

COMPREHENSIVE OBSERVATIONS AND OPINIONS BY TEACHERS AND RESEARCHERS ABOUT FINNISH SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study aims to gather information about the primary, secondary and high school educations in Finland and get the opinions and assessments of the participants regarding the three school visits which were made so as to observe classes in situ and interview teachers, students and administrators. This study is, therefore, a case study from among qualitative research patterns. This study treats the primary, secondary and high school educations as more than one situation, discusses each and makes comparisons with a holistic approach and offers a discussion according to holistic multiple case pattern (Yin, 1984). The study group of the research consists of 10, in total, among who there are 8 teachers and 2 academic members that took place in the school observations and interviews in Finland in May 2022. The data were collected during on-the-job observations in Finland as part of the IPA project titled “Yes to High Quality of Instruction for Special Education.” Various sources were used during the data collection process. The qualitative responses provided on-line to open-ended questions were analysed with content analysis. In consequence of the observations and assessments on Finnish schools, it was discovered that top quality conditions and performance were provided in various aspects such as the physical conditions of schools, the working conditions of teachers, environment of schools and student behaviours.

Key Words: *school observations, Finland, educational environment, educational system*

Introduction

Finland is a country seen as an example in terms of both successful educational institutions and wealthy level (Esenlikçi & Engin, 2021). Educational system is the leading factor in the realization of this wealth (Demirkan, 2018). According to the results of International Student Assessment Program from among international assessments (Programme for International Student Assessment- PISA), Finland, a country which consecutively ranks the first (Takayama, 2010), demonstrates an effective performance in offering equal and professional education (Kupiainen, Hautamaki & Karjalainen, 2009). Kupiainen et al. (2009) suggest that the most prominent qualities of the Finnish educational system are the use of school-based curricula, equal importance attached to each and every dimension of learning and individual development, reliance on professionalism, self-management and social equality. In this sense, it is necessary for countries intending a successful educational system to analyse on which elements these qualities have an influence in operational terms.

It is significant to witness the implementation of these qualities in schools, so that a successful educational system can be directly observed. We believe that it would offer a guide to develop

efficient practices if the observations and assessments of pedagogues and researchers are discussed in a research for this purpose. Indeed, there were various researches carried out to that end. In this sense, Toker Gökçe and Celep (2011) compared the educational systems of 11 countries. The researchers compared the countries' period of compulsory education, school starting age, age of graduation, purpose of compulsory education and the modes of administration based on documents but omitted certain school- and grade-based findings. Likewise, Kesici and Ceylan (2020) compared the school life quality in Finland, Turkey and South Korea with a document analysis. They reported that there were differences between these countries in sexes, socio-economic levels, teacher and family supports, living environment and self-sufficiency. The research was discovered to benefit from secondary data sources which do not include sources like observations and interviews. Comparing Estonia, Turkey, Finland and Ireland for out-of-class activities with a different point of view, Özgem and Akçıl (2022) performed a document analysis and discovered that Turkey was the country with the least out-of-class activity alternatives and diversity among the given. However, this study was also based on secondary data sources which did not include observations or interviews. In this respect, we believe that the literature lacks a definition and comparison based on direct observations and interviews and that the data obtained from various sources like these would offer a more efficient assessment.

The studies involving the observations by Turkish pedagogues and researchers on Finnish schools provide a notable ground for the assessment of Turkish schools and the transfer of efficient practices to Turkey. Turkish studies are generally based on the comparison of various countries without observation or proof-based assessments (Güler, 2022; Mete, 2013; Özerbaş & Safi, 2002; Solak, 2013). Apart from these, the literature also contains researches based on observations and proof-based assessments. Among these, one was performed by Özdemir (2017). The research reports the observations and assessments of four teachers who observed schools in Finland. The research made the observations as to the educational system, teachers' training and selection, administration structure of schools, educational programs, private schools, the education of children with special needs, mode of teaching and out-of-class activities. The photos of and records of interviews with teachers were used as data. The findings of the researcher reveal that the most fundamental element in Finnish schools was teacher, the teachers' wages were at a desirable level, cooperation was highly appreciated, there were 30-minute long breaks between courses, schools were built on wide lands, attention was paid not to build multi-storey schools, equal education was intended for everyone, classes consisted of 25 students on average, there was no competitive education, applied education was adopted as an approach and the educational system was not based on exams. Rather than the educational system qualities, Genç (2019), during a visit to Finland, observed the educational components which were important in terms of entrepreneurship. The findings acquired from this visit show that Finland implemented an educational system which was flexible, student-oriented and equal and which was based on integration with life and featured learning by experience. In a visit by Ekinçi and Öter (2010) to Finland, participants reported that Finnish schools used spacious areas, libraries were developed and accessible, tables and desks could be differently positioned and workshops were considered significant. However, the limited number of participants, the insufficiency of the data collection sources and the descriptive nature of the analyses in these researches lead to notable drawbacks as to the significance and comprehensiveness of the findings.

Unlike previous researches, this study provides an assessment with respect to the interviews and observations by both teachers and the researchers. This study deals with the Finnish education system as a whole and attempts to identify the school outputs of the system as well as the qualities of the schools. In this sense, the goal of this study is to reveal the observations by visitor Turkish teachers and researchers on the educational services and students of these schools and comment on the interviews with the teachers and administrators of the primary, secondary and high schools in Finland. The questions discussed to this end were as follows:

In the Finnish schools visited by Turkish teachers and researchers, what are the;

- a) Physical conditions of the schools (such as classes, materials and use of out-of-class spaces),
- b) Working conditions of teachers,
- c) Environment of schools (such as supportive or preventive learning atmospheres),
- d) Experiences regarding educational processes in classes,
- e) Observations regarding student behaviours in classes,
- f) Observations regarding teacher behaviours in classes,
- g) Observations regarding the physical nature of classes,
- h) Observations regarding the teaching materials in classes,
- i) The pros and cons of Finland when compared to Turkey on the basis of schools,
- j) The pros and cons of Finland when compared to Turkey on the basis of classes,
The pros and cons of Finland when compared to Turkey on the basis of in-class teacher and student behaviours.

METHOD

Research Model

This study aims to gather information about the primary, secondary and high school educations in Finland and get the opinions and assessments of the participants regarding the three school visits which were made so as to observe classes *in situ* and interview teachers, students and administrators. This study is, therefore, a case study from among qualitative research patterns. By definition, a case study is a method which defines in detail one or more situations limited with a certain period of time using various data collection tools and deriving in-depth information from multiple sources such as observations, interviews, visual and audio materials, documents and reports (Creswell, 2007). This study treats the primary, secondary and high school educations as more than one situation, discusses each and makes comparisons with a holistic approach and offers a discussion according to holistic multiple case pattern (Yin, 1984).

Study Group

The study group of the research consists of 10, in total, among who there are 8 teachers and 2 academic members that took place in the school observations and interviews in Finland in May 2022. The teachers were participants from Science and Art Centres who specialized in varying branches while the academic members were from two state universities in Ankara, Turkey and made researches on high-skilled individuals and measurement and assessment subjects. The population was made up of three male and seven female participants. The average of the ages was 40.

Data, Data Collection and Data Collection Tools

The data were collected during on-the-job observations in Finland as part of the IPA project titled “Yes to High Quality of Instruction for Special Education.” Various sources were used during the data collection process. In this respect, the used sources included i) documents, ii) interviews, iii) direct observations, iv) participatory observations, and v) physical tools and means (such as technological devices, workshops and other physical means used in schools). That is, the researchers applied to both data source and data subject (students, teachers and administrators)

diversifications and observer (teachers and academic members from varying fields) diversification, which is unique to case studies, so as to collect efficient data.

As part of the research, the participants were provided with an open-ended questionnaire consisting of 11 questions which required of them to compare their observations and assessments of the Finnish education system with that of Turkey based on their observations of the schools, classes, students and teachers as well as the face-to-face interviews carried out with teachers, students, school principals and provincial director of national education. Two academic members and two teachers who specialized in the relevant field provided their opinions in the creation of the questions. Later on, the questions were submitted on-line to the participants with the answers collected via e-mail. The 11 questions asked to the participants are as follows;

1. What are your observations about the physical conditions (such as classes, materials and use of out-of-class areas) of the schools you visited in Finland?
2. Please write your opinions about the working conditions of teachers in Finland.
3. Please write your opinions about the environment of schools (such as supportive or preventive learning atmospheres) in Finland.
4. Please write your experiences about the educational processes you have observed in classes in Finland.
5. Please write your opinions about the in-class student behaviours you have observed in Finland.
6. Please write your opinions about the in-class teacher behaviours you have observed in Finland.
7. Please write your observations about the physical nature of the classes.
8. Please write your observations about the education materials in classes.
9. What are the pros and cons of Finland when compared to Turkey on the basis of schools?
10. What are the pros and cons of Finland when compared to Turkey on the basis classes?
11. What are the pros and cons of Finland when compared to Turkey on the basis of in-class teacher and student behaviours?

Data Analysis

The qualitative responses provided on-line to open-ended questions were analysed with content analysis. Content analysis “should objectively and systematically classify, digitize and make semantic and/or grammatical derivations from the messages of verbal, written and other materials” (Tavşancıl and Aslan, 2001, s. 22). This study employs categorical analysis from among the content analysis methods. Categorical analysis first divides a given message into small fragments and then categorizes them under groups according to certain criteria (Bilgin, 2006). This study follows the stages of content analysis. These stages (Tavşancıl and Aslan, 2001; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011) are data preparation, analysis unit identification, coding schema and category preparation, data analysis according to coding schema, assessment of coding consistency among point scorers, category or subject identification and result reporting. This study ensures coding according to the concepts and subjects resulting from the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). After the coding procedure is completed, randomly selected answers were examined by the three researchers in order to check the conformance among codings, and the conformance coefficient was calculated to be .90. This value shows that there was a high conformance among the coding researchers (Tavşancıl and Aslan, 2001).

The strategies suggested by Merriam (1998) and Yin (1984) were used as part of the validity and reliability of the research. In this sense, data collection tool and source diversification was

made, long-term observations were made and all the participants were included in the process so as to ensure internal validity. For external validity, on the other hand, rich descriptions and typical characteristics were expressed. Finally, method diversification was used for reliability, and all the findings and procedures were defined in detail and supported with proofs.

FINDINGS

The findings of the research were presented in the order of the questions given in the data collection tool. In this sense, findings regarding the observations of the participants about the physical conditions of the schools (such as classes, materials and use of out-of-class areas) they visited in Finland are given in Table 1.

Table 1. *Observations of the Participants about the Physical Conditions of the Schools They Visited in Finland*

Subject	Category	Code
Physical condition of the schools	Class	Shoe-free education (primary school) Randomly organized in-class order (open classroom, integrated open classroom environment and class order suitable for single line or group works) Classical class order in high schools No issues with internet connection in classrooms Spacious atmosphere Education in schoolyard if the weather is sunny Classrooms with cushions Writings and smart boards on side walls Classrooms divisible and combinable with panels and curtains
	Material	Familiar classroom materials (such as use of projectors) Stationery rooms and cabinets (free-of-charge for teachers) Workshops (such as for occupational training and real life skills) Computers and projectors
	Use of out-of-class areas	School location (in groves) Playground in schoolyard Markings in grove showing directions and panels showing details of the creature living in grove Bicycle parking areas for students Usability of corridors and staircases as learning spaces Books (library) in corridors that are always accessible School design to assign responsibility to students in receiving foods, throwing the remains into bin, throwing wastes by sorting them and sorting dishes Eating order according to the rules of good manners

Table 1 shows the observations of the participants about the physical conditions of the schools they visited in Finland under the subject “physical conditions of schools.” This subject has three categories which are “Class, Material and Use of out-of-class areas.” The class category mentions to the following codes: shoe-free education, random desk order in classes, spacious atmosphere,

writings and smart boards on side walls and classrooms divisible and combinable with panels and curtains. Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants regarding this category.

We have witnessed that students did not put on shoes in primary school buildings. The motive here was to create a home environment (P1).

The classrooms adopted the “open classroom” approach and were designed to be scaled up and down with movable partitions (P7).

The material category refers to “class materials, stationery rooms and cabinets, workshops and devices such as computers and projectors.” Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants regarding this category.

Space designs were striking in that they were wide and spacious and considered the educational areas rather than administrative ones (P7).

The primary and secondary schools contained workshops that were intended for occupational skills and life-oriented application skills. These included wood, gastronomy, sewing and repair workshops (P4).

The category ‘use of out-of-class areas’ relates to the location of schools, schoolyards, bicycle parking areas for students, varying learning environments, always accessible books (library) in school corridors and responsibilities assigned to students in getting foods, sorting dishes and throwing wastes into bin. Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants.

There were workshops and labs other than classrooms. These areas and tools were accessible and ready for use. Staircases and floors were designed to allow sitting, and we witnessed that students could freely sit on the ground (P7).

It was interesting that even primary school students could ride their bicycles to school on their own and that they had parking spaces (P6).

Table 2 shows the opinions of the participants regarding the working conditions of teachers in Finland.

Table 2. *Opinions regarding the Working Conditions of Teachers in Finland*

Subject	Category	Code
Working conditions of teachers	Wage	The minimum wage is between 2800 and 2900 EUR and they are on strike claiming the it is not sufficient
	Opportunities	Physical conditions are acceptable (they have kitchens, stationery rooms and one-person phone booths) Catering and transportation are provided by the government
	Course load	Course load is not exhaustive (22 hours a week on average) Working hours are similar
	A respecting environment	Speaking in a low voice Self-confident teachers
	Teacher employment	Exams are not dictated by a central administration but required according to school needs (school

		principals take active role)
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Table 2 shows the remarks of the participants regarding the working conditions of teachers in Finland under the subject “Working conditions of teachers.” The subject is also divided into five categories which are “Wages, Opportunities, Course load, Respecting environment and Teacher employment.” Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants regarding these categories.

...there was a room where teachers could obtain their stationery needs free-of-charge. The secondary school building had a one-person sound-proof phone booth which let teachers make personal phone calls. Apart from these, teachers also had a separate meeting room where they could convene (P1).

As a rule of social state approach, the state also covered the catering and transportation of teachers like it did for students. The co-teacher application in classrooms eases the burden of teachers and alleviates their concern for reaching out to every student (P5).

I have seen that teachers were independent and calm. They respected each other. It was also interesting that there was a sound-proof chamber so that they did not disturb each other when they spoke on phone. They worked on sound insulation so as not to cause disturbance. It was also striking that the minimum wage for teachers was 2900 EUR which they considered too little and, therefore, were on strike. The value attached to individuals was also shown to teachers which was good (P6).

Table 3 shows the opinions of the participants regarding the environment of schools in Finland (such as supportive or preventive learning atmospheres).

Table 3. *Opinions on the Environment of schools in Finland*

Subject	Category	Code
Environment of schools	Supportive of learning	Education opportunity in all the parts of schools Classroom order (available for free and cooperative study) Free-of-charge learning materials Reading corners in corridors Physical hardware Stress-free learning environment Schools resemble homes (no shoes are put on) In-class panels for students who need personal support Schools are not surrounded by walls or wires Schools are designed as a part of the nature and environment Student-oriented education Schoolyards resemble playgrounds All the needs of students are met by the state Responsibility culture and accountability There are toilets in multiple places Opportunities offered by schools (laptops and Internet connection)
	Preventive of learning	Climate conditions which prevent out-of-school courses

Table 3 shows the opinions of the participants about the environment of schools in Finland under the subject “environment of schools.” This subject is divided into two categories which are “Supportive of learning” and “Preventive of learning.” Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants regarding these categories.

Finland’s environment of schools was found to be designed to support learning and improve skills. Especially the carpentry, cooking and sewing and design workshops ensure that students learn with application and experience (P3).

The preventive factor, on the other hand, was that the climate did not allow courses to be taught in an out-of-school environment (P4).

The environment of schools in Finland is supportive of learning. The schools were physically designed to help students feel comfortable. Panels in classrooms respond to the learning needs of students who require personal support. It can be claimed that these panels contribute to the implementation of integrating education. These panels ensure that other students are not distracted while working with a student in a panel and that the communication and bond between a student with special needs and other students are not interrupted. ... Outdoor areas are equipped with designs to allow physical activities of students. Children between 1 and 14 receive education in the same building and study in classrooms applying to their development levels. The students of these age groups walk in schools only with their socks while teachers also put on socks or their slippers. The spaces without classrooms are furnished with comfortable armchairs and stairs where students can sit (P5).

Table 4 shows the experiences of the participants regarding the educational processes in the classrooms in Finland.

Table 4. *Experiences regarding the Educational Processes Observed in the Classrooms in Finland*

Subject	Category	Code
Experiences regarding educational processes in classes	Student-related factors	Individual differences Classrooms are calm and silent Students spend 30 to 90 minutes for homework everyday Students spend 19 to 30 hours for courses every week Students efficiently take notes on a jointly-used software Student grades are shaped at the end of each course
	Teacher-related factors	Play-based teaching Applied teaching Processes enriched with visuals even though the mode of teaching is instructive Employment of specialized teachers and appropriate materials Sensible authority of teachers in classrooms No further effort to ensure student discipline Support provided to students for good acts
	Program- and material-related	Opportunity provided to teachers to adapt curricula to their courses

	factors	Ability to use varying books and materials Opportunity provided to students to enter to various courses (splitting up in various groups) Use of programs as a tool in Finland (there is a common program but not dictated) Sufficiency of education materials in classrooms Device/equipment training provided to students in early ages
	School-related factors	No difference of level among schools (all students go to the same kind of school) Number of students in a class suitable for education (there is a low number of students in classrooms in general) There is a very distinctive desk order (desk order is generally suitable for group work) Branch and classroom concepts are flexible in teaching Classrooms are not over-equipped with technology

Table 4 shows the opinions of the participants about the educational processes in the classes observed in Finland under “experiences regarding educational processes in classes.” The subject was divided into four categories which are “Student-, teacher-, program- and material-, and school-related factors.” Student-related factors were the individual differences, calm and silent nature of students, time allocated to homework and courses and not-taking software for students. Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants regarding this category.

As part of their needs, students’ individual differences were always considered (P1).

Teacher-related factors were play-based teaching, applied teaching, processes enriched with visuals even though the mode of teaching is instructive, employment of specialized teachers and appropriate materials, sensible authority of teachers in classrooms, no further effort to ensure student discipline and support provided to students for good acts. Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants regarding this category.

Classrooms are quite calm and silent during teaching. Teachers do not work hard to teach something. There is no warning or interruption. Undesired student behaviours are neglected. These behaviours are not common though. I believe that a school poses desired qualities if it is based on respect culture (P5).

Program- and material-related factors were the opportunity provided to teachers to adapt curricula to their courses, opportunity provided to students to enter to various courses (splitting up in various groups), use of programs as a tool in Finland (there is a common program but not dictated), sufficiency of education materials in classrooms and machine and equipment training provided to students at a very early age. Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants regarding this category.

Students are not obliged to use a dictated textbook; they can use various books and materials (P3).

School-related factors were the lack of a difference of level among schools (all students go to the same kind of school), number of students in a class suitable for education (there is a low number of students in classrooms in general), distinctive desk order (desk order is generally suitable for group work), flexible branch and classroom concepts and lack of classrooms over-equipped with technology. Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants regarding this category.

All the students go to the same school, and there is no difference of schools like science or Anatolian high schools in Turkey. Classrooms contain a small number of students in general. Desk orders were suitable for group activities and was not arranged to directly face teacher's desk (P6).

Table 5 shows the observations of the participants about the student behaviours in the classrooms visited in Finland.

Table 5. *Observations about Student Behaviours in the Classrooms Visited in Finland*

Subject	Category	Code
Observations regarding student behaviours in classes	Social and emotional skills	Very calm and at ease Observance of class rules High awareness of their responsibilities An enthusiastic student profile Low distraction levels Good communication skills Students feel at home Students have high self-confidence and motivation Target-oriented when choosing a department or profession Students are aware of the instructive role of their teachers

Table 5 shows the opinions of the participants about the student behaviours in classes observed in Finland under the subject "Observations regarding student behaviours in classes." The subject is further categorized into "Social and emotional skills." Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants regarding this category.

Students respect the rules and order of schools (P1).

I witnessed that students were very calm and at ease. They observed the class rules. What also struck my attention was that they had an awareness of responsibility. I realized that they performed their duties and responsibilities without need to a warning for they were brought up starting at a very early age. For example; there was no protection on the staircases of a primary school. This didn't pose a threat. There was even no protection on high floors (P2).

Students were aware of the instructive role of their teachers and required help timely and accurately during learning processes. Students did not run around and were smiling. They were also target-oriented when it came to the departments or professions they wanted to pick. I especially observed the primary school classrooms. They had high levels of motivation and concentration in classroom activities (P7).

Table 6 shows the findings regarding the participant observations about the teacher behaviours in the classrooms visited in Finland.

Table 6. *Observations regarding Teacher Behaviours in the Classrooms Visited in Finland*

Subject	Category	Code
Observations regarding teacher behaviours	Social and emotional skills	Awareness of responsibilities Respect towards others Cooperation, sharing and new ideas are prioritized Value attributed to students and others
	Competency in relevant fields	Education prioritizing application Tendency to individually pay attention to students Attentive and active activity management Competency in at least two disciplines Better performance when teachers work in cooperation Supportive of learning by students Motivating students Process is positively reinforced, things are considered on the bright side Teaching is prioritized with use of physical activities Student welfare is prioritized Teachers don't use red pencil
	Opportunities offered by schools	Roll-call and teaching with the central on-line network Teachers' rooms accessed with a key Less course load for teachers Support by a co-teacher or an assistant in classrooms Teachers are independent when they perform their duties

Table 6 shows the participant observations about the teacher behaviours in the classrooms visited in Finland under the subject "observations regarding teacher behaviours." The subject was examined under three categories which were "Social and emotional skills, competency in relevant fields and opportunities offered by schools." Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants regarding these categories.

Teachers were observed to be awareness of their responsibilities, have competency in two disciplines, be attentive and actively conduct activities. The calmness of the teachers summarizes the educational system throughout Finland (P3).

I witnessed cooperation, sharing, prioritization of new ideas and value given to students as individuals. Positive feedback seems to have a key role in schools. They attach great importance to physical activities, prioritize teaching with use of physical activities and give particular importance to student welfare. Teachers don't use red pencil. In high schools, teachers are expected have proficiency in at least two disciplines, such as biology and geography (P6).

Teachers had low course load and embraced their job. They had a teachers' room in school where one could only enter using a key. This shows that they are valued (P8).

Table 7 shows the findings regarding the participant observations about the physical nature of the classrooms visited in Finland.

Table 7. *Observations regarding the Physical Nature of the Classrooms in Finland*

Subject	Category	Code
Physical nature of classrooms	Physical opportunities offered by classrooms	High school classrooms offer education closer to the traditional sense while primary and secondary classrooms resemble homes and have a comfortable atmosphere Classroom walls use glass and curtains Classrooms receive daylight, are wide and spacious and not over-equipped with materials All classrooms have a sink Classrooms are wide and rich in materials Classrooms are supported with panels and lockers Classrooms have sufficient education materials Desk order is suitable for group activities There are panels all around classrooms where students can take notes

Table 7 shows the observations of the participants about the physical nature of the classrooms they visited in Finland under the subject “physical nature of classrooms.” The subject was categorized as the “physical opportunities offered by classrooms.” Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants regarding this category.

Classroom walls used glass and curtains. This ensured brighter classrooms and an open design. All classrooms had a sink (P2).

The classrooms were wide and rich in materials and were also supported with panels and lockers on which course outputs could be presented. Classroom walls were divided with screens and curtains and were rendered available for extensive activities when desired. In addition to sufficient digital supplies and equipment, the classrooms had a piano which offered advantages for teaching in the classrooms (P3).

The classrooms were designed as open classrooms or consisted of small rooms separated with partitions. Although separated, the classrooms did not have any rules for the desk order of students. They could sit anywhere they liked. The classrooms were not overcrowded, and teachers did not constantly occupy a certain part of the classroom. In primary schools, all the parts of classrooms (such as walls and floors) were used for educational purposes. In high schools, visual materials were embedded to the ceiling (P7).

Table 8 shows the findings regarding the participant observations about the teaching materials the classrooms visited in Finland.

Table 8. *Observations regarding the Teaching Materials in the Classrooms Visited in Finland*

Subject	Category	Code
Teaching materials in classrooms	Material diversity	Smart boards in primary school classrooms Projector device in second and high school classrooms

		Classrooms equipped with rich materials in line with workshop needs (workshops with tools such as saw, separate lunch and music rooms) Sufficient digital supplies and extensive Internet and computer hardware Parks in schoolyards and grove connection for courses in nature Classrooms rich in materials which even contain a piano in primary school classrooms Teachers use tangible materials as much as possible when teaching Classrooms not over-equipped with technology which is the most striking quality (handmade materials are more common)
	Sufficient number and accessibility of materials	Materials are provided according to the number of students All materials required by students are ready for their use Drawers with stationery materials in it which all students can use

Table 8 shows the observations of the participants about the teaching materials in the classrooms they visited in Finland under the subject “Teaching materials in classrooms.” The subject was grouped under two categories as “Material diversity” and “material number and accessibility.” Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants regarding these categories.

The primary school classrooms had smart boards while secondary and high school classrooms had projectors. Also, there were drawers with stationery materials in it which all students could use. The secondary school classrooms, on the other hand, had very interesting personal lockers. High school classrooms had a simpler design (P1)

There were sufficient digital supplies and extensive Internet and computer hardware in the classrooms. The parks and groves next to the schoolyards guided teaching in nature any time desired. Skill workshops had an extensive design (P3).

In the main classrooms, teaching materials were supported with comprehensive technological hardware. The workshops contained sufficient materials for all students which were designed for varying age groups... The primary school classrooms were so rich in materials that they even contained a piano. There were various instruments in music workshops. The music workshops had also vocal and recording sections. The textile, wood and gastronomy workshops were also rich in teaching materials and accessible. The materials were not offered to serve as a sample but were supplied in the number of students (P4).

Table 9 shows the pros and cons of Finland according to the participants when they compared Finnish and Turkish schools.

Table 9. *The Pros and Cons of Finland When Compared to Turkey on the basis of Schools*

Subject	Category	Code
The pros and cons of	Pros	<i>Low population-number of students</i>

<p>Finland when compared to Turkey on the basis of schools</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Low number of students -Low population - Low-rise school buildings, wide corridors and interiors <p><i>Economic conditions in Finland</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sufficient budget allocated to education -Strong economy in Finland compared to Turkey -High GNP - Supply of the stationery materials as well as textbooks and supporting books of all the Finnish schools from the education budget - Free-of-charge transportation, catering, dentist, health and material expenses throughout compulsory education (9 years) <p><i>Selection of teachers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Finnish schools employ their own teachers according to the needs - Primary school teachers are specialized in two disciplines - The profession of teachers is considered respectable <p><i>Student exams</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Students in Finland only take an exam offered by half of the universities of the country when they enter to university -The other half admit students according to the results of exams which are required on the selective and certain compulsory courses preferred by students during high school -Students can take these exams in a time they choose and in an order of courses of their preference -High schools apply advanced technical exams in which students are required to answer 5 tests in 3 attempts at most -Exams are applied separately for different departments which allow further attempts in different parts of a year <p><i>Education quality</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Inclusive education is given in perfect order -Teachers are qualified and schools are well-equipped -Students do not take extra classes or private lessons beside school -All parts of schools are utilized as learning spaces
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Teacher and student needs are prioritized with attention paid to out-of-class activities -Teachers are allowed the freedom to choose their teaching materials -Activities are provided to ensure personal student health and well-being <p>School types and selection of students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Schools do not select students, and students are referred to the school closest to their homes (all the schools offer equal conditions which help parents to have their mind at peace when sending their children to school) -Students can choose a department at university according to the fields they are successful at
	Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are only two schools in Finland which are built with the sponsorship of Nokia or any other company There are deficiencies as to digitalization The period of use of exteriors is very limited, and the school options are not sufficient There are no high schools to offer specialized education The Finnish education system generally doesn't allow students with special skills to receive or seek alternative education

Table 9 shows the two categories of “pros and cons” of Finnish schools when compared to those of Turkey based on the observations of the participants. The pros of the Finnish schools are indicated with the “low population-number of students, economic conditions in Finland, selection of teachers, student exams, education quality, and school types and selection of students” categories. Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants regarding these categories.

Finland's greatest advantage is the low number of students. This low number across the country allows the allocated budget to be sufficient. Actually, one should take it into consideration that the important factor is the strong economy in Finland compared to Turkey. ... In Finland, schools employ teachers according to their own needs. ... Students in Finland only take an exam offered by half of the universities of the country when they enter to university. The other half admits students according to the results of exams which are required on the selective and certain compulsory courses preferred by students during high school. Students can take these exams in a time they choose and in an order of courses of their preference. Implementing a perfect example of inclusive education, the Finnish education system generally doesn't allow students with special skills to receive or seek alternative education. ... There are only two schools in Finland which are built with the sponsorship of Nokia or any other company (P1).

Schools do not pick students; they go to the school closest to their homes. All the schools offer equal conditions. There is an exam applied but that doesn't require a special preparation. From transportation to food, dentist and hospital visits and materials, everything is free for students throughout compulsory education which is 9 years. Students are not subject to extra classes or private lessons and specify that the courses provided at schools are satisfactory. ... All the students go to the same school, and there is no difference of schools like science or Anatolian high schools in Turkey (P6).

The cons of Finland are the limited period of time of the use of exteriors and the insufficient school alternatives. In this sense, there are no high schools which offer specialized education (P7).

Table 10 shows the pros and cons of Finland according to the participants when they compared Finnish and Turkish classrooms.

Table 10. *The Pros and Cons of Finland When Compared to Turkey on the basis of Classrooms*

Subject	Category	Code
The pros and cons of Finland when compared to Turkey on the basis of classes	Pros	Easily accessible materials in higher numbers Low number of students per classroom Home-like design to help students feel at home Desk order to allow group activities Presence of classrooms to prepare students to daily life (such as music, handicraft, sewing and food workshops) Finnish learning spaces are designed to be supportive and liberating Presence of co-teachers in classrooms Re-designable classrooms with open classroom concept Sufficient classroom dimensions with student-friendly approach (all parts of classrooms can be used by students for various purposes)
	Cons	No drawback was discovered regarding the classrooms in Finland.

Table 10 shows the two categories of “pros and cons” of Finnish classrooms when compared to those of Turkey based on the observations of the participants. However, no drawback was discovered about Finnish classrooms. Below are quotes from the remarks of the participants regarding the advantages of Finnish classrooms.

The average number of students was 10 per classroom which is advantageous in Finland. The classrooms were designed by considering the needs beforehand (P2).

Finland is an advantageous country in terms of classroom sizes. The low classroom sizes made classroom management easier which also ensures that each student is attended

personally. In Turkey, high number of students per class leads to losses in learning and disciplinary issues. In Finland, learning spaces are designed to be supportive and liberating. In Turkey, on the other hand, there are preventive and strict rules, borders and walls which cause dislike for school among students. In Finland, learning spaces provide the course equipment required by teachers and students. In Turkey, however, only some schools have such opportunities (P5).

Among the most notable advantages of Finnish schools are the presence of co-teachers in classrooms, re-designable classrooms with open classroom concept and sufficient classroom dimensions with student-friendly approach (all parts of classrooms can be used by students for various purposes). Classrooms also have a phone booth and use quality and clean lighting and flooring. In Turkey, schools have a formal desk order, a single teacher in every classroom teaching a high number of students and noise and irregularity issues as a result of high-rise buildings.

Table 11 shows the pros and cons of Finland according to the participants when they compared the in-class teacher and student behaviours in Finland and Turkey.

Table 11. *The Pros and Cons of Finland When Compared to Turkey on the basis of In-Class Teacher and Student Behaviours*

Subject	Category	Code
The pros and cons of Finland when compared to Turkey on the basis of in-class teacher and student behaviours	Pros	<p><i>Teacher behaviours</i></p> <p>Finnish teachers are generally more active and aware of their responsibilities compared to Turkish teachers</p> <p>Positive feedback has a key role</p> <p>Teachers are well-educated and are dedicated to their job</p> <p>Students are assigned responsibilities in every field</p> <p>Teachers are highly-qualified in classroom management and the implementation of necessary activities</p> <p>Teachers respect their environment and nature</p> <p>Teachers are very professional and transparent in their classroom behaviours</p> <p>Teachers have a developed co-working culture and efficiently apply co-teaching</p> <p>Teachers have a special room for phone calls</p> <p>The necessity to renew teacher contracts with school principals also require teachers to improve themselves</p> <p>Cooperation, sharing and new ideas are prioritized and value is given to students as individuals</p> <p><i>Student behaviours</i></p> <p>Students are calm and silent and have low levels of anxiety</p> <p>Children grow up happy as there is no homework or examination stress</p> <p>They believe that feelings play a significant role in learning and are motivated to that end and provided with materials reinforcing education</p> <p>Students also learn self-study which assigns learning responsibility</p> <p>Students respect their environment and nature</p>

		<p>Teacher behaviours are respected and valued by students Students study in classrooms with motivation and concentration Handicraft activities of students are deemed quite significant Administrator behaviours Attention is paid to life quality, and programs are implemented to ensure positive thinking and life for teachers and students School hours, food plan, schoolyards, mode of teaching and various other subjects prioritize student needs Outdoor activities are performed in awareness of the fact that outdoor games and physical activities create a positive effect on the physical and mental health of students</p>
	Cons	Lack of students who play, laugh or run in corridors signify a dull environment

Table 11 shows the two categories which are the “pros and cons” of in-class teacher and student behaviours in Finland based on the participant observations when compared to Turkey. The positive participant remarks are provided below and were categorized as “teacher behaviours, student behaviours and administrator behaviours.”

In Finland, teachers and students respect their environment and nature. They are calm and silent but display high awareness. There is almost no excessive behaviour. Teachers give positive feedback to children which encourage positive behaviours. There is almost no bullying among peers. However, lack of students who play, laugh or run in corridors signify a dull environment (P5).

Teachers are very professional and transparent in their classroom behaviours. They have a developed co-working culture and efficiently apply co-teaching. They are highly-qualified in classroom management and the implementation of necessary activities. Teacher behaviours are respected and valued by students. Students are motivated and concentrated in classrooms. The Finnish classrooms achieve what the one-dimensional, formal and dictating classroom environment in Turkey couldn't. In Turkey, there are drawbacks as regards to cooperative teaching processes, professionalism and transparency. Besides, the hands-on activities of students are highly valued and supported in Finland (P7).

In Turkey, there are 30 to 35 students per classroom which is about half in Finland. This alone shapes classroom management and the educational life of a student. ... However, teaching is a highly-respected job in Finland. This is reflected throughout the process. Attention is paid to life quality, and programs are implemented to ensure positive thinking and life for teachers and students. Children grow up happy as there is no homework or examination stress. School hours, food plan, schoolyards, mode of teaching and various other subjects prioritize student needs. Outdoor activities are performed in awareness of the fact that outdoor games and physical activities create a positive effect on the physical and mental health of students as well as their behaviours (P10).

Conclusion and Discussion

This study aims to gather information about the primary, secondary and high school educations in Finland and get the opinions and assessments of the participants regarding the three school visits which were made so as to observe classes *in situ* and interview teachers, students and administrators. The findings show that the observations of the participants were positive. In this sense, the participants observed, regarding the physical nature of the schools, that there were spacious places, free desk orders, divisible and separable spaces, actively used workshops and special rooms, accessible libraries, presence of nature around the schools and ability to use all the

spaces for learning. Concerning the working conditions of the teachers, it was observed that they had desirable physical labour conditions, state support for catering and transportation, reasonable course loads, a respecting environment and employment according to the needs of the schools. The participants further observed that there was a better stress-free atmosphere, the schools were used as if a home, the environment was suitable for cooperative working, there was a culture of responsibility and accountability and the education was student-oriented. With respect to the educational process observed in the classrooms, the participants stated in general that personal differences were regarded important, activities were based on games, weight was given to applied learning, teachers were specialized in their fields, students were always supported, teachers were given the freedom to easily adapt the curriculum, materials were of sufficient quality and numbers, there was no distinct quality difference among the schools and the classrooms were not over-equipped with technology. Observations regarding student behaviours proved that they were calm and at peace, formed an enthusiastic group of learners, had high awareness of their responsibilities, observed the rules and had self-confidence and motivation levels. On the other hand, observations regarding teacher behaviours showed that they were aware of their responsibilities, attached importance to cooperation and novelties, were application-oriented and independent and worked in cooperation with assistant teachers. The physical make of the classrooms demonstrated that a comfortable and home-like design was adopted which was wide and spacious and received plenty of daylight, contained a sink in them, and were divisible and rich in materials. Concerning the teaching materials, it was found out that the classrooms had sufficient levels of technological equipment, a rich storage of materials, high levels of digital sufficiency, supported with richly-furnished workshops and contained materials in numbers sufficient for each student. Apart from the foregoing, the participants discovered that there were also drawbacks in question which were the limited use of exteriors due to seasonal changes, low digitalization capacity, lack of specialized high schools and limited number of schools built in the sponsorship of various companies.

In consequence of the comparison between the schools of Turkey and Finland based on the observations of the participants in the Finnish schools, Finland strikes attention with low population and number of students, high per capita income and budget allocated to education, employment of teachers according to school needs, quality teachers who are valued, lack of demanding exams, quality application of inclusive education and well-equipped schools.

A close analysis on the findings of the observations and assessments of the Finnish schools reveals that the conditions and performance provided for the various elements of the educational system were of high profile. Toom and Husu (2016) remark that the most fundamental element of this system was teacher and that this was especially because they assumed a wide spectrum of responsibilities as they had pedagogical independence. As reported in this research, the positive aspects of the observed system may be due to both the freedom of the teachers in adaptation and the responsibility assigned by their high teaching skills. It is believed in a wider sense that a school governed by teachers is a significant element of pedagogy. Tirri (2012) states that the school pedagogy in Finland was goal-oriented and was based on local student needs as well as the needs identified by teachers. These support the employment of teachers according to school needs, responsibilities assumed and teacher independence specified in this study. The pedagogical independence of teachers and their ability to give local decisions can be said to offer advantages for timely and efficient solutions. The positive findings of this research can be linked with these qualities. Regarding the cooperation in classrooms, co-teaching (Takala & Uusitalo-Malmivaara, 2012) and less course load are also noteworthy. Similar to the findings of the present study, Jyrhämä and Maaranen (2016) suggest weekly course loads of form and branch teachers vary between 21 and 24. The innovative, cooperative, professional and responsible traits of teachers may be linked to the quality of their education. In Finland, teachers receive an extensive and applied education by continuing to a graduate degree offering instruction based on research and questioning

(Niemi, 2016). Accordingly, the school system is influenced and organized by teachers who are more professional, independent and aware of their responsibilities.

The physical conditions of the Finnish schools indicate that a “home-like” design was adopted when reforming class atmosphere and structure. In Finland, the most notable characteristic of reformed schools is that they serve home-like spaces which serve to the wellbeing of students (Niiranen, 2022). The findings of our study indicate that the visited Finnish schools are among those designed to that end. That is, one of the reasons for the comfortable and home-like living at the schools may be due to this reform.

Among the studies carried out on the use of technology in Finnish schools, Niemi, Kynäslähti and Vahtivuori-Hänninen (2013) purport that the schools were well-designed and well-equipped with technological hardware. However, Kankaanranta and Vahtivuori-Hänninen (2011) claim that there are also schools which lag behind others in terms of use of technology. This may be the reason why the schools which are deemed to have been well-equipped cannot achieve the required level especially in digitalization. In other words, well-equipped schools may show varying sufficiency levels and differences across the country defined by use.

In Finland, personal education and education support to a small group of students consisting of special students are developed and implemented in every school. Teachers offer supportive educational services as a team and with the use of applicable methods (Suwalska, 2018). When the findings of this study, which confirm the observations regarding the quality of inclusive education, are considered together with the competence and independence of teachers, the motive behind the participant assessments for the advantageous aspects of the Finnish schools may be understood better.

When considered in terms of student behaviours, the observance of rules, enthusiastic approach, calmness and ease of Finnish students may be owing to the non-consumerist learning atmosphere offered by their schools. In a research carried out on secondary school students, Virtanen (2016) reports that the students showed high participation in courses and that they experienced low consumerism levels in learning environment. These two variables are able to alternately influence each other. Accordingly, more positive behaviours are expected in a well-equipped school which offers non-consumerist and home-like education.

On the other hand, the difficulties presented by the geographical conditions in Finland are cold weather and extended dark periods in the Scandinavian peninsula. In a country with such location, schools have limited opportunities in the use of exteriors as well as daylight in terms of both heating and lighting. Therefore, the drawbacks of Finnish schools can be associated with these.

As regards to the findings comparing the schools in Turkey and Finland, there are powerful recommendations for Turkey considering the aspects other than population and number of students. The findings by Özdemir (2017) reveal that the most fundamental element in Finnish schools was teacher, the teachers' wages were at a desirable level, cooperation was highly appreciated, there were 30-minute long breaks between courses, schools were built on wide lands, attention was paid not to build multi-storey schools, equal education was intended for everyone, classes consisted of 25 students on average, there was no competitive education, applied education was adopted as an approach and the educational system was not based on exams. These findings confirm the differences between the two countries identified in the present research. Turkey doesn't have a developed education system which assigns a central place to well-educated teachers who are paid well, has schools built on wide lands and provides equal education opportunities, a competition- and exam-free environment or cooperative teaching. The findings by Genç (2019) also support these differences. The findings of the researcher show that, unlike Turkey, Finland implemented an educational system which was flexible, student-oriented and equal and which was based on integration with life and featured learning by experience. In a visit by Ekinçi and Öter (2010) to

Finland, the participants also reported that Finnish schools used spacious areas, libraries were developed and accessible, tables and desks could be differently positioned and workshops were considered significant which were not the case in Turkey.

However, the limited number of participants, the insufficiency of the data collection sources and the descriptive nature of the analyses lead to notable setbacks as to the significance and comprehensiveness of the findings in the literature based on the observations and assessments of Turkish researchers. The findings of this research, on the other hand, were obtained with the use of multiple data collection methods and detailed analyses. Unlike previous researches, this study focuses on the interviews and observations by both teachers and the researchers. This study deals with the Finnish education system as a whole and attempts to identify the school outputs of the system as well as the qualities of the schools.

The low number of participants, performance of analyses on qualitative data and presentation of descriptive findings limit the research despite the strengths. Further studies are recommended to include the confirmation of Finnish partners for findings, work with a more populous group of participants, use varying analysis methods and ensure data diversification. The findings can be interpreted by identifying a specific type of school and focusing on redesigning the research as part of ethnography methodology.

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