Contemporary Studies Journal in Education and Psychology
P-ISSN: 3079-773X
Vol 1, Issue 1, March 2025

استراتيجيات تعزيز الأداء الأكاديمي لدى طلاب المرحلة المتوسطة في المملكة العربية السعودية في ضوء التجربة الفنلندية

*Strategies to Enhance the Academic Performance of Middle School Students in Saudi Arabia: Insights from the Finnish Experience**

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* Receiving date: 06-01-2025
* Accepting date: 22-02-2025
* Publishing date: 15-03-2025.

الملخص:

استكشفت هذه الدراسة إمكانية تبني الاستراتيجيات التعليمية الناجحة لفنلندا ضمن نظام المرحلة المتوسطة في المملكة العربية السعودية وتحلل المكونات الرئيسية للنموذج الفنلندي بما في ذلك التركيز القوي على تدريب المعلمين والتعلم المتمركز حول الطالب وتقليل الاعتماد على الاختبارات الموحدة والتكامل التكنولوجي والنهج الشامل للتعليم وتشير النتائج إلى أن تحسين جودة التعليم يتطلب تعزيز إعداد المعلمين من خلال برامج الدرجات المتقدمة والتطوير المهني المستمر وتسهم أساليب التعلم المتمركزة حول الطالب مثل التعلم القائم على المشاريع والتعلم القائم على الاستقصاء في تعزيز الإبداع والتفكير النقدي لدى المتعلمين بالإضافة إلى ذلك يمكن لإصلاح أساليب التقييم من خلال استخدام التقييمات التكوينية أن يساعد في تقليل ضغط الطلاب مع الحفاظ على الصرامة الأكاديمية ويمكن تعزيز التعلم الشخصي بشكل أكبر من خلال توسيع استخدام التكنولوجيا وضمان الوصول العادل إلى الموارد الرقمية لجميع الطلاب علاوة على ذلك فإن دمج تعليم القيادة والمهارات الاجتماعية ودورات حل المشكلات يمنح الطلاب تجربة تعليمية أكثر شمولاً وينبغي تنفيذ هذه الإصلاحات تدريجياً وتكييفها لتناسب السياق الثقافي للمملكة العربية السعودية وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن المملكة العربية السعودية لديها القدرة على تحقيق تقدم تعليمي كبير من خلال الدمج الانتقائي للعناصر الرئيسية للنموذج التعليمي الفنلندي

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأداء الأكاديمي، تعزيز الأداء الأكاديمي، طلاب المرحلة المتوسطة، التعليم في المملكة العربية السعودية، التجربة الفنلندية، التعليم في فنلندا.

Abstract:

This study explored the potential of adopting Finland's successful educational strategies within Saudi Arabia's middle school system. It analyzes key components of the Finnish model, including a strong emphasis on teacher training, student-centered learning, reduced reliance on standardized testing, technological integration, and a holistic approach to education. The results indicate that improving instructional quality requires enhancing teacher preparation through advanced degree programs and continues professional development. Student-centered learning methods, such as Project-based, and inquiry-based learning—foster creativity and critical thinking among learners. Additionally, reforming assessment methods through the use of formative evaluations can help reduce student stress while maintaining academic rigor. Personalized learning can be further strengthened by expanding the use of technology and ensuring equitable access to digital resources for all students. Moreover, incorporating leadership education, social skills, and problem-solving courses offers students a more well-rounded learning experience. These reforms should be implemented gradually and adapt to fit the cultural context of Saudi Arabia. The study concludes that Saudi Arabia has the potential to achieve significant educational progress by selectively integrating key elements of the Finnish education model.

Keywords: Academic Performance, Enhancing the Academic Performance, Middle School Students, Education in Saudi Arabia, Finnish Experience, Education in Finland.

1.0 Introduction:

1.1 Overview:

As a country with a large population, education in Saudi Arabia is critical. The government recognizes that continuous reforms must be strengthened at all educational levels. Middle school is a crucial stage in any student's journey; it forms the foundation for accessing higher education and pursuing a further career. Despite numerous reforms in Saudi Arabia's education system, significant challenges remain —particularly the reliance on rote memorization, teacher-centered pedagogy, and the insufficient development of critical thinking skills. In contrast, Finland has proven to be a leading example among countries that implement best practices in global education, consistently ranking among the top-performing nations in international education assessments.

The Finnish education system features highly trained teachers, high levels of student autonomy, and innovative teaching methodologies that place critical thinking, depth of understanding, and the ability to draw upon various sources to solve problems at the core of education (Mann et al., 2020). Finnish teachers undergo extensive preparation through rigorous training programs, including mandatory master's degrees, which equip them with the skills necessary to foster a thought-provoking and practical learning environment.

Furthermore, the Finnish curriculum is highly flexible, allowing students to spend more time on subjects they are interested in, while also encouraging them to apply what they learn in real-life contexts.

The second key aspect of Finland's success is its minimal reliance on standardized testing. Finnish schools do not use high-stakes examinations to determine academic progression, unlike the system in Saudi Arabia. Instead, formative assessments are conducted continuously to monitor student development. This approach reduces stress, fosters a love of

learning, and enables educators to tailor instruction to the unique needs of each student (Tayan, 2017).

A contributing factor to this success is Finland's effective integration of technology. Digital tools and eLearning platforms facilitate personalized learning, making the learning experience more interactive and engaging (Puustinen et al., 2022).

Although Saudi Arabia has also made notable strides in educational technology—particularly through initiatives such as the Smart Schools project—further progress is needed. Enhancements in infrastructure and improved teacher training in digital pedagogy are essential to achieving the Kingdom's ambitious goal of ensuring every graduate possesses strong digital literacy skills.

This research has discussed the feasibility of adapting Finnish strategies to Saudi Arabia's education system. The study aims to isolate components of Finland's model that could be applied in Saudi middle schools, evaluate potential challenges, and offer practical suggestions for policymakers and educators (Nawafleh et al., 2012).

Without merely replicating Finland's success, Saudi Arabia can shape a distinct education system that emphasizes student engagement, critical thinking, and lifelong learning—ultimately enhancing academic performance and preparing students for future career paths.

1.2 Research Questions:

1. What are the key elements of Finland's education system that contribute to high student achievement?
2. How can Saudi Arabia adapt these strategies to improve middle school education?
3. What challenges might arise in implementing Finnish strategies in Saudi Arabia?

4. What is the role of teacher training in enhancing student academic performance?
5. How can technology be effectively integrated into Saudi middle schools based on Finnish educational practices?

1.3 Research Objectives:

1. Identify Finnish education strategies that enhance academic performance.
2. Assess their applicability in the Saudi Arabian context.
3. Propose recommendations for educational reforms in Saudi Arabia.
4. Analyze the impact of teacher training on student engagement and learning outcomes.
5. Explore the role of technology in modernizing Saudi middle school education.

1.4 Research Gap:

1.4.1 Identification of Key Elements in Finland's Education System:

Finland's education system is widely recognized for its success; however, there is limited research that can be directly applied to the Saudi Arabian education system. Further studies are needed to identify which elements—such as teacher autonomy, curriculum flexibility, or classroom environment—are most applicable to Saudi middle schools (Puustinen et al., 2022). Verifying the effectiveness of each component within a different cultural context is essential for successful implementation. Additionally, research on the impact of play-based learning during early childhood on later student performance in Finland should be explored to assess whether similar approaches would yield comparable results in Saudi Arabia.

1.4.2 Adaptation Challenges of Finnish Strategies in Saudi Arabia:

Different challenges arise when attempting to shift from a traditional, teacher-centered education system to a student-centered approach, as

exemplified by the Finnish model. In Saudi Arabian classrooms, teaching practices are often socially structured within an authoritative framework, where students have limited involvement in decision-making (Mohammed, 2023).

There is limited research on how Saudi students and teachers can transition toward inquiry-based learning, collaboration, and independent thinking. Additionally, cultural differences—particularly in norms surrounding disciplinary authority and classroom dynamics—may present incompatibilities with Finland's educational model. Therefore, further studies are required to identify effective strategies for the gradual and culturally sensitive integration of these student-centered practices.

1.4.3 Impact of Teacher Training on Academic Performance:

Yet, there is a lack of research on how such training structures can be incorporated into Saudi Arabia's teacher development programs, especially considering that Finnish teachers are certified through rigorous training procedures, including mandatory master's degrees in education. Further research may be needed to assess whether requiring doctoral degrees in education and continuous professional development for teachers is feasible and whether it would have a positive impact (Alamrani et al., 2024).

Additionally, research should explore the impact of mentorship programs, peer-to-peer learning, and professional learning communities in enhancing teacher skills. Finally, there is a need for further investigation into the role of teacher autonomy in improving instructional methods, as Finnish teachers enjoy considerable independence in developing lesson plans, whereas Saudi teachers follow a prescribed curriculum.

1.4.4 Effect of Reducing Standardized Testing on Student Outcomes:

Finland places minimal reliance on standardized exams, as this reduces student stress and fosters greater engagement. However, there is

limited research on how Saudi students would be affected if this approach were implemented, as academic progression and university admission in Saudi Arabia primarily depend on high-stakes testing. Future research is needed to explore alternative assessment methods, particularly in project-based learning and formative evaluation, to determine whether these approaches could better prepare Saudi students for higher education and the labor market (Al-Atiwi, 2024).

Additionally, standardized tests are deeply ingrained in Saudi Arabia's educational culture, and the potential disruptions this may cause in parental perceptions, school rankings, and student motivation should also be explored.

1.4.5 Technological Integration in Saudi Classrooms Based on Finnish Practices:

Finland has successfully implemented digital tools and learning platforms; however, whether the technological infrastructure varies between regions in Saudi Arabia remains an important consideration. Therefore, there is a need for research focused on optimizing digital platforms for Saudi middle schools to ensure equal access to technology-enhanced learning for all students, whether in urban or rural areas. Further studies should also explore methods for training teachers to effectively use technology, ensuring that personalized learning experiences lead to increased student engagement (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020).

Research should also focus on the impact of blended learning models, virtual classrooms, and AI-driven educational tools on student achievement and teacher effectiveness. Moreover, investment in digital education and the role of government policies in supporting sustainable implementation should be thoroughly examined.

In Finland, the use of technology is well-balanced, ensuring that face-to-face interaction is not overlooked. In contrast, in Saudi Arabia, due to

recent global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an emerging need to research the optimal balance between digital and traditional learning methodologies (Bata, 2023). This study could compare best practices in Saudi education, examining the effectiveness of fully digital, blended, and traditional classroom settings.

2.0 Literature Review:

2.1 Teacher Training and Professional Development:

One of the key pillars of Finland's highly successful education system is teacher training. Finnish teachers undergo rigorous academic and pedagogical preparation that culminates in a master's degree in education (Puustinen et al., 2022). This is because teachers with subject matter expertise and strong pedagogical skills are better equipped to provide high-quality instruction in classrooms. Well-trained teachers have a significant impact on student achievement, as studies have shown that they contribute to creating more engaging, inclusive, and effective learning environments (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Finland's teacher preparation programs also emphasize classroom experience, research-based teaching methods, and ongoing professional development (Handolin-Kiilo & Aksela, 2015). In addition, Finnish teachers are granted considerable autonomy in designing curricula and instructional methods, which fosters creativity and enables them to adapt to changing educational realities.

Over the years, there has been considerable improvement in the training of teachers in Saudi Arabia, but significant gaps still remain. Many Saudi teachers continue to lack opportunities for structured and continuous professional development (Mohammed, 2023), making it difficult for them to adopt innovative, student-centered teaching strategies. Currently, there are insufficient opportunities for the direct application of theoretical knowledge in the classroom within Saudi Arabia's teacher training programs. Finland's model of extensive teacher training and professional

development should be adapted to the Saudi context, as it would improve the effectiveness of Saudi educators and enhance student learning outcomes. Mentorship programs, meaningful professional development opportunities, and practical training components have the potential to enable Saudi Arabia to build a more capable teaching workforce, thereby improving academic performance and student engagement.

2.2 Student-Centered Learning and Curriculum Flexibility:

Finland's educational approach is student-centered, with student learning as a cornerstone. The Finnish system promotes students' autonomy, independent learning, problem-solving skills, and increases engagement and motivation (Alamrani et al., 2024). Research findings indicate that allowing students to have greater control over the learning process enhances both their academic performance and personal development. In Finnish classrooms, project- and inquiry-based learning are deeply embedded, ensuring that theoretical knowledge is applied to real-life situations in an engaging and active manner to involve students in the learning process.

A strict, teacher-centered curriculum used to dominate in Saudi Arabia, where memorization rather than critical thinking has traditionally been encouraged (Al-Atiwi, 2024). A study by Alnahdi et al. (2019) points out that introducing project-based and inquiry-based learning to Saudi students could equip them with 21st-century skills. Flexible learning environments and more interactive, discussion-based activities could be incorporated into the Finnish approach, which encourages student agency in learning decisions and could be applied in Saudi schools. Some argue that a flexible curriculum could be a solution for Saudi Arabia's middle schools, enabling students to explore their desired subjects, engage more actively, and achieve better academic outcomes.

2.3 Reducing Reliance on Standardized Testing:

Consequently, Finland has removed standardized exams from its education system and instead turned to continuous assessments and teacher evaluations to measure student achievement (Chaloun, 2023). Research indicates that this approach reduces student anxiety, enhances creativity, and deepens understanding of topics (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). Finnish educators assess students through portfolio assessments, project-based learning evaluations, and oral presentations, focusing on comprehension and real-life application rather than rote memorization. In contrast, Saudi Arabia's education system is heavily reliant on standardized exams, which can cause stress and lead students to become over-dependent on rote memorization instead of actual learning (Bata, 2023). It is argued that a partial transition toward Finland's model, which combines project-based assessments and formative evaluations, could enhance a more balanced and effective evaluation system. Future studies should explore the best way to integrate Finland's evaluation methods with Saudi Arabia's existing system, ensuring accountability while maintaining academic rigor.

2.4 Integration of Technology in Education:

In Finland, student engagement and learning outcomes are driven by technology. According to studies, Finland emphasizes smart classrooms, digital learning platforms, and AI-driven educational tools to enhance the learning experience (Muhonen et al., 2020). As the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) describes, Finland strategically uses educational technology to facilitate personalized learning. Digital literacy is a core subject in Finnish schools, ensuring that students develop the skills needed for the modern workforce.

Working closely with foreign educational technology, which had already made significant progress in Saudi Arabia, enabled the Kingdom to achieve

notable advancements in educational technology, particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Almutairi, 2015). However, there are still disparities in digital access between urban and rural areas. Further research is needed to assess how Finland's approach to equitable technology integration can be adapted to Saudi Arabia's educational landscape. Additionally, teachers in Saudi classrooms, who are responsible for integrating educational technology, must receive proper training to use digital tools effectively.

2.5 Holistic Education and Extracurricular Activities:

Finland's education model includes extracurricular activities, sports, and the arts to provide a well-rounded education for students. Robertson & Al-Zahrani (2012) suggest that a holistic approach positively impacts student well-being, social skills, and academic performance. Finnish schools emphasize physical education, recognizing its importance in balancing studies with physical activity, music, and creative arts, which contribute to students' overall growth and mental well-being.

In Saudi Arabia, extracurricular activities have traditionally been overlooked in favor of core academic subjects. Research indicates that Saudi middle school students could benefit from incorporating sports, music, and creative arts into their curriculum (Khalil & Karim, 2016). Implementing a holistic education model similar to Finland's could improve Saudi students' academic performance, motivation, and overall development. To create a more balanced educational experience, encouraging after-school programs and resources for artistic and sports development should be considered. If Saudi policymakers selectively learn from Finland's educational system and adapt its best practices to the cultural and educational context of Saudi Arabia, they could develop a student-centered, flexible, and holistic approach. This would likely lead to higher academic excellence and long-term success compared to the current system.

3.0 Methodology:

3.1 Research Design and Approach:

The findings from this study employed a qualitative research methodology to examine Finland's educational strategies and assess their applicability in Saudi Arabia. A comparative approach was used to evaluate the effectiveness of Finland's education system and its potential adaptation within Saudi middle schools (Robertson & Al-Zahrani, 2012). This approach allows for the academic investigation of various pedagogical methods, curriculum frameworks, assessment practices, and policy structures. The study adopted a case study approach to analyze real-life applications of Finnish strategies and, more broadly, to understand their impact on educational outcomes. The comparative case study method enables an evaluation of key policies and educational reforms that have contributed to Finland's success, while also assessing their feasibility within the socio-political and academic context of Saudi Arabia (Khalil & Karim, 2016). To gather qualitative data such as educator experiences and the success of policies, the study examined preliminary government policies, teacher training programs, and student involvement strategies.

3.2 Data Collection Process:

The data sources used in this study are secondary, drawing from academic journals, government reports, policy documents, and case studies. First, there is extensive literature available on Finland's education system and its outcomes, which has been reviewed in peer-reviewed scholarly articles. Gaps and areas for improvement in Saudi Arabia's educational system are identified through an analysis of reports from the Saudi Ministry of Education (Almutairi, 2015). Additionally, comparative student performance is evaluated through global education rankings and reports from organizations such as the OECD and UNESCO.

Insights into structural and policy differences are derived from policy documents and white papers published by the education departments of both Finland and Saudi Arabia. Student learning trends are examined through international assessments such as the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment). Furthermore, content analysis of expert interviews, educator opinion pieces, and professional forums provides a comprehensive perspective on potential challenges and solutions.

3.3 Data Synthesis Methodology:

Thematic analysis is employed to synthesize the collected data, which is then categorized into key themes such as teacher training, student-centered learning, assessment reforms, technology integration, and holistic education. Differences and commonalities between the Finnish and Saudi education systems are identified through comparison (Muhonen et al., 2020). This analysis explores the trends and patterns to assess the applicability of adopting Finnish strategies in Saudi Arabia. The structured synthesis ensures that the findings align with the research objectives and provide actionable policy recommendations.

To enhance validity, data from multiple sources, including journal articles, policy documents, and expert commentaries, are used. This approach ensures data consistency across most datasets, which enhances the reliability of the study's findings (Almutairi, 2015). Furthermore, the study includes a chronologically controlled analysis of Finnish education reforms to assess their long-term effectiveness and provide guidance for similar educational reforms in Saudi Arabia.

3.4 Rationale for Methodology Selection:

Finland's education system in Saudi Arabia was examined qualitatively, providing a comprehensive view of the two systems. This qualitative approach offers an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of policies, curriculum flexibility, and new pedagogical strategies, in contrast to

quantitative studies. It also helps explore cultural and institutional factors that may influence the implementation of Finnish educational practices in Saudi Arabia in a contextual manner (Almutairi, 2015). The study utilizes thematic and comparative analysis to provide a nuanced evaluation of potential education reforms. Specifically, the qualitative approach is valuable for capturing non-quantifiable elements, such as teachers' experiences, students' engagement, and institutional reception of policy changes. Additionally, given the lack of quantitative data regarding the implementation of Finnish educational strategies in Saudi Arabia, this approach offers a more flexible and interpretive framework for drawing meaningful conclusions.

3.5 Ethical Considerations and Research Integrity:

Also, all the sources referenced in this study are cited appropriately in footnotes to ensure academic integrity and avoid plagiarism. In terms of ethical guidelines for secondary data analysis, the study strictly adheres to these principles. All data used for the study is collected from public, reputable, and appropriate sources. Since the study does not require primary data collection, participant consent and confidentiality concerns are greatly reduced (Almutairi, 2015). Maintaining objectivity when interpreting policy documents, research findings, and other written materials is a critical ethical consideration to prevent misrepresentation of either education system. To ensure this, sources are thoroughly reviewed, and conclusions are drawn with caution. Furthermore, since there is no direct interaction with students or educators, the study avoids ethical concerns related to informed consent and personal data privacy.

The study also complies with international standards of research ethics and is transparent about how data was sourced and cited (Khalil & Karim, 2016). This transparency enhances the credibility of the findings and contributes to the ethical and academic validity of the recommendations.

3.6 Limitations of the study:

Among the most significant limitations of this study is its reliance on secondary data, which may not capture the most recent developments in educational policy. Additionally, cultural, economic, and social variations between Finland and Saudi Arabia may impact the applicability of Finnish strategies in the Saudi context. Another limitation is that certain reforms may be infeasible due to existing educational policies and structures in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the study lacks firsthand accounts of Saudi teachers' and students' perspectives on classroom dynamics or implementation challenges (Bata, 2023). Since the research does not involve direct interviews, some cultural and logistical nuances may not be fully addressed. To better understand practical implementation strategies, future studies should incorporate qualitative fieldwork with educators, policymakers, and students.

Schooling in Finland is globally renowned for its success, but that success partly depends on Finland's unique socio-political circumstances, which may not be easily replicated in Saudi Arabia. Finnish education methods might encounter challenges related to economic constraints, teacher availability, and curriculum alignment in the Saudi context (Khalil & Karim, 2016). Nevertheless, this research offers realistic and practical recommendations for enhancing Saudi Arabia's middle school education system, without necessarily recommending the wholesale adoption of the identified adaptable components. Instead, the focus is on selectively integrating elements that can be adapted to fit the specific needs and conditions of Saudi education.

4.0 Results:

The findings of this study highlight the differences and similarities between Finland's education system and that of Saudi Arabia, particularly in areas such as teacher training, student-centered learning, standardized

testing, technological integration, and holistic education. The results are presented through thematic analysis, taking into account the feasibility of the study and the potential challenges that could arise when adapting Finnish strategies in Saudi middle schools.

4.1 Teacher Training and Professional Development:

This study demonstrates that Finland's exceptional pedagogical success is largely attributed to its rigorous teacher training programs. Finnish teachers are required to complete mandatory master's level education, ensuring they are equipped to apply research-based teaching strategies and foster critical thinking in their students. In contrast, while teacher training in Saudi Arabia has made progress, it still lacks continuous professional development and flexibility in the curriculum. The findings suggest that integrating mentorship programs and long-term professional learning communities, similar to those in Finland, could significantly enhance the effectiveness of teachers in Saudi Arabia (Robertson & Al-Zahrani, 2012). Additionally, the study indicates that teachers should be granted more freedom in curriculum development, as is done in Finland. In Saudi Arabia, the rigid curriculum structure restricts teachers' creativity. A structured yet flexible approach to teacher training in Saudi Arabia is crucial to creating a more engaging and dynamic classroom environment.

The research emphasizes the need for experiential learning in teacher training programs. For example, Finnish educators spend a significant amount of time in classrooms during their training, which allows them to gain hands-on experience and practical knowledge. To help new teachers in Saudi Arabia gain confidence and practical skills before they independently manage classrooms, two main strategies could be implemented (Tayan, 2017). First, mentorship programs could pair new teachers with experienced educators to guide them in classroom management and instructional practices. Second, incorporating structured

internships or teaching practicums would provide an opportunity for new teachers to apply theoretical knowledge in a real-world teaching environment. Additionally, lifelong learning programs, refresher courses, and cross-cultural exchange programs could be introduced to keep teachers informed about the latest pedagogical innovations and ensure they continue developing their skills throughout their careers.

4.2 Student-Centered Learning and Curriculum Flexibility:

A key result of this study is the finding that Finland's student-centered learning approach is highly effective. Finnish students' autonomy in their learning process fosters higher engagement and better academic outcomes. This stands in contrast to Saudi Arabia's traditionally teacher-centered education system, where students are less involved in their learning process (Mohammed, 2023). The findings suggest that gradually introducing project-based and inquiry-driven curricula in Saudi middle schools would facilitate the transition toward a more engaging and critical-thinking-oriented education system.

Additionally, the Finnish curriculum is designed to be flexible, allowing students to explore subjects they are interested in, which promotes a deeper understanding of the material. In contrast, Saudi Arabia's education system is more rigid, with traditional curricula offering limited opportunities for students to pursue their individual interests. By incorporating the flexibility to customize the curriculum, Saudi educators could create a more engaging and effective educational environment that better aligns with students' interests and future career aspirations.

Additionally, classroom interaction plays a crucial role in fostering student engagement. In Finnish classrooms, dialogue, discussions, and active student participation are strongly encouraged, creating a dynamic and engaging learning environment. In contrast, Saudi classrooms tend to follow a more lecture-based approach (Almutairi, 2015). To improve student

involvement and enhance critical thinking skills, Saudi Arabia's education system could benefit from incorporating group activities, discussions, and collaborative projects, which would help students become more engaged in their learning process.

4.3 Standardized Testing and Assessment Approaches:

The results highlight that Finland's minimal reliance on test score reporting contributes to reduced student stress and encourages creativity. In Finland, assessments primarily focus on formative approaches such as portfolio evaluations and project-based learning. In contrast, Saudi Arabia's education system still heavily relies on rote memorization due to the frequent high-stakes standardized exams (Mann et al., 2020). The study's findings suggest that combining formative assessments with the current standardized testing system could create a more balanced evaluation approach, preserving academic rigor while also alleviating student stress.

In addition, assessment diversity plays a crucial role in student development. Unlike Saudi Arabia, where students are primarily assessed based on their performance in high-stakes exams, Finnish students are evaluated on their overall learning progress. The diversification of assessments—such as peer reviews, self-assessments, presentations, and case studies—could greatly benefit Saudi Arabia by providing a more practical and comprehensive understanding of students' capabilities. These alternative evaluation methods better reflect what students know and can apply, rather than their ability to memorize information (Tayan, 2017).

Furthermore, Finland's assessment system allows teachers to tailor evaluations to meet individual students' needs, thereby personalizing the learning experience. Saudi educators could adopt a similar approach, transitioning toward a competency-based evaluation framework that considers students' learning curves and progress over time. This would

allow for a more individualized, student-centered approach to assessment, improving learning outcomes and engagement.

4.4 Technological Integration in Education:

The analysis of technological implementation reveals Finland's strategic use of digital tools to promote personalized learning. The country's advanced infrastructure ensures access to technology across all regions. While progress has been made in integrating digital learning in Saudi Arabia, a significant disparity remains between urban and rural schools. According to the study, investing in teacher training for digital pedagogy and improving infrastructure in underserved areas could maximize the potential of technology in Saudi middle schools. A key finding is that Finnish teachers are well-trained in utilizing digital platforms, whereas many Saudi teachers lack sufficient training in educational technology (Chaloun, 2023). Structured digital training programs for Saudi educators could help them effectively use smart classrooms and online resources.

In this regard, blended learning models, which combine traditional classroom teaching with online components, could be integrated into Saudi Arabia's educational system, making it more technology-driven and engaging for students. This approach would not only improve access to digital tools but also enhance the overall educational experience, fostering greater student engagement and academic achievement.

In addition, Finland's digital education methodology embraces gamification and interactivity to keep students engaged. Incorporating similar strategies into e-learning, such as interactive e-modules and gamified coursework, presents an opportunity for Saudi Arabia (Khalil & Karim, 2016). This would make learning more enjoyable and attainable, particularly in subjects like mathematics, where visualization and interactive learning can significantly enhance understanding and engagement.

4.5 Holistic Education and Extracurricular Activities:

Although not the most emphasized aspect, Finland's focus on extracurricular activities, arts, and sports plays a crucial role in the overall development of its students. According to the study's results, Saudi Arabia's education system has traditionally not invested much in extracurriculars, with a stronger focus on core academic subjects (Nawafleh et al., 2012). The findings suggest that integrating holistic education programs, such as after-school activities in the arts and sports, could significantly increase student motivation and academic performance in Saudi schools. These activities contribute not only to physical and emotional well-being but also to fostering creativity, teamwork, and leadership skills, which can positively influence academic outcomes.

Finland also makes a conscious effort to promote a balanced school life, ensuring that students are not overwhelmed with excessive coursework. In contrast, Saudi students often experience academic burnout due to the heavy workload. If Saudi schools adopt policies that enhance extracurricular activities, it could create a more conducive environment for developing students' social skills, leadership qualities, and interests outside of academics (Almalky & Alwahbi, 2023). Furthermore, promoting life skills education—such as financial literacy, communication, and problem-solving—would better prepare students for real-life challenges. These aspects are effectively handled in Finland's curriculum, and incorporating similar adaptations could significantly benefit Saudi Arabia's educational system.

4.6 Challenges in Adopting Finnish Strategies:

However, according to the study, many challenges are associated with implementing Finnish strategies in Saudi Arabia. These challenges include cultural differences, constraints in teacher training, and the continued reliance on standardized testing. The findings suggest that for the sustainable integration of Finnish educational strategies, a gradual

adaptation approach is more feasible than direct implementation. Policy adjustments and professional development initiatives would be necessary for a successful transition (Al-Atiwi, 2024). Additionally, since Finland's educational reforms have developed over several years, Saudi Arabia would require considerable time to implement similar changes. It may also be difficult for educators and policymakers to overcome resistance to change. The mismatch between current instruction methods and the dynamic, student-centered approaches of Finland could undermine the immediate validity of these reforms. As such, pilot programs in selected schools could serve as testing grounds for Finnish educational strategies, which might otherwise struggle to gain political support.

5.0 Recommendations:

5.1 Enhancing Teacher Training and Professional Development:

Mandatory advanced degree programs for teachers, similar to Finland's master's-level teacher training, should be introduced to strengthen teaching and professional development within schools. Structured mentorship and continuous professional development programs are essential for improving instructional strategies (Bata, 2023). Providing teachers with greater autonomy in curriculum development will enable them to adapt teaching methods effectively to meet students' needs. Additionally, bridging the gap between theory and practice by increasing hands-on classroom experience in teacher training will further enhance and reinforce what is taught, especially in areas like Intercultural Communication. Both models rely on a high level of trust in teachers, who are viewed as highly trained professionals capable of making important educational decisions. This approach can benefit Saudi Arabia by providing rigorous training and continuous support for teachers (Chaloun, 2023). Furthermore, enhancing teacher development through mentorship programs, workshops, and innovative teaching techniques can significantly improve the teaching process. Ultimately, investing in teacher training will have a direct impact

on student learning outcomes and engagement, leading to a more dynamic and effective education system.

5.2 Adopting Student-Centered Learning Approaches:

Student autonomous learning should be gradually introduced into the Saudi curriculum by incorporating inquiry-based and project-based learning. This approach can significantly enhance student engagement through discussions, group projects, and active participation in the classroom. Additionally, flexible curriculum models should be developed, allowing students to explore subjects that interest them while still adhering to national educational standards. In Finland, students have more control over their learning process, which fosters independence and personalized learning. If Saudi Arabia can adopt similar strategies, such as open-ended assignments, real-world problem-solving exercises, and hands-on projects, it would offer students a chance to explore a variety of subjects in greater depth (Chaloun, 2023). Moreover, teachers will need more training in facilitating discussions rather than relying solely on lectures. This shift towards active learning will help Saudi students develop critical thinking skills and better prepare them for university and future careers.

5.3 Revising Standardized Testing and Assessment Methods:

Another crucial step is to revise the methods of standardized testing and assessment in Saudi Arabia. Moving away from an over-reliance on high-stakes exams and incorporating a mix of formative assessments, such as portfolio evaluations and peer reviews, will provide a more comprehensive measure of student progress. Instead of relying on single-test performance, the shift towards competency-based evaluation—assessing student learning over time—will better reflect their true understanding and capabilities (Nawafleh et al., 2012). Effective implementation of this approach can be ensured through training educators on alternative assessment strategies. Finland's assessment system, which

emphasizes continuous feedback rather than one-time evaluations, allows students to gain a deeper understanding of subjects (Al-Atiwi, 2024). A hybrid approach—combining formative assessments with structured exams—would enable Saudi Arabia to maintain academic rigor while reducing student stress. Project-based assessments and student-led presentations can more accurately gauge comprehension and the application of knowledge. This shift in assessment would create a more balanced and supportive learning environment, fostering both academic success and student well-being.

5.4 Strengthening Technological Integration in Education:

Technological integration in education must be strengthened to ensure equal access to learning opportunities, both in urban and rural areas. This can be achieved by implementing digital training programs that equip teachers with the skills necessary to effectively use educational technology. The education system should embrace blended learning models, combining traditional classroom instruction with digital resources and AI-driven educational tools (Nawafleh et al., 2012). Furthermore, incorporating gamification and interactive e-learning strategies can enhance student engagement and simplify the learning process.

Finland's education system effectively uses technology to support personalized learning experiences, with adaptive digital tools that cater to individual student needs. Saudi Arabia can adopt similar technologies, such as interactive whiteboards, online learning platforms, and virtual labs, to create more engaging and interactive learning environments. A strong investment in teacher training for digital education will ensure educators are equipped to use technology effectively, ultimately enriching the learning experience and supporting student success.

5.5 Promoting Holistic Education and Extracurricular Activities:

Promoting holistic education and extracurricular activities is crucial to supplementing the learning experience with a well-rounded approach. Extracurricular activities, including those in arts, sports, and life skills education, play a significant role in motivating students and fostering their development in various areas beyond academics. Introducing after-school programs, creative workshops, and sports can help students thrive academically while ensuring a balanced school life that reduces burnout and promotes physical and mental well-being.

In Finland, students engage in a wide range of extracurricular activities that support teamwork, leadership, and personal expression. Saudi Arabia could benefit from implementing similar programs that encourage students to explore their interests outside of academics. Allocating time for physical education, arts, and cultural activities will enable students to develop cognitively, emotionally, and socially.

Providing opportunities for students to participate in clubs, music, and sports will allow them to build essential social skills and foster a sense of community within schools. Such initiatives are essential to creating a supportive, motivating, and holistic educational environment for all students.

6.0 Conclusion:

This study highlights that while Finland's education model provides an inspiring framework for educational reform, it must be carefully adapted for direct implementation in Saudi Arabia. Finland's success in education is largely due to key factors such as teacher autonomy, student-centered learning, flexible assessments, and effective integration of technology. However, for these practices to be effective in the Saudi context, they must be selectively tailored to the unique cultural, societal, and educational environment of Saudi Arabia.

A key takeaway is the need to focus on improving the teacher training system to equip educators with stronger pedagogical skills and greater

autonomy in the classroom. This would foster creativity and critical thinking in both teachers and students. In addition, reducing the over-reliance on standardized testing and introducing alternative assessment models, such as formative assessments and project-based evaluations, will significantly enhance the student learning experience.

Furthermore, integrating digital tools and technologies into the education system is essential to improving student engagement and educational delivery. These tools should be used strategically to support personalized learning and create interactive, engaging learning environments.

Finally, while adopting Finland's best practices, it is crucial for Saudi Arabia to account for cultural and systemic differences to ensure that reforms are sustainable and relevant. By implementing pilot programs, continuous professional development, and fostering curriculum flexibility, Saudi Arabia can gradually transform its education system. These reforms will build an academically robust framework that prepares students for the challenges of the 21st-century workforce, ultimately contributing to a more progressive, balanced, and student-centered educational experience.

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