

Basic Education of the Future – Let’s Turn the Trend!

Najat Ouakrim-Soivio

The Ministry of Education and Culture in Helsinki

Abstract

Basic education of the future – Let’s turn the trend! was a development project on compulsory education in Finland. The aim was to assess the current situation, examine the reasons for the drop in the learning outcomes at the national and international levels and study the needs to develop teaching and learning in the Finnish educational system. Two working groups coordinated by a broad-based steering group were set up for the purposes of the project. The objective of the working group on competence and learning was to discover means to improve learning outcomes, bridge the gap in the learning outcomes between girls and boys, ensure regional equality, safeguard equal opportunities for further studies and halt the trend of increasing disparities within and between schools. The project also examined the position of minorities and their learning outcomes in the Finnish educational system. The working group on motivation and teaching explored different learning environments, study materials including educational games, and innovations that support learning, investigated how learning motivation and well-being could be improved, and assessed the significance of motivation and school satisfaction for learning and school attendance. The group members also looked at the content and methods of education and pre- and in-service training for teachers. In the autumn an online survey was organized and 7,000 people responded. Also, six regional events were held in late autumn in 2014. The purpose of these events was to facilitate an extensive public discussion about the future of basic education. The working groups’ proposals as well as the results of the survey were presented in more detail at the beginning of March when the report on this development project was published. The proposals are to be exploited in the drawing up of the government programme after the next parliamentary elections in April 2015.

Key words: *basic education; education policy; equality and equity; learning outcomes.*

Introduction

The Finnish educational system has been acknowledged nationally and internationally for its high-quality. Finns have always valued education. In the 19th century folk education was an intrinsic part of the national identity project and right after the Second World War higher education was brought within the reach of all social classes. Education has remained highly valued also because it has secured good employment, a steadily progressing work career and, especially in the case of higher education, fairly good economic returns.

The compulsory education act was first enacted in 1921. In Finland, the basic right to education and culture is recorded in the Constitution:

Everyone has the right to basic education free of charge. Provisions on the duty to receive education are laid down by an Act. The public authorities shall, as provided in more detail by an Act, guarantee for everyone equal opportunity to receive other educational services in accordance with their ability and special needs, as well as the opportunity to develop themselves without being prevented by economic hardship (The Constitution 731/1999, Section 16 – Educational rights)¹.

Nowadays public authorities must secure equal opportunities for every resident in Finland to get education also after compulsory schooling and to develop themselves, irrespective of their financial standing. Most other qualifying education programmes are also free for the students, including postgraduate education at universities.

The basic education system celebrated its 40th anniversary a couple of years ago. From the beginning its characteristics have been a free, uniform basic education for everyone, in a safe neighbourhood school irrespective of the pupils' background. Basic education is free of charge and it includes learning materials, meals, school transportation, health and dental care, and pupils' welfare services. Comprehensive schools do not select their pupils; this means that every pupil can go to the school which is situated in his or her own school district. The school network is regionally extensive, and there are no sex-specific school services. The local authority has the duty to provide pre-primary and basic education and there are practically no private school systems or different educational services for children from different backgrounds. There is no streaming within schools either and there are no national tests or inspectorates. The only national test is the matriculation examination which the students take at the end of upper secondary school.

Despite all of the above mentioned, in the recent years differences between schools and learning outcomes have been growing. The share of young people with poor basic skills in different cohorts has grown. The national and international assessments have indicated a decline in the learning outcomes of pupils completing their basic education. The first signs of this decline were already detected some ten years ago.

¹ The English version of Finnish Constitution can be found at: <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990731.pdf>

These observations were isolated and localized, but more recently, indications of deteriorated learning outcomes have cropped up in several studies, both national and international. For example, in the assessment of the learning outcomes in mathematics the average success rates have dropped consistently in mental calculations, multiple-choice questions and problem-solving assignments and in all branches of mathematics (Mattila, 2002, p. 13). International survey such as TIMMS 2012 and PISA 2012 results have also shown the downward trend in mathematics (Kupari et al., 2013). For instance, the Finnish pupils' learning outcomes in mathematics have had the second largest decline during the last ten years if the results are compared to the other OECD-countries that participated in PISA 2012 assessment².

In the latest learning outcomes of the Finnish language as a mother tongue and literature the differences between schools were particularly visible in relation to major variations in writing skills. The between-school variation (13%) in the latest assessment (2011) was more than a third higher when compared to the 2005 assessment of the learning outcomes in the mother tongue and literature in the 9th grade. A similar increase in inter-school differences in the outcomes has also been reported in the PISA 2009 and PISA 2012 as well as some other international studies' results in relation to Finland (Lappalainen, 2011, p.11)

In the research carried out by the Assessment Center of the University of Helsinki in 2013 the researchers noticed that the change of the level of the pupils' attainment between the year 2001 and 2012 was significant and it has been declining considerably both among the best and the weakest pupils. Hautamäki and his group think that the results of the assessment point to a deeper, on-going cultural change taking place not only in Finland but also in the other Scandinavian welfare countries, which seems to strongly affect the young generation in particular. In the past education was considered as an opportunity to achieve a social and an economic rise, but nowadays the school has to compete with the pupils' self-elected pastime activities (Hautamäki et al., 2013, p. 12).

The attitudes that obstruct learning have grown stronger, and the gap between girls and boys is wider. In 2013, two academically appreciated research groups proposed that large and fast measures had to be taken to ensure the quality of basic education in Finland. According to the researchers, the socioeconomic changes in the Finnish society, the vast changes in the media and the rapid opening to the intercultural and international interaction have changed the youngsters' experience, expectations and attitudes. It seems that in the Finnish system there are constant contradictions between the pedagogical and cultural practices that schools are using and the real life that young people are facing outside the schools. The need to renew the basic education system also presents challenges to policy makers because the education providers, most usually the municipalities, are struggling due to the lack of financial resources (Kupari et al., 2013, p. 71)

² See the table of PISA 2012: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/PISA-2012-results-snapshot-Volume-I-ENG.pdf>

For the reasons provided above, competence and learning in the society of the future as well as motivation and teaching were selected as the flagship themes of the project called Basic education of the future – Let’s turn the trend! The Minister of Education and Culture launched a broad-based development project on compulsory education in Finland in February 2014. The aim of the developing project was to assess the current situation, examine the reasons for the drop in the learning outcomes found in the PISA survey, narrow down the gap in the learning outcomes between boys and girls and find ways to make pupils embrace more positive attitudes towards school and enjoy learning. The project was kept as transparent and interactive as possible, and the project results will be broadly exploited in the educational reforms in compulsory education. In this context it is also worth mentioning that at the end of 2014 the National core curricula for pre-schools and basic education were launched. The new national curricula will be put into practice in 2016 (See Opetushallitus, 2014a; 2014b).

There were two working groups in the project, focusing on the following themes: 1) the significance of competence and learning in terms of societal development, and 2) the motivation for learning, school satisfaction and teaching arrangements and methods. A total of 45 experts in various fields were appointed to the working groups of this project. The work of these two groups was coordinated, managed and commented on by a broad-based steering group. The organization of the project and the tasks of the two working groups are represented in Figure 1.

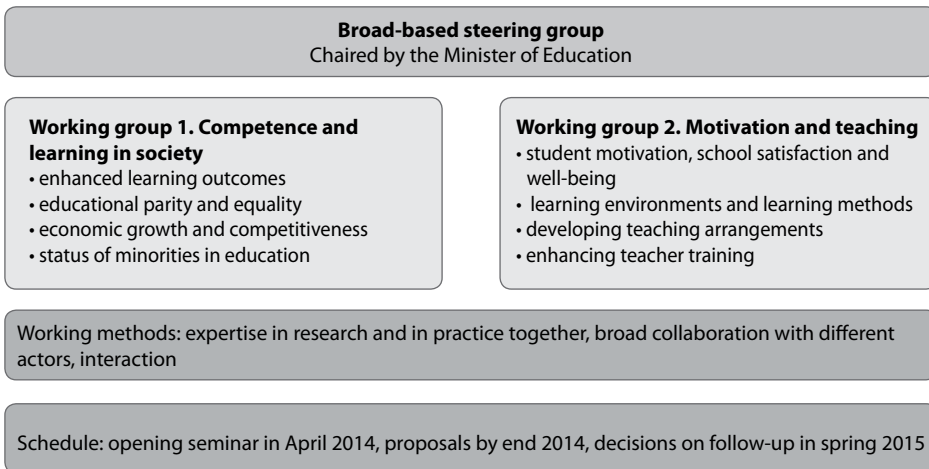


Figure 1. The organization chart of the project and distribution of tasks between the two working groups and the steering group

The first working group was called “*Competence and learning in terms of societal development*“. Its aims were to analyse and synthesize information on the role of competence and learning in shaping societal development at present and in the future and to submit its findings to the steering group. The purpose was also to identify how to boost the learning outcomes, bridge the gap in the learning outcomes between boys

and girls and across socio-economic strata, ensure regional parity, safeguard equal opportunities for further studies, and curb disparities within and across schools. The status of minorities in education was also examined.

The second working group was called “*Motivation and teaching*” and the goal of this working group was to find different ways to organize compulsory education and to look into new teaching methods that can improve learning outcomes and motivation in pupils. Various learning environments, study materials such as learning games and innovations that support learning were also explored. This working group’s tasks were the examination of pupils’ motivation and school satisfaction, with the aim to identify how motivation and school satisfaction can be increased, and to assess what bearing these have on learning and school attendance. Also, the working group collected information on the experiences of how different teaching arrangements can be developed to make teaching more favourable and to increase pupils’ well-being. The content and methods used in teachers’ pre- and in-service training were also examined. The experts also charted whether teachers’ pre-service training in its present form ensures that new teachers have the appropriate know-how, competence and skills when beginning their working life as a teacher.

After examining their themes for almost a year, the working groups produced a description of the current status of the basic education, the phenomena associated with it and the reasons for the deteriorating learning outcomes. The working groups, which mainly consisted of experts and researchers, put together reasoned proposals arising from the development needs of the basic education that will support a social structure based on education and culture and contribute to improving the prevailing situation in the future (See Ouakrim-Soivio et al., 2015).

A broad-based steering group chaired by the Minister of Education and Communications Krista Kiuru was invited to coordinate the efforts of the working groups on competence and learning and motivation and teaching. The steering group was comprised of the representatives of the eight parliamentary parties and the Trade Union of Education in Finland, the Association of Finnish Principals, the Association of Finnish Independent Education Employers, the Trade Union for the Public and Welfare Sectors, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, the Finnish Parents’ League, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and secondary level student organisations. The development proposals prepared on the basis of the working groups’ efforts were formulated so that, where applicable, they can be exploited in drawing up the government programme after the parliamentary election in spring 2015 and possibly also be used later.

The development process was put into practice via a network of development schools, when the activities of the development school network were launched in the autumn of 2014. The aims of this network are to bring together education providers, development schools and partners interested in cooperation. The idea is that all the partners join their forces to create new pedagogical solutions and practices that will help students to learn, reinforce teachers’ skills, promote sustainable well-being and

support leadership. The development schools have started to work together as regional development networks. Each participating education provider has an active role in coordinating this cooperation in its region. Schools working on the same development theme may also set up thematic networks and the networks will expand with new education providers and schools during the spring of 2015.

Methodology

Applied Methods

As part of the project, the Ministry of Education and Culture organised a national web-based survey in the autumn of 2014. The data was collected by means of the electronic Webropol-form, which was open during five weeks (between the 22nd of September and the 26th of October), and which could be accessed on a webpage³ common to all the ministries in Finland. The data was collected from different groups of respondents and different language groups, so the form was prepared both in Finnish and in Swedish.

The Ministry of Education and Culture wanted to sort out what pupils, their parents, students, teacher trainees, teachers, school principals and other educational experts think about the current situation in the basic education and the phenomena which are linked to it as well as the reasons for the drop in the learning outcomes and the needs for developing the basic education in Finland. The educational leaders of municipalities and school principals as well as the experts of the two working groups and the members of the steering group of the project reported to the Ministry of Education and Culture and the National Board of Education. The media was also informed about the survey. Many partners of this project, such as the Finnish Parents' League, were keeping their members informed.

The questions used in the survey were drawn up by the experts of the two working groups. The themes of the questions were either crucial according to the experts or such that they wanted to acquire more information about a particular theme. There were questions on the participants' background information and questions that dealt with the content in the questionnaire. The content questions were divided into two themes: knowledge, skills, learning, motivation and teaching and teachers' pre-and in-service training.

The inquiry was made of both structured and open-ended questions. The structured questions were formed as claims or multiple choice questions. The respondents answered either by choosing the most suitable option between the five different choices on a Likert-scale or they had to choose one or more options as proposed. On the Likert-scale one (1) meant completely disagree and five (5) meant completely agree. At the end of the questionnaire there were three open-ended questions where the respondent was asked to write his or her comments. The questions related to the first theme (knowledge, skills, learning, motivation and teaching) were disseminated to all the respondents and the questions of the second theme were given only to teacher trainees, teachers, school principals and other educational experts.

³ The webpage can be found at: <https://www.otakantaa.fi>

The analyses and results of this article are based on the performances of 6,979 respondents. The majority (92%) of them were Finnish speakers (N 6,398) and six percent were Swedish speakers (N=494). Two percent (N=88) of the respondents spoke some language other than Finnish or Swedish. Around 77% of the respondents were female (N=5,381) and 21% were male (N=1,488), almost 2% (N=109) of the respondents did not answer whether they were male or female. Almost half of the respondents were parents (46%, N=3,223), approximately 21% of the respondents were pupils or students (N=1,477), 17% were teachers (N=1,167), around 5% (N=320) were educational experts, 3% (N=187) were school principals and 2% were teacher trainees (N=155). There were 6% (N=403) of the respondents who did not belong to any of the mentioned groups and were categorized as “other”. Even though the results of the survey are not statistically generalizable, they provided a lot of information to the experts of the working groups on how the themes that were investigated were viewed by the respondents who were interested in education.

There was over 15,000 freely worded responses out of which around 5,000 were linked to the strengths of basic education, 5,100 to the problems respondents had noticed in basic education while 4,700 of the responses tackled the developing needs of the Finnish basic education. The data collected from the respondents’ responses to open-ended questions were classified qualitatively: first the responses were classified in detail and later the classes were combined. These responses are presented in this paper and are categorized according to the main themes raised by the data. The authentic and translated comments are used in this article to represent the examples of the kinds of strengths and development areas which were deduced from the data (See Ouakrim-Soivio et al., 2015).

Results

General Results of the Structured Questions

The results of the structured questions are presented here either by means of tables or column charts. The responses were not statistically tested, which means that the average responses between the groups are not necessarily statistically significant. The segmentation of the responses is presented in this article either by means of direct percentage or average distribution. The average indicates one key ratio - how the different answers such as *I don't know*, *I completely disagree* or *I completely agree* are separated on the Likert-scale. Below the average, more respondents chose the *I completely disagree* type of answers (option one). If the average was more than 3.5, the respondents mostly chose the *I completely agree* (option five) type of answers.

According to the Tables 1-5 the respondents’ answers were mainly positive. That does not mean that all things are necessarily fine in basic education. It can also mean that the respondents are active citizens who are affected by their environment and the related social structures such as basic education, and that is why their attitudes towards schooling are generally positive. There were no substantial differences between different groups of respondents either.

In Table 1 the claims linked to pupils' evaluation, learning outcomes and grading at the end of basic education are presented. The differences between the respondents' answers (pupils, teachers, school principals and pupils' parents) were very small. The greatest difference between the groups of respondents was related to the claim that *The pupils' learning outcomes should be used while evaluating the effectiveness of teachers' work* where the teachers' average score was 2.0 and the score of the pupils' parents 3.3. The teachers were more positive in their answers (M=4.4) than the pupils (M=3.6) concerning the claim *The pupil's knowledge is better than the grades indicate*. All of the groups of respondents disagreed somewhat with the claim *Pupils with different levels of knowledge should be taught in the same group*. Instead, all of the respondent groups agreed with the claim *I'm for the principle of neighbourhood schools*.

Table 1

The claims related to the evaluation, learning outcomes, pupils' grades and grading at the end of basic education

Items	Average score			
	pupil	teacher	school principal	parents
The grades are given on a fair basis.	4.2	3.8	.	.
The pupil's knowledge is better than the grades indicate.	3.6	4.4	.	.
If I decide to, I could have better grades.	4.1	.	.	.
Pupils with different levels of knowledge should be taught in the same group.	3.1	3.1	3.7	3
In compulsory education pupils should be regrouped, for instance in math classes, on the basis of their level of knowledge in maths.	3.7	3.6	3.2	3.7
I'm for the principle of neighbourhood schools.	4.1	4.3	4.5	4.5
Only the pupil's knowledge should be evaluated for the purpose of the school leaving certificate.	3.5	3.3	3.6	3.3
In addition to knowledge, a separate grade should be provided in the school leaving certificate based on the pupil's interests or attitudes.	3.9	3.4	3.1	3.7
A common national examination is required at the end of compulsory schooling for the sake of the comparability of grades.	3.6	3.2	3.1	3.3
The evaluation carried out at the end of basic education works well as it is.	3.8	3.2	3.3	3.4
The pupils' learning outcomes should be used while evaluating the effectiveness of the teachers' work.	3.7	2	2.3	3.3

Table 2 shows how equity and equality in basic education are seen among the respondents. In general it seems that the differences between the groups of respondents are small. The parents' answers (M=3.7) to the claim *Girls and boys are treated equally at schools* were different from the school principals' (M=4.3). Almost the same result was found in the respondents' answers to the claim *The parallel classes are treated in the same way*, where the average of the school principals' responses was 4.4 and the parents' 3.7.

Table 2

The claims related to the equality and equity in the Finnish basic education system

Items	Average score			
	pupil	teacher	school principal	parents
Girls and boys are treated equally at schools.	4	4	4.3	3.7
The parallel classes are treated in the same way.	3.9	4.1	4.4	3.7
The respondent's school provides as good a base to subsequent studies as the other compulsory schools.	4.2	4.4	4.6	4.3
Specially oriented education such as extra music, sports or languages should be available to all the interested pupils and not only to the pupils enrolled in such special classes.	4.1	3.8	3.9	4
The aptitude tests should be used while assigning pupils to special classes (extra classes for music, sports or languages, etc.).	3.8	3.7	3.5	3.5

There are only few immigrant children in the Finnish basic education. According to a recent study carried out with 15-year-old pupils, who were in the last grade of compulsory education, the immigrant pupils represented 4.6% of the whole age group in 2012. Pupils with an immigrant background are not a linguistically or ethnically a homogenous group. They represent, as all other pupils, different cultures, values and attitudes (Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2014, pp. 14–15). The experts of the first working group of the project were interested to know whether teachers have adequate skills and competences to distinguish the needs of immigrant pupils and if the pupils were given enough support. As it can be seen in Table 3, the respondents agreed that teaching should be modified according to the pupils' needs and that pupils with different backgrounds should study together. The greatest differences between the groups of respondents appeared in the claims *The teacher recognizes the need to support an immigrant pupil* and *Teachers know how to support immigrant pupils' learning and their learning process*. The answers of the teaching professionals i.e. teachers and school principals varied a little from the pupils' answers, who agreed more with those two claims than the other respondents.

Table 3

The claims related to teaching the immigrant pupils

Claim	Average score			
	pupil	teacher	school principal	parents
Teaching should be modified so that pupils' different needs are taken into consideration.	3.8	3.9	3.9	3.7
The teacher recognizes the need to support an immigrant pupil.	4	3.5	3.6	3.4
Teachers know how to support immigrant pupils' learning and their learning process.	4	3.2	3.5	3.3
It is good that children and youngsters who have different backgrounds study together.	4.2	4.4	4.6	4.4

As it has already been mentioned, national and international studies have shown that attitudes that obstruct learning have increased among Finnish pupils in the recent years. Once again the differences between the groups of respondents, other than the school principals, were small. As it can be seen in the Table, the school principals' average scores to each claim were higher than the average scores of other groups of respondents. In Table 4 it can be seen also that the respondents tended to agree with all the claims.

Table 4

The claims related to the pupils' attitudes towards school, motivation and well-being

Items	Average score			
	pupil	teacher	school principal	parents
The school is homey.	3.9	3.8	4.2	3.8
The atmosphere of the school is good.	3.9	4	4.5	3.9
The co-operation with the pupils is good (teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil cooperation).	4.3	4.6	4.7	4.3
The education is of high quality.	4.1	4.3	4.5	4.2
The co-operation between teachers and pupils is good.	4.2	4.2	4.4	4.3
Teachers treat pupils fairly.	4	4.3	4.4	3.9
There are enough meaningful challenges at the school.	3.8	3.6	3.8	3.8
Useful skills and knowledge are taught at the school.	4.1	4.2	4.2	4.2
The school is a peaceful and quiet place to work.	3.6	3.9	4.3	3.7

The education providers in Finland already have a great liberty to organize school days differently. For instance the teaching period can vary between 45 minutes and 180 minutes according to the pupils' or students' age. In the recent years several experiments have been performed concerning flexible ways to organize school days, i.e. having clubs or extra-curricular activities before or after school days. It can be seen in Table 5 that no great differences were found between the groups of respondents in their answers to the questions related to flexible school days. Generally, all the respondents agreed or almost agreed with the three claims presented in Table 5.

Most Finnish teachers' working hours are based on their teaching duties, which vary between 16 and 24 hours per week. According to OECD (2012) the number of teaching hours in Finland is below the OECD average. In Finland teachers' salaries are based on the tasks and their requirements, the results of their work and work experience. As part of the flexible school days topic, teachers and school principals were asked to respond to two claims concerning the teachers' working hours and salary. In Table 6 teachers' and school principals' average answers are presented. As it can be seen, their average

Table 5

The claims related to the flexible school days

Items	Average score			
	pupil	teacher	school principal	parents
Pupils' involvement in school development has to be increased.	4.1	4	4.3	4.1
Pupils' parents' involvement in school development has to be increased.	3.5	3.5	3.9	3.8
Flexible school days, where for instance clubs and other extra-curricular activities are organized as part of a school day, should be brought into use in the Finnish basic education system.	3.8	3.5	4	4

answers varied a lot in both claims. Principals agreed far more ($M=4.4$) with the claim that *The teachers' salaries are mainly based on their teaching hours. Teachers' working hours should be presented as annual working hours* ($M=4.4$) than teachers ($M=3.2$). Instead, the teachers agreed more ($M=4.3$) than the school principals ($M=3.3$) with the claim that reflects the current working conditions of the Finnish teachers: *Teachers are supposed to work at home. They do too much work at home without being paid for it.*

Table 6

Items related to the teachers' working hours, salary and flexible school days

Items	Average score	
	teacher	school principal
The teachers' salaries are mainly based on their teaching hours. Teachers' working hours should be represented as annual working hours.	3.2	4.4
Teachers are supposed to work at home. They do too much work at home without being paid for it.	4.3	3.3

The respondents were also asked to choose five 21st century skills that, according to them, should be taught more or better so that the pupils would succeed on the labour market in the future. The antilog in the parentheses shows how many of the respondents chose which particular skill. According to Figure 2, the four most popularly chosen 21st century skills were: communication either in one's own mother tongue ($N= 4,881$) or in other languages ($N=4,486$), problem solving skills ($N= 3,822$) and skills for analytical and critical thinking ($N= 3,776$).

The respondents were also asked to choose four purposes they would spend more resources on. According to Figure 3, the respondents would reduce class size ($N=4,901$), give more support such as remedial teaching or special education to the pupils in need ($N=4,149$) and renew the learning environments ($N=3,693$).

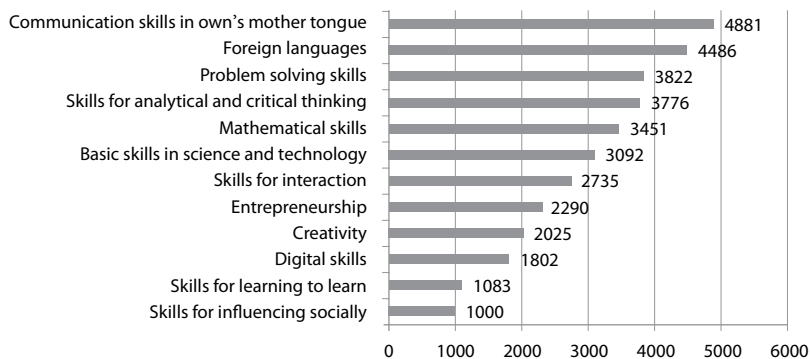


Figure 2. Respondents' answers to the question: Choose five (5) of the following 21st century skills that should be taught in the basic education more or better than now so that pupils would succeed on the labour market in the future

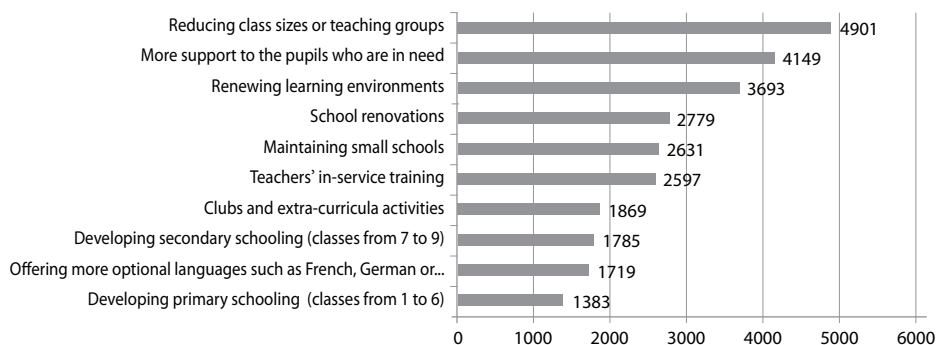


Figure 3. Respondents' answers to the question: If school was given extra resources choose four (4) of the following purposes you would spend it on?

Certain questions of the survey were addressed only to teacher trainees, teachers, principals or other educational experts. One of the aims of the developing project was to examine if the content and methods used in teachers' pre- and in-service training in its present form ensures that new teachers have the appropriate know-how, competence and skills when beginning their working lives as teachers. The respondents (N=1,868) were asked if certain skills, competences and knowledge should be taught during pre-service training or during in-service training.

According to the respondents' answers, the most important things to teach to the teacher trainees during their pre-service training were: skills and knowledge how to deal with the pupils (97%), teacher's interaction skills, knowledge and competence to teach certain subjects and recognition of learning difficulties (96%). The themes the respondents proposed to teachers' in-service training were, among other things, the following: planning and carrying out club activities and other extracurricular activities (81% of the responses), having double competence i.e. the competence to teach both in primary and secondary education (58% of the responses), developing

school culture in teaching (55% of the responses) and assessing school proceedings (54% of the responses).

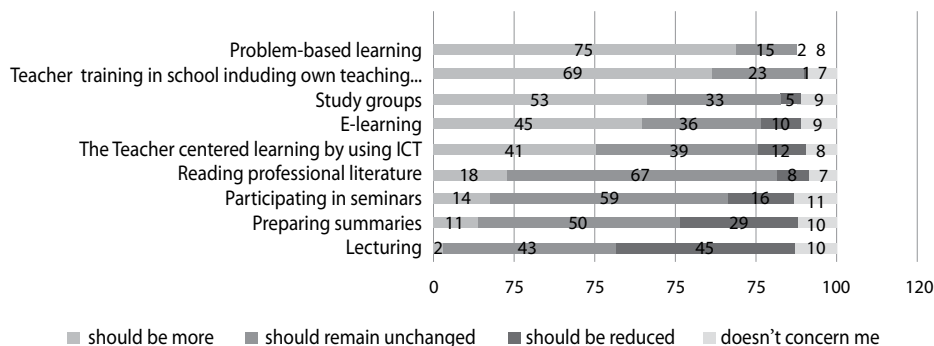


Figure 4. Respondents' answers to the question how efficient the different learning and teaching methods were during pre-service teacher training

In the last few years in Finland there have been public discussions and criticism on whether useful skills, competences and knowledge are taught in pre-service teacher training and if the methods that are used most commonly during the training are up-to-date and efficient enough. According to the respondents' answers (N=1,868) (Figure 4) problem-based learning (75% of the responses), teacher training in practice (69% of the responses), study groups (54% of the responses) and e-learning (45% of the responses) were the methods that teacher trainees, teachers, principals and other educational experts wished to see used more in the course of in-service teacher training. Not surprisingly, lecturing and preparing summaries were the methods that, according to the respondents, should either be reduced or remain unchanged.

General Results of the Open-Ended Questions

In the open-ended questions the respondents were asked to mention strengths and weaknesses in the Finnish basic education system as well as three things they would like to develop in the current system. Over 15,000 freely worded responses were received in total.

Here are some citations of the perceived strengths in the Finnish basic education. Many respondents mentioned the openness of education and that basic education offers equal opportunities to all pupils regardless of their background. It seems also that the respondents appreciated the fact that basic education is free of charge and that schools take care of the pupils' well-being holistically. The pupils' welfare services and warm school meals were also often mentioned. According to many comments, pupils with different backgrounds and with special needs also seem to be taken into account in everyday school life.

"Basic education is open to everyone. Supporting the weak pupils."

"The best thing is that school belongs to everybody. The ethical background of

basic education. Teachers are professionals and they try to act according to these values (most of them)."

"Education and school meals are free of charge. Teaching is usually good, even though the comprehensiveness and creativity are less common. Basic education has worked well, but now it is time to develop it."

"Everyone has access to this comprehensive service package: education, school meals and healthcare".

In addition, the teachers' high standards, motivation and strong professional competence were also highlighted in the responses.

"High quality teacher pre-service training and high quality teaching materials and distribution of know-how. Teachers' autonomous status (for the moment)."

"Well integrated learning environments and good teachers. Of course, this can be improved and developed."

"Teachers are professionals and conscientious and school environments are usually tidy and pretty homey."

The respondents were asked to say also what kinds of problems they had noticed in the basic education and to mention three suggestions on how the basic education should be improved. After the classification of the data, the following themes concerning the development of the basic education emerged. The principle of neighbourhood school and possibility to study in a smaller group were highly appreciated and pupils' rights to them should be ensured also in the future.

"Class/group size has to decrease, small neighbourhood schools have to be maintained."

"Class size must not increase too much. It is important to keep the neighbourhood school and small, safe classes, where questions can be asked and one can question things."

According to the respondents the teaching methods and pedagogy should be developed. Instead of learning by heart, one has to concentrate on understanding different phenomena. Different and versatile teaching and learning methods should be used instead of the traditional teacher-centred methods. The pupils should be given possibilities to influence teaching and pupils' individual needs should be taken into consideration more. The respondents also recommended using ICT in teaching and learning.

"The pupils should be given more options (optional subjects) to choose in school."

"More responsibilities to the pupils."

"More non-formal learning and skills for critical media literacy."

"Individual learning, doing things together."

"Regular in-service training for teachers. Especially ICT has given new challenges and several teachers' skills and competences in this field are not up-to-date."

The respondents pointed out that basic education should prepare pupils for life in the society and help them to develop the skills they will need in their future. According

to the written responses these kinds of skills are communication skills, social skills, creativity, entrepreneurship, good manners and courtesy.

A number of responses highlighted that school funding should not be cut. Similarly, the equity and equality in the education system must be secured.

“The society has to invest into basic education and develop it – not continue to reduce the resources.”

“The differentiation of the schools must be stopped – the homogeneity and equality of education must be maintained both at the countryside and in the cities”.

Discussion and Conclusion

Many of the comments on developing basic education and the answers of the structured questions echoed the opinions voiced by the expert groups in the Basic education of the future project.

Several recent studies have shown that equality and equity are not necessarily the right words to describe the Finnish basic education. In Finland, the differentiation between the public schools is linked to spatial segregation that has been strengthened within the urban areas. Socio-economic and ethnical segregation has proceeded fast in the last few years. Research has shown that the differentiation of schools and individual pupils' outcomes are connected to the changing socio-spatial structure of the city. Bernelius (2013) shows that the changing patterns of spatial socioeconomic and ethnic differentiation have a profound effect on the conditions in which the urban schools operate, especially through the differentiation of the schools' student base. Similarly, the schools' reputation and popularity are connected to the socio-spatial characteristics of the neighbourhoods in ways which shape school choices and housing choices which educationally motivated families make. Current studies have also shown that the streaming of pupils is overt in Finnish cities due to the so-called emphasized school classes because they are allowed to select their pupils based on the pupils' aptitude in an emphasized subject that is typically taught more than the core curriculum requires. These pupils' selection policies are tied to parental choice policies that each local authority runs (e.g. Seppänen, Rinne, & Sairanen, 2012). In the Finnish educational system pupils apply and are selected to enrol secondary education mainly on the basis of their grades achieved at the end of the basic education. That is why the final grades should be nationally comparable, regardless of the school and the teachers should follow good competence grade descriptors for each subject. Recent assessments of the learning outcomes and studies have shown that in the end of the basic education the competences between pupils with the same grade vary significantly, for instance in history, social sciences (Ouakrim-Soivio & Kuusela, 2012, pp. 110-112; Ouakrim-Soivio, 2013, pp. 175-176) and in health education (Summanen, 2014, p. 129). These differences between a pupil's competence level and their grade in the subject can vary significantly. The problem was voiced also concerning the student's competences in mathematics (Mattila, 2002, pp. 90-91; Kuusela, 2006, pp. 67-98; Hirvonen, 2012, pp.

69-71) and Finnish as a mother tongue and literature (Lappalainen, 2006; 2011, pp. 58-68).

In order to slow down the segregation processes and strengthen equality and equity in the basic education, the themes that the expert groups of the project propose are: holding on to the principle of local, neighbourhood schools, securing financial resources and development proposals concerning educational research, including a broad and long-term national programme of follow-up studies that will also support longitudinal studies related to teaching and education. In their reasoning the experts expressed very clearly that the basic education must continue to be public, free of charge and non-selective. The structures and practices of basic education must strive to eliminate links between a pupil's learning outcomes and his or her social background, living area or gender. Education demonstrably has a strong impact on the income levels of individuals and the growth of the national economy. Allocation of adequate resources to guarantee a high standard of teaching in basic education must be ensured in the future. Efforts to reduce teaching group sizes and prevent any further increases in group sizes must continue and be backed up by adequate resources (Ouakrim-Soivio et al., 2015, p. 108).

Pupils are individuals and they differ according to their abilities. Studies have shown that motivation and positive attitude towards school increases when stimulated by pupils' experiences of success. The individual ways to learn and to teach must be increased in basic education. According to recent studies (Niemivirta & Tapola, 2008) pupils' interests and their positive beliefs as learners confirm each other, and learning and learning assignments should support this kind of positive interaction. Instead of external motivation (i.e. stressing achievements and performances), the focus of learning and teaching should change to internal motivation and enthusiasm such as insights and exploration. The whole concept of learning is becoming increasingly holistic. Pupils have to be prepared to solve complex problems, where it is not enough to know only one subject well. Knowledge must be generated by exceeding the boundaries between different types of sciences (Hytönen et al., 2014; Cantell, 2015). The crucial instruments for development are wondering about different things and phenomena and asking questions (Karlsson, 2014; Lonka et al., 2000). Therefore, the experts' development proposals are related to this theme: the need to find new pedagogical solutions that would support both communal and individual learning. The operating culture of the school and the structure of the school day should be developed. The operating culture and structures of the school must support pupils' learning, well-being and participation. The school should be developed as an ethical learning community where pupils have a voice and a choice, and also take responsibility for their own learning. Changes in operating culture and the structure of school and school day require also changes in the teachers' working time models and development of leadership in schools. An effort will be made to continue and expand various experiments concerning teachers' working time models. The School

principals' qualification requirements must be reviewed to meet the changes in their job description (Ouakrim-Soivio et al., 2015, p. 89).

According to TALIS 2013 survey, the conditions of teachers' in-service-training in Finland are worrying. It seems that teachers do not participate in professional training as much as they used to and long-lasting, extensive professional in-service training is not as popular as it used to be. This result puts pressure on pre-service teacher training, for one of its aims has been to train teachers who are willing and who have the capacity to develop education regarding the ongoing changes in society (Taajamo et al., 2014). The experts in developing groups have proposed that research-based teacher education should be developed further in cooperation with universities and municipalities to form a continuum of initial education and professional development of teachers. In order to ensure that our teacher education is of a high quality, a national development programme to support teacher educators' professional competences should be launched. Systematic in-service training is a precondition for developing the professional competence of teachers. To achieve this goal, the concept and contents of in-service training need to be redefined. The national structure of in-service-training and funding system must be updated to support both teachers' systematic professional development and the development of schools (Ouakrim-Soivio et al., 2015, p. 110).

According to research, the quality and quantity of pre- and in-service training of school principals does not correspond to their professional needs (Raasumaa, 2010; Taipale et al., 2007). That is why school principals' education needs to be developed and their management skills improved, and a personal plan should be prepared for all school principals to support their professional development (Ouakrim-Soivio et al., 2015, p. 111).

In the Finnish context the whole development project *Basic education of the future Let's turn the trend!* was one of a kind. Firstly, because experts made a meta-analysis of the current situation concerning eight different development areas or themes that were recognised to be problematic in Finnish education and the development propositions were based on this meta-analysis.

Secondly, the respondents' answers were convergent with the experts' conceptions. The third point is crucial: are the science-based development proportions put into practice by policy makers? It remains to be seen how the 45 experts' evidence-based work as well as almost 7,000 respondents' answers will be taken into consideration in the course of the current year and if the Finnish basic education system will be renewed according to the developing propositions.

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Najat Ouakrim-Soivio

The Ministry of Education and Culture,
P.O. Box 29 FI - 00023 Government, Helsinki, Finland
najat.ouakrim-soivio@helsinki.fi

Osnovno obrazovanje u budućnosti – promijenimo trend!

Sažetak

Osnovno obrazovanje u budućnosti – Promijenimo trend! razvojni je projekt u osnovnom i srednjoškolskom obrazovanju u Finskoj. Cilj je procijeniti trenutnu situaciju, proučiti razloge za pad u ishodima učenja na nacionalnoj i međunarodnoj razini i proučiti potrebe za razvojem poučavanja i učenja u finskom obrazovnom sustavu. Dvije radne skupine koordinira upravni odbor. Cilj radne skupine zadužene za kompetencije i učenje je pronaći načine za poboljšanje ishoda učenja, premošćivanje jaza između ishoda učenja djevojčica i dječaka, uspostavljanja regionalne ravnopravnosti; očuvanje jednakih mogućnosti za buduća istraživanja i zaustavljanja trenda povećanja nejednakosti unutar škola i među školama. Projekt će također proučiti položaj manjina i njihove ishode učenja u finskom obrazovnom sustavu. Radna skupina zadužena za motivaciju i poučavanje proučit će različita okruženja za učenje, zatim materijale koji uključuju obrazovne igre i inovacije koje potpomažu učenje, proučiti kako se motivacija za učenje i dobrobit mogu poboljšati te ocijeniti važnost motivacije i zadovoljstva školom za učenje i pohađanje škole. Također će biti istraženi sadržaj i metode obrazovanja, zatim obrazovanje budućih nastavnika i nastavnika praktičara. Online anketa organizirana je prošlu jesen i anketirano je 7000 ispitanika. Također, u kasnu jesen održana su regionalna događanja. Svrha tih događanja je olakšati opsežnu javnu raspravu o budućnosti osnovnog obrazovanja. Prijedlozi radnih skupina kao i rezultati ankete bit će detaljnije prikazani početkom ožujka 2015. kada će biti prikazan i izvještaj o razvojnom projektu. Prijedlozi će se razmatrati i putem razvoja Vladina programa nakon sljedećih parlamentarnih izbora u travnju 2015.

Ključne riječi: ishodi učenja; osnovno obrazovanje; obrazovna politika; ravnopravnost i pravednost.