multiple perspectives on things and contact with them in person. Feeling with the body can create a connection with the outside world to achieve sensory and intellectual unity so that learners can develop multi-dimensional understanding [10]. It argues that proposing by consciously feeling and experiencing the world through one's bodily senses and integrating that with intellectual analysis can tap into the union of physical sensations and cognitive processing for a truly comprehensive grasp of knowledge and its application. Therefore, the learner does not use the brain only, the bond with the body will stimulate thinking and interest. Group activity is a crucial part of appearing phenomenal teaching. It not only refers to cooperation between students but also among teachers to exchange teaching experience and let the students become guides of the learning process to train their organizing skills [11]. Phenomenon teaching significantly improves the quality of cooperative teaching. Rather than a top-down, teacher-centered approach, it seems to create a more collaborative, interactive, and student-driven learning environment, and the learning process itself is influenced and interconnected in new ways. Moreover, phenomenon teaching has also achieved results in practical application. In 2016, Finland began to implement the phenomenon teaching concept proposed in the new curriculum standard of 2014. In some schools, subject teachers collaborate on a certain topic to discuss the best template [12]. Therefore, this phenomenon teaching method breaks down the traditional way of teaching. Instead, its teachers cooperate across disciplines to create integrated lesson plans and instructional templates focused holistically on real-world topics relevant across multiple subjects and how they interconnect. From the progress of phenomenal teaching. It can be inferred that the development of Finland's education is steady and evolutionary.

4. Ways of Improving China Education from Finland Experience

4.1. Developing Curriculum Setting

It is necessary to implement student-centered education while paying attention to subject teaching and mental health. First, teaching content needs to keep pace with the times. At the beginning of this century, the EU stresses the importance of digital literacy and regards it as one of its core qualities. And then in 2018 and 2020, appealing member states to develop digital literacy from understanding and using. So, Finland integrates digital literacy into the education system [13]. By learning from Finland's example, China can make digital literacy a core competency, adapt its educational practices to meet changing needs, balance theoretical understanding with practical application, and encourage collaboration among educators to share best practices in digital literacy development practice. Also, raising awareness of digital literacy can help prepare Chinese students to adapt to the needs of society, in line with Finland's forward-thinking and student-centered education. There is also another important issue being easily ignored, that is mental health. In recent years, more and more teenagers have suffered from mental problems, and it also has a younger age trend. Although some schools have set up psychology classes, most of them just stay in form. Understanding mental health education in Finland, rather than specialized psychological classes, is fused into the course called Environmental Study, letting students learn in various situations. The Finland Mental Health Centre also provides corresponding materials to help teachers develop lessons and students acquire psychological knowledge [14]. By learning from the example of Finland, China can integrate mental health education with existing courses to promote contextual learning to deepen students' impressions through practical activities. Mental health-related organizations can provide corresponding support, increase attention to mental health, reject stigmatization, and strengthen teacher training to ensure teachers have the confidence and ability to integrate mental health education into the curriculum. This comprehensive approach can better equip Chinese students with the knowledge and skills to maintain mental health and cope with the challenges of modern life.

4.2. Investing More in Vocational Education

Another significant aspect that China can learn from Finland is vocational education. It is necessary to improve vocational education quality, provide more training opportunities and career options, and cultivate high-quality workers who meet social needs. To realize these goals, it can be proceeded from two parts. First, organically integrate the two environments of vocational school and workplace. When Finland improves its vocational education and training environment, it will put students into these two places for interactive learning, bringing the professional knowledge learned in school into work, and allowing work experience to promote learning. And interact with schoolteachers and factory supervisors and communicate with classmates and colleagues [15]. Therefore, China can attempt to apply them to the vocational education and training system. This helps vocational college students effectively utilize industry-related knowledge, improve their practical abilities, better prepare for their careers, and lay a solid foundation for future employment. In addition, China can clarify the requirements for vocational education at different levels and increase efforts to cultivate high-quality vocational talents. Studies have shown that the overall talent gap is currently expanding, and there will still be a shortage of high-tech and skilled talents in China until 2035. In Finland, to improve the teaching level of secondary vocational schools, UAC places special emphasis on solid theoretical learning and comprehensive ability training in cultivating high-level technical talents to improve the overall quality [16]. To change the concept that Chinese society has looked down on vocational education till now, China can set improving the quality of vocational education as one of the main goals of education reform, balance theoretical and practical learning, cultivate high-level technical talents' comprehensive capabilities, and collaborate with all professionals. It can help to narrow the talent gap and meet the growing demand for skilled and high-tech workers, ultimately promoting the country's economic growth and improving its international competitiveness.

4.3. Optimizing Assessment System

Another vital aspect is the assessment system. Finland's assessment practices are consistent with its broader ideology, which emphasizes formative assessment, personalized feedback, and a comprehensive understanding of student growth and development. Therefore, China can establish a more comprehensive assessment system. Although competition cannot be rejected entirely, ineffective competition and vicious competition should be avoided. Chinese education emphasizes too much on results, leading to utilitarian competition, which is physically and mentally exhausting. On the contrary, Finland was cautious about competitions, so it rarely holds competitions to protect students' interests [17]. "Anti-competition" is also one of the secrets of success in Finland education. Therefore, China needs to reflect on the education system's current overemphasis on test scores. Through a reasonable competition mechanism, pay more attention to the process of learning knowledge and cultivating interests, rather than compare with others. To create a more inclusive and holistic educational environment. What's more the concept of lifelong learning in Finland can also give enlightenment to China. Finland's general higher education and vocational higher education are interconnected, allowing students to freely choose their development path. The participation rate in adult education in Finland is also very high, which reflects the implementation of the lifelong learning concept [18]. China can implement the concept of lifelong learning into the education system, expand adult education to provide more learning opportunities, and let more people find proper fields. Online courses can also be conducted that enable people to master practical skills for rapidly evolving technology. Endless learning can help individuals constantly improve themselves to adapt to social needs, promote mobility, and improve national power in the long run.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, this research found that education equality plays a determinant role in the success of Finland's education. Flexible and promotion paths led the Finnish to follow their own inner decisions and clear their own goals. Advanced education concepts allow Finland to try unique ways with policy decisions and make sure it is implemented, which enables the education department to learn from experience in the process of practical application. Meanwhile, Finland's success is not accidental. Instead, it is the result of long-standing historical and social factors. The trust in governing institutions results in relatively stable governance, fostering a culture of respect for authority and a willingness to accept policies. In addition, Finland's social equality supports for public education system as the cornerstone of national revitalization. Therefore, the Finnish have attached great importance to investment in education, creating an environment adverted to innovative teaching methods and the improvement of personal qualities. Due to different national conditions, China's education reform cannot be blindly followed. Expect focusing on cultivating teachers' comprehensive abilities, can also cultivate students' digital literacy to conform to the current trend and integrate mental health into daily courses. Finland's vocational education matches social needs, and its curriculum meets the employment requirements of the job market. The school cooperates well with companies as well, so that students can have more internship opportunities. Therefore, China can strengthen cooperation, optimize vocational education courses, and improve the employment orientation to cultivate more high-quality skilled talents. In terms of assessment, Chinese education should not only focus on results that hinder the advancement of educational reform. By fairly allocating educational resources citizens to shape lifelong learning concepts and raise awareness of self-learning, thereby enhancing national strength. For the time limitation, this research may not be totally perfect. This future research topic provides a new perspective on Finland for China's education reform.

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