



REPORT

ON THE

LEARNING AND EXCHANGE VISIT

ON

THE FINNISH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE MODEL

BY THE

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

18 FEBRUARY – 3 MARCH 2023

FINLAND AND SWEDEN

1.0 Introduction

The Portfolio Committee on Primary and Secondary Education together with the officials from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education participated in a learning and exchange visit on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland and Sweden from 18 February to 3 March 2023. The delegation was led by Hon. T. Moyo, the Chairperson of the Committee and was accompanied by the following;

- 4 Committee Members, namely; Hon. C. Mutambisi, Hon. S. Masara Budha, Hon. O. Murambiwa and Hon. G. Chanda,
- 3 Ministry officials, namely, Mrs O. Kaira, Ms E. Mangezi and Mr. M. Danga, and
- 1 staff of Parliament, Mrs P. S. Mtetwa (Secretary to the delegation).



The learning and exchange visit was facilitated by the Ambassador of Sweden, Her Excellency Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga, who extended an invitation on behalf of Sahwira Africa International.

2.0 Objectives

The objectives of the visit were to:

- 2.1 Learn about Finland Early Childhood Education and Care Model that has been rated the best in the world by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2021),
- 2.2 Understand the Education Financing Model in Finland,
- 2.3 Discuss best ways of collaborations between Zimbabwe Government and Zimbabweans in the Diaspora, particularly, Sahwira International Africa,
- 2.4 Visit the UNICEF Innovation Hub in Sweden, and
- 2.5 Engage the Zimbabwean Ambassador in Sweden and discuss best ways to collaborate with Finland and Sweden in the education sector.

3.0 Background to the Learning and Exchange Visit

The Ambassador of Sweden, Her Excellency Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga has had several engagements with Zimbabweans in the Diaspora in the different countries she is accredited to. One of her engagements was with Dr. Faith Mkwesha, the founder of Sahwira Africa International, a Non-Governmental Organisation based in Finland, with special interest in working and advancing the education system Africa. Thus, Sahwira Africa International working with its Partners, Fun Academy and Helsinki Education Consultancy seeks to have a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education particularly, to support Early Childhood Education and Care in Zimbabwe. The Ministry is expected to benefit from the Finnish Model, which will be tailor-made for the Zimbabwean context.

4.0 Summary of the Visit to Finland and Sweden

The delegation had meetings and workshops with the following organisations and individuals in Finland from 20 – 24 February 2023;

- a) Helsinki Education Hub Consultant to discuss the Finnish education System,
- b) Fun Academy Founder to discuss fun learning and early childhood education and care in Finland, particularly, the private sector perspective,
- c) Minister of Education and Culture and discussed the Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), and possibilities for partnerships,
- d) Finnish National Agency for Education
- e) The Finnish Centre of Expertise in Education and Development,
- f) Chairperson of Education and Culture Committee – Finland Parliament,
- g) Member of Parliament responsible for Finland and Africa Relationships,
- h) Technology Industries of Finland
- i) Sahwira Africa International to discuss decolonising Early Education – From Zimbabwe to Finland
- j) Helsinki University
- k) Director of the UNICEF Learning Innovation Hub at Aalto University Toolo Campus, Helsinki
- l) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department for Africa and the Middle East to discuss Development Aid and collaborations between Finland and Africa.

The delegation also toured the following institutions in Finland;

- a) The Helsinki Central Library Oodi, the biggest national library in Finland.
- b) International Centre for Early Education (ICEC), which is a private led Kindergarten School, and
- c) The City of Espoo Kindergarten preschool owned by the City of Espoo Municipality.

In Sweden from 27 February – 1 March, the delegation participated in the following;

- a) Tour and meeting with officials from the UNICEF Innovation Hub Head Office, and
- b) Tour of the Zimbabwe Embassy offices and round up meeting with Her Excellency, the Ambassador of Sweden, Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga.

5.0 Committee Findings

5.1 Overview of the Finnish Education Model

In 1921, Finland introduced new laws aimed at transforming the education sector, which has since evolved over time to ensure equal access for all children irrespective of background, origins, age or economic status. Firstly, the Finnish Government made school attendance compulsory for all Finnish children, and secondly, introduced free education for all children starting basic education to university level. However, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is not free but heavily subsidised. According to the regulations, no one should derive profit from providing basic education in Finland.

The Finnish basic education system consists of (a) early childhood education and care, (b) pre-primary education, (c) primary and lower secondary education and (d) upper secondary education. (See Figure 1). The stipulated teacher pupil ratio for ECEC is 1:4 for children under three years, 1:12 for children between 3 and 6, and 1:21 for children older than 6 years. The education system has developed to the extent that there are no glaring disparities in schools. This has resulted in ‘no best school’ rankings in Finland as all schools equally provide the same quality of services.

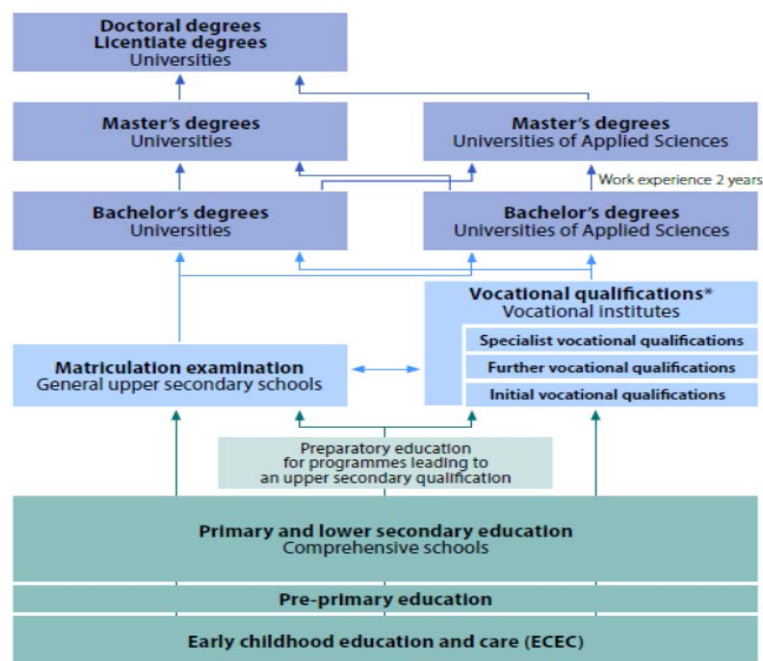


Figure 1: Education System in Finland

5.2 Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Every child has a right to attend early childhood education at the end of parental leave, from 10 months to six years. The Finnish ECEC model believes that playing is the best way of learning for this age group. Therefore, teachers ensure that children develop skills, knowledge and capabilities from different learning areas in accordance with their age, abilities and areas of interest. The planning stages involve the children too, who are the major stakeholder in all the school activities. The teachers do respect the children's areas of interest and design the curriculum in line with that. Teachers utilize various learning methods which are (a) Individual learning, (b) small group learning activities, (c) whole group learning and (d) project-based learning.

The delegation had the opportunity to visit two ECEC centres, namely;

- Espoo Pre-school operated by the government through the City of Espoo municipality, and
- International Child Care Education Centre (ICCEC) operated by the private sector.

What was striking to note was that both centres were equally good with almost similar infrastructure and services despite being operated by different entities. Both pre-schools are furnished with state of the art equipment to support early learning for the children, such as books, toys, gadgets, bunk beds and mattresses, among others. The centres also offer carpentry and painting facilities. The government provides grants to support and maintain all the pre-schools, regardless of ownership as measures to ensure equality and equity. Parents have the option to take their children to any of the pre-schools. Pre-school fees range between 0 – 280 Euros depending on the family's size and income. Those who opt for private day care centres receive a private day care support from the Finland Government to cushion them so that no child is excluded from school.

5.3 Comprehensive Basic Education

Comprehensive basic education starts when the child turns seven (7) and is compulsory. This stage comprises of nine grades. Grades 1 – 6 teachers specialise in pedagogy, while grade 7 – 9 (lower secondary) teachers, specialise in the different subject areas. The children have the same teacher for the first six years, which allows the teacher to get to know the students well. In turn, the teacher is able to develop the class curricula which suits the learners' needs. Assessments are done by the class teacher on a regular basis using the written down set standards in the curriculum. There are no national examinations or standardised tests for children in primary and lower secondary school. The class teacher is the one responsible for evaluating the students' progress over time. The final certificate given at the end of ninth grade are given by the school teachers and the learners are selected for further studies based on these school assessments.

5.4 Matriculation System

Matriculation examination is the first important standardised tests taken by students as they transition to either university or university of applied sciences or vocational colleges. These examinations are taken at the end of Upper Secondary School. The learners are tested on the following 5 subjects; mother tongue and, according to the choice of each candidate, 4 of the following; second national language, a foreign language, mathematics or one subject in general studies such as humanities and natural science. Students are also free to include optional examinations.

5.5 Teacher Professionalisation

Teaching is an attractive career choice in Finland given that the teachers are valued, well paid and trusted people in Finland. In the early 1990s, Finland decentralised the education system and abolished the school inspectorate system. This has given the teachers autonomy to run the national education curriculum without any supervision. The teachers are at liberty to plan their teaching material independently based on the national and local school curricula. The teaching profession is governed by the 1994 legislation, which introduced a master's level as the minimum qualification for all basic education teachers and a Bachelor's degree for ECEC. In terms of remuneration, a teacher earns on average 3 570 Euros (US\$3900) with the lowest earning as little as 1 750 Euros (US\$1900) per month. However, teacher salaries vary significantly based on years of experience, skills and location. Of importance to note is that the Finnish and Swedish language teachers are paid lucratively as measures to preserve and encourage teachers to specialise in the indigenous languages.

5.6 School Administrators

The School Heads or Principals are the school administrators responsible for day to day operation of the school including budget management, acquisitions and recruitment of teachers. The School Heads or Principals must have a master's degree in any teaching qualification, a certificate in educational administration or equivalent and an appropriate work experience. The Municipalities are responsible for the recruitment of school administrators. The schools have the right to provide educational services according to their own administrative arrangements and visions, as long as the basic functions, defined by law, are carried out.

5.7 Education Financing Model

Education in Finland is free of charge, with all learners receiving financial and educational support from the government. The education system is mostly state and municipal funded, with the State providing approximately 25% while municipalities about 75% of the resources. The State spends between 11% and 12% of its budget on education. The Finnish people are highly taxed in order to raise enough budgetary resources to finance education. The statutory government transfer to local authorities is based on the number of 0-15 years living in the municipality and the special conditions of the municipality. The municipalities do decide

independently how the funds are allocated and utilised within the school. It is the responsibilities of local authorities to provide free textbooks, meals and transportation for all learners. The municipalities are also responsible for paying the teachers' salaries.

5.8 Special Needs Education

Children who require special attention are assisted and provided by the school through the Special Needs Education model, provided within the mainstream education system. There are basically three levels of support that learners get from their school designed as follows;

- a) General Support whereby every pupil has the right to sufficient support for learning and attending school as soon as problems emerge. Support is usually through remedial instruction as part of everyday activities of the school.
- b) Intensified Support whereby pedagogical assessment and plan for support is made in the pupil welfare group of the school. Intensified support is more robust and consistent than general support. It aims at preventing problems from accumulating and becoming more serious or complex.
- c) Special Support is given where intensified support is not adequate. The school in co-operation with the teachers and the school welfare group draws up an individual education plan which will be used together with other support measures.

The Finnish education has developed over time such that there is no private tutoring of children in Finland. The main purpose of special needs education is to provide pupils broad based and systematic help so that they can continue to upper secondary school level.

5.9 School Meals

Free school meals have played an important part in strengthening economic growth and transforming Finland into a knowledge-based society. Finland was the first country in the world to introduce a legislation on free school meals in 1943, and has been doing this since then. Free school meals have been provided with the aim of supporting children's learning, nutrition, and health. All pupils from pre-primary to upper secondary schools get a free of charge, nutritious meal each day. The Finnish school feeding system is a joint responsibility, steered nationally while implemented locally by municipal education authorities.

5.10 Role of Helsinki Education Hub

The City of Helsinki funds the Helsinki Education Hub project, which seeks to promote growth of the education and technology (EduTech) entrepreneurship and new businesses. The concept was developed based on the need to address market concerns through development of science and engineering skills through education. The Hub connects funding, researchers and corporations through encouraging students to be innovative. Innovation Hubs creates opportunities for pre-incubation, co-creation, research acceleration and collaboration space and events. Most municipalities funds most of these innovation hubs.

5.11 Role of Technologies Industries (TI) of Finland

Technologies Industries is a consortium of more than 1800 technology companies of which 70% are privately owned. TI have committed to developing future schools through supporting innovations, research and development in schools. Focus is on different critical sub-sectors such as mechanical engineering, information technology, electronics and electro-technical industries, science and technology among others. Finland is having an aging population hence the need to address the technological gap in future schools. It is estimated that in 10 years' time, three quarters of new employees must have studied technology or ICT. Therefore, TI works closely with schools, especially the young learners so as to help develop their skills in their early years. TI hosts a program titled, *'technology programs for 1st graders'* which supports children to be innovative in their early years. The focus is mainly on development of technology, innovations and creativity among the ECD learners and how to solve life problems. TI funds the school activities and the technology to support new innovations by the learners.

5.12 Collaborations between Ministry, Sahwira Africa International, Fun Academy and Helsinki Education Hub Consultancy Group

Sahwira Africa International, Fun Academy and the Helsinki Education Consultancy Group have expressed interest in partnering and collaborating with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in supporting Early Childhood Education in Zimbabwe. It is believed that Zimbabwe can benefit from Finnish Early Childhood Education model through contextualising it to the Zimbabwean environment. Given that Finland and Zimbabwe are two extreme worlds apart, it was highlighted that the early childhood content development must take into account the Zimbabwean context of culture and heritage. Thus, Sahwira Africa International together with its partners, would like to work with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education on advancing ECD education in Zimbabwe through engaging in the following activities;

- a) Training of ECD teachers on the latest pedagogy, particularly in the use of digital and electronic tools in innovative teaching and learning trajectories; and
- b) Up-skilling/Professional Development of Early Childhood policy makers, infant supervisors and administrators in digital and electronic monitoring and supervision of the Fun learning packages.
- c) Train primary and secondary school teachers and heads on phenomenon based methodology that supports solution based thinking in students using the Finland case study model that can be contextualised to the Zimbabwean situation.

5.13 Visit to UNICEF Innovation Hub

The delegation had the privilege to visit and meet with the Directors at both UNICEF Innovation Hubs in Finland and Sweden. Sweden hosts the headquarters of UNICEF Innovation Centre while Helsinki University in Finland hosts the Learning Innovation Hub and

the Innovative Finance Hub. The Innovation Centre facilitates the discovering, co-creating and scaling up of bold solution and technologies for children today. The hub brings together a team of experts who helps in identifying latest innovations and experimentations happening in academia that could be a game changer in the development world, particularly for the children around the world. In addition, UNICEF Innovative Finance Hub hosts the Venture Fund, which finances and supports early-stage, open source technology solutions in the global south to improve children's lives and amplify local talent to global markets.

To date, many innovative solutions have been identified for scaling up and 5 are already reaching over 1 million children in multiple countries. These innovations includes among others, the Giga, Water More Life, Oky (World's First Period Tracker App Designed by Girls for Girls) and Bebbo (mobile parenting app designed to support Early Childhood Development). The Hub is also implementing a project called UPSHIFT, which is an opportunity to support youth and adolescents to become a force for positive social and economic change, contributing to a competitive labour force, sustained economic growth, improved governance, and vibrant civil societies.

5.14 Round Up Meeting with the Zimbabwean Ambassador to Sweden

The delegation concluded its benchmark visit with a round up meeting with the Zimbabwean Ambassador to Sweden, Her Excellency Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga. The following key points were highlighted;

- a) That the development of the Education Financing Model is the panacea for the sector as the Government adopts '*free education for all*' policy. The Finnish people are highly taxed contributing significantly to the national budget.
- b) That the '*school hot meal*' or school feeding program provided by the Government of Finland has gone a long way in promoting equality in education as well as increasing school completion rates. There is need to rethink the school feeding model in Zimbabwe to ensure effectiveness and efficiency.
- c) That Zimbabwe must continue its re-engagement program so as to unlock more business opportunities in Finland and Sweden, particularly in revamping the education sector,
- d) That there is need for ECD teachers to participate in capacity development and training, either online or physical exchange programmes with Helsinki University through the Sahwira Africa International Initiative. The signing of the MOU between the Ministry and Sahwira Africa International is recommended.
- e) That digitalisation is the way to go for the education sector so learners are exposed to the latest technology. The role of the private sector must not be underestimated.
- f) That the Committee engages and give feedback to the following stakeholders; Finland Ambassador based in Mozambique, Swedish Ambassador in Harare and UNICEF given their interest in the benchmark visit and exchange program.

6.0 Committee Observations

- 6.1 Finland education system has excellent learning outcomes which have been witnessed over time due to its research-based pedagogy and innovative approach to teaching and learning. This has been strengthened by the system which allows one teacher to teach pupils from grade 1 to 6. In Zimbabwe, the children are subjected to new teachers every year, which makes it difficult for a teacher to fully understand the needs of his or her learners.
- 6.2 Finland considers ECEC as the foundation of education and the Government ensures that it meets all the educational requirements for all schools to facilitate proper and equal learning in class and schools. In Zimbabwe, the Government has very little role to play in ECD financing as witnessed by limited budgetary funding of less than 1% of the budget. Nevertheless, significant progress has been made in formalising the introduction of ECD A and B facilities in all public and private schools.
- 6.3 Finland has the best and top quality teachers, including for ECEC who do enjoy professional freedom and trust from the government, hence the abandonment of the school inspectorate system. Teacher professionalisation has been central to the successful development of the education sector. In Zimbabwe, the Teachers Professional Council has been on the drawing board for too long and there is need to resuscitate this proposal as measures to transform the welfare of the teachers in Zimbabwe.
- 6.4 Finland pays its language teachers lucratively as measures to promote and motivate and the teaching of such languages in Finland. In Zimbabwe, while progress has been made in training of language teachers, challenges relating to the recruitment process continues to impact negatively on schools. Some schools, especially in remote and rural areas have no or limited language teachers.
- 6.5 Finland hosts great innovative teaching methods and strong ICT sector, which has contributed in creating favorable conditions for developing cutting-edge digital learning solutions that make learning fun. The private sector industries play a pivotal role in ploughing back to schools and encourage development of innovative solutions by the young generation. In Zimbabwe, access to ICT has been a major challenge especially in rural schools, where ICT services are not available.
- 6.6 The Finland government has been consistent in providing school meals since 1947 and this has greatly improved school completion rates as well as promoted equity in schools. Zimbabwe has adopted the concept but implementation has been constrained by limited financial resources. In Finland, the school feeding program is a national program, which is implemented through the Municipalities. Therefore, Zimbabwe can take advantage of the devolution agenda to manage the school feeding program through decentralizing implementation of the program to local authorities.
- 6.7 Matriculation Examination in Finland is only done at the end of upper secondary school, which reduces the burden on the government of running examinations at various intervals of basic education. In Zimbabwe, the first standardised tests are written at the

end of primary school in grade 7. The Zimbabwe School Examination Council has been overburdened by the limited resources to run such national examinations at grade 7, form 4 and form 6, which require huge funding. This has resulted in a huge burden on the government and parents.

- 6.8 In Zimbabwe, the education system provide for inspectors who monitor schools' performance. However, this inspectorate system has not been functional due to limited resources.
- 6.9 The Technologies Industries in Finland is making significant progress in the formation of future schools that are ICT compliant through working with relevant schools to support use of technology and development of innovative ideas. This model is also ideal for Zimbabwe and can be contextualised to suit the Zimbabwe economic environment.
- 6.10 UNICEF Innovation Hub is central to development of innovations that can transform the lives of children across the globe. The Jotters Innovation was a case in point recommended for UNICEF to take over and support since it can benefit many children in Zimbabwe.

7.0 Committee Recommendations

Early Childhood Education and Care

- 7.1 That the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education signs a Memorandum of Understanding with Sahwira Africa International to capacitate ECD teachers by 31 December 2023.
- 7.2 That the Government develops, through legislation, the education financing model suitable for ECD in Zimbabwe by 31 December 2023.
- 7.3 That the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education be supported with subsidies to upscale the school feeding program to all schools (On-going).
- 7.4 That the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education working with the Ministry of Energy and Power Development be supported to electrify and power all schools so that the ECD departments also benefit from modern digital technologies (On-going).
- 7.5 That the Government invest in recruitment of local language teachers, which is central to ECD education as provided for in the Education Amendment Act (31 December 2023).
- 7.6 That the Government prioritise funding ECD education and increase budgetary resources to 5% of the national budget (On-going).

Primary and Secondary Education

- 7.7 That Zimbabwe School Examination Council focuses on writing of 'O' and 'A' Levels examinations only and restructure grade 7 examinations to allow children to focus on the Continuous and Learning Assessment (CALA) and other school assessments, as measures to reduce the examination burden on both parents and government by 31 December 2023.

- 7.8 The Ministry of Primary and Secondary education be capacitated to fully operationalise the inspectorate system so that schools are adequately monitored.
- 7.9 The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education must continuously liaise with the UNICEF country office for incubation and development of home grown solutions that can benefit the education system (On-going).

Other Key Recommendations

- 7.10 That the Government urgently improves remuneration and conditions of service for all teaching personnel in Zimbabwe (On-going).
- 7.11 That teacher professionalisation through the establishment of the Teacher Professional Council will go a long way in addressing the current challenges facing the education sector by 31 December 2023.
- 7.12 That the Portfolio Committees on Primary and Secondary Education and that on Higher Education, Science and Technology in collaboration with its line Ministries host an **'All Stakeholder Conference'** that involves the private, intergovernmental organisations, civil society and the public sectors to discuss **'future schools'** by 31 December 2023.
- 7.13 That the Committee engages the Finland Ambassador based in Mozambique, Swedish Ambassador in Harare and UNICEF and update them on the Committee's key findings by 30 June 2023.

8.0 Conclusion

The Committee fully believes that investment in the education sector, particularly, improving the conditions of service for teachers and creation of an education fund will also go a long way in addressing some of the current challenges bedevilling the sector. The sector is central to national development through the development of human capital essential for economic growth. Therefore, the Committee calls upon the House to take note of its report which proffers some recommendations aimed at transforming the education sector, particularly Early Childhood Development. It is critical for the Government to remodel its early childhood education and care using the Finnish model and adopt what is applicable for the Zimbabwe situation.