

Finnish Lower Secondary Career Education Through a Systems Lens

Jaana Kettunen,
Finnish Institute for Educational Research,
University of Jyväskylä, Finland
jaana.h.kettunen@jyu.fi

12.11.2024
IAEVG Conference 2024
Jyväskylä, Finland

Career Education Systems

- Career education can be understood as a complex and interconnected system involving multiple interrelated components. In recent times, the term system is typically used to describe an assemblage of organisations within a given policy field and the interconnections between them (as in 'health system' or 'education system') (Steward & Ayres, 2001).
- Systems thinking can help to illuminate how such assemblages are structured and how they function by providing an overview of the system as a whole, viewing its separate components as elements of the system (Shaked & Schechter, 2017) that must work together if the whole is to function successfully (Arnold & Wade, 2015).
- While there are no perfect solutions, systems thinking facilitates the evaluation of options and impacts in the relevant context, supporting informed decision-making (Ndaurhutse et al., 2019).
- By applying systems thinking to career education, policy makers and career practitioners can develop sustainable solutions to longstanding problems that might otherwise seem intractable (e.g. Mann et al., 2020; OECD, 2018).



Aim

- The Finnish career education system has generally fared well in international comparisons (e.g. ELGPN, 2015; Holman, 2014; OECD, 2014; Sweet et al., 2014).
- For example, the results of optional PISA questionnaire indicated that 15-year-olds' level of perceived competence and participation were among the highest across the 22 responding countries (Sweet et al., 2014).
- The present study explores the Finnish lower secondary career education system using the 'dimensions of variation' reported in earlier phenomenographic research.
- The analysis focused on pertinent national documents (including legislation and core curriculum relating the Finnish lower secondary career education system), and how they associated when assessed to each category in the framework (– *through systems lenses*)



Method

- The present study builds on recent phenomenographic research by Kettunen et al. (2023), who explored career experts' conceptions of systems development in lifelong guidance.
- The primary outcome of phenomenographic analysis is a structured set of logically related categories that describe the qualitative differences in people's ways of experiencing or understanding the phenomenon in question (Marton, 1986; Kettunen & Tynjälä, 2018).
- These categories are typically organised as a nested hierarchy, ranging from least to most complex, and becoming increasingly advanced, powerful or sophisticated at higher levels of the hierarchy (Marton & Booth, 1997).
- The use of the categories of description from other investigations is both reasonable and methodologically appropriate (Collier-Reed, 2006), either as abstract instruments for the future analyses or to assess their applicability in a specific concrete context (Marton, 1981).



Method



Table 1. Career experts’ conceptions of systems development in lifelong guidance
(reproduced from [Kettunen et al., 2023](#))

DIMENSIONS OF VARIATION	CATEGORIES			
	minimal	aspirational	strategic	systemic
legislation	non-existent	nominal	embedded in other policies	explicit
strategic leadership	missing	scattered	devolved	shared
cooperation	lacking	emerging	multilateral	multisectoral
delivery	limited	fragmented	vertically coordinated	horizontally coordinated
professionalisation	resistant	aspirational	partial	regulated
evidence of impact	not evaluated	desired	ad hoc	systematic

Legislation



legislation	non-existent	nominal	embedded in other policies	explicit
-------------	--------------	---------	-------------------------------	----------

- it can be said that career education in Finland is grounded in explicit legislation
- Basic Education Act (628/1998) entitles every student to adequate career counselling and guidance services throughout the school year (§ 30). Among its other provisions, the Act directs that the government shall determine the general national objectives of compulsory basic education and the allocation of lesson hours to the teaching of different subjects, subject groups and guidance counselling (§ 14).
- According to the Basic Education Decree (852/1998) basic education shall be organised as teaching delivered by class teachers, subject teaching given by teachers of different subjects, guidance counselling given by guidance counsellors and special-needs teaching given by special-needs teachers.

Legislation



legislation	non-existent	nominal	embedded in other policies	explicit
-------------	--------------	---------	-------------------------------	----------

- Guidance counsellors' annual working hours, which differ from those of other teachers, are defined in the teachers' collective agreement (KT Municipal Employers 2014, 67).
- According to the Government Decree on the National Objectives of Education referred to in the Basic Education Act and on the Distribution of Hours in Basic Education (422/2012), two hours per week of basic education time in grades 7–9 are to be allocated to career guidance. Each pupil is entitled to receive guidance counselling and adequate support for learning and school attendance as need arises (Amendment of the Basic Education Act 624/2010)
- According to the Basic Education Act (628/1998, § 14), the Finnish National Agency for Education (operating under the Ministry of Education and Culture) determines the objectives and core content of different subjects and cross curricular themes, including career education. Within the framework of the National Core Curriculum, schools and local authorities must then formulate their own curriculum regulations (628/1998 § 14 – 15).

Strategic leadership



legislation	non-existent	nominal	embedded in other policies	explicit
-------------	--------------	---------	-------------------------------	----------

- strategic leadership in the education sector (including career education) in Finland can be characterised as shared.
- The Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for national curricula, which specify key objectives and core content for school subjects and cross curricular themes, including career education.
- Within the framework of the National Core Curriculum, schools and local authorities then formulate their own curricula regulations.
 - The local curriculum complements and emphasises the goals, policies that direct the activities, key contents and other aspects related to the organisation of education specified in the core curriculum from a local perspective.
- At the school level each school drafts its own curriculum founded on both the national and the local one.

Strategic leadership



legislation	non-existent	nominal	embedded in other policies	explicit
-------------	--------------	---------	-------------------------------	----------

- The local mandatory strategic and operational plan for guidance and counselling describes the organisation of guidance counselling, including operating methods, and the division of labour and responsibilities, as well as work in cross-sectoral networks, cooperation between home and school in guidance counselling, cooperation with working life and arrangements for the pupils' introduction to working life.
- The guidance plan is developed in cooperation with students, guardians and stakeholders, and the realisation of declared objectives is assessed on a regular basis.

Cooperation



cooperation

lacking

emerging

multilateral

multisectoral

- The analysis indicates that cooperation in lower secondary career education in Finland is multisectoral, involving cooperation networks that extend beyond the school.
 - The key elements of this approach include classroom visits by labour market representatives, workplace visits, project work, work experience placement (WEPs, TET in Finnish) and information about different sectors (Kettunen et al., 2023). WEP is implemented in cooperation with other school subjects, building on their content and working methods (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2016).
- In accordance with the Basic Education Act (477/2003), education providers must develop curriculum sections pertaining to student welfare and home-school cooperation in collaboration with local social and health authorities.
- Promoting student wellbeing is the responsibility of everyone in the school community. All actors such as teachers, special education teachers, guidance counsellors, school nurses, school social workers and school psychologists participate in the multi-professional welfare work (Student Welfare Act 1287/2013).

Delivery



delivery	limited	fragmented	vertically coordinated	horizontally coordinated
----------	---------	------------	---------------------------	-----------------------------

- The analysis confirms that career education delivery in in Finland's lower secondary education system is firmly established and horizontally coordinated.
- The National Core Curriculum promotes a 'whole school' approach to career education, which means that career education is the shared responsibility of all staff members as a transversal theme across all subjects Promoting student wellbeing is the responsibility of everyone in the school community.
- All actors such as teachers, special education teachers, guidance counsellors, school nurses, school social workers and school psychologists participate in the multi-professional welfare work (Student Welfare Act 1287/2013).

Professionalisation



professionalisation	resistant	aspirational	partial	regulated
----------------------------	-----------	--------------	---------	-----------

- guidance counsellors' qualifications and competences are closely regulated in Finland
- the Decree on Qualification Requirements for Teaching Staff (986/1998) required a master's degree in school counselling or a 60 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) postgraduate diploma. In addition to this specialised training in guidance and counseling, all guidance counsellors must possess qualifications equivalent to those of teacher. This training for research-based professionalism has generally aligned well with such new policy developments like school-based curricula and local decision making (Westbury et al., 2005).
- According to their work contract, relevant statutes and collective agreements, the guidance practitioners are obliged to attend continuous professional development events for one or five days a year.

Evidence of impact



evidence of impact	not evaluated	desired	ad hoc	systematic
--------------------	---------------	---------	--------	------------

- the impact of the lower secondary career education system in Finland is conducted through systematic approach, relaying on self-assessments and quality monitoring undertaken by education providers and schools
- The National Board of Education oversees national assessments of learning outcomes, with the primary goal of determining the extent to which national core curriculum objectives have been met. Education providers have a statutory duty to evaluate education they provide and its impact and participate in in sample-based national external evaluations (Basic Education Act 628/1998).

Evidence of impact



evidence of impact	not evaluated	desired	ad hoc	systematic
--------------------	---------------	---------	--------	------------

- Self-evaluation of schools and education provider consists of collecting information on how the aims of education based on the Basic Education Act have been achieved. The specific practices employed for self-evaluation are determined at the local level.
- In their self-evaluation, education providers and schools can draw on the results of national evaluations, development projects and the National Quality Criteria (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012). While the Quality Criteria for Basic Education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012) is not mandatory, it is widely used by schools and municipalities (European Commission, 2015).

Method



Table 1. Career experts’ conceptions of systems development in lifelong guidance
(reproduced from [Kettunen et al., 2023](#))

DIMENSIONS OF VARIATION	CATEGORIES			
	minimal	aspirational	strategic	systemic
legislation	non-existent	nominal	embedded in other policies	explicit
strategic leadership	missing	scattered	devolved	shared
cooperation	lacking	emerging	multilateral	multisectoral
delivery	limited	fragmented	vertically coordinated	horizontally coordinated
professionalisation	resistant	aspirational	partial	regulated
evidence of impact	not evaluated	desired	ad hoc	systematic

Discussion

- The present study examined Finnish lower secondary career education through a systems lens.
- The results reveal that Finnish lower secondary career education aligns closely with *systemic* development.
- The presented framework provides a robust foundation for future empirical research, and the systematic exploration of how systems align with established categories.



References

- Kettunen, J. (2024). Finnish lower secondary career education through a systems lens. *Nordic Journal of Transitions, Careers and Guidance*, 5(1), pp. 73–85.
<https://doi.org/10.16993/njtcg.85> Open access
- Kettunen, J., Barnes, S-A., Bimrose, J., Brown, A. & Vuorinen, R. (2023). Career experts' conceptions of systems development in lifelong guidance. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, online first.
<http://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-023-09595-x> Open access



Thank you

For further information, please contact:

Prof. Jaana Kettunen
Finnish Institute for Educational Research
University of Jyväskylä
Tel. + 358 40 805 4255
E-mail: jaana.h.kettunen@jyu.fi

<https://ktl.jyu.fi/en/staff/kettunen-jaana>



Work Experience Placements in Lower Secondary Education in Nordic Countries

Jaana Kettunen,
Finnish Institute for Educational Research,
University of Jyväskylä, Finland
jaana.h.kettunen@jyu.fi

12.11.2024
IAEVG Conference 2024
Jyväskylä, Finland



Work Experience Placements in Lower Secondary Education in Nordic Countries

JAANA KETTUNEN

RANDI SKOVHUS

PETRA RØISE

PER-ÅKE ROSVALL

ARNHEIÐUR EINARSDÓTTIR

MAHTAB ESHAGHBEIGI-HOSSEINI

*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article



COLLECTION:
CAREER EDUCATION
IN THE NORDIC
COUNTRIES

RESEARCH



STOCKHOLM
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Introduction

- In recent years, there has been renewed international interest on how schools assist students to learn and better prepare for work and working life (e.g., Mann et al., 2020a, 2020b).
- One of the ways in which lower secondary education in the Nordic countries provides for students to learn about work is through *work experience placements* (WEP). WEP offers one important means by which young people can formulate and test ideas about their futures, learn about different roles and how organisations function, whilst developing work-relevant skills and habits.
- Within the Nordic countries there is a strong tradition of career guidance with increasing focus on what citizens learn from taking part in career guidance and career education.
- Previous analysis of career development items in PISA (Sweet, Nissinen & Vuorinen, 2014) indicates that the Nordic countries are forerunners in developing career education activities that are valued by young citizens, but there are major differences in how such activities are implemented and practised in the countries



Introduction

- WEPs are one important way enabling young people to formulate and test ideas about their future, learn about different roles in work and how organisations function whilst also developing relevant practical skills and knowledge.
- These placements are an important element in career guidance and career education activities that young people should engage in as they progress through school and beyond (e.g. Mann et al., 2020a, 2020b; Messer, 2018; Millard et al., 2019; Miller et al., 1991).
- Throughout life, such experiences help to develop career decision-making skills and career adaptability (Borbely-Pecze & Hutchinson, 2014).



Defining work experience placements (WEP)

- WEP refers to career learning activity where lower secondary students spend short periods in workplaces to gain practical insights by participating in various work-related activities without direct teacher supervision.





Aim of the study

- The main aim was to compare how and to what extent the WEP in career education is formalized across Nordic countries.
- The key research question is as follows:
 1. What are the similarities and differences in organization of WEP in lower secondary education among the countries?

The main purposes of this comparison is to enhance our understanding of organisation of WEP across the Nordic and provide basis for the discussion and development.

Data

The NordicCareerEd country papers (policy documents, curriculum, research)

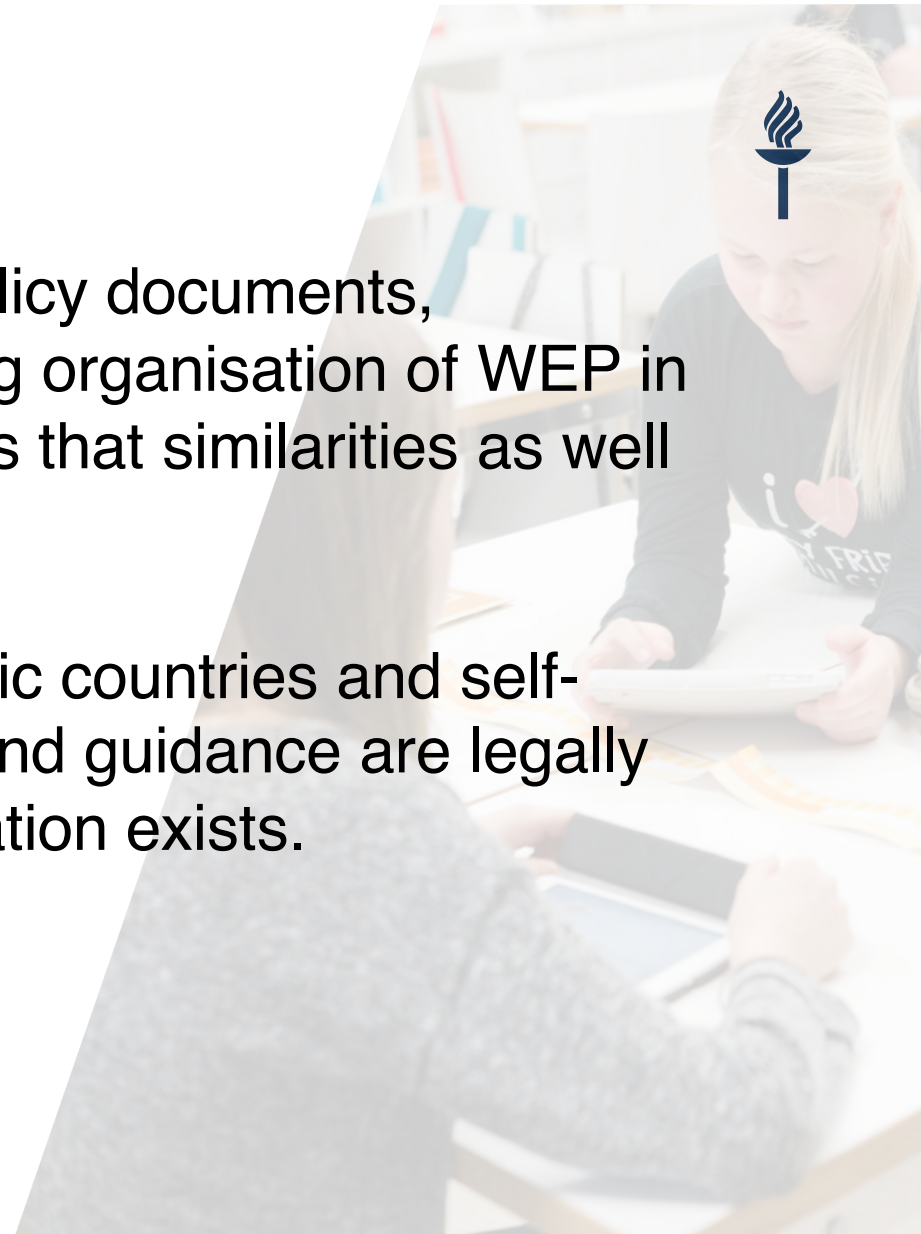
Countries and self-governing areas included in the review:

- Denmark
- Greenland
- Finland (Åland)
- Iceland
- Norway
- Sweden



Results

- Analysis of the Nordic countries' policy documents, curriculum, and research concerning organisation of WEP in lower secondary education indicates that similarities as well as differences prevail.
- In all the education acts of the Nordic countries and self-governing areas career education and guidance are legally mandated but differences on realisation exists.



Comparison of WEP organisation in lower secondary education in Nordic countries



	COUNTRY						
	Denmark	Greenland	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden	
Career education							
WEP							
WEP in curriculum							
Purpose of WEP							
Duration of the WEP							
Assessment of the WEP							
Responsibility of finding WEP							
Employers' role							

Table 1 Comparison of WEP organisation in lower secondary education in Nordic countries.

	DENMARK	GREENLAND	FINLAND	ICELAND	NORWAY	SWEDEN
Career education	Compulsory topic, integrated in the compulsory subjects	Compulsory topic, integrated in other compulsory subjects	Compulsory, timetabled subject	Vaguely mentioned, topic integrated in other compulsory subjects	Compulsory, timetabled subject	Compulsory, integrated in other compulsory subjects
WEP	Optional	Optional	Mandatory	Not stated	Optional	Mandatory
WEP in curriculum	Mentioned	Not stated	Described in detail	Not stated	Not stated	Mentioned
Purpose of WEP	Not stated	Not stated	To create a foundation for educational and career choices and to increase appreciation for working life in general, develop job search skills	Not stated	Not stated	Help students to gain knowledge about working life prior to future study and career choices
Duration of WEP	One optional week in grades 7 to 10	Not stated	One to three days in grade 7 Five days in grade 8 Five to ten days in grade 9	Not stated	Not stated	At least ten days in total for all students from grade 8 in compulsory school
Assessment of WEP	Not specified	Not specified	Workplace and student self-assessment	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified
Responsibility for finding WEP	Student and parents	Not specified	Students supported by study counsellors	Not specified	Not specified	Municipality or school
Employers' role	Not specified	Not specified	Partners	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified

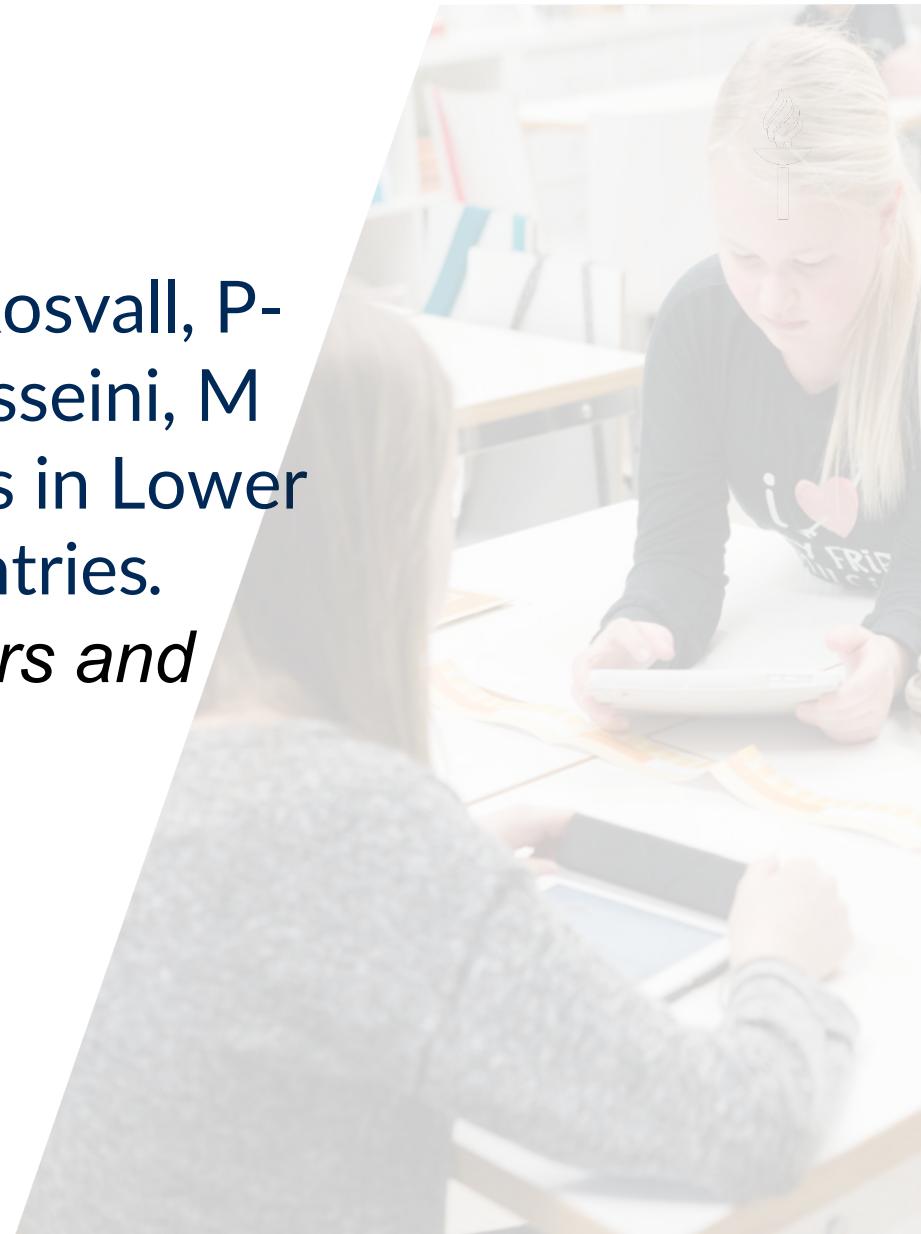
Discussion

- This analysis reflects difficulties when it comes to go further in research and compare how WEP in the Nordic countries is carried out.
- This analysis makes an important stamp in time from where it becomes easier to detect and discuss trends in policy related to WEP in the Nordic countries in the future.
- In addition it would be intriguing to, for example, empirically investigate commonalities and differences in how WEP is understood by the students



References

Kettunen, J., Skovhus, R., Roise, P., Rosvall, P-Å, Einarsdóttir, A. & Eshaghbeigi-Hosseini, M (2023). Work Experience Placements in Lower Secondary Education in Nordic Countries. *Nordic Journal of Transitions, Careers and Guidance*, 4(1), 29–42.
<https://doi.org/10.16993/njtcg.60>





Thank you

For further information, please contact:

Prof. Jaana Kettunen
Finnish Institute for Educational Research
University of Jyväskylä
Tel. + 358 40 805 4255
E-mail: jaana.h.kettunen@jyu.fi

<https://ktl.jyu.fi/en/staff/kettunen-jaana>

