



Sinisalo Sandra

Teaching in a Multicultural Environment – Understanding Teacher Competence in Finnish

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As multiculturalism becomes an increasingly significant part of the Finnish school environment, the ability of teachers to encounter different cultures and to teach pupils with an immigrant background has attracted attention and the need for research. Preparatory education teachers are a fairly new professional group that consists of various educational professionals. Their eligibility requirements and training are, however, in many ways deficient.

The competences found in this study that preparatory education teachers need in their daily work include encountering pupils from different cultural backgrounds with understanding and respect, differentiation and teaching Finnish as a second language skills as well as flexibility and the ability to identify learning difficulties from insufficient language skills.

There may be differences as to which educational background would correspond to the work of a preparatory education teacher the best. The teachers, however, agree on the need for further training when it comes to multicultural implementation of education and the fact that their educational background has not provided enough knowledge for them to acquire the competences needed in the work.

Key words: preparatory education, immigration, pupil with an immigrant background, multiculturalism, integration, teacher competence, intercultural competence

Monikulttuurisuuden tullessa yhä merkittävämmäksi osaksi suomalaista kouluympäristöä opettajien kyky kohdata erilaisia kulttuureja ja opettaa maahanmuuttajataustaisia oppilaita on herättänyt huomiota ja tarvetta tutkimukselle. Perusopetukseen valmistavan opetuksen opettajat ovat melko uusi ammattiryhmä, joka koostuu useista eri kasvatusalan ammattilaisista. Heidän kelpoisuusvaatimuksensa ja koulutuksensa ovat kuitenkin monella tapaa puutteellisia.

Tässä tutkimuksessa todettuja valmiuksia, joita valmistavan opetuksen opettajat tarvitsevat päivittäisessä työssään ovat eri kulttuuritaustoista tulevien oppilaiden ymmärtäväinen ja kunnioittava kohtaaminen, opetuksen eriyttäminen, taito opettaa suomea sitä toisena kielenä opiskeleville, joustavuus sekä kyky tunnistaa oppimisvaikeuksia puutteellisista kielitaidoista.

Voidaan olla eri mieltä siitä mikä koulutustausta vastaisi parhaiten valmistavan opettajan työtä tai millaista koulutusta opettajat tarvitsevat. Opettajat ovat kuitenkin yhtä mieltä lisäkoulutuksen tarpeesta monikulttuurisen opetuksen toteuttamiseen sekä siitä, ettei heidän koulutuksensa ole antanut heille riittävästi tietoa työssä tarvittavien kompetenssien omaksumiseksi.

Avainsanat: valmistava opetus, maahanmuutto, maahanmuuttotaustainen oppilas, monikulttuurisuus, integraatio, opettajan kompetenssi, interkulttuurinen kompetenssi

Contents

- 1 Introduction 5**
 - 1.1 Purpose and Significance of the Research6
- 2 Immigration, Multiculturalism and Integrati on 9**
- 3 Preparatory Education.....13**
 - 3.1 Organization of Teaching in Preparatory Education.....13
 - 3.2 Aims and Main Contents of Preparatory Education.....14
 - 3.3 Integration of Pupils into Finnish Society and School.....15
 - 3.4 Training of Preparatory Education Teachers.....17
- 4 Teaching in a Multicultural and Heterogenous Group19**
 - 4.1 Teachers’ Intercultural Competence19
 - 4.2 Supporting Pupils with an Immigrant Background in Learning and Their New Life Situations20
- 5 Discussion.....24**
- 6 References28**

1 Introduction

Due to increased immigration and expanding globalism many European countries, including Finland, have become more ethnically diverse (Mäkelä, Kalalahti & Varjo, 2017). The change is reflected in today's schools. In 2013, 14 994 pupils in basic education studied a language other than Finnish or Swedish as their native language, while by 2020 the number had increased up to 22 041 (Opetushallitus, n.d.). Every one in four children attending basic education in Helsinki has a background with immigration (Helsingin kaupunki, 2021). The increased diversity among learner population has led to reforms in the content and implementation of education and brought a new need to develop teachers' skills in teaching pupils with an immigrant background (Salo, 2004). In Finland, education line called preparatory education is offered for school-aged children with immigrant background who do not yet have adequate language or other necessary skills, such as age-appropriate prior academic knowledge, needed in mainstream classrooms (Kyttälä, Sinkkonen & Hautala, 2011; Opetushallitus, 2015). Teaching in preparatory education supports integration into the Finnish society and the development of cultural identity of each pupil in a variety of ways while promoting equality and equity among pupils. (Kyttälä et al., 2011; Opetushallitus, 2015). The number of preparatory education classrooms has increased during the recent years and is expected to increase further in the coming years (Nissinen & Välijärvi, 2011). The content of teaching and the skills of teachers must progress, and interest in research about preparatory education teachers and their work should gain more attention (Salo, 2004).

I will implement a literature review which aims to understand the competences needed from teachers working in preparatory education classrooms by combining different sources. According to Luukkainen (2004) competence refers to the ability to perform a task satisfactorily. In my research, teacher competence is considered as teachers' ability to plan and implement teaching according to the curriculum, evaluate learning and follow such pedagogical values that promote each pupil to do their best academically and socially in school environment. I recognize teacher competence being a continuously developing part of teachers' profession that requires education, self-reflection and practice.

The research will discuss what kinds of skills and knowledge teachers in preparatory education must adapt to provide high-quality teaching that meets the needs of the pupils. The focus of my

study is how to support the learning and integration of pupils with immigrant backgrounds in the best possible way. The setting in which the study takes place is preparatory education in Finland and the focus group includes preparatory education teachers. My main research question has thus taken the following form:

1. *What kinds of competences do preparatory education teachers need?*

I will follow the methodology of a literature review in the field of study of qualitative design. Literature review can be considered as a research technique that examines previously done research (Salminen, 2011). A narrative literature review refers to an overview in which the phenomenon is described on a large scale (Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2001). The study is in line with recent research of similar nature, and the literature includes previous research and other domestic as well as international literature relevant to my research question which means that new empirical data will not be collected. I will implement the seven steps in conducting a literature review defined by Cresswell (2014). The steps are the following: 1. identify key words of the research, 2. search literature related to the topic, 3. locate about 50 academic articles or books, 4. skim through the findings, 5. design a literature map, 6. draft summaries of the most relevant articles and 7. assemble the literature review (Cresswell, 2014). The key words I will use to find relevant literature include preparatory education, pupil with an immigrant background, multiculturalism, integration and intercultural competence.

The research is divided into five parts. First, I will define concepts relevant to the study and discuss issues related to immigration, multiculturalism and integration which form the framework of context for the research. Secondly, the research will form an overview of the content, objectives and organization of teaching in preparatory education and determine eligibility of preparatory education teachers. In chapter 4, I will characterize different competences preparatory education teachers need and lastly, I will discuss and draw conclusions regarding the findings of the research.

1.1 Purpose and Significance of the Research

The reasons I have chosen to the competences of preparatory teachers include the currency of immigration and my personal interest towards preparatory education as a field of work. I have completed a 5-week-teaching practice in a preparatory education class and in future, I would

like to work in such environment. Conducting the research will thus allow me to deepen my own professional skills. The literature review will reveal the theoretical framework that I will later use as a base for my Master's thesis.

Immigrant education and integration are pressing topics. The number of pupils in preparatory education in 2013 was 2800 whereas the predicted number in 2016 was over 10 000 (OAJ, 2015). It is reasonable to assume that immigration to Finland will continue in the future, and thus more teachers will encounter pupils from different cultural backgrounds in their work (Räsänen, 2005). The Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014) emphasizes the rights of every pupil to receive high quality education and individual support to achieve their full potential. There are no nationwide requirements determined for becoming a preparatory education teacher in Finland (Kyttälä et al., 2011.) Of the 189 teachers employed in preparatory education in 2013, only 79 percent were considered qualified (Kumpulainen, 2014).

The integration of immigrant pupils into Finland has been proved challenging (Mäkelä et al., 2017). Previous studies show that the educational attainment of young people with immigrant backgrounds is often lower than that of the native population (Kilpi, 2010). The role of the teacher in preventing social exclusion and promoting the wellbeing of pupils is significant but, at the same time, increases the workload of the profession, which is emphasized in schools with a high concentration of immigrants (Paavola & Talib, 2010). Research about teachers' competency to support pupils with an immigrant background is needed to create workable models for teachers and pupils in multicultural schools (Paavola & Talib, 2010).

By defining the competences needed as a preparatory education teacher, equal level of education for all and sensitive but effective integration of immigrants to Finland can be secured. However, it is important to note that while the role of teachers is indeed essential and important in the integration of pupils, one should also be aware that teachers work in certain structures and with certain resources, and that educational equality is not dependent solely on the skills of the teacher, but also other aspects of implementation of education need to be developed. In addition to school, integration is also affected by other factors, such as leisure activities.

The purpose of this research is to take part in the discussion about qualification requirements for teachers in preparatory education. The aims include offering gathered information to develop preparatory education teachers' training and improving the teachers' own understanding of the requirements of the work. High-quality teaching is guaranteed by professional, well-

trained staff (Laaksonen, 2009). As Kyttälä et al., (2011) state, a nationwide recommendation would make the knowledge and skills a teacher in preparatory education is expected to need visible. Given the specific teaching tasks and characteristics of preparatory education, it may be questioned whether a formal pedagogical qualification is sufficient to qualify as a teacher in preparatory education (Kyttälä et al., 2011).

2 Immigration, Multiculturalism and Integration

As one of the key tasks of preparatory education teachers is to implement teaching in a multicultural context and to support the integration of pupils, it is important to recognize what these perspectives and concepts mean. When considering preparatory education teachers' competency, it is vital to understand the context in which the teachers work. The concepts of immigration, multiculturalism and integration are thus addressed in this chapter.

Immigrant is a very complex and ambiguous term. According to Paavola and Talib (2010) an immigrant refers to a general concept of a person who has moved to another country than their country of origin, lives there temporarily or permanently and in which they have social ties, and it covers more specific terms of a refugee, asylum seeker, migrant, and returnee. A returnee is a someone living abroad who returns to their country of origin (Paavola & Talib, 2010). An asylum seeker seeks protection and the right to reside in a foreign country (Paavola & Talib, 2010; Sisäministeriö, n.d.). A person is considered a refugee if they are granted asylum in a foreign country due to a well-reasoned reason to fear persecution in their home country due to, for example, religion, nationality or race, which means that an asylum seeker acquires refugee status if they are granted asylum (Paavola & Talib, 2010; Sisäministeriö, n.d.). The concept of immigration therefore means moving to a foreign country (Paavola & Talib, 2010). The reasons for immigration include, for example, studies, work, family ties and poor social status or catastrophes in one's country of origin (Paavola & Talib, 2010; Saukkonen, 2013). So-called second-generation immigrants who have been born into immigrant families are also classified as immigrants (Kivirauma, Rinne and Tuittu, 2012).

In my research, the term pupil with an immigrant background is a central concept. By that I refer to the child's family background which does not bind the child precisely to any of the immigrant related terms defined above, but the child's background with immigration remains open. In my thesis, the term pupil with an immigrant background thus includes children who have moved to Finland and children born to immigrant families in Finland. It is important to remember that in the research, this group of pupils covers a rather heterogeneous group.

On one hand, immigration to Finland has a long history (Mäkelä et al., 2017) People from neighboring countries and areas have moved to Finland for centuries (Martikainen, Saari & Korkiasaari, 2013). On the other hand, the pace of migration in Finland has been slow compared

to many other European countries (Saukkonen 2013). The first significant group of migrants were the refugees from Chile and Vietnam who Finland received in the 1970s and 1980s (Kyntäjä, 2016; Latomaa, 2007). However, the pace of immigration began to accelerate in the 1990s, when refugees began to arrive in Finland as a result of various humanitarian crises (Mäkelä et al., 2017). In 2015, more asylum seekers arrived in Finland than ever before: 32 476 people applied for asylum while the year before, there were only approximately 3500 applications (Maahanmuuttovirasto, 2016). Immigration to Finland has continued to grow strongly during the recent years and is expected to continue to increase also in the near future. Although Finland receives refugees every year, work-related immigration is still the biggest reason for immigration to Finland (Maahanmuuttovirasto, 2022)

In 2019, there were 423 500 people with a foreign background living in Finland, which is about 8% of the total population (Sisäministeriö, 2021). Most immigrants, in total, were Estonians and Russians (Tilastokeskus, n.d.). The majority of refugees and asylum seekers were from Iraq, Somalia and Turkey (Suomen pakolaisapu, n.d.). The population with a foreign background is strongly concentrated in Uusimaa region in Southern Finland, where about half of all people with a foreign background living in Finland live (Sisäministeriö, 2021).

In the 21st century, multiculturalism has become a significant part of Finnish society and its values although Finland is still largely considered a culturally and linguistically homogeneous country (Mäkelä et al., 2017; Sajavaara, Luukka & Pöyhönen, 2007). Multiculturalism is a broad and ambiguous concept (Paavola & Talib, 2010). It can be considered to refer to the coexistence of different cultures and groups who differ in norms and practices (Huttunen, Löytty & Rastas, 2005) According to Paavola and Talib (2010) multiculturalism can be used to only refer to issues related to immigration and immigrants or also to other phenomena related to diversity, such as language, sexual orientation and disability. In my research the concept of immigration is central to the theme of multiculturalism as immigration-related themes are an integral part of preparatory education classrooms. However, I acknowledge that pupils with an immigrant background are diverse in many aspects.

Multicultural perspectives consider ethnic minorities as active integral participants rather than just foreigners or outsiders in the new host society (Algan, Bisin, Manning & Verdier, 2012). Multicultural immigration policy is thus based on respect and encouragement of ethnic diversity provided that different individuals function and work together in society through integration (Hiltunen, n.d.).

The concept of multiculturalism has also been widely criticized for reflecting unequal social power structures; those who have the power decide who carry the characteristics of multicultural or diverse (Dervin, 2013). The concept of multiculturalism often fails to consider the immigrant's subjective identity. For example, in schools many children are labeled as immigrants, and thus "others", although they would consider themselves Finnish (Dervin, 2013).

As in my research I address multiculturalism in educational context, by multiculturalism I mean all the different perspectives that there are in the original culture, language and religion of a pupil with an immigrant background compared to the dominant Finnish cultural tradition. However, I acknowledge Finnish culture tradition being dynamic and complex. It is also important to note that Finland has been culturally diverse already before the recent immigration flows as minorities, such as the Roma and Sami people and Finno-Swedes are part of the Finnish social cultural environment (Kyntäjä, 2003).

Integration refers to a dynamic and continuous interaction between immigrants and the new society and can therefore be considered a process in which immigrants try to adjust to a new culture (Finlex, 2010). The aim of integration is that immigrants adapt manners and norms in the new society that allow them to live and work there while also maintaining aspects from their original culture (Finlex, 2010; Alitolppa-Niitamo, 1994). Integration is considered successful when immigrants are able to act as equal members of the host society economically, socially and politically (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 1994; Talib, 2005).

Integration has been criticized since, by some definitions, it is seen as containing the idea that individuals should conform to the norms set by society (Harman, n.d.). It has been argued that inclusion would be the best approach to immigrants' adaptation to new societies, which emphasizes that structures should be accommodated to the needs of individuals (Harman, n.d.). The term integration is used in this study because of its prevalence. In my study, however, the values of inclusion are incorporated in the concept of integration. The research approaches integration taking into account the perspectives of immigrants. The concept of multiculturalism, defined above, includes the idea that the structures of the society are shaped in such way that respectful co-operation of different cultures is possible (Hiltunen, n.d.). The success of integration is thus influenced by both, the individual and the reception of the receiving society (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 1994; Pollari & Koppinen, 2011).

Assimilation can be seen as opposite of integration (Hiltunen, n.d.). According to assimilation theories, immigrants are expected to blend into the mainstream culture by gradually neglecting their original cultural patterns and multiculturalism is not considered to be valued (Algan, et al., 2012; Kivirauma et al., 2012). Even though assimilation policies dominated the reception of immigrants through the 20th century, different cultural integration patterns of immigrants have been researched by sociologists to an increasing extent since the late 19th century (Algan et al., 2012). In Finland, increased immigration began to affect the goals of the minority policy in the late 1990s (Kivirauma et al., 2012). Instead of assimilation, the goal nowadays is to integrate ethnic minorities to Finnish society (Kivirauma et al., 2012). Integration is implemented through language and orientation courses, schooling and finding employment (Kivirauma et al., 2012; Kyntäjä, 2016). However, unrealistic expectations of a fast integration often lead to failure in the integration process, which can be considered a problem in Finnish minority policy (Kyntäjä, 2016).

Pollari (1999) presents a theory of integration crisis that many immigrants experience when moving to a new country. The theory consists of four phases that are the honeymoon, shock, reaction and stabilization phases. A person who has just moved to a new country typically finds new things interesting. This honeymoon phase usually lasts about half years and eventually leads to the shock phase, which is often driven by unemployment, a lack of social contacts and worries about one's own or family's future which in turn arouses feelings of depression and homesickness. In the reaction phase, the person understands the permanence of the situation but does not yet adapt to it and especially in the case of children, emotions can erupt as aggressive opposition to the dominant culture. In the last phase, the person adapts to the situation, which is conveyed, for example, by the stabilization of emotional life. Undergoing these phases and thus the most critical time of the integration process usually takes about five years, but it can also last throughout one's whole life. It should be noted that integration is always a very personal process (Marjeta, 1998). As preparatory education teachers encounter pupils with immigrant backgrounds during their first years in the new country, the teacher must face the needs and feelings of the pupils during the crisis.

3 Preparatory Education

Preparatory education is organized for immigrant children who have newly arrived in Finland and for children with immigrant background who have moved to Finland before school age or are born in Finland but have insufficient proficiency in Finnish or Swedish language (Koponen, 2000). A pupil studying in preparatory education can therefore be any child whose native language is other than Finnish or Swedish and who does not have adequate language proficiency in the mentioned languages due to, for example, parents' immigrant background (Opetushallitus, 1999).

Preparatory education has only been implemented in Finland for approximately twenty years (Salo, 2004). The Finnish Basic Education Act (628/1998) legislates preparatory education to be provided. According to the Finnish Basic Education Act (628/1998), pupils with insufficient language skills are entitled to teaching in accordance with the curriculum on working days. The 2015 National Curriculum for Preparatory Education is currently being followed.

3.1 Organization of Teaching in Preparatory Education

From 2009 onwards, the scope of studying in preparatory education corresponds to one year of study (Nissilä, 2010). The minimum number of teaching hours in preparatory education for children aged six to ten is 900 hours and for children over ten years the minimum is 1000 hours (Nissilä, 2010; Opetushallitus, 2017). However, the pupil has the right to transfer to mainstream education as soon as the prerequisites for studying in mainstream education group are met even if all the assigned hours for preparatory education have not been used (Kyttälä et al., 2011; Nissilä, 2010; Opetushallitus, 2017).

No national syllabus or distribution of lesson hours have been defined for preparatory education (Nissilä, 2010; Opetushallitus, 2017). Instead, each pupil is made a personal study plan which defines the subjects the pupil will study in preparatory education, their content and number of hours used per subject, learning objectives, possible teaching of the pupil's native language, description of transition into basic education as well as any support measures the pupil may need during their studies in preparatory education (Opetushallitus, 2017; Päivärinta, 2010). The

plan for integration to general education states the teaching group into which the pupil is supposed to be integrated after having completed their studies in preparatory education and with which groups the pupil studies during the studies in preparatory education (Päivärinta, 2010). The skills that the pupil may have previously obtained in comparison with the Finnish curriculum are also defined in the personal study plan (Päivärinta, 2010).

The Finnish National Board of Education recommends that the group size of preparatory education does not exceed ten students (Opetushallitus, 2017). The education usually organized in different groups for pupils in grades one to six and pupils in grades seven to nine (Koponen 2000). Preparatory education classrooms are inevitably heterogenous as the pupils differ in age, reason for immigration, cognitive development, skill level and school background, religion, ethnicity and linguistic and culture backgrounds and new pupils often join the classroom at any point during the school year (Ikonen, 2010).

Numerical assessment is not used in preparatory education, but at the end of a completed preparatory education period, a certificate of participation is issued for the pupil (Nissilä, 2010; Opetushallitus, 2017). It describes the advancement of the pupil in studied subjects as well as the scope and content of teaching (Nissilä, 2010; Opetushallitus, 2017). Assessment is verbal and self-assessment is also taken into account and all teachers who have taught the pupil participate in the assessment process in addition to the teacher in preparatory education class (Opetushallitus, 2017). The pupil's proficiency in Finnish or Swedish is assessed on a separate language proficiency scale (Nissilä, 2010).

Pupils in preparatory education are entitled to student welfare services and special education as soon as needs for support arise and the three-tier support model, which includes general, intensified and special support, is provided (Opetushallitus, 2017). Other forms of support include, for example, interpretation and assistance services and special aids. (Perttula, 2010).

3.2 Aims and Main Contents of Preparatory Education

The main goal of preparatory education is that the student acquires sufficient skills to move to mainstream education which means that the focus of teaching is supporting the student's linguistic capabilities by promoting the student's proficiency in Finnish or Swedish (Nissilä, 2010;

Opetushallitus, 2015; Opetushallitus, 2017). Knowing the language in which the pupil completes their studies guarantees the pupil's success in current and future studies (Nissilä, 2010). The acquisition of a new language usually takes at least six years (Talib 2005). The development of the Finnish language thus requires time.

Language teaching focuses on the basics and where applicable, the objectives and contents may be the same as in the subject of Finnish as a second language defined in the Finnish Core Curriculum for Basic Education (Nissilä, 2010). In preparatory education, themes that are addressed relate to the pupil's own close environment and the taught vocabulary includes family, food, clothes, everyday objects, transport and terms related to time, such as days of the week and months (Nissilä, 2010). Emphasis is also placed on words related to Finnish culture, such as nature vocabulary or common holidays (Nissilä, 2010). The pupil learns to express the present and use different verbs and, in addition to grammar and vocabulary, listening, reading comprehension, pronunciation of the sounds missing from the pupil's home language and the Finnish reading and writing direction are taught (Nissilä, 2010). At the end of a completed preparatory education period, the pupil should be at least able to ask basic questions and respond to the same questions or requests, write and name simple things whereas more advanced pupil shows more initiative in communication, such as giving own opinions or using emotion or courtesy phrases (Nissilä, 2010).

In addition to languages, the pupils also study other subjects which are selected by keeping in mind the student's transition to a mainstream education classroom of their own age group (Päivärinta, 2010). Where the main objective for pupils in general education is to learn the contents of the subjects, the pupils in preparatory education also practice their Finnish or Swedish as a second language skills at the same time (Kyttälä et al., 2011). Thus, the contents of the subjects must be adapted so that they are more suitable for students learning the language (Kyttälä et al., 2011). There may also be subjects in a Finnish school that are not studied in the pupil's country of origin (Päivärinta, 2010).

3.3 Integration of Pupils into Finnish Society and School

Basic education has a major role in the successful integration of children with an immigrant background (Kivirauma et al., 2012). Research shows that adaptation to school community makes a significant contribution to adaptation to the new home country (Soilamo, 2008). One

of the most important aims of preparatory education is thus supporting the pupil's integration into the Finnish society (Nissilä, 2010). Where every pupil should be faced as an individual, the experiences of participation and sense of belonging are also considered important in the Finnish Core Curriculum for Basic Education (Opetushallitus, 2004). In addition to adaptation to new society in the pupils' current life situation, the aim of integration in school context includes the pupil being able to acquire education that ensures them becoming an equal member of the society also as an adult (Korpela 2010).

Integration is most rapid when integrating the child into general education as soon as possible (Opetushallitus, 2004). In transition to general education, the student's age level should be considered (Päivärinta, 2010). Developing children tend to find it important to feel like an equal member of their own age group and studying with younger peers than oneself may arouse feelings of embarrassment which reduces motivation towards schooling and thus may make it more difficult to feel like a part of the student community (Päivärinta, 2010).

Social relations are seen as improving factors of integration of children and young people especially when the friend and the pupil with an immigrant background are at the same level in their social, emotional, and cognitive development (Korpela, 2010). The school provides an important environment for creating a social friend network in addition to learning the language and customs of the new country (Kivirauma et al., 2012). Integration efforts in preparatory education include supporting formation of friendships (Kivirauma et al., 2012). In teaching of Finnish language, the ability to communicate socially is emphasized (Nissilä, 2010). During their studies in preparatory education pupils mainly study in the classroom of preparatory education but integration into mainstream education in artistic and practical subjects begins at an early stage as in them pupils can participate regardless of the level of their language skills (Kyttälä et al., 2011; Päivärinta, 2010). Pupils attend teaching of physical education, music, textile or technical work, home economics and visual arts with other groups than the preparatory education group (Kyttälä et al., 2011).

When moving to a new country and getting to know its culture, an awareness of one's original culture and emphasizing an individual's ethnic identity should be considered (Marjeta, 1998). Promoting pupil's mastery of their native or home language and emphasizing their own cultural knowledge are some key objectives in preparatory education (Nissilä, 2010). The importance of being able to use one's own native language is significant in the integration process (Ojukangas, 2011). According to the Finnish Constitution, everyone living in Finland has the right

to develop and maintain their native language and original culture which is also considered in preparatory education (Nissilä, 2010). In addition, the appreciation of multilingualism in the school community increases pupils' motivation towards studying (Ojutkangas, 2011). The Finnish Core Curriculum recognizes Finnish society being diverse, and interest in own as well as other cultures is promoted through genuine interaction across languages, beliefs and cultures (Opetushallitus, 2004)

Communication and cooperation between home and school supports integration (Korpela, 2011). It is considered important that both, school as well as home have the necessary and sufficient information about each others: interaction with guardians provides additional knowledge about the pupil and helps in planning and implementation of teaching and when school appreciates the families' values, parents' trust in school's activities increases (Korpela, 2010).

3.4 Training of Preparatory Education Teachers

Regulations on the qualification requirements for teaching staff (OPM 986/1998) apply to classroom, subject, pre-school and special education teachers. However, there are no nationwide requirements determined for becoming a preparatory education teacher in Finland and the law does not tell in which eligibility group preparatory education teachers belong to (Jonkka, 2015; Kyttälä et al., 2011 Andonov, 2013). Thus, the municipalities can themselves decide the required qualifications which may be different from each other (Kyttälä et al., 2011). In some parts of the country, eligibility in special education is mandatory whereas in others it is enough that the applicant has completed the mainstream classroom teacher training which has led to inequalities between municipalities and teachers as the same teacher may not be eligible to teach in another municipality (Andonov 2013; Kyttälä et al., 2011). Attempts have been made to intervene to determine the eligibility of preparatory education teachers in 2016-2017 but the matter has not yet changed (Jonkka, 2015).

In Finland, studies included in teacher education that prepare for multicultural education are limited and vary greatly from university to university (Jokikokko & Järvelä, 2013). In 2018, each university that offered teacher training included only one compulsory course in its curriculum that dealt with multiculturalism (Ihalainen, 2018). In Oulu, education line called Intercultural Teacher Education acts as an example of education that offers capabilities working in

multicultural and international contexts (Räsänen, 2014). Although multiculturalism is addressed in specific courses during the training, themes related to multiculturalism are also considered throughout the whole program (Räsänen, 2014).

Complementary, extracurricular studies that provide competencies for teaching groups where the majority has an immigrant background are possible to complete in all teacher education cities in Finland (Ihalainen, 2018). The University of Turku offers a 25-credit-unit called “Basics of teaching preparatory education” as well as a similar entity of 15 credits called “Additional skills for preparatory education teachers” (Ihalainen, 2018). Teaching Finnish as a second language studies are offered by the Universities of Helsinki, Tampere, Turku and Oulu and the Jyväskylä Open university (Ihalainen, 2018).

4 Teaching in a Multicultural and Heterogenous Group

The role of a teacher working with pupils with an immigrant background differs from the role a teacher teaching in a mainstream education classroom in its diversity (Matinheikki-Kokko 1999). The challenges posed by cultural diversity in classrooms can be linguistic or relate to different cultural and religious values (Virta & Tuittu, 2013). According to Matinheikki-Kokko (1999), teachers working in multicultural environments are required to have special knowledge, skills and attitudes, such as the ability to differentiate teaching and having understanding towards the pupils' original cultures while at the same time spreading atmosphere that promotes integration. Immigrants' integration to Finnish society depends in many ways on the competence and expertise of school staff (Salo, 2004). In this chapter, I will address these different particular skills required of preparatory education teachers.

4.1 Teachers' Intercultural Competence

Teachers in preparatory education encounter different cultural issues daily. According to Paavola and Talib (2010) intercultural competence can be defined as an ability and will to address multicultural encounters in classrooms in a positive manner. Mikkola (2001) emphasizes mutual respect in the context of intercultural competence. Understanding oneself but also acknowledging different lifestyles is an important part of intercultural competence (Talib, 2005). Also Dervin and Gross (2016) state that working in multicultural environment requires being aware and accepting diversity. Culturally conscious communication is a crucial part of multicultural implementation of education (Özturgut, 2011). However, knowledge of foreign languages alone is not seen as intercultural competence (Jokikokko, 2010).

In literature, another term used for the competence of teachers who working in multicultural environment is called culturally sensitive teaching. Culturally sensitive teaching represents a non-racist approach to education that considers pupil's own cultural characteristics supporting learning (Gay, 2002). According to Salo (2004) culturally sensitive teachers have the ability to encounter different ethnicities and to act naturally in situations that require certain kind of cultural recognition.

Jokikokko (2010) has researched the process of teachers' intercultural learning and intercultural competence in teachers' work. According to Jokikokko (2010), intercultural competence can be seen as a holistic, ethical orientation towards multiple aspects of life. Although the context of intercultural competence includes a multicultural encounter, intercultural competence should not be considered only a separate part of teachers' professionalism especially in today's global world and multicultural schools (Jokikokko, 2010). Intercultural competence is thus reflected in all the choices that teachers make in the classrooms and outside of them (Jokikokko, 2010).

According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), there are six prerequisites for teachers that are needed to implement culturally sensitive teaching which are socio-cultural awareness, attitudes, commitment and skills to create change, constructivist conception of learning, knowledge of pupils and practicing culturally sensitive teaching methods. Jokikokko (2002) has created a model of intercultural competence that consists of four dimensions that are cultural awareness, skills to act in multicultural situations, attitudes towards cultural diversity and action. Having intercultural competence requires aspects from all these dimensions as, for example, awareness or skills are not enough if there is no courage to act or if one lacks positive attitude towards multiculturalism (Jokikokko, 2002).

Having intercultural competence is possible for every teacher even though it develops more easily for teachers who have experience living in a different cultural environment than the majority of the population (Paavola & Talib, 2005). However, encountering different cultures does not automatically lead to the development of intercultural competence, but it requires reflection on multicultural themes and the issues multicultural situations may raise (Paavola & Talib, 2005). Intercultural learning is a life-long process in which the outcome and learning are intertwined and both equally important (Jokikokko, 2010). As Jokikokko (2010) highlights, there is no ready-made package for teacher students to memorize so that they would become fully intercultural competent before entering work life.

4.2 Supporting Pupils with an Immigrant Background in Learning and Their New Life Situations

The students in preparatory education differ in age, background and skill level (Salo, 2014). The starting points for learning inside one preparatory education classroom for each pupil may

be very different. (Nissilä, Vaarala, Pitkänen & Dufva, 2009). Individual needs must be considered in teaching arrangements (Nilsson & Axelsson, 2013). According to Ikonen (2005), a teacher working in a heterogeneous group is required to have effective differentiation skills. Differentiation in preparatory education means considering the needs of individual pupils in teaching arrangements through time spent on teaching of certain subjects and their contents and use of diverse work methods and materials (Opetushallitus, 2015).

Pupils with immigrant backgrounds have also been found to have different learning difficulties (Nissilä et al., 2009). The reasons for needs for support are diverse, and some are the same as for pupils with no background with immigration, such as difficulties related to speaking, reading, writing or mathematics (Nissilä et al., 2009). In addition to learning difficulties, it is common that pupils with an immigrant background also have other types of challenges, such as post-traumatic problems, that contribute to learning debilitatingly (Antikainen, Paavola, Pirinen, Salonen, Tiusanen & Wiman, 2015; Nissilä et al., 2009). Linguistic challenges increase pupil's stress which in turn can cause behavioral and socio-emotional regulation problems (Eres, 2016). Poor language skills may also make it difficult to form social relations and thus contribute to loneliness, exclusion and bullying (Eres, 2016; Talib, 2005).

Kyttälä et al. (2011) argue that preparatory education acts as a form of enhanced support that is not based on diagnosed learning difficulties but the desire to bring out the student's full learning potential. Obiakor (2007) presents that preparatory education can be characterized in terms of multicultural special education. Distinguishing learning difficulties from deficient language skills can be difficult (Kyttälä et al., 2011). The fact that many of the tools available to identify learning difficulties are language- and culture-related and designed for Finnish-speaking students increases the difficulty of identification of learning difficulties in pupils with immigrant backgrounds (Arvonen, Katva & Nurminen, 2009). In addition, problems of pupils with an immigrant background in school can be very wide-ranging and therefore, tackling learning difficulties alone is not enough and pupil support should be more holistic (Nissilä et al., 2009). When determining support measures for pupils with an immigrant background, the aim is to distinguish whether there is a broader difficulty in understanding, a difficulty in learning, or difficulty in learning and understanding the new language (Laaksonen, 2009). Challenges related to recognizing learning difficulties enforce preparatory education teachers to develop their special education and differentiation skills (Nissilä et al., 2009).

A safe atmosphere can be considered a prerequisite for learning. (Ikonen, 2005). Having pupils with similar experiences in one class creates opportunities for pupils with an immigrant background to explore their new life situation (Öster, 1998). One important purpose of preparatory education is to create a safe learning environment that offers balance and consistency to the pupils' lives (Öster, 1998). A safe learning environment promotes learning and, in turn, facilitates adaptation to the new Finnish environment. (Öster 1998.) The teacher should create a sense of security in the classroom (Ikonen, 2005). To enhance trust between pupils and the teacher, it is important that the teacher knows their pupils as well as possible (Ikonen, 2005). That is especially important for pupils coming from different cultural backgrounds (Terry & Irwing, 2010).

However, getting to know pupils in preparatory education may be complicated as new pupils often come into the group in the middle of the semester (Ikonen, 2005). The absence of common language or means of communication also makes it difficult (Talib et al., 2004). Preparatory education teachers are thus required to have flexibility and the ability to constantly adapt to new situations (Ikonen, 2005).

When a new pupil with an immigrant background enters the school, the teacher must, at the same time, balance their own as well as the student's cultural shock (Talib et al, 2004). The teacher may not know anything about the culture the student is from beforehand as well as for the pupil, Finnish culture is completely new. It is impossible to motivate the pupil towards learning if the teacher has no knowledge of their culture (Eres, 2016). A teacher who is interested in their pupils' backgrounds, worldviews, and characters enhances the learning experience and learning outcomes (Terry & Irwing, 2010). Igoa (1995) points out a few key factors in supporting children's integration to a new society which include appreciating children's roots and backgrounds and having a true will to understand different cultures. Thus, the teacher must get to know in advance the cultures from which pupils arrive in the school (Pollari & Koppinen 2011). It may be difficult to accept that pupils with immigrant backgrounds behave differently if the teacher is unfamiliar with different cultures (Soilamo, 2008). However, the teacher must be careful not to encounter the pupil through common, even harmful stereotypes (Dervin & Gross, 2016). According to research, many teachers do not want to put individuals in the spotlight resulting in them becoming contributors of colour blindness and reinforcing cultural stereotypes and classification (Nieto & Bode, 2008; Norberg, 2000; Obondo, Lahdenperä & Sandevärn, 2016).

Salo (2014) has studied preparatory education teachers' practical knowledge and professional development in his doctoral dissertation. He emphasizes the dual role of preparatory education teachers in promoting the integration of immigrant pupils while at the same time supporting the preservation of pupils' own native language and culture (Salo, 2014). In his research, Salo (2004) states that the teachers act as a kind of gateway to Finnish society and an example of Finnish culture for the pupils. Therefore, the teacher is required to have the ability to navigate sensitively between cultures in such way that new Finnish customs are not forced on the pupil.

In addition, situations where a pupil's family does not accept the pupil adapting habits from Finnish culture poses challenges to teaching as the pupil lives in a conflicting situation between two cultures and the valuable work the teachers do for the benefit of the pupil is not appreciated (Soilamo, 2008). Teachers in preparatory education face multiculturalism working with both pupils as well as parents. In Soilamo's (2008) research, teachers who taught pupils with immigrant backgrounds experienced the co-operation between parents challenging: the slowness of interpretation services makes communication more difficult, and many parents' perceptions of school differ from educational views in Finland (Soilamo, 2008).

Preparatory education teachers emphasize their broad societal role (Salo, 2004). According to Salo (2004), preparatory education teachers feel that pupils in preparatory education classrooms need knowledge that pupils without immigration background have acquired already in early childhood education. If the pupil has not attended school in their country of origin, at the beginning they need support on how to attend Finnish schooling and follow school policies, such as having school supplies with them or learning road signs so that they are safe when arriving at or leaving school (Nissilä, 2010). In many countries, studying is not a prerequisite for getting a job (Salo, 2004). Thus, a teacher in preparatory education must take on the role of study counselor as well while encouraging the pupils to continue their studies after comprehensive education or presenting different professional possibilities in Finland (Salo, 2004). For families, the preparatory education teacher may appear to be a representative of the entire school system and an expert in Finnish social service network (Lankinen, 2019). This may mean extra work and dedication that mainstream teachers do not face so often.

5 Discussion

This study has examined the needed competences of teachers working in preparatory education classrooms. It is important to note that the research is only a small overview of the topic and further research is needed. According to Salo (2004), not much academic research has been done directly about preparatory education teachers' competency in Finland.

As my research follows the methodology of a literature review, my own educational background in Intercultural Teacher Education or experiences about preparatory education have not been able to significantly impact the results and thus reduce the reliability of the study. This chapter, however, presents some of my own views on working in preparatory education that support the research data and information I have collected from previously done research.

This study reveals that the organization of teaching in preparatory education is unique due to many different factors and the objectives in preparatory and general education are fundamentally slightly different. For example, making the pupils' own study plans is one of the special tasks of a preparatory education teacher. The teacher is required to be flexible and differentiate teaching so that the age, educational background and the level of the development of Finnish language is considered. Pupils with an immigrant background may have various socio-emotional challenges due to the life change caused by immigration or trauma, and the teacher supports the pupils in adapting to Finnish society and school. In addition, the teachers must in one year be able to identify which pupils may have diagnosable learning difficulties and whose difficulties are solely due to the weakness of the Finnish language. Intercultural competence and encountering multiculturalism in everyday life and in cooperation between home and school is a significant part of preparatory education teachers' competency.

Today, however, there are pupils with an immigrant background in almost every classroom, and one may question whether the work of a teacher in preparatory education differs significantly from that of teachers in mainstream education. Intercultural competence, differentiation skills, co-operation and flexibility are considered a part of every teacher's competency and needed in every classroom. A Dutch research (Wubbels, den Brok, Veldman, & van Tartwijk, 2006) on teachers' interpersonal competence in multicultural classrooms can be compared in part to this study as at least 75 percent of pupils in the classrooms belonged to minorities. Based on the research (Wubbels et al., 2006), the work of a teacher who teaches pupils with immigrant

backgrounds may not differ so much from the work of a teacher whose classroom does not include as many pupils with immigrant backgrounds.

However, Wubbels et al. (2006) also state that teaching in a multicultural classroom does place heavier demands on teachers' generic competence than teaching in a more homogenous class environment. Many classroom teachers experience that their work has clearly changed and their workload increased with the arrival of immigrant pupils in the classrooms (Soilamo, 2008.) Multilingualism and multiculturalism have introduced new challenges to teaching (Soilamo, 2008). According to some teachers, having pupils with an immigrant background in the classroom requires more careful preparation of lessons and learning materials, explaining concepts more precisely and making sure the pupils have actually understood them (Soilamo, 2008). However, such language-conscious teaching, where for example the clarity of given instructions should be considered, is nowadays a requirement for all teachers and is considered to benefit each pupil.

There are also disagreements about what would be the best educational background for the professional group of preparatory education teachers or what kind of training is needed working in preparatory education. For example, Kyttälä et al. (2011) argue that the work of a preparatory education teacher is very similar to that of special education teachers. The everyday life of preparatory education and special education classrooms is in many ways similar: in both groups pupils' progress is made individually at the level of each pupil's linguistic and cognitive development, the content is adapted accordingly and each pupil is provided with special teaching methods (Kyttälä et al., 2011). In addition, the training for special education teachers provides competences to face a very heterogenous group in terms of learning conditions and effective skills to identify children who struggle with diagnosable learning difficulties, which are also needed working as a preparatory education teacher (Kyttälä et al., 2011). Andonov (2013), in turn, argues that neither the traditional classroom teacher education nor that of a special education teacher fully corresponds to the skills required of teachers in preparatory education, which they states to be broader than competences of classroom or special education teachers. According to Andonov (2013), the training in the above-mentioned fields of education does not provide tools for, among others, intercultural implementation of education. Ihalainen (2018) has interviewed preparatory education teachers about their educational background in their Master's thesis. Some teachers felt that the skill to teach Finnish was the most important part of the work. According to some teachers interviewed by Ihalainen (2018), language didactic background was found useful. Knowledge of language relatives and other similarities between languages

helped the teachers to cope with many different languages even when they did not actually master them (Ihalainen, 2018). Teachers who had studied languages also experienced understanding what it is to learn a foreign language (Ihalainen, 2018).

However, it may not be necessary to compare preparatory education teachers to other educational professionals, but instead focus on whether teachers in preparatory education feel that they have received a comprehensive training that meets the requirements of the work and enables the development of the above-mentioned competences. Eres (2016) has studied the challenges faced by teachers who teach pupils with immigrant backgrounds in Turkey. According to Eres' study (2016), teachers feel that they have not received enough knowledge and understanding to teach in multicultural groups. Teachers report the need for training about cultural and psychological characteristics of pupils with immigrant backgrounds (Eres, 2016). Hoover, Smith-Davis, Baca and Love (2008) state that teachers working with pupils with immigrant backgrounds often have inadequate training for the work.

Having almost finished my Bachelor's studies in Intercultural Teacher Education, I personally feel I have received a holistic understanding of the multicultural aspects of teachers' work. However, the training focuses mainly on general education and without my own interest and commitment to preparatory education I do not feel that the training would have provided enough concrete tools to work as a teacher in preparatory education. For example, I have not received any training to teach Finnish as a second language. Based on my experiences, Finnish as a second language teaching was the largest significant difference between preparatory and mainstream education classrooms.

Matinheikki-Kokko (1999), has characterized the versatility of preparatory education teachers' work and competency. Preparatory education teachers can be considered mergers, survivors, Finnish as a second language teachers, bilingual teachers, enrichers and part-time workers (Matinheikki-Kokko, 1999). When it comes to the challenges preparatory education teachers face, it is also important to highlight the positive aspects of the work. Preparatory education teachers interviewed by Panula and Parviainen (2016) in their Master's thesis were mainly satisfied with their work and especially following the rapidly developing language skills of the pupils and a high motivation to study in the classroom were seen as meaningful parts of the work. Having completed an internship in preparatory education, I also identify the characteris-

tics of teaching pupils with an immigrant background mentioned in this study that pose challenges to teacher's competency, but nonetheless I found teaching in preparatory education a very meaningful and rewarding job that I might want to pursue in the future.

This research presents preparatory education teachers as flexible multi-professionals in the field of education with willingness to develop themselves as educators and cares. The issue of preparatory education teachers' competency is not considered simple, but more complex. Working in preparatory education requires a combination and a wide range of skills also needed from language, special education and classroom teachers or, in general, from anyone teaching a heterogeneous group including pupils with immigrant backgrounds. Regardless of whether a specific training line will be formed for preparatory education teachers in the future developing the mainstream teacher education to meet the competences needed working as a preparatory education teacher would benefit each professional group in the field of education as themes of multiculturalism are a significant part of today's educational environment.

6 References

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