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Research paper

Educators' perspectives related to preparatory education and integration training for immigrants in Finland



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ABSTRACT

This study explored educators' perceptions of preparatory education and integration training for immigrants in Finland. It included twelve semi-structured interviews of teachers working with adult or child immigrants. A thematic analysis identified: 1. Variances in students' knowledge, skill, and experience complicate integration; 2. Flexibility, the ability to alter classwork to suit students' needs, and the lack of preparatory support or relevant materials in diverse classrooms are problematic; 3. Adult immigrants' perception as workers, not students, results in a disconnect between expectations. A holistic/ecological approach to addressing the challenges is required to support integration and inclusion better.
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1. Introduction

Finland has seen an increased influx of immigrants during the last two decades. The reasons for the migration include work and study opportunities, family relations, and the need for asylum (Martikainen, 2013). Immigration varies but has risen since 26 000 arrived in 2010 (Statista, 2021). These records show it peaked in 2016 with 34 905 in 2016 and decreased in 2020 to 32 898. With a countrywide population of 5.54 million, 8.5% have a foreign background (Statista, 2022; Tilastokeskus, n.d.). The majority come from Eastern Europe, with current increases due to situations in Ukraine and Northern Africa (Statistics Finland, 2022). This source also shows that Finland received many asylum seekers during the 2015 Arab Spring.

This increased multiethnicity in society (e.g., Civitillo et al., 2017; Gutentag et al., 2017) and diverse school populations have become a concern among teachers (Acquah et al., 2020; Sinkkonen & Kyttälä, 2014). Educators now call for a prioritization of strategies and actions promoting the integration and inclusion of immigrants. The situation also increases the demand for teachers, teacher education, professional development opportunities, and resources as teaching now requires knowledge and understanding of students' diverse backgrounds.

Although Finnish education has been acknowledged and praised internationally, the country has failed to ensure equity for immigrants. Finnish teacher education programs are ill-equipped to support prospective teachers in developing skills to work in multicultural settings, and there is a lack of in-service professional development opportunities regarding work with immigrant students (Alisaari et al., 2019; Sinkkonen & Kyttälä, 2014). In addition, the push towards technology due to the recent Covid-19 pandemic and the variances in the availability of resources due to various regional issues further complicates Finnish teachers' need for awareness and knowledge about multicultural education, which is currently quite low as the shift demands more resources and training (Acquah et al., 2016). Although research on multicultural education in Finland is common, it views diversity narrowly in terms of ethnicity, immigrant languages, and religion while not accounting for bilingual students or local cultures; this would include the situation of Finland-Swedish, a minority language, as a second language in integration education (Holm & Londen, 2010).

This research aimed to capture the relationships between main

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actors in integration education in Finland from educators' perspectives. It does this by: (1) seeking to understand the experiences of L2 educators working with newly arrived immigrants in Finland; (2.) exploring the current challenges with preparatory education and integration training in Finland; and (3) capturing educators' perspectives on the relationships between main actors (schools, policymakers, students, parents) in the Finnish L2 Education for newly arrived immigrants. It contributes to the current understanding of L2 education of Finland-Swedish and the challenges present in the institutions teaching it. The interviews in this article comprise two types of educators which we will refer to by separate terms to avoid confusion. Those who teach in compulsory education schools will be referred to as teachers as they meet the most traditional definition. Instructors are those who assist adult immigrants in integration training and the term educators will refer to both. In addition, adult migrants outside of the public school system will be referred to as learners. The term pupils will refer to children in public schools, both native and immigrant. The term students will refer to both. The research questions are:

1. What systems are in place to support the L2 Education and integration of newly arrived immigrants in Finland?
2. What challenges do Finnish educators face in supporting newly arrived immigrants?
3. How are Finnish educators of immigrant students prepared and supported in their teaching?

2. Background

2.1. Preparatory education and integration training in Finland

The education provided to immigrants is in Finnish or Finland-Swedish, Finland's two official languages. This study focuses solely on Finland-Swedish-speaking schools located in Western Finland. Regions here have traditionally Finland-Swedish-speaking populations and use Finland-Swedish as the school instruction medium. Public schools throughout Finland provide immigrant preparatory support for pupils entering basic, secondary, upper, and vocational education. These schools and their teachers have broad freedoms regarding what suits their structure and the pupils' needs. As such, decisions on curriculum, practices, materials, and programs regarding integration are made within the district. However, they consider curricula from The Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE), formerly the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE). The curriculum guarantees one year of preparatory education (FNAE, 2012a). This education provides the pupils with Finnish or Finland-Swedish language skills, necessary academic fundamentals, and cultural knowledge.

Adults are provided with year-long training according to the National Core Curriculum for Integration Training for Adult Migrants (2012a):

> The training promotes social justice, creates conditions for open democracy and welfare and prevents exclusion […] integration training prepares adult migrants for the operating methods of Finnish society, a sustainable lifestyle and everyday life skills […] The training encourages them towards interaction between different cultural groups and with the mainstream population. Integration training promotes ethnic relations and does not allow discrimination in any form or by anyone. (FNBE 2012a, p. 10).

Only adult immigrants with a permit to stay in Finland can receive integration training. This training provides linguistic, social, cultural, and life management skills. Still, not all adult immigrants meet the criteria for having an individual integration plan (IIP). Only those unemployed, receiving social assistance, and deemed in need qualify for an IPP (Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2010). Once registered as unemployed, establishing a suitable IIP takes place after assessing immigrants' language proficiency and learning skills. The assessment's results, combined with previous experiences, interests, and needs, constitute the basis of an IIP, which includes:

- Finnish/Swedish language and communication skills
- Civic and working life skills
- Guidance counseling
- Work placement periods

The stated objective of L2 training for all students is to achieve a skill level equivalent to B1 in Finnish or Finland-Swedish in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (FNBE, 2012a). Finland uses its YKI test to measure the Finland-Swedish dialect and Finnish, where B1 is equivalent to level 3 (FNBE, 2012b).

The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (2010) and The National Core Curriculum for Integration Training for Adult Migrants (2012a) support the creation of IIPs. However, for those with a low level of reading and writing skills in languages other than Finnish or Swedish, there is a separate curriculum, the "National Core Curriculum for Literacy Training" (FNBE 2012b).

However, previous documents only support the "Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration" (2010) enacted by the Finnish Ministry of the Interior, which establishes the process of creating IIPs. This act defines integration as:

> … interactive development involving immigrants and society at large, the aim of which is to provide immigrants with the knowledge and skills required in society and working life and to provide them with support so that they can maintain their culture and language. (p. 1)

While the system set up to draft these plans considers much by including the municipality, employment office, economic office, and the immigrant, they fail to include the educational systems that provide one of the main goals: education. The combined issues of insufficient training offered to immigrants and educational institutions' absence in IIP constructions is problematic. The result is that many immigrants rate Finland poorly in a recent survey in which Finland ranked 39th of 59 by expats after being 19th, the primary reasons being difficulty with the language, an inability to find suitable jobs in their field, and a general lack of ease in the life (Smith, 2021).

2.2. Barriers to integration

Although these policies, services, and guidelines for integration training exist, research shows that adult immigrants face barriers to successful integration in Finland. These barriers are workplace segregation, a lack of cultural capital relevant to Finland, and discrimination in the labor market due to language and ethnicity (Ismail, 2019; Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, 2020; OECD, 2017, 2018b). Though a 2015 reform to the Finnish Discrimination act broadened the concept of discrimination, enforcing anti-discrimination laws is challenging because discrimination is often implicit or difficult to prove (OECD, 2017). Furthermore, despite the significant focus on language learning in the first year, over 80% of those who finished the courses failed to reach a level that allows them to enter vocational training, and 60% failed to reach levels that enable entry into work following preparatory courses (OECD,

2018a). A survey of immigrants' work and well-being found that nearly 25% feel integration assistance is insufficient (Tilastokeskus, 2014). Now, the Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare (THL) recommends exploring new solutions for improving language skills (2022).

Finnish public schools have broad freedoms in educating immigrant pupils, receiving government support for this purpose. It has been noted recently that the achievement gap between native Finns and immigrant students is one of the largest in the EU (OECD, 2019). This is not due to immigrants' lack of trying, given that the OECD (2018) found immigrant pupils were generally more motivated to achieve than native Finnish students. However, immigrant pupils face discrimination by peers and adults in school, challenges acquiring the language of instruction, and segregation (Hummelstedt et al., 2021; Ismail, 2019; OECD, 2018a, 2018b). In fact, immigrant pupils face some of the highest segregation rates across OECD countries (OECD, 2019).

2.3. Experiences of educators working with newly arrived immigrants

In Finland, diversity has increased with immigration since 1990 (Korkiasaari & Söderling 2003). Increased immigration often creates conflicts between the native and newly immigrated populations (Schneider, 2008). This conflict extends to the classroom, where the native population determines the contextual definition of diversity. In 2010, Holm & Londen pointed out that linguistic diversity is seen solely as immigrant language diversity. They furthered that Finland failed to consider its bilingual nature in its multicultural education. This is unsurprising as Finnish teachers focus on commonalities and prefer color-blindness over multiculturalism, leaving issues of race and nationality unaddressed (Mansikka & Holm, 2011; Rissanen et al., 2015). This color-blindness may be a response to the challenges multicultural classrooms present. As Jokikokko (2005) points out, even teachers specially trained for multicultural classrooms may find the situation difficult. The author adds that these teachers see intercultural competence needed in multicultural classrooms as a holistic attitude and worldview. These are not practical skills and are difficult to teach. Hummelstedt et al. (2021) show that this lack of attitude and worldview exacerbates immigrant pupils' categorization as outsiders. They explain that the categorization is sometimes done explicitly by peers and implicitly in innocuous interactions where they struggle alone.

3. Method

3.1. Data collection

Data was collected through semi-structured individual interviews with 12 educators of Finland-Swedish in Western Finland. Gender is not stated in order to protect anonymity further. The objective of the study was specific with a small population. This fact necessitated purposive sampling in areas where Finland-Swedish is the language of schools and daily life (Patton, M.Q. 2002). The sample was limited because preparatory education and integration training are not available in all schools and institutions. Also, the study focused on preparatory education and integration training in a minority language. Based on these circumstances, 12 interviews were appropriate for reaching saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This was confirmed when consistent information emerged from the interviews. The recruitment process started with identifying schools and institutions offering preparatory education for pupils and integration programs for newly arrived adult learners. Next, the researchers used email and phone calls to contact potential participants at the locations. Of those educators who volunteered to participate in the study, six were preparatory education teachers, and six were instructors of integration programs for newly arrived adult immigrants. The interviews focused on their experiences, challenges, and needs related to L2 teaching and learning for newly arrived immigrants. Questions on their experiences included those inquiring about their education prior to the course and their perceived preparedness. Those questions about challenges pertained to class backgrounds, common issues, and strategies for managing class issues. The questions on needs centered around what traditional and digital materials teachers require and how they use them. Follow-up questions allowed for the revelation of information pertinent to the discussion regarding areas that interested the researchers. According to the educators' availability, the interviews lasted approximately 1 h. Five interviews took place at the schools; the rest were remote interviews. This difference was a result of Covid-19 restrictions at that time. Using an interview protocol and a checklist during the interviews ensured similar data collection procedures by the two researchers. Before the interviews, researchers provided the participants with information about the study's objectives, anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntariness. The participants also provided their written consent for recording the interviews and publishing the results. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized. The transcripts were then translated into English by one of the researchers.

3.2. Data analysis

Two authors analyzed the interviews using thematic analysis, as Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined. The steps used were: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, and (5) defining and naming themes. An iterative process guided the steps in which the whole team provided feedback throughout the entire process. Two researchers read the transcribed articles twice, once to familiarize themselves with the content and a second to code. There were initial disagreements in coding due to overlapping quotes relevant to multiple themes. The researchers reached a compromise after a discussion and input from another researcher. They then categorized these and shared the results with the entire team, which resulted in alterations and the creation of a mind map. Over two meetings, the two primary researchers discussed, categorized, and specified the themes. The initial meeting resulted in a lack of consensus, at which point they created independent lists. The second meeting combined these lists with eventual oversight by a third researcher who helped lessen the number of themes from four to three by folding one of them into two others. A presentation to the whole team of these ideas occurred, and the researchers reached a consensus on the themes.

4. Results

4.1. Overview

The final three themes are: (1) Student Heterogeneity Complicates Integration Education; (2) Flexibility and the Lack of Preparatory Support in Diverse Classrooms; and (3) Arriving Immigrants as Workers, Not Students. Each consists of subthemes consisting of multiple codes (See Fig. 1). Each theme connects to a different aspect of the teaching experience. Descriptions are ordered to facilitate the narrative seen by researchers and the themes' connections to various institutions. The first theme relates to immigrant students, the second to educators, and the last to government institutions' bureaucracies. They move between discussions of

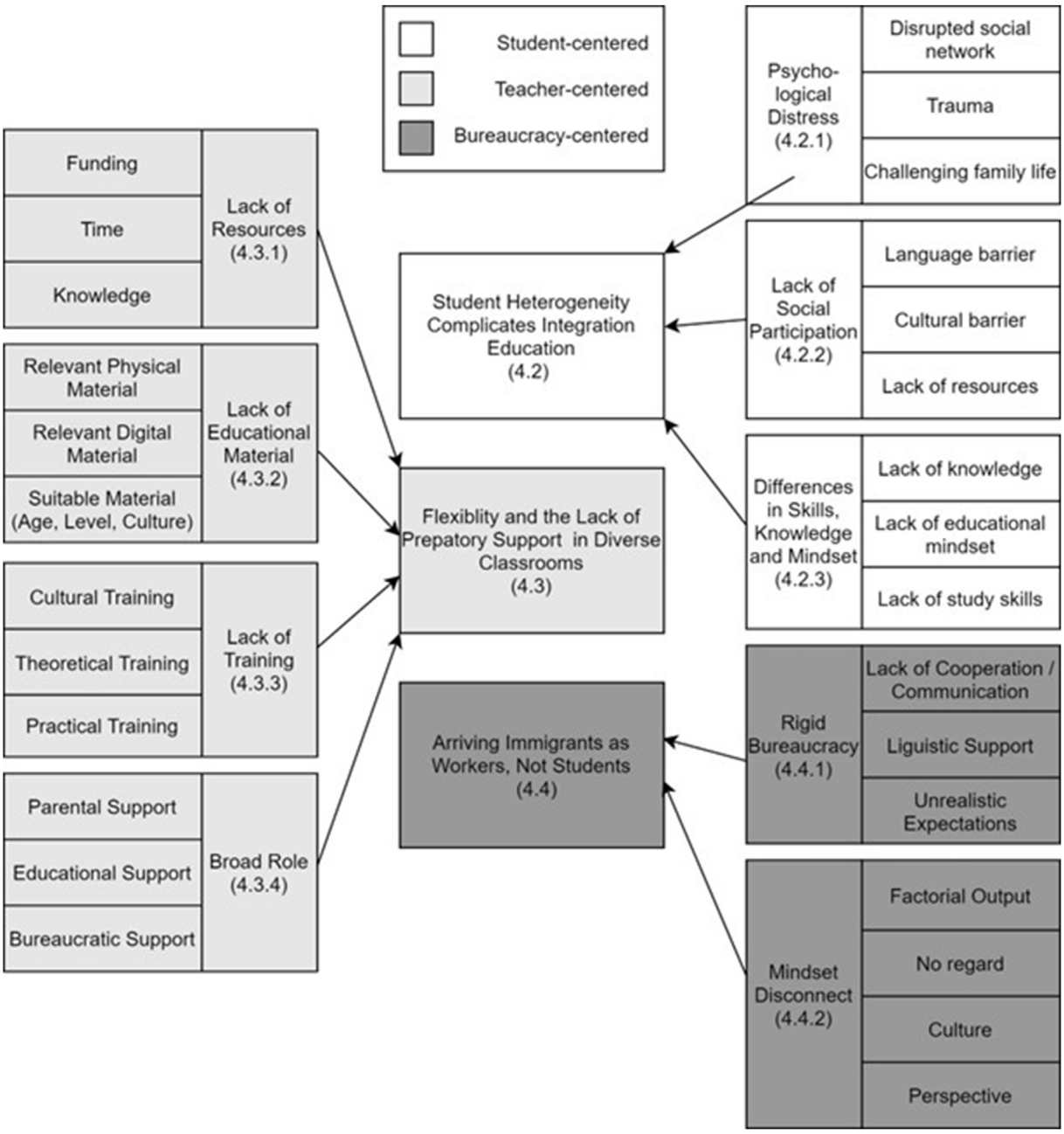


Fig. 1. Thematic map showing the three themes and their corresponding sub-themes and codes.

adult education facilities and public schools. This strengthens the narrative and uses the themes to highlight common problems within and between each area.

4.2. Theme 1: Student Heterogeneity Complicates Integration Education

Throughout all interviews, the educators recognized significant diversity among their immigrant students. The diversity not only relates to differences in knowledge, skill, or ability, which usually preoccupies educators in teaching natives (Biggs, 1993), but also consists of trauma, stress, and barriers to social interaction.

4.2.1. Differences in skills, knowledge, and mindset

Even though educators face challenges in accommodating differences in students' school-related knowledge and skills, educators describe how more significant variances in age, literacy levels, knowledge of study skills, and motivation exist within immigrant classrooms that exacerbate these challenges. One instructor describes the possible classroom configuration as it relates to education:

> But, anyway, you have somebody who can't write in their own language, and then you have somebody who has a university degree, even … And these two sit in the same classroom and are supposed to learn under the same circumstances.

Gaps in students' knowledge seem easier to handle in classrooms where they are younger because, according to educators, they still are flexible enough to learn. Older students face more dire

prospects, especially if they are analphabets. As one instructor explains:

> But if you're an alphabet and arrive as 17 or 18 years old, you do have other prospects actually. But for those who are 57, how are they supposed to live in Finland? They will never receive a citizenship because their language is so limited … So, it always feels a little — when you think about it, it always feels a little bit hopeless.

Despite the desire to support students' needs, educators also recognize that having the same expectations for each age group is unrealistic. Complicating this further is that some immigrants possess study skills differing from those required by their current environment. According to this instructor, many students face challenges because they are entering a completely different educational system with different forms of instruction and learning activities:

> The biggest problems with the [students] I have is probably, like, study technique, study skills, since we are used to them … The largest problem for us is like to instruct them, to get them to understand how to do the exercises … That's probably the biggest problem, I feel.

Lastly, motivation for learning the language varies between students. Some have other priorities, such as family and work, making the time required to learn a language taxing. One instructor sees this as especially the case for men accustomed to hard, physical labor who stated:

> Then it varies a little how motivated they are. But most of them are very motivated, yes, and want to work hard. But it's kind of harder for these men to study and realize they have to put multiple years on learning something thoroughly.

Some immigrants are entering Finland with longstanding careers, meaning it can be quite demotivating to spend years back in the classroom. Together, these factors contribute to a substantial variance in school-related skills, making effectively differentiating instruction challenging.

4.2.2. Lack of social participation

Another issue is the various obstacles to proper socialization. This problem further isolates students because learning is often considered a social process (Adams, 2006). However, the most evident barrier to socialization is the difference in language, as socialization is more challenging without sharing a common language. Strengthening this barrier is the shyness some feel because of language differences:

> It does work fairly well I do think. Yes, they can be a little bit shy. And our language students feel like they don't know enough Swedish, are too nervous for it.

Creating opportunities for cross-cultural and cross-linguistic interaction is essential to help students overcome their language-related anxieties, especially for those who may not be, as one teacher describes, the "naturally social ones." Addressing these issues would likely improve intercultural understanding between immigrant students and their native peers. Closely related to this dilemma is the cultural barrier; both native and immigrant pupils often lack awareness of the cultural differences that exist between their home countries:

> A Finnish student got very, very angry at one of 'my' boys, and he didn't understand what was going on at all … My boy had complemented another boy in the class for having nice hair. At the same time he said it, he had — as they often do in his country — touched it and shown 'nice hair.' But that's maybe not quite ok, to touch and stroke and so on. So, that's how the friend of the one who got his hair praised perceived it. He got angry, like, "You shouldn't touch my friend." …. So, then my boy just thanked him for the information.

Finnish pupils do not always recognize that certain behaviors deemed normal in Finland are unacceptable in other cultures and vice versa. Thus, improving socialization requires an improved understanding of cultural differences. These differences between students may also cause some to associate with other students of the same background, even if they speak Finland-Swedish. One teacher noted:

> I've noticed, for example, that when there are multiple students from the same background. They may come from Afghanistan. They come through Iran — they often form groups. And it varies a little. Some of them do speak Swedish. For example, I have three girls in eighth grade who stick together. They come from Afghanistan.

Given that they are in an unfamiliar country, it makes sense that these students would associate with others with whom they share a connection. However, for integration to be successful, immigrant and native peers must also be supported in socializing with one another. Many opportunities exist in extracurricular activities. However, another barrier is that some are prohibitively expensive, and some parents may not see their value. One teacher noted:

> It's a little up to the family as well, how much you want to integrate … So, it's up to the family as well, that they put effort in as well … It's a lot of sports here, and then it may be things that cost money, like attending painting school, music school — but all such stuff costs money, and that may be a problem.

This results in a lost opportunity for socialization where a common language and understanding of cultural norms are not necessarily as important as in other situations because of sports' strict rules and boundaries.

4.2.3. Psychological distress

The last subtheme concerns something almost every educator noted: psychological distress apparent in children and adults. These descriptions often relate to serious emotional trauma. Such trauma can often leave students incapable of keeping up with the rapid pace that schooling requires. As noted, some immigrants struggle to cope with psychological or physical trauma, which naturally makes it difficult to concentrate on learning. Regarding one case:

> So, not only is the trauma in many cases crippling but helping them with it can be a very delicate matter. He got five years … But he needed the years. And he had a lot of these kinds of psychosocial symptoms. And he had been … Well, been tortured and had been in jail as well.

However, trauma and stress do not end with personal experiences. Closely related are the concerns immigrants have for their former social networks. It makes sense that the newly immigrated students would turn to their previous social connections when they cannot socialize effectively in their new country. Furthermore, immigrants will always maintain relationships from their homeland, which can mean tragic and debilitating news. As one instructor pointed out:

> Yeah, and the misery never ends. It's completely horrible that … They have relatives back there, and then it happens that … We have one man, for example, that lost two sisters during six weeks in battle. … And one brother had died as well, so they're like martyrs now and … He is apparently fairly politically engaged in what's happening and has strong opinions about it. And of course, why would he have any kind of motivation for studying? He does seem fairly depressed right now … But then again, we don't really know what kind of help he receives.

This delicate situation is one where the description of immigrants is that of being stuck between two countries. It does not help that there is a general shortage of psychological counselors available in Swedish or foreign languages in Finland (Hietanen-Peltola et al., 2018a; 2018b). Another stressor students face is the difficulty associated with simply raising a family. As one instructor describes, it seems to be especially difficult for parents:

> Now when we have distance studies, we also have students who themselves have kids at home, who attend distance school … I totally get it if a father with small children at home doesn't find the time to log in ….

Of course, Covid-19 has disrupted everyone's lives, but it is especially challenging for immigrants trying to learn a language and integrate into Finnish society while being isolated at home and monitoring their children's schooling. Nevertheless, these are not the only issues that immigrants face in their education, as the educators themselves struggle to support them in the ways they need.

4.3. Theme 2: flexibility and the Lack of Preparatory Support in Diverse Classrooms

While the first theme centered around immigrants who take on the role of students. The second focuses on the struggles of the teachers. These educators use flexibility to adapt to their situation, a skill encouraged and taught to Finnish educators (Sahlberg, 2007). However, it is a strength and a weakness in the current educational setting. Normally, it enables teachers to work with authorities, administrations, and parents to create a holistic and highly individualized educational plan that meets students' needs and governmental requirements. This seems not always to be the case for educators in integration programs. Even if they are flexible and can alter curricula as they see fit, they have no contact with forces that obligate immigrants to take their courses. Flexibility also places a significant responsibility on individual educators in both schools and adult education centers, which creates challenges when they lack sufficient training, resources, and educational materials.

4.3.1. Lack of resources

Anyone who has been a part of an educational facility's daily operations knows about the triple constraint triangle of money, time, and quality, making the resources that can help make up for the lack of educational material and training limited. The educators pointed to the integral role money plays in academic life as it allows them to utilize a wider variety of materials that may better cover the needs of their students. The general sentiment seemed to be:

> Yeah, it's always tight budgets at schools and so on … So, if [a digital educational resource] costs too much, we won't be able to buy it in that way.

However, this lack of monetary funding extends itself into an issue for students who may not be able to purchase the supplementary resources that could make the educational process more accessible. This limits the options available to an educator. Confounding this is the lack of accumulated and shared knowledge of those in the field who would be able to advise practices and purchases. As one instructor pointed out:

> Yes, in the start, there was a lot, a lot of trial and error since I didn't know what was expected from me, and I didn't have any curriculum to use either. I wrote one later myself. [City name] is in that way fortunate to start in — there was experience in the municipality. I'm thinking about around [location] which have had refugees for a long time already, so there in that school, there were already teachers who before have had immigrant students. So, I got a lot of tips and got to learn a lot from there …

In a sense, the lack of resources leaves educators struggling to teach students as they see fit. This lessens their teaching effectiveness to the degree that they may feel pessimistic about student outcomes. This is not to say that they, or their students, do not meet success. Much to their credit, they manage to find a way to function in classrooms where they must function without guidance from more experienced educators. Nevertheless, the lack of accumulated knowledge stems from a lack of training, which every educator mentioned as an issue.

4.3.2. Lack of training

Flexibility allows educators to use what resources they have access to suit their students. This skill fits into the ideas of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in schools, which teachers have a hand in creating. However, instructors in adult programs have no part in creating IIPs and thus have greater issues as they lack control. Educators need control, flexibility, and guidance to be truly effective. However, the heterogeneous nature of immigrant classes is problematic even when these are present. This is because many never received instruction on teaching in these classrooms as they require teaching one language without using another. As one instructor points out:

> The thing that's a little different from the language classes you have in an ordinary school is … that in a normal school you have a language in common, be it Swedish or Finnish …. The pedagogical education I received … did not prepare me for that.

There are well-defined and researched methods within the practicalities of L2 teaching (VanPatten, Keating, & Wulff, 2020) with which Finnish educators seem to be unfamiliar. As a result, educators felt unprepared for the theoretical aspect even though they all had educations that qualified them for appointment to these positions. At least one teacher felt the need to research L2 teaching on their own:

> But this, yeah, I really had to think things through because when you teach these students, it's not like teaching Swedish — you actually have Swedish as a second language. So, I started reading up on it myself and attended some courses that I found. But a kind of saving grace was kunskapskanalen (the knowledge channel) … So, I got a great background from that.

Educators were ill-prepared to teach L2 Swedish, but they also struggled with the realities of teaching in a diverse classroom. This diversity refers not only to differences between educators and students but also those among students. Few educators reported having homogenous groups; even then, the cultures would differ

from their own. These differences manifest themselves consistently in classrooms:

> It would have been good to have some knowledge about other cultures and ways of thinking, and maybe of course how their language is structured compared to Swedish or Finnish … And we nag them about using a fork and knife and putting the knife in the right hand and the fork in the left one. And I recently learned that it's the other way around in Islam.

When taken alone, none of these issues would be of great concern to an educator with a desire to reach their students. Together, they create an untenable situation exacerbated by a lack of materials that forces educators to develop their own, taking up limited class time.

4.3.3. Lack of educational material

The lack of material is one of the most prominent issues and refers to traditional and digital materials. Both are lacking in terms of availability and suitability. The lack of conventional material relevant to Finland necessitates extra lessons on culture and the Finland-Swedish dialect. This is time-consuming:

> There's teaching material from Sweden, but very little Finland-Swedish material. So, there's a lot of Kronor and cities in Swedish and their traditions. It becomes very strange when you read a text, and then you have to think about how to apply it to Finland.

The lack of relevant digital material also means the absence of valuable videos and recordings. This problem creates issues with the accents and dialects students learn through Swedish material intended for Sweden. Correcting this takes valuable time, which is a limited resource for all the stakeholders in the class:

[In reference to the material they use which comes from Sweden]. I also usually comment, for example, the tj-sounds, which are different — r and s, which they pronounce as "sh" in Sweden. Stuff like that I comment on, so they can see the difference.

In addition to being unsuitable due to linguistic and cultural differences between Finland and Sweden, the available material is often unsuitable because immigrant learners vary significantly in age, educational background, and digital literacy capabilities. As one instructor expressed:

> There's a lot of games, of course, which are made for children, but I feel like … I've myself not wanted to bring them into the class because I think they're very childish.

Given this information, it is evident that educators work in an environment where they feel they lack sufficient preparation and material to teach effectively. As professionals, they feel obligated to use their training to meet the needs of their students. Their response is flexibility in their approach; this means learning how to operate in these rooms independently, piecing together material from multiple sources, altering existing material, or creating suitable material. Furthermore, to meet the needs of their students, current educators are currently finding themselves flexing to cover a large number of roles as integration education is not just about culture or language.

4.3.4. Broad role

Educators' roles in immigrant classrooms are broader than in traditional classrooms. They go beyond merely teaching a language; their work involves cross-cultural communication, cultural education, literacy instruction, fostering digital literacy skills, supporting immigrant parents, and more, depending on a student's needs. Given the lack of Finnish cultural and linguistic knowledge on the students' part due to their recent arrival, educators often support students in necessary yet unforeseen ways. This issue connects to the fact that immigrant classrooms operate in a manner not parallel to the general Finnish Education Model but vary greatly depending on the situation.

This manifests in two ways in educators' support of parental roles. The first of the following excerpts is a teacher's perspective on challenges involving pupils with immigrant parents. The latter is an example provided by an instructor related to supporting learners who are parents:

> … so I remember that last time I used [a game] with the class, it needed a consent form from the parents, which was very complicated, and when we were at the start and were to begin training and the parents … When they're at the beginning, they don't understand that much Swedish. It was a little bit irritating.

But I spoke with a student today, and his daughter was ill and had a very sore throat and very high fever. They had a newborn baby at home. I can't have him sit there and read from thetextbook aloud to me …

The requirements of dealing with Finnish schools are innate to Finns but present another obstacle to integration for immigrants. With this schooling comes skills and knowledge easily taken for granted and unaccounted for in the curriculum. While many teachers applaud the curriculum, it means that educators have added to it in ways not foreseen in the curriculum, as the following excerpt points out:

> But at the moment, I think, especially those who arrived as primary analphabets, they put a lot of energy in just decoding. That is, they haven't started reading automatically yet. They've solved the code, but they still read one letter at a time or one sound at a time, which means the reading comprehension decreases.

Beyond these basic skills, educators may need to help build culturally relevant educational skills, such as digital literacy, so students can succeed within Finnish systems. This often means helping immigrants navigate the bureaucracy inherent in communication with authorities which necessitates the skills they learn in class as well as many others. As one instructor states:

> But there's a lot of other things involved in being a teacher … You don't have the main responsibility for any group and the administration. But you still dip your toes into it, how contact with the TE-byrå [The Employment and Economic Office] works — because the majority of students are the TE-byrå's customers.

This adds yet another role that many educators take on in immigrant classrooms. As educators use their flexibility to expand the curriculum to meet individual students' needs, the material they cover must vary with every class. As a result, educators face classrooms where they feel unprepared, have few materials, and exert little control over student expectations. This lack of control stems from a bureaucracy that does not communicate with the people responsible for its enforced decisions. The next theme lies in a disconnect between how educators see immigrants and how the bureaucracy treats immigrants.

4.4. Arriving Immigrants viewed as workers, not students

Those interviewed express that Finnish authorities do not view immigrants as students even though they have time to learn in Finnish institutions. Instead, authorities view them as potential workers, and they have expectations placed upon them that reflect this. Exacerbating this issue is the lack of communication between the authorities capable of effecting change and the educators who may understand when change is needed.

4.4.1. Rigid bureaucracy

The current policies related to immigration are rigid and unrealistic, reflecting a lack of situational awareness among authorities. Fostering communication between authorities and frontline educators would undoubtedly help alleviate some of the resulting issues, if not by eliciting change, then by cultivating a better understanding of the other's expectations. As one instructor muses:

> What should be developed is … I don't know. It may not be relevant. But it's the contact with the authorities here, which has the money and power over who gets to study … and why they get to study …

Among the issues manageable with better communication are the rigid timeframes and expectations placed upon immigrants by authorities who lack understanding of the realities of standard classrooms, let alone diverse ones. As illustrated in the previous quotes, the expectations are high, but the time given for education, about one year, seems inadequate. And not everyone is able or willing to redo their education later in life. This lack of situational awareness by authorities shows in other ways, a large part of which is how they provide services:

> You should have an email address, and you should know how to write an email address. "And what's wrong here?" "Well, you have space after the period there and "fi". Then the address won't work" And stuff like that. To get used to logging in, logging out, and keeping track of username and password, having different kinds of those … So, for the digital competence, to develop it, that you need to use these kinds of tools.

Digital skills are necessary for life in Finland as it rates as the second most digital nation (European Commission, 2021) in Europe. People with limited digital skills are severely disadvantaged in seeking support or managing daily life. Compounding this disadvantage is that the sites needed to manage everyday life are in languages they are supposed to be learning (an exception being that many sites are also in English). This illustrates the fact that Finns designed these services from a Finnish perspective. The same is evident with how immigrants' educational system is structured. There is a disconnect between those overseeing these systems, those the systems serve, and those that teach the language needed to access them.

4.4.2. Mindset disconnect

The disconnect goes deeper as educators view the integration process as educational while the governmental authority views it as procedural, even factory-like. It is an assembly line with the expectation that all immigrants should be capable of undergoing the same treatment and achieving the same outcomes. Worsening this process is the fact that instead of improving the problems within it, the main focus seems to be an effort to streamline the process towards higher efficiency:

> Yeah, and that's the challenge. Authorities and politicians think that all should go through the same pipeline in the same amount of time …. Generally, they say you have about three years to learn the language, but that varies from person to person. Some only get one year to learn the language, or two. But this group who follows the ABC track, they're allowed under special considerations to have five years. That's the current situation, but it's about to change.

This ideology that all people fall into categories is antithetical to the Finnish educational system, which strives to support individual outcomes. In addition, the Finnish occupational and educational systems seem to expect the same things from immigrants as it does from its own citizens, an expectation that inevitably results in cultural misunderstandings. This detrimental expectation is likely born from inexperience with other cultures rather than intentional malice, and this is evident in the fact that there is support to accessing these services. However, this disregards many immigrants' cultural values regarding priorities in life. They come from vastly different cultures where the normal expectations regarding their roles as family members, citizens, and employees may be different than in their adoptive country:

> [Some immigrants] can have attended maybe six years of school, and then you startworking, marrying, take care of family, and children. It's simply another way of living. So, it's obviously a big change for them …

Following this point are some ideas essential to Finnish work culture, which, while necessary in other cultures, are complicated for immigrants in Finland due to the lack of Finnish language skills and Finnish culture's reliance on technology to communicate:

> You should instead be able to work together. You should be able to communicate (a reference to language skills) … You should be able to rationalize, and like comprehend how things work — what kind of means you use, what tools you use … and things like that. So, it's a lot more advanced to arrive in Finland which is an information society, a completely different thing.

The various barriers and challenges immigrants in Finland face relate to cultural differences and the fact that many immigrants will have different perspectives resulting from their native society. The diverse societies from which immigrants come will have distinct and unique cultures that share common laws, practices, and institutions governing work and education. The system in which immigrants enter seems to be set on making them Finnish citizens through assimilation. However, it assumes they already have both the same ideologies as Finns and the skill competencies gained through an educational system in which they have never taken part. Beyond this, authorities seem to lack a basic understanding of the perspective of immigrants and the struggles they face. They are all unique, and for many letting go of the past and accepting new standards cannot occur instantly. The following point shows an educator's observation of immigrants' struggle to begin the process:

> It takes a while before you feel safe in the new country and starts opening up and maybe start telling others of what you've experienced.

The quote illustrates the differences between realities and expectations due to a lack of perspective by authorities. The expectations placed upon immigrants are at odds with educators' training. This training teaches them to be flexible in their approach to a diverse classroom for which they have little training and scant

materials. This situation places undue stress on educators whose stated goal is to help those they teach. Worse still are the implicit ramifications of these expectations and the damage they can cause to immigrants.

5. Discussion

The integration of immigrants in Finland is a continually improving process. The government's adoption of new laws, acts, and policies reflects a genuine desire to solve the issues. These policies create a system resulting in IEPs, which directly answers question 1. However, the policies' issues invariably affect the lives of immigrants and the problems they face in their adopted country. The thematic analysis shows that part of the problem lies within the educational system that assists integration. The main themes present are the variances and issues faced by immigrants in their role as students, the issues faced by the educators who teach them, and the lack of understanding of classroom realities by authorities as seen by educators teaching Finland-Swedish. All these, outlined extensively in the results section, are the final answer to question 2. The results show a need for improvement in handling immigrant integration within Finland regarding Finland-Swedish L2 education and can bolster research on integration in Finland.

The first finding that student heterogeneity in classes is complicating integration illustrates the lack of preparation teachers experience regarding their ability to handle diverse classrooms and the issues with multiculturalism that accompany them (Acquah & Commins, 2013). This issue contributes to the study of integration and its pitfalls. Hummelstedt et al. (2021) pointed out that the status of immigrants as outsiders and the implicit nature of how this status is maintained even when speaking a national language reveals the complicated nature of this process. Ismail (2019) expands on this issue by pointing out that immigrant parents' lack of language skills further isolates their children as they can lack the ability to communicate about them as pupils effectively. Both contribute to the gap in achievement reported by the OECD (2018a). Neither this gap nor the issues presented in the article can be addressed here without the perspective of Finland-Swedish's status as a minority language, and interpretations of the results should account for this fact as research also exists on the troubles faced by native Finns who speak this language also struggle with identity (Sjöholm, 2004) and the issue stretches back to the 1930s.

The second finding is that educators use flexibility to deal with the lack of materials and preparatory training. It also illustrates the needs of those teaching Finland-Swedish to immigrants. These points are a direct answer to question 3. In particular, the lack of training regarding how to teach a group of students without a common language mentioned by educators and the lack of relevant material is most troubling as these necessities predicate effective teaching. Almost 6% of Finns speak Finland-Swedish as a first language; of the remaining percentage, 7 out of 10 speak it (YLE News, 2018). Given that these are Finland's two official languages, it is only natural that one would traditionally act as a means to teach the other. However, with the increase in immigration in recent years (Statista, 2021), the methods long used by teachers are ineffective in teaching these new, diverse classrooms in which a base language of instruction other than the one taught does not exist. The last finding that authorities view immigrants as potential workers and not students further complicates the previous issues as the realities of the current situation is at odds with the official policy. The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (2010) states:

Integration means interactive development involving immigrants and society at large, the aim of which is to provide immigrants with the knowledge and skills required in society and working life and to provide them with support, so that they can maintain their culture and language (p. 1).

The idea that immigrants should act like natives while in Finland is unrealistic, and the idea that they can do so upon arrival is even more so. However, this expectation is present in the themes regarding their language and varied cultures. In addition, not all immigrants may feel as though they can trust the authorities they left behind, and truthfully, some will never trust those they find in Finland because of it. Still, even those who wish to utilize the systems, particularly the educational system, may not have the language skills (Ismail, 2019). This point hinders the 2010 Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration's additional definition: “integration also means the multi-sectoral promotion and support of integration referred to in paragraph 1 using the measures and services provided by the authorities and other parties” (p. 1). The lack of understanding of immigrants and what expectations authorities can rightfully place on them leads to a lack of understanding of what they need to integrate properly and what integration means to them as individuals, further complicating the issues present in the first two themes. This lack of understanding or acceptance of what integration means to them robs them of social empowerment, which the previously mentioned act explicitly promotes. In light of this, it becomes evident that the reality of the situation is not living up to the well-intentioned acts and policies meant to guide integration.

Looking further into the issue highlights the disparity between official policy and how this policy is enacted. The Ministry of the Interior states directly on its webpage that a chief aim of Finnish immigration policy is to maintain the welfare society currently in place by bolstering specific sectors which lack workers (Ministry of the Interior, n.d.). The stated reason for this is the aging population. Stated intentions and investments go to attracting the top talent with programs such as Talent Boost, which, while good for the economy, affirms the mindset that the immigrants Finland needs are highly skilled workers (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, n.d.). Those who struggle to learn the language or do not have the skills necessary to obtain meaningful employment that the language would allow are thus not needed. This point illustrates that proper integration is a secondary concern in enacting policy.

6. Implications & recommendations

This study hopes to contribute to the understanding of the struggles faced by teachers of Finland-Swedish in Finland. Though there is a wealth of previously mentioned research on immigrants, this particular area remains murky. Given that Finland-Swedish is the language studied here, the article has implications for the study of minority languages; however, it has limitations as the situation in Finland is unique. Despite the status of Finland-Swedish as a national language, issues such as the one presented here remain. However, given the official status, the issues are often explored, meaning that strategies to deal with these issues may be relevant to other minority languages. Another limitation is that only the opinions of educators are present, and the whole truth of the situation would require an understanding of all those involved in the processes stated above.

This article illustrated the issues that exist from the perspectives of Finnish educators regarding preparatory and language training. In terms of future research, a logical next step is to document and analyze the perspectives of immigrants regarding this matter. Analyzing their perspectives could better inform authorities and educators of the issues they face that remain unseen in this research.

In addition, the authors recommend establishing courses that can provide the training absent in these accounts. More specifically,

this involves education in multiculturalism, the practicalities of teaching diverse classrooms, and second language learning theory. This education will result in an accumulation and sharing of knowledge on the matter, which will only improve the situation of educators and those they teach. It is also likely to result in the creation of materials and courses at the academic level if proper funding exists.

Another recommendation is the inclusion of educators in drafting Individual Integration Plans. The recommendations educators can provide to authorities on matters involving the education of immigrants could be invaluable in assisting them toward integration. It would also allow educators to understand the expectations of authorities directly. If the intended purpose of immigration is indeed economic, then integration is the only means to improve the overall state of immigration. Given that the first step in IIPs is language education, involving educators will only improve the plans and, thus, integration.

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