High School Experience and Agency of South Korean and Finnish Pre-Service Educators

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ABSTRACT

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The upper secondary schooling period is the time when the young seek their interests and gain a deeper understanding of themselves while making initial major choices in their life. Therefore, the agency of students to realize their own values and pursue them should be enhanced in the school environment. This research aims to trace high school education and its effect on agency.

For this study, semi-structured individual interviews and quantitative surveys were done with ten pre-service educators from South Korea and Finland, who have experience of studying subject teacher qualification at master's level. The interview and survey questions were related to their studying experiences and relationship with others at high school, parents' influence, career choices, and ideas about the future. The Capability Approach (CA) and family resources were taken as discussion tools over the findings.

The findings indicate that the score-oriented educational climate of high school education in South Korea hinders students' expansion of their capabilities and freedom. Finnish pre-service educators have higher satisfaction about their upper secondary education than their South Korean counterparts. Family influence on education and career choice in South Korea is bigger than in Finland.

The study sheds a light on the importance of a healthy upper secondary school environment, where students are supported to explore and follow their interests. To encourage the expansion of capabilities of the youth, interesting and in-depth learning opportunities, supportive educational climate including respectful relationships at school and at home are required.

Keywords: high school experience, agency, pre-service teachers, South Korea, Finland, capability approach, family influence

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

Individuals continuously make choices and decisions, ultimately building their identity. Choosing a career is one of the major decisions in life, and people make the decision while considering many different internal and external factors of theirs. For example, the motivation for entry into the teaching profession can be material, professional, altruistic (Park & Lee, 2019), or a combination of them. The choice of occupation is the choice of social identity, and agency, the ability to act on the world to conduct choices and realize a self-concept, is deeply associated with it (Robertson, 2015).

The upper secondary level of schooling is a period of transition from childhood to adult life, and it is the time when initial important decisions for the future are made (Park, 2013). Students choose whether they want to pursue academic or vocational paths before starting schooling. At school, they take different subjects following their interests and prospects, participate in various activities, and weigh different possibilities open before them. At the end of education at this level, students are expected to advance toward the next stage of their lives that they have chosen as adults.

Considering the importance of the upper secondary schooling period for one's career choices and later life, it is critical to know the factors which influence students' agency and seek ways to enhance it. Reflection of recent graduates on their schooling experiences and life after graduation can provide insight into the student agency and upper secondary education. This is in line with the notion that people with agency are always engaged with patterns from their past, adjust their actions to their surroundings, and design hypothetical steps forward (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Acknowledging the temporal orientation and intentionality in agency, the participants' past life courses – their high school experience and life after graduation – their current life, and ideas about future will be discussed in this study. The target groups of this research are pre-service educators from South Korea

and Finland, with various career aspirations including teacher, professor, researcher, and entrepreneur. Despite the various career paths, the participants share the experiences of studying for a subject teaching qualification at the master's degree level, and many of their career wishes are related to the field of education. The career choices of the participants in the field of education will be elucidated, focusing on their high school experiences and family influences as their developmental context. Consequently, the findings in this research have limited transferability to other groups of upper secondary graduates or the ones who are in other fields than education.

Comparative education study can provide a way to broaden and deepen understanding of educational phenomena beyond the boundaries of a single country (Good, 1962, as cited in Prakash, 2016). Both South Korea and Finland have shown remarkable achievements in international education assessments including PISA (Programme for International Students Assessment). However, the competitive educational atmosphere in South Korea, which is interconnected with the loophole of meritocracy and lack of safety net in the society, requires reconsideration of the overall education and social system (Nam, Bae, & Oh, 2019). Finland has experienced a recent decline in PISA ranking and a growing gap of academic achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged socioeconomic groups ("PISA", 2019). Comparing the two different educational climates of South Korea and Finland can provide a new perspective to address the education system in each country.

The concept of agency can be found in various fields other than education such as sociology (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), anthropology (Ahearn, 2001), psychology (Bandura, 2006; Bandura, 2015; Bandura, 2018), and there have been different approaches to the concept. Among them, Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA) was taken as the theoretical lens of this research (Sen, 1985; Sen, 1992; Sen, 1999). The focus of CA is the capabilities of each individual to pursue valuable beings and doings. CA suggests that each individual has his or her own values gained from reflective and informed choices (Walker, 2005), but the values are influenced by the individual's personal, social, and environmental context as

well (Robeyns 2005; Walker, 2005). Therefore, the concept of agency in CA encompasses not only the valuable beings and doings of individuals and their trials to achieve the objectives but also multiple layers of influencing factors surrounding them.

The leverage of family background on children's higher education in South Korea and Finland will be presented, focusing on the teaching profession. Family background has a significant influence on one's values, educational and social achievement, and agency. For example, parenting styles and beliefs of parents can have an impact on diverse aspects of development of their children (Huang, Cheah, Lamb, & Zhou, 2017). On the other hand, the availability of different types of parents' resources affects their children's academic achievement and attainment (Sirniö, Kauppinen & Martikainen, 2017; Nam et al., 2019).

The main purpose of the thesis is to understand high school experiences which were significant to the informants' agency and the factors that influenced their choice of pursuing a teaching career. Under the aim, Chapter 2 clarifies the concepts of CA with a figure visualizing their relations. Family influence in the two countries will be presented in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, the methodology employed in this research will be introduced while the findings of the research can be found in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 is dedicated to the further discussion on the findings, with another figure about the application of CA concepts and family influence to career and life choice, reflecting the significance of high school education.

2 CAPABILITY APPROACH

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the concept of agency and the major notions of the Capability Approach (CA). First, the main concepts of CA including agency will be presented. Second, the definition of agency from different theories will be introduced. Finally, the insights to education based on the perspective of CA from previous studies will be discussed.

2.1 Main Concepts of Capability Approach

2.1.1 Overview of Capability Approach

Capability Approach (CA) was pioneered by Amartya Sen, originally to index the development of societies with emphasis on people's ability to make choices and freedom (Cauce & Gordon, 2012). CA sets the objective of human development as the expansion of people's actual freedoms to pursue what they value to do and to be (Alkire, 2005; Robeyns, 2005; Walker, 2005). CA is a paradigm or a framework rather than a theory, which conceptualizes and assesses phenomena such as poverty, inequality, or well-being (Robeyns, 2005; Robertson, 2015).

The incompleteness of CA has been pointed out by many scholars (e.g. Gasper, 2007; Robertson, 2015; Mok & Jeong, 2016). Underdefinition of CA allows different disciplines to adapt the framework according to their interests, but it has the danger of lack of persuasiveness and even misinterpretation or misuse of the framework (Gasper, 2007). For example, the main concepts in CA, such as capabilities and well-being, have not been specified by Sen even though it was his intention (Robertson, 2015). Neither does CA introduce a specific process for public discussion or scrutiny process to reach social agreement of beings and doings which are valuable and deserve to be valued (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009).

Nevertheless, CA offers a plural perspective to apprehend well-being as it gives attention to several different information to judge one's quality of life, in-

cluding traditional economic or the individual's subjective well-being information (Robertson, 2015). The approach employs concepts such as functioning, capability, freedom, and agency to describe the evaluative framework to assess the social arrangement in regards to well-being.

2.1.2   Functionings

Functionings refer to beings and doings that make life valuable and that people have reason to value (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009). They enable people to be whom they want to be and do activities they want to do, including a variety of things from simply having food and shelter to more complex activities and states such as staying healthy, working, being able to read and write, or being respected (Robeyns, 2005; Kelly, 2012). Functionings represent multiple various aspects of life that people appreciate, therefore are important constituents of a person's being (Alkire, 2005). They are the practical realisations of the ways one has chosen to lead her life (Walker, 2005).

Functionings and the value that they have are closely related to one's choices, situation, and her valuation of her functioning vectors. Sen (1985) explained this feature of functionings as follows:

> The functioning vectors can be ranked and partially ordered in line with some common valuations, or in the light of … "urgency," or some other acceptable criterion. (p. 198)

In the same vein, making a genuine choice would affect the nature and importance of the functionings achieved (Alkire, 2005). However, not every activity and the value that an individual attaches to the activity can be her functioning. Functionings are limited to the ones which can be valued, and evil or harmful activities cannot be included (Alkire, 2005). CA urges social choices about values to be made through public discussion and agreement process while it may depend on the agency of the actors to address the issues of concern in that certain context of matters (Alkire & Denuelin, 2009).

CA accepts the influence of personal, social, and environmental factors of each individual (Robeyns, 2005; Walker, 2005). According to Robeyns (2005), an

individual's functionings are affected by her personal characteristics (e.g. physical condition, sex, intelligence, etc.), social arrangement of her society (e.g. public policies, social norms, gender roles, etc.), and environmental factors surrounding her (e.g. climate, geographical location). Thus, individual functionings can be shaped by one's relative advantages in her society and improved by empowering the public and policy environment (Walker, 2005).

In CA, considering the only present functionings or status of individuals is not sufficient to evaluate their life, and their potential and what they are able to be and do should be taken into account (Robertson, 2015). Taking the impact of one's surroundings on her current and future opportunity set into consideration, CA focuses on an individual's substantive opportunities to take actions to do and be what she values.

2.1.3   Capabilities and Freedom

Capability can be defined as "a person's freedom to enjoy various functionings – to be or do things that contribute to their well-being" (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009, p. 22). Robertson (2015) states the difference between functionings and capability as follows:

> Functionings refers to what people actually do, their achievements, lifestyle and identity; the current status of their "beings and doings." Capabilities refers to what they could become and do. These are the valued beings and doings that people could achieve in the future, taking into account all the factors that might constrain them. (p. 77)

Robertson (2015) illustrates the difference between the two concepts with the example of the occupation of a school teacher. Working as a school teacher and having the lifestyle of a teacher is functionings while having the realistic potentiality to be a teacher is capability.

Capability can be referred to as 'a set of vectors of functionings,' which reflects one's freedom to lead a certain type of life among different livings (Sen, 1992). In accordance with Sen, Alkire (2005) suggests that capability is the freedom of a person or group to pursue or achieve valuable functionings. She compares capabilities to a budget set as they are a set of actual opportunities that one

can spare in one way or another while choosing one path over others among various options in life. Just like a 50 euro banknote at one's disposal in his wallet, which he can use for buying or doing different things, one has choices among different functionings of his and can pursue various life paths (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009).

Capability should be thought of as the genuine opportunity people have to achieve what they value, which is their freedom. People's rights to exercise freedoms are conformed to whether they have the necessary competencies to do so or not (Hart & Brando, 2018). Development is "a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy" (Sen, 1999 p. 1). Hence, people's freedom and development are fundamentally interwoven to each other (Walker, 2005).

Freedom is defined as the real opportunity that people have to achieve what they value (Sen, 1992). Freedom has the opportunity aspect – "the ability of a person to achieve those things that she has reason to value" - and the process aspect, – "the freedom involved in the process itself" (Sen, 2002, as cited in Alkire & Deneulin, 2009, p. 37). Alkire and Deneulin (2009) suggest other characteristics of freedom as well. They associate the opportunity aspect of freedom with capability and the process aspect with the notion of agency. Furthermore, the concept of freedom can draw attention to empowerment, responsibility, and public action rather than using force in the expansion of functioning (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009).

CA encourages individuals' freedom of making a choice to pursue their own functioning. Intrinsic value in the freedom to choose is emphasized in CA as well as in the functionings, the things that one finds value to be and to do (Hart, 2012a). In other words, the central idea of CA is related to "freedom in the range of options a person has in deciding what life to lead" (Dreze & Sen, 1995, as cited in Walker, 2005).

Capability is a combination of freedom and rationality (Walker, 2006). However, capability should be distinguished from mere choices. Alkire and Deneliun (2009) note that expanding one's choices does not necessarily lead to a better quality of life. They explain that 'expanding choices' is a concept based on

western liberal individualism, and moreover people need to make just a few good choices in many cases.

It is challenging to describe the constraints which prevent people from achieving their capabilities in general terms as capabilities are closely interlaced with personal history, preference, personality, and values (Robeyns, 2005). Despite this difficulty, it is agreed that capability is what people are actually capable of being and doing rather than the resources they can access (Walker, 2005). Theoretical or legal freedom or opportunities which are beyond individuals' reach are not freedom (Alkire, 2005). Similarly, Robeyns (2005) states that it is important in CA that one has genuine access to all the capabilities in her capability set, without external pressure on certain life choices. Therefore, social arrangements should be assessed based on the degree of freedom people have to achieve or pursue the functionings they value (Alkire, 2005).

Sen argued that freedom and a person's own values are critical in assessing his quality of life (Hart & Brando, 2018). However, the quality of life or individual functionings can be enhanced by freedom as well. Political and social freedoms can provide effective contributions to development because they are constituent elements of it (Sen, 1999). In addition, the capabilities and functionings desired in society can be discussed and charted by its members. Sen sees the public as an active participant in change, and public consultation is critical in deciding which capabilities are valuable in each particular society (Walker, 2005).

2.1.4 Well-being

CA does not provide a clear explanation of well-being while it can be employed to conceptualize and assess it (Robeyns, 2005). Sen mentions that the core characteristic of well-being is "the ability to achieve valuable functionings" (Sen, 1985, p. 200) without specifying what are the components of 'good life.' In CA, an individual's life and well-being can be understood as the combination of functionings that one has the potential to achieve, thereby capabilities are the determinant factors for well-being (De Rosa, 2018).

Well-being and agency are closely connected (Walker, 2005). One's agency may influence his or her well-being, and being well may support one's ability to pursue other objectives (Sen, 1985). In addition, individual advantage can be evaluated by one's well-being such as one's nutritional status or self-esteem, or one's agency, which is her ability to follow her value (Alkire, 2005). However, one can choose her agency goal over her well-being, as in one may choose to participate in political demonstration despite repression from the police, while another person may value achieved well-being more than her agency freedom and decides to stay in her comfortable home (Robeyns, 2005).

2.1.5   Agency in CA

In CA, agency refers to "a person's ability to pursue and realize goals he/she [author's edit] values and has reason to value" (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009, p. 22). A person's agency aspect is closely related to "his or her aims, objectives, allegiances, obligations, and-in a broad sense the person's conception of the good" (Sen, 1985, p. 203). Sen (1999) defines agent as

> someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well. (p. 19)

Kotan (2010) suggests that the concept of human agency is related to three factors, which are (a) action, power, and causality, (b) purposefulness, and (c) determination to achieve the objectives. In his definition, a human agent is:

> a person or collection of persons having the ability to exert power so as to influence the state of the world, do so in a purposeful way and in line with self-established objectives. (p. 370)

An act of choice accompanies choosing functioning from one's capability set, and those choices are influenced and constricted by societal structures (Robeyns, 2005). The concept of agency has the central position in CA in that one needs to exercise her agency to make choices from different options with the required set of capabilities for functioning or well-being (Walker, 2005).

The notion of agency in CA has similarities with the concept of personal agency from social cognitive theory, but it is a broader and deeper concept. Not

only one's self-efficacy but also her abilities, socio-economic status, and expected social roles along with legal, policy, and human rights of her society need to be considered in the notion of agency in CA (Robertson, 2015). Furthermore, CA's viewpoint of one's agency includes goals and commitments for individuals themselves as well as their society and contribution to public discussion on social goals (Alkire, 2005).

Figure 1 was created for a deeper understanding of the relations between major concepts of CA, based on the CA concepts presented in some of major CA literature (Sen, 1985; Sen, 1992; Sen, 1999; Alkire, 2005; Robeyns, 2005; Walker, 2005). A double-sided arrow means that the two connected concepts influence each other mutually. For example, one's achieved functionings are affected by her surrounding features while the functionings can bring positive changes to the surroundings. Agency has a central position in CA. It influences one's value and current and future capabilities. Agency is mutually related to well-being and surrounding features as well. Among the current capability set (e.g. x1, x2, x3, x4, x5, x6, x7), one makes a value-laden choice while exercising her agency, and it leads to her achieved functionings (e.g. X1, X4). Development refers to the expanded freedom by education and sociopolitical freedom. However, it is possible that capabilities and freedom in the future stay the same as the current ones or even become more limited in undesirable situations.
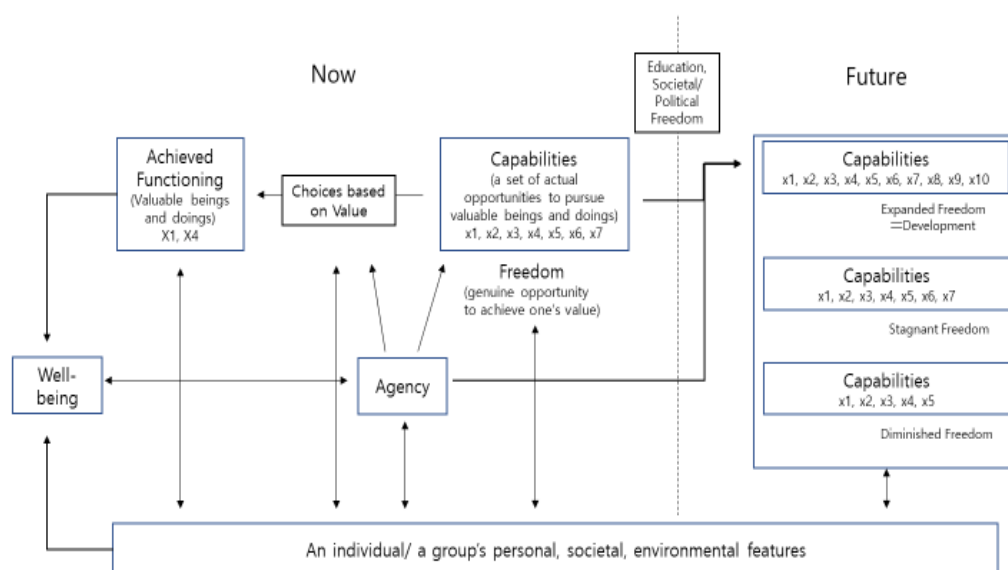

Figure 1. The Major Concepts of CA

2.2   Definitions of Agency

Human agency has four core properties in social cognitive theory, which are intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2006; 2018). People form intentions as well as think about ways to achieve them (Bandura, 2006) whereas through forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness human agency is manifested (Bandura, 2018). Forethought is a plan for the future by setting goals and understanding the purpose of achieving the wanted results, and self-reactiveness involves regulating herself to follow the plan proactively (Alfaiz, Hidayah, Hambali, & Radjah, 2019). Self-reflection is highly connected to people's belief in their capacity to achieve the goals they set for themselves and their commitment when difficult situations arise (Bandura, 2015).

Socio-cultural context that an individual is in should be taken into account in agency, and agency cannot be theorized as a personal or individual characteristic (Rajala, Martin, & Kumpulainen, 2016). The influence of individuals' sociocultural context on their agency has been noted, and Ahearn (2001, p.110) defined agency as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act." Agency arises from the diverse dynamics such as social, political, and cultural aspects of a specific place and time (Desjarlais 1997, as cited in Ahearn, 2001). However, individuals' will and ability to have an impact on their environment are acknowledged. Billet (2006) argued that human agency occurs within a social basis but is not necessarily subjugated by the social structures, and the interdependency between human agency and social structure is relational. In line with Billet (2006), Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, and Paloniemi (2013) suggested that individuals are embedded in and infused by their surrounding conditions, which they are capable of transforming.

Life-course notions of agency agree with the interdependency between individuals' agency and the social conditions they live in while paying attention to temporal orientation and intentionality in choice-making (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). This viewpoint is elucidated in the principle of agency suggested by Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe (2003, p. 11) that "individuals construct their own life course

through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance." From a life-course perspective, the interplay between one's past events and influences, present engagement, and future orientations is needed to be focused to understand agency (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). One's agency is closely related to building his or her own identity as well. The process of identity decisions happens mostly at major life transitions, where agents make choices (Hitlin & Elder, 2007).

Autonomy and power relations are other adherent concepts to agency (Rajala et al., 2016). One way to define agency focusing on autonomy is as follows:

> Agency refers to the human capability to anticipate the unknown (based on prior experiences and current competencies, skills, knowledge, values, attitudes and beliefs), to set goals, to plan their pursuit and attainment, and to accept responsibility for one's action (Schoon, 2018, p.27).

OECD (2019 p. 2) defines agency as "having the ability and the will to positively influence one's own life and the world around them". Along with autonomy, various positive implications are associated with agency, such as purposiveness, freedom, creativity (Rajala, 2016), self-fulfillment, motivation, well-being, and even happiness (Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

In the present study, Sen's definition of an agent as a person who takes action and creates change in his context while pursuing his own values and goals (Sen, 1985; Sen, 1999) is adopted as well as the influence of personal, societal, environmental characteristics of individuals on their agency and the choices they make (Robeyns, 2005). The study notes that individuals' notions of 'good life' they want to pursue are influenced by their surroundings, such as their family and the values in their society (Hart, 2012b; Hart & Brando, 2018). At the same time, the study adopts that the valuable beings and doings of individuals may not accord with others' values completely (Sen, 1999; Alkire, 2005; Robeyns, 2005; Walker, 2005). Furthermore, the relations between past, present, and future of each individual in his or her agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Elder et al., 2003; Eteläpelto et al., 2013) is taken into account.

2.3   Capability Approach and Education

In CA, education has instrumental, empowering, and redistributive roles (Unterhalter, 2009). CA acknowledges not only the instrumental value of education but also its intrinsic value to the freedom of a person and non-economically instrumental values (Mok & Jeong, 2016). Education has a non-economically instrumental value in that it has a significant role in expanding other capabilities including future capabilities (Terzi, 2007).

CA offers an outcome-based understanding of schooling, where students can flourish and opportunities provided to students at school enable them to be and to do what they value and aspire (Hart & Brando, 2018). When judging the well-being of students based on the CA paradigm, what they actually succeed to do – their 'functionings' – as a result of their schooling must be considered because CA differentiates 'learning' from 'having a school to attend' (Kelly, 2012).

Insights about the purpose and objectives of education can be found in CA. CA appreciates education which can raise critical reflection along with the ability to debate and reason and which involve traditionally marginalized groups (Unterhalter, 2009). The list of central capabilities listed by Martha Nussbaum suggests fundamental features that should be fostered through education, such as a capacity to reason, a capacity to understand the consequences of one's decisions and deeds, a capacity to act while pursuing one's values, and a capacity to appreciate one's own and others' lives (Hart & Brando, 2018).

Individual differences and freedoms in and through education are respected in CA (Hart, 2012a). CA focuses on improving people's capability to choose a life path which they have reason to value, and in a school environment, it means that students have the freedom to achieve diverse lifestyles they appreciate by making informed and reflexive decisions (Walker, 2005). In CA, education provides a fundamental way to raise reasoned agency, which leads individuals to have substantive freedom and more capabilities by being able to distinguish things they are led to prefer and what they would like to choose genuinely (Mok & Jeong, 2016).

Providing freedom of choice can have an intrinsic and direct effect on the quality of life of students (Kelly, 2012). The process of shaping the capabilities by participating meaningfully and equitably is as crucial as capabilities themselves (Hart & Brando, 2018). Students should be educated to be autonomous as autonomy enhances one's ability to realize and live in a way which is worthy of living (Brighouse, 2000). Students' autonomy in their career choice is promoted in CA as enhancement of students' well-being and functionings is encouraged instead of concerning only their economic situations in development of their career aspirations (Robertson, 2015).

CA acknowledges that students' freedom needs proper guidance and restriction. Restricting a young person's temporary freedom may expand the freedom that he will have in the future in some cases (Saito, 2003). In other words, students' freedom in the future should be considered as well as their freedom in the present (Walker, 2005). For example, if a child refuses to be educated, this can result in fewer opportunities as well as a lower level of freedom and agency in her later life (Walker, 2006), and agreeing with the child's refusal may not be the action of respecting her freedom.

To find the optimal guidance level of students' freedom and capacity, Hart and Brando (2018) employ the concepts of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Bruner's scaffolding. They ask teachers to consider students' well-being achievement along with their active participation and freedom in their development: If teachers are too lenient, students' well-being achievement may be threatened; if they are too strict, students' active participation and freedoms can be harmed.

Teachers and school culture have an impact on the values of students. The notions about the 'good life' of teachers, parents, and other significant persons of students influence students' aspirations and values in their own lives. Conversion factors including the viewpoints of the guardians affect the transition of students' aspirations and values into well-being and agency freedoms (Hart &

Brando, 2018). Hart (2012b) suggests that the way aspirations of students are generated can influence their agency in achieving the aspirations along with other factors, which help and hinder them.

Education has two major roles in developing capacities: It can enhance students' capacities and opportunities they have; and it develops the judgment of values of students to identify where to exercise their capacity (Saito, 2003). Formal education is involved in the identity formation of individuals as they adapt their subjective wellbeing or decisions according to their possibilities at hand (Walker, 2006).

However, schooling may not necessarily enhance students' capabilities, and it can even diminish or restrict them (Walker, 2005). Students may learn not to be ambitious and have lower expectations about themselves by 'being realistic' (Kelly, 2012). This phenomenon of 'adaptive preference' was also noted in CA, and Unterhalter (2009) suggests that it is necessary to inquire into the basis on which the people's educational aspirations stem from as they can be the result of their adaptation to their respective circumstances. Furthermore, CA points out that the equal amount of educational resources does not mean the same level of learning for every student; individuals' different conversion factors require different amounts of resources (Unterhalter, 2009).

One way to support students to aim for and achieve higher capacity would be making the curriculum flexible and open. Walker (2005) argues that curriculum should be open instead of forcing smallness on students. She argues that schools should be the place where students are equipped with the capabilities to chase opportunities they value.

Wood and Deprez (2012) reflect their own teaching career and try to apply CA to their classes in university with elements such as individual well-being, education for reasoned values, and education related to individuals' actual livelihood. They are determined to provide students with an emotionally safe environment where they can learn in line with their values and identity as well as space for reflection and discussion. In addition, opportunities to connect their

lives with their learning and explore their own surroundings with the class contents are expected to enhance motivation and engagement of the students (Wood & Deprez, 2012). Unterhalter (2009) mentions that applications of CA on higher education pedagogy resonate with liberative education by Freire, whose central idea is "becoming more fully human" (Walker, 2009, p. 335).

3 ROLE OF FAMILY BACKGROUND IN EDUCA-TION

In this chapter, the influence of family background on children's academic achievement is discussed. The definition of family background on education is presented with previous findings about higher education attainment of students from different family social statuses. To have a close look at the two target countries of the present study, family background and educational attainment in South Korea and Finland are introduced, with the focus on the two countries' teaching qualification and status of the teaching profession.

3.1 Family Background and Its Influence on Children's Education

Family background in education is a complicated concept, and there are various ways to measure it. The socioeconomic status of a family can be one way of assessment. Willms and Tramonte (2015, p. 16) defined a family's socioeconomic status (SES) as "the relative position of a family or individual on hierarchical social structure, based on their access to, or control over, wealth, prestige, and power." Typically, parent's education, parent's occupation, and family income are the components of family socioeconomic status (Buchmann, 2002). However, the difficulty of creating universal measurement exists due to different constructs in socioeconomic background concepts in each country, and a single measure might not be reliable and valid for every country and culture (Rutkowski & Rutkowski, 2013).

Geske and Grinfelds (2012) listed three main components of family background: material resources, social resources, and cultural resources. According to them, material resources refer to family income, welfare, and availability of other educational support, and social resources normally include parents' interest and involvement in children's education. Cultural resources are usually associated with the level of education of parents, the number of books and art objects

at home, and general attitude toward education including that of teachers and schools (Geske & Grinfelds, 2012). In the present study, familial background on children's academic achievement will be discussed in terms of the availability of financial, social, and cultural resources for education in the family.

Family background has a significant correlation with the educational attainment level of children. Children's health and education is determined by the socioeconomic circumstance of the family and available resources, hence children from low SES families have a higher risk of failing and underachieving in their education (Acacio-Claro, Doku, Koivusilta, & Rimpelä, 2018). On the contrary, students from advantaged socioeconomic families are more likely to have higher academic achievement, as well as bigger ambition compared to the ones from less advantaged backgrounds (Acacio-Claro et al., 2018; Sirniö, Lehti, Grätz, Barclay & Erola, 2020). Parents with a high level of education value children's education and might be more active in supporting their children's educational achievement (Geske & Grinfelds, 2012).

One's family SES is closely related to her social achievement in adulthood, and education is a key mediator in imparting parents' social status to the next generation (Sirniö et al., 2017; Nam, et al., 2019). When individuals make decisions about pursuing further education, the attractiveness of a further education opportunity is evaluated based on the feasibility, costs, and benefits of the option because individuals make rational decisions for their future (Raftery & Hout, 1993; Holm & Breen, 2016). If a student from disadvantaged background thinks that she would not get enough benefits, if not lose, from a higher level of education due to high educational expenses, she is not likely to seek further education opportunities. Furthermore, recent findings broadened the scope of the familial influence and found out that socioeconomic classes and other capitals of grandparents can influence grandchildren's achievement (Acacio-Claro et al., 2018).

It is a task for every educational system to find the solution to alleviate the influence of familial factors and provide genuine equality to students. The context of each institution has an impact on the degree to which family background influences children's education because the education of individuals is done

within a particular system (Sirniö et al., 2020). Therefore, the political and social policies are expected to function as mitigators of family background.

Meritocracy is often considered as one of the mitigating measures. Merit refers to individuals' characteristics, abilities, or skills that are valued within a certain community (Elmgren, 2019). Meritocracy is generally regarded as a social system in which rewards in society are earned by individuals' abilities and efforts (Meroe, 2014). Raftery and Hout (1993) discussed the necessity of meritocratic selection in educational transitions in Ireland, attributing class immobility despite the expansion of educational opportunity to the absence of increase in meritocratic selection.

However, meritocracy may not be enough to bring a genuine equality in educational opportunities. For meritocracy to be ethically acceptable, equality and distributive justice should be comprehensively realized, which has not been successful in the current society yet (Meroe, 2014). Consequently, merit has become a tool to justify social injustice, and the ideology of merit attributes an individual's success or the challenges they face to their own responsibility and (lack of) merit (Elmgren, 2019).

3.2 The Influence of Family Background in South Korean and Finnish Higher Education

PISA 2018 results show that both in South Korea and in Finland, education systems have had positive impacts to mitigate the influence of social background. In the two countries, students' social background has a relatively weak impact on their learning compared to other OECD countries; their average reading performances were higher while the relationships between SES and reading scores were weaker than the OECD average (Schleicher, 2019). In the following parts, the relation between family background and higher education in the two countries, including teaching qualification and the teaching profession will be discussed.

3.2.1   The Influence of Family Background in South Korean Education

In PISA 2018, SES accounted for 8% of the variance in reading performance in South Korea while the OECD average was 12%. South Korea has a small percentage of low performers and a large percentage of top performers in reading among socio-economically disadvantaged students (OECD, n.d.a). On the other hand, the reading performance gap related to repeating a grade is large when students' and schools' socio-economic profiles are taken into account (OECD, n.d.a).

In South Korea, Hyuksin (innovation) school was introduced to promote publicity of education amid the widening education achievement gap between social classes (Won & Eum, 2018). The characteristics of Hyuksin schools include student-oriented classes, passionate teachers, trustful relationships among members, active communication, and community-like school culture (Baek & Park, 2015). These schools appear to decrease the influence of father's education level on children's educational achievement, especially in the cases where fathers' education levels are low (Won & Eum, 2018). In addition, accomplishment pressure from teachers or school, amount of assignments, relationship between teachers and students, teachers' support, and teacher autonomy are reported to be factors to decrease the education gap (Baek & Park, 2015).

Despite the positive signals, more and more South Koreans believe that social mobility by education is no longer possible as income and socioeconomic class polarization has aggravated in the current South Korean society (Ministry of Education, 2017). The academic achievement gap of students between regions and social classes gets wider in higher levels of schooling (Namkung, Kim, & Kim, 2012). One rationale behind these phenomena is the gap regarding family's investment in educational expenses for children between advantaged and disadvantaged social classes (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Education and family social status are closely connected in South Korea. According to Nam et al. (2019), the South Korean family's collective effort behind children's educational attainment is because an individual's social status tends to be regarded in the same light as their family's social class. Motivation to raise

one's status has been deeply rooted in South Korean education history, and familistic education fever enables the social benefits from education to be shared within the family as a whole (Kang, 2008). As a result, families put effort together to maintain or raise their social status, which results in thriving private education (Nam et al., 2019).

Meritocracy does not provide a solution to minimize the family influence in South Korean society. Meritocracy has been one of the core ideologies in society and has been considered as a fair and equal system in South Korea (Nam et al., 2019). However, studies about South Korean 'education fervour' have pointed out that meritocracy, especially the one based on test score (testocracy), is still favorable to the social groups who have more resources and strong social influence while it disadvantages students from other social groups (Park & Namkung, 2019; Nam et al., 2019).

Nam et al. (2019) argue that the ability represented as one's (test) result is gained through the interplay between her effort, education, and other factors (her SES, luck, etc.), and no assessment can remove these external factors completely. However, individuals under pressure in the absence of a social safety net choose to strengthen their belief that exams should be done fairly instead of suspecting the meritocratic system itself (Nam et al., 2019).

Entry into the teaching profession is not free from family support on education and counterargument against meritocracy. Teaching has been a popular occupation in South Korea (Yang, 2012), and getting a regular, tenured teaching position in public schools in South Korea requires going through a competitive nationwide exam for teacher recruitment. Due to the fierce competition in the exam, financial support is needed for exam preparation. According to Kim, Lee, and Chun (2017), an average student teacher spends four years and 56,460,000 Korean won on private education after graduation to pass the exam and be a subject teacher in public school. Naturally, teacher position candidates from socio-economically advantaged classes have higher chances to pass the exam due to the costly university tuition fee to get the teacher qualification and the expenditure for exam preparation (Yang, 2012). On the other hand, indiscriminate and

fair opportunity for entry into the profession was one of the main motivations for student teachers to study for the exam along with job security, the recommendation from others, and a good working environment (Yang, 2012).

3.2.2 The Influence of Family Background in Finnish Education

In PISA 2018, SES accounted for 9% of the variance in reading performance in Finland while the OECD average was 12% (OECD, n.d.b). In accordance with the PISA 2018 result, a family's socioeconomic status has a relatively weak influence due to late tracking and free education in Finland (Sirniö et al., 2020).

Sirniö et al. (2020) explained that low family SES influence on offspring's education in Finland can be attributed to the educational policy reform in the 1970s, with later stratification and expanded chances for higher education opportunities. Currently, the comprehensive school continues without any stratification until 16 years old, and there are few economic barriers which prevent students from pursuing further education (Sirniö et al., 2020). Furthermore, financial aid can support economic security of students during their studies including government-guaranteed student loans and housing supplements for students ("Financial Aid for Students," 2020).

In Finland, the education level in adulthood is highly associated with school achievement, which refers to not only the academic ability but also one's attachment to the school (Acacio-Claro et al., 2018). On the other hand, students' health-compromising behaviours in the absence of health-enhancing behaviours were suggested to be linked with a lower adult educational level (Koivusilta, West, Saaristo, Nummi & Rimpelä, 2013). Consequently, intervention to improve academic achievement and enhance the ability to maintain one's mental and physical health can mitigate family background influence in the Finnish context (Acacio-Claro et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, education does play a role in reproducing social classes in Finland, as in other countries. In the research to track intergenerational income transmission in Finland, Sirniö et al. (2017) found out that higher education can be one of the key factors for high-income families to uphold their status while education

may not influence much for the lower origin to reach a higher status. A similar phenomenon was found in Acacio-Claro et al. 's study (2018), where the correlation between parents' and grandparents' socioeconomic circumstances and students' higher education, psychological and health-related capacity, and school achievement was researched. In general, better family socioeconomic circumstances are positively related to high achievement in school, high adult education level, and positive lifestyle habits (Acacio-Claro et al., 2018).

Kosunen (2018) pointed out the phenomenon of "shadow education," which involves tuition-fee-based actors and private services in the university entrance system in Finland. The existence of shadow education implies that time and money are required to prepare for university entrance examinations even if the study programmes at university are free of charge to the recipients (Kosunen, 2018).

The teaching profession has been respected in Finland despite a recent decline in popularity. A five-year master's degree from a university is required to be a teacher in Finland (Reimer & Dorf, 2014). While there is no nationwide exam for teaching positions in Finland, teacher education degrees have been quite selective due to high popularity. For instance, the University of Helsinki's teacher education program accepted only 6.8% of applicants in 2016 (Muhonen, 2017). On the other hand, occupational inheritance can be found in Finland, as the number of student teachers whose parent is a teacher was significantly large in the survey with teacher students at the beginning of their studies (Reimer & Dorf, 2014). Nevertheless, it can be concluded that fewer financial resources are needed to be a regular, tenured teacher in public secondary schools in Finland compared to South Korea.

4   METHODOLOGY

4.1   Research Aim and Questions

This research aims to find out how secondary education can lead students to a high agency in their life afterward. Under the purpose, the topic of the study is the influence of upper secondary education and family background on students' life decisions, especially their career choices. To deepen the understanding, the research was conducted with South Korean and Finnish informants instead of having participants from a single country.

Cross-cultural studies can advance and expand knowledge while transcending the particular surrounding context and having a broader perspective toward human behavior (Papayiannis & Anastassiou-Hadjicharalambous, 2011). According to Gómez and Kuronen (2011), a small-scale qualitative cross-national approach allows researchers to analyse the phenomena within the cultural and social contexts, including the actual local practices and everyday life of people. Similar to anthropological research, ethnographic and other qualitative methods are often employed in cross-cultural qualitative comparison (Gómez & Kuronen, 2011).

Among various types of upper secondary schools, general high school settings in South Korea and Finland were chosen. The participants of this research are young educators who have experience of studying for the teaching qualification at the master's degree level from the two countries. The research was done with the following research questions in mind:

 (1) What kind of high school experiences were meaningful to the informants' agency?

 (2) What are the factors which influenced the informants' career choices of teaching career?

4.2   Methodological Approach and Data Collection

A mixed method approach was originally planned to collect the data for this research with a quantitative survey in the first phase and individual interviews in the second phase. However, the survey could not reach enough number of participants due to the differences between the two countries' academic systems and low turnouts. As a result, the majority of the data of this research was attained by interviews while the survey was mostly used as the preparatory stage before the interviews and the basis of the semi-structured interview questions for individual informants.

Snowball sampling method was employed to recruit most informants due to several challenges. First, the academic systems for subject teacher qualification are different between South Korea and Finland. In South Korea, most bachelor's degrees consist of four academic years, which is one year longer than in Finland. Furthermore, it is possible to get teacher qualification in bachelor's degree by majoring in subject education or by taking pedagogical courses alongside major studies for a few top-tier students with subject-related majors (e.g. English Literature, Mathematics, etc.) In Finland, however, a master's degree in subjects is required for subject teacher positions at lukio. Second, South Korean universities have a winter vacation from late December to the end of February. Since January and early February were the scheduled time for the data collection of this research, it was difficult to contact lecturers in South Korea and recruit informants with their help. Third, the turnout rate for the online survey was less than expected despite the help from student associations and faculties of education in different Finnish universities. As a result of the snowball sampling, the original idea of purposive sampling for the interviews based on the survey results was not possible although the survey results still showed some meaningful differences among participants.

The data collection was conducted with the following measures. First, an online survey regarding high school experiences and their ideas about the future was distributed to the informants. Second, online individual interviews were

conducted with the ones who agreed to continue participating in the second phase. In total, 28 online survey results were garnered (7 South Korean; 21 Finnish), and ten participants, five from each country, agreed to participate in the interview. The main informants of the study are young people aged between 22 to 32, who enrolled in or recently studied for the subject teacher qualification at the time of the data collection.

All of the participants graduated from general high school in South Korea or lukio in Finland. The participants are from three different universities in each country, six in total, and finished their secondary education in different high schools from each other. As described in Table 1, Finnish participants had more positive feelings about their high school experiences in general than the South Korean participants. The average score of South Korean participants was 2.25 and Finnish participants 4 out of 5 (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive information about the participants

Participant	Age	Want to be a secondary school subject teacher	Overall feeling about high school experiences (0: very negative, 5: very positive)
K1	28	No*	1
K2	25	Yes	4
K3	26	Yes	2
K4	31	Yes	0
K5	32	No*	2
F1	27	No*	5
F2	32	No*	4
F3	22	Yes	4
F4	23	Yes	4
F5	26	Yes	3

Notes: K: South Korean; F: Finnish; * Even though there are participants who do not wish to be a secondary school teacher at the moment of the data collection, all of the participants have the experience of studying in the teacher qualification programme at master's degree level; The answers about the overall experience of their high school experiences are from the participants' online survey answer on the question "When you think about your upper secondary schooling experiences in general, how positive are your feelings about it?".

Qualitative research has strength in that it can provide information on the dynamics of social context, processes, and change. Qualitative research also enables the researchers to answer 'how' and 'why' regarding the dynamics (Mason,

2006). Despite the challenges in genuine understanding, interviews can be a useful research method to learn about the world of others (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Some features of the ethnographic approach were borrowed during the overall data collection process of this research, especially in interviews. Ethnographers intend to learn from and be taught by their informants rather than collecting "data" about them (Spradley, 1979).

The interviews in this research were semi-structured so that participants can be free to respond to the interview questions as they wish while the researcher can inquire into these responses (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer can modify the style, pace, order of questions to elicit fullest answers while interviewees can respond in their own words, leading to a profound understanding of the interviewee's perception of the studied phenomena (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The basic interview protocol for this study was based on the answers that each participant provided at the survey. When relevant information arose or clarification was needed, the order of the questions was changed or extra questions were added. If informants were thought to have provided enough answers to have a clear picture about one topic, some questions in the protocol were skipped.

Considering the researcher's own background as a secondary school teacher in South Korea and a master's degree student of education in Finland, the "insider" approach can be justified in this research. Greene (2014) suggested that insider researchers can orient themselves well in the research environment and/or participants, have a more natural interaction with the participants, as well as access more easily to the target social group.

While taking the role of co-constructor of the stories based on what her informants provided, the researcher kept in mind that interview is social interaction, and therefore interview is a recreation rather than the representation of past events (Humle, 2014; Löfgren & Karlssen, 2016). The interviews had narrative features in that participants could relate their stories instead of answering the researcher's questions merely (Tracy, 2012).

Korean was used for the survey and in the interviews with the South Korean participants while both of the data collection phases were done in English with the Finnish participants. The average duration of the recorded files from the interviews is approximately 55 minutes (min: 40 minutes; max: 70 minutes).

4.3   Data Analysis

The inductive thematic analysis method, which allows themes to be strongly related to the data (Javadi & Zarea, 2016), was taken in this research. According to Braun and Clarke (2008), thematic analysis has strength in its flexibility, which can provide rich, detailed, and complex findings from the data. A theme represents a patterned meaning in the data, and it takes an important role in answering the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

All of the 10 interviews were transcribed as the first phase of the analysis. The length of transcribed data was 167 pages of text in total with the font size of 12. The line spacing in the Korean texts was 1.0 and 1.5 in the English texts. To transcribe the data, the recorded files were listened to at 0.34 to 0.5 speed for the first time while certain parts were listened to several times for accuracy. Once the basic transcription ended, the files were played at normal speed so that the researcher could notice subtle nuances in the interviews and correct the errors made. Initial codes of the data with the tag of informant number and page number were made at this stage. At the second round of the analysis, the initial themes of the data were generated as shown in Table 2. The themes were reviewed, refined, joined, and separated at the third round while primary categories were created. At the fourth round, the themes were clearly defined and given names, generating the index structure of the *5. Findings* chapter. Later, the transcripts and analyses of different rounds were revisited to consolidate the integrity of the research.

The themes and the discussion presented in the following chapters are the outcomes of the researcher's prolonged inquiry. The researcher of this study was

aware that the data collection and analysis processes are influenced by the researcher's preconceptions and different orientations as well as by her disclosures, comments, and choice of questions (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). Braun and Clarke (2008) emphasize the role of researchers in taking charge of identifying patterns or themes, making selections, and reporting them instead of merely discovering themes emerging from the data. The researcher of this study tried to take full responsibility for her research including pursuing themes with the help of her supervisor.

Table 2. Example of the Analysis

Original quote	They encouraged me by saying that I was good at something in the subject. Then I gained more courage to raise my hand and answer in the lessons when I got this good feedback. Or when I didn't realize that I was good at something, then my teacher told me that I was good at this and continue to do something. Then I started noticing these things about myself that before without these comments I wouldn't know about. So they gave me this courage and to realize what I'm, which things that I'm good at (F2, p.2)
Notes from the 2nd round	F2 thinks her teachers influenced her a lot since they encouraged her by complimenting her performance, which prompted her to participate in the class more. And they also made her realize her potentials that she might not have noticed without their comments.
3rd round	Theme: Teachers' influence Subthemes: 'gave courage to participate more,' 'Discover one's potential'
4th round/ Final codes	Theme: Teachers' influence and support for major/career choice Sub-theme: Teachers' influence Sub-sub-theme 1: Motivation/demotivation Sub-sub-theme 2: Opening New Doors

4.4   Ethical Considerations

Due to the research topics related to personal life experience, it was required to get information related to the participants' private experiences and feelings. During the data collection, various measurements were taken to ensure the ethical integrity of the study. First, a web page was made to notify the researcher, research intent, research design, data privacy policy of the research. When the informants were recruited, a consent form written in Korean and English and the link for the web page were sent to them. All of the informants participated in the research voluntarily and were informed of their rights as the research participants. To avoid data leakage, an external voice recorder was used to record the interviews and the recorded files along with transcriptions were stored in a memory stick.

In the data analysis phase, the informant's privacy and safety were considered as a priority. The informants were anonymized to conceal their identity. Each informant was randomly assigned with a number with country initial and a number from 1 to 5 (e.g. K1; F5). The randomly allocated numbers are not related to their age, gender, or the order of their participation in this research. To protect informants' privacy and to prevent any harm to them, gender pronouns and specific informant numbers were avoided at certain points of the reporting stage if the central meanings were not affected. Finally, the interpretation of the data was confirmed by the informants at the member checking phase, as described in *6.2.1. Trustworthiness.*

5 FINDINGS

In the following chapter, the analysed result of the collected data is presented along with exact quotes from the interviews. First, the results regarding the informants' study experiences in their high schools are introduced including teachers' influence, sense of achievement and challenges in learning, guidance and counselling, high school as an opportunity to explore. Second, the school culture that the informants experienced is described with a description of their school environment and relationships in school. The third section is about building agency in life, where the informants' parental influence and lessons from their experiences are discussed. Finally, suggestions for the future high school education that informants made are presented with positive changes currently happening in school.

5.1 Study Experience in High School

5.1.1 Teacher's Influence

Finnish informants talked more about the influence of their teachers in their motivation in learning than South Korean informants did. When they heard positive feedback from the teachers, they wanted to be more engaged in the class and in some cases, it influenced their major studies in university. A few participants from Finland had teachers who could bring the informants' interests to their subjects so that they "started to think about these subjects differently" (F5). On the other hand, the opposite case happened as well. For example, an informant skipped classes and lost interest in further learning of the subject because of conflict with her teacher despite her original fondness of the subject.

> I really liked English but then because of this teacher I didn't care that much at all. On some level I wanted to be good in English, but then because of teacher, I was like "Okay whatever. She doesn't believe in me anyway so…" (F2)

Finnish informants were also keen on teachers' pedagogical approaches. The teachers who influenced informants positively provided extra materials or information if the students showed interest or extra help when the students had difficulty in understanding. This extra effort from teachers was thought of as "a very personal and nice way to take students' preferences into account" (F1). A teacher's giving her students choices regarding the level of the task was appreciated as well. By informing class schedule and due date of the assignments clearly and suggesting timeline for assignments, teachers helped students acquire and practice organizational skills.

Teachers' teaching methods were memorable to a few Finnish informants. Effective teaching methods helped one informant remember the meaning of a philosophical metaphor long after the class. Educational technology and teachers' creative ideas in teaching with various educational devices and applications made students' learning "exciting" (F3).

Teachers had the power of opening new perspectives of students to see themselves or society. Teachers' positive comments on F2's performance made her realize her talent that she had not been aware of. Another informant from South Korea thinks that what her teacher talked about during the class sparked her interest in society.

> [One of my favorite teachers] was a teacher with a warm perspective to see society. I think I got much influence from him as well. He was interested in human rights. For example, he shared his viewpoints about the death penalty and talked about disadvantaged people in society (K1).

5.1.2   Sense of Achievement and Challenges in Learning

Many answers from both South Korean and Finnish informants about their positive experiences in studying were related to getting a high score in examinations. When getting a good score as a result of their hard work, the achieving experience gave a huge sense of accomplishment to several South Korean informants. Putting a lot of effort into a certain exam was considered as a learning opportunity as itself to one Finnish informant.

In South Korean participants' cases, good scores in the examination also meant that they were "going closer to the goal" (K5), which was getting admission from the universities that they wished to go to. Some South Korean informants expressed the high expectations they had had about university life. Getting a high score gave them hope and the feeling that they were going through the process well enough.

All of the South Korean participants and one Finnish participant shared the experience of being under pressure and having a huge workload at high school. The university entrance preparation system in South Korea required much effort and dedication of physical and mental energy from the informants, which made them feel "tired and annoyed with an exhausted body" (K5). The informants thought that the system was malfunctioning, but they "could not provide a clear answer" (K3) about the overheated system and had no "time to think over" (K3). Consequently, they had to remain and participate in the competition. When informants did not get a good result or studied one more year than their peers to get into a more prestigious university, they got stressed and felt much pressure that they "should not fail again" (K5).

The usefulness of huge workload and prolonged study time at high school was questioned by both countries' participants. F3 felt that the knowledge from her high school is "not relevant to [her] life anymore," nor could she remember it now. Inefficient systems were pointed out as challenges by different participants from both countries: In Finland, subjects were not connected to each other, and it often resulted in many assignments given to students at the same time. Sometimes South Korean students had to follow the school curriculum against their own will. Changes in university entrance systems came as difficulties to the informants from both countries.

5.1.3   Guidance and Counselling

Experiences about guidance and counselling at high school were mentioned only by a relatively small number of informants. The Finnish informants had the experience of discussing with their guidance and counselling teachers. The teachers

helped students choose and organize their courses and discussed their career and university choices with the students. In South Korean informants' cases, the class teachers took the role of university admission counselling.

One informant from Finland shared her experience of successful counselling sessions, which helped her arrange her class schedule well. However, other informants from both countries did not have the same idea. They were not satisfied with the teachers' opinions or had doubts about the teachers' capability in guidance.

> I think [teachers] must show students different options of university choices, which can open more experiences [to them] … but when I think about why my teachers could not do so, it's because the teachers themselves did not have experiences outside their city … I felt that my teachers were quite incapable, which caused disruption in the communication with the teacher… The teachers' irresponsibility of neglecting students' university admission left a very negative influence on me (K3).

5.1.4 Opportunities to Explore about Self and Interests in High School

The informants from the two countries had opportunities to explore their interests at high school. Many of the Finnish informants described themselves as students who were interested in learning at high school. They also appreciated the possibility of studying different subjects "in depth and specific" (F2) compared to the lower school levels. The academic system in Finland in which students can choose courses to take was considered positively even though one informant wished that she could have taken more challenging subjects and tried harder for those.

South Korean informants mentioned extracurricular activities as the chances they had to deepen their understanding of the self. K4 shared the experience of reading different books from the library and growing interests in classical literature, which made him consider pursuing Korean language and literature for his major. Winning the first prize at the essay writing contest held in school gave another informant a chance to discover the unknown potential within her. This experience made her realize the importance of having a variety of experiences at a young age.

5.2 School Culture

In this section, informants' description of their school environment is introduced, followed by the relationship between teachers and students. To present the relationship between teachers and students, the degree of friendliness and respect, support, and teachers' professionalism as well as the influence of teachers on the informants' ideas about the teaching profession are depicted. The next sub-theme, the relationship among students, has two topics including friendship and academic atmosphere among students. The sub-theme about the relationship among teachers is mentioned shortly at the end.

5.2.1 School Climate

Finnish informants described their high school atmosphere as "easygoing" (F5), "motivated" (F1), and "calm" (F4). Students' freedom of choice and motivation were ingrained in the school system in that students in lukio are generally "the ones who chose to come" (F1). They also chose courses to take, which made the class size of each subject vary from three to 25 students.

South Korean informants experienced a challenging school climate in general. Some informants said that they had to stay at school until late to study. Normally, high schools were assigned to students based on their wishes and distance from home was taken into account, but not every student could go to the school they wished. Consequently, it could lead to the discontent of students about the school. In some cases, moving to another neighborhood where the educational environment was allegedly better was considered.

> Seeing that certain school districts in Seoul are famous for a good academic atmosphere, I wondered a lot whether I should have insisted on going to school in those districts, however hard it would have been (K4).

To some South Korean informants, the fact that their schools were private affected the school atmosphere they felt. Private school teachers may have less teacher autonomy than public school teachers in South Korea (Kim, 2018). While talking about students' harassment to their teachers at school, one informant said

that teachers were like "salarymen" as they were out of protection from the institutional system because the school was private. Another informant faced a lot of regulations about school uniforms and hairstyle. In addition, there was physical punishment and religious service was advertised openly to students in her school.

The idea that grades matter the most was reflected in various parts of school life that South Korean participants experienced. For instance, the half-in-jest class slogan of one informant's high school class was "If you study now, the better your future spouse's profession will be." In another high school, there was an 'advanced class,' namely a class of students with top grades to whom the school took extra care. The presence of the class could give students motivation to study harder, but it could be a discriminative factor and a source of feeling of alienation to the ones who could not join the class.

5.2.2   Relationship between Teachers and Students

Degree of Friendliness and Respect

Both countries' informants appreciated humorous teachers who made jokes with students and treated them in a friendly manner. Teachers' effort to have amicable relationships with students was taken positively as well.

> Sometimes he brought his dog to school and we would pat the dog. We also listened to music and he was kind of a cool teacher. He always told jokes and the lessons were very fun (F4).

On the other hand, the teachers whose behavior seemed inappropriate were considered negatively. For example, K1 said that there were teachers who "played strange pranks or were unreasonably stubborn" in her school.

In positive teacher-student relationships, teachers and students showed respect to each other. Teachers treated the students as "equals" (F5). Teachers understood each student's own characteristics, listened to their opinions carefully, took flexible approaches to resolve problems, and respected students' choices. The same respectful mindset was applied to disciplining students in some of the Finnish informants' schools.

> The reason behind the teacher's strictness was because she treated students as adults and expected them to behave in a certain way. The teacher was very calm and collected at all times without raising her voice or yelling. (F5)

Disciplining students happened privately "when other students could not see" (F1) in F1's school.

Problematic relationships between teachers and students were described by the informants as well. Some teachers vented their emotions on students or suspected a student's behavior. In some extreme cases in South Korean high school, an informant related that there were subtle sexual harassments to students committed by teachers. In another case, the authority of teachers was lost, and students deceived their teachers a lot. The distrust between the two parties grew bigger as time went by, and teaching and learning were disturbed. The experience was very negative and gave a pessimistic idea about the teaching profession to the informant who observed the distressing relationship.

Degree of Support

Informants had warm memories with their teachers who showed support to them. The good memories with the teacher who sincerely cared about students became a strength to withstand the challenging school culture to some South Korean informants. Students could open to the teachers when they felt that the teachers were willing to help them.

> I think it helped me a lot to gain the strength that I could confide my concerns to someone. Especially, the fact that she was someone who had a higher authority and was a reliable figure in the school community – a teacher – influenced me a lot (K2).

> Most of the teachers were ready to help us even when we didn't have problems of their subjects. So, the teachers were actually interested in our lives. And we could talk to them if we had any kind of trouble. (F3)

Teachers' excessive emphasis on students' academic achievements was seen as burdensome to South Korean informants. It was mentioned that the informants were uncomfortable with the teachers' attitude because the teachers behaved as if "grade and university admission were the most important things in high school" (K1). The informants felt that teachers were lining up students with exam scores. In addition, teachers' viewpoint toward one informant's achievements at

a school event was seen as negative because the teachers focused on using those achievements for the university admission process rather than what she genuinely learned from the experience.

Degree of Teachers' Professionalism

The definition of professionalism in this research includes teachers' knowledge of their subjects, their pedagogical methods, and their enthusiasm for teaching. The professionalism of teachers affected the relationship between them and the informants. The Finnish informants appreciated the passion of the teachers for their profession. The informants felt that if the teachers were enthusiastic about their job, it made them "confident in learning and made learning fun" (F5).

> Most of high school teachers were really excited about what they were doing. They really liked the subject they were teaching and they seemed to feel that teaching in high school was their calling (F3).

Teachers' expertise in their subjects and using various ways to teach were mentioned by several informants from Finland. For example, an English teacher's fluent British accent and a biology teacher's profound knowledge to answer students' questions were seen as proof that they were capable teachers. Similarly, the logical structure of the curriculum of the subject, new teaching approaches, willingness to adapt to students' needs, and elaborate lesson plans of teachers were positively considered.

Sometimes the teachers' enthusiasm for teaching went beyond teaching their own subjects. F3 referred to the memorable teachers she had met as "Teaching first subject second teachers," who want to educate the students on a deeper level, as good human beings. Furthermore, teachers' active engagement with students' extracurricular activities was valued by both South Korean and Finnish informants.

The informants also talked about the teachers whom they considered unprofessional. Some teachers of a South Korean informant did not prepare their classes well while publicly mentioning their ambition to get promoted to students. Another issue mentioned by another South Korean informant is related to political neutrality in class. Her school is located in the city where a tragic historical

event happened a few decades ago, and she felt that the history teacher was imposing his opinion about the event on students. The informant thought that it is something to be concerned about as it can transmit the teacher's political viewpoint to students. In some cases, teachers had much enthusiasm in their subject but lacked proper pedagogical skills. For instance, a Finnish informant's teacher showed students a movie related to his subject and expected them to have a conversation about it without providing any support to facilitate their understanding.

The hostile relationship between teachers and students affected the perceived image of teachers' professionalism to a South Korean informant. When it was seen that the teachers were harassed by their students severely, the qualities of the teachers were doubted as they seemed not to be able to control their students' offending behaviors.

Teachers' Influence on Teaching Profession to the Informants

Teachers provided career role models to the students, especially to the ones who wanted to pursue teaching professions. Great teachers inspired their students to become a teacher. The teaching methods that the teachers used became examples to the students.

> I had very good experiences about how teachers taught their subjects, even though I am not going to be teaching those subjects. So, I kind of unknowingly gathered teaching tools for my future. (F3)

Even when the teachers' teaching methods were considered improper, their behaviors were analyzed and gave lessons about the teaching profession.

On the contrary, some of the South Korean informants felt that their teachers gave a negative impression of working at school. When teachers were seen to be suffering due to the adversarial school culture or disregard their own profession, the informants did not feel attracted to the teaching job.

> One day, I heard a teacher recommending to my friend whose grade was quite good in school and who wished to be a geography teacher. I was shocked that the teacher said to my friend, "Hey, your grade is too good to be a teacher." … I found the teacher's comment very unreasonable that grades are the criteria to decide her dream and she can do better than a teaching job with her grade. (K3)

5.2.3 Relationship among Students

Friendship Issues

The informants reported both positive and negative experiences of their friendship in high school. Some informants had nice relationships with their peers, with whom they spent time together frequently outside classes. In one South Korean informant's case, the fact that she had to stay at school until evening contributed to her friendship with other students. Many Finnish informants said that the small size of the school helped them know each other. While it is possible that a school "happened to have extremely nice people" (F1) in a specific year so that students' friendship blossomed naturally, active arrangement of events by the student council and teachers contributed to the feeling of togetherness among students in some cases.

> We had a lot of in-school events as well. It was mostly thanks to our student council and they always arranged something fun every week. So, every Friday there was a different theme. For example, we had to dress in a certain way. (F5)

However, being a small school in a relatively small town was not enough to create feelings of solidarity. In one Finnish informant's case, the peer groups which had already been formed in the middle school affected the high school atmosphere. This was aggravated when the school did not take much care about the sense of community within the students. Furthermore, South Korean informants who experienced disappointment in the other aspects of school culture did not wish to develop friendships with many of their classmates.

Academic Atmosphere among Students

Studying with other students in high school remains a positive experience for some informants from both countries. They had experiences of preparing for exams with friends, "having each other's backs" (F5). The informants had a sense of achievement when they felt that their knowledge or ability was recognized by peers.

> My friends gathered around me before Korean history examination, asking questions to me. It turned out that I correctly guessed most of the short-answer questions in exams,

and I was praised by my friends. It is a fun memory that I have about my study experience. (K2)

In general, Finnish informants thought that a positive academic atmosphere can be attributed to the fact that students in high school are the ones who made a choice to continue studying.

The opposite cases were told by other informants. One Finnish informant experienced difficulties in group work because of the undesirable relationship among students. The peers who were not motivated in studying gave a disturbing influence on others' learning in the classroom of one South Korean informant. The competitive educational climate drove students to put a lot of effort into their studies in South Korea. However, several South Korean participants related pressure and loneliness they felt within the system. The competition-oriented atmosphere resulted in students bullying their peers and feeling excessive jealousy toward others because of grades. The overheated system "hurt the students who were involved in it" (K3).

5.2.4   Relationship among Teachers

The sense of belongingness or lack of it among teachers was mentioned by few informants. In F4's school, the teachers had a remarkably good working relationship.

> They were obviously were very nice to one another. I can remember when one of my teachers came late to our class. She said it was because she had so much fun with other teachers. I think that that explains quite a lot. (F1)

When teachers felt that "their well-being was taken care of" (F3), it could affect the entire atmosphere of the school as the teachers' positive relationships transferred to the students. In the opposite situation where the teachers were not on good terms with each other, they did not let their relationship affect the general school atmosphere by avoiding arguing in front of students.

On the other hand, some teachers did not provide support to their colleagues who were abused by students. One South Korean informant felt that the teachers even instigated students' wrong behaviors toward their colleagues, which evoked more disappointment about the school culture.

5.3 Building and Exercising Agency in Life

In this section, how informants have developed their agency in life is discussed. First, their parents' influence is depicted. The second part is about the informants' learning about themselves. It is divided into four different sub-themes: difficulties and lessons from them; experience and decision-making; being positive about oneself; and attitudes toward the future.

5.3.1 Parental Influence

Informants related different degrees of parental influence on their career and life choices. In general, most South Korean informants experienced stronger parental influence than Finnish informants. South Korean parents provided suggestions and recommendations about their children's career choices more actively although the final career and life decisions were made by the informants. Two informants said that the atmosphere of their family along with their parents' and other family members' wishes about their career affected them considerably. Two other South Korean informants joined the teaching qualification master's degree programmes partially due to their parents' suggestion, even though they were not continuing the study at the moment of data collection.

> I think from the beginning when I thought about my future career at a young age, the fact that my parents are civil servants affected me a lot. When I was having a part-time job at the broadcasting station, the working culture there was very opposite from that of civil servants and my family. So, I kind of thought that they would be disappointed if I choose to have my career in this field…After I made a decision to go to graduate school for the teacher qualification, my mother has supported me financially as well… Thanks to the support, I could dream about being a teacher in earnest. (K2)

The degree of parental influence varied among South Korean informants as well. One of the informants shared her trust that "mom has never been wrong" (K1) while another does not feel much influence from her parents due to the long period that she has lived independently from her parents. In addition, financial support from parents for their education was mentioned as one way of parental influence. Many South Korean informants had the experience of getting private tutoring during high school.

Most Finnish informants and one of the South Korean informants talked about social and emotional support from parents. Most parents of the Finnish informants have "always been very supportive" (F1), and they discussed different career options with their parents. However, many informants emphasized that it was they who made a decision about their own career path even though they discussed it with their parents.

> Of course, I talked with my parents. But they were like, "If you want to do this, you can. But we are not pushing you into anything." I think I'm more of a person who makes all these decisions by herself. (F4)

The social support that the informants got from their parents included the parents' setting examples of work ethics and mindset toward work while providing "some guideline" (K4). For example, F1 thinks that her belief in herself and in learning came from her upbringing since her parents have the same belief as her.

The underlying influence of parents and family background on her career choice as well as the expectations of the other people were mentioned by F1. She pointed out that the educational level of the parents and other features of the household of the informants have a huge impact on decision-making in career paths even if the parents try not to pressure their children.

> Our parents or heritage or social class have actually an enormous effect on people. So, when I said that I decided independently, I can't say that for sure because I also know that I have this very privileged position of having the mother who went to university, so I had someone to look up to. I had already known what it is like. (F1)

5.3.2   Learning about Oneself with Experiences

Difficulties and Lessons from Them

The informants shared challenges they have had in their lives during the interview. To several South Korean participants, the disappointment of not getting the admissions from the universities they had aimed for was one of the major difficulties they have experienced in early adulthood. Nevertheless, they eventually appreciated the experiences of their bachelor's degree that they had not been satisfied with at the beginning. The experiences became "valuable and precious" (K1) while the informants strived toward the direction they wished.

> If you see my bachelor's degree transcript, I had the lowest grade in my first year and it got better and better. I kind of accepted my reality… and decided to try hard there… and went to graduate school to study interior architecture, which I originally wished to study. It was so fun to study there. I felt like I came to university again and started from the beginning (K5).

Similarly, Finnish informants showed the attitude of taking events and experiences in the past positively. When a certain, involuntary event happened in life, "it took more time to recover" (F1). Sometimes sudden transitions in life gave the feeling that they were "running away from" (F2) personal issues. Nevertheless, those experiences were considered favorably.

> When I look at it now, it has led me in good places, so I don't have regrets for going and doing these things. And I think if I, for example, would have started university studies when I was 20, I think I wouldn't have been ready myself. So, I was ready for that later. (F2)

Hardships gave opportunities to expand their empathy toward others. One informant was able to understand her teachers to some extent, toward whom she used to take a critical stance because of their lack of passion. Having encountered various problems existing in school culture while working as a teacher, she thinks that her teachers' attitudes might have changed over the years after experiencing a feeling of helplessness at their job several times. Another informant who had an experience of being bullied at school thinks that her experience would help her become a caring, empathetic teacher.

Experiences and Making Decisions

The majority of the informants mentioned that having different experiences allowed them to understand themselves better and helped make decisions in their lives. By trying different options, the informants found more possibilities open to them and made a choice which interests them the most. Informants said that "detouring" (K2) and various working and studying experiences helped them build their self-knowledge. They pursued their own "aspiration" (K1) and "prospect" (K3), which "came naturally" (F2) with the experiences.

> I had [job] experiences from one to three months, and if I felt that that field is not suitable for me, I moved to a new field in a decisive manner. So, I don't think that I had regrets about the past workplaces when moving; I rather thought "I learned something new. This is not for me. It was a good experience." (K4)

Trying to take various chances also helps informants to have less regret in life as they think that one "would regret more if [he or she] does not try to grab it." (F1).

To some extent, having an unsatisfying high school experience prompted two of the South Korean informants to consider pursuing a teacher qualification degree. One wished to contribute to bringing changes to the competition-oriented educational environment, and the other aimed to work in schools with a good academic atmosphere, opposite from his own high school culture.

Finnish informants learned how to improve their life skills with experiences. From the experience of teaching elementary school students, an informant learned how to be more careful. Two other informants realized that making small plans and organizing schedules are necessary to achieve a goal. One of them also said that she became less impulsive and learned to concentrate on the long-term goals even though the results may not be seen immediately.

Being Positive with Oneself

Being mature over the life courses brought self-positivity and higher self-esteem to the informants in general. They are aware of what their abilities are and can "take credits for the achievements" (F5). This attitude brought them confidence and made them feel "more recognized by other people" (K4). They can "embrace and encourage" (K2) themselves better than in the past.

> Now I am more mature. I know myself better. I think that's the main key here. The fact that I know what I want, not exactly what I want, but I know what I like and what I don't like, and I am okay with it. So, I think that's why I am more confident. Because when you are 16, you are still kind of searching what you like." (F1)

The informants learned their limits and how to cope with them. The informants are able to "accept disappointments and deal with them" (F4). The insight gained from experiences that life doesn't always proceed as one wishes to was considered positively.

> I feel I am nothing [big], which made me a little bit worn out but also humble. I mean, I realized that I should try harder. And I have met different kinds of people… and have been in different fields, which broadened my perspective. I have got more experiences and more interests. (K5)

In addition, the feeling that they "survived" (F1) the difficult situations or experiences they had in the past contributed to the confidence that the informants have.

The informants came to see their own characteristics in a more positive way. One participant from Finland accepts her introverted personality without pressuring herself to be more extroverted, as she used to do. In addition, meeting diverse types of people in a bigger society after high school helped her acknowledge who she is while meeting others similar to her.

Attitudes toward Future

Once they became sure about their future career direction, the informants felt "calmer about the future" (F4) and "motivated to work towards the future" (F5). Many of the informants from the two countries expressed their belief in themselves about their capability to go closer to their wishes.

Regarding setting up and achieving specific life and career plans, informants showed mixed attitudes. The majority of the informants had some idea of their wishes for the future, but the degree of certainty varied. Some South Korean informants mentioned that they "can do it" (K1) and shared their resolutions or milestones to reach the goal. On the other hand, one Finnish informant mentioned uncertainty with her future ideas due to personal issues. Some of the informants from each country did not have a clear picture of their future.

The uncertainty, however, was not considered negatively by many informants. Even though the specific goals are not still clear, they have a general goal that they would be "lying to self "(F2) if they do not go closer toward. One Finnish informant wishes to keep various career options open. She does not want to diminish her possibilities as she believes that she has the capacity of doing different things. Others emphasized the freedom to "go with the flow" (F4).

> [I]n fact, people grow up continuously… When my students say to me, "Teacher, I don't have a dream (job)," I say, "Don't you worry at all. I don't have one either." A dream is something that changes often even if you have one. (K3)

5.4 Suggestions to High School Education

5.4.1 Explorative and Healthy School Culture

When asked about how high school education can bring positive changes they experienced later in life, most informants from both South Korea and Finland mentioned the safe environment where students are able to explore without being worried about failures.

Finnish informants focused on encouraging students to pursue their interests. They agreed that students should feel comfortable about making a mistake and be "merciful to themselves" (F1). The importance of extracurricular activities to explore was noted along with academic subjects. It was suggested to be beneficial for students to concentrate on certain things that interest them, but guiding them to have only one specific goal was considered undesirable.

Some South Korean informants mentioned the necessity of changes in the education system. They wished more chances for students to know "what they like, dislike, can bear, cannot bear" (K5) and do not have "fear of failure" (K2). Studying subjects on a deeper level instead of trying hard to memorize was wished as well.

> I wish the high school classes were less restricted by exams. And I really liked societal studies, so I wished that there would be more subjects to explore those things. I liked science as well, but I couldn't learn to think deeply. I just had to memorize because I was busy taking exams. (K1)

Teachers' role in creating healthy and supportive school culture was mentioned. Teachers should listen to students' concerns and fear, which "would be the beginning" (K2) of empowering them. K4 shared the point of view that teachers should encourage students to explore themselves and take responsibility for creating a learning-oriented atmosphere. F2 noted the importance of giving opportunities for students to know their strengths and get positive feedback from teachers. Strengthening guidance and counselling was mentioned as one way to support students.

Giving students the choices to choose subjects was considered to be important by Finnish and South Korean informants. High school "might be the first

time in someone's life" (F5) to make decisions for oneself. Deciding their specialization and choosing courses helps students to explore their interests and reflect on themselves.

5.4.2   Positive Changes in School

During the interviews, some positive changes already happening in high schools in both countries were mentioned. In South Korea, the students do not have to stay at school for a long time if they do not want to, which was seen as an efficient and "wonderful change" (K5). Sessions like 'period 0' disappeared several years ago, and students come to school on time without having a mandatory self-study session before actual classes start. 'Hyuksin schools,' which pursue a student-oriented educational approach, are becoming popular in South Korean public education. In Hyuksin schools, students enjoy democratic school atmospheres and are encouraged to participate in more diverse and professional extracurricular activities.

In Finland, different kinds of educational technology and new national curriculum are expected to bring about changes in classrooms. The new curriculum aims for a holistic approach and subjects have a closer connection with each other. Students have fewer compulsory subjects and have more freedom in their choices. In the new curriculum, students learn not only the details of a subject but also their contexts. In other words, students are "not just given the pieces of the puzzle but also the frame" (F3).

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Comments on Findings

6.1.1 Summary

The influences of high school experiences, parents, and later experiences of informants to their agency are the main topics of this research. Regarding high school experiences, teachers' influence was related several times. Finnish informants appreciated that their teachers provided encouraging feedback and extra support to facilitate their learning. In positive cases, teachers helped informants acquire academic and other competencies such as organizational skills in their lessons. The informants felt a sense of achievement by getting a satisfying result in exams. However, too much workload caused burnout and fear of failure, especially to South Korean informants. Guidance and counselling sessions had limited capacity for supporting informants' choices for their career and further education. High school provided opportunities to learn subjects in depth and explore their interests in academics to Finnish informants while some of the South Korean informants discovered their interests by reading books from the school library or participating in school contests.

School culture and relationships in school were influential to informants' decisions on choosing a career option for a teacher. Informants appreciated friendly teachers. Mutual respect between teachers and students, however, was more valued than the friendliness of the teacher for the desirable teacher-student relationship. The teachers who treated the students as equal human beings and listened to students' opinions were praised. Teachers' support and willingness to help students' life beyond their learning of the subject were appreciated as well. On the other hand, South Korean informants disapproved of some of their teachers' attitudes that overemphasized grade and university admission. Teachers' passion for their job affected informants' mindset about learning. In terms of the relationship among students, schools' attempts to build a sense of belongingness were sometimes necessary to create bonds among students. Studying together

with peers for a common goal was considered a positive experience. Immoderate competition, however, was blamed for conflict among students and the loneliness that students felt. Good relationships within teachers were seen as a positive catalyst for the community spirit of the whole school.

The difference in family influence in career and life decisions of individuals between South Korea and Finland was shown. Parents of some South Korean informants expressed wishes for the informants' career and life choices, although the final decision was made by the informants. In addition, their parents financially supported their education in the forms of private tutoring during high school and tuition fees for higher degree studies. On the other hand, Finnish informants' parents did not appear to recommend or suggest directly about the informants' career and life choices. Rather, they listened to the informants' decisions and supported those once informants made their minds. A few informants from both countries learned work ethics and mindset toward work from their parents.

Life experiences took a significant role in the maturing process of the informants. Informants have encountered challenging situations in their lives, but they were able to regard them positively in the end. Hardships gave them opportunities to have more empathy. Having different experiences led them to understand themselves better, and self-knowledge became the foundation of their life decisions. As time goes by, the self-positivity and self-esteem of the informants increased thanks to the strengthened self-knowledge. Once informants made the main decision about their future career, they felt calmer and motivated. Even though the informants showed different levels of certainty about their future, uncertainty was not seen negatively; they have a general direction of life while specific future goals and ideas can change.

Informants agreed that high schools should support students' agency by creating a safe environment where they can explore their interests and different knowledge. Teachers have an important role in creating such a school environment and supporting students to know themselves better. Enhancing guidance

and counselling and giving students opportunities to make choices were mentioned as the ways to support students' exploration. On the other hand, there are already positive changes happening in school. Shortened study time and schools with student-oriented approaches in South Korea and the new national curriculum's holistic approach in Finland were mentioned by the informants.

6.1.2   Meaning of Findings

The concepts described in *2. Capability Approach* and *3. Roles of Family Background in Education* were employed to discuss the findings. In CA, education helps students find and shape their own value (Mok & Jeong, 2016) and expand their capacities to pursue it (Terzi, 2007; Hart & Brando, 2018). Education inspires students to appreciate their own and others' lives and equips them with a critical mindset to be able to debate over societal values (Hart & Brando, 2018). Students' freedom and autonomy are respected (Brighouse, 2000) while teachers and educational systems provide enough support and guidance (Saito, 2003). Teachers and others involved in the educational climate realize that their underlying values may affect students' values (Hart & Brando, 2018).

Family's material, social, and cultural resources can have a significant influence on students' academic attainment as well as their academic aspiration (Geske & Grinfelds, 2012; Acacio-Claro et al. 2018; Sirniö et al., 2020). The educational system may alleviate the influence of family background (Sirniö et al., 2020). However, a meritocratic system has not been the unequivocal solution in a society where educational achievement is closely related to the social status of the family (Meroe, 2014; Elmgren, 2019; Nam et al., 2019). In South Korea, families tend to endeavor to achieve children's successful education results together (Kang, 2008; Nam et al., 2019), including examinations for teaching positions (Yang, 2012). In Finland, the influence of family background on education appears to be less compared to South Korea. Nevertheless, there is still an inarguable correlation as illustrated in shadow education in university entrance (Kosunen, 2018) and occupational inheritance (Reimer & Dorf, 2014).

In high school, teachers have an extensive role in expanding students' capability. Appropriate and creative teaching methods and classes to learn subject knowledge in depth can enhance students' interests and capabilities related to the subject. Positive feedback from teachers can encourage students and let them discover their own talents that they did not know. Learning a subject profoundly is desirable while it should be related to students' lives to be meaningful (Walker, 2005; Wood & Deprez, 2012). Following the classes, students can learn skills other than academic knowledge, such as organizing their schedules efficiently.

Schools provide students opportunities to discover their interests and pursue them (Walker, 2005; Mok & Jeong, 2016; Hart & Brando, 2018). Along with regular classes, school facilities or extracurricular activities can be the chances for students to understand themselves better. Guidance and counselling can support students' shaping their own values. Trying hard for academic achievement can be the procedure for students to chase their goals. On the other hand, if the goal, often university entrance, is overstressed in school culture, students' well-being deteriorates.

Teachers can be the example of pursuing value in life to their students. If teachers are passionate about their job and are equipped with expertise in their subject, they can become role models to their students, especially to the ones who want to pursue a teaching career (Lunenberg, Korthagen & Swennen, 2007). On the contrary, when teachers do not prepare their classes or and denounce their own profession, the opposite effect might happen.

Freedom and autonomy in high school education appear to be more strongly ingrained in the Finnish system. Students in lukio are usually the ones who made a choice to take further academic paths, and they have more choices of courses. Some teachers let them decide the level of the materials or tasks as well. This may contribute to stronger motivation in learning and build a learning-oriented environment in general (Brighouse, 2000; Kelly, 2012). On the contrary, the South Korean university entrance system and high school education have not been able to provide enough freedom to students. The educational climate was described to be stricter and more regulated than the Finnish system by the South

Korean informants, and it may have negative influences in developing their capabilities during high school (Hart & Brando, 2018).

Teachers have a pivotal role in creating a respectful and favorable school environment. Respect from teachers towards students can lead to students' respect for their teachers. Amicable relationships of teachers with their colleagues can be transmitted to favorable relationships among students. In addition, having diverse school events organized by student councils with the support from teachers can consolidate bonds between students. On the contrary, some teachers committed inappropriate behaviors to students or trust was missing between teachers and students in a negative school environment.

The underlying value of teachers and educational systems have influence on students' agency (Hart & Brando, 2018). In the South Korean system, grade and university entrance are considered as the top priority in most of the school culture. Teachers and school culture that adhere to the system may use it as the dominant ideology at school and as a means to regulate students. Consequently, it can result in students' feeling of exclusion and conflict among themselves. Furthermore, teachers who do not have a broad perspective may not be able to provide effective and helpful counseling to students.

The academic result-centered educational environment in South Korea does not provide enough opportunities and time to develop critical thinking to students involved in the system (Unterhalter, 2009; Hart & Brando, 2018). Students are rushed and do not have freedom or space to think over. The course contents were often not taught in depth enough to develop reasoning skills. However, some teachers succeeded in promoting students' interest in society and marginalized people to some degree, and students created bonds with each other in school life.

After high school graduation, agency of the informants was exercised when overcoming difficult situations and disappointments in life. Dealing with challenges brought them a better understanding of others in similar situations. By engaging in various beings and doings, the informants continued to find and

pursue their values while expanding capabilities and achieving functionings. Experiences and their values collected in their life courses led to the informants' self-positivity, which can lead to their agency (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Even though their feeling about the degree of certainty for the future varied, they have been continuously shaping and pursuing functionings and developing capabilities with their agency. On the other hand, their life decisions are influenced by conversion factors, including their family (Robeyns, 2005; Walker, 2005).

Parental influence accounts for another major aspect of students' experience in high school as they provide financial, cultural, and social resources to their children. Furthermore, individuals inherit their parents' mindset and attitude toward life (Huang, Cheah, Lamb, & Zhou, 2017). The level of parental influence can be different by culture (Huang et al., 2017) and by family.

In South Korea, the social capital of a family was glanced on the basis of the parents' interest in the informants' life decisions as parents proactively suggested the informants' career choices. Parents' recommendation was one of the reasons behind informants' decisions on pursuing the teaching profession. On the other hand, financial resources of parents were spent on private tutoring during high school and tuition fees for the higher degree. Moving to another district for a better educational environment is an example of a family's collective support for the children's education (Kang, 2008; Nam et al., 2019).

The influence of parents in Finland appears to be less compared to Korea. The influence of family background, such as parents' education level, was acknowledged by an informant, but it was not observed precisely in the data of this study. Social support from the family was regarded important, and major life decisions of the informants were discussed and supported within the family. Parents set the example of the attitude and mindset toward various aspects of life. However, the informants felt that the decisions were made mostly with their own thoughts and wishes, not their parents'.

These differences in family influence can also be explained by the different dominant parenting styles in the two countries. Parental responsiveness and demandingness are related to children's adjustment, achievement at school, and

psychosocial maturity (Steinberg & Morris, 2001) universally. However, parenting styles and beliefs are influenced by social and cultural contexts as well (Haung et al., 2017). For example, it is common for parents from South Korea or China to intervene or influence their children's career aspiration development (Kim & Bang, 2016). According to Huang et al.'s (2017) study with Taiwanese mothers and Chinese immigrant parents in U.S. and U.K., the proactive parenting style of parents is related to Confucian traditions, but the immigrant parents begin to adopt the attitudes and practices of child-rearing from their new surroundings in the acculturation process.

Furthermore, the family context has an influence on the youth's self-perception as an adult. Benson and Johnson (2009) suggested that youth from less advantaged families have a higher tendency to perceive themselves as adults compared to the ones from more advantaged families. From the same research, it was shown that more family resources, higher levels of family intimacy, and parental control can be connected to less feeling of an adult while peer-like communication with parents, conflicts between parent-children, and children's involvement in housework have the opposite effect. In the present study, it is possible that these factors of family dynamics affected the informants' self-perception of adulthood as well as the degree of parental influence on their career and life decisions.

Figure 2 shows the relationship and application of CA concepts and parental influence to high school education and later life. The experiences during high school are closely associated with the school environment and parental influence. School environment refers to support and learning opportunities provided at school, school's educational climate including the national and regional educational system that the school is part of, and relationship among members. On the other hand, parents support their children with their material, social, and cultural resources. School environment and parental influence can function as external factors of an individual's well-being, self-knowledge and achievement experiences at school, capabilities, and freedom of the individual, and agency.

During high school, agency is built on the basis of their education experiences and parental influence while it can affect them as well. Among various

learning and experiencing opportunities at school, each student makes choices based on her values and deepens their understanding about themselves while experiencing success and failure. This can lead to the capability set or freedom of each student, which is expanded in the future by further education and experiences in the environments beyond school. The future capability set, agency, and other conversional factors of individuals such as parental influence and contextual factors in later life will affect life decisions they make and eventually their future well-being.
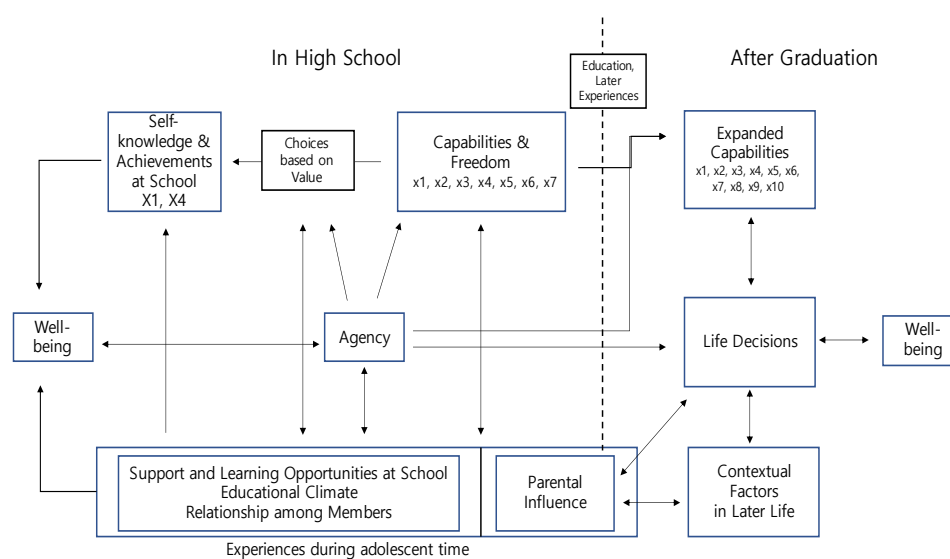

Figure 2. Findings based on CA and parental influence

Thus, the role of high school education in enhancing students' agency is in strengthening the support system at school and providing diverse and meaningful learning opportunities. In addition, a healthy educational climate should be created both at school and at home, where students can pursue their interests and learning while feeling supported. The existence of a feeling of belongingness and respect among the members would be the basis for the desirable education environment. Furthermore, the education and social system should support teachers, schools, and parents to raise and strengthen the agency of students.

6.2   Trustworthiness and Limitations

6.2.1   Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria that are useful in building the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. According to them, credibility is about ensuring the validity of the findings with the given research participants and contexts. Credibility can be compared to internal consistency (Morrow, 2005). Research has high dependability if similar findings can be found with the same or similar participants and in the same or similar contexts, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability refers to the degree to which readers can apply the findings of research to other contexts (Morrow, 2005). Confirmability is relevant to the degree of the influence of the participants and conditions on the findings as well as the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Among different methods for meeting the trustworthiness criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), prolonged engagement with the data, negative case analysis, and member checking were employed to strengthen the credibility of the research. Prolonged engagement with the data started with interview transcriptions, which is a significant component of the analysis process (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). During transcription, the researcher paid close attention and started to make sense of the data. The underlying codes and themes were identified already at the transcription phase of each interview. More preliminary codes were created as the data collection period proceeded and initial themes were thought of. The transcribed interview files including the summarized versions were reviewed six times in total. Negative case analysis was done as the themes were changed and refined in the four rounds of analysis phases. The codes and themes were reorganized until the themes satisfactorily addressed the main points of the study without incongruent data.

After the first draft of *5. Findings* section was done, it was sent to the interview participants by electronic mail for member checking. The informants had about ten days to read and express their opinions about the findings. Among the

ten participants, eight replied that they received the file well, and four showed agreement about the findings while the others did not give comments on the contents. On the other hand, the credibility of the research was challenged due to the snowball sampling, which will be explained in length in the following chapter.

One of the measures for dependability and confirmability of research is keeping process logs, which are researcher notes of activities happening as well as decisions that are made during the study (Connelly, 2016). In the present study, process logs were kept at various points of the research processes. They provided the researcher opportunities to look back on previous thoughts and decisions related to the research and hence complemented the writing procedure.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the external validity of qualitative research cannot be specified as it depends on the level of similarity between the conditions of the research of interest and receiving contexts. Therefore, it was suggested that the researcher provide a thick description to support the possible transfers of the research instead, which was attempted in this research.

The topic of this research is deeply related to the career experience and agency of the researcher for her educational experiences and professional background as a high school teacher in South Korea. Therefore, listening to the informants' accounts and analysing them provided the researcher opportunities to reflect on her own experiences and life. The researcher's positionality may have deepened her understanding of the data, but it could have led to the biased interpretation.

6.2.2 Limitations of the Study

The study has limitations regarding the recruitment of the informants. It is partially due to the differences in the academic systems in the two countries and snowball sampling. Even though the focus groups were decided as teacher students to share a similar background, many South Korean teacher students were excluded and the scope of South Korean participants was limited. The informants had to be the ones in their master's level studies to equalize the education level of the participants from the two countries while the majority of South Korean

teacher students get their teaching qualification from their bachelor's degree, as explained *in 4.2. Methodological Approach and Data Collection*. The difference in the academic system may have affected the average age gap between the two countries' participants (South Korean: 28.4; Finnish: 26.0).

The difficulties are the methodological problems inherent in cross-cultural research. Hetherington (1998) listed some of the challenges in cross-national research such as differences in legal and administrative frameworks; cultural differences, including religion, governance and history; semantic similarities that mask difference; differences of conceptualization of similar problems or phenomena; and language. The listed challenges were present during the research process of this study as well.

Contrary to the original idea, purposive sampling based on the survey result was not possible. It was intended to invite the ones whose answers are at the extremes to the interview to compare their perceptions of the influence of high school education and family on their career choices. However, snowball sampling was taken because of the low participation rate of the survey and other practical issues. Consequently, the answers to some survey questions did not differ much, especially among the Finnish participants. For example, several Finnish participants answered that their teachers' influence was high and they are not certain about achieving their future goals.

Snowball sampling method may have influenced the unexpected variance among the participants. Among the recruited interview participants, there were recently graduated teachers, the ones who decided not to continue the teaching qualification degree, and the ones who were pursuing both their bachelor's and master's level studies at the same time. In addition, only one participant out of ten was male, and the voices of students with different majors could not be included. History was the most common major for the South Korean participants while the English language was the most popular one for the Finnish informants. The fact that four South Korean participants out of five graduated from private high schools is coincidental as about 60% of high schools are public in South Korea (Korean Educational Statistics Service, 2021).

Due to the limited scope of the participants, the study can neither represent the entire group of high school graduates nor subject teacher students in South Korea and Finland. Furthermore, young people who graduated from different types of upper secondary schools and who are in fields other than education were not included in the research. It is also possible that the participants of the study were high achievers with enough support from their families as they could continue their studies to master's level. Therefore, applying findings related to the high school and later life experiences of the participants to other cases should be done carefully. In addition, the flexibility of the semi-structured interview format in a limited time span might have led the researcher to miss some of the factors which affected informants' agency and career choice.

6.3   Suggestions for Further Studies

Expanding the scope of participants and purposive sampling can shed another new light on the research topic. Including graduates from different types of upper secondary schools and the ones who are in other fields than education will provide a broader understanding regarding the influence of high school education and agency. Furthermore, young people who dropped out from upper secondary schools or did not pursue further studies after middle school level (yläkoulu in Finland) should be targeted for creating or implementing the countermeasures to support them or students in similar situations in the upper secondary level education currently.

Participants' family background, such as their SES or parenting style can be researched in a more detailed way in further study. It can lead to diverse perspectives to see social phenomena related to education, teaching profession, and meritocratic system while the participants' opinions regarding the phenomena can be heard further. In addition, cross-cultural studies among the countries with different PISA results or non-OECD member countries will be meaningful, considering that both South Korea and Finland have had relatively positive results

in students' academic ability and family influence on students' academic achievement.

Purposive sampling based on the survey answers can offer interesting viewpoints about high school education, parental influence, and ideas about future. It could yield fewer variables among participants as well. On the other hand, structured interviews can result in more precise information about the topics. In the same vein, quantitative research methods can address a considerable number of people's experiences and thoughts.

The group agency has not been covered enough in this research. CA suggests public consultation should be the means to decide on the values of the community, which can bring positive changes in society. Research about group agency related to upper secondary education and reestablishment of values of education will yield valuable findings and provide insights in finding solutions in a democratic way regarding problems remaining in the educational system.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Research Notification in the Website Created for the Research

(https://lifechoicesandschooling.wordpress.com/home/)

Tracing the influence of uppersecondary schooling experience 고등학교 경험의 영향 되짚어보기   Front Page   Personal Data Management

About Data Privacy in This Research 해당 연구의 개인정보 이용 방침

RESEARCH NOTIFICATION /연구 알림

This is a multi-method study at the University of Jyväskylä for a master's thesis on uppersecondary schooling experiences of graduate level students. Along with the survey, individual interviews with a few selected participants will be conducted to get more in-depth understanding of their career/life choices.

본 연구는 교육대학원생들의 과거 고등학교 교육 경험과 현재 삶의 선택들에 관한 핀란드 유바스큘라 대학교 석사 논문 연구입니다. 설문과 함께 참가자 몇 분과 직업과 삶의 선택에 관해 더 깊게 이야기를 나누기 위해 개별 인터뷰가 진행될 예정입니다.

Name of study and controller/연구 제목과 담당자

Name: Tracing the influence of uppersecondary schooling experience/고등학교 경험의 영향 되짚어보기

Appendix 2 Consent form

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Tracing the Influence of Upper Secondary Education

Youkyoung Chung 정유경

English	한국어
CONSENT TO SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND PROCESSING PERSONAL DATA	연구와 개인 정보 처리에 대한 동의서
I have been asked to take part in a study *Tracing the Influence of Upper Secondary Education*	저는 '고등학교 교육 경험의 영향 추적 연구'에 참여하는 것을 초청받았습니다.
I have read the research notification and obtained sufficient information about the study and the processing of my personal data. The content of the study has also been described to me through email and/or text messages, and I have received sufficient responses to all my questions about the study. I have had a sufficient amount of time to consider my participation in the study.	저는 연구 알림을 읽었으며 연구와 저의 개인 정보 처리에 대한 충분한 정보를 얻었습니다. 이 연구의 내용은 저에게 이메일 혹은 문자 메시지를 통해 알려졌으며, 저는 연구에 대한 저의 질문에 충분한 대답을 얻었습니다. 저는 저의 연구 참여를 고려할 충분한 시간이 있었습니다.
I understand that participating in this study is voluntary. I have the right, at any time during the study and without giving any reasons, to cancel my participation in the study. Cancelling my participation will not result in any negative consequences for me.	저는 이 연구에 참여하는 것이 자발적임을 이해합니다. 저는 연구 중 언제든지, 이유를 알리지 않고 연구 참여를 취소할 권리가 있습니다. 참여를 취소하는 것은 저에게 아무런 부정적인 결과를 초래하지 않을 것입니다.
In addition, I can, at any time, withdraw my consent to the study without any negative consequences for me.	또한, 저는 언제든지 연구에 대한 동의를 저에게 부정적인 결과 없이 철회할 수 있습니다.

By signing this consent form, I accept that my data will be used in the study described in the research notification. ☐ Yes	이 동의서에 사인함으로써, 저는 저의 데이터가 연구 알림에 쓰여 있는 대로 사용될 것을 받아들입니다. ☐ 예
I give my consent to the processing of special categories of personal data in this study, including the topics such as race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, membership of a trade union. ☐ Yes	저는 이 연구에서 개인 정보의 특별한 범주의 정보들이 취급되는 것에 동의합니다. 이는 인종, 민족, 정치적 견해, 종교적 혹은 철학적 믿음, 노동 조합 가입 여부 등을 포함합니다. ☐ 예
I give my consent to be contacted with regard to any further research. ☐ Yes	저는 필요시 추후 연구를 위해 연락이 올 수 있음에 동의합니다. ☐ 예
By signing this consent form, I confirm that I will participate in the study, that I am a voluntary research subject and give my consent to the aforementioned. *Signature* _____ *Date* _____ *Name in Print*_____ **Consent received** _____ _____ *Signature of the recipient* _____ *Name in print*	**이 동의서에 서명함으로써, 저는 자발적으로 이 연구에 참가하며 위에 언급된 내용에 동의함을 확인합니다.** *서명* _____ *날짜* _____ *이름* _____ **동의서 제출됨**. _____ _____ *받는 이 서명* _____ *이름*

| The original signed consent form will remain in the archives of the person in charge of the study, and a copy of it will be given to the research subject. This consent form will be retained securely for as long as the data is in identifiable format. If the data is anonymised or erased, this consent form no longer needs to be archived. | 서명된 동의서 원본은 연구자가 보관할 것이며, 사본이 연구 참가자에게 주어질 것입니다. 이 동의서는 연구 데이터에서 참가자의 신상이 식별 가능할 때까지 안전하게 보관될 것입니다. 데이터가 익명으로 처리되거나 삭제될 때 이 동의서는 더 이상 보관될 필요가 없습니다. |

Appendix 2 Online Survey Form for Finnish Participants

Tracing the influence of uppersecondary education

This is a multi-method study at the University of Jyväskylä for a master's thesis on uppersecondary schooling experiences and their influence in later life. Along with the survey, individual interviews with a few selected participants will be conducted to get more in-depth understanding of their career/life choices. The researcher of this study is the data controller. The information given by you will be discarded after being processed anonymously for the thesis. You can find more information about the research, the researcher, and the data management of the research at this website:. https://lifechoicesandschooling.wordpress.com.

Mandatory fields are marked with an asterisk (*) and must be filled in to complete the form.

1. How old are you in full years? (e.g. 29) *

_____

2. What is your gender? *

○ Male

○ Female

○ Other

○ Prefer not to answer

3. Which uppersecondary institute did you attend?

○ General uppersecondary school (lukio)

○ Vocational school

○ Joint degree (both lukio and vocational school)

○ Other -------->

4, What are your major and minor studies (both at your bachelor's and master's studies)? *

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                                                   │
│                                                                   │
│                                                                   │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```
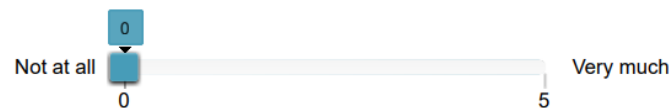
5. Are you aiming to be a subject teacher in secondary level school (students aged 13-18)? *

○ Yes

○ No

6, What subject(s) are you planning to get teacher qualification?*

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                                                   │
│                                                                   │
│                                                                   │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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7. When you think about your uppersecondary schooling experiences in general, how much did your teachers influence you? *

Not at all [0] —————————————— Very much
          0   5

8. When you think about your uppersecondary schooling experiences in general, how much did your school's educational climate and culture influence you? (Educational climate includes all the things happening in class or in school.) *

Not at all [0] —————————————— Very much
          0   5
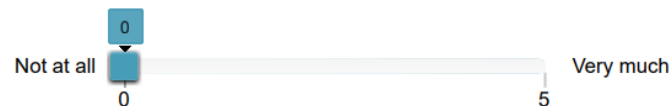
9. When you think about your uppersecondary schooling experiences in general, how much did your study experiences influence you (Study experiences can include your motivation to learn, the study strategies you used and their results, the amount of your study, etc.) *
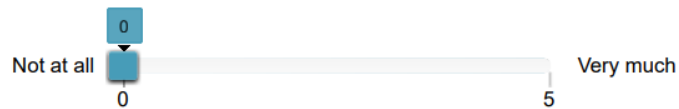
Not at all [0] —————————————— Very much
          0   5
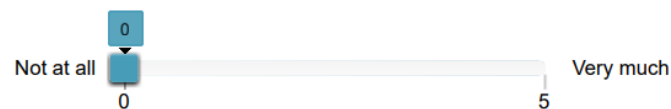
10. When you think about your uppersecondary schooling experiences in general, how positive are your feelings about it? *

0
Not at all ▮ ———————————————— Very much
0   5

11. To what degree do you think your parents influenced you to choose your career path? *

0
Not at all ▮ ———————————————— Very much
0   5

12. To what degree do you think you have clear future goals? *

0
Not at all clear ▮ ———————————————— Very clear
0   5

13. How important it is for you to achieve your future goals? *

0
No importance ▮ ———————————————— Very important
0   5

14. How certain do you feel about achieving your future goals? *

0
Not at all certain ▮ ———————————————— Very certain
0   5

15. Do you have something to say more about your uppersecondary schooling experiences, career/life choices, or any others?

16. According to the research plan, the second phase of this study will include individual interviews with a few participants for more detailed understanding of career/life choices. Are you interested in participating further? *

○ Yes

○ No

17. If you are willing to participate in the interview, can you leave your contact information?
(If you do not want to participate further, you do not have to leave your contact information.)

Name	
Email	