

Insight into Two Education System: The Finland Phenomenon and A Journey to Guatemala

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Abstract: This article examines two documentaries related to the education system: *The Finnish Phenomenon* and *Crossing the Bridge: A Journey to Guatemala*. First, the article describes the mode of Finnish education, emphasizing the excellence of the Finnish education system, including teacher training and student choice. The article then explores the educational challenges in Guatemala described in *Crossing the Bridge* and how the Friendship Bridge program helps women lift themselves out of poverty and gain access to education through micro-credit and need-specific curricula. The author highlights the educational philosophy of allowing students to be creative and the importance of personalized instruction. This article provides contributions to International educators.

Keywords: Education system, International educator, Teacher training, Student diversity, Educational challenges

1. Introduction

The Finland Phenomenon [1] is a documentary that gives an insight into the world's finest secondary education system. This high-quality documentary provides valuable insights into how Finland achieved excellence in education. It offers a detailed exploration of the factors contributing to its success and the lessons we can learn from to enhance our education systems. The documentary effectively highlighted the numerous distinctive features of Finland's education system through the conducted classroom visits, interviews of both students and teachers and the pertinent statistics presented on the screen. Finnish education is highly esteemed by the entire population, and many regions in Finland strongly emphasize teacher training.

Across the Bridge: A Journey to Guatemala [2] is a documentary depicting the work of Friendship Bridge, a development program established in 1989 by Ted and Connie. The video used micro-credit to help impoverished women and their families, which truly made a difference in Guatemala by assisting women to escape poverty and gain access to education through the Bridge. It even paved the way for the next generation to receive education.

These two videos are chosen as they represent extreme examples of education. the aim to comprehend educational issues and solutions better in this diverse backgrounds, drawing valuable insights on improvement of education. The Finnish education system, renowned for its success, is explored through the lens of a friend who left a high-paying job in China and moved their entire family to Finland in search of a better education for their children. The article seeks to understand why Finland has such great appeal and what led to the development of the best education system in

Finland. Furthermore, it aims to explore the real challenges and hardships involved in education faced by many developing countries like Guatemala. Comparing these two education models allows a better understanding of educational problems and solutions in different contexts. Moreover, this article provides a reference for international educators and valuable educational experiences and best practices. This article also raises awareness of educational equity and justice.

2. Finnish education system

The first element that strikes one about the Finnish education system is the well-developed, very rigorous, and comprehensive teachers' training. Finnish teachers have substantial social prestige, and countless students strive to become teachers. Surprisingly, aspiring teachers face fierce competition in Finland, with just the top 10% of graduates admitted to the demanding teacher training system. This rigorous process ensures teachers have exceptional academic credentials and provide top-notch training in the latest educational methods, beginning with admission to a teacher's school. Subsequently, aspiring teachers will undergo five years of rigorous study and training to prepare for their teaching careers. Candidates observe veteran teachers, co-design and execute lesson plans, and receive feedback from peers, mentors, and students. One of the training activities is that the prospective teachers are taken to schools to observe a class, and then they are asked to reflect on the course they attended and think about why the teacher designed this class this way and what they would do differently. This training method is similar to the "Inquiry and Reflection" concept in our reading. [3] The combination of high standards of teacher entry requirements and the highly esteemed teaching career contribute significantly to Finland's educational success.

Another crucial feature that sets Finland's education system apart is that at the age of 16 students can either enroll in the Finnish high school, which prepares them for university, or enter into the vocational training. Students are free to choose their preferred courses and career paths and, in the meantime, be respected. This left a profound impression on the author about the film because when students encounter pivotal moments that require them to make choices, they can make their own decisions, free from family interference. Surprisingly, more than 40% of Finland students choose a vocational tract, which is not deemed incorrect. In general, Finnish workers, no matter what specific jobs they do, have decent pay and enjoy equal respect in the real sense. This transformation reflects a shift in perspective from a family-centric, social-service-based system to one that prioritizes children's needs and society's support for children. [4] Moreover, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child statements – to encourage the expansion of secondary education, incorporating both general and vocational pathways to guarantee accessibility and availability to every child to implement appropriate measures, including introducing tuition-free education – are also in line with this objective. [5] This is also considered one of the reasons why Finland excels in education. Schools recognize that students possess diverse talents. Instead of pushing every student toward the same academic path, they opt to provide high-quality education and vocational training equally to students and allow them to make their own decisions.

3. Guatemala Education system

After gaining some good insights from the Finland documentary, the focus shifts to the education situation in a developing country — Guatemala. Achieving educational equity in such regions, particularly for women, presents significant challenges. On the one hand, women often lack the financial means to pursue education, and on the other hand, a local perception devalues the need for women's education. In this film, what struck the author as particularly commendable is how the Friendship Bridge project found ways to assist those facing difficulties in accessing education, especially in Guatemala, where many women face barriers to schooling, whether due to economic

constraints or other challenges. The Friendship Bridge broke this cycle by giving out micro-credit and accessible and valuable classes to women in Guatemala. In this way, women can earn more money and hopefully save some money to support their kids' education. This program offers classes on topics like business development, personal health, and leadership tailored to the specific needs of these women. These classes use interactive teaching methods such as discussions, drawings, games, and role-play to overcome illiteracy barriers. These are valuable lessons that should be learned by international educators dealing with educational challenges in developing countries.

4. Comparing two educational system

Both videos helped the author better grasp the idea of "letting go and holding back" [3], which means letting go of the students and their creativity and holding back the teacher's impulse to lecture or intervene frequently. Similarly, in Finland, teachers try to create a relaxing atmosphere in the classroom, and they motivate students not by relying on tests or pressure but by fostering trust and nurturing their interests. Teachers value exploratory learning rather than knowledge memorization, and they free up space to let students do work on their own. Similarly, Guatemala's classes also emphasize giving students a voice instead of the teachers dominating the whole period.

As an international education professional, evaluating the Finnish education system reminds the author of its similarity with China's educational philosophy. Finland's approach of allowing students to choose their educational path in high school deepened the understanding of an age-old Chinese educational philosophy — "因材施教 Yīn Cǎi Shī Jiào," which roughly translates to "know your students well and educate them in a case-by-case manner." Because students have different strengths, interests, talents, or needs, we need to emphasize the skills of individual students. As teachers, we must appreciate their individuality and help students find the field they are interested in and good. This lesson is valuable to learn and adapt; education necessitates personalized teaching. Every student has potential, and it is the teacher's job to 'lure' that potential out and translate it into something useful to society.

Secondly, the films shed light on Guatemala's education system and emphasize the urgent need required to address gender inequalities and create opportunities for marginalized groups, especially young girls, to gain access to quality education. There is a need to pay attention to these issues as we embrace the theory of change, focusing on borderless, decolonized, socially just, and inclusive pedagogy and scholarship. [6]

5. Conclusion

The state of education in the world varies greatly. This article focuses on the two extreme education systems of Finland and Guatemala; by comparing them, it emphasizes the diversity and challenges of education and the need to find solutions. The Finnish educational system offers an excellent model for us. The success factors of the Finnish education system include high-quality teacher training and the right of students to make their own choices for their future learning and careers. This emphasizes the value of individualized education and the critical role of educators in developing students' interests and talents. The case of Guatemala, on the other hand, underscores the gender inequality and lack of opportunities for marginalized groups, in particular, the urgent need for young girls to have access to quality education. There is a huge contribution to the upliftment of instruction and encouragement of international educators to commit to inclusive, gender-equitable education emphasizing personalized learning. Ultimately, these experiences have inspired the authors to create equitable and inclusive educational environments for the next generation. This article emphasizes the diversity and challenges of education and the role of international educators in creating a better education system.

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