

**Parents` satisfaction on the quality of education and care
in Qatar-Finland International School**

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Finnish education system has gathered good reputation worldwide. Consequently, educational know-how has met an expanding demand on the international market and education export has become a competitive export. One of the flagships of education export is Qatar-Finland International School (Q.F.I. School) which was established in autumn 2014. The purpose of this thesis is to explore parents' satisfaction on the quality of education and care in Q.F.I. School.

Data were collected from the parents by the administration of school. Questionnaire was carried out during the late winter 2015. It consisted of structured theses and a possibility for open comments after each thesis was given. Quantitative data were analysed with SPSS-programme and a content analysis for qualitative data was made.

The results revealed that parents were satisfied on the quality of education and care. As quality elements parents emphasised enjoyment of the child, characteristics of the teachers, teaching methods of home-class teaching and positive experience of home-school collaboration. Also individualised learning possibilities and differentiated teaching was mentioned but on the other hand parents brought out that these elements have room for improvement. Additionally communication in Arabic department should be enhanced. Based on qualitative data parents emphasised the quality either in well-being oriented, result oriented or collaboration oriented way.

As a conclusion it can be said that the Q.F.I. School has succeeded in creating a warm socioemotional environment and they are offering high-quality home-class teaching and opportunities for collaboration albeit there are some areas for development. According to findings of this thesis it can be stated that the Finnish quality criteria may respond to the international education requirements.

Keywords: parents, quality, education and care, education export, evaluation, ecocultural theory

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Suomalaisella koulutusjärjestelmällä on hyvä maine maailmanlaajuisesti. Sen seurauksena suomalaiseen osaamiseen kohdistuu yhä kasvava kysyntä kansainvälisillä markkinoilla ja koulutuksesta on tullut kilpailukykyinen vientituote. Suomalaista koulutusvientiä edustaa syksyllä 2014 Qatarin perustettu Qatar-Finland International School. Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena on kartoittaa vanhempien tyytyväisyyttä koulun toiminnan laatuun.

Tutkielman aineiston keräsi koulun johtoryhmä kevättalvella 2015. Aineisto kerättiin vanhemmilta kyselylomakkeella. Lomakkeessa oli strukturoituja väittämiä ja jokaisen väittämän jälkeen tila avoimelle kommentille. Määrällinen aineisto analysoitiin SPSS-ohjelmalla ja laadullisen aineiston analyysissa käytettiin sisällönanalyysia.

Tuloksista kävi ilmi, että vanhemmat ovat tyytyväisiä koulun toiminnan laatuun. Laadun osatekijöinä vanhemmat mainitsivat lapsen viihtyvyyden, opettajien ominaisuudet, kotiluokissa käytettävät opetusmenetelmät sekä positiiviset kokemukset kodin ja koulun välisestä yhteistyöstä. Vanhemmat toivat esiin laadun osatekijöinä myös yksilöllisen oppimisen mahdollisuudet ja opetuksen eriyttämisen. Näissä osaluokissa oli kuitenkin vanhempien mielestä kehitettävää. Myös arabian laitoksen ja vanhempien välisessä kommunikaatiossa oli parantamisen varaa. Laadullisesta aineistosta kävi ilmi, että vanhemmat painottavat laatua eri tavoin. Osa vanhemmista korosti vastauksissaan enemmän lapsen hyvinvointia, osa tuloksia ja osa yhteistyötä.

Voidaan sanoa, että Qatar-Finland International School on onnistunut luomaan lämpimän sosioemotionaalisen ympäristön ja tarjoamaan korkealaatuista kotiluokkaopetusta sekä mahdollisuuksia yhteistyöhön vaikka kehitettävääkin löytyy. Tämän tutkielman tulosten perusteella voidaan ajatella, että suomalainen koulutus on siirrettävissä kansainväliseen kontekstiin.

Hakusanat: vanhemmat, laatu, kasvatus, koulutusvienti, arviointi, ekokulttuurinen teoria

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century the Finnish education system has been widely acknowledged. Finland has succeeded well in international rankings and due to the excellent achievements it has been more approved that the Finnish education system can provide a model to others. This creates possibilities to develop and expand educational export. (Väljörvi et al. 2007, 3.) One of the pioneer companies in the field of education export is EduCluster Finland Ltd (ECF) which has founded a primary school to Qatar. The operations in Qatar-Finland International School (Q.F.I. School) are based on the Finnish National Core Curriculum but it is adapted to the Qatari standards and context. The aim is to build up a globally high-classed education system in Qatar and Q.F.I. School is a part of the reform of their education system. The school started to operate in autumn 2014. (Qatar-Finland International School 2014a, 8; University of Jyväskylä 2014a.)

The aim of this thesis is to inspect parents' satisfaction on the quality of education and care in Q.F.I. School. The main purpose is to bring out information about strengths and developmental areas of the school practices to the personnel. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (2012, 13–15) highlight the importance of evaluation when developing and improving quality in schools. Furthermore, it is essential to define and develop quality because it is noted by researchers that quality of the setting effect on various aspects of child's development (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa 2002, 87; Harrist, Thompson & Norris 2007, 306; Ministry of Education and Culture 2012, 13–15). Quality itself is considered to be a multidimensional concept (Niikko & Havu-Nuutinen 2009, 433). The quality in this thesis is defined by three different elements which are Well-Being and Support of the Child, Quality of Teaching and Home-School Collaboration and quality is considered from the aspect of intersubjective paradigm (Parrila 2004, 72–74). In this paradigm quality is understood from the subjective perspectives as well as from objective factors arising from the larger social structures.

According to Ceglowski (2004, 10) and Rentzou and Sakellariou (2013, 294), quality should be evaluated by different stakeholders. It is generally agreed that nowadays the active role of parents in

quality evaluation and development is acknowledged and it is underlined that parents have a right to receive information and participate in school operations. (European Parents' Association; Kronqvist & Jokimies 2008, 3.) This thesis is based on Ecocultural theory which emphasises the role of parents and places the child into the framework of families and education (Määttä 1999, 77–82; Rantala 2002, 21–22). For this reason the data were collected from the parents. Questionnaire was utilised and mixed methods were carried out in analysis to achieve more comprehensive understanding about the quality of education and care in Q.F.I. School.

2 FINNISH EDUCATION SYSTEM WORLDWIDE

2.1 Appreciation and success of the Finnish education system

The Finnish education system starts with early childhood education. At the age of six, children attend to compulsory pre-primary education and basic education starts at the age of seven. (Ministry of Education and Culture a, 3; Perusopetuslaki 1999.) In Finland early childhood education and care (ECEC) is based on Educare-model (Fonsén 2014, 17). This means that ECEC is systematically interweaving education, teaching and care. The term education and care is used in this thesis to describe operation in Q.F.I. School. This is due to the idea that education and care not only provide goal-oriented and pedagogical teaching but also covers the needs of the child holistically and serves the needs of the families. (Qatar Finland International School a; Stakes 2003, 2–3.)

Finland has succeeded well in international rankings such as Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Grek 2009, 23, 28). Various features of the Finnish education system have been presented to be behind of this success (Väljörvi et al. 2007, 3–4). One of these special features of the system is equity and equality. Same opportunities to learn and develop are provided to everyone regardless race, ethnic origin, gender, disability or wealth. Secondly, education is free for everyone and individual learning and support is valued. It is well recognised that the aim of the Finnish education system is to maximise the potential of every individual. Thirdly, most of the basic schools are publicly funded and all the schools follow the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education. The structure of educational system and the school practices are developed to support life-long learning. (Finnish National Board of Education 2004, 12; Ministry of Education and Culture a, 6–11, 24; Väljörvi et al. 2007 3–4.) Furthermore, any national examination is not executed until the end of upper secondary education and there are no strict external evaluation (Ministry of Education and Culture a, 16–18; Väljörvi 2012, 123). Finally, the high-quality of teachers' education, comprehensive pedagogy, autonomy and self-reliance of teachers are distinctive features of the Finnish education system and considered to be behind the success (Grek 2009, 28–29; Ministry of Education and Culture a, 24–26; Väljörvi 2012, 123).

2.2 Education export

Education export can be understood as a traditional education service export but often it is also interpreted to include other fields related to education. These other fields are for example consultation services or technological solutions of education and learning. The concept of education refers to the whole Finnish education system from the early childhood education to the universities while the concept of export refers to business customers who are abroad. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2010a, 7.) Välijärvi et al. (2007, 3) note that after the excellent achievements of the Finnish schooling system in PISA, it has been more acknowledged that the Finnish educational system can provide a model to others. In the 21st century the Finnish education system has been widely acknowledged and it has become an essential part of Finnish identity and positive image abroad (Ministry of Education and Culture 2010b, 3, 16; Ministry of Education and Culture b).

According to Ministry of Education and Culture (2010b, 16–17), globalisation and the growth of education market as well as the fact that many countries are investing in development of education and education systems, are creating opportunities for Finland to develop and expand its educational export. The good reputation as a cooperation partner and internationally qualified institutions and personnel are the strengths of the Finnish education export. Also the good pedagogical knowledge and high-quality educational research and evaluation form a part of educational export. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2010b, 16–17.) As well as there are strengths and opportunities in educational export there also occur to be some challenges. For instance Finland has not been able to respond to emerging demands of the Finnish educational know-how. There are also limited resources, shortage of product development and restrictive legislation of the education export activities that set a challenge on Finland's education export. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2010a, 3, 18.) In autumn 2013 an operation programme was formulated by a working group of Ministry of Education and Culture to enhance education export. The operation programme determines different components which should be improved. Among the other things the quality control and learning should be brought to the forefront, more motivated student should be recruited to Finland, self-created legislative barriers should

be eliminated and education export should be turned into a profitable business. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2013, 5, 10–14.)

However, Finnish education export lays its foundation on the strong and comprehensive education system of homeland and continuous development of it. Networking in Finland creates an opportunity to provide diverse services and products and again clusters of operators will enhance the possibilities to meet the various needs of the customers and identify new business opportunities. To be competitive in the expansive field of education export, the Finnish education export must become goal-oriented so that resources can be utilised. The importance of higher educational institutions as key developers should be recognised and these institutions should have possibilities to enlarge and promote education export. Above all, it is important to strengthen the quality of the operators working in the field of educational export. This would assure that the Finnish education export could meet the international quality standards. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2010a, 20–25; Ministry of Education and Culture 2010b, 6–13.)

2.3 Qatar-Finland International School

Q.F.I. School is established by the request of Supreme Education Council of Qatar and it is coordinated by EduCluster Finland Ltd. ECF is a subsidiary company of University of Jyväskylä which is specialised in the education export. (University of Jyväskylä 2014b.) It has been recognised and endorsed to be a pioneer company exporting and customizing Finnish education system around the world. Three complementary Finnish educational organizations are working together in ECF which are the University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences and Jyväskylä Educational Consortium. Also Sanoma Oyj and Finnish Consulting Group are involved in the operation of Q.F.I. School. As it is mentioned in previous chapter, the importance of networking in the field of education export cannot be denied (Ministry of Education and Culture 2010a). Q.F.I. School is a part of the reform of the education system in Qatar which aims to build up a globally high-classed education system. 5-year commercial treaty was agreed in June 2014. (Qatar-Finland International School 2014b; University of Jyväskylä 2014a.)

Q.F.I. School is a primary school for girls and boys in Qatar, in the city of Doha. Currently the school offers grades 0, 1 and 2 for children aged 5–7 but during the academic year 2015-2016 the school will be broadened to cover also grades 3–6. The curriculum of Q.F.I. School is based on the Finnish National Core Curriculum but it is adapted to the Qatari standards and international context. In Q.F.I. School Finnish education practices are recognised as one of the world's best performing education and the strengths of Finnish education system are highlighted in the school operation. Mentioned strengths are composed of the socio-constructivist concept of learning, outstanding school operation, high-quality teacher training, effective learning environment, constructive evaluation system and flexibility which enables a child-centered learning. The main teaching language in Q.F.I. School is English whereupon one of the goals is to educate bilingual children. (Qatar-Finland International School 2014a, 8; Qatar-Finland International School 2014b.)

The vision of Q.F.I. School is to provide a safe, supportive and motivational environment where the learning and growth of the children enable to reach their maximal potential. Children always come first. The individual learning paths of children are taken into account because every child has own way of learning, own interests and own challenges. The aim is to promote holistic well-being of the child, encourage lifelong learning and enhance social confidence. In Q.F.I. School learning takes place in a child-centered and playful environment and learning happens through integrated, thematic and problem solving approaches. In curriculum there are assimilated both academic but also cross-cutting skills as creativity, self-expression and learning to learn skills. Children are seen as active learners and participation of children leads to the meaningful progress. Assessing is not carried out in order to compare children with each other. Instead of that, assessment is a shared process which aims to enhance learning. Importance of warm atmosphere and positive learning experiences are recognised and embraced and behavior policy is based on positive reinforcement. (Qatar-Finland International School 2014a, 12, 18–20, 92; Qatar-Finland International School 2014b.)

3 QUALITY IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION AND CARE

3.1 The definition of quality

According to Ceglowski and Bacigalupa (2002, 87) the level of quality of education and care can be seen as a key matter. They bring out evidence which illustrate that variation in the early childhood education and care has effects on extensive range of child outcomes. This is noted also by others. Harrist et al. (2007, 305–306) state that stimulating and supportive environment nurtures the development of the child from early age. However, quality is considered as a complex and multidimensional concept and the definition of it has been difficult to determine in the field of education and care (Hujala & Fonsén 2012, 313; Niikko & Havu-Nuutinen 2009, 43; Rentzou & Sakellariou 2013, 294). Woodhead (1998, 5) states that the challenge of defining quality in education and care is specifically its dynamic and relative nature. He points out that economic, educational and cultural context cannot be separated from the framework of quality. Equally relevant to the issue are the questions of past, present and future because definitions of quality develop and vary over time. Therefore it is impossible to prescribe quality in a once-and-for-all way. (Moss 1994, 1; Woodhead 1998, 15.)

Hujala and Fonsén (2012, 313) write that traditionally quality is something that is considered to be objective. This pointview sees quality as figures that can be measured from outside. The ethos is based on the word of finance and business where cost-efficiency and standardisation of indicators are valued. Also expanding globalisation has set the need for universal definition of quality and furthermore created a need for relevant and global indicators for it. (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 1999, 88; Hujala & Fonsén 2012, 313–314; Niikko & Havu-Nuutinen 2009, 433.) In this objective paradigm of quality, quality is defined and evaluated by specific professionals, experts and academic research. It is known as an exclusionary way of defining and evaluating quality. (Pence & Moss 1994, 172.)

Hujala, Fonsén and Elo (2012, 300) point out this same perspective towards the concept of quality but importantly they note that this perspective is

criticised by researchers. The revision is to consider quality as a subjective concept that varies according to who defines it (Dahlberg et al. 1999, 89). Pence and Moss (1994, 172) reassure this. According to them quality is invariably subjective because it is based on values and interests of individuals or different stakeholders. Parrila (2004, 72) extends this by saying that in subjective paradigm, quality should be defined by all the stakeholders that are involved. This is known as inclusionary way of defining and evaluating quality. This paradigm takes into account objective factors as well as subjective perspectives of different stakeholders. It emphasizes the extent of different stakeholders and their active role in defining and evaluating quality. (Hujala & Fonsén 2012, 314; Pence & Moss 1994, 172–173.) Additionally, also Parrila (2004) brings objective and subjective definition of quality together. She calls this definition as an intersubjective paradigm of quality. In this perspective objective and subjective definitions are not opposite to each other. According to her, quality includes both definitions simultaneously. The definition features the subjective perspectives of quality but it is always connected to the larger social structures and values that exist in society. (Parrila 2004, 72–73). In this thesis the quality is understood as intersubjective.

3.2 Different stakeholders and quality

As mentioned in previous chapter, researchers suggest that quality should be defined and evaluated by different stakeholders who are involved in the education system (Ceglowski 2004, 10; Rentzou & Sakellariou 2013, 294). Katz (1993, 7) believes that there are five perspectives how quality in education and care can be viewed. These are perspectives of professionals, children, practitioners, parents and society.

First perspective is professional pointview and it is called top-down perspective (Katz 1993, 8). Cryer, Tietze and Wessels (2002, 261) point out that there are certain elements in education and care that are recognised as being essential for the optimal development of the child. These factors are usually used in defining and evaluating quality from top-down perspective (Harrist et al. 2007, 307). Dahlberg et al. (1999, 97) divide these factors into structural, process and outcome factors and the same division is used by Parrila (2004). Structural factors are related physical and psychological elements of the setting such as adult-to-child ratio or level of personnel training (Hujala et al. 2012, 303; Harrist et al. 2007, 307; Parrila 2004, 73). Process

factors refer to the experienced environment of the setting. This includes peer relationships, interactions between children and practitioners and it can be extended to cover the co-operation with parents and institution. These factors also contain activities and materials available for children. (Dahlberg et al. 1999, 97; Harrist et al. 2007, 307.) Outcomes as a quality factor refer to the development of the child and increasingly more to the parental satisfaction towards the quality of setting (Dahlberg et al. 98, 1999). Harrist et al. (2007, 306–307) and Ceglowski (2004, 103) highlight that the research of quality in early childhood and care has been mostly viewed from the perspective of professionals and it is focused on studying structural and process factors. Researchers' perspectives on quality have been studied by Rentzou and Sakellariou (2013, 298). The study was conducted by using Early Childhood Environment Scale - Revised (ECERS-R). ECERS is acknowledged and widely used indicator for the quality evaluation in early childhood education and care (Sakai, Whitebook, Wishard & Howes 2003, 427–428; Sheridan 2007, 199).

Secondly, the bottom-up perspective tries to find out children's perspective on quality of their care. Quality is defined and evaluated by how children experience it. (Ceglowski 2004, 103–104; Katz 1993, 9.) Ceglowski and Bacigalupa (2002, 88–91) note that children's perspective would enhance the current conception of quality and practices but this perspective is studied minimally. In Finland Niikko and Havu-Nuutinen (2009) have studied quality factors from children's perspective. In their study they interviewed 15 children about their preschool year. They found out that children were mostly satisfied with their preschool year and play, peer interactions and possibility to learn were mentioned as quality factors. The data collected from children was used to enhance data collected from parents and practitioners. (Niikko & Havu-Nuutinen 2009, 436–443.)

Thirdly, the inside perspective is practitioners' perceptions on quality. This perception includes not only factors of collegial relationships but also interactions between practitioners and parents and relationship with different agencies. (Katz 1993, 7, 12–14.) A study from Harrist et al. (2007) found out that elements on quality such as effective communication and rapport between all stakeholders and personnel characteristics were highlighted by the practitioners. Personnel characteristics include the belief that educated practitioners are capable to provide qualified teaching and care and individual support if needed (Harrist et al. 2007, 307, 318). Findings from Ceglowski's (2004, 106–107) study were slightly different. Practitioners valued more

professionalism and training as a key element of quality but communication with families was also mentioned. Fourth perspective on quality is the outside-inside. It is about parents' perceptions on the quality of child care (Katz 1993, 7, 11–12). This perspective will be discussed more in chapter 4. Harrist et al. (2007, 308) disclose that inside and outside-inside perceptions on quality are tend to be conducted simultaneously. For example in Finland Hujala et al. (2012, 299) and Niikko and Havu-Nuutinen (2009, 431) have gathered both parents' and practitioners' perspectives on quality in a same study. Finally and fifthly, the outside perspective on quality is how society is served by the ECEC settings (Ceglowski 2004, 104; Katz 1993, 7, 14–15).

3.3 The quality in this thesis

The quality in this thesis is defined by three different elements. Elements are determined by research questions and based on the Quality Criteria for Basic Education in Finland and Curriculum of Qatar-Finland International School. The aim of the Quality Criteria is to endorse the high-quality teaching and it specifies how the functions of the school is expected to appear. The Quality Criteria helps professionals to be more aware of strengths and weaknesses of the operations in the school. One should note here that it is reasonable to pay attention also to the conducive functions which lead to the learning, not only to the actual learning results of the children. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012, 9–10.) In this thesis it is justifiable to define and evaluate quality by Finnish criteria because the question is about Finnish education export. According to Ministry of Education and Culture (2012, 40) the curriculum is the foundation of evaluation and development of the school. On that account the curriculum of Q.F.I. School is used beside the Quality Criteria. The quality elements in this thesis (Well-Being and Support of the Child, Quality of Teaching and Home-School Collaboration) will be discussed next. All the elements are tightly linked to each other because together they form the basis of the quality.

The Well-Being and Support of the Child. As it is noted before, the quality of education and care has a significant impact on the positive outcomes (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa 2002, 87). On reflection, it seems accurate to say that the high quality of education and care leads to the well-being of the child. Well-being is based on the feeling of belongingness, warm peer and adult relationships and the enjoyment of the

child. When children feel that they are appreciated and accepted they feel safe to try new things. (Stakes 2003, 15.) Well-being of the child is seen as a target also in the various instructional documents as National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (Stakes 2003, 15) and National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education (Finnish National Board of Education 2010, 5–6). One of the main quality elements is the received support of child. According to the Quality Criteria the support of learning, growth and well-being should be determined by individual needs of the child. The basis of the support should be an early intervention and preventive action with multi-professional cooperation. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012, 45.) Same viewpoints can be drawn up from the curriculum of Q.F.I. School. In Q.F.I. School the child comes always first and the mission is to support holistic well-being of children. The vision is to support children in learning and growth and enable each child to achieve his or her full potential in life. It is highlighted in the curriculum that the system is based on a child-centered approach and a personal learning plan for every child should be made. The aim of general support is to enhance student's progress. In addition Q.F.I. School provides advanced learning content for students who have high level ability and specified learning support practices for those who need regular support. (Qatar-Finland International School 2014a, 8–9, 96–97.)

The Quality of Teaching. The second element of the quality in this thesis is teaching and teaching arrangements. According to the Quality Criteria the purpose of basic education is not only to teach but also include the aspects of education and care. The learning of children should be goal-directed and diverse learning styles, developmental differences and backgrounds should be taken into account. Differentiated teaching requires pedagogical knowledge and it is emphasised in the Quality Criteria that the high-quality teaching is based on varied teaching methods and appropriate environment, resources and teaching materials. The size of group should be reasonable in order to that teachers have opportunities to observe and support the learning and development individually. Such as the whole system, the teaching should also be based on a child-centered approach. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012, 42–44.) Same aspects are brought together in the curriculum of Q.F.I. School. It is pointed out that educational goals should be based on the needs of individual learner and group. Versatile working approaches and integrated learning are the key issues while planning the teaching. Selected working approaches should make the learning process

meaningful, increase motivation and enhance interaction with peer group. (Qatar-Finland International School 2014a, 23.)

The Home-School Collaboration. The third quality element is collaboration between home and school. This is emphasised in all matters related to learning, growth and development of the child (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012, 46–50). The Quality Criteria defines that the practical and fundamentally positive home-school collaboration is essential for the well-being of the child. The importance of collaboration increases when the challenges of well-being are occurred. The collaboration can be done both in individual and community levels and it should always be based on mutual respect and trust. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012, 50.) It is raised in the curriculum of Q.F.I. School that parents have the responsibility to bring up their child and the role of school is supportive. They encourage parents to participate actively in the home-school collaboration and the operation of the school in general. Q.F.I. School for example carries out external evaluation processes with parents and other relevant stakeholders. (Qatar-Finland International School 2014a, 107–108, 125.) Evaluation and parents' role as a quality reviewer will be discussed more detailed in the following chapter.

4 PARENTS AND QUALITY EVALUATION

4.1 The role of evaluation

According to Hujala and Fonsén (2012) quality maintenance requires a continuous evaluation. The quality evaluation is a way of receiving information about education and care that has been carried out. Evaluation plays an important role in a pursuit of high-quality operation as well as in development of education and care. (Hujala & Fonsén 2012, 312; Kupila 2004, 113.) Nummenmaa (2004, 81) points out that the quality evaluation can be divided into two main objectives which are operation control and operation development. Operation control is more about the perspective of administration. The operation development is generally about the perspective of the other stakeholders and it aims to learn about operation, create new goals and develop procedures. (Nummenmaa 2004, 81.) Heikka, Hujala and Turja (2009) see also the development as one of the key factors in the evaluation of education and care. They state that the evaluation gives valuable information about the needs of development. With the help of evaluation, education and care are more corresponded to the targets that are set nationwide. There are also other issues which Heikka et al. (2009) bring out whilst talking about the importance of evaluation. They think that the evaluation supports the learning and development of child, enable a child-centered planning and enhance the collaboration with parents. (Heikka et al. 2009, 61–73.)

As it is discussed before, quality is considered as a complex and multidimensional concept (Hujala & Fonsén 2012, 313; Niikko & Havu-Nuutinen 2009, 43; Rentzou & Sakellariou 2013, 294). According to Moss, Dahlberg and Pence (2000) there is also a problem in a technical sense concerning the quality management. How can quality be recognised, evaluated and improved? What are valued goals and how are goals measured accurately? Can quality be assured and improved through systems of management and regulation? (Moss et al. 2000, 103–104.) Alila (2004) clarifies how the quality management happens through regulations and documents in national level. There are different levels how administration aspires to control education and care which are a norm control, information control, objective control and resource control. (Alila 2004, 27–28.) The quality management and control can be implemented through

different development projects, taking for example Valoa 1 and 2 projects made in Finland (Kronqvist & Jokimies 2008, 9; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2004a, 95–96). Even if the quality management can be assured and improved in different levels, one should note that evaluation always takes a stand on what is good education and care. In other words it seems to confirm the idea that the quality evaluation can always be seen as some kind of definition of quality. Disposition of questions and the quality evaluation itself expresses what is important, how the child is seen and what kind of pedagogical practices are carried out. (Alila 2004, 27–28; Hujala & Fonsén 2012, 312, 325.)

According to Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2004b) there are several different models, methods and indicators to evaluate the quality of education and care both locally, nationally and internationally. There is not only one right evaluation system that is suitable for all units. Instead of that every school should find their own methods and indicators which are applicable to them and which are working exactly in their environment. The quality control should be planned in a way which is taking into account the perspectives of various stakeholders. (Jinnah & Walters 2008; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2004b, 11.) As Ministry of Education and Culture (2012) also states, internal assessment and systematic external evaluation are combined in a development oriented school. One of the models to develop quality is Plan Do Check Act-model by Deming. In this model development is seen as a continuous and planned process which is proceeding in the stages of planning, implementing, evaluating and developing. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012, 13–15.)

Evaluation methods of early childhood education and care have started to develop in USA. In USA National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) aims to improve the quality of education and care. Also the quality evaluation method in Australia, called QIAS, is created based on the NAEYC. Nowadays there is a quite variation of different quality research and indicators worldwide. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2004b, 48–51.) As it has been stated previously, internationally one of the most widely used indicator is ECERS and indicators derived from the ECERS. (Sakai et al. 2003, 427–428; Sheridan 2007, 199). In Finland Hujala et al. (1999, 80) have created the nationally used quality evaluation model of early childhood education and care (Parrila 2004, 74).

4.2 Ecocultural theory

Children live in various different environments and high-quality interactions between these environments are acknowledged in the field of education and care (Heikka et al. 2009, 43; Hirsto 2010, 99). One theory to explain these interactions is Ecocultural theory (Määttä 1999, 78–79). It is based on Sociocultural and Ecological theories (Gallimore, Weisner, Kaufman & Bernheimer 1989, 217). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological theory highlights the relations between various contexts on children's development and it is based on four different systems and interactions between child and these systems. Ecological theory takes into account also the interactions between other people who are involved in these systems. (Bronfenbrenner 1996, 5–6, 209; Heikka et al. 2009, 43; Hirsto 2010, 99.)

The first system, microsystem is the closest to the child including family and home environment and also nursery or school settings. The second layer, mesosystem is based on the relations and interactions of the microsystems that child participates in. Mesosystem emphasis the interactions between others than the child itself, as an important element of the optimal development and learning. Positive effects of interactions towards child's development can be enhanced if people interacting are significant to the child (parents) and working in mutual understanding between each other (parent-school collaboration). (Bronfenbrenner 1996, 209–214.) The other two systems, exo- and macrosystem, take into consideration the larger social environments and structures that are part of the child's life, mostly indirectly. Basically, macrosystem delineates the characteristics of other systems and it refers to consistencies in a content and structure of these other three systems. These regularities are under the influence of ideologies, values and belief systems of certain culture. For example the home-school collaboration may vary between different cultures. (Bronfenbrenner 1996, 9, 26, 258.)

The key element of Ecocultural theory is the active role of the family. Families accommodate and actively shape their everyday lives and external social circumstances around them. (Määttä 1999, 77–82; Rantala 2002, 21–22.) Furthermore, Heikka et al. (2009, 43–45) talk about contextual growth theory which is also based, among other theories, on Bronfenbrenner's and Ecocultural theory. Contextual growth theory sees education and care as a shared process of all stakeholders involved. It emphasis the active role of the child and underlines child and family centered approach

to education and care. (Heikka et al. 2009, 47; Hujala 2004, 85.) In the other words from the perspective of Ecocultural theory or Contextual growth theory, parents are playing as important role as the child his or herself. This should cover all the aspects of education (Hujala 2004, 85; Tauriainen 2000, 41).

The collaboration between family and school is not a new concept but currently the importance is not only to increase parental involvement but also to build equal partnership between home and school. Nowadays the importance of partnership in education is widely recognised. Reasons for this, among the other things, are the changes in family structures and parenting, accountability and demands for children's achievements. (Hill & Taylor 2004, 161; Hujala, Turja, Gaspar, Veisson & Waniganayake 2009, 57; Jeynes 2011, 1, 24; Jinnah & Walters 2008; St. John-Brooks 1997, 9, 16, 20.) Partnership and collaboration is not only the responsibility of the educational institution but also right of the parent. Not only parents are responsible of their child's well-being and development but they are also seen as active partners who have the right to receive information about their child and his or her education, work together with the school to attain educational goals and participate in planning, monitoring and evaluating the curriculum implemented at the school. (European Parents' Association; Jinnah & Walters 2008; Stakes 2003, 28–29; St. John-Brooks 1997, 18.) According to Epstein (2009, 9) partnership between the family, school and community can improve not only the programmes itself but also the atmosphere. It can support teachers work and the families, increase parent's skills, provide services that are needed and most of all support children to achieve their maximal potential and become active citizens.

It is generally agreed that partnership and parental involvement have positive impact on children's development and success at school (Alasuutari 2010, 150; Hill & Taylor 2004, 161; Jeynes 2011, 72, 112, 140; Tan & Goldberg 2009, 444). Furthermore studies have shown that partnership and parental involvement have effects on parents' satisfaction and the quality of settings (Foot, Howe, Cheyne, Terras & Rattray 2002, 6, 16; Harrist et al. 2007, 316; Jinnah & Walters 2008). For instance Jinnah and Walters (2008) found out that there is a possible link between parents' involvement and satisfaction towards the child care program. Also Foot et al. (2002, 16–17) discovered a moderate link between parental participation and satisfaction. Fantuzzo, Perry and Childs (2006, 150) yet again, note that when practitioners recognise the importance of partnership, parents show increased satisfaction. Parents' satisfaction

is connected to the quality of the settings - that is to say partnership creates quality. (Foot et al. 2002, 16; Jinnah & Walters 2008).

4.3 Parents` perspectives on quality

Quality in child care has been studied since the 1970's. From the beginning the evaluation was based on effects of the care and later on 1980's on the individual elements that effect on children's cognitive and social development. Tools such as ECERS were created and physical environment was one of the most assessed elements. At the end of the 1980's and the beginning of the 1990's the studies were about long term effects on children and it became established that the home environment should be taken into consideration when assessing the effects of child care. (Ceglowski 2004, 103; Ceglowski & Bacigalupa 2002, 89; Hujala & Fonsén 2012, 315; Parrila 2004, 70.)

As stated before, the top-down perspective has been dominant and only recently the studies of child care quality has taken another perspective. Researchers have begun to broaden the definition of quality and other perspective such as parents` and children`s are acknowledged as a crucial part in the quality evaluation. Recently parents are seen as the customers of child care. (Ceglowski 2004, 103; Ceglowski & Bacigalupa 2002, 89; Dahlberg et al. 1999, 98; Hujala et al. 2012, 310; Kronqvist & Jokimies 2008, 3.) Customer satisfaction is seen as a key element in defining, evaluating and developing quality, efficiency and profitability of the of services and the use of customer feedback have also become more commonly used in the field of education and care (European CAF Resource Center 2013, 31, 42; Tauriainen 2000, 41). Fenech (2012, 343) on the other hand notes that parents should be seen not only as consumers but as an active citizens who can contribute to the quality of education and care.

Fenech (2012, 327) states that it is assumed by policy makers that parents have a limited knowledge about what is the quality of child care and parents tend to overstate the quality of setting. Rentzou and Sakellariou (2013) and Cryer et al. (2002) studied parents` perspective on quality and similar results came up. Both studies showed that parents` ratings were higher than ratings of trained observers or researcher (Cryer et al. 2002, 274; Rentzou & Sakellariou 2013, 303). Jinnah and Walter (2008) talk about positive response bias which means that parents` evaluation on quality tends to be better

than actual service provided. This is assumed to be the result of the lack of information, limited possibilities to participate and make decisions. Parents also tend to trust that their children receive qualified child care. (Cryer et al. 2002, 274–275; Jinnah & Walter 2008; Rentzou & Sakellariou 2013, 304.) In this context Hujala et al. (2012, 311) suggest that by improving the communication and by making the educational practices visible parents can have better understanding on quality.

Fenech (2012) brings out another point of view. She states that parents are capable to discern the quality of child care. In her focus group interviews she found out that parents not only have knowledge and understanding about the same elements of quality that policy makers and administrative stakeholders but also broader and more extensive perceptions on the quality child care. However findings from her study cannot be generalised because the small sample but she states that parents' definitions should not be forgotten or underestimated. (Fenech 2012, 333, 341–343.)

According to Harrist et al. (2007, 315) one essential element in the definitions of quality by parents was a rapport between practitioners and family. Also Ceglowski (2004) found out similar results. In her interviews parents mentioned good communication with the families as a key element of quality. In the same study parents also mentioned professionalism and training as important aspects of quality. (Ceglowski 2004, 106.) Identical elements appeared in study by Harrist et al. (2007) where in parents' opinion trained and educated practitioners were considered to be competent and able to provide an appropriate and high-quality care. Professionalism was not mentioned to be a key element but again it was discussed among the parents (Harrist et al. 2007, 318, 322). In a study by Niikko and Havu-Nuutinen (2009, 438–441) parents of preschool aged children highlighted individual support as a crucial element of quality. Also Fenech (2012, 339) ascertains that parents emphasised the individual and additional support of the child as a key aspect of quality care. In addition to individual support, parents mentioned possibility to learn as an aspect of quality. This was also mentioned in a study by Niikko and Havu-Nuutinen (2009, 441).

In Finland Alasuutari, Karila, Alila and Eskelinen (2014) surveyed in their preparatory report for the new law of early childhood education and care the perceptions and satisfaction of parents on quality by using an online questionnaire. This survey revealed similar findings as studies mentioned above. Most of all parents valued personnel characteristics and qualified and educated personnel were mentioned frequently as a strength of the setting. Also effective communication between

practitioners and family and recognition of individual needs of the child were emphasised. (Alasuutari et al. 2014, 11–12, 41–42.) In addition to elements mentioned before, Hujala et al. (2012, 309–310) and Fenech (2012) note that in parents answers, one central element on quality was the enthusiasm and satisfaction of the child. Parents defined quality according their believes what would be best for the child (Fenech 2012, 341).

5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

5.1 Research questions

In this thesis parents` satisfaction and perceptions are explored in order to evaluate and develop the quality of education and care in Qatar-Finland International School. The quality in this thesis is defined by three different components. It is investigated how satisfied parents are with well-being and support of the child, quality of teaching and home-school collaboration and what quality elements do they emphasise in their answers.

Research questions are:

How satisfied are parents on the quality of education and care in Qatar-Finland International School and what quality elements do they emphasise?

1 The child comes first; How satisfied parents are on the well-being and support of the child?

2 Providing high-quality teaching in Qatar; How satisfied parents are on the quality of teaching?

3 Educating together with parents; How satisfied parents are on the home-school collaboration?

5.2 Mixed methods research

In data analysis quantitative methods are mainly used and qualitative analysis is included to enhance results. The aim is to explore how satisfied parents are on the quality of education and care in Q.F.I. School. Overall, there are some common features in quantitative research. Firstly, typical quantitative research is based on measurable

data, numbers and close ended questions. (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007, 6; Johnson & Christensen 2004, 30–34.) Secondly, quantitative research is considered to be value free and it is based on belief of objectivity (Johnson & Christensen 2004, 32–34). Thirdly, according to Vilkkä (2007) every research has a purpose. The purpose of quantitative research is either to explain, describe, explore, compare or predict issues and features concerning people or phenomena of nature. Fourthly, it is usual in quantitative research to set a hypothesis based on research question. The hypothesis is settled by means of previous studies, theories and models and it express researcher`s expectations of the results. Hypothesis are especially defined in explanatory and comparative researches but are rarely defined in descriptive and exploratory researches. This thesis is exploratory research and therefore there is no need to set a hypothesis in advance. Exploratory research is often used for investigating issues that are poorly known and it aims to discover new perspectives. (Vilkkä 2007, 19–24.)

On the other hand qualitative research tries to understand the world and its phenomena as socially constructed. Qualitative research aims to achieve the subjectivity of the experiences and perceptions of informants. The data are gathered with open-ended comments and other methods that usually associate with spoken or written words. (Johnson & Christensen 2004, 32–34.) As Metsämuuronen (2005, 203) also points out qualitative research is more focused on detailed structures of phenomena rather than comprehensive distribution.

Mixed methods research is recognised as one of the major research approaches and it is also conducted and valued in the field of educational research (Johnson & Christensen 2004, 51; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner 2007, 112). The definitions of mixed methods research made by various researchers have been gathered by Johnson et al. (2007, 118–123). They consider that essential part of mixed methods is the presence of both quantitative and qualitative research. The use of both approaches can bring breadth and deeper understanding to the research. This is also acknowledged by others (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007, 6; Johnson & Christensen 2004, 47). These two approaches can be equally emphasised or either one of them can be dominant (Johnson et al. 2007, 124). According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007, 82) Morgan (1998) recommends that the emphasis should be based on data collection method. In this thesis data are mainly collected and analysed by quantitative approach. This is explained in figure 1. A reason for emphasising the quantitative approach in this thesis

is the partner in cooperation. Administration of Q.F.I. School designed the questionnaire to measure parents' satisfaction in quantitative way.

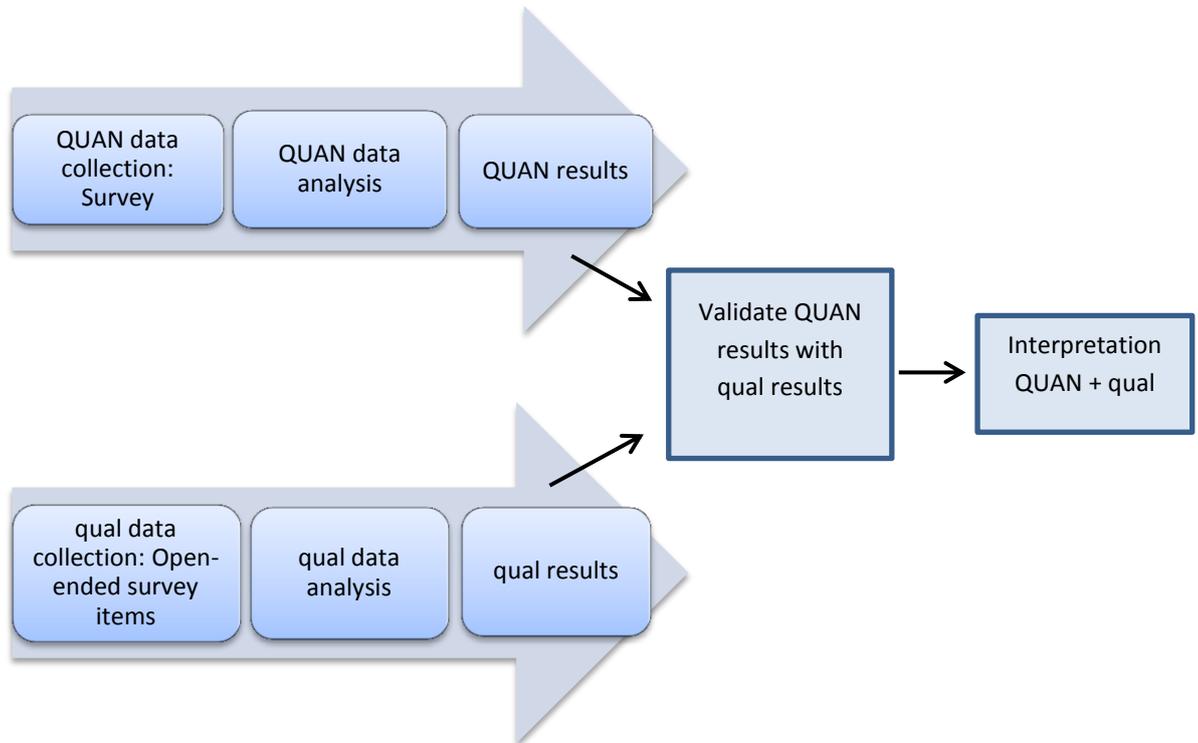


FIGURE 1. Validating quantitative data in mixed research (Adapted by Creswell & Plano Clark 2007, 63)

The definition of mixed methods research also includes the stage of mixing the data. The stages on which the mixing happens can vary from research questions to data analysis. (Johnson et al. 2007, 122.) Creswell and Plano Clark (2007, 117) state that in data collection stage data can be collected concurrently but independently from each other or sequentially but in a relation to each other. In this thesis both quantitative and qualitative data are collected at the same time with one questionnaire. In analysis both quantitative and qualitative analysis are made. At first quantitative data are analysed, secondly, qualitative data are analysed and finally qualitative data will be applied to quantitative data to enhance it.

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) there are three ways in which mixing can happen. Data can be merged or converged, two data sets can be connected or two data sets can be embedded into each other. In embedded study design

one data set has supportive role to another and it is considered that the single data set itself is not adequate. (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007, 7, 67.) In this thesis qualitative data are embedded in quantitative data which as mentioned before, play more important role. This is shown in figure 2. Together these two different data sets give more useful and meaningful answers to the research questions. They also might provide fuller picture and explicate findings in more depth. These features are considered to be the advantages of mixed methods research (Johnson et al. 2007, 122).

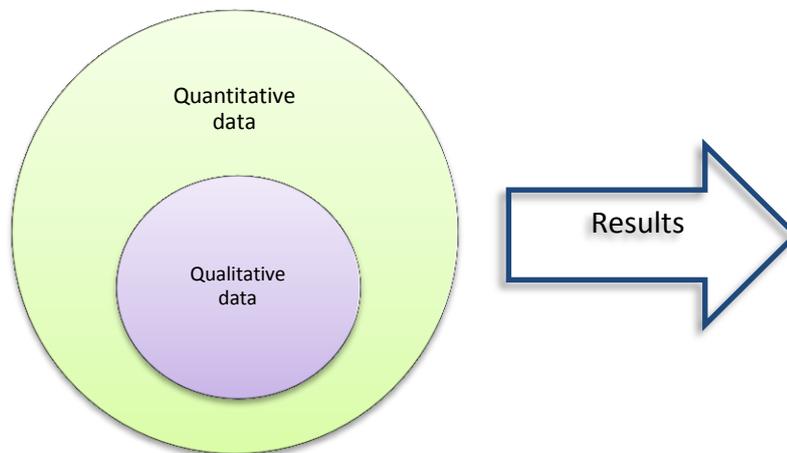


FIGURE 2. Embedding the qualitative data into quantitative data (Adapted by Creswell & Plano Clark 2007, 7)

To sum up mixed methods research is a type of research which tries to broaden and deepen the corroboration and understanding by combining components from both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Johnson et al. 2007, 122–123). Metsämuuronen (2005) confirms the idea that it is beneficial to combine these two approaches and that the approaches are not exclusive. Although he points out that often it is reasonable to choose one of the approaches to be a main approach. Results are more reliable when more than one research methods are used. (Metsämuuronen 2005, 245.)

5.3 Data collection

According to Sapsford (2007) survey research can be carried out by systematic observations or systematic interviews of participants. Standardisation provides the basis for survey research and the aim is to receive coherent answers to coherent questions. It is essential to ask the questions accurately in the same way in each interview or specify accurately what is to be observed and observe same issues in every case. A questionnaire is one of the most common tools to implement a survey research because when investigating characteristics of a population, its resources, needs or opinions, a reasonable thing to do is to go out and ask the questions. (Sapsford 2007, 6–7.)

Questionnaires can be used for various purposes for example studying informants' values, beliefs or thoughts. It is considered to be an adaptable tool for many kind of research methods not only for quantitative research. Rating scale or more accurately the Likert-type scale is a typical type of a questionnaire. In Likert scale informants are asked to choose from numbers which are anchored with words or descriptions. The amount of possibilities of answers can vary from four to eleven. (Johnson & Christensen 2004, 164, 171; Vilkka 2007, 45.) The questionnaire used in this thesis (appendix) is a five-point Likert scale because parents have a possibility to choose from five descriptions of agreement. Possibilities are “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “neutral”, “agree” and “strongly agree”. In this questionnaire numbers are substituted for emoticons but for technical reasons the emoticons cannot be seen in appendix. Johnson and Christensen (2004, 171) state that five-point rating scale is well tried in the field of education. On the other hand Vilkka (2007) points out that rating scales are established also in the field of business when companies are developing their services in a customer oriented way. Through this type of scale respondents level of agreement or disagreement can be specified and opinions based on their experiences can be taken into account. (Vilkka 2007, 45.)

The questionnaire used in this thesis (appendix) is made by administration of Q.F.I. School and data were collected during February 2015. In the questionnaire parents can choose whether they want to answer in English or in Arabic and all the Arabic answers will be translated into English. The questionnaire is carried out via INKA tool which is an internet based system to evaluate and develop the quality of education (EduCluster Finland Ltd). Ruskoaho et al. (2010) point out that traditional

survey questionnaires that are sent via mail are replaced by online questionnaires. This type of survey is considered to be easy, cost-effective and fast to carry out (Ruskoaho et al. 2010, 279–280; Tuten, Urban & Bosnjak 2000, 17).

The questionnaire consists of thirteen theses and three of them are questions about basic information. For ethical reasons (discussed more later) there is a question about research permission at the beginning of the survey. Parents are able to determine will they give permission to use their answers for research purposes in University of Jyväskylä. Parents are also asked about the nationality and the grade of the student. There is a request to fill in separate form for each child if family has more than one child in Q.F.I. School. After every remaining ten theses there is a possibility to give further comments concerning the matter in question. In this study we will focus on the certain theses in quantitative analysis which are determined by research questions. The first question is about how satisfied parents are on the Well-Being and Support of the Child. This is explored with the following theses in the questionnaire.

- 1) The child comes first, always: Most of the time my child likes to go to school in the morning.
- 2) Student Progress: My child is making progress at school.
- 4) Student Support Systems: My child gets enough support for his/her growth and learning from a multiprofessional team (teacher, special needs teacher, nurse, school counsellor).

The second question is about how satisfied parents are on the Quality of Teaching. This is explored with the theses five and six.

- 5) Teaching: The quality of teaching in the home class is good (Finnish teachers).
- 6) Teaching: The quality of teaching of Arabic department (Arabic, Islamic, Qatar, History) is good.

The third question is about how satisfied parents are on the Home-School Collaboration. This is explored with the theses seven, nine and ten.

7) Assessment: The used assessment methods keep me well informed about my child`s progress.

9) Home-School Collaboration: The school is communicating efficiently with the parents/guardians.

10) Home-School Collaboration: The school offers enough possibilities for parents/guardians to get involved with the school life.

Metsämuuronen (2005, 53) points out that quantitative research is usually based on a sample which can be selected randomly or non-randomly. This thesis is conducted with a total sample. According to Vilkka (2007, 51) total sample means that all the units of research such as objects, individuals or groups are measured. Metsämuuronen (2005, 53) continues that total sample is used when researchers want to study specific group. Vilkka (2007, 52) adds that this type of “a sample” is common when research data are small. Questionnaire was sent to 90 families.

5.4 Data analysis

Data were analysed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences Statistics 22 (SPSS) which is created to analyse quantitative data (Metsämuuronen 2005, 480). The number of returned questionnaires was 45 and 43 of the parents gave a permission to use their answers for research purposes. One of the answers was excluded from the data because there were plenty of missing values and therefore the final amount of the analysed replies was 42. One or two missing values were found in six answers. It is common to have missing values in data and it is recommended that these values are substituted. This can be done by using the mean of the specific variable. (Einspruch 2005, 11; Metsämuuronen 2005, 496. In this thesis randomly missing values were replaced by the mean of each variable.

Before conducting analyses, two new variables were computed by using the existing variables. Theses 1, 2, and 4 and theses 7, 9 and 10 were combined. These

variables were named after research questions 1 and 3 (Well-being and Support of the Child and Home-School Collaboration). Data computing can be done if two or more variables measure similar issues. In this case we were interested in the phenomena behind multiple variables rather than one separated variable. This kind of data computing can be relevant or even desirable in practice. (Einspruch 2005, 42; Metsämuuronen 2005, 507.) Cronbach's alpha was computed to assure the reliability of the new variables. The idea was to create also a third data set for the research question number 2 (the Quality of Teaching) by combining theses 5 and 6. However we decided to reject the third data set because of the weak value of Cronbach's alpha. Instead of that we explored those two theses individually. Theses 3 and 8 were excluded from quantitative data analysis because of the lack of relevance for the research questions in this thesis. These theses covered the themes of student admissions and school leadership (appendix). To explore the overall satisfaction on the quality, a one more variable was created by combining theses 1–10. The values of Cronbach's alpha and reliability are discussed and reported later.

On the other hand the comments given to all of the 10 theses were used in qualitative analysis. This was because the themes that touch on research questions occurred also in theses that were excluded from the quantitative data analysis. There were 99 comments altogether. 16 of them were written in Arabic and 83 in English. Same comments occurred few times which may be because parents were advised to fill in a separate questionnaire for each child. The Arabic replies were translated into English but were not used in this thesis mainly because of the quality of the translation task. This procedure was suggested by the Q.F.I. School. Qualitative analysis was conducted by the guidance of the research questions. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2011) talk about theory bounded analysis when a certain theory or framework is linked to the analysis of qualitative data. Categories arise from the data but former information guides and supports the analysis. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2011, 96–100). The categories can also overlap partially or completely which means that particular units of data fit under more than one category. This can result from the fact that the categories mean basically the same or moreover, that there is a relationship among two or more categories. (Johnson and Christensen 2004, 508.) This type of analysis of the qualitative data is known as an abductive analysis (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2011, 95–100).

In this thesis one unit of data was understood as an entirety of thought and units of data were allowed to overlap in all categories. Qualitative analysis proceeded so

that at first, we carefully explored the data individually. Both researchers created upper themes according to research questions. Themes were partially guided by the themes of the individual theses in questionnaire. Next we compared the themes and combined them by negotiating. After that we clustered original comments under the upper themes together and simplified expressions. Subthemes were created by sorting all the comments under one upper theme according to the content of comment. While exploring the themes, we noticed that similar types how parents emphasised the quality emerged from the data. On that account deeper qualitative analysis was made by typifying. We decided to verify that types were relevant by confirming that there were an adequate amount of meanings under each type. According to Eskola and Suoranta (2008), generally the thematic structure of qualitative data is presented at first. Analysis can be carried further by creating more abstract types that arise from the data. At best these types illustrate the data in broad and interesting way. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 181.)

6 PARENTS` SATISFACTION ON THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND CARE

6.1 The Well-Being and the Support of the Child

Next the results of this thesis will be presented. At first, parents` opinions about the quality of education and care will be introduced by the means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages. Further analysis is done by comparing differences of particular groups (nationality and student`s grade). Secondly, in this context, the qualitative results will be brought to extend the quantitative results. There were 16 participants who were Qatari and 26 from other nationalities (N = 42). The amount of participants who had a child in the grade 0 was 20 and in the grades 1 and 2 there were 11 participants in both individually.

The results of the first research question, The child comes first; How satisfied parents are on the well-being and support of the child, are presented next. The mean of Well-Being and Support of the Child was 4.27 (SD 0.57) so it can be argued that parents are satisfied on this area. Nationalities and students` grades were used to bring depth to the analysis. Normality of variables were studied by visually inspecting histograms and by using Shapiro-Wilk -test because the number of participants were rather low (N = 42). The results showed that the Well-Being and Support of the Child -variable was not normally distributed (Sig. = .000, df 42). Due to the results of Shapiro-Wilk -test, non-parametric tests were performed to analyse the differences on parents` satisfaction among nationalities and students` class grades. Mann-Whitney test was carried out because it is an acknowledged non-parametric test to compare means of two groups with each other and Kruskal-Wallis test was performed to compare means of several groups. (Metsämuuronen 2005, 594, 866–867, 1047–1052.)

In table 1 the satisfaction on the Well-Being and Support of the Child according to nationality is presented. There was no statistically significant difference between nationalities (Sig. = .739) and differences between means did not occur. Similar findings can be found in table 2 regarding to student`s grade. Neither there was no statistical significant difference (Sig. = .305) but a minor differences can be observed when comparing the means. The mean of 0 grade parents was slightly higher.

TABLE 1. Satisfaction on the Well-Being and Support of the Child according to nationality

	Qatari		Other		U	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
	M	SD	M	SD			
Well-Being and Support of the Child	4.29	.56	4.26	.59	195.50	-.33	.739

M = Mean
SD = Standard Deviation
U = Mann-Whitney

TABLE 2. Satisfaction on the Well-Being and Support of the Child according to student`s grade

	Grade 0		Grade 1		Grade 2		Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Well-Being and Support of the Child	4.42	.51	4.15	.62	4.12	.62	2.38	2	.305

M = Mean
SD = Standard Deviation
df = degree of freedom

To deepen the quantitative results, qualitative analysis was made and it revealed three themes for the first subquestion. Themes were Enjoyment, Individualised Learning and Progress. The theme of Enjoyment is divided into two subtheme which were stronger enjoyment and weaker enjoyment. Stronger enjoyment occurred clearly more in parents' comments than weaker enjoyment. This can be seen related to fairly high mean of this variable (M = 4.27, SD 0.57). Parents highlighted that the child likes to go to school and is happy with his or her teacher. Other things that parents mentioned for stronger enjoyment were peer relationships and the activities that the school offers.

“He is very happy with the class work he is taking part in and never complains that he is bored and is always positive when he talks about his school day and reports that he having fun and learning.” (Participant 669811)

Weaker enjoyment occurred in comments as a lack of child's personal interest and motivation. One parent brought up that the child does not like the way the teacher operates. In some comments school practices such as early morning were mentioned.

“She doesnt always want to go but mostly that is because of the really early start of The day. So she is tired.” (Participant 671328)

Individualised learning was divided into two subthemes, adequate support and lack of support. Adequate support was related to personnel’s ability to offer support for the child.

“The teacher has been trying her best to give individualized learning to my child.” (Participant 669218)

These kinds of comments can be found from the data but the comments related to lack of support were dominant. It was noticeable from the parents comments that the child did not get enough individual support whether he or she has high level abilities or need for specified support practices.

“My son level above the students in his class because he was in previous international school no math or English added him from school” (Participant 669523)

“The teachings should be tailored to the child’s ability to learn and not a standard for everyone with different levels.” (Participant 669218)

The theme of Progress contained also two subthemes. These themes were positive and slow progress. Neither one of these themes were dominant. As it is mentioned before, units of data can fit under more than one theme (Johnson and Christensen 2004, 508). In this case the comments under the Individualised learning were partially same as the comments placed under this theme. It can be argued that there is a relationship among these two themes. In some comments parents brought out that they assume progress to be slow because of the deficient support. Regarding to slow progress, parents expressed that the child is improving slowly and he or she should progress more. In comments related to positive progress, parents disclosed that the child was obtaining knowledge and skills. In other words, they brought out that the child is learning and making progress. The next comment crystallises the previous themes.

“My child is making good progress in obtaining some knowledge and skills such as English language, building toys, Science week made great impression. However some of the skills are at the same level or even a bit weaker than before such as drawing, coloring within lines, basic mathematics operations.” (Participant 671533)

According to quantitative results, parents were satisfied on the Well-Being and Support of the Child and this can be also seen in the high incidence of the stronger enjoyment comments. Even though the mean was fairly high, it cannot be ignored that some dissenting results were found concerning individualised learning.

6.2 The Quality of Teaching

In this chapter the results of research question number two, Providing high-quality teaching in Qatar; How satisfied parents are on the quality of teaching, are discussed. As mentioned before, the variables in this question are considered separately. The mean of Home-Class Teaching was clearly higher ($M = 4.57$, $SD = .55$) than the mean of Arabic Department Teaching ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.02$). It is noteworthy that the standard deviation under Arabic Department Teaching was wide ($SD = 1.02$) which means that the amount of variation in answer was larger. This can be seen when observing the distribution of answers presented in table 3. Variables were not normally distributed

(Home Class Teaching Sig. = .000, df 42, Arabic Department Teaching Sig. = .000, df 42) so Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests were carried out. In table 4 the difference between nationality and quality of teaching is presented. It can be seen that there was no statistically significant difference between nationalities and Home-Class Teaching (Sig. = .892) nor between nationality and Arabic Department Teaching (Sig. = .270). No differences in means were observed either. In table 5 can be found parents' satisfaction on the Quality of Teaching according to student's grade. Again, there were no statistically significant difference (Home-Class Teaching Sig. = .727, Arabic Department Teaching Sig. = .124). On the other hand the parents of grade 0 were slightly more satisfied when comparing the means.

TABLE 3. Distribution of answers in the Quality of Teaching

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Home Class Teaching	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.4%)	16 (38.1%)	25 (59.5%)
Arabic Department Teaching	2 (4.8%)	1 (2.4%)	14 (33.3%)	15 (35.7%)	10 (23.8%)

Values are presented as frequencies and percentages.

TABLE 4. Satisfaction on the Quality of Teaching according to nationality

	Qatari		Other		U	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
	M	SD	M	SD			
Home Class Teaching	4.56	.63	4.58	.50	203.50	-.14	.892
Arabic Department Teaching	3.81	1.33	3.65	.80	167.50	-1.10	.270

M = Mean

SD = Standard Deviation

U = Mann-Whitney

TABLE 5. Satisfaction on the Quality of Teaching according to student`s grade

	Grade 0		Grade 1		Grade 2		Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Home Class Teaching	4.65	.49	4.55	.52	4.45	.69	.64	2	.727
Arabic Department Teaching	4.05	.83	3.45	1.37	3.36	.81	4.18	2	.124

M = Mean

SD = Standard Deviation

df = degree of freedom

In qualitative analysis two themes for the Quality of Teaching arose from the data. Themes were Teachers and Teaching. Under the theme of Teachers, subthemes personal and professional characteristics were found. Parents commented that children are happy with the teacher and that teachers are friendly and they care about the child. Also a good child-teacher communication was mentioned. Overall the comments related to teachers personal characteristics were positive and only one parent brought up a negative characteristic of a teacher.

“Drive by a love of the amazing she has. I have asked her a few times if she would like to change schools and every time I get firm “no” :)” (Participant 669192)

“... He does complain that the teacher gets angry easily and often.” (Participant 669187)

Professional characteristics that parents mentioned were gifted and qualified teachers who know the children and their needs. The ability to utilise the professional skills in order to support the child was mentioned in a few comments. Parents felt that teachers are dedicated but it cannot be generalised because in one comment more engagement from the teachers staff was requested. The separation into personal and professional characteristics was not that evident because we personally believe that personality and professionalism are strongly interweaved in the field education. For example in the

comment below, the different characteristics of teacher are tightly linked each other. The name of the teacher is changed.

“I am very happy with the teaching staff at QFIS, They are all both professional, friendly and I have complete faith in Ms Lahti in her teaching abilities and she knows and cares about my child and can relate to him.” (Participant 669811)

Teaching was formed out of three subthemes which were teaching methods, teaching arrangements and goal-directed teaching. For teaching methods parents mentioned issues concerning the good quality of Finnish education and teaching styles but in contrary parents criticised that Arabic Department teachers should apply more of Finnish teaching methods. Generally it appeared in comments that parents consider the teaching methods to be too easy and homogeneous. In several comments more or less challenge was requested.

“We feel that our son should progress more than the current state. no more extra activities to allow to take care of student who are deficient in certain area...” (Participant 669517)

In subtheme of teaching arrangements parents brought out different propositions and wishes regarding to operations in Q.F.I. School. Suggestion concerned various issues from everyday practices to curriculum. Arrangements in teaching environment and resources were also mentioned.

“... We have been wondering is it necessary for children that young to have subject Qatar history/ any history for that mater, and to be assessed from the subject.” (Participant 671533)

“The school currently offers two streams of Arabic: native and non-native. However, there are enough students in the school to create a third class for students who are exposed to the Arabic language but are not native speakers...” (Participant 670291)

The last subtheme under Teaching, goal-directed teaching, revealed that some of the parents thought that teaching is beneficial to their child because the child is learning and

making progress. It is noteworthy that some parents compared teaching in Q.F.I. School to other schools and it can be argued that they did not consider the teaching as goal-directed as it could be because the lack of progress.

“The things they studied in these few months very weak compared to other outstanding schools” (Participant 669523)

From these results one may conclude that parents were overall rather satisfied on the Quality of Teaching but according to quantitative results parents were happier with the Home-Class Teaching. Qualitative comments endorsed this result by emphasising Finnish teaching methods. Furthermore it is noticeably that even if the mean of Home-Class Teaching was high ($M = 4.57$, $SD = .55$), parents requested more differentiated teaching. The comments we have presented in this and previous chapter would indicate that there is a relation between differentiated teaching and individualised learning.

6.3 The Home-School Collaboration

Finally the results of the third research question, Educating together with parents; How satisfied parents are on the home-school collaboration, are presented. The mean of Home-School Collaboration was 4.24 ($SD = 0.56$) which means that parents are satisfied on the collaboration. Variable was not normally distributed ($Sig. = .007$, $df 42$). No statistically significant difference occurred between nationality and Home-School Collaboration ($Sig. = 1.00$) nor between student`s grade and Home-School Collaboration ($Sig. = .459$). These are presented in tables 6 and 7. Furthermore, no difference in means between nationalities was discovered but a minor difference between 0, 1 and 2 grade was observed. The mean of 2 grade parents was a bit lower than the others.

TABLE 6. Satisfaction on the Home-School Collaboration according the nationality

	Qatari		Other		U	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
	M	SD	M	SD			
Home-School Collaboration	4.23	.62	4.24	.53	208.00	.000	1.00

M = Mean
SD = Standard Deviation
U = Mann-Whitney

TABLE 7. Satisfaction on the Home-School Collaboration according to student`s grade

	Grade 0		Grade 1		Grade 2		Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Home-School Collaboration	4.33	.57	4.24	.54	4.06	.55	1.56	2	.459

M = Mean
SD = Standard Deviation
df = degree of freedom

Two themes were emerged from the qualitative data which were Communication and Involvement. Communication was divided into two subthemes, effective and weak communication. Concerning effective communication, parents brought out multiple ways to communicate as a strength. Another issue that came out was the approachability and polite features of the personnel.

“Very good with weekly summaries, emails and push sms!” (Participant 669171)

Equally relevant is that parents brought out that there is a problem in communication, especially regarding the operations in Arabic department. This can be argued because

the majority of the comments relating to weak communication was found under the thesis of “The quality of teaching of Arabic department (Arabic, Islamic, Qatar, History) is good”. The biggest problem among parents seemed to be that they do not receive enough information or have enough communication with the Arabic department.

“To be honest I have not had much communication with the arabic department except from the newsletters. My son has spoken some random arabic greeting and number but I would appreciate if there was feedback about what has been taught in the lesson so I can reinforce it at home to assist his learning.” (Participant 669811)

In previous comment it can be seen that there are parents who found that the communication is weak and they wanted to have more interaction. This type of comments were found also under the theses “The used assessment methods keep me well informed about my child’s progress” and “The school management succeeds well in their work”.

Involvement consisted of two subthemes which were good possibilities and developing possibilities to involve. Comments under the good possibilities were related to the parent association which creates opportunities to participate. Parent association is also mentioned in developing possibilities. However, under this subtheme parents brought out that association is still forming and they are looking forward to have more opportunities to participate. In addition, some parents brought out other ideas than parents association to involve with the school operations.

“There should be more ways to get involved. I am sure that will come with time, as the school becomes more established.” (Participant 669174)

“...Also middle of a term descriptive progress report (or parent/ teacher meeting) would help parents follow up.” (Participant 671533)

To sum up, quantitative results showed that parents were satisfied on the Home-School collaboration. Qualitative results reinforced finding because many parents found communication effective and saw good or developing possibilities for involvement. Nevertheless, parents brought out that there is a lack of communication especially in

Arabic department. In quantitative results weak communication can be seen in amount of neutral answers under Arabic department (table 3).

6.4 Parents' ways to emphasise the quality

As a summary, parents' satisfaction on the quality of education and care in Q.F.I. School were explored by the means (M) and standard deviations (SD). Quantitative results show that parents were generally satisfied on education and care in Q.F.I. School (M = 4.16, SD = 0.48). To be more precise, parents were satisfied on the Well-Being and Support of the Child (M = 4.27, SD = 0.57) and the Home-School Collaboration (M = 4.24, SD = 0.56). Particularly satisfied parents seemed to be on Home Class Teaching (M = 4.57, SD = 0.55). Even if the mean of quality of teaching in Arabic Department was slightly lower than others (M = 3.71, SD = 1.02), it can be argued that parents are rather satisfied on the quality in Arabic Department Teaching as well. According to the findings there were no statistically significant difference between nationalities (Sig.>.05) and differences were not observed in comparisons of the means (tables 1, 4 & 6). Statistically significant difference did not occur neither in student's grade comparison (Sig. >.05). By observing the means there seems to be a minimal difference between the 0 Grade parents and other parents. The means of 0 Grade parents seem to be a bit higher in all variables (tables 2, 5 & 7).

Themes of qualitative analysis are presented in figure 3. According to these themes, three ways of emphasising quality elements among parents were found. On the grounds of data used in this thesis, there are well-being oriented, result oriented and collaboration oriented parents.

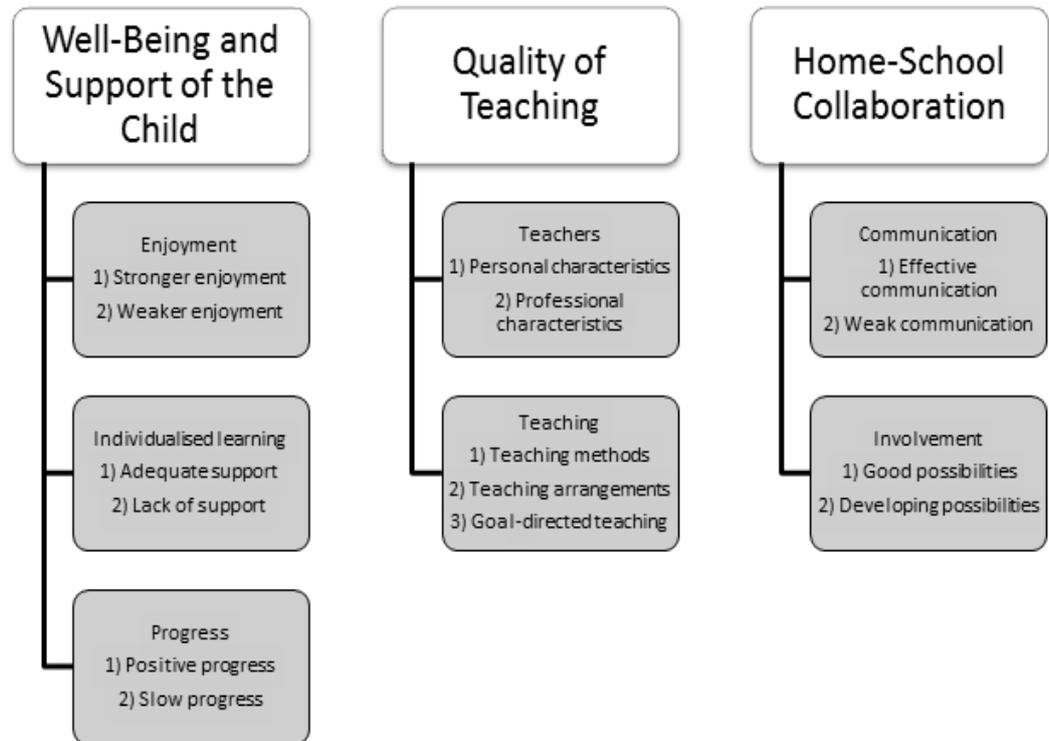


FIGURE 3. Themes of qualitative analysis

Well-being oriented parents emphasised the enjoyment of the child as well as the socioemotional environment of the school. These parents highlighted that warm interactions and peer relationship are an important part of quality. Child's feelings of success and his or her satisfaction on school signified to the parents. *Result oriented* parents underlined more the progress of the child and brought out the importance of academic skills. The focus of these parents was in individualised support and differentiated teaching which should lead to improvement of child's skills and knowledge. *Collaboration oriented* parents highlighted their own active role as a part of quality of education and care. They put a stress on effective communication and possibilities to involve. These parents accentuated that by the means of cooperation child can be reinforced to achieve his or her maximal potential.

7 DISCUSSION

7.1 Implications of research results

The purpose of this thesis was to distribute information about the quality of education and care that has been carried out in Q.F.I. School. From the research results it can be stated that parents possess valuable information about quality of education and care of their child. It seems that parents recognise the elements of quality and they are capable to bring out development areas. Also Cryer et al. (2002, 275) and Fenech (2012, 341) point out that parents value the same elements of quality that is generally agreed among the researchers. When utilising the results, personnel of the school can become more aware of the strengths and development areas of the operations in the school. According to Plan Do Check Act -model by Deming, this kind of evaluation can lead to development of operations and improvement of quality (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012, 13–15). Strengths and development areas of the school would not have occurred that accurately if we had used only quantitative method. On that account we personally believe that mixed methods used in this thesis was an eminently appropriate way to explore and form a comprehensive understanding of the quality of education and care.

Quantitative results showed that parents' overall satisfaction on the quality of education and care in Q.F.I. School is good. Results were similar to previous studies about parents' perspectives on quality. Cryer et al. (2002, 274) and Rentzou and Sakellariou (2013, 303) found out that parents tend to be satisfied on education and care of their children. Qualitative findings of this thesis extended quantitative findings and these results were also parallel to previous studies. In comments, the strong enjoyment of the child was mentioned several times and moreover, well-being oriented parents underlined socioemotional environment as an element of quality. In studies by Fenech (2012, 341) and Hujala et al. (2012, 309–310), feeling of belongingness and contentment of the child as well as the fact that he or she enjoys going to setting were mentioned as an important part of quality. From the results of this thesis, it can be argued that the enjoyment of the child is related to the personal and professional characteristics of the teachers and teaching methods, especially the methods used in

home-class teaching. The practices and characteristics of personnel were identified as quality components also in a study by Harrist et al. (2007, 317–319). In addition, according to Ceglowski (2004, 106), parents valued caring and stable personnel who can provide professional care as a quality element.

The positive experiences of home-school collaboration were also emphasised in parents' answers in this thesis. Fantuzzo et al. (2006) note that recognition and appreciation of parent partnership is most likely to increase the level of parental satisfaction. In other words it can be stated that the parents' satisfied experiences of school contacts indicate the efficient home-school collaboration. (Fantuzzo et al. 2006, 150.) Regarding to parental involvement, Jinnah and Walters (2008) found out that parents who feel that they are able to share ideas and suggestion with the teacher tend to be more satisfied on quality. Altogether, in previous studies, parents have mentioned collaboration and communication as essential elements of quality (Ceglowski 2004, 106, 109; Cryer et al. 2002, 275; Fantuzzo et al. 2006, 149; Harrist et al. 2007, 315–316). In this thesis collaboration oriented parents proposed ideas and wanted to be involved in school operations and child's learning. It can be claimed that these parents took an active role in a way that Ecocultural theory suggests. According to the theory family itself creates own culture and the macrosystem is seen as an integral part of families' everyday life, not only as an external agency. That is to say perceptions and beliefs of each family create an individual way to operate. (Määttä 1999, 79; Rantala 2002, 21.) From the research results of this thesis one may assume that unique family cultures are embodied in ways how parents emphasise the quality.

On the other hand qualitative comments revealed some essential development areas concerning the operation in Q.F.I. School. There were two matters where seemed to be room for improvement. Firstly, as result oriented parents reported, there appear to be a lack of support for individualised learning and a need for more differentiated teaching. In other words, personal learning paths are not actualised that well in Q.F.I. School. This feedback is remarkable because in the curriculum of the school, a child-centered and individually supported system is underlined (Qatar-Finland International School 2014a, 96). Also in a study by Niikko and Havu-Nuutinen (2009, 438) parents highlighted the right of the child to have tailored teaching according to his or her abilities.

Secondly, even if parents seemed to be generally quite satisfied with the home-school collaboration, they pointed out that communication in Arabic department

is weak. It can be argued that in the framework of mesosystem, effective communication creates a basis for cooperation and interaction with parents and leads to the advantageous development of child (Bronfenbrenner 1996, 209-215). Also in the curriculum of Q.F.I School, involvement and active role of the parents are emphasised. (Qatar-Finland International School 2014a, 106–109.) Harrist et al. (2007) and Hujala et al. (2012) found out in their studies that parents value visibility and involvement. Visibility and involvement give parents a possibility to see what is going on in the setting and in that way they have a more knowledge to evaluate and develop quality. (Harrist et al. 2007, 320–321; Hujala et al. 2012, 311.) To illustrate this point one need only refer to the comments that parents presented in this thesis. There were parents who brought out directly that they cannot evaluate the quality of teaching in Arabic department because they do not know enough about it. There were also some parents who recognised the same problem but expressed it indirectly in their comments.

To sum up from the previous arguments it can be concluded that Q.F.I. School has succeeded in creating a warm socioemotional environment and they are offering the high-quality home-class teaching and opportunities for collaboration. These features are confirmed in the curriculum of the school and the Quality Criteria for Basic Education in Finland hence it can be said that they have reached their objectives in these areas. It can also be agreed that there is room for improvement regarding to personal learning path of the child and communication in Arabic department. As recognised before, similarities between the results from this thesis and findings from the previous studies can be seen even though it is a matter of education export and different cultures. Cryer et al. (2002, 273) found out that despite of contextual differences, German parents and parents from USA had consistencies in their perspectives and definitions on quality. According to findings of this thesis, it can be stated that the Finnish quality criteria may respond to the international education requirements. In some comments a minor friction between cultures was perceptible but because of researchers` restricted knowledge of Qatari culture it was hard to identify and evaluate the impact of larger social structures to the parents answers. This can be linked to the macrosystem of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. According to this theory, educational objectives and values as well as pedagogical practises vary from macrosystem to another but also between families (Bronfenbrenner 1996, 26; Sheridan 2007, 204).

7.2 Validity and reliability

7.2.1 Quantitative data

Validity and reliability are inseparable part of the research. The validity and reliability of the research are strongly connected to the validity and reliability of measurement instrument. The questionnaire used in this thesis was created by using INKA tool that is a generally accepted internet based system to evaluate education and care in Finland. INKA is used in various Finnish education institutions. (EduCluster Finland Ltd.) Metsämuuronen (2005, 58) states that a ready-made indicator increases the validity and reliability of the research. The fact that the questionnaire is carried out via INKA tool, raises also the trustworthiness of this thesis. According to Metsämuuronen (2005, 174) pre-testing is an essential part of constructing an instrument. We do not know whether the pre-testing is done or not but we have a strong faith that questionnaire made with the help of INKA-tool is correctly created and tested.

Validity can be divided into external validity and internal validity. External validity is basically how well the research can be generalised and in most cases it concerns the sampling. Internal validity means that the research is valid if it measures what it claimed to be measuring. Internal validity again can be divided into more specific areas which are content, construct and criterion validity. Content validity means that the constructs cover the phenomena broadly enough and that they are consistent with the theory. Construct validity goes further than content validity. According to construct validity the variables measuring the same issue should correlate. In addition, criterion validity measures correlation with something external value which operates as the criteria of validity. (Krippendorff 2013, 329–331; Metsämuuronen 2005, 109–115.)

In this thesis, the external validity is strengthening by the choice to conduct questionnaire with a total sample. We wanted to explore the satisfaction of all parents in Q.F.I. School. Response rate may be regarded as moderate (50%) because according to Veal (1997, 154) the response rates in survey researches are often only 25–30 percents. On this basis, the results cannot be generalised to the entire set of parents but can be interpreted as illustrative and directional results. As mentioned before, a ready-made questionnaire was used in this thesis. This can raise the internal validity but one should, nevertheless, consider the issue from another angle. Generally the process

of constructing the instruments begins from the research questions and relevant theories (Metsämuuronen 2005, 100, 107). In this thesis the process developed conversely. At first we received the questionnaire and based on that, the research questions and theoretical background were drawn up. It can be said that this thesis was mainly defined by the questionnaire. With different kind of instrument, trends and breadths of the thesis could have been deeper in relation to our research questions. Furthermore, a questionnaire with more theses, including control theses, could have raised the validity of this thesis (Metsämuuronen 2005, 70).

Reliability means that the test can be repeatable if needed (Krippendorff 2013, 272–273). Metsämuuronen (2005) states that if the same test would be conducted for same group of people researcher would get similar findings. He suggests that there are three ways in which reliability can be computed. These are Parallel test, Test-Retest or internal consistency by using Cronbach's alpha. (Metsämuuronen 2005, 65, 118.) In this thesis other procedures than the observation of internal consistence were impossible to carry out. According to Metsämuuronen (2005, 69, 511) Cronbach's alpha is one of the most used and distinguished indicators to measure the internal consistence of variables. He also point out that if the value of alpha is lower than 0.60, it should not be accepted. In this thesis the values of Well-being and Support of the child -variable ($\alpha = .69$) and Home-School Collaboration -variable ($\alpha = .71$) were satisfactory. However, the value of premeditated third variable (the Quality of Teaching) was weak ($\alpha = .49$) so it was rejected. Cronbach's alpha for the whole instrument was strong ($\alpha = .82$).

According to Metsämuuronen (2005, 245) research data are more reliable when various research methods are used. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2011) also bring out the idea that research questions should be explored with the support of diverse viewpoints. They talk about triangulation which aims to combine different methods, researchers, informants and theories. A purpose is either related to the question of truth or question of comprehensiveness. In this thesis triangulation is used to strive for completeness. Within-method triangulation is utilized when quantitative Likert-scale and qualitative open-ended comments are implemented in the same survey. Also research triangulation is used in the data analysing because there are two researchers who are interpreting answers. Triangulation is one option to enhance dependable features of the research but it is not perfectly trouble-free. It is essential that researchers familiarise themselves with the opportunities and challenges of the triangulation. The most controversial issue concerning triangulation is the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

There are people who think that different methods can be used in the same study but on the other hand some people think that it is completely unjustified. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2011, 142–146.)

7.2.2 Qualitative data

The examination of validity and reliability of qualitative data vary from the examination of quantitative data. Initially, the concepts of reliability and validity are criticised because qualitative research is not based on assumption of one truth but to subjectivity of the researcher. In qualitative research the evaluation of reliability covers the whole research process and the role of researcher is essential. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 208–210; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2011, 136.) On that account one should note here that we are inexperienced as researchers and it might have an impact on the results of this thesis.

According to Tauriainen (2000, 113) qualitative research process can be examined by the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. *Credibility* means that the research is believable and it is based on language and interpretations. In other words, research is more trusted if the interpretations of the researcher correspond to the interpretations of the participants. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 211; Tauriainen 2000, 113.) In this thesis the biggest challenge with credibility was the language. English is not the first language of the researchers and probably it is neither the first language of the majority of the participants. Grammatical errors occurred in qualitative data which hindered the interpretations of researchers. In some comments it was impossible to figure out the meaning of answer due to short comments without verbs and adequate conjunctions. These comments were left out by mutual agreement. Also the comments written in Arabi were left out which effected on credibility. Tauriainen (2000, 114) points out that credibility is increased if researcher familiarise oneself with context where participants live but in this thesis researchers did not have possibility to do so. We interpreted qualitative data based on our own cultural background and parents answered to the questionnaire based on their cultural background. To illustrate this one need only refer to Harzing (2006, 257) who states that cultural characteristics effect on response styles. It can be argued that, cultural differences also effect on *transferability*. According to Eskola and Suoranta (2008, 211–212) transferability refers to the degree which the

result can be generalised into other contexts. It is noticeable that Q.F.I. School is unique social context so it can be argued that the transferability of the results is rather impossible.

Dependability explores the factors that might have an impact on the research process. These factors can relate to relationship between the researcher and participants, either one of those individually, methodological issues or environmental factors. (Tauriainen 2000, 116.) Relationship between the researchers and participants did not exist in this thesis. We personally believe that this might increase the objectivity of the analysis because the participants remained distant and no personal relation was developed. On the other hand the results may have influenced by the research method. When using structured questionnaire, participants have a limited possibility to bring out own opinions. In this thesis participants were guided to give further comments for specific thesis which itself had a certain theme. Finally, *confirmability* refers to the degree to which the result can be confirmed by someone else (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 212). The research triangulation discussed earlier might have increased the confirmability of this thesis. At first we analysed the qualitative data separately and then combined our results by argumenting and challenging our views. Confirmability is also increased by the observation that the results in this thesis are parallel to previous studies.

7.3 Ethical issues

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2011, 127) a good research is guided by the ethical commitment. The guidelines of responsible conduct of research and good research ethics were followed in this thesis. In Finland the Finnish Advisory Board of Research Integrity (2012) has drew up guidelines for responsible conduct of research and for handling alleged violations of conduct. These guidelines should be carried out in all institutions which are conducting research nationally or internationally. In order to conduct ethically reliable research, researchers should comply with principles advocated by the research community such as integrity and accuracy in every stage of the research. In addition ethically sustainable and scientific methods should be applied in data collection, research itself as well as in evaluation. Research permission should be requested correctly in advance and results should be reported and published openly. By

following these principles researchers also assure the credibility of the results. (Finnish Advisory of Board of Research Integrity 2012, 28–30.)

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2011) highlight the researcher's obligation is to protect participants. Participants are entitled to have all the relevant information about the purpose, methods, possible risk factors and benefits of the study. Altogether, all the factors that might influence on participants willingness to participate must be openly shared. Participation should be voluntary and a possibility to refuse and to withdraw must always exist. In addition, anonymity and confidentiality are crucial part of good research ethics. (Johnson & Christensen 2004, 102, 112; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2011, 131; Vilkkä 2007, 99–101.)

In this thesis research permission was accepted and signed by the principal of Q.F.I. School and parents were informed about the questionnaire by the personnel of the school. The researchers were not personally in contact with the participants but we firmly believe that the information given to the parents from Q.F.I. School was informative and relevant to the matter. Above all, as it is in good scientific practice, also in this questionnaire it was voluntary to give the permission to use the answers for research purposes. The data were collected anonymously so that identities of the parents remain unknown to all stakeholders (personnel of Q.F.I. School and researchers). Data were handled, analysed and stored confidentially and afterwards destroyed in appropriate way. Results will be reported in this thesis and to the administration of Q.F.I. School.

7.4 Further studies

It would have been interesting to collect the data via different research methods. By the means of interview or narrative stories parents would have had a better chance to express their perception and opinions about the quality of education and care in Q.F.I. School. Another interesting future research topic would be to examine quality from the perspectives of the other stakeholders. In this thesis the quality was explored from the viewpoint of the parents and the active role of families was emphasised. In order to achieve more comprehensive understanding of quality, also the perspectives of children, personnel of the school and professionals should be taken into consideration. We personally believe that children are essential informants while defining quality. Children

are the ones who experience the school practices every day and therefore they possess valuable information about it. In this thesis it would have been problematic to explore the views of children because of practical reasons.

As it is argued before, quality consist both subjective perspectives and also larger social structures when it is seen as intersubjective. According to intersubjective pointview, educational and cultural contexts of societies cannot be separated from the framework of quality. (Parrila 2004, 72–73; Woodhead 1998, 5.) If the aim is to utilise Finnish education system worldwide, it would be remarkably relevant to study issues regarding to educational export. It would be worth to consider more deeply and broadly that does the Finnish quality automatically correspond to international requirements. Furthermore, it should be reflected how Finnish practices function and how professionals can adapt their know-how in culturally and ideologically different contexts. The development and expansion of education export might be confronted with challenges but it also creates possibilities to improve the quality of education and care in the globalised world.

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APPENDIX: Parents questionnaire

Parents Questionnaire 2014-2015

NOTE: If you have more than one child in our school, please fill in separate form for each child.

Basic Information

Research permission: The home university of the Q.F.I. School (University of Jyväskylä, Finland) may use my answers for research purposes. All answers are strictly confidential and anonymous.

- Yes
- No

Nationality

- Qatari
- Other

Student's grade:

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

The child comes first, always:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Most of the time my child likes to go to school in the morning.	<input type="radio"/>				

Please give further comments:

Student Progress:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
My child is making progress at school.	<input type="radio"/>				

Please give further comments:

Student Admissions:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The school has been able to create a balanced student body regarding age, gender, language and nationality.	<input type="radio"/>				

Please give further comments:

Student Support Systems:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
My child gets enough support for his/her growth and learning from a multiprofessional team (teacher, special needs teacher, nurse, school counsellor)	<input type="radio"/>				

Please give further comments:

Teaching:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The quality of teaching in the home class is good (Finnish teachers).	<input type="radio"/>				

Please give further comments:

Teaching:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The quality of teaching of Arabic department (Arabic, Islamic, Qatar History) is good.	<input type="radio"/>				

Please give further comments:

Assessment:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The used assessment methods keep me well informed about my child's progress.	<input type="radio"/>				

Please give further comments:

School Leadership:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The school management succeeds well in their work.	<input type="radio"/>				

Please give further comments:

Home-School Collaboration:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The school is communicating efficiently with the parents/guardians.	<input type="radio"/>				

Please give further comments:

Home-School Collaboration:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The school offers enough possibilities for parents/guardians to get involved with the school life.	<input type="radio"/>				

Please give further comments: