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ORGANIZING READING LESSONS IN PRIMARY GRADES USING THE FINNISH CURRICULUM

Amonova Amina Shavkatovna

Graduate student of Asian International University

Abstract: This article explores the process of organizing reading lessons in the primary grades using the Finnish curriculum. Finland's education system has garnered international acclaim for its high-quality teaching, student-centered approach, and emphasis on holistic development. In the context of primary education, reading instruction is a foundational skill that requires a structured yet flexible approach. The Finnish curriculum emphasizes individualized learning, the importance of early literacy skills, and the integration of diverse pedagogical strategies. This article examines the key principles and methods employed in Finnish primary classrooms to teach reading, highlighting the role of early intervention, phonics, reading comprehension, and the integration of technology. The discussion also touches upon the teacher's role as a facilitator, the collaborative learning environment, and the assessment strategies used to monitor progress. By understanding the Finnish model of reading instruction, educators worldwide can gain insights into best practices for fostering a love of reading and ensuring literacy development in the early grades.

Introduction:

Reading is a cornerstone of primary education, serving as the foundation for future academic success and personal development. The ability to read is not only crucial for understanding written texts but also for fostering cognitive skills, creativity, and a lifelong love of learning. In Finland, one of the world's top-performing countries in education, reading instruction is approached with a balanced and evidence-based framework that combines theoretical knowledge with practical strategies.

The Finnish curriculum, renowned for its focus on equity, student well-being, and teacher professionalism, offers valuable insights into effective reading instruction. The curriculum emphasizes early literacy development and the importance of fostering strong reading skills from the outset. Primary education in Finland aims to develop reading abilities in a way that is tailored to the needs of each student, ensuring that no child is left behind. This article explores how reading lessons are organized in the Finnish primary grades, considering the pedagogical principles, strategies, and tools that contribute to the success of Finnish literacy programs.

Main Body: Key Principles of the Finnish Curriculum for Reading Instruction

The Finnish curriculum for primary education is grounded in the principles of inclusivity, individualization, and holistic development. One of the central goals is to support all students in becoming confident, competent readers. The curriculum does not rely on a one-size-fits-all approach but rather encourages flexibility, allowing teachers to



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adapt instruction based on the unique needs of each student. This individualized approach is essential in addressing the varying rates at which children develop reading skills.

Furthermore, the Finnish system prioritizes the integration of reading with other subject areas, ensuring that literacy is not confined to isolated reading lessons but is part of a broader educational experience. Reading is seen as an interactive process that develops through engagement with various types of texts, including books, digital media, and other materials. Teachers are encouraged to create a rich language environment in which children are exposed to a wide range of texts from an early age.

Early Intervention and Phonics Instruction

The Finnish approach to reading instruction places a strong emphasis on early intervention. Teachers assess children's language skills at an early age to identify those who may need additional support in developing their reading abilities. Finland's commitment to early intervention ensures that struggling readers receive timely assistance, which is vital for preventing long-term literacy challenges.

Phonics instruction plays a critical role in Finland's early reading lessons. Finnish children are taught the relationship between sounds (phonemes) and letters (graphemes) from an early age, allowing them to decode words efficiently. Phonics is integrated with other language activities, such as listening, speaking, and writing, to support a comprehensive understanding of language structure. Teachers use playful and engaging activities, such as rhyming games and sound recognition exercises, to make learning phonics enjoyable and interactive.

Reading Comprehension and Fluency

As children progress in their reading development, the focus shifts toward building reading comprehension and fluency. In Finnish primary schools, reading lessons go beyond decoding words to include an emphasis on understanding texts and developing critical thinking skills. Teachers engage students in discussions about the meaning of the text, ask questions to stimulate comprehension, and encourage students to make connections between the story and their own experiences.

Finnish educators also recognize the importance of fostering reading fluency, which is the ability to read smoothly and with expression. Fluency is developed through repeated practice with texts that are appropriate for the student's level. Teachers often use paired reading, where students take turns reading aloud with a partner, allowing for peer support and fostering a collaborative learning environment.

Teacher's Role and Pedagogical Approaches

Finnish teachers are central to the success of reading instruction. Teachers in Finland are highly trained professionals, often with a master's degree in education, which equips them with a deep understanding of pedagogy and child development. They are seen as facilitators of learning rather than traditional instructors, with a focus on creating a supportive and nurturing learning environment. Teachers are encouraged to use a variety of teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of their students.



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Finnish teachers employ a student-centered approach, where learning is tailored to the individual needs and interests of each child. This is especially evident in reading lessons, where teachers use diverse materials and activities to engage students with different learning styles. For example, some children may benefit from more hands-on activities, such as using tactile materials or interactive digital tools, while others may thrive with more traditional paper-and-pencil tasks.

In addition to using a range of materials, Finnish teachers incorporate a variety of instructional strategies, such as differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and cooperative learning. This flexibility allows for more personalized learning experiences, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed in developing their reading skills.

Integration of Technology in Reading Lessons

In recent years, Finland has embraced technology as a tool to enhance reading instruction. Digital tools, such as educational apps, e-books, and interactive games, are increasingly used to support reading development. These tools offer personalized learning experiences and can be especially useful for students who need additional practice or support.

Technology is also used to promote a love of reading. For example, Finnish primary schools may use digital platforms to introduce students to a wide range of reading materials, from traditional books to interactive multimedia content. Teachers may encourage students to explore these materials on their own, fostering independent reading habits and curiosity.

Assessment and Progress Monitoring

The Finnish education system places a strong emphasis on formative assessment, which helps to monitor student progress without the pressure of high-stakes testing. Teachers regularly assess students' reading abilities through informal methods such as observation, one-on-one interactions, and student self-reflections. This approach allows teachers to identify any challenges early on and provide targeted support to students who may be struggling.

The assessment process is designed to be supportive rather than punitive. Teachers use the information gathered from assessments to adjust their teaching methods and ensure that students receive the appropriate level of challenge. This approach encourages a growth mindset, where students are motivated to improve their skills through effort and practice rather than fearing failure.

Conclusion:

Organizing reading lessons in the primary grades using the Finnish curriculum offers valuable insights into creating an effective and inclusive literacy program. The Finnish approach emphasizes early intervention, phonics instruction, comprehension, fluency, and the use of diverse teaching methods, all within a supportive and flexible learning environment. By focusing on individualized instruction and providing a wide range of learning materials, Finnish teachers are able to meet the needs of all students, ensuring that each child has the opportunity to develop strong reading skills. Moreover, the



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integration of technology, along with a focus on formative assessment, allows for personalized learning experiences that cater to the unique abilities of each child. As a result, Finnish primary education continues to set a global standard for literacy development, offering valuable lessons for educators worldwide. By embracing the principles of the Finnish curriculum, educators can create reading lessons that foster a love of reading, encourage critical thinking, and set the foundation for lifelong learning.

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