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Sara Ray

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COMPARISON OF TEXAS AND FINNISH EDUCATION SYSTEMS

by

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Dedication

To my parents, Jane and Doug Ray, who have helped me through this exciting journey, and my son Harrison who gave me the motivation to complete it!

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I want to acknowledge the many professors who have encouraged me throughout my educational journey including Dr. Maria Curtis, Dr. Amy Lucas, and Dr. Mike McCullen. I could not have made it this far without them, and I am so thankful for all the skills and encouragement they have given me to succeed.

ABSTRACT
COMPARISON OF TEXAS AND FINNISH EDUCATION SYSTEMS

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The Finnish education system is widely considered to be one of the best in the world (Chung, 2019). Educators from many countries have examined Finland's system to determine what makes it so successful (Nieme et al., 2012). As Finland continues to maintain a high standard, Texas has steadily fallen in rank in the United States and requires much improvement (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). After attending courses at the University of Helsinki in Finland to learn more about the Finnish education system, my experience suggested many areas in which Texas could improve to achieve a more successful education system for its students and teachers. To test this hypothesis, I conducted surveys of Texas and Finnish teachers. I compared the results to the latest data of student satisfaction surveys taken by the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED). After obtaining results from sixty-nine teachers, I concluded that there is a significant difference between the two locations when comparing teacher education levels and the implementation of standardized testing.

As shown in my analysis, Finnish teachers obtain higher education levels. This is considered to be one of the main reasons for Finland's successful education system (Juusola & Riih , 2018). Another factor shown from the data is the importance of the absence of standardized testing of Finnish students. The Finnish students benefit from the decision to end high-stakes standardized tests. This policy was implemented in the 1970s after Finland went through significant education reform.

In this thesis, I assert that this data indicates that two significant educational changes should be undertaken in Texas. The Texas Education Agency should require higher quality education for Texas teachers and eliminate the administration of high-stakes standardized tests.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Education is the foundation that jumpstarts a person's ability to read, write, solve equations, experiment, and learn how to become a successful citizen. Millions of children start their educational journeys each year, but the quality of that education is different for each educational system. One source available for information on the success rate of various countries in their educational systems is the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The OECD is an international organization whose mission "is to promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world" (OCED, 2018, p.2). One of the ways the OECD tries to accomplish this goal is to compile the information used to compare the education systems of the thirty-six countries who are currently members of the organization. Among these member countries are the United States and Finland. The OECD does an excellent job of breaking down different areas of education and formatting it into readable charts and graphs.

One of the most well-known comparisons the OECD administers is the PISA, or Program for International Student Assessment. This assessment is given every three years to fifteen-year-old students near the end of their academic year. These students are represented in each member country as well as other participating countries who are not currently members of the OECD. The assessment contains material on math, science, and reading. When the PISA was first administered in 2000, many people were surprised to see that Finland had the top scores over every participating country. At that time, professionals from around the world began researching why Finland's education system was producing such great results. Meanwhile, the United States had an average PISA score that ranked 15th out of thirty-two countries (Statistics, 2002).

The 2015 PISA results showed an even wider gap between Finland and the United States. Finland scored in the top five out of seventy-two countries, while the United States was ranked 25th (OECD, 2018). The PISA also presented data regarding equity in education, school policies and practices, school governance, and student's well-being. These are all critical factors to include when assessing a country's education system. In this thesis, I will focus on comparing two education systems represented in the OECD data: Texas and Finland.

Texas is currently ranked thirty-seventh in education out of the fifty states in the United States (Company, 2018). This ranking by the McKinney Company reports, "The states were ranked on performance in higher education as well as primary and secondary schooling, and pre-K education" (Company, 2018, para.1).

The low ranking of Texas schools by the McKinney Company is a significant indication that serious reform is needed for the Texas education system. The assessment of students in Texas is primarily based on standardized testing (Davis et al., 2015). High-stakes standardized testing begins when students enter the third grade and continue each year until they graduate from high school. Because of this standardized testing system, students who fall behind in the pace prescribed by an academically rigorous system set by the state of Texas often are never able to catch up. This can lead to low academic performance and an increase in the rate of school dropouts (Lyster, 2016).

For students to be genuinely successful, teachers must be able to meet all of their academic needs. The data in this study indicate that this is not being done in the Texas educational system, and highlights drawbacks similar to those found in previous studies (Morgan, 2016). Often students of color and low SES groups suffer the consequences, a holdover from as far back the segregation era (Blanton & Blanton, 2000). By contrast, teachers in Finland are not required to concentrate on assuring that students master specific

material to pass standardized tests. This frees the Finnish teachers to address the educational needs of their students more broadly (Mariussen & Virkkala, 2013).

Education is the fundamental necessity of life that starts the building blocks of a person's success, happiness, and well-being. If a student's educational needs are not met, all of these factors affect the success rates of their future. Teachers should be given the resources and ability to support each student in their classroom. The data set out below compares the two educational systems based on surveys, data, and literature review. This thesis concentrates on teacher education and the effects of using standardized tests on the overall performance of the systems under consideration.

More generally, my research question is: Does Finland have a more successful education system than Texas? If so, what policies can be implemented to improve the Texas education system based on the Finnish education system's success?

My motivation for this question is to explore future policy reform of education in Texas based on the research of the success of the Finnish education system. I am an elementary teacher whose aspirations of reforming the educational system in Texas became much bleaker as I administered my third-grade students their first Pre-STAAR benchmark exam. Cringing as I read the state-mandated directions, I saw my students' anxiety rise, and my heart sunk as I knew at least a third of my students would not pass this test. I knew this because a third of my students came to me on a kindergarten or first-grade reading level. The progress most of them accomplished throughout the year made me proud, but I knew it was not enough to pass the STAAR exam. Starting my education degree gave me the false sense that there was a remarkable impact that I could have on a child's education and well-being, but I soon realized that dream was complicated as I am required to center all my teaching efforts around preparation for high-stakes standardized testing culture. My goal in this thesis is to show that there are more equitable and sufficient ways to educate

children and allow teachers to do what they do best, teach. Current literature is abundant in what policies each system is implementing and how they are performing. To define the success of an education system, I will examine many factors, including the well-being and satisfaction of teachers and students, the implementation of standardized testing, and teacher education levels. My literature review will include sources describing the education systems in Texas and Finland and include sources that cover the definition of how success is defined.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Texas

Texas has a unique education system. Like all the states in the US, Texas can create and mandate its institutional structure. Texas follows a set of curricula called the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS. Every school that receives state funding must develop from this curriculum (Erekson 2012). Unfortunately, this does not give Texas educators autonomy in their classrooms. Research has been done on the accountability system on the perceptions and practices of elementary teachers (Cruz, 2010). In this study, researchers assert the results indicating "teachers feel a great deal of pressure, especially from the emphasis on outcomes of state-level tests, campus principals, central office, and other teachers" (Cruz, 2010). Standardized testing is common practice in Texas, and the material used for these tests comes from the TEKS. The term "teaching to the test" is common in Texas as many parents, teachers, and education advocates oppose this testing tactic. For students, teachers, and administrators, accountability through testing is the critical leverage point for policymakers seeking to promote educational reform (Warren et al., 2015). Policies surrounding educational testing have become political spectacles and struggles for both publicity and control (Hoffman et al., 2001).

With Texas having a low ranking in education nationwide, it might be time to reevaluate and reform some of their education policies. Research has indicated that high-stakes standardized testing is a very ineffective way to calculate the success of students (Fielding 2004). "Teaching to the test also has a "dumbing" effect on education and learning as worksheets, drills, practice tests, and similar rote practices consume higher amounts of classroom time" (Sacks, 2000, as cited in Volante, 2004). Time spent in the

classroom on test-taking skills can replace other necessary instruction that could benefit students to grow as learners (Herman, 1992, as cited in Volante, 2004).

The administration of high-stakes standardized testing in the Texas school system could be one of the reasons for its low school ratings (Morgan, 2016). Texas starts testing students in elementary school in the 3rd grade and continues to examine them every year until they graduate high school (TEA, 2018). As of 2018, Texas has now started a new school rating system that counts the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STARR) test as a large portion of the "school progress" section that gives schools a rating from A-F, A being the highest rating (TEA, 2018). This not only puts more pressure on students to perform well but also teachers to make sure their students are performing well on the STAAR test to make sure their school will get the highest ratings (TEA, 2018).

Finland

Finland has a nation-wide educational system that is mandated by the Finnish government's Ministry to Education and Culture. In *The Finnish Miracle of PISA: Historical and Sociological Remarks on Teaching and Teacher Education*, Simola describes the recognition that Finnish education received after the 2000 PISA results were posted. Simola claims that one of the main reasons the Finnish education system works is the quality of teachers and teacher education. In the book *The Education Systems of Europe*, the chapter on Finland describes the Finnish education system and states that, since the education reform was carried out in 1974, Finnish teachers are now required to obtain a master's degree (Hörner et al., 2015). Before the 1970s, Finland had a low academic achievement rate as only one in ten Finnish adults had completed more than nine years of schooling (Sahlberg, 2010). Teachers attended teacher colleges that

were separate from University. After several drastic policy changes, the Ministry of Education and Culture transformed Finnish education into what it is today (Matikainen 2018).

Requiring a master's degree allows Finnish teachers to develop the craft of teaching and achieve a high professionalization. Schools give teachers full autonomy inside their classrooms to teach children the highest standards (Juntunen, 2017). This is in stark contrast to the way teachers in Texas are expected to teach. Texas teachers are only required to have a bachelor's degree and do not have to obtain a degree in education. Many Texas teachers have a degree outside of education and obtain an alternative certificate that they can complete online; this is permitted because there is a chronic high turnover rate among Texas teachers and constant need to fill vacant positions. Because of this ease of entering the teaching profession, many Texas teachers go into their teaching career with no educational background or training. This has a profound effect on the quality of teachers in Texas compared to those in Finland.

Pasi Sahlberg is a Finnish educator and policy advisor who has written numerous books and articles about the reasons behind the Finnish education system's success. The research in Sahlberg's brief describes the methods that have led to the much sought-after education system in Finland, identifying Finland as one of the most literate societies in the world, referred to as the "Finnish knowledge economy" (Halme et al., 2014). Sahlberg goes into great detail about the Finnish education system, emphasizing that highly educated teachers are part of the reason that the Finnish education system is so successful.

Teachers are highly trusted and respected and are given vast amounts of control over their classrooms. As a result, teaching is one of the most sought-after professions in Finland, as thousands of applications are processed every year, and

only the highest qualified candidates are chosen to become education majors at the University (Sahlberg, 2010, p1).

Sahlberg also explains how Finnish schools have eliminated high-stakes standardized testing from their curriculum.

The Finnish education system does not employ external standardized student testing to drive the performance of schools; neither does it employ a rigorous inspection system. Instead of test-based accountability, the Finnish system relies on the expertise and accountability of teachers who are knowledgeable and committed to their students (Sahlberg, 2010, p.2).

Instead of relying on standardized tests, teachers are put in charge of the assessment of their students. The teachers can differentiate their instruction based on the needs of their students. As a result, students are able to be successful in their educational journey.

OECD/PISA Data Comparisons

The OECD has collected data that compares its different member countries in many ways, including the test results of the PISA that occurs every three years. The administrators also survey students about their well-being and satisfaction with school. The 2015 PISA well-being report, *PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Student's Well-Being – Overview*, states "students' perceptions of learning support from teachers are associated with higher life satisfaction" (OCED, 2017). The impact that teachers have on students can affect the satisfaction students have in their daily lives over the course of a lifetime. The report combines many factors that make up a student's well-being, including psychological, social, physical, and cognitive attributes at school.

According to the PISA findings, Finland is ranked 2nd among students' overall well-being. In contrast, the United States is ranked 25th and is barely above the average score of student's overall well-being (OECD, 2017). According to this report, one change to improve student's well-being satisfaction is for teachers to build strong positive relationships with each student, thereby increasing each student's motivation. In other words, this will improve student work ethic and increase success rates for students. Teachers are encouraged to experiment and craft interdisciplinary modes of curriculum delivery in their classrooms, creating multiple ways to teach to a class rather than requiring all children to achieve high success on a single standardized test (Björklund & Ahlskog-Björkman 2018).

Social Implications/Applicability

The study of the Texas and Finnish education systems gives a small preview of the broader scope of complications faced in global education. The number of struggling countries that are currently attempting to reform their education systems are rising each year, and some are turning to Finland for ideas. In the report Finnish Education, in a Nutshell, you can see an outline of how the Finnish system works and why. The report states, "One of the basic principles of Finnish education is that all people must have equal access to high-quality education and training. The same educational opportunities should be available to all citizens irrespective of their ethnic origin, age, wealth, or where they live" (Education, 2017). The report makes it clear the strengths in the approach which Finnish education achieves when compared to Texas, particularly on the factors of quality of teacher education to the lack of high-stakes standardized testing (Chung 2019; Hendrickson 2012).

Gaps in Research

There has been much research done on the longtime consequences of high-stakes standardized testing and low-quality teacher education in Texas and the United States (Hagopian 2014; Beatty 2001; David, 2011). Also, there is research on the impact of high-quality teaching and how it is related to student well-being (Cohen & Bhatt, 2012; Hebert & Durham, 2008). The gaps in the study have been on applying this research to form new policies to reform struggling education systems in Texas. My primary focus examines why the Texas education system is so stressed and how we can model policy reform on the Finnish education system.

There have been examples of successful Finnish elements and how to implement them in an American setting (Schneider et al., 2016). I integrate those studies and data collected while observing teachers in Finland, my own experiences as a teacher in Texas, and data collected from teachers in both places.

Current Study

As stated, my research aims to compare the Texas and Finnish educational systems and to use gathered data to see which system is more successful. For this thesis, "success" includes the satisfaction of teachers and the well-being of students.

The factors analyzed to determine such success include the implementation of standardized testing: teacher education levels, and the support and resources provided to teachers to be successful inside the classroom. The literature review assesses the many topics that cover the determination of successful education systems. I will use the research collected to form an outline for fundamental policy reform that might improve the educational system in Texas.

Hypothesis

I believe that the results of my research and data will show that the Finnish education system is more successful than the Texas education system given its flexibility and the long-term career paths typical of Finnish educators, the lack of standardized testing, and teacher satisfaction

First, I will compare teacher satisfaction to see if Texas teachers or Finnish teachers are more satisfied with their jobs. I hypothesize that Finnish teachers are more satisfied with their teaching job than Texas teachers. I will show this by comparing the satisfaction of teaching positions and resources provided to teachers.

My second hypothesis compares teacher education. I believe that Finnish teachers will hold higher degrees than Texas teachers. I will also compare teacher education quality and hypothesize that Finnish teachers will rate their teacher education higher than Texas teachers.

CHAPTER III: METHODS/DATA

For this study, I used two sample groups. I surveyed elementary and high school teachers in Texas and Finland. I did this by distributing surveys to teachers located around the Houston, Texas area, and teachers in school districts in and around Helsinki, Finland. My goal was to survey one hundred teachers, fifty in each location. I was able to retrieve sixty-nine surveys, thirty-five from Texas teachers, and thirty-four from Finnish teachers. The study uses an online survey sent to teachers through people I had met while studying at the University of Helsinki, and teachers who work in the surrounding Houston area. Since I currently reside in Texas, and half of my surveyed population reside in Finland, I used online surveys as it was the best method to reach teachers in each location (See Appendix 1 for survey questions)

In my study, I observed how the dependent variable, including teacher satisfaction levels and quality of education, is determined by the independent variables, the location of systems: Texas and Finland. I used the survey to determine teachers' overall satisfaction, the use, and effects of standardized high-stakes testing, and the satisfaction each location had with their current education system. I then used the data that was collected by the OECD published in the 2015 PISA report about student's well-being in the United States and Finland. This information determines the life and school satisfaction rates of students in each location and compares them to the results I obtained from my survey.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

Discussion

Figure 1A-C

Figures 1A-B show the comparison of the education levels of Texas and Finnish teachers. Research states that Finnish teachers are required to obtain a minimum of a master's degree, and in the results, 91.2% of Finnish teachers surveyed have a minimum of a master's degree, while 2.9% have a doctorates degree, and 5.9% stated they were in the process of completing their doctoral program. In contrast, Texas teachers stated 77.1% had obtained a bachelor's degree, while only 17.1% have a master's degree, and 5.7% stated they are in the process of obtaining a master's degree.

One of the primary reasons for the success of the Finnish education system is the high quality of teacher education (Sahlberg, 2010). Since teachers are required to go through a rigorous application process to be accepted into the education program at University and then must obtain a master's degree, the respect and quality of teachers in Finland are much higher than those in Texas. Finnish teachers are said to be experts in their field of education, so they are allowed to have more autonomy inside their classrooms. Their presence in classrooms brings a rigorous standard that enables them to meet their students where they are. They are seen as competent leaders in their classrooms, and thereby impress upon their students that they are operating in a creative and supportive educational environment, creating a sense of respect for learning, teachers, and the profession of teaching more generally.

They can assess and create instruction to meet the needs of each student. Finnish teachers give students the ability to be successful because instruction focuses on their individual needs rather than meeting state-based assessments.

Figure 1C shows the number of teachers that obtained an alternative teaching certificate showing the amount of Texas teachers that did not acquire a bachelor's degree in education. Almost half of Texas teachers surveyed, 42.9%, said they have an alternative teaching certificate, while only 17.6% of Finnish teachers have an alternative certificate. Not only do the majority of Texas teachers only obtain a bachelor's degree, but a large number of those teachers did not obtain a degree in education. Some teachers who go through the alternative teaching program do have a specialized degree in their teaching subjects, such as math or science, but this is not always the case. The ease of receiving an alternative teaching certificate has created a surge in people entering the teaching profession without an education degree.

In recent years, the turnover rate of Texas teachers has increased, and more teachers are changing careers after just a few years as education professionals. According to recent data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), "One in ten teachers quit teaching in Texas schools after their first year, according to state records. Five years after earning their teaching certificate, three in ten teachers are either no longer in the profession or have left the state" (Zelinski, 2019, p.1). These data are significant because it shows the amount of Texas teachers unsatisfied with their teaching position and seeking employment elsewhere. This attitude could be due to many factors, including those discussed in this thesis, such as the lack of funding for classroom resources and supplies, and the implementation of high-stakes standardized tests.

**What is your highest degree earned? * Where do you teach?
Crosstabulation**

		Where do you teach?			
		Texas	Finland	Total	
What is your highest degree earned?	Bachelors	Count	27	0	27
		% of Total	39.1%	0.0%	39.1%
	Masters	Count	6	31	37
		% of Total	8.7%	44.9%	53.6%
	Doctorate	Count	0	1	1
		% of Total	0.0%	1.4%	1.4%
	Other	Count	2	2	4
		% of Total	2.9%	2.9%	5.8%
Total	Count	35	34	69	
	% of Total	50.7%	49.3%	100.0%	

Figure 1A. Highest degree earned

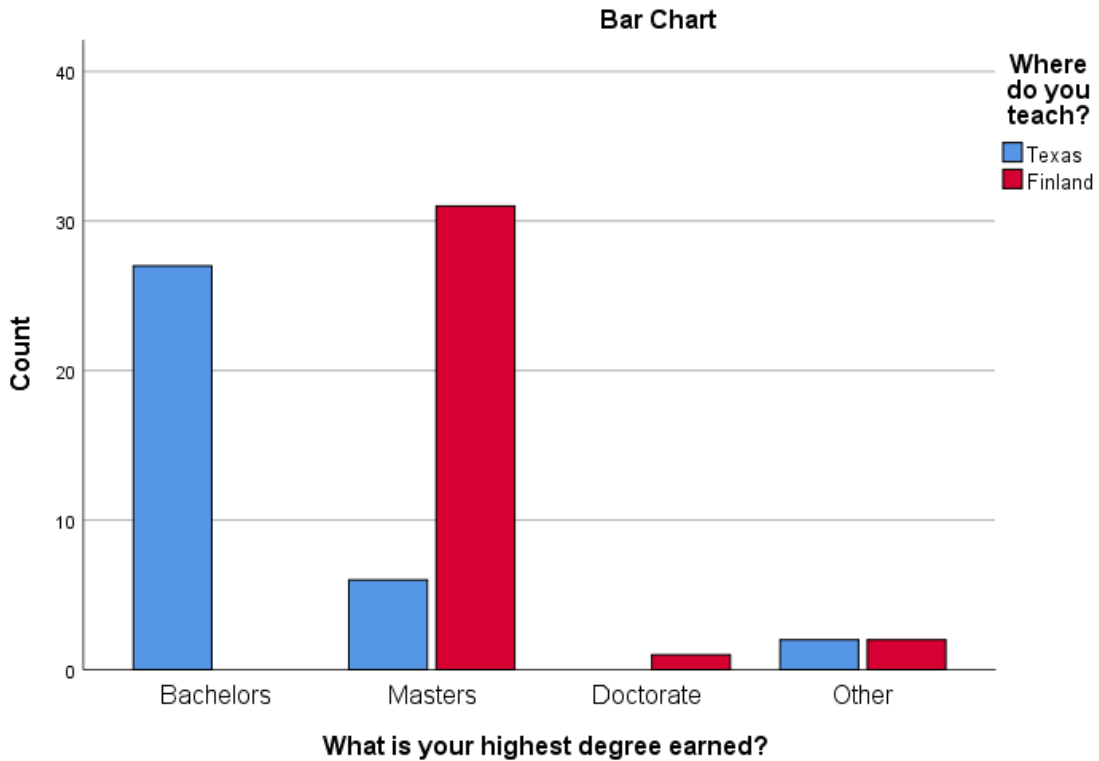


Figure 1B. Highest degree earned graph

Did you go through alternative training to obtain a teaching certificate?

*** Where do you teach?**

Crosstabulation

			Where do you teach?		Total
			Texas	Finland	
Did you go through alternative training to obtain a teaching certificate?	Yes	Count	15	6	21
		% within Where do you teach?	42.9%	17.6%	30.4%
	No	Count	20	28	48
		% within Where do you teach?	57.1%	82.4%	69.6%
Total	Count	35	34	69	
	% within Where do you teach?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Figure 1C. Alternative certificate

Figure 2A-B

These figures show the results of question 18: "Is teaching a respected career choice in your state or country?" (Appendix 1: Survey). The results from the survey were very similar to the information in current research. In the survey, 88.2% of Finnish teachers answered "yes," while only 37.1% of Texas teachers answered the same. Among Texas teachers, 42.9% answered "no," and 20% stated "other," citing that their teachers were sometimes respected or unsure.

Teachers' respect levels are much higher in Finland due to both societal attitudes and the process one has to go through to become a Finnish teacher. The selection process to get into the teaching education program at University is more rigorous, with only 1 in 10 teachers selected for the program (Sahlberg, 2010, p.2). This process, along with the higher qualifications for Finnish teachers, makes the career more desirable for motivated candidates. That is why teachers' quality is one of the top reasons for the success of the current Finnish education system.

**Is teaching a respected career choice in your state or country?
* Where do you teach? Crosstabulation**

		Where do you teach?		Total	
		Texas	Finland		
Is teaching a respected career choice in your state or country?	Yes	Count	13	30	43
		% within Where do you teach?	37.1%	88.2%	62.3%
	No	Count	15	1	16
		% within Where do you teach?	42.9%	2.9%	23.2%
	Other	Count	7	3	10
		% within Where do you teach?	20.0%	8.8%	14.5%
Total	Count	35	34	69	
	% within Where do you teach?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Figure 2A. Teaching respected career

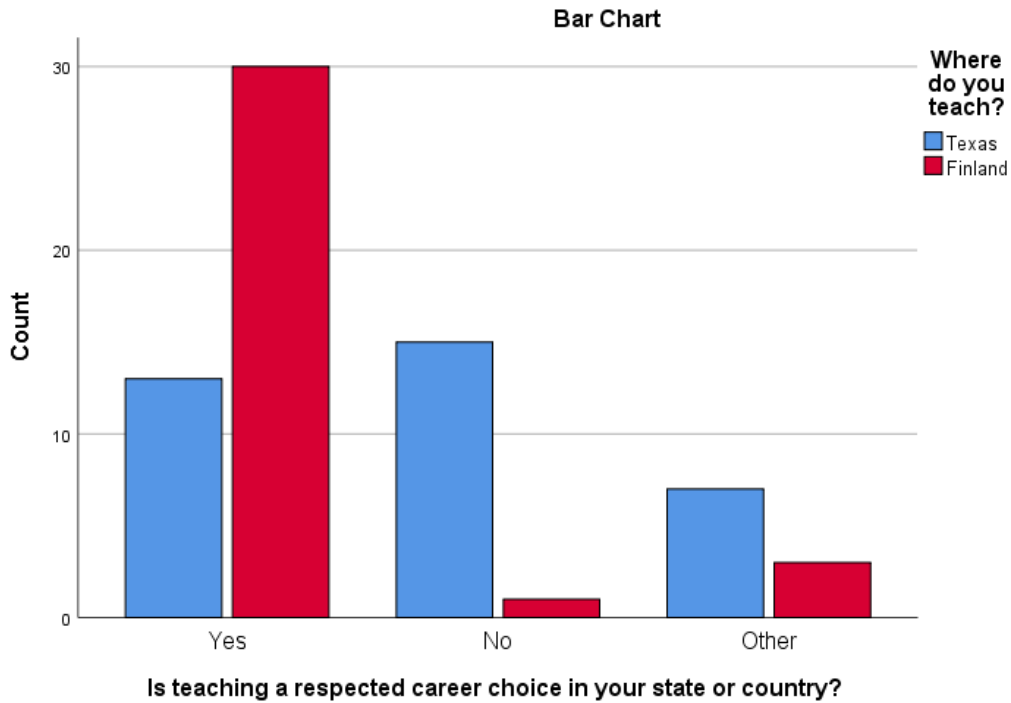


Figure 2B. Teaching respected career graph

Figure 3A-E

Figures 3A-C show the results for the satisfaction rates of a teaching position. Figure 3B shows the results of the Chi-Square test comparing teacher position satisfaction for Texas and Finnish teachers. For this test, the null hypothesis is that there is no association between the satisfaction rates of Finnish and Texas teachers. The research hypothesis is that there is an association between the satisfaction rates of Finnish and Texas teachers. The independent variable of the hypothesis is the satisfaction rates, and the dependent variable is the teachers' location. The significance level is 0.05, and as stated, the statistic tests are a Chi-Square. The hypothesis for this test is that there is an association between the satisfaction of teaching positions and the location of the teacher. After running the Chi-Square test in SPSS, the results show a significant level of 0.544. These results are higher than the set significance level of 0.05. Therefore, I will not reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no association between teachers' location and the satisfaction of their teaching position.

These results are surprising as I thought the teaching position satisfaction rates would be higher in Finland, but the results show that rates of satisfaction are almost the same in each location, with the majority of both Finnish and Texas teachers being either extremely satisfied or somewhat satisfied of their teaching position. With further research and data collection from both locations within Texas and Finland, more information can be found.

Along with satisfaction rates, results compare the rates of how their education systems supported each location. The survey asked teachers the amount they pay for their classroom supplies and resources. Figure 3D shows these results stating that Texas teachers pay a significantly higher amount on supplies and resources, with 91.4% paying over \$150 in one school year, including some answering that they pay thousands of

dollars each year on supplies and resources. Finnish teachers are quite the opposite, as the majority of Finnish teachers' pay \$50 or less in a school year on supplies and resources. Resource funding comes from governmental support in Finland from the Ministry of Education and Culture. Teachers have the supplies and resources they need to properly do their jobs and not expected to supplement their classrooms out of their pockets.

Figure 3E-F shows the satisfaction rates of teacher salary. The majority of both Finnish and Texas teachers were both somewhat satisfied with their monthly or annual salary, while 25.7% of Texas teachers and 26.4% of Finnish teachers said they were dissatisfied with their monthly or annual salary. These results show there is no association between salary satisfaction and location, which could contribute to the results of job satisfaction above. These results could be because of the locations I collected from, as salaries in Texas vary depending on the school district. Since most of the Texas surveys are from the Houston area, teacher salaries are competitive and tend to be much higher than in small rural areas in Texas (Editor, 2019). In Finland, the salary rates come from the Ministry of Education and are similar for all teachers.

**How satisfied are you with your teaching position? * Where do you teach?
Crosstabulation**

			Where do you teach?		Total
			Texas	Finland	
How satisfied are you with your teaching position?	Extremely satisfied	Count	17	18	35
		% within Where do you teach?	48.6%	52.9%	50.7%
	Somewhat satisfied	Count	17	15	32
		% within Where do you teach?	48.6%	44.1%	46.4%
	Somewhat dissatisfied	Count	1	0	1
		% within Where do you teach?	2.9%	0.0%	1.4%
	Extremely dissatisfied	Count	0	1	1
		% within Where do you teach?	0.0%	2.9%	1.4%
Total	Count	35	34	69	
	% within Where do you teach?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Figure 3A. Satisfied with teacher position

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.140 ^a	3	.544
Likelihood Ratio	2.912	3	.405
Linear-by-Linear Association	.005	1	.942
N of Valid Cases	69		

a. 4 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .49.

Figure 3B, Satisfied with teaching position Chi Square

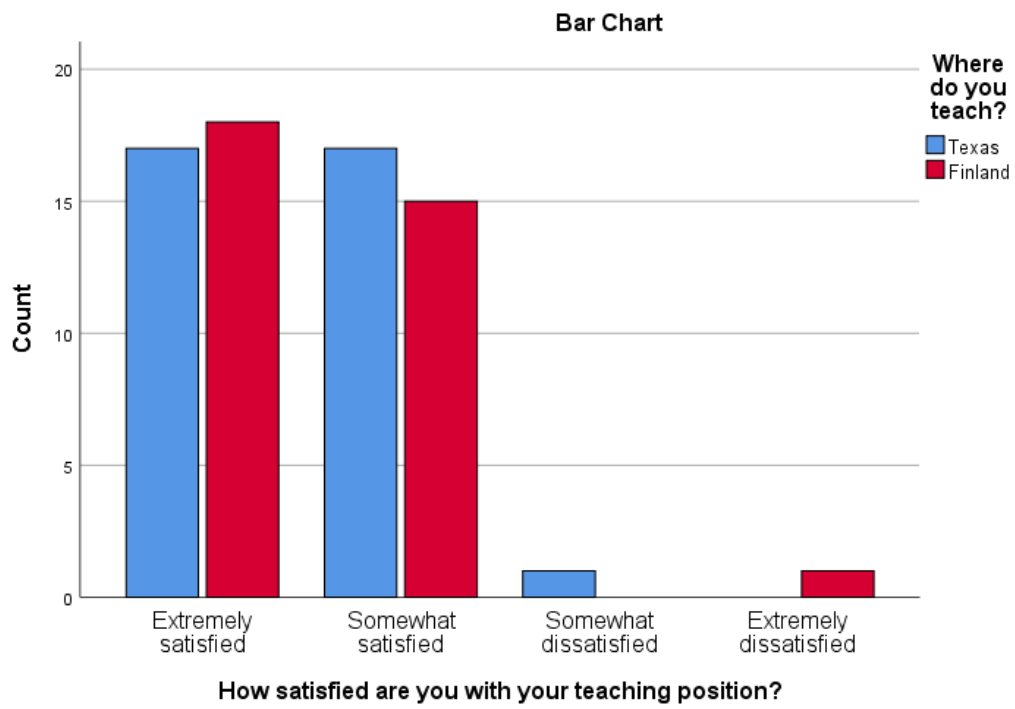


Figure 3C. Satisfied with teaching position graph

How much do you personally pay for classroom and/or teaching supplies in one school year? * Where do you teach? Crosstabulation

			Where do you teach?		Total
			Texas	Finland	
How much do you personally pay for classroom and/or teaching supplies in one school year?	\$0-\$50	Count	0	20	20
		% within Where do you teach?	0.0%	58.8%	29.0%
	\$51-\$100	Count	0	6	6
		% within Where do you teach?	0.0%	17.6%	8.7%
	\$101-\$150	Count	3	0	3
		% within Where do you teach?	8.6%	0.0%	4.3%
	\$151-\$200	Count	11	1	12
		% within Where do you teach?	31.4%	2.9%	17.4%
	Other	Count	21	7	28
		% within Where do you teach?	60.0%	20.6%	40.6%
	Total	Count	35	34	69
		% within Where do you teach?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 3D. Pay for classroom

How satisfied are you with your monthly or annual salary? * Where do you teach? Crosstabulation

			Where do you teach?		Total
			Texas	Finland	
How satisfied are you with your monthly or annual salary?	Extremely satisfied	Count	3	2	5
		% within Where do you teach?	8.6%	5.9%	7.2%
	Somewhat satisfied	Count	20	20	40
		% within Where do you teach?	57.1%	58.8%	58.0%
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Count	3	3	6
		% within Where do you teach?	8.6%	8.8%	8.7%
	Somewhat dissatisfied	Count	5	6	11
		% within Where do you teach?	14.3%	17.6%	15.9%
	Extremely dissatisfied	Count	4	3	7
		% within Where do you teach?	11.4%	8.8%	10.1%
	Total	Count	35	34	69
		% within Where do you teach?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 3E. Salary satisfaction

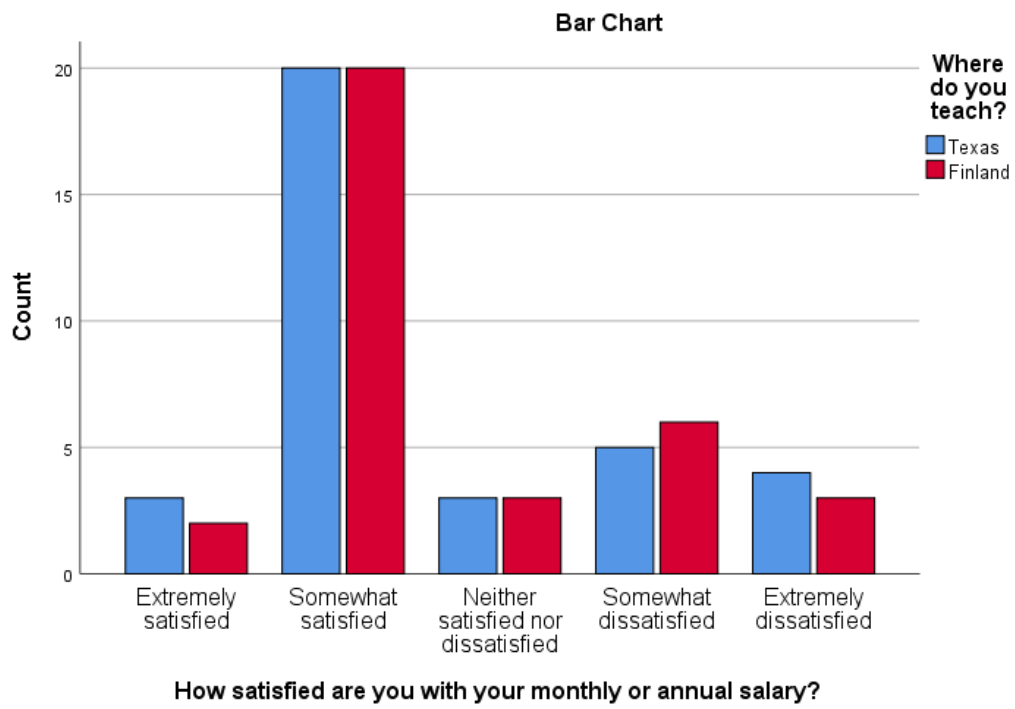


Figure 3F. Salary satisfaction graph

Figure 4A-G

Figures 4A-G discuss the results for questions asked about standardized testing. While studying in Finland, I repeatedly heard by teachers and university professors that the elimination of high-stakes standardized testing continues to be one of the top reasons for Finland's successful educational system. As stated by Salhberg, Finland no longer depends on standardized results to assess students and teachers; instead, Finnish teachers are qualified experts who determine which assessments their students need. Since Finnish teachers are not required to assess students using a high-stakes standardized test, teachers can distinguish growth and mastery-based on a student's academic readiness. In other words, teachers can differentiate their instructions and assessments for each student based on their academic level rather than using a standardized based test.

The survey asked teachers if they have ever administered a state or national standardized test. Figures 4A-C shows the result, with Figure 4B displaying the results of the Chi-Square test. For this test, the null hypothesis is that there is no association between location and the administration of standardized testing. The research hypothesis is that there is an association between location and the administration of standardized testing. The independent variable of the hypothesis is the location, and the dependent variable is the administration of standardized tests. The significance level is set at 0.05, and as stated, the statistic tests are a Chi-Square. The hypothesis for this test was that there was an association or relationship between teaching location and the administration of standardized testing. After running the Chi-Square test in SPSS, the results show a significant level of 0.000. This result is less than 0.05, indicating an association between location and the administration of standardized tests. I will reject the null hypothesis since there is an association between the two variables and state that Texas teachers have administered more state standardized tests.

The results state that 88.6% of Texas teachers have administered a state standardized test, while 41.2% of Finnish teachers answered the same. The only standardized test administered in Finland is a University entrance exam. This test determines what university students qualify for if they choose that route for the educational journey. A majority of the Finnish teachers who took my survey stated that they were teachers in a Secondary grade or grades that would possibly administer a University entrance exam. Since I was not suspecting such a high number of Finnish teachers answering yes to this question, I would like to do more research on what standardized test they have administered, and if it is similar to the standardized tests implemented in Texas.

Figure 4D shows the results for the question asking if the curriculum is based on standardized testing. According to the Chi-Square test done for this data, the significance level is 0.016, which is lower than the set level of 0.05. The results show that there is a relationship between curriculum based on standardized testing and location. The majority of teachers in Texas, 57.1%, stated that their curriculum is based on a standardized test, while only 25% of Finnish teachers stated the same. These results contribute to the idea that the Texas curriculum "teaches to the test," as discussed above. Since the curriculum is highly regulated to fit a standardized assessment, teachers have a tough time differentiating their instruction to fit each student's needs. Students who need more time or practice on specific skills do not have the opportunity to master material that must be on standardized tests. This information is most likely the reason 94.3% of Texas teachers in Figure 4G stated that standardized tests were not an excellent way to assess students' academic performance, and 58.8% of Finnish teachers answered the same.

Have you administered a state or national standardized test? * Where do you teach? Crosstabulation

			Where do you teach?		Total
			Texas	Finland	
Have you administered a state or national standardized test?	Yes	Count	31	14	45
		% within Where do you teach?	88.6%	41.2%	65.2%
	No	Count	4	20	24
		% within Where do you teach?	11.4%	58.8%	34.8%
Total	Count	35	34	69	
	% within Where do you teach?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Figure 4A. Administered standardized test

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	17.078 ^a	1	.000		
Continuity Correction ^b	15.053	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	18.214	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	16.830	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	69				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.83.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Figure 4B. Administered standardized test Chi Square

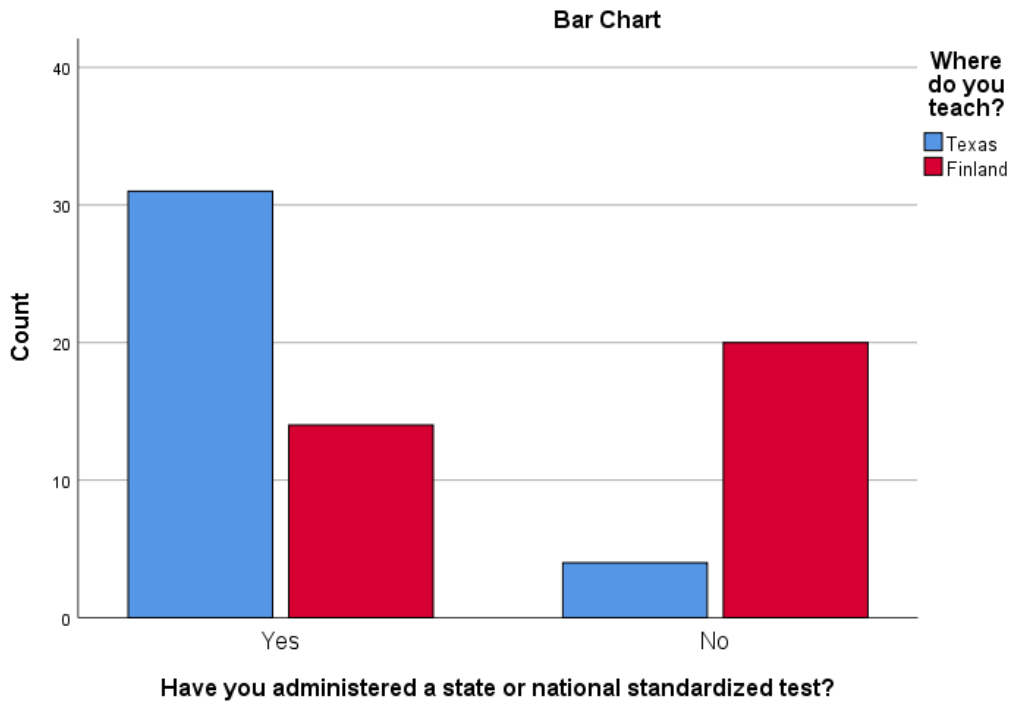


Figure 4C. Administered standardized test graph

Is the curriculum you teach based on material that will be on a standardized test? * Where do you teach? Crosstabulation

			Where do you teach?		Total
			Texas	Finland	
Is the curriculum you teach based on material that will be on a standardized test?	Yes	Count	20	8	28
		% within Where do you teach?	57.1%	25.0%	41.8%
	Sometimes	Count	7	7	14
		% within Where do you teach?	20.0%	21.9%	20.9%
	No	Count	8	17	25
		% within Where do you teach?	22.9%	53.1%	37.3%
Total	Count	35	32	67	
	% within Where do you teach?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Figure 4D. Curriculum based on standardized test

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.265 ^a	2	.016
Likelihood Ratio	8.493	2	.014
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.129	1	.004
N of Valid Cases	67		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.69.

Figure 4E. Curriculum based on standardized test Chi Square

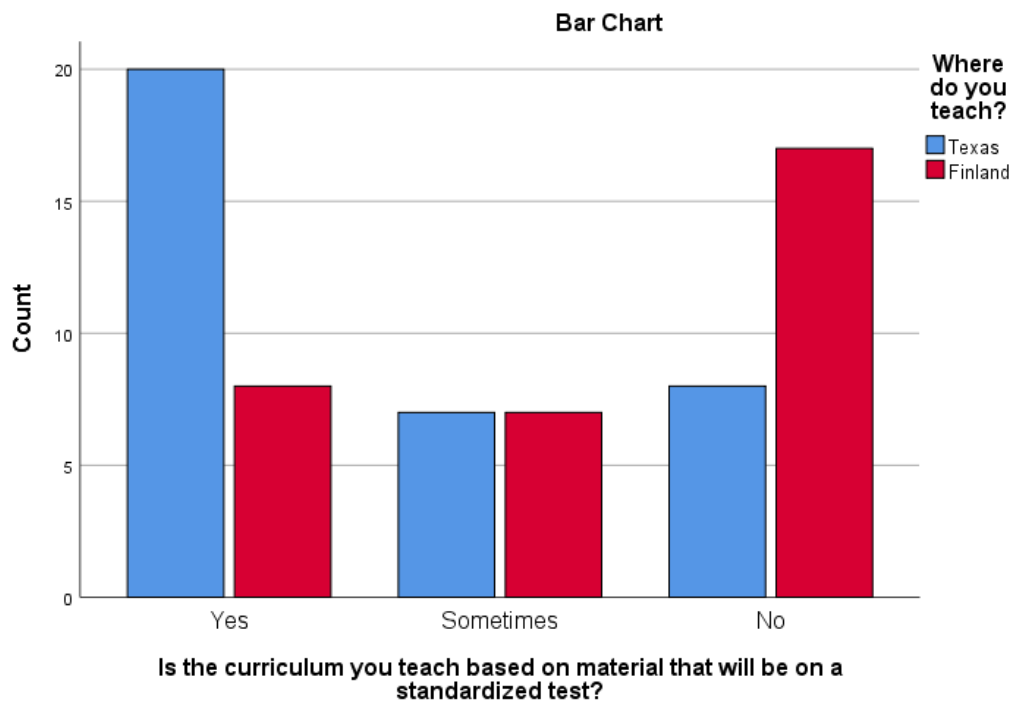


Figure 4F. Curriculum based on standardized test

Do you believe high-stake standardized tests are a good way to assess students' overall academic... * Where do you teach? Crosstabulation

			Where do you teach?		
			Texas	Finland	Total
Do you believe high-stake standardized tests are a good way to assess students' overall academic...	Yes	Count	1	9	10
		% within Where do you teach?	2.9%	26.5%	14.5%
	No	Count	33	20	53
		% within Where do you teach?	94.3%	58.8%	76.8%
	Other	Count	1	5	6
		% within Where do you teach?	2.9%	14.7%	8.7%
Total	Count	35	34	69	
	% within Where do you teach?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Figure 4G. Standardized test good way to assess

Figure 5A-C

Figures 5A-B shows satisfaction rates teachers have for their education system. Only 20.6% of Texas teachers are somewhat satisfied with their education system, while 30.9% of Finnish teachers said they were somewhat satisfied, and 11.8% said they were extremely satisfied, meaning 42.7% of surveyed Finnish teachers are satisfied with their education system. These results show that from surveyed teachers, Finnish teachers are more satisfied with their education system than Texas teachers. This data could be due to the many factors stated above as Finnish teachers are less likely than Texas teachers to teach a curriculum based on a standardized test or administer a standardized test allowing them to have more control over how and what they teach their students. Finnish teachers also spend less money on resources and supplies for their classrooms. As I will discuss in more detail below, receiving proper supplies and resources to achieve student success was the top answer for needed improvements that Texas teachers would like to see in their education system.

The survey asked teachers if they believed there needs improvement in their educational system and what those improvements should be. Figure 5C shows that 100% of Texas teachers surveyed believe that there need to be improvements to their educational system, and 84.8% of Finnish teachers believe the same. I was surprised to see the high percentage of Finnish teachers answer yes to this question, but two main factors stood out in the survey results. When asked about the quality of their mentor program as a first-year teacher, most Finnish teachers stated there was no mentor program available. Finnish teachers also stated that they had less support from their administration. Several Finnish teachers stated that their most significant issue with the administration was that there was not enough support for their first few years of teaching.

Adding a mandated mentor program for new teachers was one of the improvements many Finnish teachers stated in the survey.

The majority of both Finnish and Texas teachers said they would like smaller class sizes, smaller student to teacher ratio, and several Texas teachers wanted more resources provided by the schools. Other things teachers added to the survey were more mental health education for teachers and students and more support for students with learning disabilities and behavioral issues. Both of these topics have been very controversial in Texas, and more research is needed to understand their perceived needs in these areas better.

How satisfied are you with the current education system in your state or country? * Where do you teach? Crosstabulation

		Where do you teach?			
		Texas	Finland	Total	
How satisfied are you with the current education system in your state or country?	Extremely satisfied	Count	0	8	8
		% of Total	0.0%	11.8%	11.8%
	Somewhat satisfied	Count	14	21	35
		% of Total	20.6%	30.9%	51.5%
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Count	6	2	8
		% of Total	8.8%	2.9%	11.8%
	Somewhat dissatisfied	Count	9	2	11
		% of Total	13.2%	2.9%	16.2%
	Extremely dissatisfied	Count	6	0	6
		% of Total	8.8%	0.0%	8.8%
	Total	Count	35	33	68
		% of Total	51.5%	48.5%	100.0%

Figure 5A. Satisfied with education system

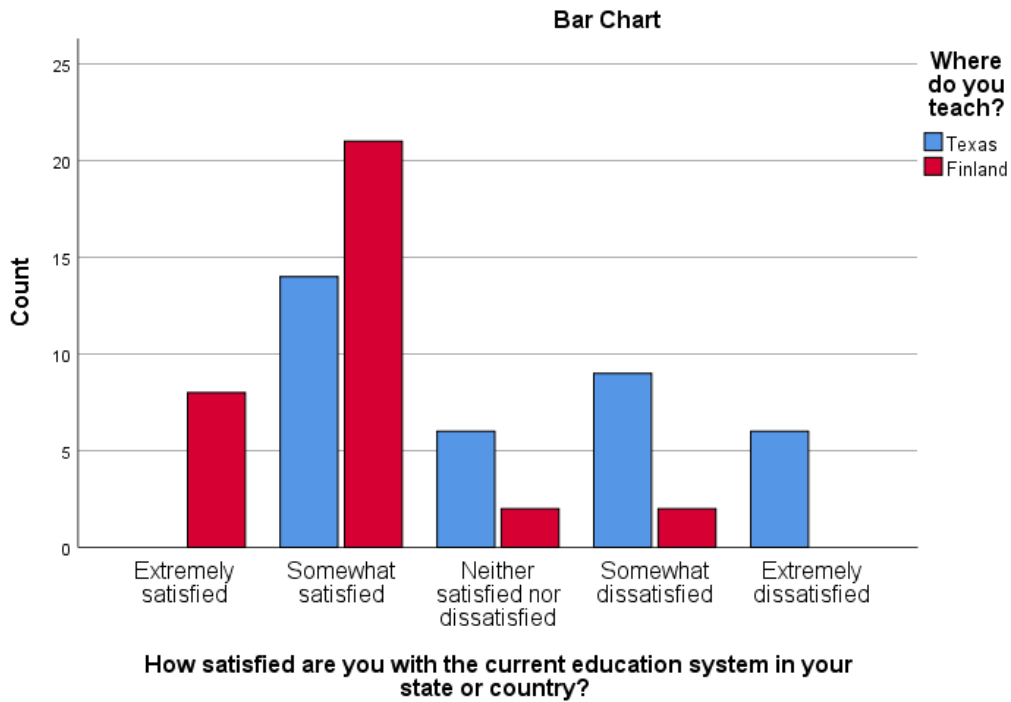


Figure 5B. Satisfied with education system graph

Do you think there needs to be improvements to the current educational system in your state or co... * Where do you teach? Crosstabulation

		Where do you teach?			Total
		Texas	Finland		
Do you think there needs to be improvements to the current educational system in your state or co...	Yes	Count	35	28	63
		% within Where do you teach?	100.0%	84.8%	92.6%
	No	Count	0	4	4
		% within Where do you teach?	0.0%	12.1%	5.9%
	Other	Count	0	1	1
		% within Where do you teach?	0.0%	3.0%	1.5%
Total	Count	35	33	68	
	% within Where do you teach?	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Figure 5C. Improvements needed

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

As stated in the introduction of this thesis, education is a fundamental right for every child. Children should have access to high-quality education with highly skilled teachers who have the proper resources and support to do their jobs to the best of their ability.

Data collected from my survey shows several differences between the Finnish and Texas educational systems, including the amount of teachers' pay for classroom supplies and resources, administration of standardized tests, and teacher education levels. One of the most significant reasons the Finnish education system has been so successful since the reformation in 1974, is the high-quality education teachers obtain (Salhberg, 2010). Results show that every teacher surveyed held at minimum a master's degree. This data shows the high standards set by the Ministry of Education and Culture for teachers in Finland. Since teachers are highly qualified, they are more respected and given autonomy inside their classrooms (Salhberg, 2010). According to my data, the education levels of Texas teachers are not as high. The majority of Texas teachers stated that their highest level of education was a bachelor's degree. Results show that Texas teachers are not as respected, and they are given less freedom inside their classrooms as state-based exams determine much of their curriculum and assessments (Morgan, 2016).

With these significant findings, my first proposal for educational policy change would be to require Texas teachers to obtain a higher quality degree in education that included a bachelor's and master's degrees. I believe this implementation would give Texas teachers more respect and control over their classrooms. If teachers were more respected in Texas, it could bring in higher quality candidates to enter into the teaching field. Respect creates more qualified teachers for students to become more successful.

The second most substantial results I acquired were those on standardized testing. Finnish schools do not have standardized assessments to show the performance of students (Salhberg, 2010). My data shows that most Texas teachers have administered a high-stakes standardized test, but most Texas teachers do not believe this is an excellent way to assess students. The tremendous pressure put on students and teachers to perform well on state-based tests could be one of the reasons many teachers are leaving education to find different careers (Cruz, 2010). Such pressure could also contribute to the data collected by the OECD about student well-being. As stated above, students from the United States who took the 2015 PISA had lower rates on overall well-being. The results from the OECD are from the perspective of the U.S., but most states in the U.S. have very similar testing requirements, making state-based tests the primary way states assess students (Alcolar, 2018). My second proposal would be to eliminate high-stake standardized testing from the Texas educational system and allow more qualified teachers to administer student-based tests.

There are some limitations to my research, as I was not able to acquire the number of surveys I intended to gather because of time constraints and the ability to communicate with Finnish teachers. There is a great distance between Texas and Finland, and there is a ten-hour time difference that made it difficult to communicate with sources and acquire the number of surveys I needed. Also, after becoming a teacher myself, I would have asked additional questions such as how many hours do you spend working a day, including planning outside of the classroom, and how many hours are given for planning classes within contractual hours of work. As a Texas teacher, I work many hours outside of my contracted hours, and when I studied in Finland, I learned teachers have several hours to plan for classes during contractual hours, as their instruction hours with students were concise.

I want to continue researching this topic and possibly obtain qualitative data by interviewing individual teachers from different areas in Texas and Finland. By doing this, I could get personal experiences as to why people have become teachers and how they feel about their current education system. Having several statements from teachers could make my argument for educational policy reform much more robust, and hopefully create a stronger foundation to make real changes in the Texas educational system.

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APPENDIX A:

SURVEY

1. Where do you teach?
 - a. Texas
 - b. Finland

2. How long have you been a teacher? _____ years

3. What grade are you currently teaching?
 - i. _____

4. What is your highest degree earned?
 - a. Bachelors
 - b. Masters
 - c. Doctorate
 - d. Other: _____

5. What Bachelor's degree do you have?
 - i. _____

6. What Master's degree do you have?
 - i. _____

7. What Doctoral degree do you have?

i. _____

8. Did you go through alternative training to obtain a teaching certificate?

i. Yes

ii. No

iii. If yes, list what program: _____

9. What would you consider the quality of training you received to become a teacher?

i. Excellent

ii. Good

iii. Fair

iv. Poor

v. Other: _____

10. How do you rate the quality of your mentor program as a first year teacher?

i. Excellent

ii. Good

iii. Fair

iv. Poor

v. Other: _____

vi. No program provided

11. How many hours of instruction do you teach in a normal school day?

i. _____ hours

12. Have you administered a state or national standardized test?

i. Yes

ii. No

13. Is the curriculum you teach based on material that will be on a standardized test?

i. Yes

ii. Sometimes

iii. No

14. How often do you teach mandatory curriculum that is regulated by your state or country?

i. Always

ii. Sometimes

iii. Never

iv. Other: _____

15. Do you believe high-stake standardized tests are a good way to assess students' overall academic progress?

i. Yes

ii. No

iii. Other: _____

16. Please explain your feelings about high-stakes standardized testing in
Elementary/Primary and High School/Secondary School:

17. How satisfied are you with your teaching position?

- i. Very satisfied
- ii. Satisfied
- iii. Somewhat Satisfied
- iv. Dissatisfied
- v. Very Dissatisfied

18. Is teaching a respected career choice in your state or country?

- i. Yes
- ii. No
- iii. Other: _____

19. You get proper resources to do your job to the best of your ability:

- i. Always
- ii. Sometimes
- iii. Never
- iv. Other: _____

20. How much do you personally pay for classroom and or teaching supplies
in one school year?

- i. \$0-\$50
- ii. \$51-\$100
- iii. \$101-\$150
- iv. \$151-\$200
- v. Other: _____

21. How satisfied are you with your monthly or annual salary?

- i. Very satisfied
- ii. Satisfied
- iii. Somewhat Satisfied
- iv. Dissatisfied
- v. Very Dissatisfied

22. Do you think you should get paid more as a teacher?

- i. Yes
- ii. No
- iii. Other: _____

23. How satisfied are you will the support from administration at your school?

- i. Very satisfied
- ii. Satisfied
- iii. Somewhat Satisfied
- iv. Dissatisfied
- v. Very Dissatisfied

24. Please elaborate on why you chose your answers on how satisfied you are with your current administration?

25. How satisfied are you with the current education system in your state or country?

- i. Very satisfied
- ii. Satisfied
- iii. Somewhat Satisfied
- iv. Dissatisfied
- v. Very Dissatisfied

26. Do you think there needs to be improvements to the current educational system in your state or country?

- i. Yes
- ii. No
- iii. Other: _____

27. What improvements would you like to see in your current educational system? (Circle as many as needed)

- i. Shorter school days
- ii. Higher quality teacher education
- iii. More teacher resources provided by the school
- iv. More autonomy for teachers in the classroom
- v. Smaller student per teacher ratio in the classroom
- vi. Other: _____

28. Please list any other improvements you would want as a teacher inside your classroom and school:
