

Global Insights for National Reform: A Comparative Review of Education Management in Finland, Japan, Singapore, and the United States

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Abstract: Global Insights for National Reform: A Comparative Review of Education Management in Finland, Japan, Singapore, and the United States. Objective: This study aims to analyze and compare the governance structures, curriculum models, teacher professionalism, learning strategies, assessment systems, and international achievements of education systems in Finland, Japan, Singapore, and the United States, and to derive strategic lessons relevant for improving the Indonesian education system. **Methods:** The research employs a qualitative comparative design based on a systematic literature review. The search strategy covered international databases (Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ProQuest, and Google Scholar) and official sources (OECD, UNESCO, and BPS). From 734 initial documents, 30 high-quality sources were selected through a screening process, eligibility assessment, and critical appraisal using *CASP* and *MMAT* tools. Data extraction followed a structured template and was analyzed through thematic coding and comparative synthesis across six key dimensions: governance, curriculum, teacher quality, learning strategies, student evaluation, and international achievement. **Findings:** The analysis shows that the success of education systems in developed countries is supported by key principles: Finland emphasizes trust-based governance and phenomenal learning, Japan prioritizes teacher collaboration through lesson study and discipline, Singapore utilizes meritocracy and structured career paths for teachers, and the United States emphasizes curriculum flexibility and local innovation. Indonesia, despite implementing the Independent Curriculum and the Freedom to Learn policy, still faces challenges related to resource inequality, teacher competency, and the implementation of innovative learning. **Conclusion/Contribution:** The study concludes that Indonesia must invest in teacher capacity, equitable distribution, and formative evaluation while adopting international best practices that align with its socio-cultural realities. The contribution of this study lies in providing evidence-based, contextualized policy recommendations that integrate global insights into Indonesia's path toward a more equitable, innovative, and sustainable education system.

Keywords: education system, education management, comparative studies, Indonesian education reform.

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■ INTRODUCTION

Education is a central component of a nation's development and progress. Optimally implemented educational processes and quality will be the foundation for developing competitive and valuable human resources for the nation. Education, at its core, must develop students into well-rounded individuals, training them to grow into individuals with broad perspectives and critical thinking skills in solving life's problems (Siswadi, 2022).

Education can take two forms: formal and informal. In the informal context, the educational process begins at home with parents, instilling life values and developing positive character traits in children as future learners. Formal education, on the other hand, is a learning process that takes place in various educational institutions appropriate to each student's age level (Bautista et al., 2015). In this context, the learning a child receives as a learner can encompass topics such as national insight, scientific developments, social issues, and even culture and religion. Through these two levels of education, students are expected to achieve the desired level of understanding and overcome existing challenges (Suryawan, 2018).

According to data published by the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS), education in Indonesia improved in 2023 compared to previous years. One supporting indicator, considered evidence of this statement, is contained in the 2023 Education Statistics Survey, namely, an increase in the number of schools. From the 2022 to 2023 academic year, the number of schools at the junior high school (SMP/MTs), senior high school (SMA/MA/SMK), and vocational high school (SMA/MA) levels increased. At the junior high school (SMP/MTs) level, 584 new schools were added, followed by 229 senior high schools (SMA/MA) and 66 vocational high schools. Meanwhile, at the elementary school level, the number of schools

decreased by 17. In addition to the increase in the number of schools, the dynamics of school status in Indonesia have also undergone significant changes. Public schools are now more numerous at the elementary school level. Meanwhile, at higher levels, private schools predominate, particularly at the senior high and vocational high school levels (BPS, 2023).

However, while survey data and documents published by Statistics Indonesia (BPS) show improvements in the implementation and distribution of education in Indonesia, it is important to recognize that the quality of education that supports the creation of an empowered society is not solely measured by the number of schools established (Wijaya et al., 2024). Referring to scores from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a global assessment agency that measures mathematics, science, and literacy skills, Indonesia's education score in 2022 ranked 69th out of 80 countries (Tonga et al., 2019). The breakdown of each assessment score is as follows: 366 for mathematics, 383 for science, and 359 for reading. This ranking places Indonesia far below other Asian countries such as Singapore, China, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, which rank in the top 1 to 5, respectively (OECD, 2023).

Previous studies on education in Indonesia have largely emphasized two critical issues: the persistent mismatch between the increasing number of graduates and the limited job opportunities (Sinaulan, 2019; Databoks, n.d.), and the urgent need for systemic transformation to improve flexibility, relevance, and quality within the education system (Harumawati et al., 2024). Moreover, scholars have highlighted the importance of effective educational management, where planning, evaluation, and supervision at the school level play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning (Efendi & Sholeh, 2023). While these studies provide valuable

insights into the domestic challenges of Indonesian education, they remain focused primarily on internal dynamics, such as graduate employability, school-level management, and national policy reforms.

However, what remains underexplored is a comparative perspective that situates Indonesia's education system alongside other countries widely recognized for their educational excellence. Most of the existing literature does not systematically analyze how governance structures, curriculum design, and management practices in these countries may provide relevant lessons for Indonesia's context (Ariansyah & Winarko, 2024). This absence creates a significant gap, as cross-national comparisons can uncover best practices, highlight transferable models of policy implementation, and identify contextual factors that either enable or hinder systemic transformation (Bilad et al., 2024). Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by conducting a comparative analysis of educational management practices in other countries and drawing practical insights for Indonesia. By moving beyond internal diagnoses and adopting a cross-national framework, this research contributes to the broader literature by offering strategic recommendations that are both globally informed and locally applicable.

Comparative studies of education have been widely conducted in the last decade to identify best practices that can serve as benchmarks for other countries. For example, Schleicher (2019), in his OECD report "Education at a Glance," emphasized that key factors in the success of an education system lie in teacher quality, a relevant curriculum, and governance that adapts to social change. Meanwhile, Sahlberg (2021), in his study on "Finnish Lessons," emphasized the importance of educational equity and teacher autonomy in supporting the achievement of long-term quality learning. Furthermore, Tan and Chua's (2020)

research on Singapore's education system demonstrated that the combination of meritocracy, long-term planning, and the integration of digital technology can boost the global competitiveness of human resources. Meanwhile, Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) emphasized that the decentralized nature of the United States' education system fosters diverse innovations, but it also faces challenges related to regional disparities.

More broadly, UNESCO's (2022) research in *Reimagining Our Futures Together* recommends that national education systems be more flexible, collaborative, and based on social justice to respond to the demands of globalization, technology, and multidimensional crises such as the pandemic and climate change. Thus, this research positions itself within the stream of international comparative education studies that focus on the relevance of education policy, governance, and management as keys to transformation.

The purpose of this research is to examine the process and implementation of educational management in several countries renowned for their reputation as centers of "best education" for the nation's future generations. These countries are Finland, Japan, Singapore, and the United States. The selection of Finland, Japan, Singapore, and the United States is grounded in their consistent global recognition as leaders in educational quality and efficiency, each representing distinctive governance models worth examining comparatively. These countries frequently top the OECD and PISA rankings, with Singapore, Japan, and Finland among the highest performers in mathematics, science, and reading, and the U.S. excelling in innovation despite broader disparities (OECD, 2019; Ripley, 2015).

Finland is known for its high-quality learning process, embracing the principles of equality, justice, and religious tolerance. The learning

methods employed in Finnish schools prioritize humanity and go beyond the classroom. This contrasts sharply with the state of education in Indonesia, which is often characterized by a repetitive, competitive learning system, long, classroom-focused teaching hours, monotonous teaching methods, and a lack of qualified human resources. Thus, Finland can serve as an appropriate reference for curriculum formulation and the development of effective learning plans (Itkonen, 2018).

Japan is also known as a country that highly values teachers as vital human resources in the learning process. Furthermore, Japan's educational curriculum places significant emphasis on affective, cognitive, and psychomotor aspects. This country places a strong emphasis on discipline, work ethic, courtesy, and etiquette in every aspect of life. Therefore, the implementation of educational management in this country is an interesting area for study (Tsuneyoshi, 2024).

Next, Singapore believes that a nation's wealth lies in its people. Therefore, to encourage national progress and growth, the regeneration process is guaranteed through quality education. Education in Singapore adheres to a holistic system, implementing bilingualism in communication activities and integrating technology into the learning process. Singapore's educational reforms toward holistic outcomes: unintended consequences of policy layering. Therefore, this can serve as a reference for resolving educational conflicts in Indonesia, which are currently persecuted by government policies and hidden behind the pretense of budget efficiency (Kwek & Wong, 2023)..

Finally, the United States has a decentralized education system. This means that each state has its own role or autonomy in developing the curriculum and learning standards that apply to each educational institution in its local area (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). In contrast, Indonesia, although comprised of many regions,

has a centralized and regulated education system that is governed by a single national policy. Therefore, existing problems often become significant obstacles to educational progress. This study is expected to yield recommendations for improving the implementation of educational management in Indonesia and contribute to improving the quality of existing education. The research method used is a literature review. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How are educational management practices implemented in Japan, Finland, Singapore, and the United States, and what principles underpin their success?
2. What similarities and differences can be identified between these systems and Indonesia's current educational framework?
3. Which elements of international best practices are potentially transferable to Indonesia's context to address its educational challenges?

■ METHOD

Research Design

The research design used in this study is a qualitative research design with a comparative study approach based on a literature review (Schleicher, 2019; UNESCO, 2022). This research will systematically analyze various academic literature, policy reports, and international research findings on educational management practices in Japan, Finland, Singapore, and the United States (Sahlberg, 2021; Tsuneyoshi, 2024; Kwek & Wong, 2023; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Through this approach, the research aims to identify the key principles, governance structures, curriculum designs, and implementation strategies that support the success of education systems in these countries (OECD, 2019; Ripley, 2015). The results of the analysis are then compared with the conditions of education in Indonesia to identify

similarities, differences, and potential adoption of relevant best practices (Wijaya et al., 2024; Ariansyah & Winarko, 2024). Thus, this research design allows for the development of strategic recommendations that are globally-minded but remain contextual to the needs of education in Indonesia (Bilad et al., 2024).

Analytical Framework

The author established an analytical framework before data collection. This framework was developed by considering the main dimensions commonly used in comparative education studies, allowing for systematic and consistent analysis across countries. The established dimensions include educational governance (centralization and decentralization, as well as school and teacher autonomy), curriculum design (flexibility, national standards, and integration of 21st-century competencies), teacher quality and professionalism (qualifications, social status, and ongoing training), learning strategies (student-centered, teacher-centered, technology utilization, and project-based learning), assessment systems (formative, summative, national exams, and standardized tests), and international achievements (e.g., PISA results). With this framework, the literature search and selection process was not conducted haphazardly but rather guided by predetermined categories, allowing for a structured comparison between the education systems of Japan, Finland, Singapore, the United States, and Indonesia (Bray, Adamson, & Mason, 2014; Crossley & Watson, 2003).

Search Strategy

The literature search for this research was conducted through several systematic stages. The first stage began with identifying keywords relevant to the research topic, including issues of education management, education governance, curriculum design, and comparative studies of

education systems in Indonesia, Japan, Finland, Singapore, and the United States. The second stage involved conducting a literature search in various international databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ProQuest, and Google Scholar, as well as official sources from international institutions such as the OECD iLibrary, UNESCO, and the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS). Relevant research registers were also consulted, including the Campbell Collaboration Library of Systematic Reviews, the Education Evidence Portal (EEP), and the OECD Education Evidence Base. This search yielded 734 articles from databases, 54 documents from gray literature, and 34 records from research registers.

The third stage involved deduplication to remove duplicate articles, leaving 680 unique articles. During this stage, three records were automatically marked as ineligible by the automated tool (e.g., non-scientific or irrelevant format), and 17 records were removed for other reasons, such as incomplete metadata or inaccessible files. The next stage involved screening based on title and abstract, resulting in 192 articles deemed highly relevant. Eligibility was then assessed based on full-text accessibility and content alignment with the research focus. At this stage, 162 articles were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. The reasons for exclusion were as follows: 112 articles did not focus on education management or governance, and 50 articles were opinion articles without empirical data. From this stage, 30 articles were selected for further analysis. These articles then underwent quality assessment (critical appraisal) using instruments such as the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) for qualitative studies and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) for mixed methods studies.

The final stage was data extraction using a custom template that included author information,

publication year, country, key findings, and relevance to the Indonesian educational context. The extracted data was then analyzed through thematic and comparative synthesis, resulting in a comprehensive understanding and strategic recommendations for improving the education

system in Indonesia. In summary, the entire process included 30 studies, of which six reports from the included studies were analyzed in more depth. This process is visualized in a search strategy flowchart (Figure 1) to facilitate understanding of the stages of data collection and analysis.

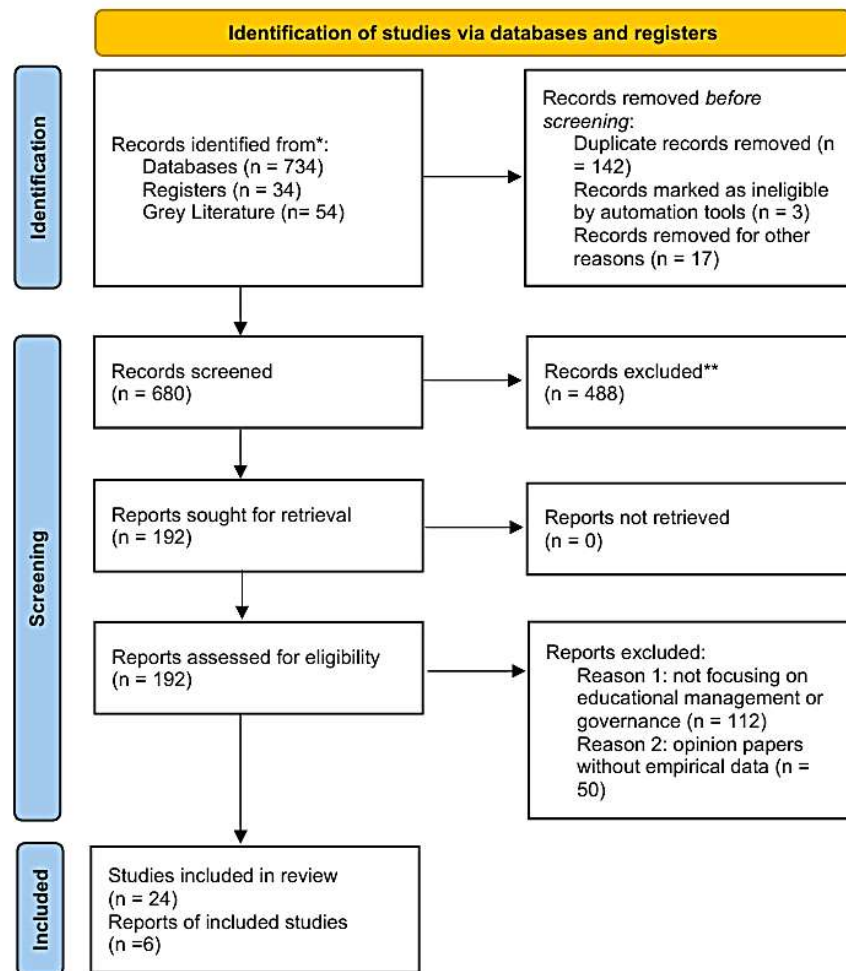


Figure 1. Search strategy flowchart

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In this study, literature was selected based on strict inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria included scientific journal articles, academic books, and official policy reports discussing education systems, governance, curricula, and learning practices in Indonesia, Finland, Japan, Singapore, and the United States.

Only publications in English or Indonesian, published between 2000 and 2025, and from credible sources were included in the analysis. Conversely, literature excluded included popular articles, opinion pieces, or sources without peer review, studies irrelevant to national education, publications published before 2000 (except those with historical significance), and articles available

only in abstract form. By applying these criteria, 30 relevant articles were selected from the initial literature for further analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study employed a literature-based comparative thematic analysis approach. Each article that met the inclusion criteria was thoroughly read and then coded to identify key themes, such as educational governance, curriculum design, teacher quality, learning strategies, and their impact on student achievement. Emerging themes from each country (Indonesia, Finland, Japan, Singapore, and the United States) were then systematically compared to identify patterns of similarities, differences, and relevant best practices. Furthermore, a narrative synthesis approach was used, summarizing findings from various sources and integrating them into a broader analytical framework. This approach allowed the study not only to describe the results from each country but also to provide contextual interpretations in relation to the Indonesian education system. To maintain consistency in the analysis, each piece of data was reviewed through a process of literature triangulation, comparing results from various academic sources and policy reports. This technique enhanced the reliability and validity of the analysis results. The final results of the analysis are presented in the form of a comparative table and narrative description that emphasizes the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for adopting cross-country education strategies.

This study acknowledges the potential for bias, particularly due to the limited English-language literature and differences in socio-cultural contexts across countries. To minimize this, strict selection criteria, source triangulation (scientific articles, policy reports, and official data), and a systematic comparative analysis approach were used to maintain objectivity in the results (Moher et al., 2009; Kitchenham & Charters, 2007).

■ **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

A comparative analysis of the education systems of Finland, Japan, Singapore, the United States, and Indonesia reveals fundamental variations in six key indicators: governance, curriculum, teacher quality, instructional strategies, student evaluation, and international performance. These differences demonstrate how each country constructs its education system according to its national philosophy and context. A more in-depth explanation of each indicator follows.

Educational Governance

Educational governance is the most fundamental dimension that determines the direction and quality of the education system in each country. Finland is often praised for its fully decentralized system. The central government only establishes a core curriculum framework and general standards, while schools and teachers are given broad flexibility to implement them according to local needs. This model is known as trust-based governance, which fosters high trust in teacher professionalism and school autonomy (Sahlberg, 2015). As a result, school creativity flourishes, teachers feel valued, and students receive more contextualized learning experiences. However, the downside of this system is the risk of regional variation in quality if teacher and school capacity are uneven. Even in Finland, criticism has emerged that decentralization could reduce the central government's accountability for overall national quality.

Japan and Singapore present the opposite, with highly centralized educational governance. Japan implements a uniform Course of Study across the country, resulting in relatively consistent quality standards. However, school and teacher flexibility is limited (Takayama, 2018). On the positive side, this system guarantees a minimum national quality, but on the other hand, it reduces the space for local innovation and adaptation.

Singapore goes even further: all aspects of education, including curriculum, assessment, and even teacher training, are tightly controlled by the Ministry of Education. Education in Singapore is viewed as a key instrument of economic development. The advantages include a clear development direction and measurable results; however, critics argue that the system is overly exam-oriented, placing high pressure on both students and teachers (Ng, 2017). Numerous reports indicate high rates of academic stress and anxiety among Singaporean students, suggesting that academic success often comes at the expense of mental health.

The United States presents a contrasting model: extreme decentralization based on states and school districts. Despite standards like the Common Core, the reality is that quality varies significantly across regions. Wealthy districts can afford modern facilities and qualified teachers, whereas poorer districts often lack these resources (Darling-Hammond, 2020). The downside of this model is the wide disparity, which often makes the American education system unfair. While there is significant room for innovation, this system often yields a patchwork of policies that are inconsistent and difficult to assess nationally.

Indonesia lies somewhere between these two poles, still searching for an ideal form of governance. Through the Freedom to Learn policy, the government aims to strike a balance between national standards and local flexibility. However, disparities in school and teacher capacity have resulted in uneven implementation. Urban schools are relatively better prepared, while schools in underdeveloped areas face limited resources (Kemdikbudristek, 2022). The implication for Indonesia is the importance of developing trust-based governance, similar to Finland, but with stronger accountability mechanisms and resource support to prevent widening disparities.

In general, the findings of this study align with international literature highlighting the dilemma between centralization and decentralization in education governance. Decentralized models, such as those in Finland (Sahlberg, 2015; Simola, 2017), the United States (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Rothstein, 2019), and some Indonesian contexts (Kemdikbudristek, 2022; Susanto, 2021), encourage innovation but risk creating disparities in quality across regions. Conversely, centralized models, such as those in Japan (Takayama, 2018; Cave, 2019) and Singapore (Ng, 2017; Tan, 2018; Wong & Wong, 2020), guarantee national quality standards but limit innovation and can cause psychological distress among students. Thus, this study emphasizes the need for Indonesia to find a balance: adopting trust-based flexibility while maintaining accountability and adequate resource support.

Curriculum

The curriculum reflects the educational philosophy and direction of a nation's development. Finland stands out with its competency-based and phenomenon-based learning curriculum, which emphasizes critical thinking skills, problem-solving, and interdisciplinary collaboration (Lonka, 2018). This philosophy brings students closer to the realities of life, rather than simply memorizing. However, criticism has arisen that this approach demands a high level of teacher preparedness, and without adequate professional support, results can be suboptimal. Japan emphasizes balancing academics and character building through moral education (*tokkatsu*). This system successfully fosters discipline, responsibility, and a collective work ethic (Shimahara, 2017). However, its downside is the strong social pressure for conformity. Different students often struggle to adapt, and individual innovation is sometimes stifled.

Singapore has designed a curriculum that adapts to the needs of the global economy. With the slogan “Teach Less, Learn More,” this system emphasizes in-depth understanding of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects and English (Gopinathan, 2012). This model has been successful in producing a competitive workforce, but it has also been criticized for being too pragmatic and utilitarian, positioning education as merely an economic engine.

The United States grants states significant autonomy in designing their curricula. Students can choose from various academic pathways, including Advanced Placement (AP) and vocational options. This freedom is positive, but it also widens the gap between developed and underdeveloped regions (Ravitch, 2016).

Indonesia, through the *Merdeka* Curriculum, is attempting to adopt the flexibility of Finland, emphasizing literacy, numeracy, and project-based learning. However, the main obstacles lie in teacher competency and facilities. Many teachers are unfamiliar with interdisciplinary approaches, while schools in rural areas often lack the necessary supporting facilities. The implication for Indonesia is the need for significant investment in teacher training and infrastructure to ensure that the new curriculum philosophy does not remain merely a document.

In general, the findings of this study are consistent with the existing literature, which shows that each country’s curriculum reflects its own unique educational philosophy. Finland is innovative through phenomenon-based learning, but demands high teacher preparedness (Lonka, 2018; Kangas et al., 2019). Japan emphasizes collective discipline through *tokkatsu*, but risks suppressing individual creativity (Shimahara, 2017; Rohlen, 2019). Singapore is highly effective in producing a competitive workforce, but it is too utilitarian (Gopinathan, 2012; Tan, 2018). The United States is flexible, but it widens the quality

gap (Ravitch, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2020). Indonesia, through its *Merdeka* Curriculum, is progressive, although it still faces obstacles in teacher competency and facilities (Kemdikbudris tek, 2022; Susanto, 2021).

Teacher Quality

Teachers are a key pillar of educational success. Finland sets very high standards for teacher recruitment, accepting only the top 10% of applicants, and all teachers are required to hold a master’s degree (Sahlberg, 2015). Teachers are valued on a par with doctors or engineers. Criticisms of this system include the difficulty of replicating it in other countries, as it requires a academic culture and a robust university system.

Japan emphasizes continuous development through the use of lesson study. Teachers collaborate to design, observe, and reflect on learning (Takahashi & McDougal, 2016). This fosters a culture of lifelong learning among teachers. However, the downside is the extremely high workload for Japanese teachers, which has even been reported to lead to *karoshi* (death from overwork).

Singapore systematically manages teacher development through the National Institute of Education (NIE). Teacher career paths are divided into teaching, leadership, and specialist tracks, providing incentives for continuous improvement (Ng, 2017). However, the pressure to consistently excel makes the teaching profession in Singapore also vulnerable to stress. The United States faces a problem of unequal distribution of teachers. Schools in wealthy districts can recruit excellent teachers, but schools in poorer areas often only employ those with minimal experience (Darling-Hammond, 2020). A major criticism of this system is the structural inequity that causes educational quality to depend heavily on a student’s zip code.

Indonesia faces similar challenges. Despite the launch of certification programs and the

Teacher Leader program, many teachers still lack access to modern pedagogical approaches. Teacher distribution is uneven: large cities have an oversupply of teachers, while remote areas have a shortage (World Bank, 2020). Consequently, Indonesia needs to strengthen its merit-based recruitment system, ensure equitable distribution, and foster a culture of professional reflection, such as lesson study.

The findings of this study are consistent with international literature emphasizing the importance of teacher professionalism. Finland has successfully maintained quality through high recruitment standards (Sahlberg, 2015), Japan through lesson study despite heavy workloads (Takahashi & McDougal, 2016), and Singapore with a structured career path that also creates pressure (Ng, 2017). In contrast, the United States faces an unequal distribution of teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2020), a situation similar to that in Indonesia, which still faces challenges in achieving equity and pedagogical competence (World Bank, 2020). Thus, the literature demonstrates a trade-off between quality, workload, and equity (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; OECD, 2019).

Learning Strategies

Learning strategies are at the heart of classroom education. Finland is known for its humanistic and student-centered learning approach. The phenomenon-based learning model encourages interdisciplinary connections, where students learn through collaborative projects that stem from real-world problems (Lonka, 2018). The teacher acts as a facilitator, not simply a provider of knowledge. The advantage of this model is that it fosters intrinsic motivation, critical thinking skills, and creativity. However, its weakness is the high demand on teachers to design interdisciplinary learning, so without in-depth training, the quality of implementation can decline. Japan implements a learning strategy that emphasizes repetition,

intensive practice, and emotional engagement through lesson study. Students are accustomed to discipline and a culture of rigorous study from an early age. This strategy has proven effective in fostering academic perseverance, but it also creates significant pressure on students (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). The growing cram school (*juku*) culture suggests that formal schooling is insufficient, forcing children to sacrifice playtime for additional learning.

Singapore stands out for its high-stakes assessment-based strategy. Students are prepared with highly structured, intensive, and competitive learning methods. This strategy is effective in improving academic performance, particularly in STEM fields, but has a negative impact on students' mental health. Surveys show that many Singaporean students experience high levels of stress due to intense competition (OECD, 2019). The United States exhibits a diversity of learning strategies due to its decentralized system. Some schools have adopted a Finnish-style project-based learning approach, while others remain traditional. Many leading schools implement differentiated learning based on digital technology; however, schools in underprivileged areas are still relying on simple rote memorization methods (Ravitch, 2016). This widens the quality gap between regions.

Indonesia is promoting project-based learning in its *Merdeka* Curriculum. The philosophy is similar to Finland's, namely, connecting learning to real-world issues in society. However, many teachers are still unaccustomed to moving beyond the traditional lecture model. Another obstacle is limited resources, for example, for digital-based learning or science experiments. Consequently, innovative learning strategies in Indonesia require intensive support in the form of teacher training, provision of facilities, and incentives for schools that dare to innovate.

The findings of this study are generally consistent with international literature, which

suggests that learning strategies reflect national educational philosophies. Finland, with its phenomenon-based learning, effectively fosters creativity but relies heavily on teacher preparedness (Lonka, 2018; Sahlberg, 2015). Japan, through lesson study, improves discipline but also creates high levels of stress (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Takahashi & McDougal, 2016). Singapore excels with its exam-based strategy, which encourages STEM achievement despite the associated stress (Ng, 2017; OECD, 2019). The United States exhibits a variety of strategies that actually widen the quality gap (Ravitch, 2016). Indonesia, through its *Merdeka* Curriculum, attempts to implement project-based learning, but is still hampered by teacher competency and facilities (World Bank, 2020). Overall, this study reinforces the view that each strategy faces a trade-off between innovation, psychological stress, and resource constraints (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; OECD, 2019).

Student Evaluation

The evaluation or assessment system is a crucial indicator of educational success. Finland is a unique model because it has virtually no national standardized exams until the end of high school. Evaluation is formative mainly, as it is based on teacher observation of students' learning (Sahlberg, 2015). National exams are administered only at the end of high school, freeing students from the pressure of testing early on. The upside is that students can focus on meaningful learning. However, critics argue that this model can reduce accountability if teachers are incompetent or biased.

Japan implements a dual evaluation system: on the one hand, emphasizing the highly competitive college entrance exam, while on the other, maintaining formative evaluation in schools. Japanese university entrance exams are notoriously rigorous and have a significant impact on students' futures, creating immense pressure (Takayama, 2018). This system is considered

effective in encouraging hard work, but it also compromises adolescents' psychological well-being. Singapore relies on high-stakes assessments, such as the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), which determines students' educational pathways from the age of 12. This system ensures rigorous and efficient selection, but also carries social stigma for students who fail. This system has been sharply criticized for creating social "stratification" from an early age (Ng, 2017).

The United States is known for its culture of standardized testing. The No Child Left Behind program expanded the use of standardized tests to measure school performance and accountability. Critics argue that this system forces teachers to "teach to the test" and reduces the space for creativity (Darling-Hammond, 2020). Indonesia has long relied on the National Examination, which has been criticized as unfair because it only measures outcomes, not processes. Through a recent policy, the National Examination was abolished and replaced with a National Assessment based on literacy, numeracy, and a character survey. However, implementation challenges are significant, as some schools and teachers still view the test as an end in itself, rather than a diagnostic tool. The implication for Indonesia is the importance of strengthening ongoing formative evaluation while maintaining objectivity through a fair, nationwide assessment.

The findings of this study align with international research highlighting the dilemmas of evaluation systems. Finland emphasizes observation-based formative assessment, which promotes meaningful learning but is prone to accountability issues (Sahlberg, 2015). Japan and Singapore employ high-stakes testing models that are effective in maintaining standards and selection, but these models also create psychological stress and social stratification (Ng, 2017; Takayama, 2018). The United States, with its culture of standardized testing, exhibits positive aspects of accountability but has been criticized for stifling

creativity and forcing teachers to focus on test preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2020). Indonesia is moving from the National Examination to the more diagnostic National Assessment, in line with international trends, but still faces implementation challenges (World Bank, 2020). Thus, this study reinforces the view that no evaluation system is without flaws: each model balances accountability, fairness, and student psychological well-being.

International Achievement

International achievement is often measured through global surveys, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Finland was a star performer, having topped the PISA rankings in the early 2000s. However, its position has declined over the last decade, although it remains above the OECD average. This raises the question of whether the Finnish system, while considered ideal, requires ongoing evaluation to ensure its sustainability. Japan and Singapore consistently rank high in PISA, particularly in mathematics and science (OECD, 2019). This demonstrates the effectiveness of a disciplined, rigorous assessment-based system. However, criticism stems from non-academic dimensions: despite high scores, students report lower levels of stress and happiness compared to those in Scandinavian countries.

The United States ranks in the middle. Despite its world-class universities, the performance of high school students in PISA is often subpar. This highlights a significant gap between the educational elite and the majority of students (Ravitch, 2016). Indonesia still lags in the PISA survey, particularly in literacy and mathematics. The contributing factors include low teacher quality, limited learning facilities, and regional disparities (OECD, 2019). The implication for Indonesia is the need for a serious focus on strengthening basic literacy and numeracy, as without this foundation, international performance will be challenging to improve.

The results of this study reveal a pattern consistent with those of other studies. Finland, once considered a PISA “star,” has now seen its performance decline, although it remains above the OECD average (OECD, 2019). Japan and Singapore consistently record high performance, particularly in mathematics and science; however, this achievement is offset by an increase in student psychological distress (OECD, 2019). The United States, on the other hand, ranks in the middle, reflecting a disparity in quality across regions (Ravitch, 2016). Meanwhile, Indonesia still faces significant challenges in reading literacy and numeracy due to low teacher quality, limited resources, and regional disparities (OECD, 2019). Thus, this study confirms that international rankings reflect a combination of academic quality, equitable access, and student well-being.

Implications for Indonesia

This comparative analysis yields several important lessons for Indonesia. From Finland, Indonesia can learn the importance of building trust-based governance that positions teachers as the primary actors. However, given that teacher capacity in Indonesia is not evenly distributed, trust must be balanced with strong training and resource support. From Japan, Indonesia can draw inspiration from a culture of discipline and professional reflection (lesson study), while avoiding excessive academic pressure that can harm student well-being. From Singapore, Indonesia can emulate strategic planning that integrates education and economic development, while ensuring the system is not overly utilitarian. From the United States, Indonesia can learn about the dangers of inequality resulting from extreme decentralization, while also drawing inspiration from the technology-based innovations being developed in several developed districts.

Another significant implication is the importance of building a balanced education system: between national standards and local

flexibility, between academic achievement and student psychological well-being, between outcome evaluation and the learning process, and between economic interests and character development. Indonesia needs to develop a relevant curriculum, professional teachers, innovative learning methods, fair evaluation, and international achievements supported by strong foundational literacy.

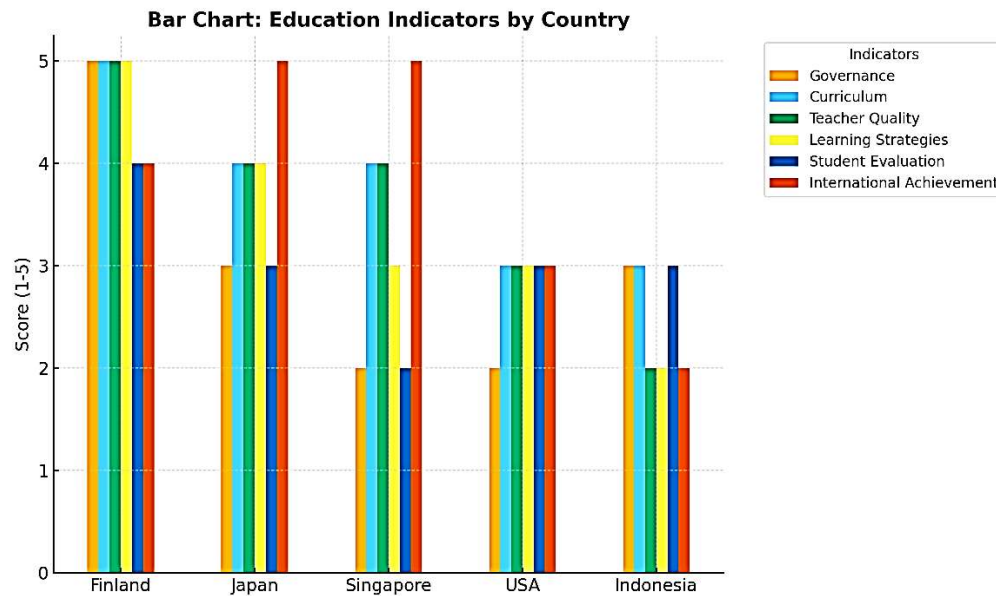
Based on the above discussion, and to enhance the clarity of comparison, Table 1 presents a comparative analysis of the education

systems in Finland, Japan, Singapore, the United States, and Indonesia. The table highlights the *Underlying Philosophy*, *Key Success Factors (Enablers)*, and *Potential Challenges of Adaptation in Indonesia*.

To enhance understanding of the whole research results, the following bar chart visualization is presented. As the findings are qualitative, they have been translated into a 1–5 scale, with higher scores indicating stronger advantages and lower scores indicating weaknesses.

Table 1. Comparative analytical table of education systems

Country	Underlying Philosophy	Key Success Factors (Enablers)	Potential Challenges of Adaptation in Indonesia
Finland	Egalitarianism, social trust, social democracy, and education as a citizen's right	Highly selective teacher recruitment (top 10%), school autonomy, minimal standardized testing, strong welfare state support	Public trust in teachers in Indonesia remains low, as the exam-oriented culture remains dominant, and there are significant infrastructure disparities across regions.
Japan	Confucian values: discipline, collectivism, loyalty, hard work; education as character formation	<i>Lesson study</i> , standardized national curriculum, high discipline, strong parental involvement	Indonesian collectivism is less rigid, bureaucratic inefficiency, and weaker national discipline compared to Japan.
Singapore	Pragmatism and meritocracy: education as an engine for economic development	Rigorous selection system, heavy investment in teachers (NIE), STEM-focused curriculum, centralized management	Meritocracy may widen inequality in Indonesia, as central management capacity is not as strong, risk of excluding students from disadvantaged groups.
United States	Liberal individualism, democracy, freedom of choice, and education to maximize individual potential	Curriculum pluralism, multiple tracks (AP, vocational), community-driven innovations	Extreme decentralization is difficult for Indonesia, which still requires national standards to ensure equity.
Indonesia	Nationalism, Pancasila, colonial legacy (standardization & hierarchy); education for national unity	National curriculum, <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> policy, teacher certification, and education digitalization	Uneven implementation, resistance to change, disparities in teacher quality, and facilities across regions



Cultural Differences, Social Structure, and Colonial History in Education Policy Adoption

A comparative analysis of the education systems of Finland, Japan, Singapore, the United States, and Indonesia shows that the success of each country is determined not only by policy design alone, but also by the foundation of cultural values, social structures, and historical experiences that shape the character of their education. Therefore, in the Indonesian context, the policy adoption process in these countries must consider these fundamental factors to avoid merely borrowing policies ineffectively (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014).

Cultural Values

Finnish culture is built on the principles of egalitarianism and high social trust. Teachers are given full autonomy to design learning because they are considered trustworthy professionals (Sahlberg, 2011). This situation differs significantly from that in Indonesia, where the education bureaucracy remains hierarchical and paternalistic. Decision-making is often top-down, making it challenging to achieve teacher independence as in Finland (Bjork, 2005).

However, Indonesia's local culture, which emphasizes mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), can be a valuable resource for building collaboration among educators through communities of practice or similar programs such as lesson study.

In Japan, cultural values emphasize collectivity, discipline, and hard work. The concept of lesson study has developed effectively because it aligns with social norms that value togetherness and excellence in work (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Indonesia shares similar values of mutual cooperation, but implementation is often hampered by a lack of consistency and a short-term orientation. The challenge for Indonesia is how to transform the ceremonial value of mutual cooperation into a systematic collaborative practice in education. Singapore emphasizes meritocracy as a primary social value. Education is viewed as a pathway to social mobility, and high-achieving students are afforded access to higher levels of education and more lucrative careers (Tan, 2010). In Indonesia, meritocracy is often hampered by nepotism, patronage, and unequal access to education. As a result, achieving healthy competition is a challenging task. A competitive culture, if implemented without

considering structural inequalities, can actually widen social gaps. Meanwhile, American culture emphasizes individualism, freedom, and pluralism. Every student has the freedom to choose an educational path based on their interests and talents (Spring, 2016). In the Indonesian context, a uniform national curriculum often does not align with local needs or student diversity. Adopting policies like those in the US has the potential to be positive in providing flexibility. However, it must also be balanced with minimum national standards to avoid widening disparities between schools.

Social Structure

Finland's social structure is relatively homogeneous, both in terms of ethnicity and wealth distribution, allowing for the effective implementation of educational equality policies (Sahlberg, 2015). In contrast, Indonesia faces sharp socioeconomic disparities between regions. Differences in teacher quality, infrastructure, and internet access between Java and outside Java, for example, make the Finnish egalitarian model difficult to implement without strong affirmative action policies (World Bank, 2020). Japan and Singapore are relatively homogeneous in terms of ethnicity and language, allowing their national education systems to function effectively. Indonesia, with over 700 regional languages and ethnic diversity, faces significant challenges in implementing a uniform national curriculum (Bjork, 2005). This diversity can be a source of pedagogical richness, but it also demands more contextual and flexible policies.

The social structure of the United States bears similarities to Indonesia's in terms of pluralism. However, the US has stronger fiscal resources to support variations between states. Indonesia, with its regional autonomy, faces significant fiscal disparities between provinces, making the adoption of a US-style federal model unrealistic without improving the distribution of the national education budget (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015).

History of Colonialism

The history of Dutch colonialism left a long legacy on the Indonesian education system. Colonial education was designed to produce a bureaucratic workforce, rather than fostering creativity or equity (Tilaar, 2009). As a result, education in Indonesia still emphasizes obedience, memorization, and standardized testing, rather than encouraging innovation and critical thinking. Unlike Indonesia, Japan, since the Meiji era, has been able to modernize education independently without the burden of colonialism, allowing it to develop a curriculum tailored to local needs (Hendry, 2013). Singapore is indeed a postcolonial country, but its pragmatic approach to education as an instrument of social mobility and economic growth has transformed its colonial legacy into a driver of development (Tan, 2010). This shows that colonialism did leave obstacles, but with strong political leadership and a clear direction for development, this legacy can be transformed.

Barriers and Drivers to Policy Adoption

In its efforts to adapt education policies from developed countries, Indonesia faces complex dynamics influenced by culture, history, and socio-economic conditions. Some factors have the potential to become barriers, while others can actually be drivers of national education transformation.

In terms of barriers, one of the biggest challenges is the hierarchical bureaucratic culture inherited from the colonial era. The educational bureaucratic structure in Indonesia remains very top-down, making the idea of trust-based governance, such as that in Finland, which places full trust in teachers and schools, challenging to implement. This is exacerbated by sharp socio-economic disparities between regions. The Finnish egalitarian model, which relies on equal access, faces serious obstacles because educational facilities in large cities are far more advanced than in remote areas. Furthermore, practices of nepotism and patronage in the recruitment and

promotion of teachers and education officials often undermine the principle of meritocracy, as implemented in Singapore. Meanwhile, Indonesia's ethnic and linguistic diversity presents a challenge in emulating a uniform Japanese curriculum. Efforts to standardize often ignore local diversity, potentially fueling resistance. Furthermore, the legacy of Dutch colonialism, which emphasized memorization, obedience, and exams as benchmarks of educational success, remains deeply embedded in teaching and learning practices in schools, hampering creative and critical approaches.

However, despite these challenges, several key factors can strengthen the adoption of educational policies from other countries. For example, the value of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) as a unique social capital in Indonesia could serve as a foundation for developing Japanese-style lesson study practices, where teachers collaborate in designing and evaluating learning. Similarly, the strong desire for social mobility can be compared to Singaporean meritocracy, provided the selection system is transparent and fair. Furthermore, Indonesia's cultural pluralism is a strength that supports curriculum flexibility, similar to that in the United States. The diversity of languages, traditions, and local wisdom can be positioned as a resource for community-based, contextual learning. Finally, the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) reform, launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, could serve as a gateway to school autonomy and educational innovation, modeled after Finland. This policy demonstrates the country's efforts to shift from a uniform approach to a system that provides greater space for schools and teachers to be creative.

Thus, adopting education policies from developed countries in Indonesia cannot be done directly (copy-pasted). Instead, it must consider the inhibiting and enabling factors stemming from social, cultural, and historical conditions. The

appropriate strategy is to adapt positive principles that align with the Indonesian context while simultaneously mitigating deeply rooted structural barriers.

Implications for Indonesia

The implication of this analysis is that adopting education policies from other countries cannot be done without careful consideration. Indonesia requires a process of cultural translation (Steiner-Khamisi, 2014), namely, translating policies into its socio-cultural and historical context.

- a. From Finland, Indonesia can learn about trust-based governance, but this must be combined with a strong local accountability system to prevent uncontrolled freedom.
- b. From Japan, lesson study can be adapted by integrating the value of mutual cooperation among Indonesian teachers to build a culture of professional reflection.
- c. From Singapore, meritocracy can be implemented gradually, while still providing affirmation for poor groups to prevent them from being left further behind.
- d. From the United States, curriculum flexibility can be adopted to accommodate regional diversity, but minimum national standards must be maintained.

Thus, Indonesian education reform must be selective, adaptive, and contextual, rather than simply copying the policies of other countries.

The Philosophical and Historical Roots of Education Policies in Various Countries

When comparing the education policies of developed countries such as Finland, Japan, Singapore, and the United States with those of Indonesia, the crucial question is not simply "what" policies they implement, but "why" they implement them. The answer to this question requires a deep understanding of the philosophical foundations, cultural values, social structures, and

historical experiences that shape the direction of education policies in each country.

Finland: Egalitarianism and the Philosophy of Social Justice

Finland has chosen an education policy path that emphasizes equality rather than competition. The “why” of this can be traced to the strong egalitarian cultural heritage within Finnish society. As a small country with a homogeneous population, Finland places social solidarity as the foundation of development. Its free education policy, the absence of national standardized exams, and complete trust in teachers embody the philosophy that every child has the right to equal learning opportunities (Sahlberg, 2011).

Historically, Finland emerged from World War II in a state of poverty and under development. National development is then directed at the equitable distribution of public services, including education, as a means of creating social cohesion and reducing inequality (Sahlberg, 2015). Therefore, Finland’s success in education is not merely the result of technical innovation, but rather a logical consequence of its philosophical orientation toward equity and trust-based governance.

Japan: Collectivism, Discipline, and the Meiji Restoration

In Japan, the question of “why” educational policy places such a strong emphasis on discipline, hard work, and collectivity can be answered by examining the cultural roots of Confucianism and the history of modernization during the Meiji era (1868). Confucian philosophy emphasizes social harmony, respect for hierarchy, and the importance of education as a path to moral development and integrity (Hendry, 2013).

Since the Meiji Restoration, Japan has recognized that national strength can only be built through an educated population. Therefore, the state has promoted a uniform, nationalistic-oriented education system with strict discipline to produce loyal and productive citizens

(Beauchamp, 1989). This is the historical root of why Japan developed policies such as lesson study and structured school routines, which reflect the values of collectivism and work excellence.

Singapore: Pragmatism of Meritocracy and Survivalism

“Why” does Singapore emphasize meritocracy-based education? The answer lies in historical and geographical realities. As a small country without significant natural resources, Singapore, from the beginning of its independence under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, recognized that human capital was its sole source of development (Tan, 2010). Therefore, education was designed as a merit-based social selection mechanism, where high-achieving individuals were given greater opportunities to advance to higher career levels. The philosophy of pragmatism underpins every policy. For Singapore, education is not merely a tool for identity formation, but a survival strategy in global competition. Therefore, a rigorous examination system, differentiated educational pathways, and substantial investment in STEM (Scientific and Technologically Advanced) address the country’s practical needs to survive and excel amidst limitations (Gopinathan, 2007).

United States: Individualism, Democracy, and Pluralism

In the United States, education is viewed as a means of realizing democratic ideals. The “why” of educational policy emphasizing freedom of choice, regional autonomy, and curriculum diversity can be explained by the philosophical roots of liberal individualism and the history of federalism. Since its inception, the United States has upheld the values of individual liberty and equal opportunity. John Dewey, an influential educational philosopher, emphasized that schools should be miniature democracies that train citizens to think critically, participate, and appreciate differences (Dewey, 1916). Furthermore, the federal structure grants each state broad authority

to regulate education, resulting in a diverse system that remains grounded in the principles of freedom and pluralism (Spring, 2016).

Indonesia: Colonial Legacy and the Search for National Identity

The question of “why” Indonesian education policy tends to be centralized, standardized test-based, and compliance-oriented cannot be separated from the history of Dutch colonialism. The colonial education system was designed to produce low-level labor and loyal bureaucrats, rather than fostering creativity or equality (Tilaar, 2009). Post-independence, despite efforts to nationalize the curriculum, the colonial mindset emphasizing rote learning and bureaucratic hierarchy persisted. Furthermore, as a country with immense ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity, the government tends to choose a uniform approach to maintain national unity. This explains why curriculum reform in Indonesia often faces a dilemma between the need for local differentiation and the demands of national standardization (Bjork, 2005).

Philosophical and Historical Comparison

Upon closer examination, each country has distinct philosophical and historical roots in developing its education policy. These differences are not merely a matter of policy technique, but rather reflect how each nation understands education as a social, political, and cultural instrument. Finland, for example, has a strong legacy of egalitarianism. Finnish society, relatively homogeneous and sparsely populated, developed a post-war social consensus that equality was the primary path to stability. Education was viewed as a universal right, not a competitive arena. Therefore, Finnish education policy rejected national standardized exams, granted teachers broad autonomy, and emphasized collaboration over competition. Philosophically, this choice was rooted in the values of equity and trust, namely the belief that teachers and schools could be trusted to fairly assess children’s development

(Sahlberg, 2011). The long history of post-war social development reinforced this orientation, making education in Finland a reflection of the national social reconstruction project.

Unlike Finland, Japan built its education policy on Confucian cultural roots that emphasize discipline, collectivity, and respect for hierarchy. Education in Japan since the Meiji Restoration (1868) has been directed toward strengthening the nation-state by cultivating loyal, diligent citizens with a strong work ethic. This philosophy is then manifested in a highly regulated educational structure, strict school routines, and collaborative learning models such as lesson study. Japan views education not only as a means of transferring knowledge, but also as a socialization mechanism that shapes collective morality and loyalty to both the group and the nation (Beauchamp, 1989). Thus, the historical roots of modernization based on nationalism and Confucian culture explain why Japan remains consistent with an educational model that emphasizes togetherness and uniformity.

Singapore has taken a different path. As a city-state with limited natural resources, Singapore has faced an existential challenge since its independence: how to survive amidst global competition. Education has been pragmatically defined as an engine of economic development and social selection. The philosophy of meritocracy underpins Singapore’s education system, where high-achieving individuals are given a faster path to better socio-economic opportunities. This is reflected in the rigorous examination system, stratified educational pathways, and a strong emphasis on STEM as a practical necessity for national development (Gopinathan, 2007; Tan, 2010). In other words, the historical roots of small-state survivalism and political pragmatism explain why education in Singapore is highly competitive and results-based.

Meanwhile, the United States has built its education policy based on a philosophy of liberal individualism and a federalist framework. Education in the United States has been viewed

from the outset as a means of advancing democratic ideals, where every individual has the right to choose an educational path that best suits their interests and needs. John Dewey, one of America's most influential educational philosophers, emphasized that schools should be miniature democracies that train children to think critically, collaborate, and appreciate differences (Dewey, 1916). On the other hand, the federalist structure prevents the central government from having full control over education, allowing each state to develop its own curriculum and policies. This explains the diversity of American educational policies, which, while seemingly fragmented, actually reflect a commitment to the values of freedom, pluralism, and democracy (Spring, 2016).

Indonesia, unlike these four countries, carries the burden of a long history of colonialism. The Dutch colonial education system was designed not to educate its people equally, but rather to produce administrative personnel who could serve colonial interests. This colonial educational orientation emphasized obedience, memorization, and strict selection, rather than creativity or equal access (Tilaar, 2009). After independence, although the curriculum was nationalized, many bureaucratic mindsets inherited from the colonial system persisted, including centralized policymaking, curriculum uniformity, and the dominance of exams as a measure of educational success. Another factor reinforcing this tendency is the reality of Indonesia's ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. To maintain national unity, the government favored a uniform education system, even though this often stifled local creativity (Bjork, 2005).

This comparison reveals that Finland emphasizes equality due to its roots in social egalitarianism, while Japan prioritizes discipline and collectivity, influenced by Confucianism and Meiji nationalism. Singapore has adopted a meritocracy due to the reality of small-state survivalism, while the United States emphasizes freedom, rooted in its traditions of liberal

individualism and federalism. Meanwhile, Indonesia emphasizes centralization and standardization due to its colonial legacy and the need to maintain unity amidst diversity. Therefore, differences in education policies cannot be separated from the philosophical foundations and historical experiences that shape each country's identity.

Implications for Indonesia

This analysis of the philosophical and historical roots reveals that adopting policies from other countries cannot be divorced from their specific context. Indonesia, with its history of colonialism and high social diversity, requires an education model that combines equality (Finland), collaboration (Japan), meritocracy (Singapore), and flexibility (United States), while remaining rooted in local values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). Based on the previous analysis, the explanation of this research question is as follows:

Educational Management Practices Implemented in Japan, Finland, Singapore, And the United States, and the Principles Underpin Their Success

Educational management practices in Japan, Finland, Singapore, and the United States vary significantly, reflecting each country's distinct historical, cultural, and philosophical contexts. Finland implements a decentralized, trust-based model, where the central government provides only a core curriculum framework and common standards. At the same time, schools and teachers have significant autonomy to adapt learning to local needs (Sahlberg, 2015). The success of this model is supported by high social trust in teacher professionalism, a focus on equity, and a collaborative, student-centered learning approach through a phenomenon-based curriculum (Lonka, 2018).

In contrast, Japan and Singapore implement highly centralized educational

governance. Japan uses a uniform “Course of Study” across all schools, ensuring consistent quality but limiting local flexibility (Takayama, 2018). Teachers engage in lesson study, a collaborative practice that enables them to continuously develop, observe, and evaluate learning (Takahashi & McDougal, 2016). Singapore strictly controls all aspects of education, including curriculum, assessment, and teacher development, to ensure alignment with national economic development goals (Ng, 2017). This model guarantees measurable results but places high academic pressure on both teachers and students. The United States is on the opposite side, with extreme decentralization, despite federal guidelines, such as the Common Core, each state and school district has significant autonomy in determining curriculum, instructional strategies, and evaluation systems (Darling-Hammond, 2020). This model encourages innovation but creates significant disparities in educational quality, primarily due to the varying economic conditions of each region.

The key principles of these systems’ success include: trust-based autonomy and equity (Finland), disciplined and collaborative professionalism (Japan), strategic planning and meritocracy (Singapore), and flexibility and innovation (United States). Each system strikes a balance between central control, teacher autonomy, quality assurance, and responsiveness to local contexts.

Similarities and Differences with the Current Indonesian Education Framework

The current Indonesian education framework shares both similarities and differences with these international models. The Freedom to Learn policy introduces decentralization and local flexibility, similar to Finland’s trust-based approach and curriculum flexibility in the United States. Indonesia also emphasizes teacher development, similar to lesson study in Japan and structured career paths in Singapore, to enhance teacher professionalism.

However, significant challenges remain. Teacher quality is uneven, educational facilities differ significantly between urban and rural areas, and the bureaucratic system remains centralized and hierarchical, a legacy of Dutch colonial rule (Tilaar, 2009; Bjork, 2005). Unlike Finland or Singapore, the capacity to ensure access and equity remains limited. Unlike Japan, a culture of disciplined collaboration has not yet become a fully established professional practice, and unlike the United States, technological and curriculum innovations are unevenly implemented. Indonesia’s ethnic and linguistic diversity also demands a balance between national standards and local contexts.

Elements of International Best Practices That Can Be Adopted in Indonesia

Several best practices from other countries can be adapted to strengthen education in Indonesia. Finland demonstrates the importance of trust-based governance by granting autonomy to schools and teachers, while ensuring accountability and providing necessary resources. Japan emphasizes collaborative professional development through lesson study, which can be adapted to incorporate the value of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) to foster a culture of reflection among teachers. Singapore exemplifies a meritocratic career path with incentives for high-performing teachers and support for underprivileged regions. The flexibility of the United States-style curriculum enables adaptation to regional and cultural diversity without compromising minimum national standards. Furthermore, project- and phenomenon-based learning, along with a balanced evaluation system, can enhance student engagement, critical thinking, and meaningful learning while maintaining accountability.

■ CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that Indonesia’s efforts to adopt educational policies from developed countries

such as Finland, Japan, Singapore, and the United States cannot be implemented directly without a thorough adaptation process. Each country has its own unique underlying philosophy, historical context, and socio-cultural structure, which in turn give rise to different governance models, curricula, learning strategies, assessment systems, and international achievements. In the Indonesian context, several inhibiting factors exist, such as hierarchical bureaucracy, socio-economic inequality, nepotism, ethnic and linguistic diversity, and the legacy of colonialism that emphasizes memorization and obedience. These factors have the potential to limit the effectiveness of adopting faith-based educational models (Finland), meritocracy (Singapore), curriculum homogeneity (Japan), or curriculum liberalism (the United States). However, Indonesia also has significant driving factors, including the value of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), which aligns with the collaborative spirit of Japanese teachers; aspirations for social mobility that align with Singapore's meritocracy; cultural pluralism that supports curriculum flexibility, similar to that in the United States; and the Freedom to Learn (*Merdeka Belajar*) policy, which could be a first step toward a more autonomous education system, similar to Finland's. Therefore, the best strategy for Indonesia is not to copy policies from other countries in their entirety, but rather to adapt them to the local context. Local values, such as *Pancasila* and mutual cooperation, should serve as a foundation, while best practices from other countries can be selectively adopted to strengthen the national education system. This approach is expected to foster a more inclusive and equitable Indonesian education model that is relevant to the challenges of the 21st century, while also being rooted in national identity.

The results of this study have both practical implications and policy recommendations. For teachers and schools, improving competency through ongoing training is crucial to ensure more consistent implementation of innovative strategies

such as project-based learning. Schools also need to foster a culture of formative evaluation and encourage collaboration among teachers to strengthen shared reflection. The use of simple technology can facilitate learning differentiation, especially in schools with limited facilities. From a policy perspective, the government needs to strengthen teacher recruitment and equitable distribution, provide supporting infrastructure, and ensure that national evaluations truly serve as diagnostic tools, not merely selection tools. Furthermore, improving teacher welfare and implementing new curricula gradually, with regular evaluations, are key to ensuring that educational innovations do not burden schools. With a gradual transition between classroom practice and policy support, education quality can be improved more sustainably.

This research has several limitations that require attention. First, the study primarily relies on secondary data from international literature and official reports, such as those from the OECD and the World Bank, which means that its findings are heavily influenced by the availability and quality of these sources. Second, comparisons between countries are conducted at the macro level and therefore fail to capture variations in practices at the school or classroom level. Third, socio-cultural contextual factors unique to each country can only be discussed in general terms, which may potentially create an interpretation bias. Fourth, methodological limitations arise from the lack of primary data collection through direct observation or interviews with education stakeholders. Therefore, the results of this study should be viewed as an initial analytical framework that can be further developed through additional research, incorporating field data and both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

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