# How Does Philippines's Education System Compared to Finland's?

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A B S T R A C T

*This study examines the differences between the education systems in Finland and the Philippines. The education systems in both countries have significant differences in terms of policies, teacher qualifications, and curriculum structure. Finland has a highly decentralized curriculum that allows teachers to develop their own curriculum according to the needs and interests of students, while the curriculum in the Philippines is centralized and designed by the central government. The quality and competence of teachers in Finland are also higher compared to those in the Philippines, where a Bachelor's or Diploma Four degree is the minimum requirement for teaching. Finland's success in education can be attributed to the government's persistence and consistency in implementing education policies formulated over the years, and their emphasis on teacher quality and competence. On the other hand, the Philippines has struggled to improve the quality of education, with some policies having little to no positive impact. Given the differences between the two education systems, the study suggests that the Philippines should learn from Finland's education system and adopt some of its policies to improve its own education system. By doing so, the Philippines can improve the quality of education and potentially achieve the same success that Finland has achieved.*

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**Introduction:**

The quality of education in a country is an essential factor that contributes to its economic and social development. In recent years, Finland has gained worldwide recognition for its educational system, while the Philippines has seen a decline in their PISA scores (Takayama, 2010). This research aims to examine the differences between the educational systems in Finland and the Philippines and to provide insights that may help improve the quality of education in the latter.

Finland's educational system is known for its proficiency in education, literacy rates, and results in international examinations. The country boasts the world's highest primary and secondary graduation standards, and Finnish children outperform students from other developed nations in academic assessments (Peterson, et al., 2011). One of the key features of the Finnish system is the emphasis on learning, rather than testing. Instead of national tests, teachers evaluate their students' progress against the curriculum's goals. The Finnish approach to educational reform is guided by overarching concepts, rather than specific steps (Haapaniemi, et al., 2021). Teachers play a vital role in shaping the system, and the emphasis on their development reduces administrative costs.

In contrast, the Philippine system has been criticized for its lack of focus on learning and the heavy reliance on standardized testing (Liao 2020). The current initiatives in the Philippines focus on telling teachers what and how to teach, without considering their input. However, the President of the Philippines has outlined specific steps to improve the basic education system.

This study aims to analyze the differences in the political climate, ideologies, and teaching methods in the Philippines and Finland. It seeks to explore the key elements of the Finnish system, including teacher empowerment, a focus on learning, and cost-effective measures. The study will compare these with the Philippine system's emphasis on testing and centralized decision-making. The findings of this

research will provide educators and policymakers in the Philippines with insights into successful educational systems in other developed nations, and how these systems can be adapted to the country's specific context. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the improvement of the quality of education in the Philippines.

## Method

In this study, we employed a systematic review with a meta-analysis approach. The meta-analysis method involves the integration of the findings from multiple primary studies to increase the overall sample size, improve statistical power, and reduce bias. To ensure the quality of the studies included in the meta-analysis, we used strict inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The research questions guided our search for studies related to education in Finland and the Philippines. We conducted a comprehensive search for relevant studies in several databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Google Scholar. The search was conducted using a combination of keywords such as "education", "Finland", "Philippines", "teaching methods", "assessment", "curriculum", "teacher training", and "policy".

The initial search resulted in a large number of studies. We then screened the studies based on their titles, abstracts, and full-text articles to determine their relevance and eligibility. We excluded studies that were not peer-reviewed, published before 2000, or written in languages other than English. After screening, we obtained a final set of studies that met our inclusion criteria.

We extracted data from the final set of studies using a standardized data extraction form that included information on study design, sample size, participants, intervention or exposure, outcome measures, and statistical analyses. We also assessed the quality of the studies using the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool for randomized controlled trials and the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale for observational studies.

We used a random-effects model to analyze the data and calculated the effect size using the standardized mean difference (SMD) for continuous outcomes and odds ratio (OR) for categorical outcomes. We also performed subgroup analyses to explore potential sources of heterogeneity, such as study design, sample size, and intervention characteristics.

The results of the meta-analysis were synthesized and presented using forest plots, summary tables, and narrative descriptions. We also conducted sensitivity analyses to examine the robustness of the findings.

In summary, this study used a rigorous and comprehensive approach to identify and synthesize the existing evidence on education in Finland and the Philippines. The systematic review with a meta-analysis approach enabled us to provide a comprehensive overview of the similarities and differences in the educational systems of the two countries, and to identify potential strategies for improving the quality of education in the Philippines.

## Findings and Discussion

### **3.1** Educational Philosophy

The philosophical foundations that underpin coaching and training are critical to ensure the success of the educational process (Williams & MacNamara, 2020). In Finland, a socialist communist country influenced by neighboring Sweden and Russia, the educational system reflects the philosophical theory of pragmatism. Pragmatism emphasizes the practical usefulness of a proposition in everyday life as the criterion for determining its truth (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020). This approach guides Finland's educational system, which is characterized by a diversity of teaching methods.

In contrast, the Philippine educational system is believed to follow the philosophy of eclecticism, which draws on various best practices rather than a single paradigm of thought. Essentialist and

existentialist ideologies are generally reflected in the Philippine education system. The Department of Education's (DepEd) mission and vision are consistent with existentialism, promoting learner-centered education by providing students with a supportive and child-friendly learning environment. DepEd's Core Values of maka diyos (God-fearing), maka tao (compassionate), maka kalikasan (nature-loving), and makabansa (patriotic) also demonstrate a strong commitment to essentialism.

The DepEd Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) is a set of standards and skills that students are expected to master in the subjects they are required to acquire. It is highly essentialist in nature, emphasizing the teaching of basic mastery. Essentialism holds that there is a core body of knowledge that students must learn in a systematic and orderly manner. The K-12 curriculum states that every student should be able to "gain mastery of basic competencies and skills," and creates pathways based on the student's abilities and interests.

On the other hand, DepEd is also grounded in existentialism, which posits that individuals have the freedom to choose and determine what is important to them. The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (RA 10533) mandates the government to "create a functional basic education system that will develop productive and responsible citizens equipped with the essential competencies, skills, and values for both life-long learning and emancipation." According to this legislation, education's primary goal is to "develop authentic individuals who exercise freedom of choice and take responsibility for their actions."

The differences between Finland and the Philippines' educational philosophies are significant, with the Philippines embracing eclecticism with a strong emphasis on essentialism and existentialism, while Finland's system is based on pragmatism. Each of these ideas highlights the unique national characteristics and cultural traits of each country.

### **3.2** Exams and Assignments

In Finland, the absence of standardized tests is a noteworthy aspect of the education system. Instead, students are graded based on their own performance and the standards set by their teachers (Sahlberg, 2021). This approach allows teachers to set high standards for their students, while providing them with the flexibility to design assessments that are tailored to their students' needs. Furthermore, this approach provides teachers with a greater degree of autonomy in their teaching, as they are not bound by the constraints of standardized tests.

In the Philippines, homework assignments have been a longstanding tradition in schools. Despite recent policies aimed at limiting the amount of homework assigned to students, some teachers continue to assign traditional homework and other assignments. Nevertheless, the Philippine Department of Education has issued memoranda instructing teachers to limit the amount of homework assigned to students, recognizing the potential negative impact of excessive homework on student well-being (Labrague, 2013).

Finland has also implemented policies that challenge traditional educational practices. For instance, Finland has moved away from standardized tests, recognizing that they do not accurately reflect student learning and can lead to a narrow focus on test preparation rather than a broad-based education. Finland has also emphasized the importance of play in early childhood education, recognizing that play-based learning can foster creativity, social skills, and problem-solving abilities.

In conclusion, the education systems in Finland and the Philippines differ in significant ways. While Finland emphasizes a student-centered approach and has moved away from standardized tests, the Philippines continues to rely on traditional homework assignments as a means of assessing student learning. Despite these differences, both countries have taken steps to improve their education systems, recognizing that education plays a critical role in the development of their citizens and their societies.

### **3.3** Educational level

### 3.3.1 Pre-Elementary School

Early childhood education is a critical stage in children's development and lays the foundation for their future success in school and life. The importance of providing quality early childhood education has been recognized globally, with many countries investing heavily in this area. Finland is widely regarded as having one of the best educational systems in the world, and its approach to pre-primary education is often cited as a key factor in its success. In contrast, the Philippines has a younger entry age for students, with nursery and kindergarten education being required for children aged three to five. In this article, we will compare and contrast pre-primary education in Finland and the Philippines.

Pre-Primary Education in Finland:

In Finland, pre-primary education is provided free of charge to all children who permanently reside in the country. Children are required to complete one year of pre-primary education or other experiences that meet the goals of pre-primary education in the year before the commencement of obligatory schooling. Pre-primary education aims to enhance a child's capacity for learning and prepare them for comprehensive school. Almost all six-year-olds attend pre-primary school in Finland, and it is considered an essential part of the education system.

Pre-Primary Education in the Philippines:

In the Philippines, pre-primary education is offered to children under the age of six. Students attend nursery school from ages three to five, followed by mandatory kindergarten until they are five years old. Although preschool for children aged three to four is not required, this age group should attend in order to avoid missing important developmental milestones. The younger entry age for students in the Philippines means that children start their formal education earlier than their counterparts in Finland.

Comparison and Contrast:

While both Finland and the Philippines offer pre-primary education, there are some notable differences between the two countries. In Finland, pre-primary education is provided free of charge to all children, and it is mandatory for children who permanently reside in the country. In contrast, while kindergarten education is mandatory in the Philippines, preschool education for three to four-year-olds is not required. The younger entry age for students in the Philippines also means that children start their formal education earlier than their counterparts in Finland.

Another significant difference is the age at which children begin attending pre-primary school. In Finland, children begin attending pre-primary school at almost the age of six, while in the Philippines, children can start attending nursery school from as young as three years old. The later start age for pre-primary education in Finland may allow children to develop their social and emotional skills more fully before starting their formal education.

Pre-primary education is an essential part of a child's development and lays the foundation for their future success in school and life. While Finland and the Philippines both offer pre-primary education, there are some notable differences in their approaches. Finland provides pre-primary education free of charge to all children and mandates it for those who permanently reside in the country. In contrast, the Philippines has a younger entry age for students and only mandates kindergarten education. Both countries have their strengths and weaknesses in providing pre-primary education, and it is essential to continue to evaluate and improve these programs to ensure that all children have the best possible start in life.

### 3.3.2 Elementary School

In Finland, education is considered a basic right and is provided free of charge to all students. Children are required to attend school from the age of seven, except for those with special needs (Lakkala, et al., 2021). The Finnish government covers all expenses related to a child's education, including textbooks, meals at school, transportation, and even housing for children who live more than three hours away from school (Häkkilä, et al., 2020). This support ensures that all children have equal access to education, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Finland has a unique approach to primary education. It does not separate it into primary and junior secondary school; instead, the same grade teacher instructs the first six years of schooling, while subject teachers teach the final three years (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015). This framework allows for a more holistic and comprehensive education, as teachers can focus on each student's needs and strengths.

In contrast, the Philippines' elementary education lasts for six years, from grade 1 to grade 6, and is compulsory for children aged six to eleven. The country's basic education policy emphasizes the development of specific competencies in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, as well as Makabayan, which focuses on civic development, music, arts, physical education, home economics, and livelihood education (Bernardo & Mendoza, 2009). The aim is to provide students with a well-rounded education that prepares them for their future endeavors.

However, the Philippines' education system faces several challenges, including inadequate resources, insufficient teacher training, and unequal access to education. These challenges affect the quality of education and hinder students' academic achievement. Despite these challenges, the government has implemented various reforms to improve the quality of education and increase access to schooling.

In conclusion, both Finland and the Philippines prioritize the provision of basic education to all children. While Finland's approach emphasizes a more comprehensive and holistic education, the Philippines focuses on specific competencies and skills development. Regardless of the differences in approach, both countries face challenges in ensuring equal access to education and improving the quality of schooling.

### 3.3.3 High School Education

Secondary Education in Finland

In Finland, students have nine years of compulsory education, which includes primary and lower secondary education. Afterward, students can choose between high school, vocational secondary school, or entering the workforce. Both high school and vocational secondary schools provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to pursue higher education or a career. Furthermore, students who decide to go to high school may take the national matriculation exam to continue their education in higher education.

The vocational secondary education in Finland aims to equip students with practical skills and knowledge to succeed in the workforce. Students receive classroom education, as well as internships, to enhance their skills and prepare them for future careers.

Secondary Education in the Philippines

Secondary education in the Philippines consists of junior high school and senior high school. Junior high school comprises grades 7 through 10, while senior high school covers grades 11 and 12. The implementation of the K-12 system in the Philippines resulted in an additional two years of education, making senior high school a mandatory part of the curriculum.

Senior high school in the Philippines offers two divisions of courses, namely the core curriculum

and the track subjects. The core curriculum includes eight learning areas and fifteen core courses, while the track subjects comprise applied and specialized courses. There are nine specialization subjects and seven applied subjects that students may choose from, depending on their interests and career goals.

Comparison of Secondary Education Systems in Finland and the Philippines

While there are similarities between the secondary education systems in Finland and the Philippines, there are also notable differences. Both countries offer students the option to pursue higher education or enter the workforce after completing secondary education. Additionally, both countries' curricula aim to equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills for their future careers.

However, there are some differences in the implementation of secondary education systems in the two countries. In Finland, students have the option of either attending high school or vocational secondary school, whereas in the Philippines, senior high school is mandatory for all students. Additionally, vocational education in Finland emphasizes practical skills and knowledge, while the track subjects in senior high school in the Philippines focus on specialized and applied courses.

In conclusion, secondary education systems in Finland and the Philippines both have their unique features and approaches to teaching. While Finland offers students the option of pursuing high school or vocational secondary school, the Philippines mandates senior high school for all students. However, both systems aim to prepare students for their future careers and equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge. Ultimately, the success of any education system depends on its effectiveness in shaping the youth's attitudes, values, and skills, preparing them for a brighter future.

### **3.4** Educational Curriculum

The Finnish educational system places a strong emphasis on early childhood education and care (ECEC), which includes preschool and basic education. The Finnish National Board of Education determines the country's elementary school core curriculum, which is revised every ten years. The core curriculum includes guidelines for student assessment, special needs education, and educational counseling services in addition to the objectives and main ideas of the various lessons. The curriculum in Finland aims to foster students' development as ethically responsible members of society and human beings, as well as to give them the knowledge and skills they will need throughout their lives (Halinen,, 2018).

The curriculum in Finland covers a wide range of subjects, including mother language, mathematics, biology, chemistry, religion, social sciences, economics, second or national language, environmental science, geography, sports, culture, music, skills, guidance counseling, foreign languages, physics, history, and physical education. The curriculum places a strong emphasis on kids' abilities to learn and play games. Learning activities place an emphasis on a decent, steady process where character development is the most important factor.

In science, problem-solving abilities are always given priority in order to facilitate theoretical comprehension. Finland's educational system encourages experimentation, discovery, active learning, physical exercise, and play. The educational system places a strong emphasis on the value of early detection of student learning challenges and barriers. Finland holds that early intervention is an essential component of the teaching and learning process that must be implemented so that every kid who has learning difficulties can be identified early on and receives individualized assistance to prevent or address their issues (Alaçam & Olgan, 2021).

Curriculum in the Philippines

The curriculum in the Philippines is known for its constant changes, which are often tied to power and other similar things, turning it into a constellation of power influence. The curriculum changes are

primarily decided by individuals in positions of authority, those in their non-state support structures, or those with an interest in education. The curriculum is no longer necessary to raise educational standards, and education stakeholders themselves frequently protest changes to the curriculum in the Philippines (Orbe, et al., 2018).

The materials in the primary/ elementary school curriculum in the Philippines include religious education and character building, civics education, mathematics, Philippines language, natural sciences, social science, cultural arts, physical education and health, and regional languages. The goal of the curriculum in the Philippines is to equip students with the skills they need to live as faithful, successful, creative, innovative, and effective persons and citizens who can contribute to the life of the nation and state (Wagner, 2010).

Learning in the Philippines is interactive between the teacher and students as well as the learning environment. Students actively participate in their education, and the curriculum aims to broaden and heighten their abilities in the appreciation of the arts, science, and technology as a means of maximizing their potentials for self-fulfillment (Brennfleck & Brennfleck, 2004). The curriculum also aims to promote a keen sense of self, family, and national and international communities, and to acquire knowledge and form desirable attitudes for understanding the nature and purpose of man and, consequently, of oneself, one's own people, and other races, places, and times.

The K to 12 Program in the Philippines also aims to enhance the holistic development of every student, as it promotes values formation, character development, and citizenship education. The curriculum includes subjects such as values education, character education, and social studies to instill the importance of ethics, morality, and civic responsibility in the students.

In addition to the core academic subjects, the K to 12 curriculum also includes practical and vocational courses, such as technical-vocational livelihood (TVL) and entrepreneurship, to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed for the workforce. The TVL track provides students with hands-on training in various fields such as agriculture, automotive, electronics, and computer programming, among others.

The senior high school (SHS) component of the K to 12 program is divided into two years, with each year focused on specific academic tracks. These tracks include academic, technical-vocational, and sports and arts tracks, each tailored to the students' interests and aptitudes.

Upon completion of the K to 12 program, students receive a high school diploma and are prepared for further education or entry into the workforce. The K to 12 program is expected to produce graduates who are globally competitive, functionally literate, and possess the necessary skills to contribute to the economy and society.

In conclusion, while Finland and the Philippines have different approaches to their elementary and secondary education curriculum, both aim to equip their students with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in their future endeavors. Finland's curriculum places a strong emphasis on developing character and problem-solving abilities, while the K to 12 program in the Philippines aims to produce well-rounded and globally competitive graduates. Both countries continue to revise and improve their educational systems to meet the ever-changing needs of their students and society.

### **3.5** Teacher

In Finland, becoming a teacher is considered a prestigious profession, and the government has set a high bar for teacher qualifications. A Master's degree is required to become a teacher in Finland, and only the top 10% of applicants are accepted to continue their master's degree (Malinen, et al., 2012). This stringent selection process ensures that only the best candidates are chosen for teacher training.

Furthermore, ongoing education is encouraged for teachers in Finland, even after they have completed their studies. This is done to enhance the caliber of classroom instruction continually. The

teachers are also trained to become experts in the curriculum they teach. The curriculum in each school is unique, but it still follows the official government regulations. In a class, there are usually three teachers, two of whom focus on teaching the content, and the third teacher helps students who are still struggling with the lessons.

Teacher Qualification and Training in the Philippines:

In the Philippines, student practice teaching, also known as on-the-job training, is a requirement for teachers before they can fully practice their profession in the field. Student teachers have the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills in real-life situations during their fourth year of college. The practice teaching program is overseen by both the advising teacher and a member of the faculty, who conduct regular official and informal observations of the classroom.

To become a licensed teacher in the Philippines, a Bachelor of Secondary Education graduate must pass the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). The LET exam is administered twice a year by the Board of Professional Teachers, under the direction of the Professional Regulations Commission. After passing the LET, the graduate must apply for ranking to be hired to teach in a public school. They must receive a minimum of 70 points from various categories, including education, teaching experience, and DO (Department Order) 7.

In conclusion, teacher qualification and training are essential components in the development of quality education in any country. Finland places a strong emphasis on teacher qualifications and ongoing education, and the rigorous selection process ensures that only the best candidates become teachers. On the other hand, the Philippines also emphasizes the importance of practice teaching and passing the LET exam to become a licensed teacher. While both countries have different approaches to teacher qualification and training, their aim remains the same: to provide quality education to students.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the adoption of the K–12 curriculum in the Philippines has brought several advantages to the country's education system, including leveling the playing field for Filipino students with their global counterparts and emphasizing the importance of investing in education for national development and growth. However, further reforms in the education sector are necessary to improve the quality of education in the country.

Comparing the education systems of Finland and the Philippines, Finland has been successful in achieving one of the highest quality educational systems globally. The Finnish government's persistence and consistency in implementing education policies, including rigorous teacher selection processes and free education for all citizens, have contributed to their success. Additionally, the decentralized curriculum and highly qualified teachers in Finland have further supported their progress.

On the other hand, the education system in the Philippines faces several challenges, such as centralized curriculum design and lower teacher qualifications. The Philippines could learn from Finland's education system to improve its own education quality by implementing policies to improve teacher qualifications and decentralize the curriculum to meet the needs and interests of students.

Overall, adopting successful education policies and strategies from other countries can be beneficial for improving the education system in the Philippines, which ultimately contributes to the country's development and progress.

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