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# MODELS OF EDUCATION: NEOLIBERAL, CONSERVATIVE AND WELFARE STATE - THE CASE STUDY OF FINLAND AND POLAND

Abstract. Suwalska Arleta, *Models of Education: Neoliberal, Conservative and Welfare State – the Case Study of Finland and Poland* [Modele edukacji: neoliberalny, konserwatywny i welfare state – na przykładzie Finlandii i Polski]. Studia Edukacyjne no. 71, 2023, Poznań 2023, pp. 205-218. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 1233-6688. Submitted: 15.11.2023. Accepted: 12.12.2023. DOI: 10.14746/se.2023.71.13

The article addresses two distinct models of education: Finnish and Polish, taking into consideration the ways of financing education. The research aims to identify the characteristic features of the Polish and Finnish models of education and teachers' professional status in Finland and Poland.

The focus of the study was to analyze relations between the neoliberal and conservative policies in Poland and the welfare state policy in Finland. The next step was to identify how state economy is related to ways of teachers' educational functioning in Finland and Poland. The paper reveals differing attitudes and patterns which characterize the Finnish and Polish models of education with consequences for teachers' satisfactory functioning in their profession.

**Key words:** models of education, neoliberal model of education, conservative model of education, welfare state policy in education, teachers' salaries, teachers' job satisfaction

### Introduction

The paper addresses two models of education which determine how public money is invested in education: Polish, with neoconservative and neoliberal policies, and Finnish, based on welfare state policy of a prosocial society. The analyzed documents reveal some tendencies in both countries related to teachers' eagerness to work or leave the profession, as well as the societal satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the education system.

# The politolinguistic approach in the analysis of political rhetoric

The ideology of education with its political aspect in this article was taken into account through the politolinguistic approach, "which brings together and combines critical discourse analysis and concepts derived from political science" (Wodak, Krzyżanowski, 2008, p. 152). Political rhetoric has links to political education, political considerations and political legitimization. It involves three different "dimensions of politics: polity, policy and politics" (Wodak, Krzyżanowski, 2008, p. 152).

The main focus of our study was to analyze relations between politics and education, which are applicable to all teachers in Finland and Poland. Our analysis started with a review of literature on globalization and politics. The next step was to identify how state economy is related to ways of educational functioning which influence teachers' work in Finland and Poland. We made use of the politolinguistic approach method to study documents concerning neoliberal version of capitalism with conservative influence in Poland as well as the welfare state policy in Finland (Wodak, Krzyżanowski, 2008, p. 156). The method reveals different views, regularities and principles which characterize the two models of education.

The article is conducted in the paradigm of constructivism. The subject of analysis are two models of education in Europe. The first one is neoliberal and conservative, whereas the second one is welfare state model of education.

We formulated the following research questions:

- 1. What are the characteristic features of Polish and Finnish educational models?
- 2. What professional teachers' status emerges in view of the presented features of Polish and Finnish systems?

# Ideology and politics

Today ideology is used to confirm a "certain political viewpoint, serve the interests of certain people, or to perform a functional role in relation to social, economic, political and legal institutions" (Law and Ideology, p. 1). Śliwerski added that political and pedagogical ideologies are "expressions of the interests of particular groups, classes, or nations, community, religious or political movements seeking to impose their particular aims and interests and to dominate other people" (Śliwerski, 2009, p. 40). In this perspective, Konarzewski (1995, p. 127) claims that "the practicality of pedagogy inevitably breaks it

into ideological camps and subjects it to political pressure". Power also involves control (van Dijk, 2001) which means that one group control the other group and "limit their freedom of action and influence their thinking" (Ewing, 2017, p. 2069).

According to Adrian Leftwich (2004) and Heywood (2002) politics is treated as the centre of interest of politicians and all people who are involved in institutions and societies. As Giddens (2006) uderlined politics concerns the ways how to influence on the scope and content of each government. In the 21st century, the term *policy* supports the ways of presenting the main directions within the domestic and foreign policy of a country. The wave of the ongoing economic challenges reinforces the risk of global economic control. Beck and Habermas mention the subpolitical sphere with its tendency based on production of economic crisis. Giddens, 2006) added that there is seen the control of economic processes.

State economic policy is related to country's political system, with its immediate influence on business and its processes. Winiarski (2006) adds that state economic policy should help sectors which are not supported enough by private entrepreneurs, especially schools and medical care. Policy should overcome obstacles related to economic stagnation, inflation and crises. Public budget generally reflects a state's economic policy, which is directly linked to production growth and increased Gross Domestic Product. Consequently, governments influence their economy by creating economic policies. According to Beck, government policies are also affected by the disappearance of industrial societies in favour of "the second modernity" for all social classes (Giddens, 2006, p. 120).

On the other hand, countries like Finland base their economic concepts on welfare and the distribution of country's income. The welfare is related to universal free education with teachers who have professional qualifications, high level of professional development and adequate wages. This policy contributes to a secure existence, creating citizens living in good conditions and ensures their healthy lifestyle. Furthermore, Finland (Klamut, 2007) created a precapitalist policy with the development of a prosocial society where we observe cooperation of many institutions to design a country's innovation and infrastructure to match companies, regional government offices and centers of technology.

The Social Democratic Party between 1975 and 1978, included concern about the so-called welfare society to understand better the basics of the welfare state in the party's self-perception. The programme of 1987 used the old objectives and presented them as suggestions for politics which enabled Finland to move into welfare state direction. This way, in 1987, the government

decided to build a modern and equal society. It changed the traditional coalitions based on the Social Democrats Party and the Centre Party. The 'bluered' government programme was based on the welfare society as a new Finnish national basis.

In the same year, in his speech to his party followers, Holkeri suggested middle class support, "a welfare state without patronage" (Kettunen, p.44) and without socialism. The government formed by the National Coalition Party and the Centre Party in 1991 made use of the welfare society concept in the context of health and wellbeing of Finnish citizens. The programme suggested low incomes and admission to the European Union. It informed about 'welfare services' perceived as an attribute of a 'welfare society'. In this perspective, the social policy enabled preserving the idea of the Nordic welfare society, (the National Coalition – J. Katainen, A. Stubb, 2011-2015; Centre Party – J. Sipilä, 2015-2019, the Social Democratic Party – Prime Minister A. Rinne and S. Marin since 2019).

In Poland, the Civil Platform Party, as the ruling political force between 2007-2015, introduced neoliberal ideology with emphasis on the relations between individuals and their society and "the distinction between separate public and private spheres" (Olssen, 2000, p. 482). There is no comeback to times described by Bouhdiba (1987), where education was treated as supporter of socialists who work against the true interests of children and parents based on utopian fantasies about universal cooperation. From 2007, we observed minimal standards in education, treated as preparation for a good life. Neoliberal trends (Jones, 2003) contributed to the initiation of the conservative educational policy presented by hard selection within schools.

According to H.A. Giroux (2010), neoliberalism has been explained as a very dangerous ideology based on inequality. Neoliberal ideology has been present in the USA and the UK and was incorporated into Poland with the concentration wealth in the hands of the world's elite. It contributed to the hegemony of neoliberal politics with its consumer gadgets and a free choice of lifestyle.

A strong state, especially from 2015 supports strongly interests of the ruling elites and overcome obstacles of social resistance. Poland is a good example of a country, where are limits to the welfare state and inequalities in the access to social benefits. In this perspective, neoconservatives, who are leaders of social change influence also on education policy.

Since 2015, Poland has been introducing widely conservative doctrines permeated with hierarchies and expectations that people are not equal. The ruling conservative party contributed to the division of Polish the society into classes, where they promote the rules of a strong state and a free market. They do not follow radical social changes. The Law and Justice policy also made

use of right-wing populism, euroscepticism and Christian democracy (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, 2023), in which political leaders are responsible for ensuring the integrity of traditional institutions. In this spirit, they also introduced educational changes based on centralisation within the educational system described below.

## The Finnish welfare state model of education

The Alternative Reform Movement started educational changes within welfare state in Finland. The biggest reform in Finnish education started in November 1963 and was based on socially consulted steps. Firstly, the best secondary school graduates were selected for the teaching profession to work together in collective responsibility for education. The Finnish society wanted a good education for all, so the Agrarian and Left Party prepared new rules and the largest social consensus in education (Suwalska, 2021). As a result, the Finns rethought not only the theory, but also the teaching methodology in schools. The welfare state model of Finnish education (Sahlberg, 2015) introduced equity with inclusive education system to fulfill dreams through education. In addition, Finland stripped the system of external control.

Also, they introduced strategies for developing the quality of teachers' work. Finns wanted to trust teachers and schools more. A characteristic feature of the reform were political compromises on the wave of welfare state. There was a political consensus based on the "heritage" of the liberated peasants, on the spirit of capitalism and the utopia of socialism, i.e. equality, efficiency and solidarity in the education system. This way, the Finnish education policy is highly rated for its high trust in teachers' work, in teachers and principals who are able to create real forms of cooperation, in relationships that affect the collaboration between parents and teachers.

People with high confidence like to reveal more accurate and complete information about problems, as well as their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Therefore, education is not centralized and managed with a strong hand by the minister, but it is managed from the bottom up, i.e. it is teachers who adapt the curriculum to the needs of their pupils and to the rapidly changing world and have a huge impact on shaping the curricula in their school or region. The government invests huge amounts of money in the development of teachers, but spends nothing on the reporting system, benchmarking system, grading system, rankings, tests or surveys of schools' and pupils' performance. All pupils learn to work together to help each other. The highest level of cooperation is observed between Finnish Board of Education, municipalities, teachers and heads.

According to Sahlberg, the educational change in Finland was based on several clear factors: "collaboration between schools, individualized teaching, whole-child focus, accountability based on trust and equality of outcomes" (2015, p. 149). There is a holistic approach with development of creative ideas that are used in the classroom. There is also the ultimate sense of collective responsibility. There is a constant level of discussion and consultation in Finland that certainly stimulates the best solutions in education. In this light, the highest level of autonomy among teachers is observed, which builds their career paths. In Finnish culture, the importance of the teaching profession is recognised and treated as one of crucial professions. Therefore, teacher education is consistently invested into. In this light, schools collaborate, help each other and teachers create a «collaborative culture in their classrooms" (Suwalska, 2022, p. 102). In addition, teachers in Finland focus on the whole child. They pay attention not only to the development of their character, but they also want to develop their personalities, skills and talents.

The Finnish society appreciates education, which is considered to be the main factor securing the future of both the nation and the individual. They treat the teaching profession seriously and see it as a lever for improving the social and economic situation of the country. They have designed a well-planned teacher education program for the 21st century, which in principle can be treated as a continuous process from entering university to retirement. The public space is dominated by a comparative discourse, in which teachers' salaries and prestige are not compared to those of cleaners or cashiers, but to those of doctors and lawyers. This has been well thought out in Finland, namely the highest demands on the teaching profession (Sahlberg, 2015; Niemi, 2011; Suwalska, 2021).

# Finnish teachers and their success in the wave of globalisation

In Finland, smart, educated and respected teachers are really respected and constitute the intellectual elite of the country. Therefore, the model of education resigned from controlling procedures. Finland abandoned school inspections, school boards, and employs only a handful of people in its Ministry of Education. The country's education is based on free methods of teachers' designing and implementing school curricula and there is no investment in rankings and systems of school reports (Niemi, 2011; Suwalska, 2020).

Educational success is largely attributed to efforts focused on recruiting, preparing, developing and maintaining a strong teaching staff within the pur-

poseful system of building human capital. The Finnish system provides deep support for learning, and in both countries teachers are assigned a significant role in building quality (Sahlberg, 2015). Political leaders are aware that investing in the education system leads to the formation of a strong group of teachers with high competences. Teachers are the key to their pupils' academic success. The quality of Finnish teachers' work and their preparation for the profession has been recognised as one of key factors in improving the quality of teaching. This approach is directly related to teachers' role in creating high-quality education and involves investment in teacher education and further professional development. It also draws attention to the importance of the quality of teachers' work takes turns out pupils with high educational achievements (Suwalska, 2022). It also confirms the assumption that the potential of a school emerges from the potential of its teachers, who are its most valuable resource.

Table 1 Education in Finland and Poland (authors' source)

Country	Finland	Poland
Number of students in the classes	- about 20	– even 27 or more
Teachers	- have all teaching materials at their disposal	- do not have all teaching materials at their disposal
Meals at school	- teachers and pupils have free meals at school	- teachers and pupils do not have free meals at school
School organization	- children have time to rest and are not overtired,	- children have a lot of homework, are often overtired
Curriculum	- decentralized	- centralized

# Teacher salary and job dissatisfaction - international perspective

Teacher salary is the main part of educational funding in each country. Policy decision influences on investment in teacher salary taking into account teachers' effectiveness and student achievement. The annual "Education at a Glance" reports (2005a, 2005b, 2008, 2009), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) presented teacher salary at three levels: new teachers, experienced teachers with 15 years of work, and teachers with the highest salary.

Low teacher salary influences on teacher dissatisfaction and attrition rates. The relationships which compare teacher salary, teacher dissatisfaction and attrition rates were conducted internationally (Davidson, 2007; Lee, 2006; Osei, 2006; Webb et al., 2004) and in the U.S. (Imazeki, 2005; Kelly, 2004; Kirby et al., 1999; Stockard & Lehman, 2004). Davidson (2007) underlined that low teacher salary and poor-quality working conditions contributed to low teacher motivation and ineffectiveness in Tanzania. Additionally, Osei (2006) claimed that the financial pressure related with finding extra work contributes to fatigue among teachers. Lee (2006) also added that the teachers without enough salary treated their job as temporary, whereas teachers who earn enough money appreciate job security and wanted to participate in teachers' development.

In Japan (Central Education Committee, 2007), Australia (Ingvarson, Kleinhenz, & Wilkinson, 2007), and India (Kingdon & Teal, 2007), has been introduced the idea of performance-related pay. Most countries prefer standardized compensation system that "determines salary level based on education level and teaching experience" (Khan, 2002). When we take into consideration improvement of the teachers in a particular country, it is really needed to examine how much each country invests in teacher salary.

# Neoliberal version of capitalism in Poland on the wave of inflation – decreasing teachers' salaries

The neoliberal model of capitalism and the development of globalisation have dominated the recent years, shaping teachers' working conditions and salaries depending on the country. Transnational corporations, whose income sometimes exceeds the national income level of many countries, have created favorable conditions within European countries for such companies to exercise a kind of regulatory dictate in the form of favorable tax regulations for corporate giants (Fullan, 2001). At the same time, it generated various external costs, e.g. resulting from the reduction of tax revenues to state budgets, and thus led to worse conditions for the development of public investments, including in the sphere of education, health and safety. In addition, the last two years in Poland have been dominated by inflation, which became the winner of plebiscites organized in many countries regarding the choice of the word of the year. Inflation in Poland is unfortunately still high, hence the discussions on this subject are inflamed. The Law and Justice party underlines factors independent of them, including, above all, such as the war in Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic and the related disruptions in the supply and availability of key products, especially energy and raw materials.

According to Varoufakis (2022), the model of capitalism which has been dominant for almost five decades is characterized by building global production and supply chains of products, primarily according to the principle of maximizing profits, regardless of social, climatic and other costs. This involved moving and localizing production to places where low production costs were ensured in order to absolutely maximize profits. An asymmetric, justified neither economically nor socially, distribution of world wealth is the consequence of this principle. Hence, there is an increase in social inequality, including disparities in income. The syndrome 4B is evident here, i.e. the rich will be richer and the poor will be poorer (Varoufakis, 2022). The table below presents decreasing teachers' salaries in comparison to minimum wage. Polish teachers increasingly become poorer, which is especially apparent during the inflation period of 2022 to 2023.

Table 2 Teachers' salaries in Poland 2007-2023 (selected examples)

Year	Minimum wage (gross in PLN)	A contract teacher, percent above the mini- mum wage	A nominated teacher, percent above the minimum wage	A certified teacher, percent above the minimum wage
2023	3490 PLN, Until 30 June 2023	3690 PLN, 6%	3890 PLN, 11%	4550 PLN, 30%
2017	2000 PLN	2361 PLN, 18%	2681 PLN, 34%	3149 PLN, 57%
2012	1500 PLN	2246 PLN, 50%	2550 PLN, 70%	2995 PLN, 100%
2007	936 PLN	1444 PLN, 54%	1829 PLN, 95%	2195 PLN, 135%

Source: The Minister of National Education on the amount of minimum rates (Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, poz. 352, p. 1).

The steady decrease in teachers' income contributes to the situation of staff shortages in state schools and results in privatization of Polish education, which corresponds to The Constitution of Liberty, in which Hayek (2006) claims that only some people are designed not waste most of their energy and time for earning, their freedom is based on implementation of their chosen goals. In the circumstances of 2023, Burda added that "tired of a system that sees neither pupils nor teachers, forced by low salaries and rising living costs, they quit their jobs" (Burda, 2023, p. 1). The phenomenon of school ineffectiveness has become apparent, as teachers quit their jobs and create staff shortages. As a result, rich people in Poland pay a lot of money for high quality private education or extra lessons with private teachers.

# Finnish teachers' incomes and details

In Finland it is guaranteed the salary increase in next 12 months about 6% (The average salary increase in one year in Finland..., p. 1,). In this light, teachers' salary in Finland starts from 1,750 EUR per month (a starting salary in 2023) to the maximum salaries about 5,570 EUR per month. The average teachers's salary is 3,330 EUR per month. As a result, 50% teachers earn less than 3,330 EUR.

In Finland, the 25th and the 75th percentiles are taken into account. The salary distribution diagram presents that 25% of teachers earn less than 2,720 EUR while 75% of them earn more than 2,720 EUR. In this light, 75% of teachers earn less than 3,810 EUR while 25% earn more than 3,810 EUR (The average salary ..., p. 2-3,).

Teachers' salaries are grouped. Around 65% of all reported figures are in the range 2,070 EUR to 2,920 EUR. Approximately 20% fall under the 2,070 EUR mark. 10% are from 2,920 EUR to 3,310 EUR. Only 5% of people grossed 3,310 EUR or more. It means, that each young teacher's is twice more than their starting salary by the time they reach the 10 years of experience (The average salary ..., p. 2-3,).

Table 3 Finnish teachers' salaries in 2023 (The average salary ..., p. 3-4)

0-2 years of teaching	2-5 years of teaching	5-10 years of teaching	10-15 years of teaching	15-20 years of teaching	20+ years of teaching
2,070 EUR	2,660 EUR,	3,680 EUR	4,550 EUR	4,880 EUR	5,200 EUR
	+29%	+38%	+24%	+7%	+7%

The Finnish method of teachers' remuneration is very motivating and creates good financial conditions for young teachers to decide to work in the profession throughout their lives. A decent salary in the teaching profession is also a certainty for parents that public education is at a high level, because teachers engages and pays them well.

# Summary

The presented documents reveal a tendency in Polish education (Potulicka, Rutkowiak, 2010) in which the main aim of education policy seems to be the decrease in teachers' salaries and the neoconservative goal to transform the whole teacher, into a new type of a teacher tailored to the school management under the rules the contemporary democracy. As a result, the labour market (Potulicka, Rutkowiak, 2010) becomes young people's tutor, which punishes students' laziness and awards competition. There is a prophecy (Potulicka, Rutkowiak, 2010) that the most difficult is to convince the whole society that only a few people are able to be the leaders whereas for the other people these positions seem to be unreachable.

Dissatisfied pupils, parents as well as teachers point to the phenomenon of school ineffectiveness. The rich are paying now and will pay a lot of money for good quality education, whereas poor parents will be bereft of some lessons because there will be no teachers to fill in the posts (Olejnik, 2022; Szkwarek, 2022).

On the other hand, according to Nowosad, Suwalska (2023) Finnish society appreciates education, which is considered to be the main factor securing the future of the nation and the individual. Finland has created a procapitalist policy with the development of a prosocial society, well-paid teachers, highly trusted within the Finnish society, who are interested in school work during their whole life. The country has allowed for teacher's autonomy at schools, designing culture of teaching and protecting their rights and working conditions paying them adequately to their level of experience.

### Conclusion

To sum up, each country can make use of varied models by designing and implementing educational changes within its system of education. There are ideological, political and prosocial models within welfare state options of building educational systems paid by public money. Only some countries, like Finland, have chosen decentralization with its consequences for teachers' eagerness to work at schools.

On the other hand, the ruling political parties in Poland have chosen centralization within their education policies with its consequences for teachers' salary cuts and staff shortages, which contribute to the growing lack of trust in teachers' profession, as well as to teachers' lack of interest and enthusiasm. Will it soon change in Poland? Rather not, because before and after parliamentary elections in 2023 (Rzeczpospolita 2023, p.1), no one from the contemporary political formations seems to be interested in educational changes that are well-designed and tailored to pupils' and teachers' needs.

### **Author contributions**

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work.

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