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Examining Divergence and Convergence: A Study of the Finnish and Indian Educational Models

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyse the educational systems of Finland and India. It attempts to trace the contrasting analysis of the educational system of two different countries of developed and developing nature. It examines the common structure of education, maintaining basic education objectives at various levels while highlighting the education policies of two extreme countries. It emphasises how Finland places higher emphasis on early childhood education, whereas the existing education system of India neglects the same. Though the NEP-2020 talks about ECCE, it will take time to be fully implemented. At the same time, higher education in India is more compartmentalised and rigid as compared to Finland. Equity in educational opportunities is still a distant dream for India. Several disparities exist in India when it comes to giving equal access to education. Whereas, completely free education in Finland is an example of its equity in education for the world. Both India and Finland follow a core national curriculum, despite this in India, various boards like CBSE, ICSE, and the state make it difficult to follow the same curriculum though the curriculum framework is the same for Finland there are no disparities in the curriculum followed by the various schools. Correspondingly, if we talk about the examination system of Finland where there is only one national examination which is the matriculation exam to get admission into a higher education institution whereas in India there are several types of examinations that make the examination system of India very complicated. Finland follows a strong and genuine process of recruiting teachers. In India, it's generally felt that the students who don't have any other career options become teachers. The paper concludes by emphasizing several suggestive measures to improve the existing status of education in India.

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Introduction:

Finland's educational system is well-known around the world. As indicated by the Worldwide Educating for the Future Index 2019 report distributed by The Economist, Finland has been positioned as number one as the best country in the world for schooling. India isn't even mentioned on this list. So, what is the difference between the Indian and Finnish educational systems, and why is Finland ranked so highly?

Educational Systems of India and Finland: At a Glance

There was no public education system in Finland until 1860. It was being taught in the church at the time. In 1866, a non-denominational national school system was established. The Nordic countries' free educational system is

shaped by their welfare state model, which focuses on restoring a 'universal guarantee of core human rights and individual autonomy" **(Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013, p.7)**. Tuition-free education seeks to provide equitable opportunity for children and youth from all walks of life **(Bjorklund, Bjorklund & Sjoholm, 2013)**. Finland has a system of education that is open to everyone and is based on the idea of walking together. This means that education is free and accessible to everyone. Finland has one of the world's finest educational systems. Finland is known for its educational excellence and equal opportunity policies. Until they reach high school, there is no homework or standardised testing. Their school days are shorter. A national curriculum is followed by all schools. In schools, students and teachers spend less time. India's educational system has a long history and has evolved through several periods. During the British administration, it underwent a significant transformation. The current Indian educational system has its roots in the English educational system during the British period in India. Education is crucial in shaping the future of Indian society.

Characteristic	Indian Education System	Finnish Education System
Structure	10+2+3	9+3+3
Keywords	Access, Equity, Quality, Governance	Quality, Efficiency, Equity, Internationalization
Basic Education Objectives	Freedom from ignorance, poverty, unhappiness	Morally responsible citizenship, life skills
Education Policy	Promote national growth, citizenship, integration	Equal access to top-notch training
Fee	Free in public, tuition in private	Free at all levels
Use of Electronic Media	Limited use in public schools	Extensive use in most schools

Figure 1: Comparison of Indian and Finnish Education Systems

A. Structure

The structure is the core element of each national system of schools. It is the basis on which the system of schools is constructed. Some of the most relevant school features are specified by the structure, such as school entry age, compulsory education, duration of various school levels, subordination of the system, and internal correlations. The contents of curricula, syllabi, and even textbooks depend on the structure.

The education structure in India was, 10+2, after there is a change in the structure of education after the New Education Policy 2020. Here, the general structure of education is 10+2+3, where five years of primary schooling for Grade 1 to 5 exist, three years of upper primary for Grade 6 to 8, two years of secondary for Grade 9 & 10 & two years of higher secondary i.e., grade 11 and 12 and three years of higher or university education.

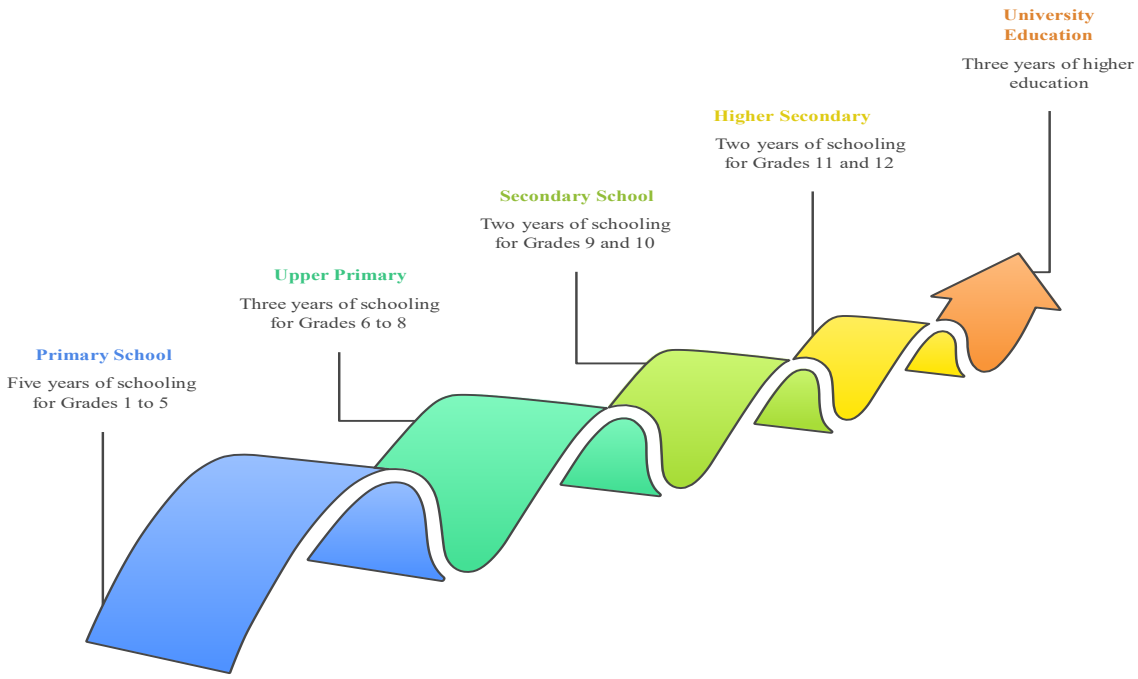

Figure 2: Representing Education Structure in India before NEP 2020

There is an overhauling change in the structure of education after the New Education Policy 2020, (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020). The 10 +2 system is being altered, and now it will be a five-plus three-plus three-plus-four system in the new education policy-2020 as follows.

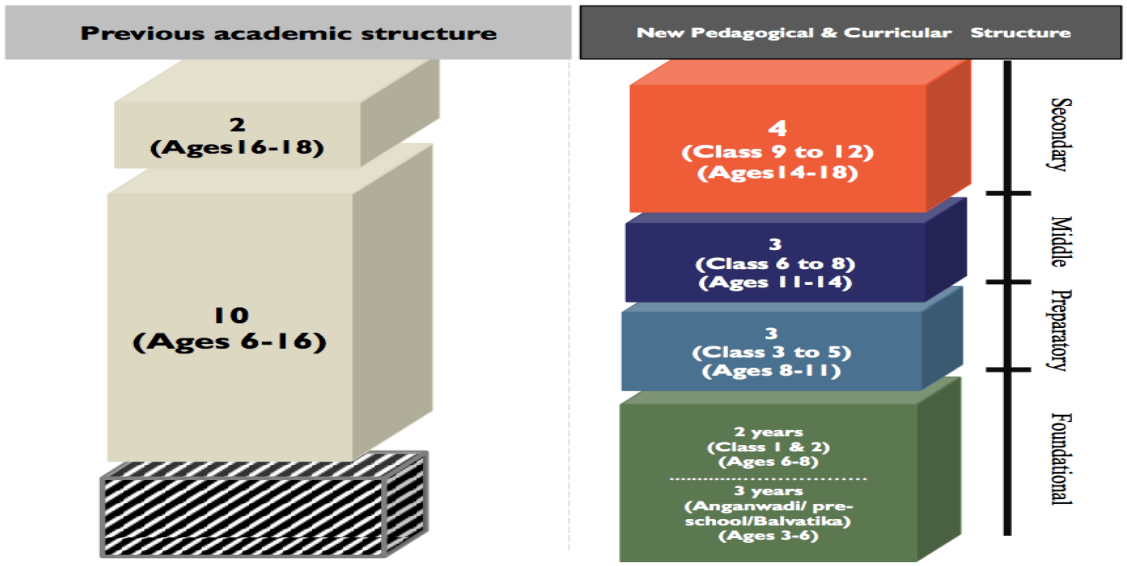

Figure 3: Flow Chart representing the new structure of education as per NEP 2020 contrasting with the previous academic structure (Source: NEP 2020)

As in fig. 3, it implied that the first five years will be known as the foundational stage which will include three years of Anganwadi/pre-primary class and two years of school learning classes 1st and 2nd. It will involve children in the age group from 3 to 8 years. The learning in this stage will be multistage and the focus will be on play and activities. The next 3 years are the preparatory stage; it will include children of class 3rd to 5th and ages from 8 years to 11 years. It will be focused on interactive classroom learning through play, activity-based, and discovery methods. In this structure, the next 3 years will be known as the middle stage which includes children of age 11 years to 14 years and classes 6th to 8th. In this stage, the focus will be on experiential learning. The last stage is for four years and will be known as the secondary stage. The children of age 14 years to 18 years and classes 9th to 12th will come under this

stage. The study in this stage will be multidisciplinary which will give students the flexibility to choose their subject and it will also boost their critical thinking.

Pre-primary education, early childhood education care, general upper secondary education, basic education, higher education, vocational education, and adult education comprise the Finnish Education System. The primary education continues for six years, and secondary education lasts for three years, for a total of nine years of compulsory basic education (Finnish National Agency for Education **(EDUFI, 2022)**. Following that, students usually attend either an upper secondary school or a vocational institution for three years, after that they can then pursue higher education or gain employment.

Primary Education: Finland's education is as free and equitable as any in this advanced society – there are no tuition fees, and even meals are provided for free. It all starts with pre-school and daycare systems (including 1 compulsory year). After that, students must attend a compulsory comprehensive school for nine years before choosing from a variety of secondary school options.

Middle Education: Grades are given starting in fourth grade. As the year progresses, students are encouraged to improve, with repeats only being considered as a last resort when parents are involved in the decision. Finnish children do not go to school till the age of 7, and there is no formal grading or measurement system to judge a student's abilities for the first 6 years, which reduces stress at a young age **(Nazari & Bahrami, 2023; Ahmad, 2005).** Classes are small and the atmosphere is stress-free, and efforts are made to connect education to the wider world. Free transportation is provided to students who live far from their nearest school.

Secondary Education: Secondary education is for four years and is a mix of high school and junior college. It is free but not compulsory. Those planning to continue their education at a university or polytechnic institute complete their secondary school education and receive a secondary school diploma. At this time, they can also write their matriculation certificate.

Vocational Education: Secondary school Instead, Finnish students can choose to attend a vocational school, where they will receive training to establish their occupational expertise However, this system is not strict, and they can still apply to study at a tertiary level with a vocational school diploma.

Tertiary Education: Universities and polytechnics are the two types of tertiary education in Finland. The latter, on the other hand, focuses on practical skills and avoids research.

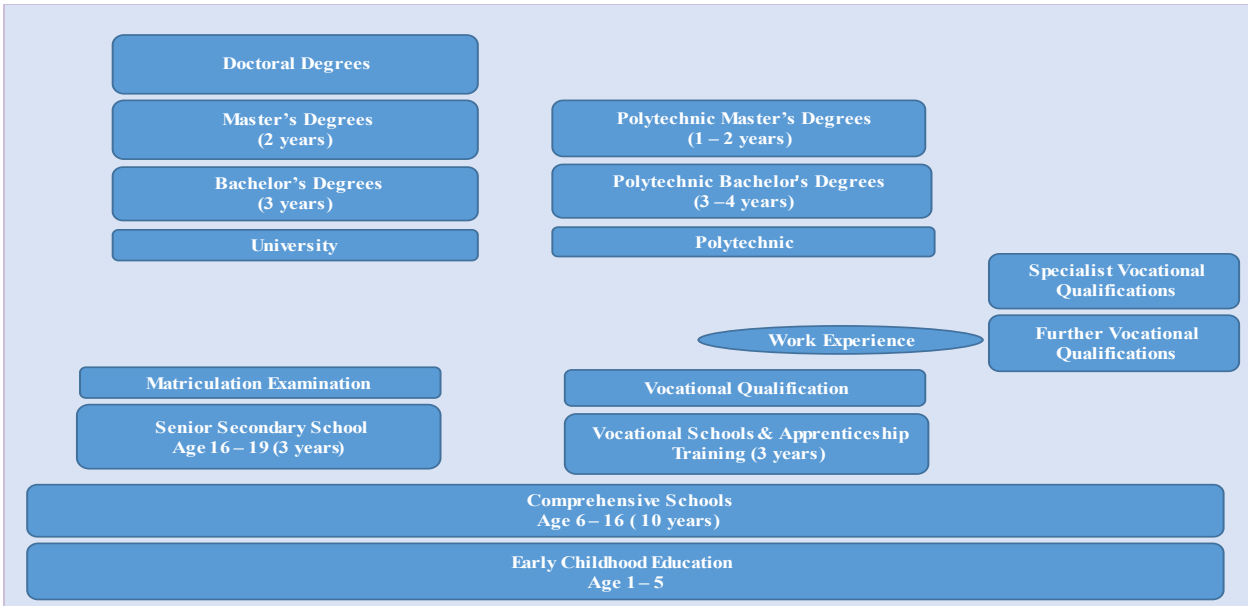

Figure 4: Flow Chart representing academic structure of Finland

B. Compulsory Education:

In Finland, all children aged 7 to 17 have the right to basic school education (school years 1–9), the age group as a whole. In most cases, compulsory education begins in a child's seventh year of life. All children born in Finland are compelled to attend obligatory school. The cost of comprehensive school education is zero. The age of entry and exit is 7 and 17 respectively for compulsory education **(Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2022).**

In India, Right to Education Act of 2010 **(RTE Act, 2009)** guarantees compulsory and free education to all Indian children aged 6 to 14. The age of entry and exit is 6 and 14 respectively for compulsory education.

C. Educational Aims and Objectives:

As per Finland, the main goal of Finnish education is to ensure that all citizens, regardless of gender, age, mother tongue, financial situation, and residence, have equal access to education. Education is positioned on justice and used to realize social justice in society **(Sahlberg, 2014; Piattoeva, 2010)**. Education is regarded as one of all citizens' fundamental rights. Another major goal of Finnish education is to ensure that the entire population has access to a high level of education and competence.

For India, the basic education objectives revolve around liberating humans from the chains of privation, ignorance, and misery. Basic education objectives lead to a non-exploitative non-violent system.

D. Curriculum

A core national curriculum is followed by the Finnish education system. The selection of key subjects, curricular frameworks, and a clear explanation of how much time should be devoted to each topic are all part of the core curriculum. It places a strong emphasis on language learning, with students required to learn both Swedish and Finnish (both of which are Finnish national languages), as well as a foreign language. Whereas for India, after the recommendation of NCF in 1988, a core curriculum was made compulsory all over the nation. The majority of those fundamental components aim to foster a sense of unity and national identity that will result in national solidarity. Among the non-unusual core elements promoted in the NCF are the records of India's freedom struggle, constitutional obligations, materials crucial to the formation of national identity, India's shared cultural heritage, democracy, gender equality, secularism, socialism, environmental preservation, the removal of social barriers, the small-own family norm, and scientific advancement.

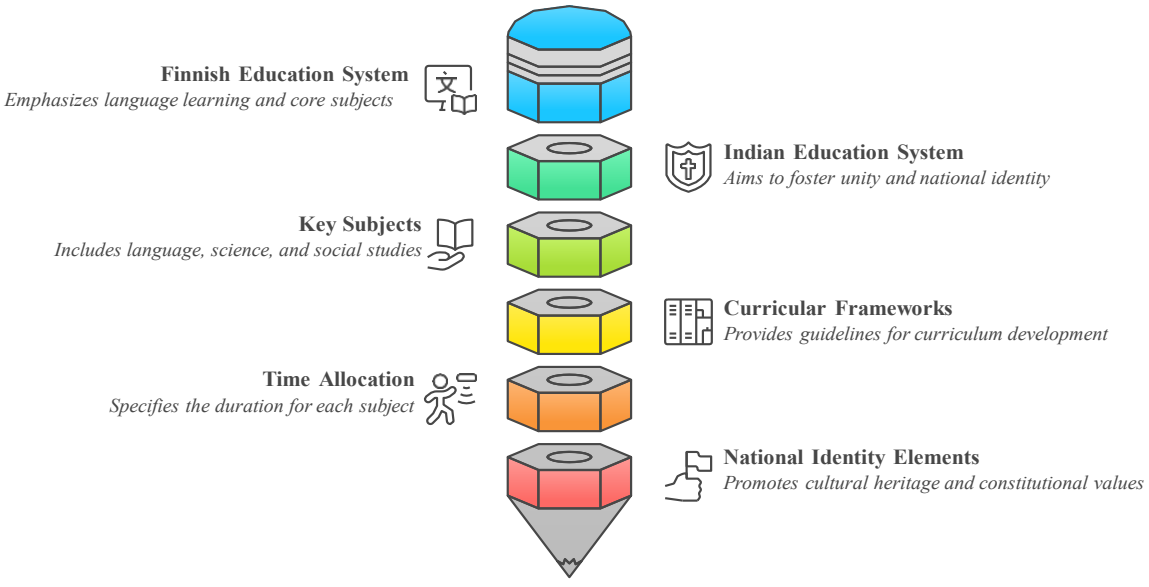

Figure 5: Comparative Analysis of Finnish and Indian National Core Curriculum

E. Instruction

The importance of learning by doing is emphasized in Finnish classrooms, with a focus on group work, problem-solving skills, and creativity. Students are anticipated to collaborate on interdisciplinary projects starting in primary school. Students often stay in the same class with the same teacher for several years in their early years of school. In that manner, the teacher can track their progress across multiple grade levels, and they can learn in a setting that many perceive to be a homely environment. Though Indian schools have come a long way in using differential curriculum transaction techniques from learning by doing to project work to enhance creativity but the high pupil-teacher ratio in almost all schools in India doesn't make it feasible to use all these child-centred techniques. Hence, lecture method of curriculum transaction is still the heavily used technique through all grades nationwide.

In comparison to other OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries, Finnish students spend the least amount of time at school. In 2010, Finnish 9-11-year-olds spent an average of 640 hrs per year in school, compared to the OECD average of 821 hours. Where as in India students spent 800 hrs to 1000 hrs as per their grade per year in school which is much more than OEDC average hours in school.

F. Assessment

Teachers are advocated to assess their students frequently, and recommendations for assessment are furnished inside the countrywide core curriculum in the Finnish setup. Presently, there may be also a push for scholar self-evaluation, so that students may comprehend their development and assist in designing their knowledge of sports. All students take the National Matriculation Exam at the termination of upper secondary school to determine whether they are eligible to graduate. This test assesses a student's proficiency in four areas. The outcomes of this test also have an impact on where they are placed in higher education institutions. Students who choose vocational education over upper secondary school will not have to take this exam, but they are qualified for university after completing their initial vocational training.

The Indian education system is known as an exam-ridden system. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) introduced Comprehensive and Continuous Education (CCE) for school education in 2009. CCE gave a whole new meaning to the assessment mechanism. The transition from the traditional two examinations per year to continuous assessment alters the face of assessment. Two boards examination is held for school students. One in 10^{th} grade and the other one in 12^{th} grade. Besides these, various examinations are conducted to get admission into higher education according to the course chosen. However, in NEP-2020 it is stated that a common entrance test is being conducted by the National Testing Agency headed by the ministry of education for admission across the various university. This test is for graduate, and undergraduate admission, and fellowships in HEIs.

G. Administrations

Finland's governance is based on the decentralization principle. Local governments have a significant amount of autonomy and responsibility, despite the fact that education policy is defined by the Ministry of Education and Culture and implemented by the Finnish National Agency for Education (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2021). Parliament and the Government set education policy. Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture is the highest authority in the country and is in charge of all publicly funded education. It is in charge of drafting educational legislation as well as the Government's share of the state budget. The Finnish National Agency for Education is a nationwide development agency that collaborates closely with the Ministry of Education to design content, educational objectives, and methods for pre-primary, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education and training. It isn't in charge of higher education.

As India is concerned, education is on the concurrent list so the responsibility of education is of both the central government and state government. Ministry of Education previously known as the Ministry of Human Resource and Development defined the policy on education which is then implemented by the NCERT at the school level and UGC at the higher education level. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is the primary resource organization that assists and advises the federal and different state governments on academic issues concerning school education.

H. Expenditure on Education:

India's education spending has increased over the last five years. However, the government thinks tank Niti Aayog recommends that India increase education spending to nearly 6% of GDP over the next two years. Finland devotes in education by creation all levels of schooling free, from pre-primary to higher education, to ensure equity in student learning experiences (Finnish education in a nutshell, 2013). Currently, India spends 3.1 % of its GDP while Finland spends 6.9% of GDP.

Figure 6: Comparative representation of expenditure on Education for Finland and India

I. Teacher Education:

Finland's teachers are well-educated. All teachers in general education must have a Master's degree. Teachers in vocational education should have a Master's or Bachelor's degree. Teachers in Finland are highly autonomous, so a high level of training is considered necessary. Day-care center teachers and counselors typically hold a bachelor's degree. A Master's degree is obligatory for pre-primary teachers in schools. A master's degree in counseling studies is required for guidance counselors working in elementary and secondary education as well as training programs. Special needs teachers must either have a postgraduate degree in special pedagogy or a teaching credential that includes coursework in special needs education. Polytechnic professors are required to hold either a post-graduate Licentiate degree or a Master's degree, depending on their position. They also need to finish their educational studies. Typically, university instructors must hold a PhD or another postgraduate degree. Teacher education can be done in two ways: sequentially, with pedagogical training coming after the first degree, or concurrently, with pedagogical training integrated into the Master's program. This is true concerning vocational teacher education.

In addition, the sequential paradigm helps people who choose to become teachers later in life. The quality of teachers and research-based teacher education is considered the most prominent factor behind the Finnish success in PISA **(Sahlberg, 2014; METU, 2019)**. The Higher Education Evaluation Council oversees Finland's teacher education initiatives.

In India, Teacher education is stage-specific as pre-primary teacher education, Primary teacher education, Secondary teacher education, and other higher education programs. Pre-primary teacher education like Montessori,

Kindergarten, Nursery, and pre-basic is a one-year certificate or diploma course conducted by the State govt. Higher secondary education is required for admission to this course. Haryana's government developed a two-year course leading to a "Diploma in Pre-school Education" in 1987. The government has recognized a number of institutions. This course was created in response to NPE 1986.

Primary teacher education is a two-year duration course for the training of teachers at the primary level. Secondary teacher education is two years program in the case of B.Ed. for which the qualification is graduation. Training Colleges concoct graduate teachers for secondary or Higher Secondary classes. Higher education programs include M.Ed., M.A (Education), and Ph.D. in Education. Specific Training Courses such as Vocational Teachers Training are organized for training teachers in technical subjects. There are several courses and institutions to make specialized teachers.

Suggestive Measures to Improve the Educational System:

1. The implementation of the New Education Policy 2020 brings extensive alterations in higher and school education making India a vibrant knowledge society and will place it on the much-awaited higher pedestal. To make the current education system flexible, holistic, and multidisciplinary to fulfil the promise of a 'New India' is the vision of NEP 2020.
2. The utmost critical measures to improve, repair, and revamp the educational system, as well as to change the mindset of stakeholders, including office staff, from the start. This would facilitate the transition from "what to think" to "how to think." If data-creation and crunching could be replaced with quality-improvement measures that stem from both self-motivation and system motivation, the task of achieving the NEP's goals would be made easier.
3. Successful implementation of NEP 2020 faces significant obstacles, including socioeconomic disparities, regional imbalances, inadequate digital infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified faculty (Kumar & Sen, 2020; Mangat, 2024). Instead of 3.1 percent of GDP, India should increase education spending to nearly 6 percent of GDP over the next two years. The state's accountability to allocate a sufficient budget to the education sector should be the concern of the government.

   Because education promotes social and economic advancement, a nation needs well-defined and progressive policies for education at the high school and college levels. The policymakers and administrators for school and higher education need to implement the revamping strategies of NEP 2020 to make economic and social progress.
4. Lifelong learning and research help prevent human obsolescence in terms of knowledge, abilities, and experience, resulting in a confident and pleasant life, because lifetime learning is necessary for every human being in society. It follows that learning and research at any age will lead to a higher level of maturity, enlightenment, and life pleasure. The lifelong learner equipped with all competencies can further enlighten the future generation.

Conclusion

PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) Ranking: PISA is a nationwide study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development **(OECD, 2010)**. It evaluated educational systems in its member and non-member countries. It was started in 2000 and conducted every three years. It is carried out to improve educational policies and outcomes. Finland, Canada, South Korea, Japan, and Singapore have consistently ranked first in the PISA rankings. In the PISA test conducted in 2009-12, India was ranked 73rd out of 74 countries participating whereas Finland was in the top five. Finland has consistently been one of the top achievers not only for its very high literacy scores but also for its exceptional educational equity, characterized by very little between-school variation

(METU, 2019; OECD, 2016; Sahlberg, 2014). Finland places a higher emphasis on early childhood education whereas the existing education system of India neglects the same. Though the NEP-2020 talks about ECCE it will take time to fully implement. At the same time higher education in India is more compartmentalized and rigid as compared to Finland. Equity in educational opportunity is still a distant dream for India. There are several disparities exist in India when it comes to giving equal access to education. Whereas, completely free education in Finland is an example of its equity in education for the world. Both India and Finland follow a core national curriculum, despite this in India various boards like CBSE, ICSE, and the state make it difficult to follow the same curriculum through the curriculum framework is the same but for Finland, there are no disparities in the curriculum followed by the various schools. Similarly, if we talk about examinations Finland has only one national examination which is the matriculation exam to get admission into a higher education institution whereas in India there are several types of examinations that make the examination system of India very complicated. Finland follows a strong and genuine process of recruiting teachers. Even a pre-school teacher in Finland holds a master's degree. The professional development of teachers is taken very seriously in Finland. But in India, we cannot generalize any of the above. There is no single process followed in the recruitment procedure. Some schools have very educated teachers whereas some don't. Some schools take professional development very seriously whereas some schools don't have the concept. In India, it's generally felt that the students who don't have any other career options that become teachers.

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