



# The Best Education Systems Rise on The Best Teachers

by Nuri Öztürk

Education is one of the most important processes in people's life. All over the world, especially in under developed or developing countries, education can carry kids from low socio economic level to higher levels like a metamorphosis. Countries establish organizations in order to manage this process. Bigger organizations, like UNESCO and OECD, try to do the same thing at global level. They make some classifications and comparisons among countries. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is one of these instruments. PISA aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15 years old students. Finland and Singapore are two of the most successful countries in PISA.

There are some similarities between Finland and Singapore. Populations of both countries are about 5 million. According to human development report of United Nations (UN) both are among top countries. Educations systems are also in top systems all over the world. That is why educators from different countries have a great interest about education systems of Finland and Singapore. Therefore many people think that the secret behind their success is 'education'. This is not an unfounded argument. Because, 'knowledge based society' concept is an indispensable part of the education policies of both country. "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" is the vision of Ministry of Education of Singapore ([www.moe.gov.sg](http://www.moe.gov.sg)). "The welfare of Finnish society is built on education, culture and knowledge" says Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland ([www.minedu.fi](http://www.minedu.fi)). Matriculation exam in Finland and General Certificate of Education (GCE) in Singapore provide access to higher education level.

There are also some differences between Finland and Singapore Education System. While the administrative structure in Finland is more local based, Singapore has more centralized system. Education is free at all levels in Finland, but some standard and second-tier fees are paid in Singapore. There is no supervision process for teachers and school principals in Finland, but schools are supervised by cluster superintendents in Singapore.

It may be claimed that teachers are at the front line in the battle against ignorance and poverty. All countries have some regulations in order to train teachers they need. Selection of teachers and teacher training processes are another significant similarity between Finland and Singapore. Teachers are acknowledged as the main actor in education. The groups of people who have an active role in education process are teachers. Teachers directly touch the kids. They motivate, lead and inspire kids in their classrooms. In many of the bibliographies of successful people you can easily see the fingerprints of great teachers.

Sahlberg (Lessons from Finland. *American Educator*, Summer 2012, 34-38) says that Finnish system relies on the expertise and professional accountability of teachers. The most admired profession in Finland is teaching. Selection of teacher candidates and training deserve a closer look. Teacher candidates are selected based on matriculation examination results. After a written exam on assigned, their social interaction and communication skills are observed in school situation. Finally, they are interviewed and asked to explain why they have decided to become a teacher. Social prestige and professional autonomy are the most important factors that affect young Fins to select

teaching as profession. Secondly, selected candidates are trained well. Research, practice and reflection are the components of teacher training. These components are supported by scientific knowledge, thinking processes and cognitive skills. Theoretical education must be complemented by research and a master's thesis on a topic relevant to education. All teachers must have a master's degree at primary, middle and high school level. Another important part of teacher training is practice. Candidates observe lessons by experienced teachers and their practice is observed by supervisory teachers. Briefly, Finnish teachers are selected carefully, well trained with theory and practice. Master's degree is the testimonial of their skills. They are highly admired in society and serving to society.

In Singapore's case, teachers are important part of education too. Thinking teacher has an important role in thinking schools. National Institute for Education (NIE) provides theoretical foundation to produce thinking teachers. Key elements of teacher education are underpinning philosophy, curriculum, desired outcomes of teachers and academic pathways. Three value paradigms of teacher training model (TE21) are learning centered, teacher identity and service to the profession and community. These values are surrounded by skills and knowledge. Prospective teachers are carefully selected from the one third of the secondary school graduates by panels that include current principals. Strong academic ability, commitment to profession and serving diverse student bodies are essential. Another important aspect in teacher training in Singapore is that prospective teachers are paid a monthly stipend during the training. There is also a close relationship between NIE and schools where all teachers are mentored for the first few years (Schleicher, A., 2012, Ed., *Preparing Teachers and Developing School Leaders for the 21st Century: Lessons from around the World*, OECD Publishing).

Consequently, it is seen that two of the best education systems over the world rise on great teachers. Great teachers are selected as a result of a rigorous process. The students who have high academic capability prefer to be a teacher. The main reason behind their decision is not the salary, but the admiration in the society. Second factor takes place during the education taken at the universities. This process combines theoretical education and practices. Thirdly, starting phase of profession is supported by experienced teachers. At the last step, teachers are provided many opportunities during their professional career. As Sahlberg said, Finland realized the role of teachers in education and invested them in 1970s. Singapore is still improving its teacher training by TE21 model for 21<sup>st</sup> century. For the countries that want to invest in their education system, it is better to start with teacher training system.

**Nuri Öztürk**  
 @nuriozturk\_  
PhD Candidate,  
Ankara University/Turkey