

## **TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM AND THE CHALLENGES OF QUALITY AND EQUALITY IN EDUCATION**

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### **Abstract**

Education is important. We heard these words many times in our lives. That is one of the reasons why our parents send us to school. Education is not only an important foundation in our lives but also the basic human right. Teacher is playing an important role in education. It is our challenge as higher education institution for producing the best teachers. We will take a look at how a small country like Finland has been able to be the top in education and the passion it has for the equality in education for all. Through this paper you will find how serious it is the government of Finland to select and educate students to become teachers through the teacher education program at universities. It is given the responsibility to the teachers to actually make their own curriculum. They keep adapting the challenges of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a multicultural country we need to prepare ourselves to the challenges that we will face now and in the future.

**Keywords:** teacher education program, challenges, quality, equality, education

## **A. Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to inform educators, teacher education, and analysts to see education beyond the box. We need to adapt the rapidly changing world with improving the quality of education to prepare our next generation to deal with many future problems. In this paper, we will take a look and compare the success of education in Finland and what we can learn from their successful story. Teacher is playing a crucial role in education. Therefore, it is very important to improve the quality of teacher education to produce the best teachers that have the authority and autonomy to design, review, and practice the curriculum and the student assessment.

## **B. Discussion**

The discussion here covers education challenges in 21<sup>st</sup> century, teacher as the key in education, education system, learn the success of Finland's education, the similarities and differences of education system between Indonesia and Finland and improving the quality of the teachers by improving the quality of teacher education.

### **1. Education Challenges in 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Education around the world is facing many challenges or we can say it as crisis in education. Two challenges that we need to focus these days are: how quality of education can be accessible by all students regardless of their economic condition, religion background, gender and nationality? And

how can make sure that we give students the knowledge and skills that they need for the rapid change of the world today? Now I will ask you who will take the responsibility for this? Teachers? Students? Schools? Principals? Ministry of Education? Leaders? or The society itself? I am sure you are going to agree that all of those that I have mentioned above should work together to face the challenges in education.

The first challenge is the inequality in education. Everybody has the right to access education. That is the basic human right that all nations have agreed and it was written in the Human Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed in 1948, article 26:

”Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally to all on the basis of merit.”

There is no doubt that all countries want their citizen to get education. It is easy to say, but we need to take a look at the effort of making education as something accessible for all. We have public schools, private schools, religion-based schools, gender-based school here in Indonesia and many other countries. I am sure the purpose of making these “school label” is to make sure that people have many choices to decide which school suits their needs best. These labels only create a gap between each school. For countries like

Indonesia the public schools are very popular among parents because they consider those who go the public school as smart students and those who are studying in private schools usually have no choice after being rejected by the public school. This case might be very different in other country. We see quality of education as something that is only reachable by those who have money and that only create inequality in education.

The second challenge that I want to mention is about knowledge and skill that students learn in school. We need to prepare students and give them knowledge and skills that they need in facing the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We have heard so many times about students who say that lessons in school are so boring and irrelevant to their needs in rapidly changing world. We need to handle this challenge by making systemic improvement by making education policies and strategies designed in smart and sustainable ways with collaborating teachers and school leaders in planning, implementing, and reviewing all aspects of intended changes (Sahlberg, 2015: 30). We need to understand that reforming schools is complex and it takes a slow process. When we are rush to make things happen like we want, we just ruin it.

## **2. Teacher as the Key in Education**

In education we see a teacher as the play maker in a class. It is also true that students are also playing an important role in class, but what we see here is that a teacher is the one who will drive the students to where they need to be. Imagine a teacher as a bus driver, he or she will be able to take you to a place to where you want, but

sometimes to the wrong destination. A teacher has a huge responsibility in sharing knowledge and skills to the students so they will actually learn something in school. We always want a high quality teacher to teach our children in order to make a successful achievement in education. Andere (2014: 8) states,

“Therefore, it seems that high quality and availability of teachers everywhere in education system has to be coupled with other factors to have a more precise and complete story of success.”

It is clear that we want a good teacher, good school, good curriculum, good education system, but how can we define what we call as a good teacher? The list could go endlessly. A good teacher might be someone with the best education achievement and strong practical skills, someone who can maintain discipline in class, those who can be a good friend of their students, have a strong motivation to teach or even those who can create a new way to deliver knowledge and skills to the students. In the end, the best teacher could be determined by many factors, sometimes beyond the reach of education policies and teacher training. The best teacher will depend on the ever-changing interaction with students, other teachers, and parents, with school leadership and with the social or national goals of education in each nation or system (Andere, 2014: 9).

### **3. Education System**

From what I have been searched through media I can honestly say that there is no single

thing that has become the key to the success performance in education. The countries that we knew have a good reputation in education like Finland, United States, United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea and many more, they do not build a success stories overnight. It is a long journey with lots of research. We need to realize that every single country is different in education system because the needs are also different. We might think that the only solution could be decentralization in education but I have to say that there is no country which performs total decentralization in education. The government still needs to control several things in education. Andere (2014: 8) states:

“What I want to emphasize is that there is no single factor can be identify as a success key of education. It has to do with the culture, history, teachers, policies, and also the help of the learning environment, in other words it is possible to separate them”.

The most important thing is that we need to support and develop education system and it is for the schools but not to control them. What I mean is that we need to trust the schools and teachers, so the teachers will have a lot of pedagogical freedom, and schools have a strong inside and outside network support. As we all know students need to take several test for measuring their ability and how much they have learned. My question is “Does that work?” I strongly believe that tests only create the gap between what we call as “smart students and not so smart (stupid) students” It is weird because we want to create equality in

education, that every child has the right to develop their unique talent, so every child is unique in their own way. One child might do well at Math, but he is not really interested in English. Do we need to consider that child as stupid because he cannot understand all of the subjects in school? To create equality in education and to improve it we need to train our teachers well. Let us take a look at Finland. They train their teachers and make a great success in Education since the reformation of education that began in 1970.

#### **4. Learn the Success of Finland's Education**

According to the article produced by Stanford University School of Education published in September 2010, Finland is regarded as one of the world's most literate societies. People might surprise to know that in the last decade Finland has become the leading of OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) country in education achievement. Many researchers from all across the world are coming to Finland to find out what is the secret of their success in education. Many people believed that one of the key elements that have impacted the success of Finland's education is excellent teacher. Pasi Sahlberg the Finish educator, author and Professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education says that Teaching profession in Finland has always been popular and this is what I hear in many other countries that teaching used to be a very popular profession among young people. I think the good question is how Finland has been able to maintain teaching in a school as something that attracts young people and I think that what distinguish our schools from the many other schools that we have been able to

keep teaching profession firstly intellectually attractive and interesting for teachers, in the other words how teachers they feel that they can use the knowledge and skills that they learn in teacher education fully. They have the role in curriculum planning and design and they have a very important role in assessing student's performance. Teachers in Finland enjoy high respect from the society. They consider teacher as a prestigious profession almost the same as doctors and lawyers. What is surprising is that, it is driven by moral purpose that the teachers have rather than material interests. Education in Finland includes the start of an optional pre-school year at the age of six, nine years of basic school (*peruskoulu*) which is a six year of primary school and three year lower secondary school. This is followed by three year upper secondary education. The options for upper secondary education are general and vocational education. What is cool about schools in Finland is that they do not have crazy amount of student testing to drive the performance of schools, or even a rigorous inspection system, the finish system relies on the expertise and accountability of teachers who are knowledgeable and committed to their students. Among young Finns, teaching is the most admired profession in regular opinion polls of high school graduates.

Teaching has become a dream job, but becoming a teacher in Finland is a very competitive process, and only the best and brightest students are able to apply at teacher education. Every spring the Department of Teacher Education all across Finland begins to accept application from high school graduate. Sahlberg (2010: 2) states that this selection process is very



competitive, for example only 5000 from 20000 applicants will be accepted. First, a group of candidates is selected based on matriculation examination results, the high school diploma issued by the school, and relevant records of out of school accomplishments. Candidates complete a written exam in assigned book on pedagogy, candidates engage in an observed clinical activity replacing school situation where social interaction and communication skills come into play, top candidates are interviewed and asked to explain why they have decided to become teachers. These highly capable candidates complete a rigorous teacher education program at government expansion.

Teacher education program in Finland is research -based, meaning that it must be supported by scientific knowledge and focus on thinking processes and cognitive skills used in conducting research (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006). All teachers for basic and high school must finish a master degree. For preschool and kindergarten teachers must have bachelor degree. You might think that the popularity of teacher in Finland has something to do with high paid teacher. This is not the case in Finland. Like what I have mentioned above, it is more like a moral responsibility to make better education for all rather than material things. Teachers earn about \$38.500 US dollar (OECD, 2008). We are going to take a look at how they study in the universities:

- a. Primary school teacher major in education and upper grade teachers concentrate their studies in particular subject e.g English, as well as didactics, consisting of pedagogical content knowledge specific to that subject.

- b. Teacher education in Finland always tries to make balance of the professionalism of the teachers and their personalities. It is important to focus on pedagogical thinking skills of the teachers, how they will manage their knowledge and practicing it.
- c. For primary teacher candidates they will learn the theory in education, pedagogical content knowledge, and subject didactics and practice.
- d. Then they will complete their master's degrees thesis. Primary school's teacher candidates normally complete thesis in the education field. Secondary teachers select subject of their own.
- e. The curriculum in teacher education always makes sure that the candidate possesses a theory and practical skills that they will need in the school.
- f. The candidates will learn about education psychology and sociology, curriculum theories, assessment, special-needs education, and pedagogical content knowledge in selected subject areas of their own.
- g. Primary school teacher education includes 60 ECTS credits of pedagogical studies and at least 60 more ECTS courses in the education sciences. Subject teacher education follows the same principles as primary school teacher education but it is arranged differently.
- h. There are two main ways to become subject teachers. Students must complete master degree with one major subject and one or two minor subjects. Then, they will apply to Department of Teacher Education. One academic year (60 ECTS credits) is for studying pedagogical studies, focusing on the subject-oriented teaching strategies. The other way is to apply

directly to the teacher education program when applying to a subject.

- i. Every university in Finland has their own secret to train highly talented students to become a teacher.
- j. Students learn the skill to design, conduct and also how to present their original research on practical and theoretical aspects of education.

## **5. The Similarities and Differences of Education System between Indonesia and Finland**

We cannot simply practice all of Finland's education system in Indonesia. Like what I stated before, that there is no single key success in education, it is a mix between culture, economic, government, teachers, students, and it is such a complex thing. My point is that, are we going to stay still? We need to act now. We need to prepare our students for the global competition with better knowledge and skills. Educational reformation is not only the work of the government or the Ministry of Education, but it is also the work of schools, teachers, principals, and many more. Teachers and students must have the freedom to decide how to design instruction of what to study and when. We can see that there are some similarities between education system in Finland and Indonesia:

- a. First, in Indonesia the government insists to make all children to go to 9 years basic education. In Finland it is known as *peruskoulu*. This is one of the ways to make all children to finish the basic education.
- b. The teacher training program is also almost the same as what happen in Indonesia, theory and practice both are equal

The differences of Indonesia and Finland education performance are as follows:

- a. Teacher profession is not appealing anymore among young generation. For Indonesia citizen the profession of a teacher doesn't give them lots of money or freedom in education system, therefore it is not appealing anymore for the young generation. Doctors and lawyers are still dream jobs for young people. It is the opposite of what happens in Finland where they see teacher as a dream job. They know that teacher has huge impact of improving and changing to society and also build the country. Young people in Finland are choosing teacher as their dream job because it is very competitive job, but they have been given trust and huge responsibility by the society and the government to make a change.
- b. The teachers in Indonesia are not given the freedom to design their own curriculum. Therefore, they were stuck with the national curriculum given by the central government and they cannot practice many creativities, knowledge and skills that they have learned from the teacher training in university.
- c. We need to understand that not all regions are the same. Every region is different (culture, people, economic) and it needs special treatment in education, especially in Indonesia with huge number of different languages, cultures, religions and many more. There is no such a thing as complete decentralisation but it is important to understand that decentralisation will create a better education if it is done in the right way and the government still monitoring for the curriculum framework and budgeting.

Teachers, principals, students, and parents must be heard because they have a clear picture of what the students need in education.

- d. In Indonesia many schools are labelled as SBI (*Sekolah Berstandar International*) or international standardize school. It means that the school has international standardize curriculum, facilities, service, education system, basically all the good stuffs that can be achieved by the schools in big cities. The fee is also very expensive, making this kind of school only accessible for upper middle class society. This is not the case in other schools in remote area where the facilities are very limited and not all children can equally get the best education. The government is trying to make sure there is no big gap between each school. They want to make sure that all the children can go to any school that they want and they can trust the quality of that school. Tougher competition between schools can bring bad effect to the education and also for the students. Many schools are trying to be the best school in town to attract more students. Sometimes they did horrible thing like cheating in National Exam in order to get high score from the national level and it is use to attract new students. Finland is special because it has been able to create an educational system where students learn well and where equitable education has translated into little variation in student performance between schools in different parts of country, as shown in all PISA studies since the year 2000 performance. Finland Minister of Public Administration and Local Government Henna Virkkunen (2011-2014) states that one of the

most important policies in Finland is that they want to have a system where all the pupils and all the people have the equal opportunities and education and it doesn't matter where you are living or are you rich or poor, or are you girl or boy, we want to give equal opportunity for everyone. This internationally rare status has been achieved by using reasonable financial resources and less effort than other nations have expended on reform effort.

#### **6. Improving the Quality of the Teachers by Improving the Quality of Teacher Education**

We cannot decide what the most important thing that we can learn from Finland's success is but most analysts observe that excellent teacher plays a critical role.

- a. Research-based teacher education or teacher training that prepares teachers in pedagogy, education theory, practice teaching and making and testing their own research. We need to develop the strategy in teacher education in order to prepare the best teachers for our society. This process will continue as time goes by, because everything move so fast these days and we need to adapt our education system with what the society needs.
- b. Significant financial support for teachers, schools, for teacher education, professional development, reasonable and equitable salaries, and supportive working condition.
- c. Teachers have the authority and the autonomy to design curriculum and student assessment which motivate them to do more research in improving the quality of education and to

practice what they have learned in teacher education.

- d. After the release of the result of PISA in 2001, the world suddenly noticed the amazing success of Finland, which is top of the international charts in reading, mathematics and science. Finland has aimed to make every school a good school and to avoid the extremes of affluence and poverty that are so often reflected in schools.
- e. A key feature of education in Finland can be summed up in three words: Trust in teachers. This means that highly trained and qualified teachers are decision makers in their schools. One teacher said, “We have a good attitude, respect our teaching work and take it seriously. We are passionate about teaching.” In other words, teacher professionalism and teacher autonomy go together, not just as words, but as reality.
- f. Learning is student-centered. Children in early years are not prepared to take tests; play is emphasized in preschool and in the earliest grades, not academic learning. Cooperative learning is emphasized in high school.
- g. There is no competition among schools for test scores because students do not take standardized tests.
- h. Finland indeed offers an attractive model for the world of twenty-first century: Not dog-eat dog competition and survival of the fittest, but a school system where the needs of developing children are recognized and addressed by well-prepared teachers and principals.
- i. No matter how far one is from the large metropolitan cities, how rural, small or isolated

the school is, the high quality of the teachers, principals, education services, and facilities is very homogeneous.

- j. Finish adults place on the education of finish small children. Everything, from the teachers' teaching to the premises, the architectural design, the furniture, the open spaces, the naturally lighted hallways and classroom, and the huge interior design, are all thought for the little ones, creating a wonderful learning environment.
- k. In 2003, 2006 and 2009, Finland continued to achieve very high result in the PISA tests, topping the list of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries and wrestling a tie with or even surpassing Asia tigers such as South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan and later on, Singapore, which has shown consistently high result in International tests both in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and now in PISA.
- l. Not only is it the case that Finland's 15-16 years olds perform at a high and at equal levels but this also appears to happen with apparently little student effort (in terms of time spent in studying as perceived by students), only moderate expenditures and one less year of formal schooling than in most other countries around the world.
- m. Schools in Finland are inviting, attractive, well-organized, very tidy, unassuming, and unpretentious from the view point of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and other facilities such as fancy



laboratories' highly technical scientific equipment like electron microscope or astronomical observatories that one may find in schools in Singapore, South Korea, or England, for instance. For decades, the main teaching device used by teachers has been and continues to be an overhead projector, although a more modern and versatile version is now a digital camera device attached to light-emitting diode (LED) projector or white board system.

- n. Teachers' salaries in Finland are not higher than those in other countries. Teachers and principals in countries like South Korea, Luxembourg, and Switzerland receive much higher salaries.

### **C. Conclusion**

Education is a fundamental human right and it must be supported by all aspects. Equality in education is a must. We have to make sure that all children access education regardless of their economic status, religion, gender, nationality and political status. There are many challenges we face in the education of 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is the responsibility of all aspects of education to create teaching and learning process that gives the students' knowledge and skills to face their future. We found out that too much tests and schools' competition could lead to the ineffective education. Teacher education is the place where students are studying how to become a teacher. It must provide the students with many aspects that will make them ready to be qualified educators. The Finland's education success gives us hope that there is something we can do to our education, that the old fashion way of solving the education problems was not necessary anymore. Teachers in Finland are one of the keys of success in their education. The

government of Finland always makes sure that all school have the same quality and there is no huge gap in the achievement of the students.

Through this paper I want to encourage educators, policy makers and the government to prepare ourselves for the growing needs of quality and equality in education. The growing numbers of immigrant from across the world will face a new challenge in education not just in the western countries but also country like Indonesia, where I believe in years to come will be the destination for people from all across the world to stay and enjoy the unique multiculturalism in this country. We need to prepare from now on to make sure everybody has equal opportunity to access education.

### **Acknowledgement**

Thanks to Allah, the God of Mercy who has given us blessing. In this amazing opportunity I would like to thank the Head of English Education Study Program who has given me the chance to write this article.

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