

Digital Learning in Finland During COVID-19

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Background





Key figures

Independence: 6.12.1917

Population: 5 536 146 (2020)

Capital: Helsinki

Official languages: Finnish, Swedish

Currency: Euro

Member of the European Union
since 1995

Education, average cost per student (2015, primary):

Finland: 9 305 EUR

EU22: 8 656 EUR

OECD: 8 631 EUR

- Education is publicly funded, free for all.
- Primary education includes free school meals, school transportation, extensive health and social care.
- Teachers have a masters degree.
- There are no school inspections or national examinations in primary education.





Finnish Digital Society Today

From Finnish households:

87 % have a personal computer.

- 74 % have a laptop.
- 32 % have a desktop computer.
- 54 % have a tablet computer (e.g. iPad).

89-94 % have an internet connection.

- 53 % have a broadband connection.
- 61 % have a WLAN connection.
- 77 % have a 3G/4G mobile connection.

In Finland, mobile broadband and data prices are relatively inexpensive compared to other European nations.

- 98 % (16-24 years) access internet with smart phone (contra 32% desktop computer).

By internet use and frequency, Finland is among top EU28 countries (98%, 16-24years).

- In 2016, households spent 26 % of their media spenditure budgets to ICT devices.

Finland is #1 in the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2020 from European Union nations.



Digitalization of the Finnish Schools Pre-COVID

- Variation occurs between schools.
- MS 0365 or Google ecosystem (or both).
- Digital student administration system (e.g. Wilma)
- In elementary schools, 50 % of the learning material provided by publishers (printed and digital).
- Largest publishers are Sanoma and Otava.
- Teachers ICT skills were in a fairly good level – (COVID-19 has excelled this development).
- Best cover and quality of wireless connections in schools compared to European nations.
- Most common devices in schools PC laptops and iPads. Rough estimate is 1:4 cover of devices.
- Trend is towards flexible loaning of devices, sharing and moving with devices rather than having a solid ICT classroom.



Digital Learning in Finland During COVID-19



Timeline

- 1st confirmed COVID-19 case end of January 2020.
- As of 18th of March 2020 schools begun distance learning activities.
- As of 13th of May 2020, learning & teaching continued in schools for the most part.
- School year 2020-2021 full of COVID-19 related disruption of teaching, hybrid and distance learning occurred throughout the year.
- School year 2021-2021 for the most part has been typical and "normal" start of the school year.



Digital infrastructure in hybrid learning scenarios

According to Trade Union of Education in Finland (OAJ), the Finnish Parents League, Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, and research studies and reports:

In overall, remote teaching went well during Spring 2020 and in the coming months in given conditions indicating digital infrastructure was somewhat capable to provide the transformation to distance learning.

The estimate is that schools digital infrastructure is fairly good.

However, challenges remain:

- Smart phones for teachers, also the lack of other **mobile** devices
- The variation of digital learning environments is a challenge.
- Further skills and knowledge of teachers & learners.

Learners access to digital tools and internet at home

- Around 20 % of education providers and teachers were concerned that the lack of internet connection and/or device endangered the equal treatment of students (FINEEC, 2020).
- Learners usually have (in this order) smart phone, laptop or tablet computer.
- Both learners and caregivers have reported remote learning went fairly good and they had sufficient devices to participate to learning activities.

Frequent and live interaction with both teacher-led and community-led activities is the best practice.

What support do schools need?

Teachers need support:

- Different softwares and open-access learning content
- Assessment and interaction in digital learning environments
- Student welfare and support mechanisms

Schools:

- Clear rules, norms, guidance and shared (and jointly decided) practices
- Supporting staff and learners with stress, mental health, anxiety and so on.

Schools and education providers have been very pleased with tutor teacher model – this has been a great support mechanism and endorsed widely.

Summary – Best Practices

- National investment in the quality work of distance education to ensure equal and non-discriminating access to education throughout the country.
- Increasing interaction and communality in distance education
- Using learning analytics and data to support teaching, guidance, evaluation and support.
- Reducing the number of teaching and learning applications and improving interoperability. Reducing and harmonising practices. Less-is-more thinking.
- More systematic improvement of teachers' pedagogical digital competence through continuing education and continuous local peer support (e.g. tutor-teachers).
- Ensuring the availability of support and guidance services for students and student welfare services in the context of distance education.
- Ensure adequate technological infrastructure for students and teaching staff (especially endpoint devices, connectivity, work phones).
- Establish clear, consistent and simple practices (distance education plan) for the daily activities and choices of distance education, such as the software and materials used, schedules, communication, provision of support etc.
- Use video-mediated, real-time and interactive online teaching to a high degree, serving as the basis for the entire distance education.
- Create the best preconditions through legislation and administration for municipalities, teachers and schools to succeed in their work in distance education.
- Keep schools and educational institutions as open as possible to children and young people. The priority is small children and special groups (e.g. students that need special support), for whom contact teaching should be provided as the first choice.
- Providing distance learning in the future as well.



Thank you!

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