

# The Prospects of Implementing Finnish Experience in The Field of School Education in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: The government of Uzbekistan is currently focusing on reforms in the education system. International experiences, particularly in school education, have been studied to identify the achievements of developed countries. Implementing Finland's experience, which has made significant progress in school education and whose students have achieved high results in the PISA test in recent years, is now a top priority. This article compares aspects of the school education systems of Uzbekistan and Finland, analyzing the prospects of introducing Finnish experience. It specifically addresses education management, economic factors, types of schools, and stages of education, with each aspect concluding with insights into the specifics of the Finnish experience. This article explains the differences between Uzbek and Finnish schools based on historical approaches. Therefore, the methods of history were mainly used in this article. Investigating the data from the official documents helped to understand the government's policy in school education in Uzbekistan. The articles and books written by researchers were main resources for uncovering the specific characters in Finnish school education system. Historical background of Finnish school management system might help to understand how Finnish experience can solve problems of school education system in Uzbekistan. The article analyses whether the outcomes of recent reforms in school education in Uzbekistan might tackle the issues of implementing Finnish experience in this area. Furthermore, it suggests that giving more authority for schools and teachers like in Finland might be a solution for some problems of Uzbek school management system. However, final results might be related to people's societal worldview about education which includes the reputation of teachers in society.

**Keywords:** School administration, educational management, educational quality assessment, teacher training, school finance, teaching language.

**Introduction:** Education system is the foundation for the development of any society. Countries with quality education have also achieved economic growth. Individuals who receive quality education can access well-paying professions, contributing to the country's development by reducing poverty and unemployment.

Examining the education systems of economically developed countries reveals numerous achievements in this field. However, some countries, even if not among the economically developed, can serve as exemplary models in education. Finland is one such country. On December 4, 2001, the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) test results from Finnish students drew global attention. In all three areas of this test – mathematics, reading and science – Finns ranked highest among OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries (Sahlberg, 2015). Remarkably, they achieved these results without extra courses, tutoring, or homework, sparking worldwide interest in the Finnish education system. Experts from various countries visited Finland to uncover the secrets of its success.

## Literature review

Two types of literature were used to compare the education system of Uzbekistan and Finland. Official documents provided a basis for evaluating Uzbekistan's current education system, including the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, laws from the Oliy Majlis (Parliament of Uzbekistan), decrees and decisions from the President, and decisions from the Cabinet of Ministers (The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023; Oliy Majlis, 2019, 2020; The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2020; the Cabinet of Ministers, 2017, 2018, 2020, 2021; Statistics Agency, 2023).

The evaluation of the Finnish education system was based on research by scientists who studied Finnish educational practices. Pasi Sahlberg's book provided insights into the Finnish education system (Sahlberg, 2015). Timothy Walker's book, drawing on his experience as a teacher in Helsinki, offered additional information (Walker, 2023). Ilkka Taipale's edited book also contributed valuable information on social innovations and the education system in Finland (Taipale, 2019). Further research by various scientists on the Finnish education system was instrumental in this study (Simola, 2005; Simola et al., 2017; Kauko, 2019; Thrupp et al., 2023).

# METHODS

The research employed a comparative approach to the education systems of the two countries. Key aspects of both systems were studied, and conclusions were drawn by comparison.

In examining Uzbekistan's education system, official documents were supplemented with the author's views and conclusions based on personal experience. For the Finnish education system, conclusions were drawn from experts who had directly observed the system. After studying the features of both educational systems, comments were made on the feasibility of introducing Finnish practices in Uzbekistan.

# **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Recent efforts have been made to introduce Finland's advanced educational technologies in Uzbekistan. The Cabinet of Ministers' decision to establish the Uzbekistan-Finland Pedagogical Institute considered regional development prospects, priority tasks in pedagogy, and modern techniques and technologies, drawing from Finland's advanced experience in teacher training (Cabinet of Ministers, 2021). The primary goal is to introduce Finland's advanced educational practices in Uzbekistan.

Introducing a foreign country's educational experience requires attention to specific features of the educational system, economic and demographic conditions, and historical development aspects. For the Finnish educational experience, it is crucial to consider the differences between the educational systems of Uzbekistan and Finland. Table 1 highlights the unique features and differences in school education between these two countries.

The table primarily includes general characteristics of education, with additional differences in class organization and the perspectives of teachers and students in both educational systems. Below, the aspects listed in the table are discussed in more detail.

# Education system management

The highest organization in the field of education in the Republic of Uzbekistan is the Cabinet of Ministers. According to Article 23 of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan 'On Education' which entered into force on September 24, 2020, it was determined that the Cabinet of Ministers leads the competent state bodies in the field of education (Oliy Majlis, 2020). The Cabinet of Ministers manages all educational organizations, operating on educational standards it develops. The Education Quality Control Inspectorate under the Cabinet of Ministers carries out tasks such as certification of educational organizations and teaching staff, granting and revoking licenses to nongovernmental educational organizations, and compiling educational ratings. The Agency for the Presidential, Creativity and Specialized Schools Development supervises the activities of its educational organizations. Additionally, the Ministry of Preschool and School Education is the competent state management body in education, responsible for developing state standards for school education, assessing learners' knowledge, skills, and abilities, and preparing and publishing educational literature (Oliy Majlis, 2020). Local government bodies finance educational institutions, define areas attached to educational institutions, and ensure the employment of graduates of general secondary education organizations. Educational organizations are managed by pedagogic and supervisory councils and the head of the organization, as outlined in Article 28 of the Law (Oliy Majlis, 2020). Schools are managed from top to bottom by organizations with defined powers, with teaching processes organized by teachers based on state standards set from above. Learners' knowledge and teacher certifications are controlled by competent bodies, and textbooks are published by the ministry, with teachers organizing training sessions based on approved textbooks.

One of the main challenges facing the education system of Uzbekistan is school independence. According to PISA, establishing clear requirements for student learning outcomes and ensuring school independence in curriculum and assessment positively impacts the entire educational system. Independence encourages schools to innovate, which is difficult to achieve through strict officialdom (Pulatov, 2023).

In Finland, since the 1990s, municipalities have been granted more decision-making power in school management due to the Basic Education Act of 1998, which came into force in 1999. Municipalities were empowered to determine the number and location of educational institutions in their territories, leading to the closure of small comprehensive schools and the establishment of larger schools covering grades 1-9. They were also given freedom in economic and ideological management. The law provided educators with choices in the education they provide and in evaluating its outcomes (Thrupp et al., 2023). Such management of education can be understood as adaptation to the population and economic potential of the regions.

In Finnish schools, teachers are given wide authority in carrying out their activities. Erkki Aho, who served as chairman of the National Board of Schools in Finland from 1973 to 1991, noted that teachers enjoyed significant pedagogical autonomy and the trust of both students' parents and the administration. This means that schools in Finland are not inspected by state commissions, and there is no supervision by educational authorities over their activities (Taipale, 2019). This high level of autonomy and trust reflects the high status of teachers in Finnish society, allowing them substantial freedom in their professional activities.

Timothy Walker, an American teacher who worked in Finland, observed that teachers are not monitored through standardized tests or school inspections. Despite the absence of such oversight, the learning process is not negatively impacted. According to Walker, there is a high level of professional responsibility among Finnish teachers, made possible by the society's trust in them (Walker, 2023). Therefore, the lack of control over teachers in Finland does not detract from their work quality. Instead, their sense of responsibility ensures the high quality of the educational process. Public trust in educators, combined with their professional responsibility, results in high-quality education.

To introduce a similar system in Uzbekistan, it is necessary to cultivate a sense of responsibility in each teacher and build a high level of trust in them within society. Walker points out a problem in the U.S. school system, where there is too much emphasis on reporting, driven by fear, and too little on the responsibility associated with the notion of trust (Walker, 2023). This problem also exists in Uzbekistan's educational system. Therefore, it is crucial to foster high trust in teachers by state bodies and parents and to respect their professional skills. Moreover, developing a high level of professional responsibility among teachers, where they take their work seriously even without supervision, is essential to ensuring the quality of education. This requires a societal shift where individuals in any field are responsible for their profession and approach their work as a duty, not out of fear of reporting.

Another important aspect is the responsibility given to children from an early age in Finland. People who learn to take responsibility young will likely feel responsible in their professions later. In Uzbekistan, creating a foundation for professional responsibility requires assigning children responsible tasks from a young age to develop their independence. When introducing Finland's educational experience to Uzbekistan, this aspect must be considered.

#### The ministry responsible for school education

In Uzbekistan, the Ministry of Preschool and School Education is responsible for school education. This ministry has the authority to implement a unified state policy in school education, methodically manage general education institutions' activities, and strengthen their material and technical base.

In Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture implements government policy in school education. This ministry oversees introducing and implementing laws and general plans, contributing 11.6% of budget expenditures in 2019, ranking third among Finnish ministries. The Finnish National Education Agency under the Ministry develops general programs for primary and secondary education (Thrupp et al., 2023).

Five departments within the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture perform functions equivalent to those of four ministries in Uzbekistan (Ministry of Preschool and School Education, Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ministry of Sports and Youth Policy). This consolidated management reduces state budget expenses and directs funds to more effective projects. Moreover, the autonomy of local municipalities and schools reduces the ministry's burden. Implementing the Finnish education system in Uzbekistan would require significantly reducing the functions under the Ministry of Preschool and School Education and granting more independence to schools, thereby reducing the ministry's burden and state budget expenses.

#### The role of trade unions

Trade unions play a crucial role in protecting employees' interests across all sectors. In Uzbekistan, primary trade union organizations operate in almost all organizations, including schools. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Trade Unions" (2019) stipulates that trade unions have the right to

implement public control over regulatory legal documents related to employees' socio-economic rights and interests. They can also participate in investigating occupational accidents and diseases (Oliy Majlis, 2019). However, trade unions in Uzbekistan have not effectively protected teachers' interests, as evidenced by their involvement in forced labor for cotton picking and street cleaning.

In Finland, the Education Trade Union, Opetusalan Ammattijärjestö (OAJ), is a large organization uniting employees from early childhood to adult education. OAJ significantly influences education policy. During the Sipilä government (2015-2019), OAJ protested several times against education funding cuts, highlighting the negative impact on municipal education services and increased inequality among students (Thrupp et al., 2023). Trade unions like OAJ play a crucial role in advocating for the education system, contributing to its development.

Introducing the Finnish education system in Uzbekistan requires a strong trade union to protect teachers' interests and the education system, similar to OAJ. A robust community organization would encourage the government to pay serious attention to the education system.

#### **Evaluation of education quality**

In Uzbekistan, the quality of education is controlled by higher authorities like the Cabinet of Ministers and the Inspectorate for Quality Control of Education. For example, the Inspectorate for Quality Control of Education certifies and accredits educational organizations and monitors the educational process's quality (Oliy Majlis, 2020).

Uzbekistan's quality assessment system includes international research, such as PIRLS, TIMSS, PISA, and TALIS, to evaluate students' knowledge and learning environment (Cabinet of Ministers, 2018). These assessments help identify existing problems and find solutions in the education system. In Finland, quality control is based mainly on sample-based national assessments and self-assessments by schools and municipalities, rather than testing and monitoring by higher institutions (Thrupp et al., 2023). Municipalities are responsible for their education systems, with the government providing non-binding guidelines (Kauko, 2019). This approach emphasizes schools' selfassessment and minimizes constant inspections by higher organizations.

Finland actively participates in international assessments like PISA, PIRLS, and TIMSS. According to the 2001 PISA results, Finnish students ranked first among OECD countries without the need for extra tutoring or extensive homework, demonstrating the

success of the Finnish education system (Walker, 2023; Sahlberg, 2015).

To implement a self-assessment system in Uzbekistan similar to Finland's, research is needed to determine its effectiveness based on teachers' and students' mindsets. The success of such a system depends on fostering a sense of professional responsibility and high aspirations among students.

#### **Training of teachers**

Recently, Uzbekistan has focused on training highly qualified teachers, incorporating international best practices and expanding higher education in this field. A 2020 presidential decision outlined tasks for improving Chirchiq State Pedagogical Institute and Kokand State Pedagogical Institute, setting a three-year education duration for some bachelor's courses and developing mechanisms for special tests on professional competence for pedagogical course applicants (The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2020). These initiatives aim to introduce significant changes in teacher training.

Teachers play a crucial role in students' achievements. Dr. Päivä Lipponen, a specialist in history and social sciences and a former Finnish Parliament member, noted that the teaching profession has always been highly valued in Finland. The establishment of teacher training seminaries in the 19th century, even before Finland's independence, helped Finland become an advanced country in teacher training (Taipale, 2019).

Päivi Lipponen also mentioned that teaching was the fifth most prestigious profession in Finnish society and explained the qualifications required of a teacher. According to her, both classroom and subject teachers must obtain higher education at a university. Classroom teachers study the basics of education, while subject teachers study specialized subjects and pedagogy. At the end of their training, students write a dissertation to receive a master's degree, thus acquiring scientific, practical, and ethical professional competence (Taipale, 2019). The training of educators is based on university curricula designed to ensure they acquire all necessary skills.

Pasi Sahlberg, in the foreword to Timothy Walker's book, noted that in the 1980s, Finland implemented large-scale reforms in higher education, requiring all teachers to conduct scientific research and obtain a master's degree (Walker, 2023). This requirement encouraged young teachers to further their knowledge and skills in teaching methodology and educational organization before starting their professional careers, positively impacting education quality.

The government of Uzbekistan decided to establish the

Uzbekistan-Finland Pedagogical Institute based on cooperation between Finland's Turku University and Samarqand State University to implement teacher training following Finland's experience (Cabinet of Ministers, 2021). This initiative aims to introduce Finland's esteemed educational practices into Uzbekistan's higher education system for teacher training.

# The reputation of teachers in society

In Uzbekistan, teaching is not considered one of the most prestigious professions. Teachers' average salaries are lower than the national average. For example, according to a 2023 report by the Statistics Agency, the average monthly salary in Uzbekistan was 4,409,000 UZS (about 357 USD), while the average salary of general secondary education teachers was 3,030,000 UZS (about 245 USD) (Statistics Agency, 2023). Efforts are being made to improve the status of teachers in society. The new Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, adopted on April 30, 2023, includes an article recognizing the teaching profession as foundational for societal and state development and commits the state to protect teachers' honor and dignity, their social and material well-being, and their professional growth (Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023). Enhancing teachers' status constitutionally can increase their societal influence. Improving their economic situation is the next step.

Pasi Sahlberg stated that having Finland's "best teachers" was not solely due to the education system that trained them. He attributed it to their professional glory, societal respect, and teamwork (Sahlberg, 2015). A teacher's development into a strong specialist depends on education, working conditions, social status, and cooperative work.

Introducing the Finnish education system in Uzbekistan requires attention to teachers' societal position. Studies show that teaching is highly valued in Finland. For example, 86% of parents surveyed by Hannu Räti expressed satisfaction with teaching in Finnish secondary schools (Simola, 2005). A study by University of Helsinki researchers Janne Säntti and Jari Salminen analyzed changes in teacher training, demand, and the ideal teacher from 1945 to 2015. Since the 1990s, Finnish teachers have been seen as research-oriented, change agents, and professionals working in a free environment. They must be ready for change and constantly develop their skills and knowledge (Säntti & Salminen, 2015). This demand allows teachers to play a decisive role in educational development.

When introducing the Finnish educational experience in Uzbekistan, it is essential to consider not only teacher training but also other factors, such as work requirements, working conditions, societal status, mutual cooperation, and autonomy in decision-making.

# Types of schools

Uzbekistan has general education schools, specialized schools, presidential, creative, and specialized schools under the Presidential Educational Institutions Agency, and private schools. The regulation "On General Secondary Education," approved by the Cabinet of Ministers on March 15, 2017, sets model charters for general secondary education organizations and specialized schools (Cabinet of Ministers, 2017). The Education Quality Control Inspectorate under the Cabinet of Ministers oversees private educational institutions.

Presidential, creative, and specialized schools have more opportunities than other general secondary schools. For instance, a 2020 decision by the Cabinet of Ministers mandated that these schools adopt advanced foreign textbooks and teach at least one foreign language (Cabinet of Ministers, 2020). Such initiatives contribute to educational development.

Article 50 of the new Constitution of Uzbekistan states that the government ensures the development of a continuous education system, various types and forms of education, and the development of state and nonstate educational organizations (Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023). This provision supports the establishment of private schools.

In Finland, a completely different process can be observed. According to a law passed by the Finnish Parliament in 1968, every child or teenager, regardless of where they live or their parents' financial situation, had the right to nine years of quality education (Taipale, 2019). 9-year comprehensive schools with the same capabilities were started to be established. Old public schools and paid secondary education were also abandoned. In 1987, Holkeri, who was the Prime Minister of Finland, explained in his address that a key concept of Finnish education policy was that every student, regardless of social background, had the same access to education (Simola et al., 2017).

The main program goal was to create equality in Finnish comprehensive schools. The debates in education policy were related to the creation of equality and justice in this education. Finland's policy on the establishment of comprehensive schools has successfully led to beneficial social outcomes by increasing the general well-being and education level of the population (Kauko, 2019). Such schools, which appeared in Finland in the 1970s, were the cause of public criticism until 2001 (Walker, 2023). The results of the 2001 PISA test put an end to all doubts.

Although the principle of equality is the main goal in Finnish comprehensive schools, some problems should be mentioned. It is known that the management of Finnish comprehensive schools is entrusted to local municipalities. This situation has led to differences in the number of students attending schools in cities across the country. This calls into question the principle of "one type of schools for all" (Thrupp et al., 2023). Although the education system in schools is almost the same, there are some differences due to the fact that their financing depends on the municipalities. Despite such shortcomings, Finland can be an example of a country that has created equal opportunities for students.

When introducing Finland's experience in Uzbekistan, focusing on equality and justice is crucial. In Uzbekistan, various schools differ significantly in teaching quality and conditions. Children from economically well-off families can attend private schools with modern equipment and highly qualified teachers, while state-controlled schools provide amenities that not all students can access. Therefore, reviewing principles of equality and justice is essential when implementing Finnish educational practices.

#### Languages of education

Education is conducted in seven languages in Uzbekistan: Uzbek, Karakalpak, Russian, Tajik, Turkmen, Kyrgyz and Kazakh (Murtazayeva et al. (Eds.), 2022). It is related to the multi-ethnic nature of the population of Uzbekistan. Textbooks are published in all these languages, and schools in languages other than the national language are established based on the number of representatives of the nationalities living in a certain area.

In Finland, the population mainly speaks three official languages: Finnish, Swedish, and Sami (Sahlberg, 2015). Basic education is conducted in Finnish and Swedish. The Sami people in northern Finland have the right to education in their language. The Ministry of Education and Culture established a working group in 2020 to improve Sami language teaching (Thrupp et al., 2023). This shows similarities in education policies between Uzbekistan and Finland regarding minority languages.

## **Stages of education**

According to the Law "On Education" in Uzbekistan, education includes preschool education, general secondary and secondary special education, professional education, higher education, post-higher education, personnel retraining, and extracurricular education. General secondary education comprises grades 1 to 11, divided into primary education (grades 1-4), lower secondary education (grades 5-9), and secondary education (grades 10-11). Education is compulsory and free of charge in state educational institutions up to grade 11 (Oliy Majlis, 2020).

As of 2015, education in Finland consists of:

Early childhood education (ages 1-6)

Pre-school education (ages 6-7)

General secondary education (grades 1-9, ages 7-16)

General upper-secondary education (grades 10-11, up to ages 18-19)

Vocational upper-secondary education (grades 10-11, up to ages 18-19)

Higher education, universities or polytechnic schools (3 or 4 years) (Sahlberg, 2015).

Peruskoulu (general secondary education) in Finland includes 9 years of education, with grades 1-6 considered primary education. In primary education, students are usually taught by one class teacher, while subject-specific teachers, such as science teachers, start teaching in grades 7-9. After completing the 9th grade, students continue their studies in general uppersecondary schools or vocational schools.

Sonya Kosunen, a parliamentary assistant to Finland's education minister, stated that almost 92% of general secondary school graduates immediately apply to lyceums (general upper-secondary education) or vocational colleges. These institutions prepare students to study at universities or polytechnic institutions in Finland or abroad (Taipale, 2019).

Comparing the education systems of Uzbekistan and Finland, it is evident that education in Finland begins at a much earlier age. Early childhood education has been a main component of the Finnish education system since 2013. Children are cared for in the family until their first birthday, after which education for children from the age of 1 is provided by municipalities, private, or family educational institutions (Sahlberg, 2015). The stage of preparation for school is conducted for one year from the age of 6. In Uzbekistan, state-owned preschools accept children from the age of 3, while private preschool educational institutions may accept children earlier based on their capabilities. However, this education differs from early childhood education in Finland. Therefore, from the Finnish educational experience, it is necessary to first pay attention to the issue of teaching children from an early age. Additionally, while primary education in Finland lasts 6 years, it only lasts 4 years in Uzbekistan. Rethinking the division of education into stages would be an important step in introducing the Finnish educational experience.

#### **Financing of education**

General secondary education in the Republic of Uzbekistan is provided free of charge by the

government. Article 50 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan states that the government guarantees free general secondary education and primary professional education (Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023). However, free education is not guaranteed in private educational institutions. Article 9 of the "Law of Education" states that general secondary and secondary special education can be provided on a fee-contract basis in private educational institutions (Oliy Majlis, 2020). While general secondary education is compulsory, studying in private or public educational institutions is optional.

One of the most notable aspects of Finnish education is that it is free from primary education to universities (Taipale, 2019). There are almost no private educational institutions in general secondary education. Erkki Aho, who served as chairman of the National Board of Schools in Finland from 1973 to 1991, emphasized that education, including various support services, textbooks, and hot meals, was completely free for students (Taipale, 2019). In addition to free education, children in Finland are provided with healthy hot meals in schools. Although textbooks are provided free of charge in general education schools in Uzbekistan, free meals have not been organized, except in Presidential schools. Addressing this aspect in the introduction of the Finnish educational experience could create better facilities for students. However, the economic potential of the government must be taken into account.

The greatest success in the Finnish education system depends on the principles of equality and freedom in educational management. To succeed in Uzbekistan, it is necessary to focus on these aspects. Unfortunately, there are no equal opportunities for students in general education schools under the Ministry of Preschool and School Education compared to those in Presidential, creative, and specialized schools under the Presidential Educational Institutions Agency. This is due to differences in school buildings, modern equipment, and teacher qualifications. Additionally, private schools differ significantly in facilities compared to public schools.

It is also essential to consider the Finnish approach to school education management. Schools and teachers in Finland are granted significant independence, allowing them to make their own decisions on many issues. However, for such freedom to be effective, societal mindsets must change. There must be a creation of a sense of responsibility and the formation of trust in society towards teachers. Finnish society has a high level of mutual trust and professional responsibility, which is lacking in Uzbekistan not only in education but

in many other areas.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the Finnish experience in school education cannot simply be copied and implemented in Uzbekistan. Changing the societal worldview and gaining a wider understanding of trust and responsibility concepts are necessary. Therefore, it is important not only to carry out governmental reforms but also to change the entire society's attitude towards education. The people should understand the value of education in their life, prosperity and the development of their country. Parents can pay more attention to the education of their children from early ages. Children should learn to be independent during lessons like in Finland. Teachers should have wide authority for choosing textbooks, organizing lessons and evaluating processes. Lessons can be oriented for students, teachers role should be only as an organizer, not as lecturer.

Furthermore, reforms must be coherent across all stages of education, not just in school education. This is because the learning ability of individuals develops step by step when they pass through the stages of education. Early childhood education and pre-school education provide basic skills for children to study at school. Higher education is responsible for preparing high-qualified teachers for schools. It can be concluded that the outcomes of school education are connected to the other stages of education. In Finnish education system this connection can be one of important factors to their good results.

It should be noted that learning Finnish schools was limited because of the absence of the opportunity to visit personally. It is important to mention that the information about the Finnish school education system based solely on secondary research which the author did not observe firsthand.

In the future the author is going to visit Finland to gain a deeper insight into their educational system. The subsequent research of the author might pay attention to other prospects of implementing Finnish education system to Uzbekistan.

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