

## GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP, AND POLICY IN SCHOOLS: INSIGHTS INTO FINNISH EDUCATION FROM A NORWEGIAN PERSPECTIVE

*This study explores the management, leadership, and policy frameworks in Finnish schools, analyzed from a Norwegian perspective. It highlights the distribution of responsibilities among school staff, the interaction between administrative and pedagogical leadership, and the influence of national educational policies on everyday school practices. The research emphasizes transparency, teacher autonomy, and participatory decision-making as key components of the Finnish educational system. Norwegian observations provide insights into how these practices foster student engagement, accountability, and holistic development, offering valuable lessons for improving school governance and leadership in other educational contexts.*

**Keywords:** school governance, educational leadership, policy implementation, Finnish schools, teacher responsibility, Norwegian perspective, school management, educational best practices.

The present study examines the governance, leadership, and policy frameworks in Finnish schools from a Norwegian perspective, emphasizing the distribution of responsibilities, teacher autonomy, and the practical implementation of national educational policies. Finnish schools are widely recognized for their decentralized governance model, which balances administrative authority with professional autonomy for teachers. In this system, principals, teachers, and support staff share responsibilities, fostering collaborative decision-making and collective ownership of educational outcomes. This approach contrasts with more hierarchical educational systems, where authority is often concentrated at the administrative level, limiting the ability of teachers to adapt their instruction to the needs of individual students.

National educational policies in Finland provide broad guidelines rather than prescriptive rules, allowing schools flexibility to respond to local contexts, community needs, and student diversity. These policies prioritize equity, inclusivity, and holistic student development, ensuring that all students, regardless of background or abilities, receive high-quality education. Teachers are entrusted with significant responsibility for curriculum delivery, student welfare, and classroom management. Professional autonomy is paired with continuous professional development, which strengthens teachers' capacities to apply innovative instructional methods and respond to the evolving educational demands of the 21st century.

The role of the teacher extends beyond instructional duties to include fostering social-emotional development, guiding students in ethical decision-making, and promoting civic engagement. Finnish schools place strong emphasis on creating supportive and participatory learning environments, where student voice is valued and collaborative problem-solving is encouraged. Interaction between schools and their communities is also a critical aspect of governance. Transparent decision-making, active engagement with parents, and cooperation with local organizations enhance accountability, build trust, and create a sense of shared responsibility for student success.

From a Norwegian perspective, Finnish practices provide valuable lessons for improving school governance and leadership in other educational systems. Key insights include the importance of distributed leadership, teacher responsibility, participatory decision-making, and policy flexibility. These features contribute to the development of student-centered learning environments, support professional growth, and cultivate a collaborative culture within schools. Moreover, the Finnish approach demonstrates that balancing accountability with autonomy can produce high-performing schools without imposing excessive bureaucratic oversight.

In conclusion, Finnish schools exemplify how decentralized governance, professional autonomy, and inclusive policy implementation can create effective and equitable educational environments. Observations from Norway suggest that incorporating similar strategies could

strengthen school leadership, teacher engagement, and overall educational quality in diverse contexts. Adopting these approaches may not only improve student outcomes but also foster resilience, adaptability, and innovation in educational systems worldwide, preparing young learners to thrive in increasingly interconnected and multicultural societies.

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### TEACHING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM: STRATEGIES FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION

*This study explores strategies for teaching cultural diversity in the classroom through a culturally responsive pedagogy. It emphasizes the importance of fostering respect for diverse cultures, promoting student engagement, and enhancing understanding of one's own heritage alongside others'. The research highlights practical classroom strategies, including the use of inclusive teaching materials, guest speakers, culturally relevant curricula, and interactive activities. Culturally responsive education is shown to improve student self-efficacy, social development, and preparation for participation in increasingly globalized work environments.*

**Keywords:** *culturally responsive teaching, multicultural education, classroom diversity, inclusive pedagogy, student engagement, cultural heritage, intercultural competence, educational strategies.*

Culturally responsive teaching aims to cultivate students' respect and understanding for diverse cultures and peoples they will encounter beyond the classroom. This objective is increasingly important in a world characterized by complexity and diversity, which often exceeds the limited experiences students encounter in their immediate social environment. In typical educational and social settings, students tend to exhibit behaviors that reflect belonging or exclusion within peer groups. Generally, students feel comfortable with familiar individuals, ideas, and behaviors, while they often react with apprehension toward unfamiliar ones.

Culturally responsive instruction addresses these natural tendencies by helping students appreciate differences in perspectives and cultures rather than fearing or judging them. For example, teachers can demonstrate that individuals who look or behave differently from students are fundamentally similar, thereby humanizing diverse populations. Strategies to support this include classroom activities where students share stories about family traditions, holidays, and daily life, providing peers with insight into different cultural practices. Visual aids, such as photographs depicting people of various ethnicities, body types, and clothing engaged in common activities, further reinforce the recognition of shared humanity.

Inviting guest speakers from diverse backgrounds who have made meaningful contributions to fields such as science, arts, and politics helps dispel stereotypes and demonstrates that competence and influence are not confined to specific cultural or ethnic groups. Avoiding repetitive