

## **A Critical Study of Finnish Education System in Contrast to Education System in Pakistan: *Equity, Quality and Parental Involvement***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Quality education is one of the determining factors in the progress of any nation. The present study discusses the Finish Education system which has been ranked top among all the European countries and across the world in present times. Finland has reached an unimaginable stage in the domain of education as recently it has been declared as the first country in the world to teach students without courses or subjects. The Finish Education system stresses to teach the students events and situations under the approach of <sup>1</sup>Phenomena-based learning. The study rings around two important areas; firstly, it analyzes the principles of <sup>2</sup>equity, <sup>3</sup>quality, and <sup>4</sup>parental involvement as major principles behind the success of the Finnish Education System. Secondly, it brings to light the degree or level of the same factors in the education system in Pakistan. The current qualitative is based on Phenomenological Interviewing. By discussing the Finnish Education, this paper recommends considerable recommendations particularly factors such as equity, quality and parental involvement in children's learning for enhancing quality education.*

Key Words: Equity, Finnish education, Parental involvement, Phenomena-based learning, Quality, Sustainability.

### **Introduction**

When it comes to the success of any nation, education plays a key role in this regard. It is highly desirable that the education system of a country should be compatible with the spirit of the age and for

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<sup>1</sup> *Phenomena-based learning* is an approach to learning in which students not taught through classical division of courses and subjects rather they are taught events and situations.

<sup>2</sup> *Equity* in education means equal & quality education system for all the learners/students

<sup>3</sup> *Quality education* refers to a system of education which competes with the contemporary demands and spirit of age.

<sup>4</sup> *Parental Involvement* indicates to the participation of parents in the learning of children.

that, it must be integrated with the factors such as *equity*, *quality*, and *parental involvement*. In this regard, Finland boasts the most successful and latest education system all over the European countries and across the world. In 2000 and 2003 <sup>5</sup>(PIA) programs for international students, an assessment conducted test for European students to measure the quality of education. The result left the whole of Europe frozen with surprise as Finnish students topped the test. This marvelous achievement of Finnish students appealed to many national and international research scholars to search and know the reasons for such a great success. After a detailed survey and research studies, the research scholar brought to light factors such as equity, quality, teachers with highly prestigious pedagogy, strong parental involvement, as contributing elements in this educational achievement of Finland.

This paper rings around the two important areas; firstly, it analyses the elements of *equity*, *quality*, and *parental involvement* as major principles behind the success of the Finnish Education System. It discusses Phenomenal Education or Phenomenon-Based Learning. The approach deviates from the classic division of curriculum such as in the form of different courses, rather, in this approach events and context are taught to students. This approach enables the students to learn 21st century desired skills such as creativity, critical thinking, innovation, and communicative interaction. Secondly, it brings to the light that the same principles are lacking in education in Pakistan. In the education system of Pakistan, the principles of *equity*, *quality*, and *parental involvement* are not observed which results in failure or unsuccessful learning of children. It brings to light some of the recommendations regarding the improvement of the education system in Pakistan.

## **Research objectives**

1. To explore factors such as *equity*, *quality*, and *parental involvement* in Finnish Education System.
2. To find out the level/degree of the selected principles in the education system in Pakistan.

## **Research Questions**

1. How factors such as *equity*, *quality*, and *parental involvement* did result in the great success of the Finnish Education System?
2. What is the level or degree of the selected factors in the education system in Pakistan?

## **Significance of the study**

The current research study is significant in a number of ways. Firstly, it touches upon the most important discussion i.e. education which plays pivotal role in the progress of any nation. Secondly, the study deals with *Finish Education* as a role model and makes a contrast analysis with education system in Pakistan. The present study brings to the light the promising factors of successful education system.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The principles of equity and quality play important role in successful education. The mentioned principles have played a noticeable contribution to the Finnish education system. The World Bank and the OECD, prescribe equity in educational policies, subtly using this noun to avoid the

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<sup>5</sup> PIA stands for Program for International Student Assessment.

impossibility of an education structured under the framework of the capital system to provide genuine equality among learners. Both terms are taken as synonyms in common sense, Saviani (2015, p.12) postulates the thesis that “it is exactly the use of the concept of equity that justifies inequalities by allowing the introduction of utilitarian rules of conduct that correspond to the deregulation of the entitlement, allowing differentiated treatment and extending on an unprecedented scale the discretion of those who hold the power of decision,” noting that, for those international agencies, equity is the attempt to reconcile merit and reward. Thus, it is understood the preference for that term, to the detriment of equality, because the latter contains in itself, intrinsically, the ethical-moral character that recognizes that all men have the same fundamental rights and provides them minimum dignity, which cannot be fulfilled by the capitalist socio-metabolic system. Parents’ involvement in their children’s learning and academic performance cannot be shunned. Researchers frequently found that parents play a significant role in the academic achievement of their children. Similarly, learning children highly expect their parents interested and involved in their schooling. They get motivated and instructed if they are regularly supported by their parents.

According to Gonida and Vauras, (2014) relationships between parental involvement in homework and academic achievement have a deep link with the academic learning and performance of children. On the other hand, the lack of parents’ involvement in children’s learning makes the children demotivated and discouraged which consequently badly affects their academic performance and achievement. Such a careless attitude of parents is termed as “we-don't-care-attitude” by Gina Madrigal and Ronel Mondragon in their work. In the following, brief but systematic research data has been discussed in terms of parents’ involvement in children’s learning and its results. According to the studies participated by Fan and Chen (2001) and Hill and Chao (2009), parental involvement includes three dimensions such as home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and academic socialization. The first aspect refers to children’s activities monitored by parents at home such as guiding them to do homework and discussing their day at school. The second aspect demonstrates educational activities conducted at school and it includes communication with the teacher and attending the class meeting. The last aspect majorly deals with the parental expectations and faith about their children.

## **A brief overview of the Education system in Pakistan**

In Pakistan education system lacks the elements such as equity, quality, and parental involvement. Human Rights Watch interviewed 209 people for the report – most of them with girls who never attended school or were unable to complete their education, and their families – in all four of Pakistan’s provinces: Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh. Human Rights Watch also interviewed parents, educators, experts, and activists, and visited schools. Among the factors keeping girls out of school, Human Rights Watch found, are the government’s under-investment in schools, lack of schools, prohibitive school fees, and related costs, corporal punishment, and a failure to enforce compulsory education. Human Rights Watch also found poor quality within government and low-cost private schools, a lack of government regulation of private schools, and corruption. The Pakistan government has consistently invested far less in education than is recommended by international standards.

As of 2017, Pakistan was spending less than 2.8 percent of its gross domestic product on education – far below the recommended 4 to 6 percent – leaving the government’s education system severely

underfunded. To sum up, lack of uniformity, directionless system, absence of equity and quality along parental negligence are found as responsible factors in the unsustainable education system in Pakistan.

## **Methodology**

The present work is qualitative research as it rests on Phenomenological Interviewing. Creswell (2007) defines phenomenology as “an idea without assumption because it does not make judgments about the matter until it can be supported by information, provided by the participants of the study. (pp. 58-59). The study chiefly dwells upon the technique of in-depth interviews used as an instrument to collect data regarding the principle of parental involvement from students in different government schools. Principals and other administrative members were interviewed about the factors of equity and quality education. Moreover, parental involvement in children’s learning has been surveyed. The desired information regarding the research questions of the study was recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. Moreover, the content analysis technique was implied to analyze the selected content of transcribed interviewed data.

## **Discussion**

The paper discusses three important principles such as *equity*, *quality*, and *parental involvement* in the education system of Finland. It also debates the level or degree of these principles in the education of Pakistan.

## **Success Factors in Finnish Education System**

Most of the developed countries in the world including many European countries are under the influence of GERM (globe education reform movement) in their education system (Andersen, 2010). GERM is a movement that is mainly based on competition and a standardized curriculum. The mentioned movement highly emphasized scoring, competition, and testing which are the only ways to decide the role of school and teacher that whether they are doing good or not. This approach towards education has increased teaching to the test but narrow to learning (Kuusilehto-Awale & Lahtero, 2013). According to OECD nations perusing such choices is declining the real core of learning (OECD, 2015). Whereas, if we investigate Finland’s education system, they totally ignored GERM because their education system is not based on test and competition but they mainly focus on holistic learning and they believe “Educate not only the head but also heart and hands” and this believe is the main reason of their success (Aho, Pitkänen & Sahlberg, 2006). Moreover, trust, collaboration, and mutual responsibility are also key factors in the Finnish education system. Moreover, the country has reached an unimaginable stage in the domain of education as recently it has been declared as the first country in the world to teach students without courses or subjects (Kuusilehto-Awale, & Lahtero 2014).

There is no such thing as private schools in Finland and basic schooling is considered a right of every child due to an increased interest of the Finnish public and government in providing quality schooling to their children (Finnish National Board of Education 2004). It is one of the basic principles of Finnish education, to provide equitable access to high-quality schooling to all children irrespective of their caste, color, and gender (Kuusilehto-Awale & Lahtero, 2014). They value their children's education and have a strong belief in supporting families because it creates

an environment that enhances the creative thinking of the children at school and opens a welcoming, and well-disciplined environment at home (Alasuutari, 2010).

According to the PISA (program for international student assessment) reports of 2000, 2003, and 2006, Finland was ranked at the top in education. This was totally astonishing news for the entire world and for the Finns as well (Aho, 2008; Dossey, 2003). The researchers investigated what is extraordinary in Finland that helped to achieve such a tremendous achievement. Various factors were found behind Finland's success in the field of education. Previous research suggests that the basic reason for success is the provision of equity and quality in the field of education because all the children who are poor, rich, rural, or urban are offered equal opportunities for learning. Secondly, the Finnish government makes it possible for all the children to attend pre-schooling at the age of six, and also it is the responsibility of the government to provide schooling to children's at an equal level even children's are provided with a meal, textbooks and education without any tuition fee. The third important reason for success is that in contrast to other countries of the world, they give high esteem to the profession of teaching. They select their teachers carefully and it is necessary for school teachers to have a master's degree.

## **Equity and Quality in Finnish Education System**

Equity and quality are two important factors behind the successful education of Finland. Sahlberg (2015) asserts that equity means having a socially fair and inclusive education system that provides everyone equal opportunity to fulfill their intentions and achieve dreams through education, which allows universal access to school. Equity does not mean that all students should be taught equal and the same curriculum rather, it means that all students must be given equal right to access quality education. In this way, equity ensures that the difference in results in education is not due to the social, economic, and other factors of learners. Finland provides high quality of education to all the citizens of the country regardless of the social and economic status of the students. The country provides free pre-schooling to each child. Similarly, PISA's international tests, in which Finland grabbed a great position, also resulted due to the consistent observation of equity in education. As an example of the principle of equity, more than 99% of students in the ideal age group in Finland successfully complete compulsory basic education; about 95% continue to be educated in secondary schools; of those, 93% complete their courses; and more than 60% enroll in higher education. All education in that country, from preschool to post-graduation, is completely tuition-free for all students. (Sahlberg, 2011). Finland boasts a higher level of quality education system too.

Moreover, parental involvement is a very dominant principle in the Finnish education system. The parents or guardians carry primary responsibility for bringing up the child or young person. In Finland, parents are generally satisfied with their child's school, although their works for the child's progress through the system [13]. In addition to enabling appropriate interaction between home and school, parents' positive attitude toward school is important for signaling positive, school-related values to their children [14, 15]. The world's largest parent-teacher meeting is part of the 100 Finland project, which details 100 projects or experiments from Finland in order to share them. A select twenty-five of them is being trialed in schools across the country. The second project, 100 Global, seeks innovations from around the world, and the third project consists of interviews with 100 experts in different fields of education from various continents. The country has reached the level that it becomes the first nation to teach students without books or courses. The country adopts Phenomenal Education or Phenomenon-Based Learning. The approach deviates

from the classic division of curriculum such as in the form of different courses, rather, in this approach events and context are taught to students. This approach enables the students to learn 21<sup>st</sup> century desired skills such as creativity, critical thinking, innovation, and communicative interaction. Events and context are taught to students who learn in a digital and communicative way.

## **Education System in Pakistan**

Pakistan as a developing country is struggling hard to provide millions of students possible opportunities for study. School attendance and enrollment remain a big issue due to a number of factors such as lack of financial as well as human resources and the lack of government support. According to a UNESCO report, Pakistan faces a net primary school attending rate for male and female genders of 66% which is well below the figure estimated world average of 90 % (UNESCO, 2011). The government has done nothing so far in providing equal and quality education to all, which increased the speed of polarization in Pakistani society (Rehman & Khan, 2001).

The learning process in Pakistani public schools is passive. Still the old classical and traditional methods are commonly used (SPARC, 2006). The stale syllabus is being used and children only study from their book as they are deprived of the updated knowledge. Researches say that curriculum is a channel that school administration needs for giving educational and life skills to school children. It is a holistic construct that helps school teachers transmit education to future generations (OECD, 2012). The development of the curriculum is not a static process; it is a lively and dynamic exercise that must change/develop according to the needs of society (Haider, 2016).

There is no doubt in accepting the reality that education is the backbone for the development of nations. Because if we explore the history of nations, we can easily reach the conclusion that nations like Singapore and Malaysia got independence after Pakistan and were poorer than Pakistan at the time of independence, but now they are called developed nations. They are internationally competitive in the field of education because they prioritize education.

The role students' socio-economic background plays in their access to and success in education is a key index for educational equity. For a home to have no impact on a child's attainment at school or later in life is hardly a goal to strive for, as it would indicate that education pays no long-term dividends. This does not mean, however, that striving to minimize differences both in opportunities and in attainment between children coming from different social or economic backgrounds should not be one of the overriding goals of education in its quest for equity and building human capital. In PISA, the effect of ESCS (index for economic, social, and cultural status) is analyzed at three levels: students, schools, and study programs.

On the other hand, in Pakistan, the principles of *equity* and *quality* in education are lacking. Here the socio-economic background of the students decides and affects the educational achievement of learners. The researcher interviewed principals of different government schools in KP Pakistan. There were asked about the lacking factors of equity and quality in the education system. The participants of the study were of the view that those who have wealth and finance can only afford to go to schools, colleges, and universities. This is the reason that child labor is common to see in the society in Pakistan because the state does not take the responsibility of education for children. Further, the education system in Pakistan has been divided into three different categories such as government, private, and Madrasa system. In these three sectors, different curriculum is being taught which unfortunately does not meet the demand and spirit of the age. There is no innovation made in the curriculum and old-fashioned

techniques are still used in teaching. Moreover, primary education which plays a fundamental and prominent role is completely ignored and partial attention is paid to higher education only.

## **Barriers in parental involvement in children's learning in Pakistan**

This study is based on a school survey conducted by the researcher among students from lower-middle-class families in different schools in KP Pakistan. The students included both; boys and girls as participants who were asked to reveal the barriers in the way of parental involvement in their learning. The participants exposed three important factors working as barriers in this regard. These factors include the illiteracy of parents, the poor economic condition of parents, and some of the socio-cultural factors which become a hurdle in parental involvement in children's learning. Parental illiteracy is one of the major causes in the way of parental involvement in a child's learning, found in different provinces of Pakistan in this study. Parents, being illiterate, were found reluctant and hesitant to go in school-PTMs, (Parents Teacher Meetings). Secondly, due to parental illiteracy, boys and girls are often compelled to marry at the very early age of life which makes them unable to continue their education. Moreover, grandparents, in the Pakistani family system occupy the dominant position and they decide almost everything in the family. So they being illiterate, have conservative thoughts regarding the education of girls to whom they don't allow to learn due to their so-called honor which they cannot see the damage. In this regard, parents and grandparents become the main cause of children's dropout from school and lead to child labor.

During the survey poor economic condition of the family was found as an important barrier in the way of parental involvement in children's learning. Due to this reason, on one hand, parents do not visit children's schools regarding their learning activities as they are under an overburden of work. On the other hand, the children were also found affected and irregular in going to school as most of the time they help their parents in doing work in fields or at shops. Moreover, due to the miserable economy of the family, the parents cannot fulfill the basic needs of children such as books, uniforms, and fees, etc. which results in the form of child's discontinuation of education. Therefore, sometimes, even the most competent and hardworking children cannot continue their learning and thus they have to sacrifice their dreams of learning against the poor economic condition of their family.

## **Conclusion**

The paper was aimed to analyze factors such as *equity* and *quality* and *parental involvement* in Finnish Education System and its contrast compared with the education system in Pakistan. The study exhibited that the mentioned factors are key elements in the successful education System of Finland. The country being a welfare state provides the best school education to children. The mentioned principles such as *equity*, *quality*, and *parental involvement* have been found in a very low degree or level in education in Pakistan which makes the education system incompatible with the world. The paper suggests that the discussed principles are to be sustained in education in Pakistan so that a quality education system can be achieved.

## **Recommendations**

1. There should be enough budgets allocated for education in order to meet with quality education in Pakistan. The county needs to include education as the top priority to receive considerable results.

2. Factors such as *equity* and *quality* are to be observed for all children regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds.
3. Parental involvement in children's learning plays a pivotal role so it is to be enhanced.
4. The curriculum is to be revised and assessed over the course of time by keeping the spirit of the age in mind.
5. Critical thinking is the soul of any education system so children are to be taught to think critically.

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