

**FINNISH LESSONS OR FAIRY TALES? FINNISH
EDUCATION POLICIES IN THE BRITISH PRINTED
MEDIA EDUCATION REFORM DISCUSSION IN 2015-2020**

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>This thesis examines the coverage of the Finnish education system in the British press during the period 2015-2020 on the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The Finnish education system has received widespread international attention since the first PISA results were published in 2001. Finland has found that its status as an education superpower is useful for branding the nation. The research material, 30 articles in total, was collected from four newspapers: the left-wing The Guardian and The Independent, and the right-wing The Telegraph and The Times. The analysis was carried out using Entman's theory of framing analysis, supplemented by Stephen Reese's ideas on the what and how of framing. These were used to explore how the success factors of the Finnish education system are explained to the public in the British cultural, historical and social context. In 2015-2016, the frames were: "Finnish fairy tales" and "the PISA ranking or future skills". The Finnish Fairy Tales frame questions the role of modern Finnish education policy and instead explains Finnish success in terms of factors such as history and the specific characteristics of Finnish society. The PISA ranking or future skills -frame highlights the tension between basic and soft skills and the skills needs of the future. The frame for 2017-2018 was Contextualised Finnish Lessons. The journalists who visited Finland put the so-called standard principles of Finnish education at the top of the list: high-quality teacher training, equality, no private schools, free school meals, individual learning support. The specific social and cultural context of Finland was presented, but was not seen as an obstacle to borrowing educational policies. The frame for 2019-2020 was: From cherry picking to well-being. The concept of cherry picking appears several times in articles related to policy borrowing. It refers to the practice of using examples drawn from Finnish education policy to both justify and oppose new educational policy. This study provided relevant information for nation branding of Finland in the British context. With the exception of the Finnish Fairy Tales -frame, Finland's status as an educational superpower in the UK was maintained during the time frame of this study. Finland's success in ranking tables on pupil well-being became a new success factor and a source of inspiration for new Finnish lessons.</p>	
Keywords PISA, framing, education policy, policy borrowing	
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Tutkielma käsittelee Suomen koulutuspolitiikan ja koulutukseen liittyvien valintojen esiintymistä OECD:n PISA - tutkimusta koskevassa uutisoinnissa brittiläisessä lehdistössä vuosina 2015-2020. Suomen koulutusjärjestelmä on saanut laajaa kansainvälistä huomiota ensimmäisten PISA-tulosten julkistamisesta lähtien (2001). Suomessa havaittiin pian, että asema koulutuksen suurvaltana on hyödyllinen kansakunnan brändäämisessä. Tälle tutkimukselle valittuna ajanjaksona Suomen PISA-menestys on kuitenkin ollut hienoisessa laskussa. Aiempaa Suomen koulutusjärjestelmään ja PISAan liittyvää uutisointia Isossa-Britanniassa koskevaa tutkimusta ei käytettävissä olleilla menetelmillä löytynyt. Tutkimusaineisto, yhteensä 30 artikkelia, kerättiin neljästä sanomalehdestä: työväenpuoluetta lähempänä olevista The Guardianista ja The Independentista sekä oikeistolaisempaa linjaa edustavista The Telegraphista ja The Timesista.</p> <p>Aineiston analyysi tehtiin hyödyntäen Entmanin kehystämistä koskevaa teoriaa täydennettynä Stephen Reesen ajatuksilla kehystämisen mitä ja miten -kysymyksistä. Niiden avulla selvitettiin, miten Suomen PISA-menestystä avataan ja kehystetään brittiläisessä kulttuurisessa, historiallisessa ja yhteiskunnallisessa kontekstissa.</p> <p>Vuosina 2015-2016 kehyksiä olivat: ”Suomalaiset sadut” ja ”PISA-menestys vai tulevaisuuden taidot”. ”Suomalaiset sadut” -kehys kyseenalaistaa Suomen modernin koulutuspolitiikan aseman ja selittää Suomen menestystä historian ja suomalaisen yhteiskunnan erityispiirteiden kaltaisilla tekijöillä. ”PISA-menestys vai tulevaisuuden taidot” -kehys tekee näkyväksi jännitteen perustaitojen ja niin sanottujen ”pehmeiden taitojen” sekä tulevaisuuden osaamistarpeiden välillä. Vuosien 2017-2018 kehykseksi muodostui ”Kontekstualisoidut Suomen oppitunnit”. Suomessa vierailleet toimittajat nostivat koulutuksen menestystekijöiden kärkeen niin sanotut vakioperustelut kuten laadukkaan opettajankoulutuksen ja tasa-arvon. Suomen erityinen sosiaalinen ja kulttuurinen konteksti esiteltiin, mutta sitä ei nähty esteenä opetusmenetelmien lainaamiselle. Kehys vuosille 2019-2020 liittyi toimintatapaan, jossa samoja Suomen koulutuspolitiikasta ja koulutusmenetelmistä poimittuja esimerkkejä käytettiin sekä koulutuspoliittisten uusien linjausten perustelemiseen, että niiden vastustamiseen. Tällöin rinnalle nousi myös oppilaiden hyvinvoinnin korostamisen näkökulma. ”Suomalaiset sadut” -kehystä edustavia artikkeleja lukuun ottamatta käsitys Suomen asemasta koulutuksen suurvaltana säilyi brittilehdistössä tutkimuksen aikajänteellä. Aiemmassa tutkimuksessa vastaava huomio Suomen asemasta oli tehty Australiassa. Suomen maabrändäyksen näkökulmasta nämä olivat keskeisiä havaintoja. Suomen menestyksestä hyvinvointia koskevissa kansainvälisissä vertailuissa voisi tulla uusi menestystekijä ja inspiraation lähde uusille ”Suomen oppitunneille”.</p>	
Keywords PISA, kehysanalyysi, koulutuspolitiikka, politiikan lainaaminen	
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1 INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I analyse the representation of the Finnish education system in media coverage of the OECD's Programme for the International Student Assessment (PISA) survey in the UK for the period of 2015-2020.

The Finnish Education system has gained wide international attention since releasing of the first PISA results in 2001. For Finland, these results were remarkably good. In the reading literacy Finland scored best among the participating countries, third in science and fourth in the mathematical literacy. This has motivated many researchers, media representatives, politicians, education policy experts and anyone interested in education, to seek secrets of success.

Finland found the newly emerged status as an education superpower as something that could be useful for nation branding. A project started in 2008 when Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb set up a delegation to discuss the ways on how to make Finland more "visible, relevant and globally valued". In November 2010 the delegation published a report: *A Mission for Finland*. The report suggested that Finland should present itself as a global problem-solver in its own strength-areas: functionality, nature and education. Functionality was chosen, because: "*The Finnish way of doing things, a practical approach is combined with creativity in a way that is distinctive to our culture. Examples of this include activities of societies and associations that exploit people's skills and the practicality of Finnish design.*" (Mission for Finland 2010, 182) Furthermore, about the nature as a strength-area, the report states that: "*A strong relationship to nature is a key element of the Finnish identity and culture and especially the distinctive 'edge' of our culture. Our culture that is focused on nature sets Finland apart from other western welfare states.*" (Mission for Finland 2010, 182) Finally, the delegation justifies why education is part of the focus areas by stating that "*numerous international comparisons have found Finnish basic education to be among the best in the world. Our education system is also one of the fundamental factors of equality in Finnish society*". (Mission for Finland 2010, 361)

My motivation for this thesis topic stems from my interest in seeing how the media receive Finnish lessons in another educational environment. What aspects are

highlighted and what kind of frames are used? I am also interested in reading the political as part of this analysis. In the UK, are politicians` comments on PISA results strategically fed to the media to support particular policies?

Why did I choose the British media rather than, for example, the German or Swedish media to study from this perspective? My motivation was both academic and personal. The academic motivation stems from the specific features of the British education system, many of which are quite different from the Finnish one. By this I mean, for example, the British tradition of testing, examinations and ranking tables. Another factor that makes Britain interesting is that education reform has been on the agenda of British governments for years. These features are more specifically described for example in the article of Comparative Education -journal: *PISA: multiple "truths" and mediatised global governance* (Grey et al 2018, 113).

My personal motivation for this topic comes from my previous work experience in international cooperation in the field of education. Especially after the turn of the 2010s, British partners became more interested in Finnish vocational education and training, and they were keen to cooperate with Finnish schools. Discussions often focused on the PISA survey and the secrets of Finland`s success. Could they learn something specific from the Finnish education system that they could bring back home? Before PISA, I could never have imagined that this would be possible. After all, the UK has been famous for universities like Oxford and Cambridge, boarding schools such as Eton. This in turn indicates what have been the typical areas of international comparison in education. These were not the usual primary or secondary schools, but universities or schools known for training celebrities for politics or business.

When I started writing this thesis, I soon realised that the arguments of the Finnish branding delegation were not taken for granted in the UK. Cultural and historical reasons for success were offered, rather than reasons related to the educational policies. Gabriel Heller-Sahlgren, Research Director at the Centre for Market Reform of Education in London wrote a research paper published by Centre for Policy Studies with the title: *Real Finnish Lessons. A true story of an education superpower* (2015). In the foreword of the analysis (Heller-Sahlgren 2015: vi), Julian le Grande states as follows:

"So, while many have used Finland`s experience to support their own pet theories on the desirability of certain types of education, its rise and decline have never been systematically analysed in a rigorous fashion. In this masterly exploration of the Finnish phenomenon, Gabriel Heller-Sahlgren remedies this situation. He refutes many of the standard explanations, and shows convincingly how the outcomes, both positive and negative, are better explained by a detailed examination of Finland`s history and educational culture."

The title of the research recalls the work to Pasi Sahlberg's books: *Finnish lessons: what can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* (2011) and the second edition of the book (*Finnish lessons 2.0: what can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* (2014)). Pasi Sahlberg is a Finnish educationalist who has gained international reputation as an advocate and expert of Finnish Education system.

Finnish researchers Simola et al. (2016, 131) comment that despite of the rather neutral name, the Centre for Market Reform of Education is one of the oldest right-wing think tanks established by Margaret Thatcher. Heller-Sahlgren's survey brings the political to the agenda.

Another like-minded analysis on the topic was compiled by Tim Oates with the title "*Finnish Fairy Stories*". Oates is Group Director of Assessment Research and Development in Cambridge Assessment which is a department in University of Cambridge. These two reports argued against the typical explanations behind the Finnish success. The main argument of Oates is the following:

"This elementary error of analysis has been compounded by non-Finnish analysts who have asked questions only about the things in which they are interested; they have `found` what they have been looking for, and not understood the importance of things which they have not asked about. Combined together, these two errors have given a very misleading picture of what Finland genuinely appears to have achieved, and how." (Oates, 2015)

Both of the above-mentioned researchers argue that the lessons learned from the Finnish example are largely wrong. Oates puts the misunderstandings into a nutshell by stating that the right lessons are not the following typically presented arguments: there is no inspection or national testing, the national curriculum is very general and allows schools a very high level of autonomy, there are no private schools and this is no policy of school choice and finally Finland is no model for the rest of the world. (Oates, 2015)

These two surveys were quite provocative by their titles when talking about fairy stories or real Finnish lessons. They triggered the idea of limiting the analysis of this thesis not to the peak years, but to the years during which Finland's PISA rankings have been falling.

The aim of this thesis is to study what aspects of the Finnish education system does the British media highlight during those years in their coverage of PISA related education reform discourse. The analysis is limited to news coverage related to the PISA survey since that has been the origin of interest in relation to Finnish education system. It is also one of the main arguments that the Mission for Finland nation branding delegation group was drawing upon.

The data analysed were collected from 2015-2020 from four newspapers: the left-of-centre The Guardian and The Independent, and the right-of-centre The Daily

Telegraph (later The Telegraph) and The Times. Two newspapers from each of the two main political parties were selected to identify political bias and possible differences in the frames used.

The analysis is carried out by using Entman`s theory of framing which he presents in his article: *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm* (1993). The analysis is supplemented by Stephen Reese`s ideas on the what and how of framing (Reese 2009). The frames are analysed with the focus on how the success/decline factors of Finnish education system are explained for the audience in British cultural, historical and social context.

“Few would argue that the intermingling of ideas from different education systems does not have an important role to play in educational improvement. However, it is reasonable to expect that if we want to draw valid lessons from different countries, we need to ensure that we understand what happens at each step in the transference of a particular policy idea from one context to another.” (Burdett, Newman & O`Donnell, 2016: 113)

The citation above suggests that problems might arise when policy ideas are transferred from one context to another. The context matters, but the issue is far more complicated. The politics applies to all areas of life, including education. Policy lessons drawn from different countries are also used to support opinions and aspirations. Media is part of this game. Depending on the objective, the media may emphasise for example cultural difference or similarity or ignore cultural issues completely.

As this study is particularly interested in finding out which aspects are more salient in the British media coverage of the Finnish education system, Entman`s framework analysis is a very useful tool to find answers to the following research questions set out in the thesis:

RQ1: What frames are used in the British media for explaining Finnish education system success and/or decline factors?

RQ2: How are cultural, social and political arguments present in the frames?

The first research question provides useful information for the Finnish audience interested in nation branding on how it`s education system is explained for the British audience. The second question deepens the analysis into political, social and cultural factors and thus helps to understand the transferability of educational success factors from one context to another and to recognise the presence of political bias in this process.

The next chapter provides background information on PISA. It also presents examples of previous studies on media coverage of PISA and the research gap. The third chapter discusses the methodology, gives an overview of frame analysis from the perspective of this thesis and also comments on another possible methodological approach, critical discourse analysis. The following chapter then presents the data and moves on to the analysis section. The results and discussion chapter presents the results and discusses their relevance and added value to previous research. Finally,

the Conclusions chapter presents the overall implications of the study, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE PISA SURVEY AND PREVIOUS STUDIES ON ITS COVERAGE IN THE MEDIA

In this chapter, I briefly introduce the PISA survey as a tool for comparative education. The focus is on how PISA relates to the overall picture of comparative education and what its role is today. I will also briefly examine the criticisms that have been raised against it. This supports my understanding of the role of PISA as a tool for comparative education and the interest of this thesis in exploring the media coverage of PISA. In the second subsection, I then briefly present examples of previous research on PISA media coverage.

2.1 Background information on the PISA survey

Education is seen as one of the most important tools to increase equity but also the competitiveness of societies. This constitutes a complex relationship and an interesting area of research. Currently, education policy makers around the world are constantly debating concepts and terms such as 21st century or transversal skills, anticipating future skills needs and the overall quality of education and training systems. Based on my own understanding, competition is driving societies to seek the keys to successful learning that will contribute to both human welfare and economic competitiveness. In the final analysis, the economic-welfare debate is not significant, since the improvements in terms of welfare and equity also have a positive impact on economic development.

Before the 1960s, it was assumed that the number of years of schooling or a high level of education would have a direct impact on earnings, productivity and growth. Hanushek argues that because the quality of schooling varied widely, contradictory

results were obtained and wrong policy conclusions were drawn. As early as 1964, European education ministers meeting in London recommended that the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) should establish a basis for comparable statistics. In the 1970s, the OECD began work on education indicators. With the globalisation of the economy, education policies became more economic. The emphasis was placed on producing better human capital. Comparative data became an essential factor in assessing potential economic competitiveness at the global level. (Lindgard and Sellar 2016, 361-362)

In 2000, European Heads of State set the goal in Lisbon of making Europe "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world". The conclusion was that the most efficient modern economies are those that produce the most knowledge and skills. Those that make knowledge easily accessible to as many individuals and firms as possible will be the most successful. (Schleicher 2006, 4.) Indicators were needed to measure the progress of the knowledge base. The OECD had already developed a tool for this purpose, the Programme for International Student Assessment in short PISA. These newly developed tests focusing on cognitive skills were beginning to offer possibilities for modelling the economic impact of learning outcomes. (2016, 81-82)

PISA survey, has been implemented in 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018. The first report of PISA 2000: *Knowledge and Skills for Life* was published in 2001. (OECD 2001:2) Accordingly, each PISA survey has been followed by official report year after the research was conducted. Covid-19 postponed PISA 2021 to 2022.

Today, PISA is one of the most important achievement surveys in education. PISA tests 15-year-old students in science, mathematics, reading, cooperative problem solving and economics. The test is not based on any national curriculum, but assumes that different national curricula are similar. The performance of the national systems is ranked according to the quality of the test results for each system. The equity of the system is measured by the dispersion of scores and the effect of socio-economic background. (Lindgard and Sellar 2016, 363)

Over the years, and as the number of participating countries has grown, PISA has become influential in global education governance and national policy-making. (Sahlberg, 2016, p. 129.) The first PISA test involved 32 countries. The number more than doubled in 2015, when 72 countries participated. (OECD 2016)

The OECD's constitution lists the promotion of economic growth, international trade and economic development as its main objectives. (Lindgard and Sellar 2016, 358.) Economic growth and the development of educational success are interlinked in the OECD's work. The 2008 financial crises around the world led the OECD to rethink its economic policies. The shift from GDP as the primary indicator of growth to a focus on issues of welfare, inequality and social cohesion became more important to the

organisation. In 2012, the OECD launched the Knowledge Strategy (Lindgard and Sellar 2016, 365) Since its inception, PISA has also collected data on non-cognitive skills such as teamwork, communication and entrepreneurship, and subjective well-being. Generic skills and well-being are also seen as important in modern working life, and there is widespread interest in comparative data on these skills. Economic measurement goes beyond GDP to include new aspects of well-being.

The whole concept of skill is being renewed and taking on new meanings in the fields of personality and social life. This again offers new opportunities for political action. (Lindgard and Sellar 2016, 365.) The inclusion of non-cognitive skills allows for a broader set of factors that influence human capital and increases the explanatory power of comparisons of educational performance across countries and regions. (Lindgard and Sellar 2016, 367)

In addition to measuring quality through PISA results, the OECD also conducts a survey to determine the socio-economic background of participating students. The comparison of quality and equity is measured by the strength of the correlation between socio-economic background and performance.

International comparisons, such as PISA, have changed the focus from inputs and how education systems are maintained to outputs and system outcomes. When these results are compared internationally, Schleicher and Zoido argue that peer pressure and public accountability can have even greater impact on educational change than legislation, rules and regulations. (2016, 375.) Lindgard and Sellar argue that the OECD influences education globally through epistemological and infrastructural governance. (2016, 368) Through its soft power, it helps shape the global education policy landscape. The knowledge infrastructure produced by the OECD is important to make the globe legible for governance. Lindgard and Sellar argue that this is endeared to a global epistemic community, and "both through its knowledge infrastructure and through this community, the organization exercises a kind of epistemological governance in education." One of the OECD's key success factors has been and remains its ability to adapt to changing contexts. (Lindgard and Sellar 2016, 370)

Regardless of social and cultural differences which are seen by some as explaining factors in the success or failure of education, the importance of PISA and other international comparisons, lay on the work that they are doing in setting measurable goals to serve as tools for the educational improvement. (Schleicher and Zoido 2016, 454-455) The education improvement is not imprisoned by social or cultural context and improvement is possible:

"International comparisons can show what is possible in education, in terms of the quality, equity, and efficiency of educational services achieved by the world's top performing education systems, they can foster better understanding of how different education systems address similar problems, and they can help set meaningful targets in terms of measurable

goals achieved by the world's educational leaders. Not least, in the face of rapidly improving education systems, even those who claim that the relative standing of countries mainly reflects social and cultural factors must concede that educational improvement is possible." (Schleicher and Zoido 2016, 454-455)

Following, I will give some examples of the criticisms that have been levelled at large-scale assessments such as PISA.

Researchers and media representatives have also strongly criticised international large-scale assessments (ILSA), such as the PISA assessment. This has been the case even though international assessments make countries' performance comparable and their effectiveness measurable. Among the negative aspects of ILSA, it has been suggested that the national distinctiveness of the education system and its value as a product of the nation's historical development have been lost. In this globalised world, the best performing countries set the goals and standards of education for the rest of the world. Critics also say that ILSAs promote the idea that education systems produce national economic benefits by performing well in mathematics and literacy. (Kamens 2013, 118-121)

Eisner (cited in Schleicher and Zoido, 2016) on the other hand argues that "the weighting of the cow does not make the cow fatter". Meaning that the measuring of the success is not an intrinsic value. The second main counterargument against the usefulness of ILSAs relates to the specific socio-economic and cultural contexts of countries and how they affect the transferability of policy lessons learned from other countries. (Meyer and Schiller 2013)

There are also several other points that the critics have raised up for instance in the media. For example, the Guardian published an open letter to Dr Andreas Schleicher, director of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment signed by a group of academics. They claim that OECD and PISA are damaging education worldwide. One of the negative outcomes of PISA according to them is the narrowing down of the important aspects of education by limiting the interest of PISA only to measurable subjects. The attention is taken away from immeasurable topics such as physical, moral, civic and artistic development. They finish their critics by stating:

"Finally, and most importantly: the new Pisa regime, with its continuous cycle of global testing, harms our children and impoverishes our classrooms, as it inevitably involves more and longer batteries of multiple-choice testing, more scripted "vendor"-made lessons, and less autonomy for teachers. In this way Pisa has further increased the already high stress level in schools, which endangers the wellbeing of students and teachers." (Guardian 6 May 2014)

Schleicher (2006,4) has argued that the predominant reason for the rise of interest in international achievement studies is the connection between the success in knowledge-based society and economic success of society. On the other hand, there

are several studies that indicate the power of PISA results as tools in educational policy reforms and policy borrowing. The role of supranational organisations like OECD can be seen as superior and external to national governments – as an international form of knowledge and standards. (Baird et al. 2016, 123)

The above shows how the PISA survey and other ILSA surveys raise contradictory arguments. The following sub-section presents the issue from the perspective of media coverage. It also presents examples of previous studies on media coverage of the PISA survey.

2.2 Prior research on media coverage of the PISA survey

Several studies have focused on PISA survey and the debate in the newspapers on its implications for education policy. For example, Wiseman (2013) has studied policy responses to PISA in several countries. He argues that media and policy reactions to PISA results are mainly based on initial descriptive results, especially in countries where average student performance is below expectations. Secondary analysis, which is more informative and accurate, often receives little attention, even though it is more conducive to educational reform and improvement. Wiseman found evidence of responses that were part of a wider educational culture characterised by shared norms, traditions and assumptions about particular subjects. These themes include assessment and policy, local context and community, and both accommodation and resistance. Furthermore, Wiseman notes that policy responses form a complex web. Recognition of this is the basis for understanding the shock, resistance and adaptation responses associated with PISA. He also notes that different national media highlight PISA results from different perspectives. The main areas of interest are: improving teacher quality, developing standards-based accountability systems and creating opportunities for equal education. Participation in PISA and other similar large-scale international assessments is used by education policy makers as a political tool to exercise soft power. Policy responses are varied, but they “follow two basic patterns, which are the result of attraction, borrowing, imitation or coercion; they are convergence and isomorphism”. Some countries end up implementing large-scale policy-driven reforms (e.g. Germany), developing research-based national models to understand the link between student learning and achievement (e.g. Japan), or comparing regions to examine the determinants of school effectiveness and academic performance (e.g. the US). PISA provides a rationale for evidence-based policy-making, as Wiseman puts it. (Wiseman 2013, 309-312)

The coverage of PISA in the print media has been studied in some countries, such as Japan and Australia. For example, Keita Takayama has examined the Japanese media's interpretation of the shocking results of the 2003 PISA survey in Japan in the political, economic and cultural context of the time. He concludes that the Ministry of Education used media interpretations to promote otherwise controversial changes to the Japanese curriculum. (Takayama, 2008: 393)

Another example is from Australia. Baroutsis and Lingard have studied the media coverage of the Australian PISA results and found that it has global political relevance because of the increased global political importance of PISA and the increased role of the media in policy-making. Media coverage that focuses more on quality than fairness has a significant political impact in Australia. The authors conclude by arguing that media interpretations of Australia's PISA performance have contributed to the formation of the Australian school system, despite the fact that schooling is constitutionally a state and territory responsibility. The media talk about Australian results, not those of New South Wales or Western Australia. This masks the wide disparities in performance between the school systems of the different Australian states. Regional differences in PISA results go largely unreported, while attention is given to national averages and international comparisons in ranking tables. (Baroutsis & Lingard, 2016)

The authors conclude that the data from the PISA league tables produced by the OECD facilitate the presentation of school performance in the media and support the logic of journalistic practice. The increased media coverage of PISA results has paralleled the enhanced role of OECD education activities in both global and national school governance. PISA data also showed that think tanks have a significant media impact. The article shows that the media plays a key role in changing Australian PISA results over time and suggests that this role has policy implications. (Baroutsis & Lingard, 2016)

Baird, Johnston et al examine policy and media responses to the 2009 and 2012 PISA survey in six jurisdictions: Canada, China (Shanghai), England, France, Norway and Switzerland. They start from Neustad's idea that politics and policy-making are persuasion. They are interested in how PISA and its results are presented in different policy contexts. How the results are used as arguments for persuasion and whether the arguments related to PISA seem really convincing. The main finding was that policy responses to similar PISA results varied according to different cultural and historical trajectories of education systems. The study suggests that PISA results are used as a magic wand in political rhetoric, as if they create specific policy choices. (Baird, Johnston et. al. 2016, 122)

The media representations of PISA survey in Finland and the UK has been studied in a master's thesis (Metsäperä 2019). The emphasis of the thesis is on

discovering the portrayal of PISA survey as a tool in developing education system and curricula. Comparison is made between the portrayals in the UK and in Finland.

However, the impact of Finnish education models on education policy in the UK has been studied by examining policy documents. The use of the Finnish example to support concrete policy reforms in the UK has often been linked in particular to the reform of teacher education. According to Chung (2016), who has studied Finland's PISA performance, teacher education has been considered one of the most important drivers of Finnish PISA performance in the UK. In two recent teacher education reforms, the Finnish example has been (mis)used, argues Chung (2016) in her article. She argues that British policy makers have uncritically borrowed from the Finnish model of teacher education:

“This piecemeal, ‘pick ‘n’ mix’ approach to education policy reform ignores the fact that educational policies and ‘practices exist in ecological relationships with one another and in whole ecosystems of interrelated practices’. Thus, these borrowed teacher preparation policies will not necessarily lead to the outcomes outlined by policy-makers in the reforms.” (Chung 2016, 207-208)

According to Chung, the British policy-makers have ignored the long march that has led to establishing teaching as an academic, research-based profession and the education ideology and values in Finland. The research was carried out as a government document analysis to be able to draw conclusions of usage of foreign models in forming education policies. (Chung 2016, 207-208)

Two Finnish perspectives on the reasons for Finland's PISA performance are briefly presented below to support the British media analyses. Pasi Sahlberg's book: *“What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?”* provides a Finnish perspective on the analysis of the success factors of the Finnish education system. It also discusses the improvement of education in general. Sahlberg sees success as a growth story, based on smart policy decisions in education reform over the decades. He identifies four main factors that have brought Finland's success and the world's education spotlight: a vision of equality, a focus on teaching, creativity and innovation, and highly qualified teachers. (Sahlberg, 2011)

Another important book by Finnish researchers on their own system was published in March 2017 by Simola, Kauko, Varjo, Kalalahti and Sahlström titled *Dynamics in Education Politics: Understanding and Explaining the Finnish Case*. The authors argue that although the education world has become globally networked with extensive global evaluations and global media coverage of their findings, there are still gaps in comparative theories of education. The authors present a new theoretical framework for comparative analysis of educational policy dynamics (CADEP). They argue that for comparative education research to “achieve its policy relevance, it needs a strong and ambitious theoretical framework that can incorporate the socio-historical

complexity, relationality and contingency of the research subject under consideration. Without a strong theoretical approach, it is difficult to go beyond simply listing similarities and differences that facilitate classification but obscure processes and contexts.” (Simola et al. 2017, 2-4) Simola et al. are looking for a way to make the Finnish education system understandable and comparable in other cultural settings. They found in their study that the success or failure of basic education is related to seven different discursive dynamics that are intertwined. In the case of Finland, they found four constitutive discursive dynamics in Finnish comprehensive schools: “buffering and embedded egalitarianism in policymaking, redistributive but punctuated trust in governance, diverging but civic parenthood in families` educational strategies and consolidating but paternalistic progressivism in classroom culture.” (Simola et al. 2017, 113)

The previous section described how Sahlberg (2011) highlighted equity, a focus on teaching, creativity and innovation, and highly qualified teachers as success factors for Finnish education. Simola et al. do not provide mere explanations, but focus on governance and contextual dynamics. Their research shows that neither PISA nor other studies conducted by supranational organisations, such as the OECD in the case of PISA and then the World Bank or the EU, provide unambiguous tools for reforming different education systems. (Simola et al. 2017)

This very brief review of the research on PISA shows that learning from the example of others is of interest to policy makers around the world. In the education sector, policy borrowing relates to how policy makers use foreign examples at different stages of initiating and implementing educational change (Phillips & Ochs 2003, 451).

No prior research could be found, however, on the subject of this thesis: on the appearance of Finland`s PISA performance in British newspaper discussions of education policy. On the other hand, several think tanks have contributed to the public debate on Finland as a case study in assessing how the UK education system could be reformed. This gives interesting starting point for this study. It is also clear that using other countries` methods or policies requires an understanding of the original context and dynamics. In this thesis, it will be interesting to see whether this is made visible while supporting policy aspirations.

2.3 Research gap

As the review of prior research indicated, no previous research was located on the coverage of Finland's PISA results in British media debates on education policy. This is particularly noteworthy given that education is seen as one of the strengths that would make Finland more visible, relevant and globally recognised, as suggested in A Mission for Finland -report mentioned earlier. (Mission for Finland 2010, 182) The lack of a follow-up study on how visibility, relevance and value is achieved in a country widely known for its education, combined with the real interest of British media in Finland's PISA performance, is a research gap targeted in this study.

The first research question is: what frames are used in the British media to explain the success and/or decline of the Finnish education system? This question provides useful information for the Finnish audience interested in nation branding on how its education system is explained for the British audience. The aim of studying the frames is to understand what the British media sees as relevant and/or valuable in the Finnish education system in relation to their own system.

The second research question is: How are cultural, social and political arguments present in the frames? This question deepens the analysis into political, social and cultural factors and thus helps to understand the transferability of educational success factors from one context to another and to recognise the presence of political bias in this process. This question opens perspectives on the critical approach to the borrowing of educational policies and practices, often based on the differences between countries from a cultural, social and also political point of view. How these arguments are framed and how identifying them could help localise messages, for example to improve access to education and training market of a new country.

In the next chapter, I will describe the method and the data, and how the method is applied to the data in this study.

3 THE RESEARCH METHOD AND THE DATA

This thesis uses framing as a method for examining news coverage of the Finnish education system in general and the PISA survey in particular as part of the media coverage on education policy reform in the UK. The frame analysis aims to identify the aspects that stand out as factors in the success or failure of the Finnish education system. The framing provides an approach to locate the cultural, social and political characteristics that influence how the Finnish example is presented in the media coverage. Which success factors are highlighted either through the definition of a national problem or a solution.

3.1 Framing analysis

Erving Goffman was the first to present a theoretical approach to framing in his book, *Frame Analysis* (1974). Goffman sees frames as "culturally determined definitions of reality that enable people to understand objects and events". (Goffman, 1974)

Since Goffman's work, several other scholars have gone on to define framing. Hertog and McLeod explain frames as "relatively comprehensive structures of meaning, consisting of a number of concepts and the relationships between these concepts". Frames can be used to understand social reality. (Hertog and McLeod 2001, 140) Their definition of a frame is cultural rather than cognitive. Frames are made up of the most abstract and general key concepts. The additional concepts within the frame are more peripheral, and in some cases more concrete and specific. The most powerful core concepts are myths, stories and metaphors that resonate within the culture. They have a broad meaning for culturally communicating individuals because of their symbolic power and their extraordinary significance. They activate

ideas such as national heroes, political choices or the history of a nation. The third source of power of frames identified by Hertog and McLeod is their widespread recognition. Organisations and individuals assume that members of society share the frame. Shared meaning among communicators is essential to all communication. (Hertog and McLeod 2001, 141)

Robert M. Entman has discussed Goffman's theory in his widely cited article: *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm* (1993). Entman argues that:

"to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendations." (Entman, 1993, 51-52)

Reese understands a frame as "an interpretive package for making sense of the social world". (Reese 2009, 19) They are "socially shared and over time persistent organizing principles that function symbolically to structure the social world in meaningful ways". (Reese 2001, 11)

Reese has argued that journalists not only communicate the ideas of political leaders to citizens, but also play an important role in constructing frames. (2009, 18) Drawing on Tuchman's idea of the news network concept, he argues that these frames are embedded in a cultural network where they are "connected to an underlying structure - a historically rooted dynamic cultural context". (Reese, 2009, 18) Reese discusses the divide between the "what and how" of framing in news. Reese himself is interested in how things are arranged in such a way as to guide policy and opinion. (Reese 2009, 19)

According to Reese, the "what" perspective is frame-centric. It deals with the construction of the frame. He states that the what perspective "involves the analysis of the content of the frame, in particular the network of concepts and the unique narrative and myths that make the frame work". (Reese 2009, 19) The framing is carried out by identifying framing devices of which Reese names metaphors, visual images and slogans as examples. In what of framing, the attention is also paid to the latent aspects of the text, such as problem definition and moral judgement, the keywords that form the underlying concepts of the frames. (Reese 2009, 20)

"In all, an analysis of the what of frames emphasizes the special configuration of discourse elements that articulate culture. If the what of frames are explored, it encourages an analysis that delves into the contextualization of topics – social, historically, culturally – and urges the framing researcher to look closely at the particular features of the frame." (Reese 2009, 20)

It is these frames that are most important in understanding the "way of framing", which seeks to reveal the frames that are constructed and contribute to the achievement of certain predetermined goals. The "how" of framing focuses on how

cognitive processes interact with news frames to produce outcomes. (Reese 2009, 20-21)

When examining policy borrowing in education reforms, framing provides a practical tool that can be used to expose policy makers' objectives when they rely on foreign examples. On the other hand, the "what" of framing provides a tool to reveal the factors that matter in the new context in which the borrowed policy is supposed to operate. It can answer questions such as: how is localisation done to make policy transfer successful? For example, metaphors are often used when trying to explain something new in an understandable way in a new context.

In this thesis, framing provides an approach to localise the cultural, social and political characteristics that influence how the Finnish example is presented in the media debate on education reform in the UK. This is done by locating the elements of perceived reality that are highlighted in the communication of the text, as Entman suggests (1993, 51-52) What success factors are highlighted either through the definition of a particular national problem or through the solution offered to the problem.

3.2 Why not critical discourse analysis?

Another alternative method would have been critical discourse analysis (CDA). For example, Norman Fairclough and James Gee have both used CDA to analyse language in educational settings. CDA would have provided a framework and tools for exploring the relationships between language and socio-institutional practices in social and political contexts. According to Rogers, "CDA is about a critical theory of the social world, the relationship between language and discourses in the construction and representation of this social world, and a methodology for describing, interpreting and explaining these relationships." (Rogers 2004) They would also have been useful in the search for "hidden power relations between discourse and wider social and cultural formations, and would have been interested in exposing inequalities, power relations, injustices, discrimination or prejudice". (Rogers 2004)

CDA has an approach to textual analysis that Fairclough says is particularly useful for analysts outside linguistics. In cultural and social sciences, it can enhance the value of discourse analysis as a methodological tool. According to Fairclough, CDA textual analysis includes linguistic analysis and intertextual analysis. (Fairclough 1995, 185) Challenges to the use of CDA outside the linguistic discipline have been cited, for example, linguistic formalism, which continues to dominate CDA-based textual analysis. Another argument against the unqualified acceptance of CDA-

based text analysis as a tool in, for example, the social sciences has been the lack of attention to the context of the text. Fairclough proposes intertextual analysis as a mediator that combines the two. In good analysis, there is no one without the other. Fairclough concludes:

“Let me put the point more forcefully: the signifier (form) and the signified (content) constitute a dialectical and hence inseparable unity in the sign, so that one-sided attention to the signified is blind to the essential material side of the meaning, and one-sided attention to the signifier (as in much linguistics) is blind to the essential meaningfulness of forms.” (Fairclough 1995, 212)

As the name suggests, critical discourse analysis is critical in nature. The fundamental aim is to find power relations that are difficult to detect but that favor one party more than the other. These two, a linguistic orientation at least to some extent with formalism and criticality as a starting point, were two of the reasons why it was decided not to use CDA in this thesis.

The core idea of the thesis is to locate how PISA and the success/failure factors of Finnish education are presented in the British media. In my opinion, framing gives a better starting point without “criticality”, bias or formal linguistics as an approach for this interest.

3.3 The data

The data for the analysis was collected from two left-of-centre newspapers, The Guardian and The Independent, and two right-of-centre newspapers, The Daily Telegraph (later The Telegraph) and The Times. The selection was made to identify possible differences in the frames used according to the political orientation of the newspaper. All four newspapers are national broadsheet or former broadsheet newspapers (Bennett and Kidd 2016, 166), and can be expected to comment on the education policy improvement debate. The original idea was to include only The Guardian and The Telegraph. After a preliminary search for articles, it became clear that in order to maintain a quantitative balance of left-of-centre and right-of-centre newspaper articles, it was necessary to add one newspaper from each political orientation. The Independent and The Times were chosen because of their nationwide circulation.

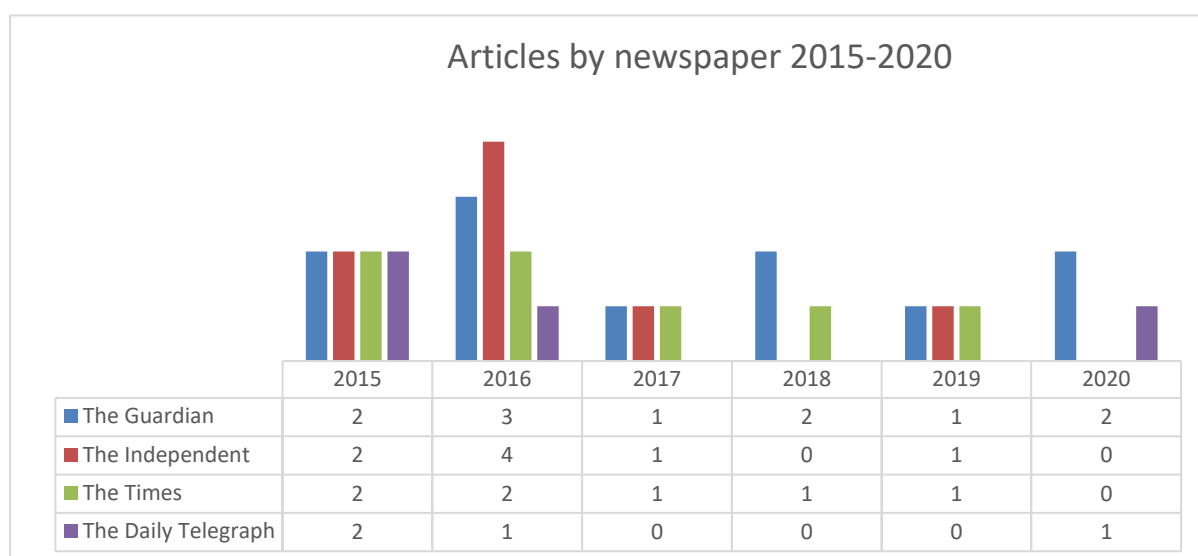
The data collection was carried out by making a search in the Internet versions of the newspapers with the following search terms: *PISA, education, Finland and policy*. These search terms had to occur at the same time. The following types of material were included: editorials, letters, comments, opinion pieces, news and features.

The original search was for articles from 2013-2020, with the aim of including articles covering the period when Finland has ranked higher in PISA. This period would have included the 2012 PISA results, which were published in 2013. The number of articles was so large, 61 in total, that it was necessary to reconsider the search. It was decided to limit the study to the period 2015-2020, with a reviewed aim of identifying which frames emerged in the British media during the period of the decline in Finland's PISA results. This final choice of the period covered by the thesis increases the relevance of the study for the Finnish public interested in comparative education and education exports. This is due to the fact that it provides information on the aspects and frames that either maintain or abandon the perception of Finland as an educational superpower.

The final article search in January 2022 left the following numbers for the left-of-centre papers: 11 for The Guardian and 8 for The Independent and the right-of-centre papers: The Daily Telegraph 4 and The Times 7. The content of these 30 articles was analysed to locate the most important frames on the topic of the thesis.

The table below shows that the highest number of references to the Finnish education system in the period covered by this study is in 2015 and 2016. This coincides with the year 2015 when the sixth PISA survey was conducted and the year 2016 when its results were published. Articles in the coming years are interesting targets for research on the impact of declining PISA performance on Finland's status as an education superpower.

TABLE 1 Articles on Finland and PISA in four British newspapers in 2015-2020



4 ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the frames found in the analysis of 30 articles. The results of the analysis are organised by year to see how the frames might change. The first stage of the analysis aims to identify the main categories of framing in order to answer the first research question: what kinds of frames are used in the British media to explain the success and/or decline of the Finnish educational policies? To which aspects of the British education policy debate is the news coverage of the Finnish education system linked and which aspects are highlighted? Frames are located by applying Entman's framing theory to each article and placing them in frames according to the perspective used to define the problem, interpret causality, make a moral judgement or recommend a solution.

The analysis is then extended to the "what to framing" in order to analyse the possible implications of the frames in more detail. Specific keywords are identified to contextualize the concepts, narratives and myths behind the frames.

The "how of framing" is then examined to see what potential objectives policy makers have when relying on a foreign example. (Reese 2009, 20-21) How are the problem and its causes and consequences defined? This question helps to contextualise the problems in social, historical and cultural terms and to answer the second research question: How are cultural, social and political arguments present in the frames? It also opens up the possibility of looking at the moral judgements or recommendations that have been made to solve the problems. This question seeks to identify any predetermined aims of the text that influence the reader's perceptions of educational policy solutions in the UK.

A common starting point for all the articles is a problem or a challenge in the British education system for which a solution is sought, proposed or criticised by referring to the Finnish example.

The frames located were:

- 2015-2016 Finnish fairytales, PISA ranking or future skills?

- 2017-2018 Contextualized Finnish lessons
- 2019-2020 From cherry-picking to wellbeing

These frames will be presented one by one in the next section. For example, teachers and teaching was one option in the analysis that could have been separated into its own frame or sub-frame, as it appeared in most of the media coverage. It was decided to focus the frame analysis on the overall picture of education policy news coverage rather than concentrating the analysis on a specific area of education policy. This choice also affected how straightforward it was to place each article within one of the identified frames. The choice of a broad approach to education policy, a kind of “bird’s eye view”, provided an opportunity to apply a wider perspective into the analysis of the arguments used in constructing the frames.

4.1 2015-2016

In 2015 and 2016, the frame generally varied according to the political position of the newspapers. Articles in the right-of-centre newspapers *The Times* and *The Telegraph* were mainly placed under the frame: *Finnish fairytales*. Articles in *The Guardian* and *The Independent* were mostly placed under the frame: *PISA ranking or future skills*. However, in all four papers these two frames also appear somewhat crossed. In the commentary articles in particular, the frames do not follow the political line of the papers. Both the *Guardian* and the *Independent* continued to highlight Finland’s PISA success. They identified equality, well-being and a creative curriculum that focuses on play in children’s early years as the keys to success.

The *Times* and *The Telegraph*, in their Finnish fairytale -frame, argued that Finland’s past success was not due to clever educational policy choices but to Finland’s cultural and historical characteristics. The standard explanations for Finland’s high ranking in the PISA test are based on misunderstanding or are misleading, because they do not actually explain success but decline. (Espinoza, 14 April 2015) The analysis shows how frames are built, for example, through metaphors.

Another interesting aspect of this Finnish fairytale -frame is that it explicitly refers to the eagerness of policy makers to justify different policies using the Finnish example. The *Guardian* published a commentary on Heller-Sahlgren’s study by Finnish educationalist Pasi Sahlberg, author of the original Finnish lessons. (Sahlberg, 2011) Sahlberg shares the same views on the enthusiasm of policy makers and the Finnish education system as the right-of-centre newspapers mentioned above. According to him, the problem is opportunistic policy quoting, which is “cherry-picking” of evidence supporting any chosen political direction. By carefully selecting

data, any education analyst can claim his findings as "evidence-based" and use them to justify his views. This clearly points to the Heller-Sahlgren and Oates studies, which seek evidence to support the Conservative government's policy on more traditional teaching methods. It also refers to these two studies by questioning their reliability, which Sahlberg argues is based on myths. (Sahlberg, 26 April 2015) The analysis will show how myth is constructed and the solution this frame offers to the reader in relation to policy borrowing.

The second frame during 2015-2016 is named: the *PISA ranking or future skills*. This frame focuses on fundamental education policy issues: learning and teaching. Under them, two themes are addressed: the future skills needs of the world of work and the quality of teaching. The frame emerges in the tension between the success factors of the PISA ranking and the skills needs of the future. Are basic skills such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) the most important skills of the future, or are they mainly emphasised to support success in the PISA rankings? In this frame, the Finnish example is presented as a solution to an existing problem, which is the policy chosen by the government: knowledge-based, teacher-led education with an emphasis on basic skills. Culture also features widely in this frame, and the analysis provides examples of this.

4.1.1 Finnish fairy tales

The Finnish fairytales -frame was found in both the Times and the Telegraph immediately after Gabriel Heller-Sahlgren's study: *True Finnish Lessons. A true story of an education superpower* (2015) was published. The Times (2015) published an article written by Heller-Sahlgren himself shortly after the publication of his study. The article: "*Why the golden boy of education has lost his lustre*" begins:

"Since the first results from the Pisa international education survey were released in 2001, Finland has been its golden boy, with policymakers and pundits worldwide pilgrimaging in droves to discover the country's secrets. The Finnish fan club continues using the country's experience to support whatever pet educational theories they have, despite the country's recent slippage in international and domestic assessments. (Heller-Sahlgren, 14 May 2015)

Heller-Sahlgren challenges Finland's role as a role model for education. He wonders why the Finnish example is used to support various educational theories, even though Finland has fallen in the PISA rankings. Heller-Sahlgren uses metaphors such as the golden boy, the Finnish fan club and pet education theories. All three metaphors, as it were, put Finland in the same position as a pet, a beloved child whose mistakes are ignored. The fan club has a desire to explain and always see things in the best light. These choices communicate how Finland's position in the UK education

reform debate is strong, but according to Heller-Sahlgren 's ideas based more on emotion than reason. This suggests that Finland has been successfully framed as an education superpower and that its position is not easily undermined. To succeed, strong arguments are needed, and here Heller-Sahlgren brings in the Finnish fairy tale -frame.

The problem that this frame seeks to address is that Finland`s past success is not based on its smart educational policy choices, but on its cultural and historical circumstances. Heller-Sahlgren names some of the standard explanations for Finland`s rise: "educational reforms and practices that focus on equality, local autonomy, relatively little teaching and homework, trust and respect for teachers - and a rejection of market-based ideas and accountability". (Espinoza, 14 April 2015) According to Heller-Sahlgren, all this is based on misunderstanding or misdirection, because in fact these do not explain Finland`s PISA success but its decline.

Heller-Sahlgren argues that there is a need to take into account "the danger of throwing out authority in schools and especially the wholesale implementation of pupil-led instruction, today embraced worldwide." If this message does not go through, the consequence is that the fairy tale will dominate "the rigorous analysis" and mislead the eager policy makers in UK and elsewhere to borrow wrong ideas which will actually take the education system to a further decline:

"... it`s becoming more like other Western countries in general and perhaps Scandinavia in particular. The old-school culture is in decline, catching up with the economic transformation and generating less learning-oriented attitudes, while the pressure to abandon teacher-centred methods is now materialising. Unfortunately, pundits and politicians have ignored all this, preferring to highlight policy explanations relying more on wishful thinking than rigorous analysis. But slipping Finnish performance is thankfully making these red herrings decreasingly persuasive." (Heller-Sahlgren, 14 May 2015)

The problem will be solved when education policy makers understand this. Fortunately, according to him, "the "sliding Finnish performance" is playing to the same goal. Conservative political views are strongly present in Heller-Sahlgren`s arguments. As Simola et al. (2016, 131) point out, Heller-Sahlgren`s study was published by the Centre for Market Reform of Education, one of the oldest right-wing think tanks in the UK.

On the same day, The Times published a news article written by its social affairs editor entitled: A history lesson on real reasons for the success of Finland`s schools. (Hurst, 15 April 2015) It refers to studies by both Heller-Sahlgren and Tim Oats, which conclude that the keys to the success of Finnish schools have been widely misunderstood. They argue that success is based on past governments rather than on its autonomous system, which gives teachers a great deal of freedom. The article quotes Tim Oates as saying that "Finland`s past success was based on centralised

reforms in the 1970s and 1980s, such as state-approved textbooks, not on current policies. Although there were no Ofsted-type inspections in Finland, the government and local authorities carefully assessed the quality of teaching in schools, including through standardised tests." (Hurst, 15 April 2015)

The article can be placed within the Finnish fairytales -frame, but it also brings a strong political perspective to the forefront. In addition to the misunderstood or misguided secrets of success, to which Finnish political experts have also themselves contributed, the article refers to domestic politics and Michael Gove, Minister of Education 2010-2014. According to the article, Gove used Finland's "highly qualified and respected teacher education" as a model for teacher education reform in the UK. Opponents of the current coalition government are using the Finnish example "to justify their calls for the abolition of school inspections, national exams and the evidence-based curriculum introduced by Gove". (Hurst, 15.4.2015) This article highlights how the Finnish example is used both as a source of inspiration for educational development and as a justification for opposition policies. This links the fairytale -frame to Pasi Sahlberg's article in the Guardian a week later where he introduces the term cherry-picking in this context. (Sahlberg, 26 April 2015)

The Telegraph article on the Heller-Sahlgren study refers to "new evidence". According to Heller-Sahlgren, Finland's success is due to "historical, economic and cultural factors that have little to do with the country's education system". In fact, traditional teaching methods may have played a role, she says. "It is also clear that the country's hierarchical educational culture, including traditional teaching methods, partly explains its achievements." (Espinoza, 14 April 2015)

The Telegraph article ends with the estimation that the highly valued Finnish model will be debated after this new evidence. The Telegraph representing political position right of centre does not question any of the arguments made by Heller-Sahlgren or present any other arguments. The article talks about "the evidence" which leads the reader to think about the courtroom where the suspect will be rightly convicted if evidence exists. Nevertheless, predicting that debates on highly valued Finnish model will arise, tells that the new evidence will not be taken as such by all.

Heller-Sahlgren's study puts forward ideas in line with the current Conservative government's views on education policy: "Britain should not give up authority in the classroom and seek to emulate the Finnish model of education, where pupils are given more power over teachers and less homework". This is in fact the reason for the country's recent fall in international rankings, says the article. (Espinoza, 14 April 2015)

The metaphor "mini-boom" is found in The Times where an article is titled: that "*Finland enjoyed a mini boom in educational tourism after topping the Pisa rankings in 2000, 2003 and 2006 but its performance has slipped.*" (Hurst, 7 December 2016)

The metaphor "mini-boom" gives the impression of a small temporary phenomenon. The ways in which arguments are organised to drive policy and opinion are clear: who would want to invest time and effort in an education policy based on fairy tales, contingency or past success?

Instead of reporting directly on Heller-Sahlgren's study, the Guardian published an article by Sahlberg, the Finnish educationalist and original writer of: *The Finnish Lessons. What can the world learn from the educational change in Finland?* (Sahlberg 2011). The Guardian provided him an opportunity to comment on the criticism, as Sahlberg's commentary can clearly be seen as a response to the Heller-Sahlgren and Oates studies. It was published two weeks after the Heller-Sahlgren study and articles in The Times and The Telegraph. Sahlberg titled his commentary: *Britain should be wary of borrowing education ideas from abroad.* (Sahlberg, 26 April 2015)

The problem that Sahlberg highlights is that UK policy makers are in danger of believing myths about foreign education systems, such as the Finnish system, and what has made them successful. The myth he refers to is that Finland's educational success is a result of its traditional culture in the 1970s and that the decline in Finland's success is due to the introduction of progressive student-centred approaches to teaching and learning since the 1990s. The implication of this myth is that Finland's modern school system would not be considered as a right source of ideas for educational development in the UK.

According to Sahlberg, the root of this problem is policy borrowing, which is "cherry-picking" evidence to support any chosen policy direction. He points out that by choosing the data carefully, any education analyst can claim their findings are "evidence-based" and justify their ideas. This clearly refers to the Heller-Sahlgren and Oates studies, which, as Sahlberg puts it, seek evidence to support the Conservative government's more traditional policies on educational methods. (Sahlberg, 26 April 2015)

The use of the word "myth" brings a direct tension with the fairytale -frame described above. Information cherry-picking can create the illusion of evidence that is not real evidence, but which serves certain political ends. The political objective in this case is to support more traditional educational methods. Rather than commenting on individual claims about the history of educational choice in Finland, Sahlberg puts himself above the debate by stressing that "what governments need to get right is a complete picture of their nation's educational landscape. The path to a better education for all our children is not a return to the past but the building of schools where curiosity, commitment and talent can be found and nurtured.". This requires linking research-based international lessons with local needs and capacities." (Sahlberg, 26 April 2015)

The solution in his “counterframe” to the problem is that it is more important to look through the windscreen rather than in the rear-view mirror, which is the opposite of what the fairy-tale frame offers. Sahlberg uses the nation’s educational landscape as an important context into which research-based international lessons should be integrated and localised. Policy borrowing is encouraged, but wisely.

4.1.2 The PISA ranking or future skills?

The frame, entitled: PISA ranking or future skills?, is based on the tensions between PISA ranking, cultural and political issues in the context of policy borrowing and future skills needs. Are basic skills such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM subjects) the most important skills of the future? Do competency-based curricula focus on basic skills mainly to support success in PISA rankings or are they really the skills of the future? What is the role of teachers in the PISA rankings

The Independent reported on an OECD study on basic skills. The report uses previous PISA data and other international student assessments to find links between school attendance and improvements in economic and social well-being. The report finds that access to education is in itself an imperfect development goal; many students leave the education system without basic literacy and numeracy skills. (OECD 2015, 3.) This is also the case in the UK, where one in five pupils leave school without acquiring basic skills. Finland achieved the highest ranking among European countries, coming sixth. (Chang, 14 May 2015)

“It takes education back to the 1950s,” argues the headmaster of a private school in a comment letter published in the Telegraph in December 2015. The comment letter is aimed at an audience sympathetic to the Conservative government’s policies. According to the author, the problem is the government’s policy of focusing on a knowledge-based curriculum with an emphasis on STEM subjects. The comment letter expresses confusion about the rationale for supporting this policy. The arguments range from the extreme, for example the narrowing of the gender pay gap if girls study more STEM subjects. This argument was put forward by Education Minister Nicky Morgan, who referred to finding by the London Economics consultancy. (Budge, 15 December 2015)

The comment letter goes on to claim that the current government believes that “good education” depends on a knowledge-based curriculum, largely delivered in front of the classroom by authoritative teachers to quiet and attentive children.” To this end, the government is taking “a leaf out of Shanghai’s book”, which is currently top of the PISA rankings in maths and science. (Budge, 15 December 2015) The culture-based arguments of this article will be presented more in detail in the following section.

In addition to the Finnish example, the comment letter justifies its opposition to government policy by referring to the views of the Varkey Foundation's Vikas Pota. Pota draws attention to the skills requirements of working life. (Pota, 24 November 2015) Companies like Siemens train their employees in soft skills, which were the focus of child-centred education in the 1960s and 70s, when "creativity was more important than knowledge, inspiration more important than structure, and cooperation more important than competition". This child-centred approach to teaching has been overshadowed by a culture of comparison and competition. Pota accuses the OECD of driving a return to the 'back to basics' agenda with its educational benchmarking programme. (Budge, 15 December 2015)

The importance of the view of the world of work is backed up even more in a reference to Pota's article where he argues that "the pressure for change is also coming from employers who think that an excessive focus on "hard skills" is not creating the kind of workforce that they want. In fact, employers say that they value most the "soft skills" of teamwork, resilience and creativity – "precisely the values that are being sacrificed in the rush to prepare for the next exam." MIT initiative, World Economic Forum and Siemens in-service training are presented as examples where "critical thinking, problem solving, persistence, collaboration and curiosity are essential skills of the future world of work". (Pota, 24 November 2015)

The Independent was also interested in how Finnish education is being reformed by replacing subjects with topics. This article supports the idea of increasing soft skills, and interviews senior officials from the Helsinki City Education Office to find out why one of the top countries in the PISA survey is planning to make such radical changes. The answer was found to be the changing needs of the world of work, where the skills needed include collaboration, problem-solving, better communication skills and a continued emphasis on supporting creativity from an early age. One of the officials, Marjo Kyllönen, says: "We really need to rethink education and redesign our system to prepare our children for the future with the skills they need today and tomorrow." (Garner, 20 March 2015)

On the eve of the release of the PISA 2015 results, Crehan commented on the secrets of top performers like Finland. PISA divides students' scores into levels one to six, with level two considered the baseline level of literacy and numeracy and meeting the standards needed to function in modern society. Countries like Finland, Singapore, Japan and Canada have far fewer students than the UK who do not reach these basic levels. In the UK, the figure is one in five. According to Crehan, the main concern is how they will enter the labour market and what jobs are available with limited skills. Crehan thinks this is because the top performing countries in PISA do not track children into different schools based on test results until they are 15 or 16. Instead,

they invest in extra time for teachers to support all pupils to reach higher academic standards. (Crehan, 6 December 2016) She points to an article about an interview with Jo Johsson, who said that uneducated people voted to leave the EU. (Hughes, 4 October 2016) The Independent also writes on Finnish education policy choices and mentions:

“Finland routinely tops rankings of global education systems and is famous for having no banding systems – all pupils, regardless of ability, are taught in the same classes. As a result, the gap between the weakest and the strongest pupils is the smallest in the world. Finnish schools also give relatively little homework and have only one mandatory test at age 16. (Williams-Grut, 18 November 2016)

The Guardian reports that “Finland is the most literate country in the world” and that “literate behaviour is crucial to the success of individuals and nations in the knowledge-based economy that will define our global future”. This study does not measure literacy but ranks nations according to their “literacy behaviour and the resources that support it”, although one of the sources of information is the PISA survey. (Flood, 11 November 2016) This article highlights the importance of basic skills alongside the criticism that PISA has received “for focusing too much attention on the basic skills that can be measured and for neglecting the soft skills valued by the world of work”. (Flood, 11 November 2016)

How are soft skills and basic skills, the skills of the future, taught then? The Guardian offers readers an article on one of the cornerstones of education: teaching. It features highly qualified, independent and respected Finnish teachers. The Guardian gives a voice to Finnish teachers and teacher trainers, rather than referring to rankings or surveys. The problem to be solved is the quality of teacher education in Britain, and the solution is to look to Finland for lessons. This view is in line with the criticisms made by the Labour Party. Labour criticises ease of entry to teaching in the UK (Crouch, 17 June 2015)

A Guardian correspondent travels to Helsinki to interview teachers and teacher trainers. Leena Krokfors, professor of teacher education at the University of Helsinki, says: “Teachers need to have this high-quality education so they really do know how to use the freedom they are given, and learn to solve problems in a research-based way,” Krokfors says. “The most important thing we teach them is to take pedagogical decisions and judgments for themselves.” Educationalists often point to historically specific factors to explain Finland’s success: “the country’s small population, its relatively late modernisation and the widespread acceptance of values such as equality and cooperation that are part of the Nordic welfare model.” According to the often quoted educationalist Pasi Sahlberg, “it is important that the decision to make teaching a postgraduate subject has given teaching a high profile in Finnish society”. (Crouch, 17 June 2015)

This article is an example of a situation where strong arguments are directly drawn from Finland to support policy change. In this article, the arguments arising from the history by the professor of teaching are presented, but Sahlberg's comment on the master level education is offered as a real reason for the status, skills and competences of teachers.

In relation to teachers, it is also interesting to note that the Conservative government's policy document adopted the goal of raising the status of teachers. The Department for Education strategy 2015-2020. World-class education and care published in March 2016 states as follows:

"As we support schools to develop their teachers, it's vital that we foster a worldleading, vibrant teaching profession. High-performing education systems, such as Finland, Germany and Japan, credit their success in part to a high-status teaching profession – highly educated, highly skilled and highly respected." (DfE strategy 2015-2020 (2016), 17)

The reference in the title of the strategy paper to world class education reflects an interest in international comparison. Although Finland's position in the PISA rankings has declined, it is still cited as the first example of a well-functioning education system.

The Times published a report on a study trip by Lucy Crehan, a young teacher and education policy graduate, who was curious about what makes the world's best performing school systems successful. She found that these countries, including Finland, "encouraged and incentivised expert teaching in education, classroom practices and career structures". Otherwise, the article focused on Canada and its cultural and social similarities with its British counterpart. (Hurst, 10 December 2016) The author is looking directly for cultural proximity to support successful policy borrowing and Canada, not Finland, is where he looks.

4.2 Years 2017-2018: Contextualised Finnish lessons

The 2017-2018 period of the analysis showed a change in the coverage of PISA success and Finnish case, with several articles written by journalists visiting Finland. In these articles, they interview not only Finnish teachers and principals, but also British and American-born teachers currently working in Finland. The interviews aim to reveal the secrets of success in an authentic context. The frame is therefore called: *Contextualised Finnish lessons*.

An article in the Guardian written by John Hart, a British teacher teaching now in Helsinki that Finland's, states that "*education policies are praised, but actually the real success is the level of responsibility and autonomy given to teachers to do their jobs*". (Hart, 9

August 2017) This proposal is emphasising position of teachers, rather than highlighting the direct problem of the UK system.

The Independent focused on the changed grading system in its single PISA and Finland related article. There are direct references in justifying the changes with benchmarking the best in order “to put the nation on a par with the best performing countries, such as Hong Kong, Finland and Canada.” (Pells, 23 August 2017) This article emphasised the status of Finland in the context of one of the best.

The Times sent its education correspondent to Finland in 2017 “for Finnish lessons” because Finnish pupils are “consistently ranked among the world’s best in maths, science and literacy”. The article was published under the headline: *What makes Finland’s schoolchildren so smart?* The Finnish lessons were obtained by interviewing Tim Walker, an American teacher living and working in Finland, one Finnish principal and by observing lessons in Kuopio. The most important lesson Walker observed was that of student support groups. Teachers are not left alone, as every school has a Pupil Support Group to deal with problematic student issues. The correspondent himself considers Finnish education to be “an odd mix of traditional and ultra-progressive”. (Turner, 13 May 2017)

The article also draws attention to the specific features of the Finnish system that have been “standard explanations for Finnish success since the beginning of Pisa: no inspectors, no ranking tables, minimal variation in quality between institutions”. (Turner, 13 May 2017) Trust, equity and support to both teachers and students form the mix she mentions above.

Three articles where Finland was mentioned had an international context. The Guardian reports on the 2018 debate on improving education in Australia. Finnish educationalist Pasi Sahlberg has been invited to be an expert at the Gonski Institute for Education at the University of New South Wales. He notes that “Finland’s reputation as a utopia of progressive education policy has remained intact, despite slippage in the PISA scores.” (McGowan, 6 January 2018) Another Guardian article refers to US education spending. “The US spends more, but always lags behind countries like Finland, which spends much less on education.” (Rushe, 7 September 2018) The Times published article on the government – parent controversy on homework in China. The report states that the anti-homework brigade complains that homework is not just damaging but useless. She refers to Finland which gets cited a lot on the basis that it has a hippyish Scandinavian disapproval of swotting and nevertheless scores highly in the international Pisa tests which rank educational achievement”. There is much less homework than in Britain, but they have also slid recently in Pisa rankings. Singapore is the new top performer and gives their children twice as much homework as the Britons. The reporter Emma Duncan asks: “With the Finns and Singaporeans pointing in opposite directions, where should we look to for

guidance?" She finds the answer to be Australia where professor John Hattie from the University of Melbourne has argued that "The worst thing you can do with homework is give kids projects; the best thing is to reinforce what they've already learnt." (Duncan, 24 October 2018) Policy borrowing is fine, but policies have been borrowed from wrong countries, like from hippyish Scandinavia.

4.3 Years 2019-2020: From cherry-picking policies to wellbeing of students

In 2019, each of the newspapers analysed published one article that matched the keywords in the search. The Guardian reports on Labour's party conference pledge to abolish Ofsted and private schools. (Weale, 27 September 2019) The article titled: "*Top of the class: Labour seeks to emulate Finland's school system*" begins with the argument: "The Finnish education system is the envy of the world. Along with Tove Jansson's Moomins, Nokia phones and Iittala glass-ware, it has become one of the country's most celebrated exports - and it's easy to see why." The reporter interviewed a headmaster in Lintulaakso school in Espoo and continues:

"Its students consistently score well at the top end of the Pisa international league tables, and as Kuusimäki walks me round his school he describes a kind of education utopia - a place where teachers are highly trained, revered and trusted, and children's wellbeing is paramount. There are no Ofsted-style inspections, no streaming by ability, no national exams until 18, no school uniforms, no school league tables and no fee-paying private schools." (Weale, 27 September 2019)

In this article Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn was quoted in an interview with the BBC: "*In some countries, education should not be charged for in any form... in Finland, for example.*" The article goes on to say that the British Labour Party is not alone in looking to Finland for answers on education policy:

"Every year, hundreds of delegations of teachers and policy makers from all over the world flock to Helsinki to see this nirvana for themselves. It has become so popular that international visits are strictly regulated and paid for - a lecture costs €682 (£607) an hour and a school visit costs €1,240. The school's headmaster sees the principles of equality and free education as essential features of the system as schools become increasingly diverse. The Finns do not believe that their system and its methods are easily transferable to other countries. (Weale, 27 September 2019)

The Guardian publishes a critical argument put forward by Professor John Jerrim of the University College London Institute for Education: "*Finland should not be used as a model because its PISA rankings are on a downward trend and its high scores in international rankings are not due to its schools. So there is no reason to try to copy Finland.*"

The Guardian reporter goes on by saying that Finnish education experts would be the first to admit they do not have all the answers and methods in one country do not always translate to another country. (Weale, 27 September 2019) The British researcher's statement quoted above, leaves the reader wondering what factors then explain past success. The researcher does not feel the need to answer this question, as Finland's success is history. The reporter herself closes the frame: "Finnish schools are rooted in the country's distinctive history and culture, small population (5.5 million) and high taxes." (Weale, 27 September 2019) This social and historical context can not be borrowed.

The shift away from policy borrowing is supported by another comment from a Finn, Sahlberg, in the Guardian: *"You can't go to Finland and pick up things that seem interesting and say: 'We want to do as Finland does. It's much more complex than that.'" Sahlberg criticised Labour's plans as unrealistic when it comes to abolishing private schools. "It has gone too far with this whole private education idea. It's very difficult to abolish it completely."* Sahlberg goes on to say that Labour would be better off focusing on strengthening the existing state sector in England, which has been fragmented by academisation and free schools. *"Simply abolishing something and saying that private schools should be made illegal is not going to happen."* (Weale, 27 September 2019) Once again in the Guardian, the final word, another Finnish lesson, is given to Sahlberg.

The same theme and frame are present in a commentary published by the Times in October 2019. The headmaster of a private school providing education for 3-18 year olds comments on the debate between private and public schools. Although he would like to see "a truly national education system without the need for such a dichotomy between state and independent schools". He criticises British policymakers for "first beat a path to Finland's door" and then immediately when China replaced Finland at the top, they turned up in "Shanghai to learn the dubious benefits of high pressure and rote learning". He goes on by saying that "Finland did not join the rush". The headmaster quotes Pasi Sahlberg on that "Finland's success was not based on a focus on academic achievement and a STEM obsession". Rather, he points out that the school system "should be designed to inspire students and enable them to lead happy and fulfilling lives both at work and outside the workplace". (Bashaart, 5 October 2019)

Well-being became an important frame in the UK context following the release of the PISA 2018 results. The Independent reported on the 2018 results, published in December 2019. The UK rises in the PISA rankings in reading, maths and science. In the global report, the UK is ranked 14th in reading, up from 22nd in 2015, 18th in maths from 27th and 14th in science from 15th. The article quotes Andreas Schleicher, the OECD's director of education and skills, as saying that it will be a "long time" before the UK catches up with top countries such as China, Estonia and Finland. The main point of the article is that the same survey found that British students are the

least satisfied with their lives: ‘Only 53% of British students are satisfied with their lives, compared with 67% in OECD countries’.... ‘It is clear that many young people feel under great pressure in a society where the stakes for achieving their goals often feel very high’. This concern is raised in the article by the National Education Union and the National Association of Headteachers. (Busby, 3 December 2019) The article discusses a new emerging frame: student well-being

In 2020, the tradition of learning from other countries in education will continue in the Guardian. Readers were offered lessons from Estonia on digital learning during Covid:

“Estonia has not only done well during lockdown, it has established itself in recent years as the new education powerhouse of Europe, outperforming even Finland in the international Pisa tests. With a population of just 1.3 million, the educational challenges Estonia faces are very different from those in the UK, but its digital success may hold lessons for other countries.” (Weale, 30 October 2020)

The Daily Telegraph returned to Pisa and Finland in an article titled: Finland’s education system has long been considered one of the most efficient in the world. So what could it teach us? The Children’s Society published its annual Good Childhood report. Only 64% of British teenagers had high life satisfaction, compared with 84% of Finnish children. (Hardy 18 September 2020) The report also cites the Pisa assessment of well-being, which found that British 15-year-olds had the highest fear of failure of the 24 European countries assessed. The author asks how can Finnish young people combine happiness and still score highly on educational attainment? Sinikka Nikamaa, a Finnish teaching and learning consultant, was interviewed and she gave many of the standard explanations starting from “equity, teaching is highly competitive career, trust in the system, no streaming, whole-child development, equity of education outcomes, wellbeing, and arts, music, drama and physical education, are important elements of curriculum as well as ‘competencies’ including thinking skills, active citizenship, ICT and collaboration, life-skills such as mandatory home economics, money management and work skills ending with student welfare groups”. One of the editor’s conclusions is that there are no national exams before the age of 18/19, or even if you are studying at a vocational school:

“A guiding principle of Finnish education is that learning should be as broad as possible for as long as possible. There are no options to narrow the curriculum at 14 and no emphasis on rote-memorising quotes or dates and none of the endless testpaper practice common in our schools...In Finland the learning process is not a gigantic weakness-based test-prep industry. Children are not taught to memorise pieces of information. ‘What you learn without joy, you forget without grief’ is an old Finnish saying...” (Hardy 18 September 2020)

According to the Finnish consultant interviewed, Finnish education is about developing the whole young person. Children are not labelled as failures at 15 or 16, but their self-image and self-understanding is supported by tailor-made well-being measures. (Hardy, 18 September 2020) While this article is rich in insights into Finnish education policy, it can be seen as a collection of arguments against the current testing regime in the UK, which has a negative impact on pupils' wellbeing.

The Guardian reported in January 2020 that Finland was the most resistant country in Europe to fake news. (Henley, 29.1.2020) A journalist was sent to Finland to find out how schoolchildren and students are taught to identify fake news and what information literacy programmes exist. In addition to teachers, the article interviewed the head of communications at the Prime Minister's Office. He explained Finland's special geopolitical position as Russia's neighbour on the front line of the online information war, which has intensified considerably since Moscow annexed Crimea and supported the rebels in eastern Ukraine. Other dis/misinformation campaigns focus on attacking the EU, highlighting immigration issues and trying to influence the debate on Finland's membership of NATO. "We are a small country with few resources and we rely on everyone to contribute to the collective defence of society," he says. The article concludes that Finland has a head start in information literacy, ranking highest in press freedom, transparency and education, and its schoolchildren have the highest PISA score in reading in the EU. (Henley, 29.1.2020) References to PISA success seems to last and offers an explanation for new areas, such as the successful fight against fake news.

4.4 Reading the cultural, social and political in the frames

This section focuses to the second research question of the thesis: How are cultural, social and political arguments present in the frames. The analysis showed that all frames described above, contained political, social and cultural argumentation. These arguments are intertwined and serve as tools to support or oppose policy borrowing from Finland. In the previous section they were presented as part of the analysis of the main frames – specially the political. In this section the focus is in highlighting some examples of reading the cultural and social and still to some extent also political in the frames.

In the *Finnish fairy tale* -frame, political goals were backed up with cultural and social arguments against policy improvements based on the Finnish example. In the Telegraph's article, Heller-Sahlgren argues that Finland's overall PISA success is based on its unique history and social and cultural characteristics. (Espinoza, 14 April 2015) Heller-Sahlgren leads readers to learn the real success factor for past, now lost,

success, as Heller-Sahlgren points out in the title of the article in the Times: *"Why the golden boy has lost his lustre"* (Heller-Sahlgren, 15 April 2015). He takes readers back to the 19th century. Finland was then under Russian rule, and its institutions were inherited from the Swedish crown. This was a time when teachers were given a special role in the nationalist movement's struggle for independence as the "candles of the nation", sowing the seeds for real success factors, teacher-centred instruction and an authoritative educational culture. (Heller-Sahlgren, 15 April 2015).

Finnish experts also emphasise themselves the history of teachers' central role in society. Leena Krokfors, professor of teacher education at the University of Helsinki, explained among other skills and competences related arguments, that teachers have always been seen as *"the people who brought civilisation to small villages"* as the country modernised in the middle of the last century. (Crouch, 17 June 2015)

The social context of Finland, due to its history under Swedish and Russian rule, is implicitly claimed to be significantly different from the British. The role of teachers in Finland has been crucial in nation-building. The authoritative educational culture and the high status of teachers are a legacy of that period, and Finland's best PISA results, according to Heller-Sahlgren, are based on it. This context can't be borrowed and Finnish education policies have also moved away from its "origins".

Sahlberg in his "cherry-picking" metaphora builds a "counterframe" based on reading the political. The political objective of conservatives is to support more traditional educational methods. He goes on about policy borrowing in general:

"What governments need to get right is a complete picture of their nation's educational landscape. The path to a better education for all our children is not a return to the past but the building of schools where curiosity, commitment and talent can be found and nurtured.... This requires linking research-based international lessons with local needs and capacities." (Sahlberg, 26 April 2015)

It is important to understand the society from which the policy is borrowed and to localise it by taking into account the recipient.

Further on Heller-Sahlgren comments on Finnish society that is "becoming more like Western countries in general or perhaps Scandicavia in particular":

"... it's becoming more like other Western countries in general and perhaps Scandinavia in particular. The old-school culture is in decline, catching up with the economic transformation and generating less learning-oriented attitudes, while the pressure to abandon teacher-centred methods is now materialising. Unfortunately, pundits and politicians have ignored all this, preferring to highlight policy explanations relying more on wishful thinking than rigorous analysis. But slipping Finnish performance is thankfully making these red herrings decreasingly persuasive." (Heller-Sahlgren, 14 May 2015)

Finland is moving closer to the West, but the cultural and social distance still exists, according to the view expressed in the above quotation.

In the Guardian article, it is described that in Finland “*the ethos of the schools and the society in which the policies are implemented are equally important*”. The lesson learned for the UK should be “*to look after, value and trust each other*”. (Hart, 9 August 2017) This proposal takes the Finnish lesson to another level, combining and emphasising the social context as a source of inspiration to guide development.

The article in the Times (Turner, 13 May 2017) draws attention to cultural by comparing Finland to other possible sources of policy borrowing: “*the other nations excelling in Pisa are hot-housing, tiger-mothering Asian countries, Finnish kids often have only four hours` school per day and almost no homework*”. Turner continues by saying that:

“Private tutoring is very rare, children are not examined until matriculation aged 18-19, but only 50 per cent take it, since education divides at 16 between academic and vocational, which is also a valued option. The government tests a random sample of schools every year to ensure quality is maintained, general assessment is done by teachers and also students` self-assessment is part of the process”. (Turner, 13 May 2017)

This article builds cultural distance with Asian countries and gives a relaxed and low-pressure impression of the Finnish social context.

As underlying forces which explain the Finnish educational miracle Turner suggests the following findings:

“Finland is one of the most equal and homogenous societies on earth, immigration is low, Finnish schools contain fewer children with social problems, there is a universal healthcare system and highly subsidised childcare, every child gets a free, healthy school meal, no private school system, schools have great socioeconomic diversity, equality extends into the classroom, children with learning difficulties are not assigned simple work – instead there is a theory that with enough help everyone can attain the required standard.” (Turner, 13 May 2017)

These arguments relate to society and in particular to a homogenous welfare society, not to the quality of education, with the exception of children with learning difficulties. The lesson learned is the context itself and the emphasis on promoting equity through support for all learners.

Similarly, The Telegraph highlighted the greater cultural distance of Shanghai to the UK compared to cultural distance to Finland:

“The kind of rote learning characteristic of Shanghai delivers ostensible results, but at a cost in terms of mental health and creativity ... Government ministers excepted, the response to the knowledge-based curriculum and associated examination-based assessment orthodoxy has been mixed.” (Budge, 15 December 2015)

The article continues by declaring that:

“With this in mind, it is noteworthy that despite Finland`s recent dip in form vis-à-vis PISA league table positions, their own people do not appear to have joined in with the rush to Shanghai. Indeed, Pasi Sahlberg, a former director general at the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, argues that the school system “should be designed to inspire

students and to enable them to lead happy, fulfilled lives both at work and outside the workplace". (Budge, 15 December 2015)

The comment letter in the Times (Bashaart, 5 October 2019) criticised also British policymakers for "*first beat a path to Finland's door*" and then immediately when China replaced Finland at the top, they turned up in "*Shanghai to learn the dubious benefits of high pressure and rote learning*". He goes on by saying that "*Finland did not join the rush*". The headmaster quotes Pasi Sahlberg on that "*Finland's success was not based on a focus on academic achievement and a STEM obsession*". Rather, he points out that the school system "should be designed to inspire students and enable them to lead happy and fulfilling lives both at work and outside the workplace". (Bashaart, 5 October 2019)

In both articles, the Finnish example is presented as a solution to an existing policy problem of careless government policy borrowing. Given also Finland's special position in the British education reform debate, the reader is led to believe that if Finland does not run Shanghai, why should Britain? This is made apparent by emphasising Finland's greater proximity to the UK in terms of education culture than the UK has to Shanghai. This is made visible by the choice of extreme concepts such as "rote learning" and creativity. Creativity is inspiring and linked to happiness. Finland is not prepared to change policy at the expense of a happy and fulfilling life. This is the case even if there is information on teaching and learning methods that would also ensure better performance in the STEM subjects relevant to PISA, but which are otherwise not considered appropriate. This is what British policymakers would do if they headed to Shanghai, where the education culture is very different and where improving PISA rankings would come at the cost of lowering life fulfillment.

In many articles, the "social" is intertwined into the whole argument. One of the main objectives of education at all levels is to prepare children and young people for working life. This aspect has been the focus of educational reforms in Finland, particularly in the field of vocational education and training. It is also part of the curriculum in primary and upper secondary schools, through the discussion of future skills needs, especially soft skills. This aspect was hardly addressed in the articles included in this analysis, which is somewhat surprising given the prominent position of this topic in the debate on educational reforms in Finland. In the period covered by this study, one article on the subject was found in the Independent. (Garner, 20 March 2015) and it was analysed in the previous section (4.1.2).

Social or society-based arguments are at the forefront when it comes to equity. This is the case in an article in the Independent, where the author points out that in Finland children are not allocated to different schools on the basis of test results until they are 15 or 16. Instead, fairness is supported by support measures tailored to pupils' needs, so that all pupils can achieve higher standards. (Hughes, 4 October

2016) She points also to an interview with Jo Johsson, who said that uneducated people voted to leave the EU. (Hughes, 4 October 2016)

Social is present also in equity related public-private schools discussion on what examples are for example Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn interview for BBC quoted by the Guardian : *"In some countries, education should not be charged for in any form... in Finland, for example."*. In a comment letter by a headmaster in Times in October 2019 *"a truly national education system without the need for such a dichotomy between state and independent schools"*. (Bashaart, 5 October 2019):

Based on the analysis described in this chapter, it can be concluded that Finland's position seems to be holding steady. The clouds raised by the decline in PISA ranking in the sky of the education superpower has silver lining. The cultural distance to the new Eastern powers seems to be so great. Finnish commentator Sahlberg sees this and offers counter-arguments. What matters is well-being in life, not obsession with STEM or ranking lists. One can assume that this is understandable and acceptable to the British and not *"the dubious benefits of high-pressure rote learning"* (Bashaart, 5 October 2019).

The next chapter describes the results of the analysis from the perspective of both research questions and discusses them in the light of previous research.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, we are particularly interested in which aspects are most central to British media coverage of the PISA survey and the Finnish education system. To achieve this aim, two research questions were set:

- What frames are used in the British media for explaining Finnish education system success and/or decline factors?
- How are cultural, social and political arguments present in the frames?

The first research question would provide useful information for the Finnish audience interested in nation branding on how it's education system is explained for the British audience. The second research question aims to deepen the analysis into political, social and cultural factors and thus help to understand the transferability of educational success factors from one context to another. Both research questions were also believed to support the separation of general policy objectives from educational policy objectives.

The analysis showed that the dominant frames in 2015 and 2016 were *Finnish fairy tales and PISA ranking or future skills*. The first frame was mainly served by The Times and The Telegraph using the metaphors Finnish fairy tales and new evidence. The frame was built around two studies that argued that Finnish education policy does not explain Finland's success but its decline in the PISA survey. The real success factors are based on historical and social factors in Finland, such as the country's hierarchical educational culture, including traditional teaching methods. The articles argue that to borrow from current Finnish policy is to borrow from the policy of recession. These good old traditional aspects of the education system are already in place in the UK, so there is no need for policy transfer. Instead, the articles suggest, we need to resist the changes Labour is proposing to modern student-centred learning and teaching.

One of the findings of this thesis is that the same examples taken from Finnish education policy are used both to justify and to oppose policy changes. The concept of cherry-picking appears several times in articles related to policy quotation. Cherry-picking is first mentioned by the Finnish educationalist Pasi Sahlberg in response to the framing of Finnish fairy tales in right-wing newspapers. Sahlberg has a strong position, particularly in the *Guardian*, and seems to have the opportunity to give another Finnish lesson often during the period covered by this study.

The tension between the success factors of the PISA ranking and the skills needs of the future is highlighted in the frame: *PISA ranking or future skills*. Do we teach children skills that are relevant for future employment, or does the content of the curriculum focus on improving PISA performance? Are basic skills such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics the most important skills for the future, or are they emphasised to support success in the PISA rankings?

In this context, Finnish education policy was presented as a solution to various problems in the UK. One of the problems presented is the government's conservative policy of teacher-led, knowledge-based education with an emphasis on basic skills. Opponents argue that the child-centred approach to education should not be overshadowed by a culture of comparison and competition. Shanghai is at the top of the PISA survey measuring these basic skills, but Finland is still a better choice to quote the policy. This is due to Finland's greater cultural proximity. If Finland does not run to Shanghai to find the secrets of success, why should the British? Finland is not prepared to change policy at the expense of a happy and fulfilling life. This argument is supported by interviews with Finnish experts like Sahlberg. This frame seeks to support the arguments from both a societal and cultural perspective. These culturally and socially based arguments are supported politically by highlighting Finland's special position in the British education reform debate over the last 15 years.

The *Telegraph's* comment letter asked: how do people with limited basic skills get into the labour market and what jobs are available for them? Countries like Finland, Singapore, Japan and Canada have far fewer students than the UK who do not achieve these basic levels. The lesson from these countries is that we need to invest in extra time for teachers to support all students to achieve higher academic standards.

The Finnish example was sought in relation to the changing needs of the world of work. Finland focused its education reforms on replacing subjects with subject areas and emphasising soft skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, better communication skills and a continued emphasis on supporting creativity.

The frame for 2017-2018 was: Contextualised Finnish lessons. During these two years, no new PISA results were published, but anyway several journalists were sent to Finland on education policy missions. The *Guardian* reports that Finland's reputation as a utopia of progressive education policy has remained intact, despite

slippage in PISA results. The Times pointed out the same by writing that Finland was consistently among the world leaders in maths, science and literacy rankings. Some policies, such as the change in the UK's grading system, were justified on the grounds that the changes followed the benchmarks of the best-performing countries in education, such as Finland. Journalists visiting Finland highlighted what they called the standard arguments for the success of Finnish education: quality teacher training and fierce competition for study places in it, equality, the absence of a private school system, free school meals and the fact that children with learning difficulties are not given simple tasks but believing in theory that, with enough help, everyone can reach the required level. Although the social and cultural context was presented, the possibility of borrowing policies related to these success factors was not directly questioned.

None of the four newspapers referred to Finnish fairy tales - a frame that seems to have received relatively short-lived media attention. The "Scandinavian anti-homework brigade" was mentioned in relation to the dispute between the Chinese government and parents over homework. Top performers Finland and Singapore have very different approaches to homework. It is difficult to decide which policy to follow, so the journalist ends up suggesting the Australian model: giving homework that reinforces what has already been learned. This is the opposite of flipped learning, which Finland, for example, has been keen on.

In 2019-2020, the larger frame was located under the following heading: *From cherry-picking to well-being*. For the Guardian, the Finnish education system remains the "envy of the world", where education has become one of the country's most celebrated exports. British policy-makers are criticised for being hasty and they are said to first having "beaten a path" to Finland's door and when China replaced Finland on the top, they headed right away to Shanghai where the system is very different. This is one example of cherry-picking, which is opposite to what Finland is doing. According to the the article, Finland did not join the rush to Shanghai, but brought wellbeing to the agenda as it was newly emerged success factor for the Finnish education system.

The wellbeing became important frame in the British context after the PISA 2018 results in December 2019. In addition to digital reading, wellbeing was among the topics that were emphasised in PISA 2018. (Schleicher 2018, 4) The UK climbs in Pisa rankings in reading, maths and science, but "the British teenagers are found at the same time to be among least satisfied with lives: 53 per cent of UK students are satisfied with their lives, compared to 67 per cent across the OECD countries." (Busby, 3 December 2019) The explaining factor was suggested to be "the great pressure in a society in which the stakes often seem very high to young people in terms of achieving goals." (Busby, 3 December 2019)

The Telegraph was interested in how young people in Finland combine happiness and still score highly on educational attainment. Rather than taking national tests and being labelled good or bad at 15 or 16, children are supported in their self-image and self-understanding through tailored well-being interventions. While this article is rich in insights into Finnish education policy, it can be seen as a collection of arguments against the current testing regime in the UK, which has a negative impact on pupils' well-being.

The analysis showed that the second research question, on the presence of social, cultural and political factors in frames, was somewhat challenging to distinguish from the more general analysis of frames. Nevertheless, the question brings added value to the study by opening up perspectives for a critical approach to the borrowing of education policies and practices. Arguments against policy borrowing are often based on differences between countries from a cultural, social and also political perspective. Increasing understanding of this will support the formulation of messages for example for the purposes of education export.

Each frame identified included political, social and cultural justifications. These justifications were intertwined and served as tools to support or oppose policy borrowing from Finland. When opposing the policy borrowing, the cultural and social factors are relevant rather than the usual explanations, such as "educational reforms and practices focused on equality, local autonomy, relatively little teaching and homework, trust in and respect for teachers, rejection of market-based ideas and accountability" named by Heller-Sahlgren is cited in the Telegraph article. (Espinoza, 14 April) The appeal to cultural and social factors is linked to political factors, because conservative politicians use this argument. At the extremest cases they were used to completely block the idea of policy borrowing from Finland. This was the case for example in the *Finnish fairy tale* -frame.

In many articles, "social" is intertwined with the whole argumentation. One of the main objectives of education at all levels is to prepare children and young people for working life. This aspect has been the subject of educational reforms in Finland, especially in the field of vocational education and training. It is also part of the primary and secondary school curriculum through discussions on future skills needs, especially soft skills. This aspect was hardly addressed in the articles included in this analysis, which is somewhat surprising given the prominent position of this topic in the debate on educational reforms in Finland. At the time of this research, one article on this topic was found in the Independent (Garner, 20 March 2015) and it was analysed in the previous section (4.1.2).

The social or society related arguments are in spotlight when talking about equity like in the article in the Independent where the writer emphasises how children in Finland are not divided into different schools based on test results until they are 15

or 16. Instead the equity is supported with support measures of students according to their needs so that all students could reach higher standards. (Hughes, 4 October 2016)

Social is also present in equity related arguments of public-private schools discussion for example in a comment letter by a headmaster of a goal of a *“a truly national education system without the need for such a dichotomy between state and independent schools”*. (Bashaart, 5 October 2019):

The reputation of Finland as a high PISA performer is still there and provides also an explanation for the Finland's success in other spheres. According to the Guardian, Finland was rated the most resistant nation in Europe to fake news in January 2020, which the journalist explains as a result of Finland's head start based on the highest scores in press freedom, transparency and education, as well as the highest PISA scores in reading in the EU. In the current global context, this skill is more important than ever.

The news frames offered for general public on Finnish example seemed to serve as tools to back up different political opinions on how to reform or not to reform the British education system. The news frames provided to the general public on the Finnish example seemed to serve as tools to support different political opinions on how the British education system should or should not be reformed. The strong inspection and testing tradition, still valued by conservatives, is not happy with “child-centred education, no testing in early childhood, no private schools” being cited as the keys to a successful education system.

In the light of the review of the previous research, the added value of this study is that it partly fills in the gap that existed on the coverage of Finland's PISA results in British media discourse. The only prior research in PISA and the media in the UK with connection to Finland had a different target which was discovering the portrayal of PISA survey as a tool in developing education system and curricula. (Metsäperä 2019).

In prior research in the education sector, policy borrowing relates to how policy makers use foreign examples at different stages of initiating and implementing educational change (Phillips & Ochs 2003, 451). The results of this study show that the same goes with opposing the planned educational change. This frame was even more dominant in the articles of this study. What was highlighted often, was that using other countries' methods or policies requires profound understanding of the original context and its dynamics.

Prior research existed also on the impact of Finnish education models on education policy in the UK in policy documents. According to Chung teacher education has been considered one of the most important drivers of Finnish PISA performance in the UK. Chung argues that “in two recent teacher education reforms, the Finnish example has been (mis)used and that British policy makers”. (Chung 2016, 207-208) They have “uncritically borrowed from the Finnish model of teacher

education and ignored the long march that has led to establishing teaching as an academic, research-based profession and the education ideology and values in Finland.” (Chung 2016, 207-208)

This thesis does not cover policy documents and can therefore not comment on Chung’s argument. What can be said on the basis of the findings of this thesis is, that the interest towards Finnish education policies is much wider than teacher education. The emphasis of teacher education was quite limited in the data. The aspects such as equity, welfare of students and measures supporting it, support to learners according to their needs, autonomy of teachers, continuous development of education policies (instead of rushing behind the latest top PISA performers) were dominating over teacher education in the media. This is again understandable difference between policy documents and media discourse. According to my own understanding, the starting and implementing education policy reforms, the widest possible impact is searched by including the changes in teacher education.

On the other hand this study supported critics that Chung presented in relation to uncritical policy borrowing from Finland by the British policy makers. The uncriticality in policy borrowing was one of the dominant arguments for example in the *Finnish fairy tales* -frame where it was supported by metaphors such as “the golden boy, the Finnish fan club and pet education theories”. (Heller-Sahlgren, 14 May 2015)

Further on Sahlberg’s book *“What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?”* provided earlier a Finnish perspective on the analysis of the success factors of the Finnish education system. It also discussed the improvement of education in general. Sahlberg saw success as a growth story, based on smart policy decisions in education reform over the decades. (Sahlberg, 2011) This study showed that there were strong arguments against the idea of growth story based on smart educational policies in the British media coverage. This was specially so in the Telegraph and the Times. Cultural and social arguments were used in challenging Sahlberg’s arguments, arguments which were also in line with the Mission for Finland (2010) -report. On the other hand, it can be seen that the Guardian acted as a voice for Finnish education policy by publishing Sahlberg’s articles which defended the role of Finnish education policy as secrets of Finnish PISA success. In these articles Sahlberg had also a slight turn towards more evaluative approach to educational policy borrowing by highlighting strongly the importance of understanding the original context of the policies.

In *Dynamics in Education Politics: Understanding and Explaining the Finnish Case* (Simola et al. 2017) the authors presented a new theoretical framework for comparative analysis of educational policy dynamics (CADEP). They argue that without a strong theoretical approach, it is difficult to go beyond simply listing similarities and differences that facilitate classification but obscure processes and

contexts.”. (Simola et al. 2017, 2-4) In the case of Finland, they found four constitutive discursive dynamics in Finnish comprehensive schools: *“buffering and embedded egalitarianism in policymaking, redistributive but punctuated trust in governance, diverging but civic parenthood in families` educational strategies and consolidating but paternalistic progressivism in classroom culture.”* (Simola et al. 2017, 113) None of these discursive dynamics emerged clearly in the analysis of this study, with the exception of trust (Hart, 9 August 2017), which was mentioned as a lesson worth learning about Finland. This is not surprising, as the primary aim of media discourse is not to justify issues to researchers from a detailed scientific perspective, but to appeal to the general public and, for example, politicians.

Interesting links were found between results of this thesis and the research of Baroutsis and Lingard who studied the media coverage of the Australian PISA results. Their finding in relation to Australia was the same as the finding of this thesis in relation to UK which was : *“the Australian press did not stop referencing Finland”* even if *“the coverage also included Asian nations, especially Shanghai after 2009”*. The perception of Finland as an education superpower carried on. On the other hand, they continued by saying that: *“Despite major cultural, demographic and political differences between Finland and Australian, and Shanghai and Australia, this did not prevent media constructions of Shanghai as a suitable reference system for Australian schooling.”* (Baroutsis & Lingard 2016, 14) This was not the case in the British media coverage, where Shanghai’s role as a reference system was questioned.

Baroutsis and Lingard also found that PISA data showed that think tanks have a significant media impact. (Baroutsis & Lingard 2016, 15) The same observation can be made about the British media coverage of the PISA survey. This was made clear for example by the role of the Centre for Market Reform of Education, where Heller-Sahlgren worked.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of this study on the PISA survey, Finland and education policy in the British media, it can be argued that the perception of Finland as an educational superpower is maintained in the UK. This study showed also how keen UK education policy makers and the media are to write about policy-borrowing. Even as Finland's PISA ranking fell, the left-leaning Guardian and Independent newspapers in particular offered articles on Finnish education policy as a source of inspiration and a model for British education policy. In the UK we cannot speak of a PISA shock like in some other countries, but in any case the lower than expected PISA performance has encouraged policy borrowing.

As noted in the previous chapter, Finland's position did not decline in Australia either. This is true even though arguments were put forward against borrowing policies from a country which is facing decline in the rankings. To weaken the perception of Finland, a researcher at the right-wing think tank, Centre for Market Reform of Education, presented what this study called a Finnish fairytale -frame. This frame did not stay in the agenda for long. Instead, one can argue that Finland has been successfully framed as an educational superpower and that its position is not easily undermined. This is a general conclusion that can be drawn from this study.

Interestingly, the status of education superpower has been widely questioned in Finland, where the debate on education has often focused on the decline in the PISA ranking. This has been the case even though Finland is still at the top or near the top of the EU in most areas measured by PISA. One of the most important findings of this study is that Finnish education policy makers and education exporters should not forget this. There is no need for a Finnish version of the PISA shock, not yet at least. Loosing is

This study is also important, as there is a shortage of follow-up studies on the objectives set in the Mission for Finland -report. Education was one of the key areas of nation branding in which Finland should present itself as "a global problem-solver".

(Mission for Finland 2010, 182.) This study provided information on media visibility and relevance in the UK context.

The cultural distance from the new eastern educational superpowers is reflected in the media coverage and this has probably helped to maintain Finland's position. On the other hand, Canada challenges Finland as a culturally closer model country for education. Another factor supporting Finland's superpower status seems to be the emergence of welfare as an important educational policy perspective in the British media. Finland scores well in welfare comparisons.

The limitation of this thesis is the author's limited expertise in the details of the UK education system and the media discourse in the UK in general. Another challenge has been to keep apart which claims are exclusively British in origin and which are based on comments made by Finnish educationalists in the British media. The frames could also have been divided into a number of sub-frames, for example by separating the public/private schools frame and the teacher -frame into their own. Keeping the framing in the level of a more 'bird's eye view' in relation to policies, helped to reduce the impact of the limitations of the researcher's knowledge of the British system.

The evaluation of this study from the perspective of theoretical limitations, can take several approaches. Subjectivity is one of the elements which has been spotted as a limitation of framing analysis of news. (Van Corp 2009, 85) Van Corp believes that subjectivity can be limited or even eliminated by "*combining inductive framing analysis, in which a repertoire of frame packages is reconstructed, and, on the other hand, techniques for validating the reliability of the results in a deductively executed content analysis*". (Van Corp 2009, 92) He explains a four step analysis for this purpose. This interesting verifying analysis is left to future reserachers.

Van Corp also raises the question of whether the researcher should be a member of the cultural group about which he or she is conducting a framing analysis about. According to him, the ideal situation for framing would be for members of the cultural group to work together with "outsiders" to the group. (Van Corp 2009, 93) The author of this study is an outsider to the main target group of the media analysis of this study. Collaboration with a British colleague would have been of considerable added value.

Another limitation of this study, which is that interculturality has not been used directly as a framing tool, raises ideas for future research. The data is rich in stereotypes and references to values, especially when comparing Finnish and Asian education policies as sources of policy lessons. Another possibility for future study, would be to look more closely at the media debate on skills that are considered important by the world of work. This question arose in this study in the context of the soft skills - basic skills debate. Research on skills needs could also focus on news coverage of vocational education and training in general in the UK and in Finland.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Newspaper articles in the analysis

The Guardian

Adams, R., Weale, S., Bengtsson, H. and Carrell, S. (6 December 2016): UK schools fail to climb international league table. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/dec/06/english-schools-core-subject-test-results-international-oecd-pisa>

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The Independent

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