FUNDAMENTAL EDUCATION RIGHTS OF CITIZENS AND MINORITES (THE CASE OF FILAND)

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Abstract: *The right to educations is regarded as one of the main human rights in the 1948 U.N. Declaration on Human Rights for All, and the 1966 International Bill of Human Rights. The aim of this right – to provide everyone with access to education. This right, although mainly relevant to children, also concerns adults. The right to education is made up of a number of different elements. Recognition of each right varies from country to country, and hence a country's ability to defend this right – since the right to education, as one of the social rights, requires the investment of*

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many resources to realize it. Finland is known as a world leader in exploiting education rights for all state communities, without any discrimination or gender separation. This article will attempt to examine the principles leading the right to education and find the correlation between them and human rights be they what they may.

Keywords: Human rights; Fundamental Education; Government Policy.

DREPTURILE FUNDAMENTALE LA EDUCAȚIE ALE CETĂȚENILOR ȘI MINORITĂȚILOR (CAZUL FINLANDEI)

Rezumat: *Dreptul la educație este considerat unul dintre principalele drepturi ale omului în Declarația Universală a Drepturilor Omului din 1948 și Declarația din 1966. Scopul acestui drept este de a oferi tuturor acces la educație. Acest drept, deși este relevant în principal pentru copii, îi privește și pe adulți. Dreptul la educație este alcătuit dintr-o serie de elemente diferite. Recunoașterea fiecărui drept variază de la o țară la alta și, prin urmare, capacitatea unei țări de a apăra acest drept – întrucât dreptul la educație, ca unul dintre drepturile sociale, necesită investirea multor resurse pentru a-l realiza. Finlanda este cunoscută ca lider mondial în exploatarea drepturilor la educație pentru toate comunitățile, fără nicio discriminare sau separare de gen. Acest articol va încerca să examineze principiile care conduc dreptul la educație și să găsească corelația dintre ele și drepturile omului.*

Cuvinte-cheie: drepturile omului; educație fundamentală; politică guvernamentală.

1. Introduction:

The right to educations is regarded as one of the main human rights in the 1948 U.N., Declaration on Human Rights for All, and the 1966 International Bill of Human Rights. The aim of this right – to provide everyone with access to education. This right, although mainly relevant to children, also concerns adults. The right to education is made up of a number of different elements. Recognition of each right varies from country to country, and hence a country's ability to defend this right – since the right to educa-

tion, as one of the social rights, requires the investment of many resources to realize it. Finland is known as a world leader in exploiting education rights for all state communities, without any discrimination or gender separation [12].

Finland is known as a world leader in exploiting education rights for all its communities, without any discrimination or gender separation [7]. For many years, education personnel, philosophers and researchers, from all of the world, have looked with envy at Finland that has become, in the opinion of all decision makers and international comparative tests, the country with the best education system in the world.

2. **Main materials**

Educational approach. The Finnish educational system seeks to guarantee students calm learning without anxiety. This system opposes the constant path of testing through student exams, and therefore it restricts the number of required tests to an absolute minimum [7;5]. Thus, there are no standard tests, and hence no preparation for exams or studying with private tutors. In Finland, schools operate at community centers, outside school hours, they host many social and sporting activities funded by schools and local authorities. Matriculation exams (yes, Finland has matriculations exams) include exams in four subjects only, one at least at an advanced level. The only compulsory exam is students' mother tongue with all others being their choice, including mathematics, second language, menu of science subjects and menu of humanities and social sciences subjects. Parallel to academic schools in Finland, higher level vocational schools operate providing their graduates with vocational knowledge and experience allowing them direct entry into the employment world. This reflects the Finnish culture believing in a leisurely pace of life, intrinsic motivation and a range of learning experiences and possibilities.

Adapting systems to the community

The Finnish system seeks to adapt teaching to individual students, and every student needing help to learn received it from school. It is the responsibility of teachers. There is no grouping of students according to their level of achievement (as accepted in Israel in English and mathematics), and comprehensive schools employ alternative teaching methods. In addition,

teachers have developed learning environments enabling learning adapted to different types of students. Finnish learners are active learners. Often decisions in Finnish classrooms are made democratically, and generally students themselves assess their own learning achievements. Isenström [5], one of the most important education researchers in Finland, wrote a book called "***Finnish Lessons***", which became a global bestseller, in which he explained the principles of the Finnish education system. One of the core elements in this education system, which appears time after time in Sahlberg's book is the ***element of equality and concern for all students***. As mentioned in the book, the Director General of the National Education Council in Finland espoused that the three principles constituting the infrastructure on which the Finnish educational policy was founded were equality, efficiency and solidarity [9].

Olli – Pekka et al [12 ,571 p.] clarified in his book that the educational reforms adapted in Finland are opposite to widespread educational reforms in the U.S.A., which are based on market economy. The Finnish approach rejects firing fewer good teachers, annulling teachers' unions, privatizing the educational system, opening charter schools, voucher method, salary incentives for teachers dependent on achievements, or adopting similar models from the corporate world in the education system. The opposite is true, Finland is committed to a public education for all children funded publicly, and the inspiration is the universal Scandinavian welfare state.

Until the mid-20th century most schools in Finland were private and a large majority of children in Finland studied elementary education, if at all; few reached university. The welfare state led to a radical change of approach in Finland in the field of education. Gradually, funding and operating schools was transferred to state responsibility and it became compulsory in Finnish law to provide education to all. „The peruskoulu", public schools replaced private education, with the support of the Finnish teachers' union, with an emphasis on the principles of equality and social justice.

Education is free in Finland from kindergarten to university (including university studies), kindergartens and schools provide free hot meals and even learning materials. The ration of kindergarten teachers to students is one to four until age 3, and one to seven afterward, and in schools one teacher for every 12 students and a little less than 20 students per class.

The emphasis in Finnish education is to strengthen the weak and prevent educational gaps.

The rate of students who complete their studies in Finland is very high, twenty percent higher than the OECD or U.S.A. average. The dropout rate in Finland is significantly lower than other western countries. The Finnish education system operates special programs to reduce the number of dropouts as much as possible, the gaps in educational achievements in Finnish schools, according to the PISA tests, are the lowest in the world (p. 32 in link to PISA test).

Rights of students from minority communities in Finland

The largest minority in Finland is the Swedish minority. Fino-Swedes, also known as Swedes-of-Finland (In Swedish: *Finlandssvenkar*; in Finnish: *Suomenruotsalaiset*), are Finnish citizens who belong to a minority for whom Swedish is their mother tongue. It is an ethnic-language minority whose status and position in the majority population is among the best in the world. The origins of the Swedish speaking population in Finland are in the Middle Ages, when farmers from Sweden settled in Finland, mainly on its western and southern coasts. In fact, more than 600 years.

Today, Swedish is the mother tongue of less than 300,000 Finns, which is about only 5% of the 5.5 million people living in Finland. Jakku- Sihvonen & Niemi [6] added that nonetheless, both Finnish and Swedish are defined in Finnish law as the two official national languages of the country. Saloviita & Schaffus [15] also mentioned that Finnish and Swedish belong to two different language families. Finns, for whom Swedish is their mother tongue, mostly speak Finnish as well. The law protects the rights of everyone to use one of the two national languages, Finnish or Swedish, in courts and any other authority and to receive official documents in these languages. The law also states that public authorities will take equal care of the social and cultural needs of Finnish and Swedish speaking populations in the country. Additionally, according to the law, Finnish or Swedish are the languages which will be employed in parliamentary work. Therefore, the government and other authorities have to submit documents to parliament in both languages together, and accordingly, also official documents.

Quennerstedt [14], a Finnish education researcher maintained in his

book that an absolute majority (approximately 98%) of schools in Finland at all levels are public schools operated by local authorities. In general, the state funds between 60% and 70% of their budgets and the remainder is funded by local authorities. The educational policy in Finland aspires to a guiding principle of giving every student an equal opportunity, irrespective of their social background or language. This principle, alongside the fact that in Finland, as stated, there are two official national languages, led to the creation of two parallel education system in the country – one for Finnish speakers and one for Swedish speakers.

Structure of education system for Swedish speaking minority is as similar as possible to that of Finnish speakers. Both systems are managed alongside each other, with almost identical curricula and resources. In schools where the language of study is Swedish, teachers are generally Swedish as mother tongue speakers. In 2012, there were 150 Swedish language schools in Finland. Now, in 2022, there are more [14]. All students in Finland learn their mother tongue and at least two more languages, one of which must be the other official national language, in other words students at Swedish speaking schools must learn Finnish and students at Finnish language schools must also learn Swedish. It should be noted that in 2015 the Finnish parliament, with a majority of 134 versus 48, rejected a proposal to abolish compulsory Swedish language studies in schools where Finnish was the language of instruction.

Regarding preschool education, local authorities in Finland are obligated by law to organize daycare centers in Swedish for children for whom this is their mother tongue. Likewise, local social and educational authorities provide kindergarten education in Finnish and Swedish. Alongside separate daycare centers in Finnish and Swedish, there are also bilingual daycare institutions with separate language groups in the same institution.

Elementary education – the elementary education system is considered as compulsory education in Finland for children aged between 7-16. The state offers, as stated, elementary education to all students in the country, irrespective of ethnicity, race and/or religion. It should be noted that all elementary school students in Finland, including those from minority populations (national average) achieved better results in the PISA tests than other countries. According to the OECD [11], Finnish schools well serve

all students irrespective of their family background, and socio-economic standing. It is important to note that the rate of private expenditure on education at school age in Finland is the lowest in the OECD and stands at 0.7-0.8% of gross domestic product (GDP), well below the average and much, much less than in Israel where it is higher than the OECD average.

With regard to secondary education, the General Upper Secondary Schools Act includes similar instructions to those in elementary school's act. The language of instruction in general secondary schools can be Finnish or Swedish. In 2020, there were many general secondary schools in Finland, of which 32 provided their students with education in Swedish. As stated, learning the Swedish language is a compulsory subject in all these schools (even those whose language of instruction is Finnish). Isenström [5, 277 p.] stated that secondary education can also be vocational and it should be noted that in 2021, of approximately 152,000 vocational school students, about 6,500 studied at schools where the language of instruction was Swedish, and close to 8,000 studied in bilingual vocational education framework. Of 157 vocational education institutions in that year, 17 were in Swedish and 6 were bilingual. As in regular schools, learning the Swedish language is compulsory in vocational schools where the language of instruction is Finnish and vice versa: learning the Finnish language is a compulsory subject in vocational schools where the language of instruction is Swedish. Higher education institutions in Finland are divided into two types: polytechnic institutions (high schools for sciences and technological vocational training) and universities. Correct to 2023, of 27 polytechnics in Finland, the language of instruction and curricula are Swedish in five and a further two offered bilingual studies.

Higher education rights for minorities. In three of the 16 universities in Finland, the language of instruction and curricula are in Swedish and a number of additional universities are bilingual and offered some of their programs in Swedish as well. The existing sharing between languages also passes to higher education institutions [12]. The Finnish government defined a special task for the main university in the Swedish language to take into account the needs of the bilingual population of the country. This academic institution also trains teachers for the Swedish education system. As well as giving the right to study in one's mother tongue, every Finnish

citizen, whether belonging to a any community or national gender, will be eligible for free studies, with all the expenses associated with studies, and will not suffer any discrimination similarly to other countries.

Influence of the educational contribution among minorities on the local economy. The Finnish labor market is made up of three main players: employer organizations, trade unions and the state. In Finland, there is a tradition of cooperation on the basis of negotiations between employer organizations and trade unions and collective agreements so that most working conditions are based on collective agreements and not on legislation. These collective agreements include salary framework, minimum wage, means of pay, working hours, sick pay, overtime, holiday pay, health and safety at work. Isenström [5] pointed out that the importance of providing training and education contributes directly and indirectly to the national product as well, as mentioned previously. Figure 1 will present the effect of these policy, compare to OECD, average results between 2016 – 2023.

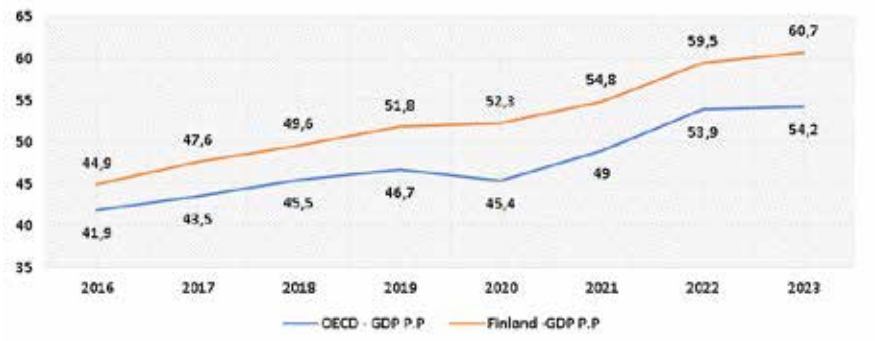


Figure 1: Fluctuations in Finland's GDP compared to OECD countries' average in the years 2016-2023.
Source: made by the writer [11]

From the findings in the figure, we can identify that although Finland absorbed many migrants, its GDP was not affected, and economic qualities were maintained over the years. One can learn from this that Finland believes in absorbing migrants and nurturing its minorities because it successfully leads them to economic prosperity that also serves the country's

employment-economic needs. This economic-educational approach contributes much alongside to the economy. When minorities do not integrate into the education system, instead of neglecting them, as occurs in many countries, they are referred to vocational training, which will provide them with the minimal ability to integrate into the labor market and undergo the best absorption in a social sense too [11].

Abdulkerim [1] referred to vocational training intended for unemployed over the age of 20 or people seeking to join the labor market. Here too there is no distinction between the majority and minority populations. During training, learners enjoy the basic network or unemployment benefits and are not required to take an entry exam or to offset other income and their travel costs are refunded. Training is intended for people without experience in the labor market or unemployed with experience. Training for those without experience aim to offer basic abilities to seek work. Training is aimed at people from a low socio-economic level who have not decided what profession to choose (11% of training is for people without experience), for immigrants to ease their integration in Finland (11%), and people without a basic background in computers (8%), and to teach the Finnish language (7%). Alison [2] added that vocational training intended for people with previous employment experience lasts about five months. About 20% of vocational training is in industrial subjects, about 71% in constructions, 71% in administration and office work and about 1% in health and social work. About 8% of total training days in the country is provided through projects funded in partnership by the government and workplaces, where there is affirmative action to integrate minority populations. Such projects are aimed at new workers or veteran workers who need training so as not to lose their place of work, and are divided into three categories: training for recruitment, refresher and in-depth training and training for role change in cases where there are risks of redundancies.

Social view of minorities' status in educational framework and state systems

Finland's general education system recognizes every student's personality uniqueness and their right to good education. Understanding that pupils, whomever they are have educational rights leads to Finland's modern

educational policy intended to guarantee equal opportunities to every citizen: education must be available to all irrespective of place of residence, ethnic origin, age, social status etc. [12]. According to data received from the international implementation program to assess students' educational achievements, the difference between Finnish schools is just 5%, in other words every school is successful [7; 9]. To expose the intellectual potential of every student and provide them with support to achieve the best educational outcomes, a mentoring and counseling system has developed in the country. Abdulkerim [1] maintained that Finnish elementary school graduates must possess varied life area abilities. They must be capable of thinking independently, learning, interacting with people around them and in varied technical environments, capable of looking after themselves in their daily life, have certain skills to participate in professional activities and initiatives, as well as activities in civic society.

Finnish society, and its general education system are aimed at understanding various life phenomena politically, democratically and regarding human rights. This consists of a broader implementation of types integrated learning and creating a suitable educational environment based on principles such as universality. As mentioned also contributing to this is the fact that education in Finland is free at every level: from preschool to university. In particular, Finnish school students have the right to free food, textbooks and transport to places of learning.

3. Conclusions

Finland, in its approach, leads western Europe in equality and fairness in results and not just opportunities. This feature is intended to guarantee high quality education to all students based on social justice and equal educational opportunities. High achievements among Finnish students are demonstrated in international tests, an absence of educational gaps between the center and peripheries and teaching becoming a very prestigious and desired profession in Finland – all these have made the education system of this small Nordic country an object of admiration and envy among educational personnel throughout the world.

The establishment does not view minorities as a social burden, rather, as an opportunity to increase the state's social ability. This meeting point with the economic-employment reality creates an unlimited number of

opportunities for every family absorbed into social community framework in Finland. The perceptual difference is the main key in correctly building democracy, which also based on decisions of the majority, also allows other social sectors, such as minorities, to find themselves within the state's social evolvement. Finland believes that everything is strengthened in its education system, despite more than a little criticism of its approach. The state believes in huge investment, without compromise in the general population, including groups needing different care and nurturing, for example special education students. In its practical implementation, Finland adapted this feature by helping and involving special needs students, caring for children from an early age, free learning, comprehensive health services, free meals for all children.

The state ensures that the rate of learners in special education classes is high, especially lower classes and avoids assessment based on grades in the first five years at school. Sticking to human rights in issues of education is a core subject in Finnish government decision-making processes. Over the years, the Finns have understood that if they want a system leading to systemic excellence, they must relate to the general population as one "civic society", without definitions of minority groups. Finland also has a problem of center and peripheries, but examination reveals that working relationships and addressing periphery citizens is as successful as central cities such as Helsinki. The system successfully creates equality in places where none exists in human material Finn's face. One of the unique features of the Finnish educational system's outcomes in PISA tests is the very low difference between all schools in the country. As a result, the area in which civilians live does not affect the quality of education they receive, and emphasizes the principle of equality.

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