



Teacher Education in Finland

PRE-SCHOOL TEACHER KINDERGARTEN TEACHER PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER PRINCIPAL SUBJECT TEACHER SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER TEACHER OF VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS SUBJECT TEACHER DIRECTOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER RESOURCE COUNSELLORS PRE-SCHOOL TEACHER KINDERGARTEN TEACHER PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER PRINCIPAL SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER TEACHER OF VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS CORE SUBJECT TEACHER DIRECTOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER PRE-SCHOOL TEACHER KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

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TEACHING BUILDS THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE FUTURE

The teaching profession is highly respected in Finland. Teaching qualifications are prescribed by law and vary for different kinds of teachers. These national requirements guarantee that the standard of teacher education remains high.

All teaching has both educational and didactic objectives, although the age of pupils and the size of classes vary greatly. Nowadays a teacher's work has changed from dispensing knowledge to guiding learning. In addition to doing the teaching, teachers have to plan it and interact with colleagues, pupils and their parents, and many different contact groups. OAJ, the Trade Union of Education in Finland, is involved in promoting teacher education by influencing decisions concerning educational policy and the development of the educational and pedagogical system. The association for students in teacher education, the Student Teachers' Union of Finland – SOOL, is part of the OAJ organisation.

GENERAL FEATURES OF TEACHER EDUCATION

Highly educated teachers are the guarantors of the quality of teaching. The majority of teacher education students study at universities.

In Finland subject specialist teachers have traditionally been educated at universities and they generally teach in secondary schools. The education of primary school teachers was transferred to the universities in the early 1970s, and that of kindergarten teachers in the mid-1990s. All polytechnic and uni-

versity teachers receive their basic and further education at universities.

TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE UNIVERSITIES

The law on the university degree system contains a separate section on teacher education. Other laws determine what teacher education programmes individual universities are entitled to provide.

Teacher education is given either in faculties/departments of education or in subject faculties such as humanities, science, or theology.

First, students take a Bachelor's degree, which comprises 180 ECTS credits, and after that a 120-credit Master's degree. They take basic, intermediate and advanced studies (120 cr) in their major subject, and basic and intermediate studies (60 cr) in their minor subject. The complete 300-credit degree takes about five years.

Students aiming at a career as a kindergarten teacher or a teacher of adult evening classes complete a three-year Bachelor's degree. Although this is sufficient qualification for these posts, many teachers carry on to do a Master's degree. Under certain conditions, a polytechnic degree is sufficient qualification for kindergarten teachers or teachers of adult evening classes.

The degree programmes include a 60-credit professional competence element, which varies according to the type of teaching posts the students are aiming at. Depending on the teaching field, they may concentrate on early childhood and pre-school teaching, the core subjects taken by all primary school pupils (so-called multi-field studies), special

education, or student counselling. Teacher education also includes pedagogical studies, which incorporate teaching practice, as well as, for subject specialists, study of the subject to be taught.

The teaching practice included in the students' pedagogical studies may take place either in the training schools of the faculties/departments of education or in other approved schools. Kindergarten teacher trainees normally practise in day care centres.

Teachers with a Master's degree have the option of continuing their studies at the doctoral level.

TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE POLYTECHNICS

Some polytechnics have a vocational teacher education unit. Vocational teacher education and training consists of pedagogical studies.

Students in these vocational institutes of higher education may, after their pedagogical studies, take a course of study for special needs teachers or study counsellors. Both are worth 60 credits.

EARLY-CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND PRE-SCHOOL TEACHING

* *Kindergarten teachers*

Kindergarten teachers work with children between the ages of one and six.

Students complete the degree of Bachelor of Education specialising in early childhood education. The studies provide the professional proficiency required for early childhood and pre-school teaching.

It is also possible to qualify as a kindergarten teacher by completing the Bachelor of Social Services degree, which must include studies focusing on early childhood education and social pedagogy worth 60 credits.

University educated kindergarten teachers may specialise in special education by completing a study programme aimed at special needs teaching.

* *Pre-school teachers*

Kindergarten teachers who have undertaken university level kindergarten teacher education may work as pre-school teachers in day care or schools. Pre-school teaching, which precedes compulsory schooling, is provided for six-year-olds. The majority of the teachers are kindergarten teachers, but qualified primary school teachers are also involved at this level. The Bachelor of Social Services degree does not qualify graduates to work at pre-school level.

Special education teachers also feature in pre-school teaching. Most of them are qualified special needs kindergarten teachers who have also completed a special education study programme. Primary school teachers with special training in this field may also be involved.

COMPULSORY AND FURTHER EDUCATION

* *Primary school teachers*

Primary school teachers teach children in years 1–6 of compulsory schooling. At lower levels they have their own class or group, for which they may provide the teaching in all subjects on the curriculum.

In order to qualify they take a Master's degree

(majoring in education sciences) at the teacher education unit of the faculty/department of education. The degree comprises the pedagogical study programme for teachers, together with all the subjects covered in years 1–6 and cross-curricular themes. It may also include basic and intermediate studies of a subject on the comprehensive school curriculum, which serves as qualification to teach that subject to pupils in years 7–9.

Primary school teachers who complete a study programme for special education teachers are entitled to teach groups of pupils transferred to special needs teaching.

*** Secondary school teachers**

Subject specialists are qualified to teach years 7–9 in compulsory schooling and in upper secondary schools and, depending on their education, also in vocational schools and adult education.

There are two ways of becoming a secondary school teacher. The majority of students complete an MA in their chosen subject and apply separately for teacher education, while some choose to apply directly for teacher education when applying to study their subject. This direct selection procedure is the more recommendable alternative in terms of teacher identity development, as the students know when applying for the right to study that they are heading for the teaching profession.

In the faculties, students often focus on two subjects they intend to teach, completing advanced studies in a major subject and basic and intermediate studies in a minor subject. Those studying to become teachers of the mother tongue and literature in most cases concentrate solely on these subjects.

Unlike other secondary school teachers, teachers

of home economics and crafts study at the faculty/department of education, majoring in education, home economics or crafts. It is possible to complete the pedagogical education as a post-graduate.

*** Special education teachers/ special education primary school teachers**

Most teachers in special education work in years 1–9 and, alongside the regular teaching, give extensive special education to pupils in need of it. They work either separately from or in the same room with the primary or secondary school teachers. Special needs primary school teachers teach small groups of learners transferred to special education.

Special education teachers need a Master's degree, majoring in special education, at a faculty/department of education. Their education includes studies giving them the professional competence needed to be a special needs teacher, and the pedagogical study programme. Those aiming to become special education primary school teachers also take a course in the subjects taught in primary school. They often do their studies in special education after having completed their degree in primary teaching.

It is also possible to have any Master's degree and then qualify as a special education teacher after completing the required study programme in special education.

Teachers working with retarded pupils need an appropriate university or polytechnic degree, complemented with studies conferring professional competence for the tasks of a special education teacher.

*** Guidance counsellors**

The term student counsellor is used in compulsory schooling (years 1–9), and guidance counsellor in

upper secondary schools, vocational schools and polytechnics.

They assist pupils and students with their course planning, applications for further studies, study techniques and entering the labour market.

The qualifications include a Master of Arts (Education) degree as well as pedagogical studies. Guidance counsellors may also qualify by completing any Master's degree and the guidance counsellor study programme.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

* *Teachers of vocational subjects*

Teachers of vocational subjects have a suitable Master's degree (university or polytechnic), or another appropriate degree, determined by the education provider.

The educational qualifications required vary in different fields of vocational training. Teachers in business and administration as well as the social services and health care sectors must always have a university Master's degree.

Teachers of vocational subjects must have at least three years' work experience in a field compatible with the teaching post before they begin their pedagogical studies, which they complete either before they take up teaching or as a distance learning programme while teaching.

* *Core subject teachers*

Core subjects in vocational education include Finnish or Swedish, foreign languages, mathematics and natural sciences. Core subject teacher trainees

require a Master's degree, having undertaken basic, intermediate and advanced studies in one subject and basic and intermediate studies in the other subjects to be taught.

The pedagogical studies are undertaken either at a university or at a vocational teacher education department.

* *Special education teachers*

Core subject and other teachers at the vocational level completing a 60-credit study programme for teachers in special education qualify as special education teachers.

* *Guidance counsellors*

Core subject and vocational teachers completing a 60-credit study programme for polytechnic teachers qualify as guidance counsellors in vocational training, compulsory education, or upper secondary schools.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

* *Universities*

Lecturers, university lecturers and senior assistants hold positions in university teaching and research, under various titles. Most of them have a licentiate or a PhD. Pedagogical studies are not required for these positions, but an increasing number of university teachers take them.

* *Polytechnics*

Senior lecturers working in polytechnics must hold an appropriate licentiate or doctoral degree. Lecturers have a suitable university or polytechnic Master's

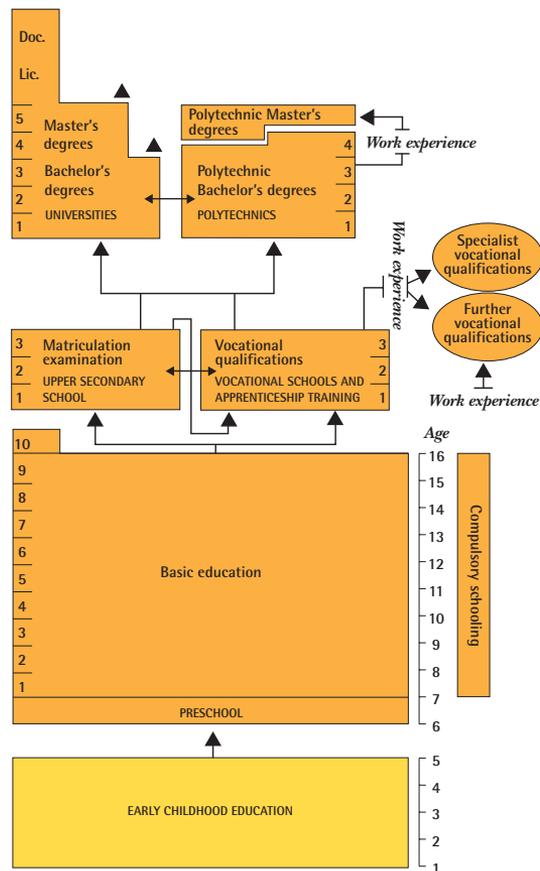
degree. Pedagogical studies are required for both positions. If the posts of principal lecturer or lecturer include vocational teaching, the teachers should have three years' work experience in the field to be taught.

PRINCIPALS AND DIRECTORS

As a rule, principals and directors have a Master's degree, and are also qualified teachers with experience of teaching and a diploma in educational administration or the equivalent. Depending on the job description, directors of day care centres are expected to have either kindergarten teacher qualifications and adequate management skills or an appropriate Master's degree, knowledge of early childhood education and adequate management skills.



THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF FINLAND



Source: The Education System Chart is published by The Finnish National Board of Education. OAJ has added early childhood education to the chart in order to show its position as the first step in lifelong learning.



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