The Role of Finnish Comprehensive School Principals in Inclusive Education Practice

Dibessa Samson

ABSTRACT

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The increasing trends of diversities and special educational needs in the school highly demands the collaboration of the school community toward inclusive education. The principals are the ones who lead the school communities. Hence, in this process, the school principals play a crucial role.

This study examines the Finnish principals' role in leading inclusive education as well as, identifies how they are leading the school cultures, policies, and practice to support inclusive education. The Index of inclusion, which has three main dimensions (culture, policy, and practice), was used as the main theoretical framework.

A qualitative research method was used. A semi structured interview was used to collect the primary data, and school policy documents from two schools were used as the secondary data. The interviews were conducted online using Zoom. A qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data. Data was interpreted using the inductive data analysis approach. The coding was done manually, and the data was coded into main categories followed by sub-categories.

The research findings show that principals have three major roles: administrative, managerial and leadership roles. In particular, leading school cultures, policies, and practices through the special education teams and guiding school communities are the main factors that assist the principals in achieving an inclusive education vision. Furthermore, professional learning communities have a significant impact for professional development since they assist the principals in the goal of inclusive education through structured teams that distribute leadership.

Keywords: Diversity, inclusive education, Index of inclusion, pedagogical leadership, school principal, special education need (SEN)

ACKNOWLEDGE

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CA   Content Analysis

CPD   Continuing Professional Development

CSIE   Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education

ECEC   Early Childhood Education and Care

DfES   Department of Education and Skills

FNEE   Finnish Board of Education

IEP   Individualized Education Plan

NBE   National Board of Education

PLC   Professional Learning Communities

SEN   Special Educational Needs

SWD   Students with Disability

TENK   Tutkimuseettinen Neuvottelukunta/

            The Finnish National Board   of Research Integrity

UN   United Nations

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund

1   INTRODUCTION

Education has been acknowledged as a fundamental human right for all people, including people with disabilities (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca Statement, (UNESCO, 1994, p. 5) states,

> The right of every child to education is proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Right and was forcefully reaffirmed in the Declaration on Education for All.

However, researchers have mostly described the history educating people with disabilities since the 1960s (see Peters, 2007). Since then, policy documents and the practical implementations across the globe indicates that educating people with disabilities have been developed through various philosophies and practices such as segregation, integration, and inclusion (Engelbrecht, Savolainen, Ne, Koska & Okkolin, 2017).

The Salamanca statements (1994) have been considered as the turning point from the medical dominances to social-centred approaches which encourages equality and equity. The main objectives of this agreement were to introduce the fundamental policy shifts from integration to inclusive education. Based on the agreement, the school principals contribute a lot in the process implementing inclusive education. More specifically, the Salamanca statements (1994) underlines the role of school principals to create inclusive school culture.

Similarly, other studies show that there are positive correlations between leadership and effective inclusive education practice in the school. For example, a research conducted by Angelides (2012) indicates that the principal's positive thought about inclusion could promote inclusive education. Additionally, the research indicates that distributed leadership emerged in the inclusive practice. However, the principal's effective leadership is crucial for implementing inclusive schools. Mitchell (2015) argues that a committed principal implements inclusive education, certainly creates positive school culture, and achieves their school goals. The success of school leadership necessarily demands collaboration, shared responsibilities from planning to evaluation stage (Angelides, 2012).

In the context of Finland, the 1970s Basic Education Reform has been recognized as a good move for the development of inclusive education (Engelbrecht, et al., 2017; Kuusilehto-Awale & Lahtero, 2014). The reform describes the concept of creating an inclusive society, accepting uniqueness, encouraging full participation, and acknowledging all unique needs (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). Additionally, Halinen and Järvinen (2008) argue that the Finnish education system has given more attention to inclusive education after the state of Finland signed the Salamanca agreement.

Principals are assigned to lead school tasks to achieve its mission and vision (Alva, Halttunen & Risku, 2012). ''The mission of basic education is to prevent inequality and exclusion'' (FNBE, 2016, p. 19). Thus, one of the expected roles of principals is leading inclusive education. Additionally, the study indicates that Finnish teachers highly acknowledged that the role of principals in the implementation of inclusive education is invaluable (Engelbretch et al., 2017).

Moreover, due to the increasing trend of diversities and special education needs, the school requires a good school leader, who is committed to address those different needs. It is because students with special educational needs are ''identified through a pedagogical process which usually ends up on a decision made by a school principal (Act on basic education, 1998)'' (Saloviita, 2020, p. 273). Hence, to deliver education for everyone, regardless of disabilities or individual differences, it is important to study the phenomenon and the role of school principal to implement inclusive education. Additionally, Finnish Principals are to ''ensure pedagogical leadership not merely in rhetoric but in day-to-day reality'' (Hargreaves & Halasz, 2007, p. 21). In Finland, principals are the main actors of pedagogical leadership. Hence, it is important to examine how principals lead inclusive education.

The main aim of the research is to examine the principal's role in leading inclusive education and to identify how principals lead school cultures, policies, and practices to support inclusive education. Therefore, the purpose of my research is primarily to understand how school principals define his or her role in the implementation of inclusive education. The secondary purpose is to obtain a

better understanding of how the principals are leading school culture, school policies and school practices.

In this study, a qualitative case study was conducted by interviewing three Finnish comprehensive school principals to collect primary data. Next, two selected school policy documents related to inclusive education were analysed. The research questions to be answered are:

1. What is the role of principals in inclusive education practice?
2. How do principals lead school cultures, policies, and practices to support inclusive education?

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is divided into three main headings: Inclusive education, Index of inclusion, and leading inclusive education. In Part 1, I will define the concepts of inclusive education from different perspectives and present the narrow and broad definitions of inclusive education as well as their philosophical background. Secondly, I will discuss the indicators of inclusive education. Thirdly, I will discuss inclusive education in Finland. Fourthly, I will discuss development towards inclusive education in Finland. Finally, I will consider discussing the concepts of the Finnish special education support model. In Part 2, I will briefly discuss the concepts of Index of inclusion, and how the index is applicable in different contexts. Secondly, I will elaborate the three dimensions of Index of inclusion (cultures, policies, and practices), and attempt to synthesize the principles of inclusion stated in the Salamanca statements. In Part 3, I will briefly discuss leading inclusive education in the context of Finland.

2.1   Inclusive education

Inclusive education is most often defined differently from various perspectives across the globe. It is because of no universally agreed definition. The definition and the concepts vary across the regions and nations according to the socio-political situation of specific countries. Most often, the definitions are related to the students' placement or ways of arranging the education. For example, in Italy since the 1980's full inclusion has been applied (Saloviita, 2020). Some other countries have run dual schooling systems: mainstream and special classroom or special education (Loreman, 2014) such as Finland, some countries still have a more segregated school system, for example, Germany (Jahnukainen, 2015; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016).

In the most cases, in the definition of inclusive education, it is also common to see the terms such as mainstream school (Engelbrecht, et al., 2017; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016; Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel & Mallainen, 2012, Loreman, 2014;

Savolainen, 2020), overcoming the barriers (Loreman, 2014), academic and social benefits for all students (Loreman, 2014). Some authors remark on the quality of education than merely the students' placement. For example, inclusive education is more beyond access to education, and about acceptance, participation, and assurance of quality education for everyone (Engelbrecht et al., 2017).

2.1.1 The narrow and broad definition of inclusive Education

Most often, the definition of inclusive education can be narrowly or broadly categorized. The narrow definition often focuses on educating students with disabilities who have been officially categorized as students with physical or neurological disabilities (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Halinen & Järvinen, 2008). It is often influenced by the medical model of disability and attributes the rise of special educational needs to individual disability. It expects individuals or students with disabilities (SWD) or students with special educational needs (SEN) to fit the learning environment.

In contrast, the broad definition of inclusive education focuses on creating appropriate learning environments for all learners including students with disabilities. The broad definition assumes that inclusive education matters to all students' educational needs, rather than merely for a select group of students. The Salamanca Statements (UNESCO, 1994), Article 3 notes as follow:

> Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups.

Thus, the broad definition of inclusive education has been derived from a social model of disability. Inclusion education has also relied on the social model of disability (McMaster, 2015). This model asserts that disability is socially constructed and strongly influenced by cultural norms and values. It attributes the barriers for participation and learning is due to the lack of an appropriate learning environment, not because of the individual characteristics like disabilities, learning difficulties (Lakkala, Uuisiautti, & Määttä, 2016).

In Finland, previous research studies (e.g., Hallinen & Järvinen, 2008) on the phenomena of inclusive education shows that the concepts of inclusion are understood from various perspectives. Inclusive education means facilitating an accessible learning environment for the disadvantaged or marginalized group (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018; Yada, Tolvanen & Savolainen, 2018). In contrast, Saloviita (2015) argues inclusion is the way to address learner's diversity when the focus remains on students with disabilities, inclusion is the way to addressing learner's diversity. The European Agency of Special Needs Education, (2010, p. 7, cited in Saloviita, 2015, p. 4) notes:

> Inclusion is now used to refer to full learner diversity, including gender, sexual orientation, ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious background, socio-economic status, disability and special educational needs.

From the perspectives of the broad education system, Malinen, Savolainen and Xu (2012) refer to inclusion as an educational system that aims to accommodate diversities. Inclusive education is "a process towards a school system that welcomes all learners despite their background, disability and other characteristics" (Malinen et al., 2012, p. 526). Hence, it is important to specifically emphasize on the school support system provided for all students to facilitate their participation, learning and well-being (Halinen & Järvinen, 2008).

In this research, inclusive education is understood from the perspectives of including diverse learners in the mainstream education system if possible and/or providing necessary support that facilitate learning and participation of all students according to their individual needs.

2.1.2 Indicators of inclusive education

Mitchell (2015) argues that merely students' placement is not sufficient to evaluate the inclusive practice or implementation of inclusive education in future. Hence, he strongly believes that inclusive education means educating students with disabilities in the mainstream school system and the progress of their learn-

ing. As a result, he proposed ten criteria in his model of inclusive education, including leadership to evaluate the practices of inclusive education. Mitchell's model is called 'a multifaceted concepts' formula (IE)= V+P+5A+S+R+I, where the initial letters represent the words in the circles below (Figure 1).
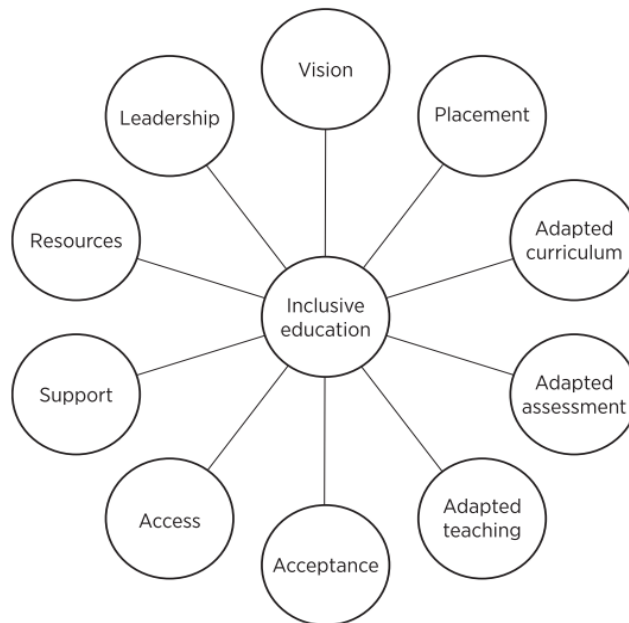
FIGURE 1. Model of inclusive education (Mitchell,2015, p. 11)

Mitchell (2015) also remarked that good leadership is essential to creating inclusive cultures that foster inclusive education. Mitchell's model suggests that, in addition to the student's placement, setting inclusive vision, curriculum, access, teaching, acceptance, curriculum, teaching, assessment, acceptance, provision of support, resources and leadership… the model used for ''planning inclusive education and for evaluating its quality'' (Mitchell, 2015, p. 28).

After conducting the research aimed to examine school change and inclusion, McMaster (2015) claims that inclusive education involves '*renegotiation of meaning*' because of changes occurring in the practice based on the contexts, namely culture and place. He concludes that the school culture is crucial in creating an inclusive learning environment. Loreman (2014) reminds the following indicators of inclusive education indicators: all students should attend the nearest school in their residence, all are welcomed and valued equally, heterogeneous

classroom, active participations, and engagement in the learning processes, peer support manifested, sufficient resource and adequate staff training.

2.2   Inclusive education in Finland

Like many other nations, Finland has signed the international agreement concerning inclusive education, namely the Salamanca statement. The Finnish Basic Education reform addressed the principles that involved in the Salamanca agreement. For example, the right of every child to attend the nearest mainstream school; the right to receive individualized support; the collaboration between multidisciplinary teams and the necessity of building the school learning community and ensuring the appropriate learning environment (Halinen & Järvinen, 2008). The FNBE (2016, p. 9) states ''the development of basic education is guided by the principle of inclusion''. The Finnish government shows its commitments to realize inclusive education through changing the policy and practices of learning.

2.2.1   Development towards inclusive education in Finland

Like other countries, the development of educating students with special educational needs in Finland has been changed a lot overtime. The research by Kuusilehto_Awale and Lahtero (2014) show that the Finnish basic education was divided into general secondary education and vocational education during the 1950s and 1960s. During the dual education policy, students' residence, and economic status of families more likely affects the students' academic path (Kuusilehto_Awale & Lahtero, 2014).

Jahnukainen (2015) explains that the movement of normalization of students with disabilities during the 1960's and which later developed to integrate students with disabilities to mainstream school emerged gradually. In the 1970s, basic education policy annulled the previous dual system and introduced nine

years of compulsory primary education for all pupils (Jahnukainen, 2015; Kuusilehto-Awale & Lahtero, 2014). This reform granted equity and equality (Kuusilehto-Awale & Lahtero, 2014),''the values of the reform were equity and equal opportunity '' (p. 12). However, the first phase of the reform focused on grouping students into ability-based groups (Kuusilehto-Awale & Lahtero, 2014). Organizing lessons based on a student's ability group contrasts the philosophy of the implementation of inclusive education (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). Referring the works of Halinen and Järvinen (2008), Yada et al., (2018, p. 344) summarize the development towards inclusive education in Finnish education system in to three phases:

> (a) the stage of 'access to education' in which the general compulsory education was developed according to the Compulsory School Attendance Act in 1921; (b) the stage of 'access to quality education' in which the current comprehensive school system was adopted in the 1960s and 1970s; and (c) the stage of 'access to success in learning' in which students' needs and quality instruction were discussed in the 1990s.

The significant change was introduced in the 1980s, when the academic tracking system was abolished and students allowed to be in the same group (Kuusilehto-Awale & Lahtero, 2014). The curriculum for SEN students was different from the other students. For instance, some authors (e.g., Saloviita & Leskinen, 2016; Jahnukainen, 2015) point out that the Finnish government has implemented the segregated special needs education curriculum mostly for medically diagnosed pupils in the 1980s. Nevertheless, Jahnukainen (2015) argues that ideologically the term integration has been already replaced by the inclusion movements since the 1980s.

A comprehensive school reform in Finland has been recognized as initial for the development of inclusive education. In the reform the concept of creating inclusive society, accepting uniqueness, full participation and acknowledging all needs (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). Based on The National Core Curriculum (2016) education is the way to promote equity, equality, and justice; as well as recommends applying the principles of inclusion in basic education.

The current educational legislation in Finland allows a 'non categorical' approach which consists of a few medical labelling criteria and focuses on individualized education plans (IEP) to identify a child's educational need. However,

the school's autonomy compromising the non-categorical need assessment procedure and sometimes relies on the medical diagnosis (Saloviita & Leskinen, 2016). Further, inclusive education and classroom practices shows that the diverse learning needs are understood from the medical model (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). In this research, the term Special Educational Needs (SEN) refers to ''all students whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties'' (UNESCO, 1994, p. 6), and students who are behind in their studies owing to various reasons (Act 628/1998; FNBE, 2016).

2.2.2 Special education support in Finland

Pulkkinen and Jahnukainen (2016) distinguish the Finnish special education support into two: the old model (a government transfer system) and the new model (Act. 642/2010). The new government provision of support system (642/2010) has been implemented since 2011. In the earlier model, subsidies for the school were calculated based on the number of students with the special education needs in the municipality or schools (Pulkkinen & Jahnukainen, 2016). Consequently, students divided into two groups: common (general) students and special students (Lakkala et al., 2016). In the new model (642/2010), a subsidy from the central government to the schools is calculated based on the number of comprehensive school aged children who reside in the municipalities (Pulkkinen & Jahnukainen, 2016). The new model of the special education provision has more significant impact than the old model (Karhu et al., 2016; Pulkkinen & Jahnukainen, 2016).

Regarding its practicality, the current comprehensive school support model is divided into three levels: universal support (general); intensified support; and special support (Act 642/2010; FNBE,2016; Karhu et al, 2018; Pulkkinen & Jahnukainen, 2016). At tier 1, the universal support offered for students who are behind in their studies may be due to difficulties in learning or has temporary challenges. The intervention might be part time special education in one or more subjects. Often the co- teaching approaches in the mainstream classroom is one way to

deliver the support at this level. There is a possibility to give remedial lessons in small group classes. At this level, pedagogical assessment and decisions are not required (FNBE, 2016). At tier 2, the intensified support offered if students have difficulties in more than one or several areas. In this case, based on the pedagogical assessment, the support is offered. At tier 3, the special support offered, ''for those otherwise cannot adequately achieve their goals set for their growth, development, and learning'' (FNBE, 2016, p. 69). Overall, the aim of the three tiers model ''is to prevent diversified and more serious problems as well as their long-term effects '' (FNBE, 2016, p. 64).

FIGURE 2. The current Finnish special education support model
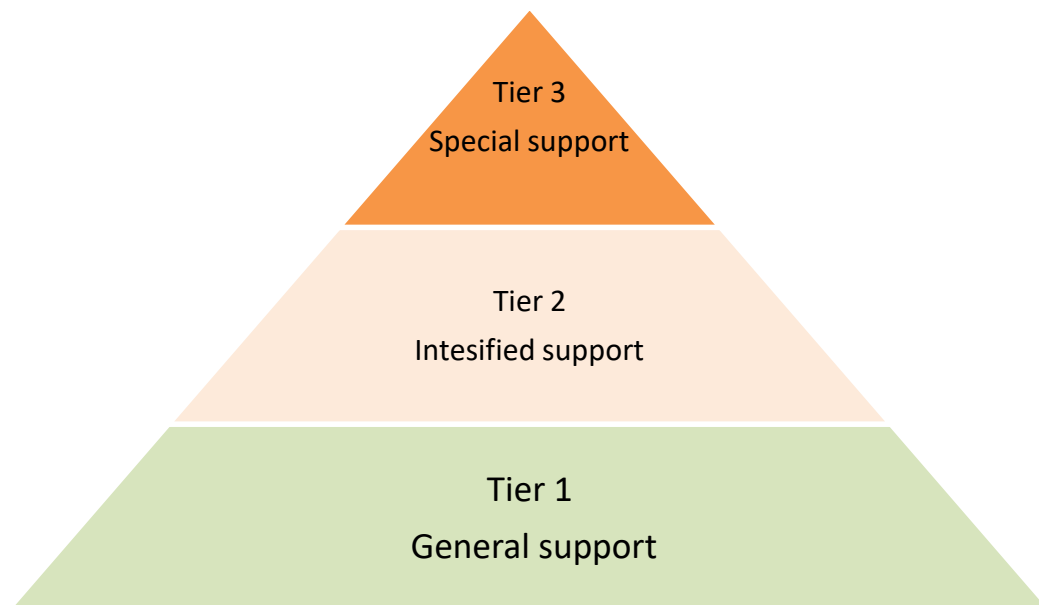
Source: National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (FNBE, 2016)

However, a large number of students are transferred to the special education support system (Saloviita, 2020; Savolainen et al., 2010; Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016). According to Statistic Finland (2020), in autumn 2019, at least 30 % of comprehensive school students received some kinds of support. Saloviita and Schaffus (2016) explain that Finland and German are among the highest nations to transfer students to special education in international comparison studies. Similarly, according to the data revealed in June 2019 by Statistics Finland, about one

out of five (18.8%) of comprehensive students received intensified or special support in the academic year of 2018. Thus, the data shows the number of students who received intensified support increased by 0.9% and special support increased by 0.4% from the previous academic year. Indeed, Finland prioritizes 'the child's best interests', adequate resources (Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016) and suitable places (Act 642/2010).

On the other hand, some researchers argue that the implementation of inclusive education has been encountered some limitations from the aspects of class arrangements in the mainstream schools, namely segregated classrooms, or special groups (Pulkkinen & Jahnukainen, 2016; Sundqvist et al., 2019). Currently many students attend segregated classrooms or small teaching groups in the mainstream schools (Sundqvist et al., 2019). The study by Pulkkinen and Jahnukainen (2016) examined the Finnish comprehensive school principals' view about the pedagogical and financial benefits of education students with special support in the mainstream classrooms. The findings revealed that almost two out of three principals (64%) responded that educating SEN students in mainstream classrooms is economically more effective than pedagogically. In the same study, only 44% of principals agreed that teaching in mainstreaming classrooms is pedagogically effective.

2.3   Index of inclusion

The Index of inclusion is an essential framework to support and consider inclusive development of the schools (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). According to the authors, the materials are comprehensive documents which help everybody to assess their status of inclusive education practices and indicate their destiny to assure inclusion. The Index of inclusion was first written by Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow (2002) to support the development of learning and participation in schools (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Collins, 2012; Nes, 2009; Smith, 2005; Vaughan,

2002). The index was first published in the United Kingdom in March 2000 (Collins, 2012; Nes, 2009; Smith, 2005). The first edition was distributed for all schools across the United Kingdom for free by Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to implement the index in all mainstream schools across the UK. At the publication in 2000, it was accepted as a major move to the inclusion school development.

After working and evaluating the index for over three years with the diverse team members including teachers, students, parents, governors, school principals, representatives of disability organizations, and local education authority and researchers, Booth and Ainscow (2002) recommend the framework to evaluate the practice of inclusive education. ''The materials are designed to build on the wealth of knowledge and experience that people have about their practice'' (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 1). They proposed the Index of inclusion framework to identify the notion of inclusion, barriers to participation and learning and to review how the allocated resources support the learning and participation (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Vaughan, 2010).

Since 2000, the Index of inclusion has been widely accepted within Europe and across the world. The first translation was published in Norwegian language. Norway and Denmark introduced their translation versions in 2004 (Nes, 2009). Some years later, the Finnish and Swedish experts also adopted the material (Nes, 2009). So far, according to the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) and Vaughan (2002), the document was translated into more than forty languages including Finnish and Swedish languages, which are the official language in Finland. As a result, the document has been used in Europe, Canada, Australia, United States of America, some African and Asian countries for the past two decades.

FIGURE 3. The three dimensions of Index of inclusion
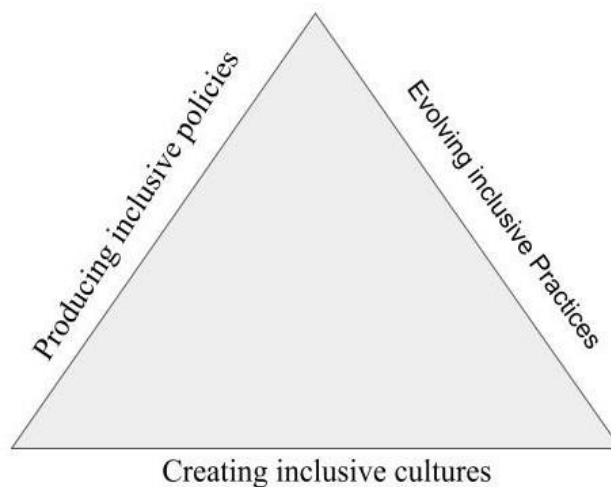
Source: Booth &Ainscow (2002, p. 7)

The Index of inclusion suggests strong parameters to measure the process of in-clusion education practices relatively regardless of the countries' social, political, and economic situations or differences of experiences. It has three major dimen-sions. These three dimensions consist in total six subsections used as the indica-tors to inclusion, in which each dimension has two subsections as follows:

> Dimension 1. Creating inclusive culture: building community and establishing inclusive value; Dimension 2. Producing inclusive policies: developing the school for all and or-ganizing support for diversity); Dimension 3. Evolving inclusive Practice: orchestrating learning and mobilizing resources. (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 8)

The document assumes that the vision of inclusion could be achieved through investing overall school development. ''The index of inclusion provided a frame-work for inclusive development'' (McMaster, 2015; p. 247). The goal is to foster diversity in school and outside the school as well as in the society.

According to Booth and Ainscow (2002), the Index of inclusion is a good tool to review the current development, identify the challenges and to plan the future school improvement. Overall, the indication and the sample questions provided in the material gives the school the benchmark as the self-review pro-cess and easy to modify according to the specific school (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). The indicators focus on building community, establishing inclusive value, and

developing school for all, organizing support for diversity, orchestrating learning, and mobilizing resources (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

The Index of inclusion has changed the language from special needs education to barriers to learning and participation and the entities from a typical to all students (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). The assumption of this framework does not categorize students to certain groups such as a typical vs typical; regular vs special class; native's vs immigrants or students with immigrant background; minority vs majority. The focus of the Index of inclusion is to improve the inclusive practices and encourage school improvement through of inclusive philosophy and values. ''The index is a resource to support the inclusive development of schools '' (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 1)

McMaster (2015) conducted research focusing on school changes and inclusion in one public school using the Index of inclusion framework. His findings show that the Index of inclusion is a flexible and suitable instrument to the overall school development and professional learning communities. McMaster (2015) also concluded that inclusion involves a continuous changing process, and the concept of inclusion is interwoven with the culture of society in general and particularly with the school culture. Thus, ''inclusive change involves negotiation of meaning'' (McMaster, 2015, p, 239).

The process of inclusion is the reflection of ongoing change. ''Restructuring the cultures, policies, and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in the locality'' (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 3). This concept of restructuring the three dimensions (culture, policy, and practice) seems like the idea proposed by (McMaster, 2015) to use 'renegotiation' of meaning to understand the development of inclusive education.

Furthermore, the authors of Index of inclusion discuss that all the dimensions are equally important to ensure inclusive education in the schools. Hence, they recommend that any plan intended for school improvement must give equal emphasis for all dimensions. Adding to that, despite all dimensions are equally

essential, the authors prioritize the first dimension-'*creating inclusive culture*'. According to their justification, creating inclusive culture is the foundation in the index, so they deliberately put on the base ground of the triangle (see Figure 3).

2.3.1   Building inclusive culture

Booth and Ainscow (2002) believe that building inclusive culture is the foundation for the other dimensions. It aims to reduce the barriers that hinders participation and learning in the inclusive settings. Therefore, the Index of inclusion envisions a school learning environment or school where all students are valued, and staff are equally respected. Booth and Ainscow (2002) mention the followings aspects of inclusion in education: appraise all learners and staff equally, increase learners' participation minimizing the any exclusionary habits and practices, reducing barriers to ensure the learning and participation for all the learners, and considering the difference between the learners as a resource.

The first dimension of index of inclusion assumes the effectiveness of 'creating inclusive culture' should be achieve the following expectations (Booth and Ainscow, 2002, p. 8):

> This dimension creates a secure, accepting, collaborating, stimulating community, in which everyone is valued as the foundation for the highest achievement of all...The principles and values, in inclusive cultures, guide decisions about the policies and values, in inclusive school cultures, guide decisions about policies and moment practice in classrooms, so that school development becomes a continuous process.

The school culture and the success of school leadership including the practice of inclusive education are highly correlated. ''School culture and school leadership become strong influencing factors in the development of inclusion'' (McMaster, 2015, p. 239). Schools with no inclusive values cannot ensure inclusive education.

2.3.2   Inclusive policies

The second dimension of index of inclusion assumes the effectiveness of 'producing inclusive policies' as follow (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 8):

> Policies encourage the participation of students... reach out to all students in the neighbour school and minimize exclusionary pressure... Support is considered to be all activities which increase the capacity of a school to respond to student diversity. All forms of support are developed according to inclusive principles and are brought together within a single framework.

Diversity is the way to see different perspectives and allows dialogue in the classroom and in school communities. The dialogue allows different views, produces knowledge, and builds trusts among the school communities. ''More deeply, it is (inclusion) about being recognized, accepted, and valued for oneself'' (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 3). It is obvious that the mainstream school with inclusive philosophy is the most effective way to celebrate differences and build inclusive school communities as well as inclusive society.

2.3.3   Developing inclusive practices

The third dimension of Index of inclusion assumes that the effectiveness of 'evolving inclusive practice' related to the provision of the support. It notes (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 8):

> This dimension develops school practices which reflect the inclusive cultures and policies of the school. Lessons are made responsive to student diversity. Students are encouraged to be actively involved in all aspects of their education, which draws on their knowledge and experience outside school. Staff identity material resources and resources within each other, students, parents/careers, and local communities which can be mobilized to support learning and participation.

This dimension is also related to enacting the policy and making it inclusive education values institutionalize, allocate resources, and mobilize of the necessary support.

2.4   Leading inclusive education

This session focuses on how the principals lead inclusive education. First, I will give the highlights about the role of principals in leading inclusive education in general. Then, discuss the role of Finnish principals in leading inclusive education.

School principals have a very essential role to achieve the mission and vision of education. Loreman (2014) argues that effective leadership is crucial at all levels to fulfil the implementation of an inclusive education. Thus, the initiation and participation in the change process from integration to inclusion is the one feature of effective leadership (Osiname, 2018). '' Effective leadership utilizes the leadership ability to ensure interactions, increase input and build the capacities to create inclusive school culture '' (Osiname, 2018, p. 70). Therefore, a school leader, principal has a valuable role to lead the change occurs within school communities to achieve the school goals. Nowadays, one of the schools' goals and principals' responsibilities are to meet the needs of different students and ensure inclusive education. ''School heads (principals) can play a major role in making schools more responsive to children with special educational needs '' (UNESCO, 1994, p. 23). Additionally, the Salamanca Statements (UNESCO, 1994, p. 23-24) states:

> Successful school management(leadership) depends upon the active and creative involvement of teachers and staff, and the development of effective co-operation and team work to meet the needs of students.

In case of inclusive education, principals are the ones who are responsible to lead the school to deliver quality of education for everyone regardless of their academic or individual backgrounds such as disability, learning difficulties, ethnicity, religion, language and so on. In addition, Osiname (2018) remarks that implementing and leading change in the school communities are the responsibilities of principals. More specifically, principals are also responsible to lead changes, mobilizing human and financial resources to tackle the barriers that hinders the schools to achieve their goals. The study conducted by Osiname (2018) shows that the principals believe that principals contribute a significant role to provide support for staff and students to implement inclusive education. He also identified five fundamental elements which principals must be involved in: school culture, change, leadership, inclusion, and challenge. There is other evidence about the positive correlations between leadership and effective inclusive education practice in school. For example, a research conducted by Angelides (2012) in four

primary schools in Cypriots shows that the principal's positive thought could promote inclusive education.

Inclusive practice is vital to acknowledge students' needs and value the unique individual interests. As a result, a good leadership ensures social justice and equality. Furthermore, the research indicates that distributed leadership emerged in the inclusive practice. Correspondingly, Conrad and Brown (2009) conducted the research on 18 primary schools in the Republic of Trinidad and Tabago to examine the principal's perspectives to foster inclusive education. The research findings show that all the participants from 18 schools were philosophically ready to implement inclusive education. While they were reluctant to take responsibilities concerning students with special education needs within the classroom. It seems instructional and pedagogical leadership is less emphasized in their leadership style. Hence, the researchers recommend three prominences: teacher education, collaborative practices, and leadership for the more effective inclusion practice.

Mitchell (2015) argues that committed principals for the implementation of inclusive education, certainly, create positive school culture and achieve the school's goals. Mitchell (2015, p. 26) notice exercising leadership as follow**:**

> Exercising leadership means a) developing strong commitments to accepting diversity, b) developing sensitivity to cultural issues, c) setting high, but realistic, standards & d) achieving positive outcomes for the most disadvantaged.

According to this notion, the leadership role is to create, maintain and foster the culture that accepts diversity and develops tolerance, acknowledges the individual differences, and works for change. Furthermore, school leaders are responsible to achieve organizational goals through collaborating, learning with staff and influencing their attitudes and behaviour of school communities and communities beyond the school environment (Hargreaves & Halasz, 2007). It has been believed that the effective principal easily facilitates the professional learning communities (Dufour, 2006; Hargreaves & Halasz, 2007).

In Finland, schools have a great autonomy (Engelbretch et al., 2017). Within the school autonomy, school leaders have many responsibilities and duties they

are assigned to perform. The primary role of school principal is to assure the education process follows the national education policy, national core curriculum and fulfil the society expectations (Levo, 2014). Moreover, the principal's prime duty is to make sure that the education follows the society's targets (Levo, 2014). In the case of Finland, most often the school principals are responsible for the administrative and pedagogical tasks. The OECD report (2013, p. 10) discusses that in Finland's National legislation states the principals' duty broadly in five aspects: 1) administrative matters, 2) financial managements, 3) pedagogical matters, 4) personnel administrative, 5) teaching. The pedagogical matters mentioned in the document includes student's assessment and evaluation of the staff. Foremost, the pedagogical leadership and financial management are the responsibilities of principals. Mäkelä (2007) discusses that from the principals working hour 31% is allocated for leading issues related to SEN students (inclusive education). The research by Engelbertch et al. (2017) also revealed that teachers perceive principals could play a significant role to ensure implementation of inclusive education in the following three ways: involvement of parents, professional competencies, and autonomy.

In addition, researchers agree on the importance of the principal in leading inclusive education. Engelbretch et al., (2017, p. 694) note as follow:

> The principals are seen to play an important role in the development of inclusive school culture where they consider all the teachers equally and they make them feel that they are a part of the school community.

Overall, in Finland usually school staff works in a team with collaboration. Hence, teachers acknowledged and valued their principals, and other specialists, who provided different support for students with special educational needs (Engelbretch et al., 2017).

3 RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter will discuss the context of the study, the research paradigm used in this study and justification behind choosing a specific research paradigm. First, I will explain the aim of this study and the research questions. Next, I will describe the research participants' backgrounds, and the research process in the research context. Then I will discuss the data collection, and analysis methods used in this study.

3.1 The aim of the study and research questions

As already discussed in chapter 1, the research attempts to achieve the following two aims. First, the research aims to examine the principals' role in leading inclusive education. Second, it aims to identify how principals lead school cultures, school policies, and school practices to support inclusive education. To achieve these aims, the Booth and Ainscow (2002), Index of inclusion framework (see chapter 2) which consists of three dimensions namely school cultures, school policies and school practices was used. According to this framework, school cultures, school policies, and school practices are the pillars for the school developments towards inclusion. Furthermore, this research explores how the principals support inclusive education through leading those three dimensions.

International studies as well as studies conducted in Finland show that principals have a major role and impacts in the process of leading inclusive education. For example, Angelides (2012) and Mitchell (2015) claim that the effective principal leadership and the success of inclusive education are interconnected. Similarly, studies conducted in Finnish context indicates that the school community believes that principals have a crucial role in the implementation of inclusive education (Engelbretch et al., 2017). More specifically, leading inclusive education is the main task of the principals in Finland. However, it is possible to argue

that the role of principals has not been widely studied in Finland. The study attempts to answer the following two research questions:

1. What is the role of principals in leading inclusive education?
2. How do principals lead school cultures, policies, and practices to support inclusive education?

3.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm describes the philosophical perspectives used by the researcher to produce knowledge (Fossey et al, 2002). Researchers argue that distinguishing the main features of each approach (quantitative vs qualitative) depends on the nature of the study. Thus, the purpose of the study, the aims of the study, as well as the research questions are the main factors to choose the specific approach (Moon & Blackman, 2014; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Smith, 1983; Tuthill & Ashton, 1983). In addition, when choosing either quantitative or qualitative research, the theoretical perspectives of the researcher mainly guide the research process.

According to Smith (1983), there are two schools of thoughts: positivist/realism versus idealism. The positivists assume that there is only a single reality (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005), use quantitative methodology, and analyse data using scientific methods. The relationship between the researcher and the objects of studies are independent: no subject-object relationship (Tracy, 2013). On the other hand, idealism believes that multiple realities exist (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Smith, 1983), knowledge is created in socially embedded situations (Moon & Blackman, 2014, Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005), and knowledge is the result of ''agreement within a socially and historically bounded context'' (Smith, 1983, p. 8). In this study, the idealistic, philosophical thoughts have been applied, because I believe that there are multiple realities and different possibilities to examine realities. Thus, I have used the qualitative research methods. The relationship between the researcher and the subject or participants are dependent on each other

(Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). The relationship between researcher and participants is 'subject-subject' (Tracy, 2013). As a result, ''qualitative researchers should take advantage of this relationship better to understand phenomena'' (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005, p. 271). Moreover, Moon and Blackman (2014) assert that ontology, epistemology, and philosophical perspectives are foundation in the process of the research, and answer what is being studied, and the reasons to study specific phenomena.

It is not always so easy to distinguish the sharp line between ontological and epistemological perspectives. For instance, Moon and Blackman (2014) pointed out that some researchers believe that ontological and epistemological perspectives are 'intimately' connected to each other. Nevertheless, Moon and Blackman (2014) discuss the guidelines that are used in the social science research design. According to them, ontology is concerned about the feature of reality and epistemology deals with how we investigate and interpret knowledge. Overall, the claims about what to be studied is determined from the ontological points of view. While epistemology is concerned how the knowledge will be created, confirming reliability, and validity, it adds the legitimacy for knowledge. Epistemology is ''what is to count as knowledge'' (Smith, 1983, p. 13) and including data processing procedures, methodologies (Tracy, 2013). Literally, understanding the ontology and epistemology could help to choose the suitable paradigm and methodology for our research.

A clear understanding of personal ontological and epistemological perspectives is essential to determine the appropriate research design. The purpose of this study is to examine the principals' role in leading inclusive education and to identify how the principals lead school cultures, policies, and practices to support inclusive education. Inclusion is one of the key terms most frequently used in this research; however, there is no common understanding and universal definition for the term inclusive education. This is because of, it is defined and understood in various ways across the globe (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). I have addressed this ambiguity by considering both narrow and broad definitions.

Personally, my ontological perspective relates to the social model of disabilities. I believe that each student has different needs and interests. Thus, inclusive education is more about addressing those different needs in mainstream education through providing appropriate support to address those needs. However, it seems that there are multiple ontological perspectives about inclusion, and it is hardly possible to choose a single reality about inclusive education. Therefore, it is possible to argue that everyone provides different meanings and understanding about the development of inclusive education based on their experiences.

To understand this phenomenon, the interpretivism paradigm is the most suitable to understand my research interest. In the interpretivist paradigm, the research results emerge from interaction between the researcher and research participants (Brantilinger et al., 2005; Moon & Blackman, 2014; Tracy, 2013). Hence, the interpretations are linked with the context of different history and culture. In the interpretive, the ontological and epistemological are interconnected, inseparable and determined between the researcher and the subjects. In other words, ''reality (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology) are constructed and reproduced through communication, interaction, and practices'' (Tracy, 2013, p. 40). In addition, in this study, the Booth and Ainscow (2002) the Index of inclusion has been used as the framework to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive education. Based on the different ontological and epistemological as well as theoretical perspectives already discussed earlier in this chapter, my philosophical orientation relates to interpretivism.

3.3   Participants of the Research

In the sampling and selection procedure, recruiting the appropriate research participants is essential. As a result, the purposeful sampling is the most suitable sampling technique for this study. Purposeful sampling assists one to choose the appropriate research subjects or participants that suit the purposes of the research (Fossey et al., 2002; Tracy, 2013). In addition, research problems determine the target population and sample participants who could provide appropriate

and sufficient data about the subject being studied (Fossey et al., 2002; Tracy, 2013). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research deals with small samples. In qualitative research, ''quality is more important than quantity '' (Tracy, 2013, p. 138). Nevertheless, there are no clear cuts for the minimum numbers for samples. For example, Tracy (2013, p. 138) recommends ''five to eight interviews as pedagogically valuable''. Whereas Fossey et al. (2002) suggests that even a single participant could provide appropriate and adequate data. In general, although the decision remains in the hands of the researcher, the research nature, aims, and goals form the rationale that help the decision process. In my case, I have planned to interview six Finnish comprehensive school principals, and three principals participated in the interviews.

In three municipalities (municipality A, municipality B, and municipality C), three principals from comprehensive schools participated in the research. The school named school X, school Y, and school Z respectively to keep the school anonymous in this research. The first participant was from municipality A. The municipality A is one of the big municipalities in Finland, which has over 140,000 inhabitants and the largest municipalities from the sample. In this municipality, the X comprehensive school (a pseudonym) that includes grades 1-9. The school enrols approximately 520. There are forty (40) teachers, ten (10) school assistants, and other non-academic staff. Sini (a pseudonym) is a principal of the school X. The school has two vice principals, who support principals in the pedagogical leadership tasks. Out of the total students 43 students have a special support decision. As a percentage, 8.3% of students have received special support either in one or more subjects at a movement. There are only two students who receive special education. This means that it is less than 0.4% out of the total students. The other sixty-three students or 12.4% receive the enhanced support. Overall, 20.4% of students have received certain kinds of pedagogical support. In addition, nine students are attending extended compulsory education.

The second participant was from municipality B. In municipality B, there are approximately 20, 000 inhabitants. In this municipality, the Y comprehensive school (a pseudonym) that includes grades 7-9. The school enrols 232 students.

There are forty teachers, and six school assistants. The school principal is Juha (a pseudonym), and a vice principal who is responsible for pedagogical leadership tasks. There are twenty-eight students who receive special education. As a percentage, 12.1% of students have received special support either in one or more subjects at a movement. The other twenty-two students or 9.5% receive the enhanced support. Thirteen students or 5.6% receive the general support in the mainstream with their peers. Overall, 27.2% of students have received certain kinds of pedagogical support.

The third participant was from municipality C. In Municipality C, there are about 10,000 inhabitants and the smallest municipality from the sample. From municipality C, Z comprehensive school (a pseudonym) school includes grade 1-9. The school enrols 172 students. As a percentage, 7% of the students receive special education support either in one or more subjects. This means out of 172, students twelve of them are entitled to receive special education. Eight students or 4.7% receive the general support. Twenty-three students or 13.4% of the students receive the intensified support. Moona (a pseudonym) is a principal for this school. Besides, she is responsible for different tasks such as organizing afternoon activities and some administrative tasks in the municipalities. There are fifteen teachers and two school assistants. Overall, 24.4% of students have received certain kinds of pedagogical support.

TABLE 1. Summary of school settings and principals' background

School settings				Principals' background			
Municipality	School name	School grades	Number of Students	Name of principals	Gender	Total years of experience	Years as a principal
A	School X	1-9	520	Sini	F	20	10
B	School Y	7-9	232	Juha	M	19	8
C	School Z	1-9	172	Moona	F	23	5

3.4   Qualitative Approach

Choosing the appropriate research method is crucial to describe the philosophical perspectives of the researcher to produce knowledge (Fossey et al, 2002). In this study, qualitative research has been preferred because qualitative research is suitable in many disciplines, including social sciences and educational research (Fossey et al., 2002; Tracy, 2013). ''Qualitative research is designed to be flexible and responsive to context'' (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 723). Moreover, Tracy (2013) discusses six main features of qualitative research: 1) It does not necessarily need expensive facilities. 2) It allows the researchers to conduct research in their interest. 3) It provides insightful information that might be missed from other data sources. 4) Qualitative research is most suitable to study a phenomenon like cultural aspects. 5) It covers possible future research topics. 6) It helps to understand the research participants in depth.

In addition to Tracy (2013) justifications, there are many other reasons to choose qualitative research in this study. First, qualitative research depends on the empirical or theoretical knowledge to understand a specific issue (Tracy, 2013). Secondly, qualitative research helps the researcher to get in depth information on specific educational phenomena (Angelides, 2012; Conrad & Brown, 2011). Moreover, qualitative research is a good approach to examining the leadership roles and experiences of participants in leading the school culture, school policies, and school practices. It supports knowing the attitudes and commitments of principals toward inclusive education, their real experiences, or roles through interviews. Qualitative research is suitable to use the data from texts (documents) and interviews (Tracy, 2013). Further, the meta-analysis conducted by Cobb (2015) shows that most of the research conducted on special education (inclusion) and principals were qualitative in its nature.

The Booth and Ainscow (2002) Index of inclusion framework has been used to evaluate the development of inclusive education at school level from three dimensions: cultures, policies, and practice. Therefore, qualitative research is suitable to examine the role of principals in leading inclusive education and how principals leading inclusive cultures, policies, and practice to support inclusive

education. Indeed, ''good qualitative research helps people to understand the world, their societies, and institutions'' (Tracy, 2013, p. 5). Similarly, other researchers have suggested that the main tasks of good qualitative researchers are understanding of ''participants' subjective meaning, actions, and social context'' (Fossey et al. 2002, p. 717). In interpretivist approach results emerged from the researcher's interaction within the participants of the research. These interpretations are linked with the situations or contexts of different history and culture. These different interpretations are the result of historical and cultural exposure that influences everyone's interpretation and make the meaning of their roles and experiences (Moon & Blackman, 2014).

3.5   Data Collection Method

The primary data were gathered through the interviews with principals and two selected school documents related to leading inclusive education were used in the data as a secondary data. Interviews are used in most types of qualitative research. Particularly, a semi-structured interview is used to facilitate examining specific topics (Fossey et al, 2002). It is also helping to discover new and get first-hand information, allowing the researcher to ask for clarification while interviewing the participants (Tracy, 2013). '' Interviews elucidate subjectively lived experiences and viewpoints from the respondents'' (p. 132) and strengthens secondary data (Tracy, 2013).

The research interviews questions were carefully designed based on the dimensions of Index of inclusion introduced by Booth and Ainscow (2002). The original index for all questions is originally prepared for quantitative research and aims to assess the status of inclusive education development (Vaughan, 2002). It consists of about 500 questions and 44 indicators. According to the framework, dimension A, B, and C which consists of 13,15, and 16 indicators respectively (see the appendices 1-4). Those questions are used to collect data from students, teachers, principals, and school stakeholders (Booth & Ainscow, 2002;

Vaughan, 2002), Therefore, first I chose the questions and indicators for principal. So, using those indicators and quantitative questions, then, keeping those in mind, I prepared qualitative nature questions that can address those indicators.

The interviews were conducted online using a Zoom video conference application. The interview length was from 45 minutes to an hour. A semi-structured interview style was designed to focus and explore specific topics (Fossey et al., 2002). In addition to interviews, two selected school documents related to inclusive education were used as a secondary data.

3.6   Data Analysis

Qualitative inductive content analysis was used to analyse the data. The content of data from the interviews and selected materials that relate to the school cultures, policies, and practices, were categorized with the Index of inclusion framework (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). However, the process itself was guided by data rather than the framework.

3.6.1   Qualitative Content Analysis

Content analysis (CA) has been used in various research studies (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000; Schreier, 2013). It is a widely used approach to interpret the meanings from the selected material in the qualitative research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2013). In addition, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) and Kondracki et al., (2002) claim that content analysis is a systematic way of interpreting the given texts or selected material to make meanings. In the same way, Schreier (2013) describes the content analysis as a systematic method that helps to give meanings to the documents by categories of the frame. It is also suitable for describing phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Mayring, 2000). Overall, there are two types of content analysis: qualitative content analysis and quantitative content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Hsien & Shannon, 2005; Kondracki et al., 2002; Mayring, 2000; Schreier, 2013).

In this study, the qualitative content analysis has been chosen for analysing the data collected through interviews and written documents. This is due to a qualitative content analysis that is flexible to interpret the written documents including transcripts from the interviews (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000). In addition, it allows the researcher to reduce data, be systematic in nature, while remaining flexible (Schreier, 2013). Thus, the process of coding and how to evaluate the reliability of the coding also systematic.

3.6.2   Inductive Approach

The inductive process is the approach to deduce or infer the concepts from the data. It is mainly preferable when little is known about the specific research topics and phenomenon under investigation (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Hsieh and Shannon; Schreier, 2013). There are two types of interpretations, namely manifest meanings, and latent meanings (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Kondracki et al., 2002; Schreier, 2013). According to Kondracki. et al. (2002), manifest contents or meanings are recognized using the frequencies of coding words, phrases, and expressions from the transcripts. On the other hand, the latent contents or meanings require deeper interpretation and conclusions to the transcripts of the interviews. So, owing to staying with the original data contents, in this study, the focus was the interpretation of the manifest meanings rather than the latent meanings. To conclude, the conventional content analysis proposed by Elo and Kyngäs (2007) were used to analyse the written data, including the transcripts of the interviews.

Hsien and Shannon (2005) discuss three types of content analysis, namely *conventional, directed, and summative*, as well as the reason for choosing a specific approach. The first approach, conventional content analysis, follows an inductive approach. The codes or key words are derived from data and the process starts with observation of the data during the research analysis phase (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It allows the researchers to produce categories from the flow of the data. The researcher might compare his/her findings with the existing theories

or previous research findings. Usually, the discussion session is where the researcher interacts with his audiences and evidence emerged in the field by other researchers.

The second approach, directed content analysis, follows the deductive approach. The codes are derived from previous research findings or theories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Directed content analysis is suitable for studying the existing or prior knowledge, theories and practices that are believed to be incomplete or benefits the research community to investigate the phenomenon in detail for the future benefits. This approach follows a more structured process than the previous one. However, this approach has been rejected because of unfitting with the aims of my research topic.

The third approach, summative content analysis, shares some features of both conventional content analysis and directed content analysis. The codes derived from the researcher's interest areas or literature review (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the study starts from the keyword, which can be identified before or during the data analysis phase. Like directed content analysis too, the summative content analysis has not been considered as the best option for this study. In general, all three approaches follow the same analytical process; but the main difference is how the initial coding schemes are developed.

Due neither directed content analysis nor summative content analysis are suitable for my research. Therefore, I have chosen the conventional approach. In the conventional data analysis, the developing the coding categories are identified from the data during analysing the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Accordingly, in my study the data was guided by Elo and Kyngäs (2007) qualitative inductive content analysis phases and processes.

The first phase, the preparation stage, is where the researcher chooses the units of selected materials and attempts to make sense or understand the data in line with the research objectives. Therefore, first, I read the transcripts of the interviews and selected two school's documents concerning inclusive education. Then, after observing the data carefully, I read it repeatedly.

The second phase, the data organizing stage, is where the process of coding starts. Elo and Kyngäs (2007) suggest five steps under the organizing phases: ''open coding, coding sheets, grouping, categorization, and abstraction'' (p. 109). Coding is the process of analysing content of a large amount of data into fewer meaningful categories. I followed the following procedures, I read the transcripts and documents repeatedly to understand the flow of information in the data. While I read the data, I highlighted the words or phrases that reflect the concepts of inclusive education, dimensions of index of inclusion, how principals describe their role in leading inclusive education, factors that assist the principals in leading the school cultures, policies, and practices. The example of open coding (Figure 4) indicates how highlighting about the role of principals in leading inclusive education has been started.

FIGURE 4.   Example of open coding
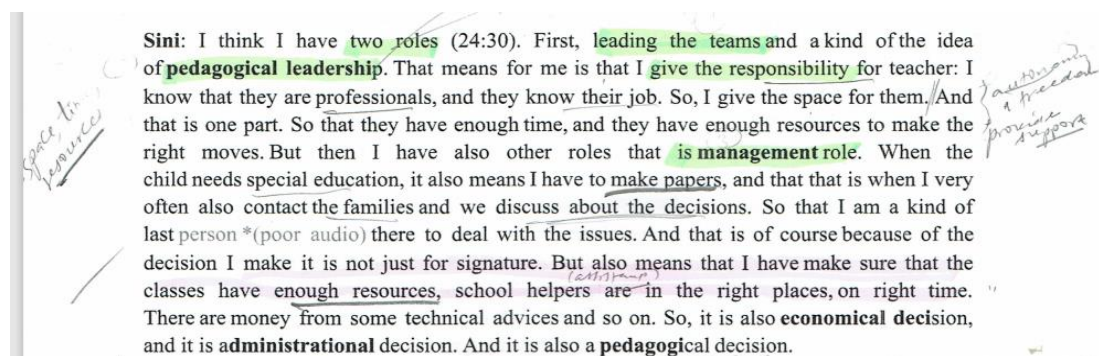
Then, I prepared the coding sheets where I highlighted core messages of each transcripts, then from the coding sheets, I grouped the similar contents from all interviewees into the table. Example of grouping the data related to the role of principals are presented in the (Table 2).

TABLE 2. Example of data grouping process related to role of the principals

As a school principal, what is your role in leading inclusive education?	Leadership role /pedagogical leadership (vision, planning, curriculum & outcomes) - leading and guiding special educational team (T1) - facilitate discussion about visions, goals & how to develop their skills. (T1) - dialogue_ (T1 & T2) - carefully plan support system in co -operation with the SEN teacher and Special education coordinator (T3) - well planned and implemented student care meetings. (T3) - developing the competence of the personne (T3)/ ongoing learning (T1 & T2) => PLC - Co-operating with a special education coordinator (T3) - my most important role is to create a positive and open-minded attitude among staff, students and guards (T3) # Management role (day to day activities, running of organization, communication) - schedule time for staff meetings (T1, T2, & T3) - the role of checkout agreements are fulfilled (T1) - meet some of those parents and pupils (T2, T3), communicate parents (T1, T2, & T3) - participating in the meetings with teachers and parents (T2) - supports /helps the teachers (ex. if teachers have a problem with pupils, share knowledge and information, (T1 & T2) - We have a coordinator here in municipality C, (T3) - To guarantee smooth daily school life (T3) #Administrative role (basic function of running organization) - make official decision and allocate resource (T1, T2 & T3) - recruiting personnel (if required) Eg. recruitment process (T2, T3) - well being at work (T3)

* (T1 transcript 1, T2 Transcript 2, & T3 Transcript 3)

After grouping similar contents together, I classified the data to main and sub-categories. In the (Table 3), an example of how coding the data into subcategories for leading inclusive cultures are presented. Finally, I prepared the abstraction in the form of tables (see Table 4, p. 44). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) believe that the coding process determines the quality of content analysis. Categories could be defined as patterns or the themes. Similarly, the data relate to how the principals leading inclusive cultures, policies, and practices were grouped together after the open coding phase. For instance, the content related to school cultures that support the principals in leading inclusive education categorized as seen in the (Table 3) on the following page.

TABLE 3. Example of coding into sub-categories

Some of grouped data related to the school culture	Sub- categories /codes
• Respect- we value each other and working with different pupils (T1 & T3) • Diversity- immigrants background (T2, & T3) • Ethnic minority students, students with learning challenges; example, autism diagnosis (T3)	Inclusion, respect, & accept diversity
• Inclusive education has been discussed a lot (T1) • Inclusive education is a priority in the school development (T1) • Discussion and dialogue among school communities (T2)	School community
• Cooperation (T1, T2 & T3) • Sharing the support among the staff (T1 & T2) • Collaboration is the main value in this school (T1) • I have supportive staff (T1)	Collaboration & partnership
• All students treated equally in all aspects (T1, T2) • Prevent any kinds of discrimination (T1, T2, & T3) • Boys and girls are equal	Equality & prevent discrimination
• Meet some parents (T2, T3) • Communicate parents via email (T1, T2, &T3) • Partnership between school and home	Communications & partnership
• Learn and adopt new approaches (T1 & T3) • Training (T1 & T2) • Professional learning development (T1, T2 & T3)	Professional learning communities

* T1= transcript 1, T2 = transcript & T3 = transcript 3

At the abstraction stage, the main categories (themes) and sub-categories (sub-themes) generated from the data was summarized in the table (see table 4). The abstraction is the final steps of data organizing phase to present the identified categories or themes as a summary. So, it could be in a chart, table, or in descriptive ways. For example, to answer the question, how principals lead school cultures, policies, and practices to support inclusive education? The answers were grouped into three main categories (leading school cultures, policies, and practices) fortunately, correspondent to the Index of inclusion, and the specific codes were organized into the sub-categories.

To analyse the data related to the roles and responsibilities of school principals, the content of the data was categorized according to the roles and responsibilities manifested in the data. The roles that elaborated by interviewees were considered under certain categories to clearly understand the role of principals in leading inclusive education. The content related to basic school functioning, running the school's routine activities, and setting the school's long-term goals were grouped together into administrative, management, and leadership roles respectively (see Table 2).

The third phase is reporting the analysing process and the results. In this study, the knowledge emerged from the research participants' experiences in leading the three dimensions of Index of inclusion: school cultures, school policies and school practices was reported. The research results compared with previous research findings. In the discussion part, the summary of the research findings, and how the new knowledge related with the previous research findings briefly discussed. At the end, the implications of this study and the possible future research areas have been suggested.

As a criterion the contents of the text that explain school inclusive cultures such as how staff work together, values that principals appreciate in the schools, how school communities work together, how students all students especially SEN students are treated, relationships between principals and parents were some of the aspects considered during the coding. Similarly, in leading school policies, how principals lead school policies to make school suitable for all students and provide the support for SEN students were considered. In leading school practices, how the assessment procedures, school arrangements and resource allocation and provision of support included. In (Table 4), an example of the abstraction from the data or the summary of results that support the principals in leading inclusive education is presented as seen on the table on following page.

TABLE 4. Example of abstraction from the data

(Leading) school cultures	(Leading) School Policies	(Leading) school practices
Inclusion, respect, & accept diversity	Nearest school policy	Students learning needs
School community	Accessibility	assessment
Collaboration and partnership	Equality and non-discrimination	Enact with laws. Regulations,
Equality and prevent discrimination		& policies
Communications & partnership	Working to prevent bullying	Pedagogical autonomy
Professional learning communities	Three tiers support reform	Students' agency
	Prevention of bullying	Support provision procedure

4   RESULTS

The findings of the study were categorized according to the main categories and followed by subcategories extracted from the data using inductive content analysis. Accordingly, the findings show that the principals have three major roles in leading inclusive education. The school principals are leading school cultures, policies, and practices through distributed leadership. The school communities, special education teams, and professional learning communities (PLC) support the school principals to lead inclusive education. In addition, leading school cultures, policies and practices can play a significant role in the implementation of inclusive education and assist principals in achieve the schools' visions of inclusion.

4.1   School principals have three major roles: administrative role, managerial role, and leadership role

The research findings indicate that Finnish comprehensive school principals have three major roles in the process of leading inclusive education. These are the administrative role, management role, and leadership role. First, when participants were asked to describe their role in general, a principal listed four roles: the administrative, management, pedagogical leadership, and ethical leadership. However, when the interviewees were asked to describe the principals' role in leading inclusive education, the ethical leadership was merged with the other roles. Finally, all interviewees mentioned the following three main roles: administrative role, management role, and the leadership roles, to which mostly they referred as pedagogical leadership.

Firstly, the principals responded that administrative role is one of their expected roles in leading inclusive education. In this report, administrative roles refer to enforcing the basic function of the organizational (school) policies and

procedures in the organizational routine activities. Administrative roles usually deal with the basic functioning of the institution's (Heikka, Halttunen & Waniganayeke, 2016). All expected tasks of principal's that elaborated in the interviews were categorized under three major principal's roles (see Table 5). From the summary table of principals' roles, some are reported here. According to the research findings, some of the principals' administrative roles include the following subthemes: a) administering the school finance and allocating resources; b) make sure everyone follows the national curriculum, the laws and regulation; c) well-being at work d) negotiation with other service providers d) recruiting personnel.

Secondly, the principals responded that management role is one of their expected roles in leading inclusive education. In this report, management roles refer to how the leader manages the staff and daily activities. The management role is mainly focused on the tasks that facilitate the daily activities to sustain the functioning of the institution (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Heikka et al., 2016). According to my research findings, some of the principals' management roles include the following subthemes: a) staff management, b) human resource, c) leading and guiding the special education teams, d) school routines (day to day activities), e) communication, and f) support or assist teachers.

Thirdly, the principals responded that leadership roles are also one of their expected roles in leading inclusive education. The leadership roles mainly involve preparing clear school vision, building an active and strong school community. According to Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003), leadership is more emphasis on the long-term goals and objectives of the organization, including setting a vision for the organization. The leadership role involves the process of curriculum planning and encouraging others to think about the long-term outcomes for the pupil's learning (Heikka et al. 2016). The roles and responsibilities of principals connected with school vision, mission, planning, curriculum activities and students' outcome or achievements are categorized under leadership, including the pedagogical leadership. According to my research findings, some of the prin-

cipals' leadership roles (pedagogical leadership) includes the following sub-themes: a) collaboration and cooperation, b) autonomy, c) planning and monitoring the progress of students' learning (learning outcomes), and d) teachers' professional development.

TABLE 4. The summary of principal's role obtained from the data

Administrative role	Management role	Leadership role
• Make sure all follow the national curriculum, laws, and regulations • Administrate finance • Recruiting personnel • Make contracts and negotiate with other service providers (eg. air quality, building inspections) • Keep and deal with necessary data and information about the school and students' profile • Share information and knowledge • Make official decisions • Well-beings and other administrative tasks	• Monitoring the progress of students learning • Staff management • School routine activities • Communication within and outside the school • Staff support- assisting the teachers when needed • Leading and guiding the special education teams • Scheduling meetings • Confirming whether the pre-set agreements are fulfilled • Negotiating the future tasks with staff, & other authorities	• Setting the school's visions • Planning the students support system to ensure quality education and inclusive education • Building the school community • Facilitating discussion about vision, goals and how improve skills • Cooperation and negotiation with those who work with pupils • Strive to develop the competence of the staff, teachers' professional development • Acknowledge teachers' autonomy • Pedagogical leadership • Promotion of equality • Instructional duties

In addition, the principals were asked about their specific responsibilities as school leaders in the process of offering the support for SEN students. All of them indicated planning of a support system, identifying the required resources, contacting, and communicating with the students' parents, making decisions,

and allocating resources are the specific responsibilities in leading inclusive education. They also underlined that the decisions are based on evidence by considering the economic, administrative, and pedagogical perspectives. Finally, they responded that all of them are responsible for leading special education team or student welfare group.

4.2 Leading school cultures are essential for principals to support inclusive education

The findings of the research indicate that leading an inclusive culture creates and maintains inclusive values and school community support, thus allowing principals to achieve the vision of inclusive education. The findings concur with the first dimension of Index of inclusion introduced by Booth and Ainscow (2002), which asserts the importance of creating inclusive culture. Inclusive culture creates a safe and inclusive environment where all students enjoy and achieve their full potential. From the analysed data the following subcategories emerged: school community; inclusion, respect, and acceptance of diversity; collaboration and partnership; communications between home and school; professional learning communities.

4.2.1 School community

The school community refers to principals, teachers, students, non-academic staff such as school nurses, school social workers, and school psychologists. The document and the interviews data revealed that the strong school community is one aspect of Finnish comprehensive school cultures. All principals described that school community as avital aspects of school cultures. Sini explained that one of the basic values in the school X is sharing the support among the teachers. According to Sini, teachers always ask for help either from the colleagues or from the principal when needed. The school communities are supportive, working in a team towards the same goals. The spirit of working as a community for com-

mon goal is a feature of the school culture. In all schools, the leadership is structured in teams. So, they use the structure to collaborate with other stakeholders and lead the overall process as a leader. In all schools, the special education teams are primarily responsible concerning inclusive education issues. For example, the school x principal, Sini explained,

> I think my leadership is based on leading the teams. Actually, I like to lead in such a way that I give some spaces and responsibility for the teams...I am standing behind them as a supporter.

Sini remarked that she gives the space and responsibilities for the team and for the teachers. The idea of standing behind them (teachers) means that the leadership is distributed among the teams and the principal is responsible to provide enough resources and necessary support when needed. Practically, Sini leads the teams, guides, and supports specially the academic staff. So, teachers and school assistants will do with the pupils.

4.2.2 Inclusion, respect, and acceptance of diversity

The philosophy of inclusion is being a part of school cultures. Inclusive education is a component of school culture and school development programmes. The transcribed data clearly shows that inclusive education is among the leading themes that are often discussed in the school environment. All participants in the research responded that inclusive education has been discussed either formally or informally at the staff level and the staff are committed to achieve their school visions and missions. In addition, in all schools the special education teams who are responsible for the development and implementation of inclusive education. Principal of school X, Sini said,

> Actually, we have been talking about this a lot...we asked last spring and again this autumn 'what we have to develop in our school?', inclusive education was one of the things teachers would like to develop.

Sini, Juha, and Moona indicated that staff have regular meeting sessions where they discuss the progress of inclusive education in their school. Teachers, school assistants, and multidisciplinary teams have open discussions on issues related to inclusive education. In all schools, the principals answered that scheduling

regular meetings for staff and arranging specific meetings concerning individual students is one of the principal roles. However, this is not the sole responsibility of the principals. For instance, in school X, besides the principal, the teachers or special education teams might suggest the need for meetings if they have something to share with the whole staff. Then the initiator (s) of the ideas could arrange the formal meetings together with the principal. All in all, it seems that inclusive education has been considered as one core component of the school cultures. For instance, Sini marked that Inclusive education is one of the priority areas in their school development.

Regarding respect and acceptance of the diversity, all principals and the welfare plan of school X indicated that there is a respect between teachers and students as well as respect among the staff. According to the principals, respect and accepting diversity support the process of leading school inclusive culture. The Index of inclusion shows that respect is one of the most important values of inclusion (see Booth & Ainscow, 2002). For example, in school Z, the more appreciated school values are collaboration and respecting each other, celebrating diversity, values each individual contribution in the learning environment; additionally, staff and students are open and positive minded.

> We have ethnic minority students, immigrants, students with learning challenges and students with a range of autism diagnosis. Have to say that the students do not pay attention to the diversity. The staff and students are quite open and positive minded... we try to follow the value where the staff respects the students and vice versa. Everybody is important.

According to Moona, inclusive education has benefits both students with and without special educational needs in many ways. Some of the benefits discussed by her were social relationship (friendship skills, peer model); academic (problem solving skills either alone or with peers), good attitudes (positive self-image, respect for others). In general, the well-established inclusive philosophy helps principals to spend their time on the other tasks rather than creating awareness about inclusion.

4.2.3 Collaboration, Cooperation, and Partnership

All school principals mentioned that within supportive school communities, collaboration and cooperation are among the main values that promote inclusive cultures and ensure inclusive education. So, all principals shared the same thought about the active collaboration of their staff to achieve the schools' visions of inclusive education. They all agreed that strong collaboration, cooperation, and good partnership with the stakeholders support them to lead school inclusive culture. For instance, Juha believes that cooperation is the only way to work towards the same goals. In fact, the students' well-being, social and academic achievement is realized in collaboration within the school community, particularly among the staff. Furthermore, the cooperation and partnership with all stakeholders are very crucial. The interviewees clearly indicated that collaboration is a part of their school cultures. Indeed, cooperation is one of the pillars for the success of inclusive education. ''It (Inclusive education) is work as long as the cooperation works '' (Juha, principal of school Y). Similarly, Moona also think that cooperation as a primary tool to achieve school's common goals. ''In cooperation we have succeeded to progress the students' well-being and learning at school '' (Moona, principal of school Z). In most cases, the class teachers or subject teachers and special needs education teachers are planning, implementing, and evaluating the lesson together.

All interviewees agreed that cooperation is the core to the success of teamwork and shared responsibility. Cooperation needs negotiation and mutual understandings. However, sometimes leaders or principals face some challenges in his/her leadership. For instance, Juha noticed that, unless all are willing to cooperate, it is unlikely that the visions of inclusion are achieved. He gave an example of the situation where a teacher was reluctant to cooperate with the staff, and how much his leadership and school communities were challenged.

Overall, the principals have the responsibilities to guide and facilitate the flow of information and knowledge within the school communities and with other stakeholders outside the school to support the success of inclusive education. Therefore, the principals encourage collaboration and cooperation within

the school communities to promote partnership with stakeholders outside the schools.

4.2.4   Communication between School and Home

All principals agreed that the communication between school and home supports the teaching and learning process a lot, particularly for those students who need extra support. To achieve the holistic goals of inclusive education, the school and home partnership are necessarily. So, to develop this partnership, communication is vital. In fact, facilitating communication is also one of the principal's roles at any educational institutions. Moreover, particularly having a secured and systematic communication channels are more effective and essential in comprehensive school. Thus, as marked previously, the flow of communication between teachers, schools and home facilitates the partnership.

In Finland, it is obvious that the students' parents and guardians follow the daily progress of their children learning process and receive daily feedback from the teachers using Wilma. According to principals, the common communication channels used to communicate with parents are Wilma, school website, phone, and different events where the parents are invited to the school environment. In all schools, the Wilma system is the primary communication channel. Sini described that there are two levels of communication between school and home. The first one is at teacher level, where teachers communicate with parents on an almost daily basis through Wilma. They mark different colours based on the student situation and may send emails. In some exceptional cases, they may call during or after the lesson. At school level Wilma used to send emails, school websites provided public information, and schools organize different events like parents' night. Adding to the above communication channel, Moona considers the communication levels from other perspectives too. She mentioned the communication held at the welfare group and individual level with students with special educational needs.

4.2.5   Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

All interviewees stated that their schools strongly support teachers' professional development. They also indicated that one of the principals' roles is to meet the needs of the learning community. In all schools, teachers are participating in learning or training activities in one way or another. When it comes to the role of principals and how they assist the teachers to take inclusion into an account. In practice, there are some similarities and differences between the schools. For instance, school Z arranges training for the teachers depending on the actual challenges they encounter in the school. The training aims to prepare the teachers to respond professionally, and support students' special education needs in the mainstreaming classrooms. Moona, who is the principal of school Z, told that this year the school already booked a training session from the national learning and guidance centre known as Valteri for the teachers.

In the school X and Y, usually teachers are participating in short term training sessions or take some courses to update their knowledge. All principals described that their municipalities offer a training opportunity for teachers every year. Teachers are interested in those courses and trainings. In all schools, teachers have been engaged in ongoing learning through in-service training like the courses offered by universities, online training, workshops etc. On the other hand, most often the informal learning methods like open discussion and dialogue happen within the colleagues. Dialogue and open discussion facilitate discussion about the visions, goals, how to develop their skills and solve certain problems. Among the participants, Moona commented about the necessity of professional development to lead the change in the society. She said,

> I am open to learning new trends, because society changes all the time. What is good and suitable now, might not be that after a few years. For example, if we think about the distance learning of last spring (due to Covid-19 pandemic), it was a big challenge for all of us, but we are still trying to fix some shortcomings.

Principals believe that teachers training programmes positively impacts the process of inclusive education development. For example, according to Moona, inclusive education is in the process, and in the right direction because of active ongoing learning cultures. From her experience, at the beginning the teachers

have hesitated to welcome students with SEN to the mainstreaming school and classrooms. Now, she appreciated the effectiveness of the training in changing the teachers' attitudes, and to accept different students into their mainstreaming classrooms. She commented that ''after a few trainings the teachers changed their attitudes and teaching methods'. Sini and Juha also concluded that teachers' in-service training has positive impacts to foster the culture and practice of accommodating different needs in mainstreaming classrooms and to promote inclusion. Finally, Moona recognized the importance of training and the improvement of inclusive education development. First, class teachers are more ready to differentiate their teaching. Second, subject teachers are improving cooperation with the SEN teachers more actively. Thirdly, subject teachers are finding their ways to use the school assistants and resources such as resource teachers, co-teachers etc more effectively.

4.3   Leading school policies have impacts on school cultures and practices

The findings show that school policies have impacts on school cultures and school practices. All the participants mentioned that Finnish Basic Education Act (628/1998), and National Core Curriculum (FNBE, 2016) give the basic and general guidelines at the national level to support inclusive education. Hence, principals explained that having inclusive policies assist the principals to ensure inclusive education. The findings support the dimension of creating inclusive policies (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Principals were asked, what are the policy documents their schools follow to make school inclusive for all. Sini, the principals of school X from municipality A said,

> Well, we have the same curriculum. For example, the national curriculum gives us the same guidelines, then the city(municipality) has a local curriculum. They make the ground for inclusive education. In our school we follow the local curriculum, and local instruction... then we have '''oppilashuoltosuunnitelma' (Student welfare plan).

Another principal, Moona from municipality C said,

> We follow the basic education law here. Every student who lives in our school area is allowed to go to this school. If the students from other school areas want to apply to our school, we check if we have the possibility to accept the application - It depends on the number of students in that class.

The students' welfare plan and the equality and non-discrimination plan that prepared by the school X shows the detail activities and the role of every member of school communities. The plan consists of tasks descriptions and responsibilities which all school communities are expected to execute. The plan gives the highlight of the school cultures, school practices and the role of principal to implement the plan. Overall, the school policies documents mentioned by principals include the Finnish National curriculum, local curriculum, and local instruction at municipality level. Some other laws, and regulations such as the Equality Act. Additionally, for example, school X considered the students welfare plan as the school policy. All principals indicated that school policies have impacts and determine how leading the school cultures, and school practices. From the data concerning the school policies the following themes were emerged: the nearest school policy; support system: three tiers model; equality and non-discrimination; and accessibility, and anti-bullying policy.

4.3.1   The nearest school admission policy

All the school principals mentioned that the admission to the school is enacted in accordance with the nearest school and equal admission criteria adopted by municipalities (municipality A, B, and C). By law, all children permanently residing in Finland are required to attend and complete their compulsory education in the municipality where they live either permanently or temporarily and the school nearest to them. The admission of the students follows the admission criteria of the city (municipality A), which are based on equal treatment (School X equality plan & Welfare plan). The other two school principals also strictly follow similar policies.

However, how to arrange the teaching groups varies among the schools. For example, in school X, primarily students are grouped in based on mixed group for all lessons, with the exceptions of physical activities which students can be grouped to ability group either in mixed groups or grouped based on sex

or other appropriate manner (school X equality plan). The teaching materials are prepared respecting the principle of equality and inclusion. Likewise, equality is also analysed in students' assessment, in accordance with the goals and criteria already introduced in the national and local curriculum (school X equality plan). Similarly, school Y and school Z accept students' student from their locality.

4.3.2 Support system: the three tiers model

As a school leader, principals have responsibility to plan and provide appropriate support for students who need different levels of support. The recent Finnish basic education has introduced the three tiers support system (Act. 642/2010): general support, intensive support, and special support. The research also found that these three tiers clearly found on both school documents i.e students welfare plan, and equality and non-discrimination plan. The support assessment and pedagogical decisions are taken based on this three tiers model. All principals mentioned that always they involved at tier 2 and tier 3. Thus, their role is more needed than at tier 1. At tier 1, teachers are assessing the needs and decide necessary support provided independently or with a special education teacher.

4.3.3 Equality, and Non-discrimination

All the school principals mentioned that they have an obligation to treat all students equally and minimize any kinds of exclusion practices. Principals underlined that, the admission and all support provided for the children must follow the principle of equality. Indeed, the Finnish laws and regulations highly respect the value of equality and grant the right to be treated equality and in a non-discriminatory manner in the basic education (Act. 628/1998). Accordingly, the right to attend basic education also applies for non-Finnish citizens residing in Finland. All children have equal rights and opportunities to learn in the school found in the municipality they reside. Principals and schools have the obligations to assure that all services and supports offered in the school are free from any kinds of discrimination. For example, Equality plan of school X, p.2 states:

> The plan is intended to provide practical ways to promote equality in primary schools. It gives equal opportunities to learn and work without discrimination based on the gender or other personal characteristics.

Accordingly, the equality between boys and girls is promoted in the basic education based on the student's age and development (Equality plan of school X). In general, they provide equal opportunities, equal treatments, the same quality education, and a support system. In addition, the document of the equality plan of school X, underlined that the particular attention should be given for the students' choice, organization of teaching and learning process, learning difficulties, assessment procedures, preventative measures linked to any kinds of harassment. The principals have the duties to ensure those policies are realized in the school cultures and implemented in the school practices.

4.3.4 Accessibility

Accessibility is one of the preconditions for the development of inclusive education. Both physical environment and school resources (example, books, digital resources, and equipment) should be available for all students. Principals mentioned that schools have the obligation to make schools accessible for all students and provide different equipment and tools according to the students' needs. For example, Juha told a recent example, how school Y arranged special furniture for a pupil to make school accessible to her. In this case, the pupil's doctor ordered a special chair for her and the school provided according to criteria prescribed and recommended. The decision is based on the discussion with the stakeholders and relies on negotiation. Similarly, the principal of school Z, Moona said that school has responsibility to provide digital materials in the mainstreaming classrooms to avoid the exclusion practice. Principals discussed accessibilities from the perspectives of the physical environment and from teaching materials. In conclusion, making school accessible to all is one of leading the school policies.

4.3.5   Anti-bullying policies to prevent bullying

All schools have anti-bullying policies and the teams working against bullying in the schools. Despite the schools have actively working to minimize bullying, unfortunately, the cases of bullying were reported in all schools. In particular, the principals of two schools were discussed some concerns about the increasing trends of bullying. The findings indicate that despite the bullying existed in the schools, the cases have not related to the special educational needs or inclusion.

According to the interviewees, bullying might be manifested in different ways due to various reasons. Fortunately, all principals explained that, so far from their experience the bullying cases were not related to inclusive education and special education. Sini argued that when people work together there might be some kinds of problems with relationships. According to her, the school environment is also not exceptional. Moona mentioned that sometimes there are more general conflicts or disagreements among students in the school. But the school is always sort out the disagreements effectively and make their relationship smooth again. More specifically, all schools have anti-bullying policies and immediately intervene when occurred. The principals are working with the class teachers, anti-bullying teams in the schools. When the case of bullying is serious, they contact other authorities such as social workers and police. Overall, all principals agreed that the bullying trends do not relate to the special educational needs or inclusive education.

4.4   Leading school practices assist the principals to enact the school policies and maintain school cultures

The interviewees strongly associated the school practices with the Basic Education Act and National Core Curriculum. When they were asked how leading the school practices to support inclusive education, principals answered focusing on how learning is organized, and resources are mobilized. Accordingly, they mentioned that the school practices are influenced by school policies and cultures. So

that, leading the practices support to implement the policies and create or maintain the school cultures. Booth and Ainscow (2002) recommended that evolving inclusive practices are important to ensure inclusive education. The data from the interviews and the documents show that school cultures and practices are interconnected and mainly influenced by school policies. Moreover, the following subcategories emerged from the data: enact laws, regulation, and pedagogical autonomy; assessment of the students' learning ability, interest and preparing students for future learning; students' agency; and the three tiers support model.

4.4.1 Enact laws, regulations, and pedagogical autonomy

All interviewees underlined that the schools obeyed the rules and regulations when executing the school plan. In line with the regulations, and curriculum, teachers have a pedagogical autonomy. Moona responded,

> From the inclusive principal point of view, I can say that we follow the laws, curriculum, and rules. We pay attention to the student's needs. The teachers choose the methods and appropriate practices according to the students 'needs. So, teachers have the autonomy to choose.

The school X documents, and the responses of all interviewees shows that the teachers have the autonomy to find the solutions they think the best for the students.

4.4.2 Assessment of the students' learning ability, interest and preparing students for future learning

All interviewees mentioned that assessing the student's special educational needs are the primary step to know the appropriate support needed for each learner. Assessing the students' needs and ability starts when pupils start their pre-primary education or at early childhood education and care (ECEC). The assessment starts at early stage mostly through pedagogical approach. Sini said,

> When pupils come to comprehensive school first, they learn the skills: how to concentrate, to care and handle their pen, pencil and so on. In the first two years 'alkuopetus', learn and exercise the learning skills such as how to listen, how to ask to the space for talk, how to be patient. Of course, reading, writing, and how to be calculating and so on. But the basic skill is how to deal in group, how to work with others and how to be patients, and how to ask for help.

According to Sini, the preschool, and two years in comprehensive school, altogether the first three years are a very essential time to collect all necessary information about the skills they need and where they probably need extra support in future. At grade 3, students start learning more subject learning and substance.

All principals underlined that the child's best interest is the priority to be considered when decisions are made concerning the student support system. Sini argues that despite school having common values and basic models, the most important is addressing the child's individual interests. Like Sini, Juha argues that, despite the basic guidelines that primarily encourage teaching students in the principles of inclusive education, the final decision should be considered based on the individual best interest and the expected outcomes. The main objective is to achieve the individual educational needs. All interviewees agreed that students' learning and well-being are the priority in the school in creating and maintaining school culture.

In addition, the responses of the participants' indicated that the schools are not rigid following the basic guidelines, rather they are flexible within a legal or policy framework when necessary. Juha, the principal of school Y said,

> There are basic guidelines, but we are always thinking about what the best for those students is. So, they are individuals, every single one, so they cannot be too strict on basic rules for that.

In the same way, Moona also argues that although the school is expected to enact the laws and rules, flexibility is also needed to find the appropriate support for the students with special educational needs.

Beyond the support system designed for the lessons, principals were emphasized about students' future studies, careers, and social life. All interviewees stated that the principals have responsibilities to guide the students about their future studies. Particularly, Sini indicated that the responsibility of principals includes making sure that all pupils have achieved the goals of compulsory education and received the certificate of comprehensive schools' certificate. Additionally, offering guidance and counselling for the students to find their future studies paths and continue their studies as much as possible. According to Juha, the

primary goal of inclusive education is to improve social relations in the future life. So, Juha believes that inclusive education is very important for students with special educational needs, particularly for those who have challenges in social relationships. He said, ''Inclusive education is very important; I think it is quite good for those specially who have sorts of social problems''. Juha assumes that some sorts of social problems manifested in students with special educational needs might be either related to how the school treats them or from individual backgrounds. According to him, it is essential to figure out the challenges, working to address those challenges. At the same time, he thinks about the learning processes of others (ordinary) students. Balancing the attention for those with special educational needs and the learning of the whole students.

Regarding the assessment procedures, all schools follow the national and local curriculum. The Basic Education Act, and the national curriculum encourages different assessment procedures for students with special educational needs. Moona Said,

> Competence can be displayed in many ways. For example, we have a student who assessed with the administrational decision based on the basic education law §18. He had passed his home economic studies by taking videos and pictures of phases of his cooking/baking. He has sent those documents to his home economics teachers for evaluation.

Moona has confirmed that there are many ways to show the skills and knowledge, whether the learning goals achieved or not. She believes that these multi aspects of assessment procedures are the basic core of Finnish education policy and they are derived from the laws and regulations.

4.4.3   Students' Agency

Often students' agency in education reflected in various ways. In all sample schools, principals mentioned that the students are represented in the school's development and learning process. For example, school Y and Z explained that the students are actively involved in anti-bullying programmes, and school X explained that students voices are heard during the school welfare plan. At individual level, in all schools the students are actively involved in their learning

process. They know the goals of their learning and the expected outcomes. Students often receive constructive feedback. Students' opinions can be heard and considered by teachers especially when set individual goals based on their interest. In the regular evaluation process, students participate in the evaluation of their progress with teachers and guardians. Besides the individual academic assessments, students can express their common concern about the teaching and learning process to the principals. For instance, Moona explained that their school has followed the clear practices, in which students are also the parts of the agreements, so they respect those practices. In case of misunderstanding, the adults discuss with them to make sure students remember that. Moona said,

> Let me tell you one example, in grade 6th we have students with a diverse diagnosis. Last semester, one subject teacher changed. A new teacher was told about certain arrangements and rules in that class, unfortunately the teacher did not follow that agreement and rules exactly as agreed. After two weeks, the students told me that one teacher does not follow their rule. Due to this the students misbehaved in the classroom during that lesson… Then I asked whether they told the issues to the teacher, they did it. But the teacher follows own approach, unfortunately which did not help. Then, I requested the teacher to go through the rules of the class and follow strictly. Finally, it works.''

Moona continued,

> At the beginning it was challenging for all members in the class, as you see these kinds of students need routine and well-planned rules, so they feel safe and capable of learning.

In the school practice, creating a safe learning environment for all students and school safety issues were raised by all principals. Moona said,'' I can say that our school's good practice is to stick to the well-planned practices''. Adding to that, in all schools the principals were stated that all challenges raised due to misunderstanding within the school communities are solved through discussion and dialogue. Furthermore, children's voices can be heard in practice.

4.4.4 The Three Tiers Support Model

The school principals mentioned that the educational support system is very important in the Finnish basic education. Support systems is the most frequently used term in the whole interview. All schools follow the three tiers support system. Principals have a role in planning, facilitating discussion with the stakehold-

ers and making the final decisions. The regulations necessarily required peda-gogical decisions only for those demanding the special support (tier 3), and in some cases for the intensified support (tier 2). According to the principals' de-scriptions, the general support is given for all students who need support or at-tention in the general classroom without any pedagogical decisions. At this level class teachers or special teachers can manage to provide the support that ad-dresses the specific needs of the students in the mainstreaming classrooms. The class or subject teacher might receive support from the co teachers or school as-sistants closely follow the progress of the students who have different needs, dif-ficulties or behind his/her peers in certain subjects. The role of principals is just to make sure the classrooms have enough support to address the diverse needs in the classroom.

At second level, intensified support is offered when the support at tier 1 no more addresses the individual needs. Hence, those students might be supported by remedial teaching, resource teachers' support, or the school assistants can sup-port according to their needs. Here, the involvement of the principal increases than the general level one. The school principals mentioned that communicating with parents, meetings with the student welfare team, and other stakeholders are their main responsibilities. At third level, the special support is given when the tier 1 and tier 2 supports are no more enough. At tier 3, there are many stake-holders who involved in the process. So, the principals must be involved in the discussion of needs assessment and pedagogical recommendation from the mul-tidisciplinary team. Juha remarks that, especially at this stage, multiple stake-holders participate in the meetings, and sometimes students refuse to accept what the school offers to them. According to him, in this kind of situation it al-ways takes more time to negotiate. In practice, most of the time the special edu-cation teachers are responsible to support those students eligible for this level. As mentioned above, the support at this level must need pedagogical decisions and the minutes/documents about the decision is recorded (usually in Wilma).

Although the three tiers of support provision articulated in the policy doc-uments, schools who participated in this study arrange the support differently to

some extent. According to the principals, some of the factors that affect the student's arrangement, and the support provision includes: a medical assessment, the number of available special education teachers and the number of students needing special education support. In school Y, one class is reserved separately for special education students. Juha said, students ''transferred to the special education class, if and only if there is a problem or have a doctor prescription about the case diagnosed''. For example, in case of school Y, out of 232 students, only 6 students (less than 3%) are attending special education classes. In this school, usually SEN students are in general classes at physical education, history, religion (based on their preference). In most cases, mathematics and language lessons are in small classes. Juha agreed that this school practice of Inclusive education works well. Furthermore, in school Y, when they get all necessary information, students are divided into four groups. One of them is those who need extra support.

> For the class who need extra help, assistants practically all the time. Special education teacher is most of the lessons, if that is not enough then the inclusion stops. Then, a small group starts. When new students come, we are trying to make the best in what we have here

Additionally, in case of school Y, students who are eligible for intensified support visit the special class. On the other hand, in school X arranging the lessons in small groups is the last solution (option). Arrangement of small class options come, when all kinds of support that is offered in mainstream classes are not effective at all. On the other hand, in school Z, there are no special classes at all, rather they minimize the number of students in the mainstreaming classrooms depending on the situation. A principal of school Z said,

> It depends on the quantity of the students in that grade. Usually, there are 25 students in the classroom. But now under negotiation to lower the limits: If at least one diagnosed pupil is in the class, the limits are always 20. School Z has quite a small teaching group from 14-18, except grade 9 consists of 25 students.

When principals were asked to discuss their responsibilities in the process of offering support for students with SEN, they answered that leading teams, and pedagogical leadership tasks; management role: contacting students' parents or guardians, plan the support system and allocating resources as primary tasks. All

interviewees agreed that the decision making was considered as economical, administrative, and pedagogical aspects. For instance, Sini, who is a principal of school X, said,

> I think I have two roles: the first one is leading the teams and a kind of pedagogical leadership. It means, I give the responsibility to the teacher. I know they are professionals and know their job. I give them space for that. So, they have enough time and resources to make the right move. The second is the management role.

According to her, when students are entitled to special education, the principal contacts the families, discusses the situations, and makes an official decision. She commented:

> The decision is not just for signature. But also, to make sure that the classes have enough resources, and school assistants in the right places, at the right time...

Moreover, Sini mentioned that this decision should be considered various aspects, namely economical, administrational, and pedagogical aspects.

Moona was focused on the importance of planning. She underlined that the school should be planned and revised the plan according to the changing school situations. For instance, she mentioned that if new students enrol in the middle of academic years, the school reviews the resource and the support management again. ''We plan the support system and map out resources needed for next academic year beforehand...depending on the student's need the support can vary'' (Moona, a principal of school Y). According to her, the school plan needs to be flexible and revised when the situations have been changed. For example, if a special education teacher is not available, then figure out the alternative options when the school situations demand it. She listed the example: ''teachers can give a regularly remedial teaching to the basic (general) and intensified support level or use a teacher's support for intensive support level''. Finally, Moona indicated that the current SEN support system is ongoing process. She also hopes that the upcoming inclusive education reform in the municipality, the new model, will take inclusion in account better than the current one.

Differentiation and individualized education plan considered as a tool to address the individual needs. The school principals mentioned that the individual interest must be the priority when school plan the support. In the research

differentiation mostly proposed when students face challenges to learn in the mainstream classrooms. Indeed, differentiation and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) are often used in the mainstreaming classrooms too. Juha said, ''The voice is against inclusion, usually when students with SEN are in the big classes''. According to him, the idea of opposing the inclusive classroom emerged when SEN is included in the big classes and teachers are unable to deliver their lessons as they planned for all the pupils in the mainstream classrooms. Hence, he usually proposed a differentiation approach such as contents, timetable etc. Perhaps, this kind of decision is made after a long time of assessments. In general, even though there might be some challenges, the school seems always optimist and looking for different opportunities and possibilities to ensure that inclusion truly happens in the schools. Staff shows solidarity and commitment to address the needs of every individual.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses and concludes the key research findings in connection with the framework of index of inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), and with the previous research findings. Since, I have used conventional content analysis approach (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), the inductive content analysis approach (Elo & Kynäs, 2007) was applied in the data analysis. The research findings are compared with earlier research on inclusive education. In addition, it will be used to answer the following research questions: 1) What is the role of principals in leading inclusive education? 2) How do principals lead school cultures, policies, and practices to support inclusive education. The aims are to examine the principal's role in leading inclusive education, and to know how principals are leading the three dimensions of the index of inclusion: cultures, policies, and practices to support inclusive education. At the end, I highlight some limitations of this study as well as outline potential areas for future research.

5.1 Evaluating the results against the Index of inclusion

The findings indicated that all schools have strong school communities working in collaboration. The philosophy of inclusion and inclusive values such as welcoming all students, respecting, and valuing diversity in learning environments were manifested boldly. This laid the foundation for the inclusive school cultures and the principals could focus on leading the communities to maintain these cultures. In this study, from the dimension of creating inclusive cultures, the main subcategories that emerged from interviews and documents were: inclusive philosophy, school communities, respect and acceptance of diversity, collaboration, cooperation and partnership, communication and partnership between school and home. As mentioned in chapter 2, the first dimension of Index of inclusion-*creating inclusive cultures* has two subsections: 1) *Building community,* and 2) *Es-*

tablishing inclusive values (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Therefore, the principals continuously build school communities and maintain already well-established inclusive cultures.

In this study, from the dimension of inclusive school policies, the most emerged subcategories from interviews and documents were the nearest school policy, accessibility, equality and non-discrimination, anti-bullying programme, the three tiers support reform. My research findings are in line with the Booth and Ainscow's (2002) indicators. The second dimension of Index of inclusion- *producing inclusive policies* have two subsections: 1) *developing school for all*, and 2) *organizing support for all* (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). The document consists of fifteen indicators. Some of the indicators include admitting all students to the local school, school physical accessibility, settlements of new students, having groups valued all students, responding to student's diversity, having inclusion policy, less bullying trends, removing barriers to participation and learning.

In this study, from the dimension of inclusive school practices, the most subcategories emerged where students learning needs assessment, comply with laws and regulations, students' active participation, and support provision procedures. The research findings show that all those indicators were discussed in one or other ways in Finnish comprehensive school contexts. The third dimension of index of inclusion- *evolving inclusive practice* has also two subsections: 1) *orchestrating learning,* and 2) *mobilizing resources* (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). The original document has sixteen indicators. All indicators related to assessment, learning arrangements, how to allocate and utilize the resource to facilitate learning processes.

In addition, some aspects regarding policies and cultures are really interwoven. For example, the Finnish special education support system (three tiers) elaborated by school principals from both policies and practice perspectives.

5.2   Principal as school administer, manager and pedagogical leader

My research findings indicate that the Finnish comprehensive school principals have three major roles in leading inclusive education: administrative roles, management roles, and leadership roles, namely pedagogical leaders. A previous study examined the role of Finnish school principal's shows the following: administrative personnel and other administrative issues, managing finance, pedagogical aspects and instructional (teaching) tasks (OECD, 2013).

In addition, Mäkelä (2007, p. 220) divided the Finnish principal's tasks into four major areas: *1) administrative- economic management, 2) network management, 3) staff leadership, and 4) instructional leadership*. Using the empirical evidence, Mäkelä (2007) divided the proportion of principal's tasks in percent based on the working load or working hour (see Figure 5). According to Mäkelä's study, the administrative- economical management covers 33%, the network management covers 31% of the total workload, and the staff leadership covers 22% of the workload, and the instructional leadership covers 14%.
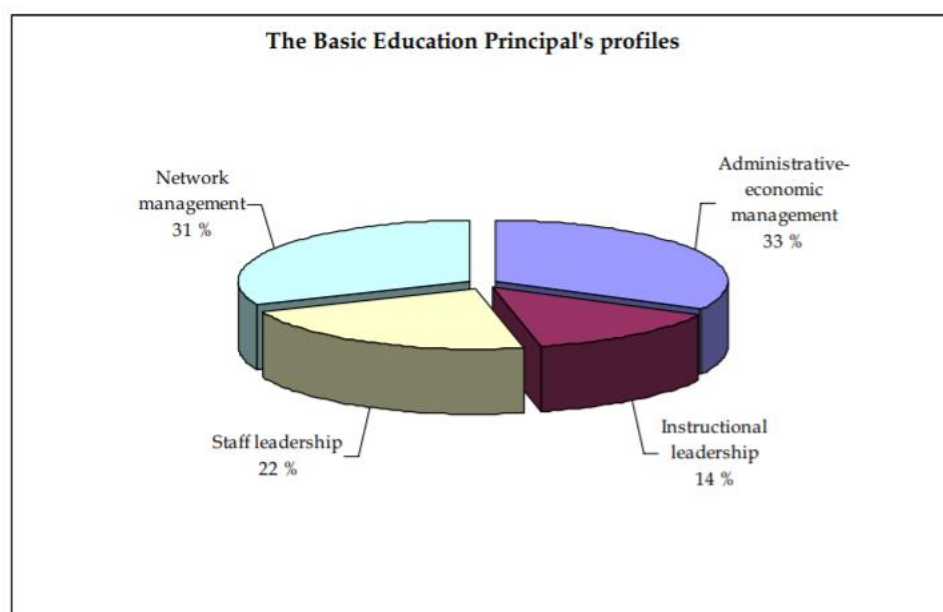

FIGURE 5. The basic education principal's profiles by (Mäkelä, 2007, p. 220)

Mäkelä (2007) studied the principal tasks in Finland comprehensive education school. In this study, she identified the principal's roles, tasks, and expectations in general as well as the time proportion of principal take to lead issues related to special educational needs. More specifically, Mäkelä (2007) attempted to split the expected tasks of principals in leading issues concerning special education needs (inclusion). Mäkelä (2007, p. 220), noted some of the principal's tasks as follow:

> The special students' need for special education has increased considerably, adding to the networking supporting the student, communication with family advising centres, school nurses, foster homes, hospitals, other schools, municipal authorities, and the like have added to the principal's relations duties. The economic responsibilities of principals have increased, and we live in a network society… I have named (the role) network management.

Mäkelä's study reveals that leading inclusive education is the second tasks of principals which almost cover one-third (31%) of principal's working hours. In the above chart (Figure 5), network management shows the time proportion allocated to special (inclusive) education.

Furthermore, the research findings indicate that school's leadership depends on the structure of the teams. Thus, practically principals are leading those teams. Nkengbeza (2014) states that the school leadership includes principals, vice principals, and other teams or groups who run the school (daily activities). Moreover, principals are on the top of the school leadership structure (e.g. Hargreaves & Halasz, 2007; Nkengbeza, 2014); however, the leading approach is non-hierarchical Hargreaves & Halasz, 2007), and principal share responsibilities and lead or support the teams. Indeed, the Finnish schools' staff are structured in teams and enacted in the principle of mutual respect and cooperation (Hargreaves & Halasz, 2007). In conclusion, principals lead inclusive education through structured teams that distribute leadership.

5.3   Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities (PLC) have different definitions and could be manifested in different forms such as 'professional communities, professional

learning communities, communities of practice' (Hargreaves & Halasz, 2007), and professional development. Professional learning communities (PLC) is the constructive learning approach where the colleagues learn and work together (Hord, 2018). Researchers (e.g., Dufour, 2004; Hargreaves & Halasz, 2007; Hord 2018) agree that the PLC is very essential for principals to lead their organization effectively. ''A key task of leadership is to create strong and positive cultures that motivate and mobilize people to achieve the organization's purpose'' (Hargreaves & Halasz, 2007, p. 16). My research participants agreed to the importance of PLC to lead inclusive education. PLC helps staff who work towards the same goals in collaboration to improve the students' learning outcomes. Staff who are actively engaged in ongoing learning to improve their profession and working in collaboration to achieve their school mission would be considered as learning communities.

In my study, principals mentioned that the PLC implemented both formally and informally in their schools. In school X and Y, a professional education plan is one of the core area of school plan. Teachers participated at least twice a year to discuss inclusion in the school, take some courses from universities or training providers. In addition, a principal of school Y mentioned that continuous professional development programs are common. The previous research confirmed the fact that the PLC is well embedded in the culture in Finnish education system. For instance, Hargreaves and Halasz (2007) discuss the Finnish schools' PLC as the following: first, the Finnish schools have a common clear purpose of creating social justice. Second, the school communities have a strong commitment to genuine interest for learning. Third, the culture of trust, cooperation and sharing responsibility well founded. According to the data published in 2018 by Finnish National Agency, 80 percent of Finnish comprehensive schools' teachers were participated in the continuing professional development (CPD) in 2017. The proportion of teachers who participated in the programme as a mentor and has been mentored were insignificant and it was 1.7 % and 4.7 % respectively. To sum up, about 6 % of the teachers have mentored the other (Paronen & Lappi, 2018).

In conclusion, principals have two responsibilities in professional learning communities: involved as a school community and facilitating the professional development as a leader.

5.4 Provision of support system

The findings of this research indicates that the special education support system has a significant impact for the implementation of inclusive education. Thuneberg et al., (2013) state that universal or primary support is given for all students in the mainstream classrooms to promote the good quality of basic education. Similarly, other studies show some of its benefits as follows: it improves the quality of education (Pulkkinen & Jahnukainen, 2016), ensures inclusive education (Karhu et al, 2018), flexible model of support provision, improved the pedagogical assessment procedures (Thuneberg et al., 2013), early intervention (Pulkkinen & Jahnukainen, 2016; Thuneberg et al., 2013).

All my research participants emphasized on the provision of support of the system to ensure inclusive education. Recently, many findings indicated that the number of SEN students who are learning in the mainstream classroom settings show increasing trends (Pulkkinen & Jahnukainen, 2016). A recent study by Mihajlovi (2020) shows that 91 percent of students with SEN attend the mainstream schools either in mainstream classrooms or in special groups. However, at the same time, there are some controversial ideas about the increasing number of segregated or special teaching groups in mainstream schools. The number of students attending the special group or small classes increases since three tiers introduced (Mihajlovi, 2020; Sundquist et al., 2019). Teaching SEN students in small groups does not promote full inclusion, ''special education in small groups is the ideology of integration'' (Laakkala et al., 2016, p. 53).

My research findings show that the ways of arranging the special education support were different among the schools. In a school, students are divided into different groups including special teaching groups or small classes (e.g., school Y). Whereas in school X, small group teaching is the last resolve to address the

individual needs. In school Z, there is no special education class at all. A previous research also concurs with these findings, for example, the most recent case study in three Finnish comprehensive schools, by Mihajlovi (2020) shows that the provision of special education in all schools was different. In two schools, students with SEN placed partially in the mainstream classrooms and supported by special education teachers. Adding to that, some students attend lessons in the 'semi-segregated' learning environments. While, in the third school, students with SEN mainly need to attend the 'resource room'. Most often, students are learning in segregated classes in the mainstream school. Thus, special education teachers are responsible for teaching and supporting students with SEN in small classes or in special groups.

FIGURE 6. An overview of the three tiers model of support
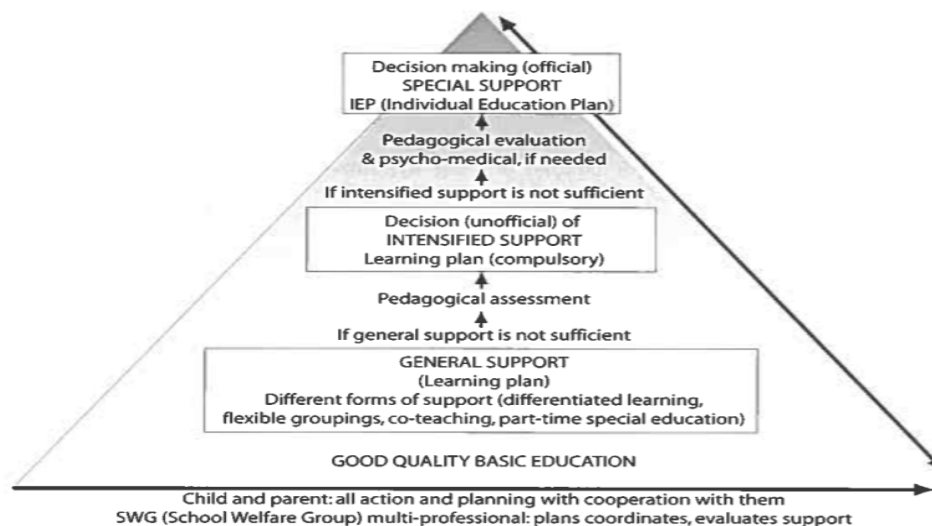
Source: Thuneberg et al., (2013, p. 69)

At tier 1, the general/universal support does not necessarily require an official need assessment procedure. At this level, the direct involvement of school principal is not necessarily required. As seen from (Figure 6), the support could be provided in the following ways: differentiation of instruction, remedial teaching, part time special education (Pulkkinen & Jahnukainen, 2016; Thuneberg et al.,2013). At tier 2, the intensified support often requires the pedagogical assessments and sometimes pedagogical decisions. At this level, most likely the school

principals work with special education teams and as a school leader dealing with communications and planning the budget and resources. In this situation, a multidisciplinary team or students welfare group is responsible to make decisions based on the needs of the students and available resources. The lesson and support follow the learning plan (Pulkkinen & Jahnukainen, 2016; Thuneberg et al.,2013). Finally, at tier 3, the special support modality might include general, intensified support as well as special education lessons (Pulkkinen & Jahnukainen, 2016; Thuneberg et al., 2013). The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) carefully prepared, then documented into the students' files. IEP includes the objectives, contents, teaching methods, learning environments, and forms of support given in more details. The support provision at this level must require the pedagogical assessments and pedagogical statements to make final decisions. Therefore, the involvement of the principal is mandatory and intensive as compared to tier 1 and 2.

5.5   Ethical Aspects

In Finland, the research that involves human participants is guided by the general ethical guidelines (principles) issued by Finnish National Board of Research Integrity (TENK, 2019). According to this guideline, the interaction between the researchers and the participants or research subject is the core ethical value. Due to this, before contacting the principals, the research permission application was sent to the municipalities. After the research permission was approved, the invitation letters were sent to principals. The letter elaborates that the participation in research is voluntary, the participants have the right to withdraw or discontinue consent at any time during the research process. The consent form was attached to the email and the participants had enough time to decide whether to participate or not.

Regarding the confidentiality of the personal information, the data collected during the research and the research results are processed confidentially in com-

pliance with the data protection legislation of University of Jyväskylä. The recorded interviews and transcribed documents saved in a secure folder. The school names, locations and the name of participants will not be revealed. At the final, research report phases the pseudonyms name will be used in the research report. Therefore, the participation will remain confidential.

5.6   Trustworthiness of the study

The quality of qualitative research interrelated with the ethical issues includes the principles of good practices and 'trustworthiness' in the data collection and interpretation process (Brantilinger et al., 2005; Fossey et al., 2002). It depends on the justifications for choosing the specific approach over the others (Fossey et al., 2002). In addition, many researchers assert that, in qualitative research, the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), are suitable to evaluate the trustworthiness of the study. These are *credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability* (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 723; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017, p. 324). So, I tried to see my research process and results through these lenses.

Credibility is one of the essential criteria to assess trustworthiness and the quality of qualitative research. Credibility of the study can be established using different techniques such as careful data collection techniques (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017), *transparent process for coding* (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017, p. 324); prolonged engagement, persistent observation... Fossey et al, 2002; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017); triangulation (Brantilinger et al., 2005; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017). Moreover, Brantilinger et al. (2005) discuss the common ways to measure credibility in qualitative research is triangulation or using multiple evidence and different data sources, for instance, interviews and documents. In this research, data triangulation is preferred, so, both interviews and two selected school documents have been used.

Transferability refers to the degree of applicability of the research findings into another context (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017). So, the finding of this study might not be applicable to a wider context than Finland, and I would not intend

to claim its generalizability, because the interpretation was linked to specific social context (Tracy, 2013). In this study, only the cultures, policies, and practices of specific school settings in three Finnish municipalities were analysed. Dependability refers to the degree of the consistency of the research process such as the methods, raw data, interpretations, and results. From this perspective, I would say, the research results have dependability. Conformability means the degree of the research results confirmed by the others. It refers to what extent the data features or the research results can be confirmed by the other examiners, or researchers (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2017). A triangulation, and various research findings has been used, so possible to claim the comfortability of the study.

5.7   Limitations of the study

There are some possible limitations in this study. First, as a beginner, applying theoretical knowledge into practice is challenging. Particularly, working on the research analysis and coding process are not always easy even for experienced researcher too; ''creating categories is both theoretical and empirical challenges '' (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007, p. 112). Second, English language is not the first language neither for me nor for my research participants. So, this might have some impacts on the flow of information. Thirdly, the sample size is small to generalize the results to other contexts.

5.8   Conclusion and recommendations

By doing this study, the researcher has gained a better understanding about the role of principals in leading inclusive education and how the principals lead school cultures, policies, and practices to support inclusive education. The research results show that principals have three major roles: administrative, management role, and leadership role, especially pedagogical leadership. In addition, leading school cultures, policies and practices can support the school principals in achieving a vision of inclusive education. While the sample size of this

study limits the generability of this research, the results were still able to high-light important issues within inclusive education leadership and indicate possible areas for future research. Moreover, such research could be conducted using a larger sample that represents more regions and municipalities.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine the role of all school communities using the framework of Index of inclusion in the future. This would help the policy makers and educators to identify the strengths and limitations in all dimensions. Overall, this kind of study provided empirical evidence on the implementation of inclusive education that may assist current and aspiring educators, researchers, and policy makers.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX I

indicators

DIMENSION A Creating inclusive *cultures*

A.1 | Building community

INDICATOR A.1.1 | Everyone is made to feel welcome.

A.1.2 | Students help each other.

A.1.3 | Staff collaborate with each other.

A.1.4 | Staff and students treat one another with respect.

A.1.5 | There is a partnership between staff and parents/carers.

A.1.6 | Staff and governors work well together.

A.1.7 | All local communities are involved in the school.

A.2 | Establishing inclusive values

INDICATOR A.2.1 | There are high expectations for all students.

A.2.2 | Staff, governors, students and parents/carers share a philosophy of inclusion.

A.2.3 | Students are equally valued.

A.2.4 | Staff and students treat one another as human beings as well as occupants of a 'role'.

A.2.5 | Staff seek to remove barriers to learning and participation in all aspects of the school.

A.2.6 | The school strives to minimise all forms of discrimination.

index for inclusion developing learning and participation in schools

APPENDIX II

indicators

DIMENSION B Producing inclusive *policies*

B.1 | Developing the school for all

INDICATOR **B.1.1** | Staff appointments and promotions are fair.

B.1.2 | All new staff are helped to settle into the school.

B.1.3 | The school seeks to admit all students from its locality.

B.1.4 | The school makes its buildings physically accessible to all people.

B.1.5 | All new students are helped to settle into the school.

B.1.6 | The school arranges teaching groups so that all students are valued.

B.2 | Organising support for diversity

INDICATOR **B.2.1** | All forms of support are co-ordinated.

B.2.2 | Staff development activities help staff to respond to student diversity.

B.2.3 | 'Special educational needs' policies are inclusion policies.

B.2.4 | The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice* is used to reduce the barriers to learning and participation of all students.

B.2.5 | Support for those learning English as an additional language is co-ordinated with learning support.

B.2.6 | Pastoral and behaviour support policies are linked to curriculum development and learning support policies.

B.2.7 | Pressures for disciplinary exclusion are decreased.

B.2.8 | Barriers to attendance are reduced.

B.2.9 | Bullying is minimised.

* DfES (2001)

APPENDIX III

indicators

C.1 | Orchestrating learning

INDICATOR **C.1.1 |** Teaching is planned with the learning of all students in mind.

C.1.2 | Lessons encourage the participation of all students.

C.1.3 | Lessons develop an understanding of difference.

C.1.4 | Students are actively involved in their own learning.

C.1.5 | Students learn collaboratively.

C.1.6 | Assessment contributes to the achievements of all students.

C.1.7 | Classroom discipline is based on mutual respect.

C.1.8 | Teachers plan, teach and review in partnership.

C.1.9 | Teaching assistants support the learning and participation of all students.

C.1.10 | Homework contributes to the learning of all.

C.1.11 | All students take part in activities outside the classroom.

C.2 | Mobilising resources

INDICATOR **C.2.1 |** Student difference is used as a resource for teaching and learning.

C.2.2 | Staff expertise is fully utilised.

C.2.3 | Staff develop resources to support learning and participation.

C.2.4 | Community resources are known and drawn upon.

C.2.5 | School resources are distributed fairly so that they support inclusion.

APPENDIX IV

questionnaire 1
indicators

Please tick the group(s) below indicating your involvement with the school:

☐ Teacher ☐ Teaching assistant ☐ Other member of staff

☐ Student ☐ Parent/carer ☐ Governor ☐ Other (specify)

Please put a tick in the box that indicates your opinion

	definitely agree	agree to some extent	disagree	need more information
DIMENSION A Creating inclusive *cultures*				
A.1.1 Everyone is made to feel welcome.				
A.1.2 Students help each other.				
A.1.3 Staff collaborate with each other.				
A.1.4 Staff and students treat one another with respect.				
A.1.5 There is a partnership between staff and parents/carers.				
A.1.6 Staff and governors work well together.				
A.1.7 All local communities are involved in the school.				
A.2.1 There are high expectations for all students.				
A.2.2 Staff, governors, students and parents/carers share a philosophy of inclusion.				
A.2.3 Students are equally valued.				
A.2.4 Staff and students treat one another as human beings as well as occupants of a 'role'.				
A.2.5 Staff seek to remove barriers to learning and participation in all aspects of the school.				
A.2.6 The school strives to minimise all forms of discrimination.				
DIMENSION B Producing inclusive *policies*				
B.1.1 Staff appointments and promotions are fair.				
B.1.2 All new staff are helped to settle into the school.				
B.1.3 The school seeks to admit all students from its locality.				
B.1.4 The school makes its buildings physically accessible to all people.				
B.1.5 All new students are helped to settle into the school.				
B.1.6 The school arranges teaching groups so that all students are valued.				
B.2.1 All forms of support are co-ordinated.				
B.2.2 Staff development activities help staff to respond to student diversity.				

continues

questionnaire 1

	definitely agree	agree to some extent	disagree	need more information
B.2.3 'Special educational needs' policies are inclusion policies.				
B.2.4 The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice is used to reduce the barriers to learning and participation of all students.				
B.2.5 Support for those learning English as an additional language is co-ordinated with learning support.				
B.2.6 Pastoral and behaviour support policies are linked to curriculum development and learning support policies.				
B.2.7 Pressures for disciplinary exclusion are decreased.				
B.2.8 Barriers to attendance are reduced.				
B.2.9 Bullying is minimised.				
DIMENSION C Evolving inclusive *practices*				
C.1.1 Teaching is planned with the learning of all students in mind.				
C.1.2 Lessons encourage the participation of all students.				
C.1.3 Lessons develop an understanding of difference.				
C.1.4 Students are actively involved in their own learning.				
C.1.5 Students learn collaboratively.				
C.1.6 Assessment contributes to the achievements of all students.				
C.1.7 Classroom discipline is based on mutual respect.				
C.1.8 Teachers plan, teach and review in partnership.				
C.1.9 Teaching assistants support the learning and participation of all students.				
C.1.10 Homework contributes to the learning of all.				
C.1.11 All students take part in activities outside the classroom.				
C.2.1 Student difference is used as a resource for teaching and learning.				
C.2.2 Staff expertise is fully utilised.				
C.2.3 Staff develop resources to support learning and participation.				
C.2.4 Community resources are known and drawn upon.				
C.2.5 School resources are distributed fairly so that they support inclusion.				

Priorities for development

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

APPENDIX V - Request to participate in a study

REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY

Introduction

My name is **Samson Dibessa**. I am an International Master's Degree programme student at University of Jyväskylä. At the moment, I am going to collect data for my research which aims to examine the school principals role in inclusive education practices and identify the perceptions of teachers about the role of school leadership to promote inclusive education.

Request to participate in a study.

You are requested to participate in a study aiming to investigate the role of principals in inclusive education practice. The title of the research is '' The Role of Finnish School Principals' in Inclusive Education Practice''.

The purpose of the study is to understand how the school principals define their role in the implementation of inclusive education. The study also helps to identify the barriers that principal encounters regarding school culture, policies, and practices. You are requested to participate in the study because the schools from the Municipality of _____ one of the target group for this research.

This notification describes the study and participation in it. The consent form is attached here.

Voluntariness

Participating in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate in this study or cancel your participation at any time.

1

Confidentiality

The school name, location and the name of participants will not be revealed. The participants name will be coded in a way that matches the collected data. The recorded interviews and transcribed documents are saved in a secure folder. At the final research report phase the pseudonyms name will be used in the research report. So, the participation will remain confidential.

How to proceed with the interview process?

If you are interested in participating in the study, you are asked to take part in **one** interview online. For the online interview **Zoom** application mainly used, however if you have another preference, we can arrange different meeting apps such as Google meet, Skype, Zoom, Teams etc.
The interview time will be arranged on the most convenient time for you. The interview will be lasting for about an hour (1 hour). The interview will be recorded using online meeting apps to ensure the accuracy of your response.
Examples, of questions may include,
 1. How does the school principal understand inclusive education and working toward its implementation?
 2. What are the barriers/challenges to learning and participation at your school?
 3. How do you describe the **school cultures, policies, and practice** from the INCLUSION perspective?
You will be allowed to skip to answer the questions that you are uncomfortable to react to or hesitate to give your opinions on certain issues or points.

Research results

The final report of the study will be published online on the university websites and available for the academic communities. Whereas it will not be possible to identify any participant from the research report.

Contact details for obtaining additional information

2

APPENDIX VI

CONSENT FORM

I have been asked to take part in a study "The Role of Finnish School Principals in Inclusive Education Practice".

1. I have read the research notification (invitation) 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 verbally, and I have received sufficient responses to all my questions about the study. I have had enough time to consider my participation in the study.

☐ Yes

2. 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.

☐ Yes

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

☐ Yes

4. I understand that my participation will be recorded and will be analyzed. Anonymized quotes may be used from the transcribed interview in the research. However, it will not be possible to identify me from the information. By signing this consent form, I accept that my data will be used in the study described in the research notification.

☐ Yes

5. I understand that the result from this study will be published online at the University of Jyvaskyla. However, it will not be possible to identify any participant from the research report.

☐ Yes

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.

_____   _____   _____
Name in print /participant   *Date*   *Signature*

Consent received

_____   _____   _____
Name of the recipient   *Date*   *Signature of the recipient*

APPENDIX VII - Interview Questions

Interview questions - for Principals

1. Could you tell us (me) about your education, working experiences, and school profile?

2. What is your role as a school principal in overall school leadership?

3. How do you define/explain/ describe inclusive education? (eg. Please could you tell me (us) your school's vision for inclusive education?) & How do you communicate those visions with stakeholders?

4. As school principal, what is your role in leading inclusive education?

5. How do you describe the school culture from the inclusion point of view?

- What are the values that you appreciate in this school? (e.g. respect, value all, less discrimination & bullying).

6. How do the school communities treat each other and work towards inclusive education? (e.g. students' relationship, staff collaboration, partnership between school and parents, & local communities' participation, is there trends of bullying?

7. What are the policies you have to make school for all? (eg. criteria to admit students, support system, assessment procedure....)

8. What kinds of school practices do you follow to address the students' diverse needs? (e.g SEN, gifted, immigrants background, ethnic minorities, etc. Please could you tell me good examples)

9. What is your responsibility in the process of offering support for students with special educational needs (SEN)?

10. So far, we discussed three dimensions of **index for inclusion** such as Cultures, Policies and Practices. From your experience, how do you lead the school cultures, policies, and practices to ensure inclusion?

11. What are the factors that assist/support your leadership to achieve the vision of inclusion? How do you evaluate the effectiveness inclusive education (eg. Indicators, dimensions)

12. How do you as a leader encourage teachers to take inclusion in account? (for example, in teachers professional Development, Professional learning communities (PLC), please could you share your experiences)

§ We are now at the end of the interview. Would you like to add or speak about something that we have not touched yet?