

ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF FINNISH EDUCATIONAL
SYSTEM AS REFERENCE FOR OVERCOMING PROBLEMS
IN EMERGING CONTEXTS

Fundamentos ontológicos del sistema educativo finlandés
como referente para superar problemáticas
en contextos emergentes

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Abstract

The present article arises from the reflection on the failure of external educational models applied in emerging contexts without considering contextual factors of each town. According to Carnoy (1974) there is a strong tradition between underdeveloped countries of coping the cultural forms and successful models from first world societies, without having prepared beforehand the objective and subjective conditions that would determine its success or failure. The aim of this paper is to analyze the philosophical basis of success behind the Finnish educational system, with the purpose of identify in it, references to overcome problems of educational reality in emerging societies. In this way contribute to the discussion about the failure on adapting external educational models to emerging contexts. It is an exploratory, descriptive and comparative review, and the character of it is bibliographic and qualitative; in addition, it will make use of logical-scientific methods (deductive-inductive) with their respective procedures, supported by phenomenological and hermeneutical philosophical methods. The results of the copy and implementation of changes in education based on successful models from other latitudes, without considering the philosophical and epistemological substratum that sustains it, or preparing the ground for its adaptation, has resulted in poor educational systems that do not respond to the concrete needs of the educational reality of emerging societies, and limit and frustrate the autonomous and original creation of contextualized and relevant educational models too.

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Keywords

Finland, ethics, Latin America, educational systems, educational needs.

Resumen

El presente trabajo surge de la reflexión sobre el fracaso de modelos educativos exteriores aplicados en contextos emergentes sin considerar factores contextuales de cada pueblo. A juicio de Carnoy (1974) existe una fuerte tradición en los países subdesarrollados de copiar las formas culturales y modelos exitosos de sociedades de primer mundo, sin antes preparar las condiciones objetivas y subjetivas que determinarán su éxito o fracaso. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar los fundamentos filosóficos del éxito detrás del sistema educativo finlandés con la finalidad identificar en este, referentes para superar problemáticas de la realidad educativa en sociedades emergentes, y de esta forma aportar a la discusión sobre el fracaso en la adaptación de modelos educativos externos a contextos emergentes. Se trata de una revisión de tipo exploratoria, descriptiva y comparativa, y el carácter de la misma es bibliográfica y cualitativa, además se hará uso de los métodos lógico-científicos (deductivo-inductivo) con sus respectivos procedimientos, auxiliado de los métodos filosóficos fenomenológico-hermenéutico. Los resultados de la copia e implementación de cambios en la educación basados en modelos exitosos de otras latitudes, sin contemplar el sustrato filosófico y epistemológico que lo sustenta, ni preparar el terreno para su adaptación ha dado como resultado sistemas educativos deficientes, que no responden a las necesidades concretas de la realidad educativa de las sociedades emergentes, y que además, limitan y frustran la creación autónoma y original de modelos educativos contextualizados y pertinentes.

Palabras clave

Finlandia, ética, Latinoamérica, sistema educativo, necesidades educativas.

Introduction

The present work arises from the reflection on the failure of external educational models applied in emerging contexts without considering contextual factors of each people. According to Carnoy (1974) there is a

strong tradition in underdeveloped countries to copy the cultural forms and successful models of first world societies, without first preparing the objective and subjective conditions that will determine their success or failure, resulting in educational systems that do not respond to the specific needs of the educational reality of emerging societies, and also limit and frustrate the autonomous and original creation of contextualized and relevant educational models.

In recent years, the changes and reforms made to the educational system of emerging countries, such as Latin American countries, have been directed to achieve, at all costs, the acclaimed educational quality and meet international standards, resulting in, according to Chacón (2009), an education totally decontextualized and disconnected from its reality.

Undoubtedly, the copying of educational models has hindered the pedagogical action of the emerging peoples of Latin America, however, the real problem lies in the poor, and often null adaptations of these models to different contexts, therefore one can see the need to critically rethink the educational situation of these societies, to understand the conditions of the success of educational models and to promote education designed for the specific Latin American situation.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the philosophical foundations of success behind the Finnish educational system in order to identify in it, examples to overcome problems of the educational reality in emerging societies, and thus contribute to the discussion on the failure in the adaptation of external educational models to emerging contexts.

The research is of exploratory, descriptive and comparative nature, and its character is bibliographic and qualitative. In addition, in order to meet the research objectives, logical-scientific methods (deductive-inductive) will be used with their respective procedures and will be assisted by the phenomenological-hermeneutical philosophical methods, for the study and interpretation of texts of thinkers who have reflected on the subject, as well as official documents of the ministries of education.

The first part of the work aims to make an approximation to the Finnish educational model, describing the principles, essential characteristics and epistemological foundations on which their educational philosophy is based. For this purpose, an attempt to identify the basic postulates of the philosophy of Finnish education, eudemonic theories, the ethics of virtues and educational constructivism is made. The second part of the work focuses on the study of the educational situation of emerging societies in Latin America, which will address the main characteristics of their educational systems, as well as the epistemological and



ideological foundations of their educational philosophy. In the third part of the work the philosophical foundations that make possible the ideal conditions for the success of an educational system are contrasted and the examples provided by the Finnish education to overcome problems of emerging contexts are analyzed.

Approximation to the Finnish educational model

To talk about Finland¹ is talking about the success of a comprehensive educational and political model, as suggested by the results of: the 2015 PISA² tests, which measure skills in reading comprehension, mathematics and science, in which, according to the OECD (2016), Finland was positioned in fourth, twelfth and fifth place correspondingly; the annual competitiveness report 2017-2018, which assesses the factors that drive productivity and growth, in which according to the World Economic Forum (2017) Finland is in tenth position; and, the results of the 2017 World Happiness Report, which evaluates per capita income, health quality, life expectancy, freedom, generosity, social support, as well as the level of corruption of private institutions and government, in which, according to the presentation of the BBC (2017), Finland ranks fifth.

All these indices and results show that the Finnish model has found the key to success in education. However, these educational results are not an isolated phenomenon, but are the product of a philosophy and ideological model that directs educational and government policies for the structuring of a support program for the integral development of its inhabitants. Next, the principles, characteristics and philosophical and epistemological foundations that support the Finnish educational model are presented.

Historical trajectory of the Finnish education system

In order to understand Finland's education system, its characteristics and principles, it is necessary to analyze its history and the changes in education that have occurred in it. For this purpose, three decisive historical events are presented in the construction of the Finnish education system:

The first is the Swedish influence of the middle of the XII century extended to the beginning of the XIX century, which, according to the data presented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland (2015), began with the crusade of the King of Sweden Eric IX (called The Saint or



Saint Erik) and the papal bull to Christianize the Nordic peoples, both events resulted in the conquest of Sweden over Finland and the cultural and linguistic clash with it. Later, in the middle of the XVI century, the Lutheran reform was introduced, which made possible the first translation of the new testament into the Finnish language; as stated by Oittingen and Koskenniemi (1960), in the historical development of the Finnish educational system, religious education, especially of the Lutheran Church, has been the starting point of public education, since the synod of 1686, it was decreed that “all the ministers of the Church should organize public examinations of Christian reading and doctrine, and demand certain knowledge of the latter for confirmation and marriage” (p.16), a situation that made possible the development of literature in Finnish language. Thus, since the XVI century, Finland experienced a great change in education, but also a time of religious and political wars that ended in the defeat of Sweden to Russia.

The second event is the incorporation of Finland to the Russian Empire; according to Sarrión (2017) after the defeat of Sweden, Finland experienced a time of civil wars caused by the disparity of the language, which led to strong internal social clashes seized by the Tsar to dominate the territory. Finland was conquered by the Russian Empire, “moving its capital to Helsinki, for practical reasons, since it was closer to Russia and easier to control” (p.467). Thus, as stated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland (2015), by the year 1809 Finland had become an autonomous duchy with great industrial development and outstanding commercial activity. Regarding education, according to Oittingen and Koskenniemi (1960) one of the relevant events of this era is given in 1866 with the promulgation of “the first school law, which served as the basis for a rapid development of the school system in the municipalities” (p.16).

The third event is the independence of the Russian empire, which occurred between the conclusion of the first world war and the Bolshevik revolution that made possible its independence in 1917. With the independence of the nascent Finnish Republic, the search for solutions to the internal and linguistic conflicts of the nation took place, since the heritage and the cultural mix of Finland, the Swedish and Russian empires, prevented the structuring of a homogeneous education model for its population, mainly in relation to language. As noted by Sarrión (2017): “after the independence of 1917 education was conceived as a tool for the reproduction of social identity, literacy and political freedom” (p. 467).

In 1921 the law of obligatory education for all the children of 7 to 13 years was approved, the same one that consists in the Finnish Con-



stitution and that according to Sarrión (2017) tries to overcome the evident linguistic fracture, that made impossible the construction of a strong educational system for its inhabitants. That law stipulated that “... the two most important linguistic communities, of Swedish and Finnish language, would have the right to receive education in their mother tongue” (p.467). From this moment the education system of Finland undertook the long journey marked by laws and educational reforms that have led it in the last decades to position itself among the first worldwide positions. Below is a brief characterization of the current education system in Finland.

According to Gösta Esping-Andersen (1990) the countries of the Nordic region of Europe show great commitment to meet social needs, which is why they maintain a heavy burden of social services. However, because of the great benefits and good results, the inhabitants of these states help to sustain the Welfare State³ through the high taxes they pay, and therefore, free education is guaranteed and quality and excellence are encouraged through social support and financing thanks to tax revenues. As expressed by Fernandez (2014), Finland is characterized by promoting a high welfare state, evidenced in its laws, in its concern for the integral development of its inhabitants which involves health, education and other social services, and to build “a homogenous population in ethnic and religious terms, in which the Principle of Universality is the one that should guide the policy of its Welfare State: Everyone benefits, everyone supports” (p.90).

In addition, following Fernández (2014), Finnish education is characterized by a marked governmental commitment to achieve a high Welfare State, which is reflected in policies of global coverage of the social needs of its population. On the other hand, government commitment is a shared feature among countries of the Nordic region, which has led them to be considered as:

Social services states instead of social benefit states which means that social services of a public nature are provided mostly by local authorities, playing a fundamental role in the development of the Welfare State. (p. 90)

To this is added the axiological aspect of social organization, because, as stated by Melgarejo (2015), contrary to the typical individualist values of the West, Finland proposes as essential values “home and family, followed by work, friends and leisure time, while politics and religion do not occupy a relevant role in their scale of values” (p.58), importance is given to the value of solidarity and helping to the other in order to build a society of equality without discrimination of any kind.



Regarding the essential characteristics in the triad of education (knowledge-teacher-student) present in this educational system, it should be noted that:

a) The school contents that are managed within the Finnish educational system, according to Enkvist (2010) have a “very specific national curricular framework that has the force of law” (p.56), and it is the obligation of teachers to meet the objectives of learning stipulated in the curriculum. However, the curriculum does not limit or frustrate the educational dynamic to rigid and dogmatic processes within the formal or normative field, but on the contrary, it shows “enthusiasm for education, faith in students and teachers” (p. 56), therefore it is flexible to the changes that must be made, provided that its purpose is to respond to specific educational needs and meet the learning objectives.

b) Teachers perceive a good salary, although not generous or exuberant, as stated by Jakku-Shivonen and Niemi (2011) the key to the success of the Finnish education system is the commitment to the teaching staff, and support for the development of research, practical studies and mentoring, which among other experiences has led to position Finnish teachers among the most prepared on the world.

c) Finnish students are considered valuable members of their society, so, in accordance with the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Board of Education and the Center for International Mobility (2016), they are entitled to full support from the State in their studies, and will be guaranteed a “personalized teaching or oriented according to their needs” (p.7), which maximizes the potential of each individual.



Principles of the Finnish education system

Before referring to the principles of the Finnish educational system, it is considered necessary to present schematically the structure that governs this system.

Finnish education as presented by the Ministry of Education and culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education (2017) is structured by: a pre-school level that is contemplated from birth to 6 years, time in which Finnish children can attend to free or low-cost day care centers for early stimulation and motor and cognitive development through the ludic element; a basic level of compulsory education that ranges from 7 to 16 years, to later make a year of complementary education, volunteering or work experiences that will help the students to decide if they will

continue their studies in the upper secondary school, in an profession institute or if they will opt for a professional degree.

However, whatever the choice of the Finnish students, the State guarantees continuity in the educational process. Thus, those who choose to pursue upper secondary education have the option of carrying out third-level university studies as graduate or bachelor's degrees, and continue with fourth-year doctoral studies, while those who opt for studies and professional degrees can complete their training through specialized professional degrees. From the study carried out on the Finnish educational system, the following are deduced as practical principles of development and social coexistence, which direct it:

Gratuity and equality: According to the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2017), Finland's education system is characterized by "offering everyone the same opportunities to study, regardless of social and economic status. Instead of encouraging competition and comparisons" (p.2). According to Jakku-Shivonen and Niemi (2011):

The main objective of the educational policy has been, and continues to be, the creation of equal educational opportunities for all citizens. Education is a fundamental right and a public service. Politicians, administrators and teachers are generally committed to promoting educational equity (p. 3).

These proposals are supported on the basis that it is the people and not the capital or the raw material that are the most important resource for the nation, and in accordance with this principle, the State seeks to enhance the right to a free and excellent education, which " help to make the most of their potential, so that they become who they want to be and what they want to be "(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, p.3).

Autonomy: according to the Finnish National Directorate of Education (2007), educational institutions are authorized to "provide educational services in accordance with their own administrative arrangements, provided that the basic functions determined by laws are respected" (p. 5). This added to the gratuity and state coverage of education allows that the development of the educational system unfolds without subordinating to economic or private interests, opens the possibility to a contextualized education and coherent with the concrete educational reality and specific local needs and grants to the teacher methodological and procedural freedom in development of their activity as long as the central guidelines of the curriculum are kept intact.



Equity: In the research on the Finnish education system, in the on-line magazine FOYND (2016), it is established that due to the high taxes that citizens pay, the State can guarantee the total, equal and equitable financing of its educational centers, supplying them of adequate equipment to generate a good educational environment that drives the teaching-learning process. In addition, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland (2017) the principle of equity fosters community life, as it invites “diverse personal development, the ability of individuals to act in the community, as well as promoting the democracy, equality and diversity in Finnish society” (p. 18).

Thus, equity becomes a transversal principle of Finnish education to face the problems of overvaluation of one subject over another, of judging students by their socioeconomic conditions, of rejecting them for their level of performance or discriminating against them for any type of disabilities. In this way, Finnish education seeks to build a more inclusive and equal education for its citizens.

Skill development: Finnish education is concerned with developing and stimulating the talents and potentials of their students. As proposed by Stanley (2016), in order to stimulate the development of personal talents, “from the last year of basic education and in upper secondary education (...) the labor practice through apprenticeship contracts between the educational institution, the student and the company” (p. 5). However, the concern of Finnish education is not limited to the development of job skills, but also to the development of artistic and cultural skills. The Embassy of Finland in Buenos Aires (2017) refers to the Finnish philosopher Snellman to explain the sense of support for art and culture, because as this author says “the strength of a small country lies in its culture, and this is its only path to progress” (p.1), therefore, the cultural factor has been strongly internalized by the Finnish population and is reflected in its educational proposal.

Teacher training: in the opinion of Jakku-Shivonen and Niemi (2011), this principle is the key to the success of Finnish education, and it translates into a “commitment to the teaching staff” (p. 6), therefore, the process of training future teachers is a priority of the Finnish education system. According to the National Center on Education and the Economy (2016) “in Finland, entering a teacher training program is already an honor. The Finnish teacher training programs are extremely selective, admit only one out of every ten students who apply” (p. 3), consequently to the high level of demand for the career, the teaching work has become a highly recognized profession of prestige.



According to Melgarejo (2006), thanks to the high level of demand in teacher training, the Finnish education system can strengthen its foundations by assigning its best teachers “in the first years of teaching, at the beginning of learning, where the fundamentals of all the subsequent learning: language, mental structure, habits, etc... are learned” (p 251). Teachers are responsible for ensuring the roots of educational processes and thereby ensure educational success.

Independence: Following the research carried out by the online magazine FOYND (2016), it is evident that the principle of independence in Finnish education focuses on helping students “learn how to think, analyze and acquire knowledge independently” (p. 1). Therefore, one of the main concerns of Finnish educators is that students are able to find necessary and valid information from open sources, which is assured, as Puukko (2012) explains in a publication of the Council for the Promotion of Finland, by the Finnish State that through a system of local and municipal libraries provides public and free access to information for all its citizens.

On the other hand, the Finnish educational system is clear that the optimization of resources in the educational process helps to enhance the autonomy and independence of students in educational processes, therefore, bets on the great possibilities and facilities provided by the didactic use of tools, books and the internet for teaching, learning and self-education.⁴ It should be noted that independent learning practices, based on the free access to information provided by the Internet or other sources that facilitate learning, do not frustrate or hinder the development of intellectual abilities and the development of mental operations in the student. On the contrary, they are presented as new and innovative ways of learning, coherent with the changing and globalized world of today.

As it has been affirmed from the beginning, the success of the Finnish educational system is not an independent and isolated phenomenon, since it integrates a projection towards the needs of the social, political and cultural dimensions of the nation. In the words of Montaña (2014), the success of this system is related to “the high qualification and motivation of its teachers, individual attention to students, continuity in political programs in education, as well as government support to students and teachers” (p.91). All this suggests that education in Finland is framed within a comprehensive program of accompaniment and social development and is not anymore simply a state function or obligation.

After studying the historical process, the structuring of the educational system and analyzing the principles on which this successful system is based, it is worth asking about the ideological and philosophical



substrate that lies behind it, that is, rethinking the prevailing philosophy in the policies and practices of the Finnish education system.

Philosophical foundation of the Finnish education system

This section clarifies that, information on the philosophical foundations of the Finnish education system is scarce, so it is decided to identify the basic postulates of Finnish education with the philosophical and psychological substrate intrinsic to their theory and practice, such as for example, the Aristotelian and Rousseauian eudaimonia, the ethics of virtues and educational cognitivism.

The first philosophical assumption with which it relates to the Finnish education system has to do with its aims, because as Jakku-Schivonen and Niemi (2011) put it, the aim of Finnish education is to make its citizens “become who they want to be and what they want to be” (p. 3), and for which the State will guarantee the necessary means to enable it through the Welfare State. In the educational field, the eudemonic goal for personal development is maintained. From this perspective, this goal has been internalized by Finnish society after thirty long years of educational reforms to improve educational quality and teacher preparation, which were developed as an “innovative” educational proposal for the conquest of happiness and harmony with nature, as stated by Jakku-Schivonen and Niemi (2011).

According to Robert (2006), the fundamental idea that guides Finnish education is that:

... a happy, well-developed student, free to progress at his own pace, will acquire basic knowledge more easily; it is not an utopia of an enlightened pedagogue, it is simply the idea that guides the action of everyone: the State, the municipalities, the directors of establishments, the teachers... (p. 2).

This eudemonic ideal of the educational system is manifested in the strong concern for the needs of students, the prioritization, individuality and freedom of the individual to establish and achieve their own goals of self-realization. In addition, this foundation, according to Ramírez (2002), can refer to the Aristotelian thought about eudaimonia, which “calls to live well and be well” (p.220). Finnish education puts in the balance an education for life or an education to pass exams or to respond in the labor market needs, and it chooses the first option trust-



ing that working in personal development is also assuring a better social development.

As described by Rousseau (2000), “the innate desire for well-being, and the impossibility of satisfying this desire with fullness, are causes that constantly seek new means of contributing to it” (p.207). In this way, education becomes a means to achieve this good life, so it has an edueonic purpose. With this is understandable the Finnish Government’s interest in building the Welfare State. In addition, the Rousseonian understanding of happiness identified with the principles of individualization and autonomy that guide educational processes is visualized. Likewise, agreeing with Vilafranca (2012), Rousseau argues that happiness” consists of temperance, wisdom, the freedom to want what you can and do what you like” (p. 48), recurrent elements in the eudemonic end of Finnish education.

Therefore, the Finnish educational system maintains characteristics of Rousseau’s edemic naturalism that foster and stimulate the intrinsic and extrinsic conditions for the individual to reach happiness, thus struggling for an education that does not alter the teleological order of the nature of the individual, but drives their desire for well-being and fulfillment to live in harmony with themselves and with others.

The second philosophical assumption with which Finnish education is identified is the ethics of the Aristotelian virtues, understood according to Araos (2003) and Garcés and Giraldo (2014) as a reflective philosophical knowledge about one’s own life and moral experience that induces a critical education, reflective but above all ethical and respectful of human life. For this purpose, the origins of ethics in Finnish education and its identification with the ethics of Aristotle’s intellectual virtues are explained below.

As stated by Melgarejo (2015), with the creation of the Turku Academy in the mid-seventeenth century, Finland had its first higher institution at the national level, stopping the migration to countries such as Sweden, France or Germany for higher education; this meant for Finland a considerable increase of professionals at the service of the State. However, the Turku Academy was mainly aimed at training officials and the clergy of the kingdom of Sweden, which according to Melgarejo (2015) “allowed the development of a Protestant ethic that was applied at all levels and aspects of education, and of which the values of effort and personal responsibility are highlighted “(p.54), so that the ultimate aim of ethics in Finnish education is aimed at individual growth and improvement, from there, to promote the growth and development of the nation.



Previously, the interest of Finnish education in the development of the potentialities of its inhabitants, as well as the discovery of talents and intellectual development through free, compulsory and quality education for the whole population, all this about the basis of the good life (living and being well) was explained. According to Reale and Antiseri (2010), for Aristotle, man seeks to live well, and he achieves it only when he lives in a manner consistent with reason, which is why: “the supreme good that man can achieve - and therefore happiness- consists in perfecting oneself as a man, that is, in that activity that distinguishes man from all other things” (p.169). Thanks to this, it can be evidenced that Finnish education is identified with the philosophical assumptions of the ethics of Aristotelian virtues, more specifically with the so-called intellectual or rational virtues.

The domain of reason in practical behavior is for Aristotle an ethical virtue that can be perfected in each man through its exercise and implementation, to make them “a kind of custom, state or mode of being, that we have created ourselves” (Reale & Antiseri, 2010, p.170). To clarify the elements shared by both Finnish education and the ethics of the Aristotelian intellectual virtues, we can analyze the work *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle (2005) points out the intellectual habits that form and perfect the person, which are: understanding, wisdom, art, science and prudence, elements that are considered by the Finnish educational system as principles for the development of competences, independence, autonomy and quality education for the good life.

For the third foundation it is necessary to clarify that the interpretation is made mainly from the theories of cognitivism and constructivism of developmental psychology. To begin with, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland (2017) announces that Finnish children enter school education at the age of 7, an age relatively late in relation to the education systems of other nations, however, this Late entry can be justified from the cognitivist theory of Piaget and Inhelder (2015) by stating that within the stages of child development, it is from the age of 7 to 8 years that the child is ready to understand and solve specific operations. This was also explained by thinkers such as Campanella (2007), who in his work *The City of the Sun* affirmed that after reaching the age of seven, when the child has developed certain linguistic and mathematical skills, he would be introduced to the study of “all natural sciences, to show each one of his inclinations” (p.16).

Before the age of seven, Finnish children attend free or low-cost day care centers where they work on the development of gross motor



skills and social relations. In addition, according to Hernández, Figueroa, Carulla, Patiño, and Tafur (2004), in the first years the children resemble small scientists since their behavior is aimed at discovering, experimenting and testing the limits and functioning of the world that it surrounds them, so that their way of understanding reality resembles “the learning processes in which the scientific world is immersed; that is, the way in which scientists discover and interpret the phenomena of the world” (p.52). The child through play discovers his surroundings and turns them into his own laboratory, in which he will experience and submit the different elements found in him, as well as himself, to the test-error test to understand how it works. This is recognized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland (2017), stating that for Finns, each child has “time and space to grow and develop is a basic principle (...) so that Finnish education takes advantage of the most delicate development, motivating children to think independently and be creative” (p. 6).

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Approximation to the educational system of emerging societies

Based on the thought of Guerra (2007), emergent societies are understood to be developing societies, which are in the process of overcoming the “historical conditions of submission or dependence” (p.88), that is, emerging not in the negative sense of emergency as it is mostly understood, but in the positive sense, as a possibility for societies to emerge over their own historically conflictive political, economic, social and cultural situation, in search of a revaluation and recognition of their culture. This second part of the work focuses on the study of the educational situation of emerging societies in Latin America, which will address the main characteristics of the context and educational systems of these contexts, as well as the epistemological, historical and ideological foundations of their educational philosophy, to finish with the analysis of the concrete case of education in Ecuador.

Characterization of emerging societies

Being Latin American, according to Paladines (2006), is not limited to a geographical determination, because in it is marked “a qualifying action that is internal (...) is not a territory but a human community, concrete, historical, located in a territory” (p.1). Thus, the identity of the Latin

American peoples is imbued with a common history and a social praxis that has determined the proper way of interpreting and responding to reality, and within is located the educational reality. This horizon can address Latin American society and the common characteristics of their peoples, their historical development, their struggle for emancipation, their emergence situation and their educational system.

First, as noted by Nassif, Rama, and Tedesco (1984), the education system of the Latin American peoples has a common structure, which historically responds to the proposal of traditional education based on levels according to the social recipients; these levels can be identified in: “universal primary education, secondary education for the middle classes and higher education for the elites” (p.17). However, by updating this theory to suit the educational reality of Latin America in 2018, it can be shown that several formal changes have been achieved, such as gratuity and free access to higher education that, in theory, should mean greater equity and equality in living conditions and the reduction of the social gap, but that has only been achieved in part, because the changes have not been made in the substantive aspect, since the only thing that has been done is to go up one more level (Fourth level education) equally elitist and restricted to a particular social stratum, just as university education was a couple of decades ago.

Secondly, according to Guerra (2007), the great problem that characterizes the educational system in Latin America is that historically it has been determined and thought from the “interests of the external and internal colonizers and not according to the victims” (p. 91). To a large extent, the history of emerging peoples is common, and is characterized by the situation of “coloniality of power and knowledge” (p.92) that has not allowed to achieve a true self-valuation, self-possession and sovereignty. Katz (2016) reaffirms this position by expressing that the Latin American peoples have been historically molded and subjected to a state of dependency, which has meant the backwardness of the periphery and the impossibility of individual and social development and growth for the region. As Guerra (2007) affirms, these are the elements that have conditioned and historically frustrated the development of the potentialities of the Latin American being, and with this refers to:

... use and deployment of reason; to self-ownership; to self-knowledge; to self-control; to self-care; to freedom, autonomy and sovereignty (individual and collective); to interdependence and mutual complementarity with other human beings; to interculturality; to transculturality; to the planetary vision (Morin); and the sense of transcendence. (p.90)



For the aforementioned, and in the words of Guerra (2007), the need for a reevaluation of the existential intuition, the re-appropriation, the decentering, the misalignment and the humanization that has shaped the luminous side of our history becomes evident. In short, it is necessary that the reflection on education starts from the concrete reality and the educational needs of each people. Every philosophy of education has as presupposition a type of anthropology, that is, a type of human being that will be formed, in the case of Latin America it is necessary to look at the free Latin American subject and actor of his own history and from there seek to develop an educational system designed from and for the emerging context.

A third characteristic element of emerging Latin American contexts is related to the alienating conditions of its praxis. According to Dussel (1998) there are two coercive categories of social praxis: alienation and liberation. When analyzing the situation in Latin America, it is concluded that it is determined by alienating structures and the imposition of totalizing systems, which repress human freedom and makes the individual a resource or tool of the system. However, the alienating conditions have been addressed before by great Latin American philosophers such as Alberdi, Montalvo or Mora who agree on the need for *mental emancipation*, as a break with the colonial culture in which Latin America had been formed, to achieve progress of the peoples. But that, unfortunately, has not been achieved and has ended in new forms of economic, political and cultural subordination. These conditions are reflected in the role given to the school as an instrument of reproduction of social structures.

For Dussel (1998) the alienating conditions can be overcome through an analytic and dialogic process, in which “the principle of the positive affirmation of reality, denied by the totality, leads to a negationist praxis of the oppressive totality, that is, in a praxis that in order to liberate, must transform” (p. 58). Applied to the educational field this would mean a transformation to the very ends of education, no longer for reproduction or to respond to external alienating structures, but an education for the liberation and empowerment of the individuals over their own reality.

Education must respond to specific needs and circumstances, therefore pretending that adopting successful external educational systems and models will solve all the problems of the people is a naive idea. A clear example of this is the positivist movement of the XIX century in Latin America, which adopted the positivist philosophy as an educational and technical instrument to incorporate the peoples of the region into



progress, following American and Western models, but which was limited to the simple adoption of a philosophy (in this case just to be a copy) and not to its assimilation and adaptation.

For this point it is clear that the best option will be one that arises from the problematic situation, from those who know and live that reality, however, it also becomes clear that the problem lies not so much in applying changes to the educational system (structural changes and functionalities that have been successful in other locations), as is the bad adaptation of these to the contexts of emerging societies, since in the application of educational reforms the objective and subjective conditions that made their success possible are not considered. If there is groundwork before the adaptation, as Zea (1969) states, “the original, if it has to be of any importance, will be given by itself, independently of the instrument and, moreover, by the way this instrument has been and can be used” (p.58).

Finally, as Carnoy (1974) states, there is a strong tradition in underdeveloped countries to copy the cultural forms and successful models of first world societies, without first preparing the objective and subjective conditions that will determine their success or failure, giving as a result educational models that do not respond to the specific needs of the educational reality of emerging societies and that also limit and frustrate the autonomous and original creation of contextualized and relevant educational models.



Education in the current Ecuadorian society

In recent years, the changes and reforms made to the education system of emerging countries, as is the case of Ecuador, have been directed to achieve, at all costs, the acclaimed educational quality and meet international standards, resulting in, according to Chacón (2009), an education completely decontextualized and disconnected from its reality. Undoubtedly, the copying of educational models has hindered the pedagogical action of emerging societies in Latin America, however, the real problem lies in the poor, and often null adaptations of these models to different contexts, which is why is clear the need to critically rethink the educational situation of these societies, in order to understand the conditions of the success of educational models and to promote education designed for the specific Latin American situation.

According to the *Mercurio* newspaper (2010), in its journalistic note, between 1963 and 1979, Ecuador had been submerged in a series of

military dictatorships, which sought, at all costs, to establish a developmentalist model that would transform the country into a self-producing nation of its own technology and industrialization, in which education would play a very important role. According to Milton Luna (2014) in this stage education was aimed at:

... Establish clearer guidelines in relation to the specific roles of education based on the political project of the “nationalist and revolutionary” government of the Armed Forces. In this sense, education would generate training not only for development, but for the transformation of reality and social justice, to strengthen the nationalist spirit of Ecuadorians and to promote democracy. (p. 89)

However, this did not go from being a simple ideal that ended up sinking Ecuador into statism, and meant a big drop in the development index. From this stage one can rescue the interest to generate changes through education, although this has been directed to the industrial and technological development, which can be verified according to Luna (2014) in the enrollment index of 1972, exposed by the National Board of Planning and Economic Coordination, which shows an index of 35.7% of enrollments in technical schools, but which, by 1977, decreased to 31.6%. Added to this is the closure of normal schools that occurred at the time, and that generated a high demand for teachers for secondary and higher education. This is a clear example of trying to implement changes in education without groundwork and analyzing the conditions of the context, while large nations experienced rapid industrial growth, in Ecuador the development rate declined.

This situation began to become favorable as of 1979, the year that begins the democratic phase of the country, and with it the desire for a new progressive constitution, and a reformist government that transforms Ecuadorian democracy to affirm the very institutions of the country (El Mercurio, 2010). However, Luna (2014) states that with the fall in the price of oil in the 1980s and the high public spending that was dragged by previous governments, Ecuador deepened external indebtedness, and a new crisis was generated, which was confronted with policies of openness to the economy and the progressive affirmation of the neoliberal model in the country, but unfortunately they only widened the gap between social classes.

The aforementioned serves as a preamble to understand the changes made in the education system of the country, according to the Ministry of Education of Ecuador (2009) and Vera (2015), from the nineties



to the present, in which Ecuador experiences three different substantial curricular changes: 1) the consensual curriculum reform of 1996, which proposed a new form of curricular planning based on objectives, b) the reform of curricular updating and strengthening of basic education in 2010, which again changed curriculum planning, but this time based on the development of skills with performance criteria or development of competencies, and c) readjustments to the curricular reform of 2016, in which a new structuring is made in the levels of basic and secondary education, which led to the elimination of specialties in secondary education by the EGB (General Basic Education) and the BGU (Unified general baccalaureate). But, nevertheless, due to the short time in the application of said changes, it has not been possible to objectively evaluate the concretion of the educational policies and reforms or obtain objective results of the evaluation and fulfillment of each one of the executed plans.

Likewise, we can mention the changes and infrastructural implementations made in the Government of Rafael Correa, who opted for a greater investment in education thanks to the good economic situation that the country experienced through the oil trade. As indicated in the documentary *Se nos fue la alegría del Contrato Social por la Educación* (2016) the educational revolution proposed by Correa in its first term of 2007, aimed to promote an inclusive, quality and efficient education according to needs and characteristics of the Ecuadorian population; by 2013, the Territorial Reordering Plan of the educational offer was launched, which meant that hundreds of single-unit rural schools were closed, relocating their students to *millennium schools*; but that, contrary to what was expected, meant a setback in education for rural sectors, as the distance, cost of transportation and time spent to go to school increased; this without mentioning the cultural, political and historical implications that the closure of the rural school for the indigenous communities entails. Therefore, the implemented changes did not achieve a substantial impact on Ecuadorian education, as they generated new problems related to an increase in institutional bureaucratization in education, academic standardization programs, changes for university admission or the closure of hundreds of rural schools⁵, which have not allowed a really significant progress in the field of education.

With regards to the university in the last decade, emphasis can be placed on priority policies for higher education, which according to Zabala (2017) were: a) the program of studying abroad scholarships for careers related to the change of the productive matrix (exact sciences), b) the consolidation of the SNNA to guarantee the relevance and educa-



tional quality, and c) the creation of four state universities; projects that responded to the revolution in education and the search for educational quality, however, along with it, there are also programs such as the evaluation and recategorization of higher education that ended with the closure of 14 Institutes of Higher Education and left around 42,000 students without a place of study.

In the same way, following Aguilar (2017) in 2015, the Council of Higher Education of Ecuador launched a set of reforms to guide the institutions of Higher Education in the country towards the review of their curricula, which as a rule were focused on in traditional approaches and paradigms (p.132), this refers to the contents and objectives, in order to transform them and promulgate a curricular redesign based on professional competences. But that, despite the benefits of the project it sought only to answer a portion of the problem in education, since as Zabala (2017) states “these changes are discontinuous in nature, as they seek to overcome the inadequacies of the adjustments in previous levels to face the anomalies that cannot be understood in terms of a previous policy paradigm” (p.84).

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The Finnish education system as a benchmark for education in emerging societies

The basic premise of which we start is that before applying any change in education, is necessary to prepare the groundwork first, and that is why, if there is something that can help overcome the educational problems of emerging contexts it is not the models or educational systems in themselves, nor the tools and didactic implementations carried out in the teaching-learning processes, but rather, the foundations that are behind it, those philosophical, epistemological, ethical and even bio-psychosocial development bases that make possible the subjective conditions for the success of an educational system. As Chavez (2003) points out, the philosophical foundations serve as a guiding compass and theoretical-practical guide of every educational system, since they are the ones that determine “the unity of thought that has to give coherence to the different answers that are offered to all the spheres of the educational process” (p.10), as well as to all the areas of the process of development and integral human formation that occur in them.

The holistic nature of philosophy broadens the field that education alone ends up limiting, as Valdés and López (2011) affirm: “Educa-

tion takes philosophy from reflection and the point of view of the whole, in order to clarify the problems relative to pedagogy” (p. 3). It is clear that every educational proposal, and therefore every educational system, is based on philosophical assumptions that determine the basic guidelines of its formative action, its structuring and its purpose.

According to Mantovani (1983) there are three basic problems of any educational system that are addressed from their philosophical foundations, which are: the type of human being that one tries to form (anthropological question), b) the way to reach that ideal of being human (axiological question), c) the very purposes of education (teleological question). As it has been presented in the first part of the work, the Finnish educational system is clear about these elements, which is why, added to the historical context and its cultural and ideological implications, it is clear why it success in educational processes, how its programs have been directed to respond to their specific situation and how the social dynamics have helped to concretize and strengthen their educational system. For these reasons, and following the scheme of the problems of Mantovani (1983) below is discussed the benchmarks to overcome problems of emerging contexts evidenced in the philosophical foundations of the Finnish educational system.

Anthropological question: according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland (2017) the Finnish educational system seeks education that helps to achieve the best use of the potential of each human being, “in order that they become who they wish to be and what they want to be” (p 3). As an example of this, the education of the youngest children in Finland “focuses on the abilities of each child, giving support to their feeling of security, to the development of their emotional life and their skills” (p.2), thus affirming the importance of individuality and personal growth within the training process.

For this, it is necessary to prioritize a personalized education, situated and coherent with the reality of the individual and its sociocultural condition, so that the center of the entire educational process is always the human being and not the welfare of the State as it is in other cases. Thus, when analyzing the implementation of changes in the educational system of emerging societies, it is evident that their application is not directed to the self-realization and the deployment of the individual’s potential for personal growth, but rather to respond and comply with standards of quality that position the nation within international rankings and allow the progress and development of the State.



Therefore, the anthropological problem is found beforehand in the educational system of emerging contexts, since it broadly maintains the guidelines of the classical school that depersonalize and massify the human being, which does not consider the individual stages of development and learning rhythms, and that frustrates the development of individual capacities and the deployment of the potential of the human being. What one achieves with this, is in terms of Ortega y Gasset (1983) to form a *mass man*, a tool, incapable of self-governance and that is content to follow others and fulfill what the system asks of him. However, the results of countries like Finland show that if education works to help the individual achieve self-realization, consequently social development and progress will be assured.

An axiological question: once the type of human being that one wants to form has been established, the second step is to identify how to achieve it - that is, to identify what values, techniques and strategies to apply to achieve it. As presented in the first part of the document, Finnish education finds one of its philosophical foundations in the intellectual virtues of Aristotle, which will outline a path for the formation of the virtuous human being, through the exercise of intellectual habits such as: understanding, wisdom, art, science and prudence, which according to Garcés and Giraldo (2014) “accompany reason and by possessing it, govern the soul and prepare it to perfect true acts” (p. 221), and which, as stated above, are considered in Finnish education.

The development of intellectual virtues or of reason allow the individual to own their own actions and decisions, as Kant (1981) also affirmed by proposing *sapere aude!* as the motto of the illustration which can be translated as having the courage to think for oneself, and thus achieve:

man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. (p. 25).

This can be summarized in the recognition of the individuality and self-governing capacity that each human being has, and that should be fostered by education. However, an education that does not respond to the growth and self-realization of the individual, will not succeed in developing it. This educative proposal of cultivating reason together with an ethic that values human dignity is the one proposed by the Finnish system, and that, if it was promoted it in emerging contexts, it would



achieve the ideal that Zea (1969) already envisaged of transforming the Latin American people:

Turned and on themselves, they will try not only to know themselves in a certain horizon of history but also as men, as the concrete actors of that history, as those who suffer the situation or circumstance that determines, personalizes, individualizes. (p.96)

Teleological question: Lastly, Mantovani (1983) proposes the evaluation of the aims of education, that is, what the educational system expects as a product of education. For Finnish education, two closely related goals can be identified, an individual goal based on eudemony or happiness as a product of self-realization and the practice of intellectual virtues for a good life, and a social purpose that manifests itself in the level of social welfare, development and progress. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland (2017) makes it clear that “Finland’s most important resource is its people” (p. 4), therefore it seeks to encourage the school, especially in the early years, to promote social skills as much as the development of a healthy self-esteem, all this supported by the social services offered by the Welfare State.

The Finnish education system places the educational process as a key element within the comprehensive development program proposed by the Finnish State to accompany its inhabitants from gestation to the death of the individual. On the other hand, by comparing the goals of education in Latin American societies, one can see the great difference that exists; for Latin American children, education is more an obligation than a pleasure, and its purpose becomes instrumental and pragmatic, a tool for improvement in many cases, but not a way to achieve happiness and self-fulfillment.

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, the copying of educational models has hindered the pedagogical action of the emerging peoples of Latin America, but the real problem lies in the poor, and often null adaptations of these models to different contexts, since they do not take into account elements that can actually help overcome the problems of emerging contexts and ensure the success of changes in the education system; these are the philosophical foundations that underpin education and that enable the subjective conditions for transformation in education. As Alberdi (1842) states in



his work *Ideas to preside over the confection of the course of contemporary philosophy*:

... there is no universal philosophy because, in the end, there is no universal solution to the problems that constitute it. Each country, each era, each philosopher has had a peculiar philosophy (...) because each country, each epoch and each school has given different solutions to problems. (p. 6)

In the same way it can be affirmed that there is no universal education model, there is no perfect educational system that can obtain the same results in all latitudes, since they always respond to the interests and needs of their context and of whom develops them. However, this does not mean that they are destined to fail in different circumstances and geographies, if it is useful to solve a problem from another latitude then one must study its philosophical, epistemological and its historical-cultural context to determine if it can be assimilated and adapted to the reality one wants to confront. In this way, avoid reproducing copies or distorting the original model; and, on the contrary, a necessary, grounded, situated and coherent adaptation to the circumstances of the concrete educational reality is proposed. It is necessary to consider that within every educational system converge psychological aspects of human development, socio-historical-cultural aspects and formative policies that provide with meaning and purpose to educational planning, which integrates theory and praxis as dynamic elements of any educational process.

In summary, the result of copying and implementing changes in education based on successful models from other latitudes, without considering the philosophical and epistemological substratum that sustains it, or without groundwork for its adaptation, have resulted in poor educational systems, that do not respond to the specific needs of the educational reality of emerging societies, and that also limit and frustrate the autonomous and original creation of contextualized and relevant educational models.

Notes

- 1 The Diplomatic Information Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (2018) describes Finland as a republic of northern Europe, belonging to the European Union, and whose capital is Helsinki. Its population is around 5.5 million inhabitants and its official languages are Finnish and Swedish.
- 2 PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) is "a continuous program that offers ideas for educational practices and policies, and helps to track student



- trends in the acquisition of knowledge and skills in different countries and in different demographic subgroups of each country “(Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2016, p.3).
- 3 According to the definition of Pedro Fernández (2017), the welfare state is a set of activities developed by governments, and are related to “the search for social and redistributive purposes through state budgets, such as: unemployment benefits or old age, health care, services and provision of housing, food and other welfare services “(p.1). In addition, as Gösta Esping-Andersen states, the Social-Democratic or Nordic model of the Welfare State “covers all risks based on the principle of universality of social benefits. It involves the transformation of traditional social assistance systems into systems with erga omnes rights (in front of everyone) and extensive social services programs “(in Fernández, 2017, p.1).
 - 4 The Finnish government grants free school books, as well as Tablets and open access to wireless internet for all students.
 - 5 The exact data on the closing of schools at the national level has not been made public, however, Domingo Mina, ex-leader of the former Union of Educators (UNE), in a newspaper article from El Comercio newspaper (2018) states that: only “in the last 10 years, in the Esmeraldas canton, 265 schools were closed “(p.1), of which 30% were single-teacher.



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