

Translating Finnish Education to Indonesia: Barriers and Adaptation Strategies in High Schools

Ahmad Hadi Pranoto¹, Ikhrom², Raharjo³, Mahfud Junaedi⁴, Faiz Abdul Majid Assharofi⁵

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo, Semarang, Indonesia; ahmadhadi2051@gmail.com

² Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo, Semarang, Indonesia; ikhrom@walisongo.ac.id

³ Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo, Semarang, Indonesia; raharjo@walisongo.ac.id

⁴ Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo, Semarang, Indonesia; mahfudjunaedi@walisongo.ac.id

⁵ Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo, Semarang, Indonesia; faizshaarofy@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The Finnish education model is widely recognized for its holistic, flexible, and student-centered approach. However, its implementation in other contexts, such as Indonesia, presents significant structural and cultural challenges. This study explores how secondary school teachers in Indonesia understand Finnish educational principles, the obstacles they face in adopting them, and the strategies they employ for contextual adaptation. A qualitative phenomenological design was used to capture teachers' lived experiences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis at three secondary schools in Central Java, representing diverse institutional and socio-cultural contexts. Thematic analysis was conducted through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The study identified three major barriers to adaptation: institutional rigidity, incompatibility with the prevailing learning culture, and limitations in educational infrastructure. Teachers demonstrated varying levels of understanding of Finnish principles, influenced by their training and school environment. Adaptation strategies included implementing interest-based projects, promoting flexible learning methods, and fostering more humanistic teacher-student relationships. The findings suggest that adapting Finnish educational values in Indonesia is not a matter of replication but requires contextual translation. Successful implementation depends on sustained teacher professional development, culturally responsive curriculum design, and policy support that enables flexibility while addressing local constraints. Finnish educational principles can inspire meaningful innovation in Indonesian schools when adapted thoughtfully. Building a supportive ecosystem through training, policy, and cultural sensitivity is key to bridging global models with local realities.

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Corresponding Author:

Ahmad Hadi Pranoto

Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo, Semarang, Indonesia; ahmadhadi2051@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The Finnish model of education, often cited for its holistic, equitable, and student-centered design, presents its own challenges when applied to diverse socio-cultural contexts. In Indonesia, efforts to integrate these values face challenges at the pedagogical, systemic, and cultural levels. This study examines how secondary school teachers perceive and respond to these challenges, as well as how they develop effective adaptation strategies. The Finnish education system is often considered one of the best models in the world due to its curriculum flexibility, teacher autonomy, as well as a skill-based learning approach without the pressure of standardized exams (Hatip, A., & Setiawan, 2022; Sahlberg, 2014). Meanwhile, Indonesia's education system still relies heavily on exam-based evaluations, a rigid curriculum, and pedagogical approaches that are not yet fully humanistic and contextual (Muryanti & Herman, 2021). Infrastructure inequalities, differences in teacher quality, and gaps in access to education between urban and rural areas are real obstacles in the process of adopting foreign systems such as Finland (Sussanti & Reza, 2022).

Other problems include the lack of ongoing professional training for teachers, as well as the lack of community involvement in education. Unlike Finland, which requires postgraduate training for teachers, Indonesia still faces limitations in professional development (Risfina, Amirul Haqi, Fitri Oviyanti, & Maryamah, 2023). Indonesia's very diverse social and cultural factors add complexity in adapting the foreign education system (Hasibuan, Wulan, Simatupang, Rudini, & Ani, 2023), so it is important to make adjustments to these values to remain relevant locally (Adha, Gordisona, Ulfatin, & Supriyanto, 2019).

Previous research has identified several key aspects of the Finnish education system, such as a high level of trust in the professionalism of teachers, a flexible curriculum, and a collaborative approach that emphasizes student well-being (Ince, 2024; OECD, 2021; Sahlberg, 2018). Finnish education's long history emphasizes equality and pedagogical reflection (Simola, 2015), making it interesting as a reference in education reform. In Indonesia, the Independent Curriculum program is one of the efforts to adapt these values, but its implementation faces obstacles at the level of teacher readiness and school culture (Hidayat, 2024). Gistituati (2022) shows the structural and philosophical challenges faced when trying to adapt Finnish approaches to the Indonesian context.

Various studies have grouped these adaptation challenges into three aspects: differences in philosophy and learning approaches (Adha et al., 2019; Berty Yustiani, 2024; Gistituati, 2022), quality and professionalism of teachers (Agustyaningrum & Himmi, 2022; Fatkhul Ibn Prayoga, Nisaul Masrurroh, 2024), as well as infrastructure gaps and access to education (Agustyaningrum & Himmi, 2022; Hasibuan et al., 2023; Sumarni, 2024).

Although there have been a number of studies that have addressed the common challenges of adopting Finnish educational values in Indonesia, most of them are still theoretical or discuss comparative curricula in a macro manner. These studies have not discussed in detail the empirical experience of teachers in the adaptation process at the classroom practice level. In fact, teachers are key actors in the successful implementation of foreign educational values into the national system (Niemi, 2015; Shamsuddinova & Nisa, 2021).

Furthermore, microstudies of teachers' strategies and reflections in dealing with differences in educational values are still very limited, especially at the secondary school level. Thus, there is an urgent need to understand the challenges and adaptations carried out by teachers directly in the field.

This research aims to strengthen and deepen previous findings through a qualitative approach that directly explores the understanding, challenges, and strategies developed by secondary school teachers in Indonesia in adapting Finnish educational values. The focus on the secondary school level was chosen because this level has its own complexity, both in terms of curriculum demands, student dynamics, and community expectations. Based on these backgrounds and gaps, this study is designed to answer the following questions: (1) How do high school teachers in Indonesia understand the education system implemented in Finland? (2) What are some of the obstacles faced by high school

teachers in the Finnish education system in their school environment? (3) What are the strategies used by high school teachers in adapting the Finnish education system into learning practices in Indonesia?

This research is essential because it makes an empirical contribution to the discourse on educational adaptation across cultures. By focusing on the experiences of secondary school teachers, this study is expected to provide a more contextual and applicative insight into how Finnish educational values can be realistically translated into the Indonesian context. Furthermore, the findings of this study can be considered in national education policy-making and the design of more contextual teacher training.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design and Justification

This study uses a qualitative approach with a field study method (*field research*), which allows researchers to explore in depth the teacher's experiences and perspectives in a real-world context (Creswell, 2014). This method was chosen to contextually reveal the obstacles and adaptation strategies carried out by secondary school teachers in implementing Finnish education into the Indonesian education system. The qualitative approach is considered relevant because the focus of this research is on the meaning and interpretation given by the subjects to the educational practices they experience (Moleong, 2017). This research is designed as a phenomenological exploration to explore the subjective experiences of teachers in different institutional contexts. This research highlights the obstacles faced in implementing Finnish education into the Indonesian education system, especially at the high school level. The Finnish education system is known for its holistic approach, teacher autonomy, curriculum flexibility, and emphasis on student well-being (Sahlberg, 2014). However, in the Indonesian context, the application of these values faces a number of obstacles such as cultural differences, unpreparedness of educational infrastructure, limited human resources, and lack of appropriate policy support (Gistituati, 2022; Kurnia, 2023). Therefore, the focus of this research is to identify and analyze these barriers and strategies through a direct approach to secondary school teachers as the main actors in the Finnish education adaptation process.

2.2 Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling techniques were used in the selection of locations and participants. Three schools were selected based on the diversity of contextual characteristics:

1. SMAN 1 Singorojo, as a representative of superior public schools in the Kendal district area with access to training and educational innovation;
2. SMKN 2 Semarang, as a vocational school that faces practical challenges in integrating a holistic approach;
3. MA Al-Fikri Semarang is a religion-based school in the Semarang area that tries to combine local values with modern educational principles.

The selection of these three schools aims to reflect the variation in the implementation of Finnish educational values at the secondary level, given the differences in resources, internal school policies, and socio-cultural backgrounds of students.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and non-participatory observations. The interviews were conducted for 21 days (March 16 – April 5, 2025), with a total of 6 teachers interviewed from the three schools. Each interview lasts between 30–60 minutes and is conducted in a semi-structured manner to maintain flexibility in the direction of the conversation while remaining focused on the core topic.

Observations were made of learning activities and classroom interactions to understand how values such as student autonomy, humanistic approaches, and non-standard evaluations are applied in practice. Documents such as lesson plans, teacher evaluation reports, and internal school policies are also collected as secondary data (Sugiyono, 2013).

2.4 Thematic Analysis

Data analysis is carried out using thematic analysis, which includes three main stages as stated by (Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman, 2014):

1. Open Coding: Initial coding is done manually on interview transcripts and field notes.
2. Axial Coding: The grouping of codes based on conceptual linkages into themes such as "structural challenges", "cultural resistance", and "innovative strategies".
3. Selective Coding: Extraction of key meanings and narratives based on dominant findings.

To strengthen the accuracy of data coding, data coding analysis is done manually according to the guidelines from the book (Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman, 2014) which is used in the process of organizing data and visualizing the linkages between themes.

2.5 Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

To maintain the validity and reliability of the data, the following strategies are implemented (Robert K. Yin, 2016):

1. Triangulation techniques: Comparison between data from interviews, observations, and documents to avoid a single bias.
2. Member checking: The researcher sends a summary of the results of the interpretation to the informant to confirm the correctness of the data and its meaning.
3. Researcher reflexivity: Reflective notes are made throughout the process of data collection and analysis to be aware of the potential biases of researchers in interpretation and conclusion-making.

With this structure, this study not only describes the obstacles and adaptation strategies of Finnish education in a descriptive manner but also provides an analytical framework that can be used in policy development and teacher training in Indonesia.

Table 1. Summary of the Data Collection Process

Research Aspects	Explanation
Approach	Qualitative, field research
Research Design	Phenomenological exploration
Research Focus	Identify barriers and teacher adaptation strategies in implementing Finnish education in secondary schools in Indonesia
Sampling Technique	<i>Purposive sampling</i>
Research Location	1. SMAN 1 Singorojo 2. SMKN 2 Semarang 3. MA Al-Fikri Semarang
Participants	6 teachers from 3 schools
Data Collection Time	March 16 – April 5, 2025
Data Collection Methods	1. In-depth interviews (semi-structured, 30–60 minutes/teacher) 2. Non-participatory observation 3. Documentation
Data Analysis Techniques	<i>Thematic analysis</i> berdasarkan Miles & Huberman (2014): 1. Open Coding 2. Axial Coding 3. Selective Coding
Data Validity	1. Triangulation techniques (interviews, observations, documents) 2. Member checking 3. Researcher reflexivity
Research Instruments	Interview guidelines, observation formats, school policy documents

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Understanding of the Finnish Education System by High School Teachers in Indonesia

The results of the interviews show that the understanding of high school teachers in Indonesia about the Finnish education system is varied, although they generally have a basic introduction to its main principles. Teachers from three different institutions, namely S1, S2, and S3, stated that they had heard and read about the Finnish education system. However, the level of depth of their understanding shows significant differences.

The S3 informant admitted that he gained knowledge about the Finnish system, especially from public media sources, such as news or social media. They know that Finland is known for its "exam-free" and "academically low" education system, but have not fully understood the curriculum structure or pedagogical approach used.

"I know from the media that education in Finland is fun, there are no exams, no rankings. But I don't know yet how the system is actually run in the classroom." – S3 (Interview 2025).

Meanwhile, S2 informants showed a more conceptual understanding. They say that the Finnish education system is very oriented towards developing students' interests and talents, with more emphasis on practical learning and the relevance of the material to real life. These teachers relate Finnish principles to opportunities for application in vocational education.

"Finland gives students the freedom to study according to their interests. This is important for those of us who teach in vocational schools. Practice is more dominant, it makes a lot of sense." – S2 (Interview 2025).

On the other hand, S1 informants related their understanding with experience in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. They see a wedge between the values of the Finnish system and the basic principles of the Independent Curriculum, such as curriculum flexibility and an emphasis on student-centered learning.

"I see that the Independent Curriculum has started to lead there. Learning is fun, flexible, and the teacher is more of a facilitator. It's similar to the Finnish system." – S1 (Interview 2025)

Some of the characteristics identified include completely free education, the absence of national exams, a flexible and decentralized curriculum, short but effective study hours, and an emphasis on student well-being and interests. In addition, they also realize that teachers in Finland must have a minimum master's qualification (S2) and that there is no ranking system between students, which creates a learning climate that is more collaborative than competitive.

Although there are similarities in the introduction of these basic aspects, each teacher has a different focus on interpretation of these values. S3 informants, for example, highlight more aspects of the learning atmosphere that are not stressful and provide emotional comfort for students. According to him, an approach that balances academic results and student happiness is very important to pay attention to in Indonesia, which still tends to prioritize the achievement of numbers.

"I see in Finland children can study calmly, not afraid of bad grades, no rankings. It makes them more focused on the process, not just the results." – S3 (Interview 2025).

Meanwhile, S2 informants showed a high appreciation for the orientation of the Finnish system which emphasizes practice and the development of individual student interests. According to him, this is relevant applied to vocational education, where the learning approach should be directly connected to students' interests and practical needs.

"Children learn according to passion, that's good. Especially if you can practice right away. In my place, such an approach can make children more active and engaged." – S2 (Interview 2025).

Meanwhile, S1 informants focus more on the role of teachers as facilitators and the use of technology in learning. He stated that the Finnish education system encourages teachers not only to teach but also to be companions and to sparks the students' thinking process.

"Teachers in Finland have at least S2 and have the freedom to develop their teaching methods. Technology is also used as an aid, not a burden. This is different from us, who are still burdened with administration." – S1 (Interview 2025).

All informants agreed that there is a fundamental difference between the Finnish education system and the education system in Indonesia. This difference does not only lie in the technical aspect, but also touches on the value and cultural aspects of education that are developing.

One of the most prominent things is the high academic pressure in Indonesia, especially due to the excessive emphasis on grades, exams, and ranking systems. Teachers said that in Finland, assessments are process-oriented and individual development, while in Indonesia, students' success is still largely determined by final exam results and position in class rankings.

"Here, parents and students are more afraid of bad grades than of not understanding the material. In Finland, children are judged by the process. It's much more humane." – S2 (Interview 2025).

In addition, teachers also revealed that the curriculum in Indonesia is still considered too dense and inflexible, which makes it difficult for teachers to adapt learning to the needs of students. High administrative burden is also the main complaint that hinders creativity and innovation in the teaching and learning process.

"We are too busy with reports. Wanting to teach creatively is difficult. In Finland, teachers are trusted, not overly supervised." – S1 (Interview 2025).

"There children are given space to choose, while here everything is uniform. Even though our children have their own uniqueness." – S3 (Interview 2025).

Thus, it can be concluded that although teachers have a good understanding of the basic values in the Finnish education system, the implementation of these values in Indonesia still faces great challenges, both structurally and culturally. Nevertheless, teachers' awareness and interest in the Finnish educational model show that there is potential to design a more humanistic, contextual, and adaptive approach to education going forward.

Table 2. Teacher's Statement On The Finnish Education System

Theme	Informan S3	Informan S2	Informan S1
System Understanding	Limited by the media	Enough to know from seminars/readings	Integrated into the Independent Curriculum
Known Characteristics	Free education, no UN, short study time	Focus on interests and talents, real practice	Flexible learning, teacher facilitator role, advanced technology
Differences with Indonesia	A system without academic stress	Study without standardized exams	Teachers must be S2, learning is still teacher-centered

These findings indicate that, although teachers initially have a positive understanding of Finnish educational values, the application and interpretation of these values in the Indonesian context still vary significantly. The depth of understanding is influenced not only by institutional background but also by individual experience, exposure to literature, training, and the orientation of local educational values. Awareness of the advantages of the Finnish system opens up space for critical reflection on the limitations of the national education system, and encourages the development of more contextually adapted learning practices.

3.2. Obstacles to the Implementation of the Finnish Education System in Indonesian High Schools

The implementation of Finnish educational principles in Indonesian secondary schools is faced with complex challenges. Based on the results of interviews with three informants S1, S2, and S3, obstacles were identified that included aspects of value relevance, context suitability, socio-cultural barriers, and structural readiness and educational resources. These findings suggest that the transposition of the education system from one country to another cannot be done directly, but requires profound adjustments involving an understanding of values, cultural change, and system readiness.

3.2.1 The Relevance of Finnish Values in the Indonesian Context

The three informants showed mixed responses to the relevance of Finnish educational principles in the national education system. S3 informants strongly support the Finnish approach, particularly in respect of the role of teachers and the creation of a non-stressful learning atmosphere. He believes that this is able to improve the quality of the relationship between teachers and students and humanize the learning process. On the contrary, S1 informants felt that the approach was too liberal for the cultural context and character of Indonesian students, and suggested the adoption of a more disciplined system. The S2 informant took center stage, stating that some Finnish values, such as interest-based learning and practice are adaptable, but not all principles are fully implemented.

"The Finnish system is good, but it is too loose to be applied directly here. We need an approach that balances freedom and responsibility." – S1 (Interview 2025).

3.2.2 Adaptable Aspects

Despite the challenges, the informant pointed out that some aspects of the Finnish education system have the potential to adapt. All three agreed that reducing academic pressure is an urgent need in the context of national education. The S2 informant revealed that the space for fun and contextual learning will open up opportunities for students to be more emotionally and intellectually active. S1 informants emphasized the importance of interest-based projects to build students' character and responsibility. Meanwhile, the S3 informant underlined the importance of the emotional connection between teachers and students as the foundation of effective education.

"I focus on an approach that makes students comfortable. If they feel accepted, they will grow more easily." – S3 (Interview 2025).

3.2.3 Structural and Cultural Barriers

The main obstacles faced in adopting Finnish values cover two dimensions: structural and socio-cultural. The three informants agreed that the evaluation system in Indonesia, based on national exams and rankings, is still very dominant and is the main obstacle to changing the approach to education. S3 and S2 informants said that the abolition of the system is still difficult for the public to accept because academic grades are seen as the only benchmark of success. The S1 informant highlighted that full freedom, as in the Finnish system, is not suitable because students do not have adequate capacity for responsibility.

"Without homework or exams, parents consider their children not to study. This is a big homework to change the mindset." – S2 (Interview 2025).

From the cultural side, the informants emphasized that the independent approach has not been cultured among students. The learning pattern is still dominated by one-way instruction, and this change cannot be made without changing habits from an early age. S1 informants also revealed that the influence of popular culture, such as TikTok and social media, creates attention disorders that make it difficult to implement deep learning.

"Children now get bored quickly, they want instant entertainment. It is difficult to get them to focus on learning with a too free approach." – S1 (Interview 2025).

3.2.4 Required Preparation

The three informants stated that the implementation of Finnish education principles requires strong systemic support. The S3 informant emphasized the need for teacher training evenly and continuously to increase understanding of progressive education methods. S2 suggests that an independent approach should be habituated from an early age, and character education should be strengthened to foster student responsibility. S1 highlights the importance of equitable distribution of facilities and technology training so that teachers in various regions can effectively implement modern learning methods.

"If facilities and training are not evenly distributed, only certain schools can innovate. Others are left behind." – S1 (Interview 2025).

The obstacles to implementing Finnish education in Indonesia do not only stem from differences in the system, but also from the perspective, policies, and readiness of the educational culture in Indonesia. Values such as interest-based learning, a humanistic approach to teacher-student relationships, and the reduction of academic pressure are considered to have great potential for improving the quality of education. However, this can only be realized if it is supported by continuous teacher training, societal paradigm changes, and adaptive and contextual education policies.

Table 3. Informant's Statement on Barriers to Finnish Education Implementation

Discussion Topics	Report	Statement
Relevance of the Finnish Principle	S3	Agreed, it is important to apply the principle of respect for teachers and an approach that does not pressure students.
	S2	Agree in part, some principles are suitable, but not all can be applied directly.
	S1	I disagree, the system is too free and it is more suitable to apply a disciplinary system like in Japan/China.
Adaptable Aspects	S3	Reduced academic stress, teacher well-being, and strong teacher-student relationships.
	S2	Practical learning and learning atmosphere are fun according to students' interests.
	S1	Projects based on students' interests and character development.
Aspects That Are Difficult to Implement	S3	The abolition of the UN and ranking system is difficult to accept due to the culture of high values.
	S2	Without a national exam, it is difficult for the public to accept.
	S1	Full freedom in students is not suitable because they are not ready for responsibility.
Social and Cultural Barriers	S3	The culture of chasing value and ranking hinders a collaborative, pressure-free approach.
	S2	People are not used to independent learning and lack of control.
	S1	Popular culture like TikTok distracts from students' focus and interest in learning.
Required Preparation	S3	Equitable teacher training and changes in the mindset of the community.
	S2	Improving human resources, learning literacy, and early learning habits.
	S1	Equitable distribution of facilities, technology training, and the role of parents in accompanying learning.

3.3. Implementation Strategy of the Finnish Education System in Indonesian Senior Secondary Schools

The results of in-depth interviews with three informants (S1, S2, and S3) revealed various adaptation strategies that are selective and contextual. The three teachers sought to translate Finnish educational values into local practices, taking into account the structural and social challenges faced.

3.3.1 Infrastructure Readiness and Learning Environment

Differences in the condition of school infrastructure greatly affect the implementation of the Finnish approach. The S3 informant admitted that as a relatively new school, some learning support facilities are not fully complete, although procurement efforts are ongoing. S2 said that his school was experiencing limitations due to the reduction in funding from the government, which had an impact on the inaction of updating project-based learning support facilities. Meanwhile, S1 reported that his school has been equipped with a very supportive infrastructure, including digital labs and artificial intelligence (AI)-based classrooms. The facility facilitates experimentation with student autonomy approaches and alternative evaluations.

"We have become a driving school. There are many spaces that students can use to explore their own ideas. But still, the big class is sometimes a challenge." – S1 (Interview 2025).

3.3.2 Teacher Competence and Training

Finnish education value implementation strategies also rely heavily on teachers' competencies and their participation in training. S3 said that most teachers in her school are not ready to implement project-based learning or non-exam approaches, especially due to the lack of training provided.

"There are still many teachers who are not used to the concept of learning without exams. We need more concrete and applicable training." – S3 (Interview 2025).

The S2 informant reported that some teachers have implemented the project approach through the Independent Curriculum, but the inequality of ability is still felt because not all teachers have the same readiness. S1 describes a different situation, where most teachers have undergone intensive training and even become facilitators in the driving school development program.

"We are used to participating in training. Some of our teachers are national mentors. So, the application of Finnish values such as flexible learning is familiar." – S1 (Interview 2025).

3.3.3 Policy Support and Implementation

Although the Independent Curriculum normatively provides flexibility for teachers to innovate, its implementation is still largely determined by individual initiative. The three informants realized that this policy provides room for the exploration of methods such as project-based learning and differentiation of learning.

S3 informants view curriculum flexibility as both an opportunity and a challenge, as it is not accompanied by uniform operational direction. The S2 informant stated that freedom in learning needs to be balanced with internal standards so that students still have a framework. Meanwhile, S1 stated that although policies are supportive, systemic supervision and support are necessary to ensure that innovation is not sporadic.

"The current curriculum actually provides space, but if there is no mentoring and reflection, teachers can be confused on their own." – S2 (Interview 2025).

3.3.4 Class Ratio and School Culture Challenges

The implementation of student-centered learning – as a core of the Finnish approach – also faces challenges in terms of learning culture and classroom structure. S3 admits that the active role of students is difficult to build when their learning culture is still highly dependent on teachers' instruction.

"Children are used to being ruled. It takes time and practice to make them confident in independent learning." – S3 (Interview 2025).

The S2 informant added that large classes make it difficult to apply individual approaches optimally. The S1 informant emphasized that although the active student approach has been supported, without an adequate teacher-student ratio, Finnish ideal practices are difficult to realize in the Indonesian context.

"Ideally, one teacher holds a maximum of 20 students. But here, it can be up to 36 students. So the personal approach is a bit hampered." – S2 (Interview 2025).

3.3.5 Innovative and Contextual Adaptation Strategies

The three teachers showed creativity in translating Finnish educational values into local strategies. S2 develops cross-subject projects based on students' interests, while S3 builds a more communicative and non-stressful classroom atmosphere. S1 integrates digital technology and AI in designing adaptive and flexible learning experiences, while maintaining academic standards.

"I created a project about the environment, and students were asked to explore solutions to the problems they saw around. They become more critical and creative." – S2 (Interview 2025).

"A humane teacher-student relationship is key. If children feel listened to, they will be more active and open." – S3 (Interview 2025).

The implementation strategy of the Finnish education system in Indonesian secondary schools shows a pattern of selective and context-based adaptation. The three informants (S1, S2, and S3) presented a variety of strategies influenced by the readiness of facilities, teacher competence, policy support, and local socio-cultural conditions. Although implementation has not been evenly distributed, teachers have demonstrated transformational initiatives through a project-based approach, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and using curriculum flexibility. This strategy shows that the Finnish education system can not only be imitated, but needs to be reinterpreted according to the Indonesian context.

Table 4. Informant's statement on Finland's education implementation strategy

Aspects	Informan S1	Informan S2	Informan S3
Infrastructure Readiness	Flagship schools, well-equipped facilities (digital labs, AI classes), supporting student autonomy	Limited facilities due to funding reductions, impacting project-based learning	New school, facilities are not complete, still in the procurement process
Teacher Competence & Training	Intensively trained teachers, some national mentors, are accustomed to a flexible approach	Some teachers are ready, but the inequality of competence is still felt	Many teachers are not ready, have minimal training, are not used to non-exam methods
Support & Policies	The curriculum is supportive, but needs mentoring and a monitoring system	The need for internal standards so that teacher freedom remains directed	The curriculum is flexible, but the operational direction is not uniform
Class Ratio & School Culture	Support for the student approach is active, but the student ratio (36:1) hinders the personal approach	Large class is an obstacle to the individual approach	Dominant instructional culture, students are not used to being independent, it takes time to build confidence
Innovative Adaptation Strategies	Use technology & AI, flexible learning design, maintain academic quality	Cross-curricular projects based on students' interests,	Create a communicative and humanist classroom atmosphere,

Aspects	Informan S1	Informan S2	Informan S3
		encourage creativity and focusing on student learning relationships and comfort	

Discussion

The results of this study show that there is a variation in the understanding and adaptation strategy of Finnish educational values among secondary school teachers in Indonesia. Differences in educational background, teaching experience, training received, and availability of resources in schools lead to non-uniform implementation between educational units. These inequalities reflect a gap in institutional and individual readiness, which ultimately affects the effectiveness of adapting Finnish educational values in the local context. These findings are in line with the view Sahlberg, (2014), which emphasizes that the success of the Finnish education system rests not only on macro policies, but also on a deep understanding of an educational philosophy that emphasizes trust, professional autonomy, and meaningful learning.

One of the core values in the Finnish education system, namely student autonomy, is actually the most significant challenge in the context of Indonesian culture which tends to be collectivist and hierarchical. Based on the cultural dimension Hofstede, (2011), Indonesia scored high on the dimensions of collectivism and power distance, which shows the tendency of society to follow authority and prioritize group harmony over individual initiative. This explains why learning approaches that emphasize individual exploration and decision-making by students, such as in Finnish education, face resistance in a learning environment that still relies on teacher direction and hierarchical structures.

Teachers' confusion in applying these values, especially in schools that have not received adequate training, indicates a weak implementation strategy in terms of policy and technical assistance. As stated by Darling-Hammond et al., (2019), procedural understanding alone is not enough in implementing progressive education; What is needed is a conceptual, reflective, and contextual understanding of these learning philosophies and methods. This is reinforced by the view (Niemi, H., Toom, A., & Kallioniemi, 2016), which emphasizes the importance of a bottom-up approach and flexibility in adapting progressive education models such as those in Finland. In the absence of a locally tailored implementation framework, teachers tend to experience confusion or even frustration in their efforts to translate Finnish values into daily practice.

Further, the theory of change from Fullan, (2007) states that changes in education must be rooted in the internal capacity of the school, supported by a consistent external system. In this context, the Independent Curriculum in Indonesia provides room for innovative approaches, but its implementation is still highly dependent on individual teachers' initiatives. The absence of a joint monitoring and reflection system leads to sporadic innovations, as expressed by S2 and S3 informants.

The implications of these findings extend to three main domains: teacher training, curriculum reform, and education policy. First, teacher training needs to be designed not only for the transfer of technical knowledge, but also to build philosophical understanding and cultural sensitivity to student-centered approaches to learning. Second, curriculum reform must ensure that the flexibility offered does not obscure the direction of learning, but rather supports the achievement of students' essential competencies through differentiation and project-based learning as recommended by the (OECD, 2021). Third, education policies must strengthen systemic support in the form of reflective supervision, professional development incentives, and equitable facility improvements.

As concluded by Hasibuan et al., (2023) and Aryawan & Rai, (2024), the adoption of Finnish educational values in Indonesia cannot be done instantly. A gradual approach is needed that integrates structural readiness, changes in learning culture, and transformation of public perception of educational goals. The success of adaptation depends on the commitment of all stakeholders in creating an inclusive and sustainable education ecosystem.

Thus, this study underlines that the Finnish education system cannot be replicated in its entirety, but rather needs to be selectively adapted through a contextual approach that takes into account cultural characteristics, resource availability, and teachers' professional readiness. Educational transformation in Indonesia can only happen if innovation is supported by a strong collective vision, in-depth training, and the courage to reform the system holistically. Without synergy between teachers, schools, policymakers, and society, progressive educational values such as those espoused by Finland will only become idealism that is difficult to realize.

4. CONCLUSION

This study contributes significantly to our understanding of how Indonesian secondary school teachers interpret and attempt to adapt Finnish educational values, revealing that adaptation is not a matter of replication but a process of cultural and contextual translation. The research highlights that core Finnish principles—such as professional trust, student autonomy, non-competitive evaluation, and a focus on well-being—clash with entrenched Indonesian educational norms, including hierarchical authority and achievement-based assessments. A key finding is that meaningful educational change requires systemic support beyond the classroom, including reflective teacher training, supportive school environments, and coherent policy alignment. However, a major limitation of this research lies in its focus on teacher perspectives, with limited exploration of other key actors such as school leaders or regional policymakers, particularly in under-resourced areas. Future research should examine the role of school principals as change agents and explore how progressive educational values can be adapted in remote regions. Longitudinal studies are also needed to assess the long-term impact of recent reforms, such as interest-based learning and the removal of national exams, on student development and learning outcomes. Ultimately, while the Finnish model cannot be directly transplanted, its humanistic values can serve as an inspiration for building an education system that is both contextually relevant and centered on the holistic development of Indonesian learners.

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