

**A case study on the relationship of education policy and
practice in regard to migration**

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ABSTRACT

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Literature suggests that students with migrant backgrounds are exposed to vulnerable positions in education. Finland is a country with a rising migrant rate. Thus, this study focuses on exploring the relationship between education policies and grassroot level practices regarding migrant students on a school at a municipal setting in Central Finland.

This case study includes two sets of data collection. The first data set consisted of policy documents identifying the provisions for migrant students in the Finnish education system. These were analysed with systematic key word search and content analysis. The second data set consisted of 360-degree interviews from people in various positions on the local and school level. The interviews were analysed with content analysis to gather information from the grassroot level about the practices for the inclusion of migrant students and the challenges faced in the process. Finally, the findings of these two sets of data were combined to identify gaps between policy and practice and present development proposals for handling migration in the Finnish education system.

This research found that policy level education in Finland is not defining enough, if at all, education for migrants, while spotted that policy level initiatives and omissions are maintaining the opportunity gap against migrant pupils and support problematic phenomena, such as racism on school grounds. On the grassroot level education, interviews displayed a variety of initiatives towards inclusion and equal confrontation of migrant students highlighting though the diverse experiences students can have, as initiatives are solely depending on educators ideologies and not on clear policy guidelines.

Keywords: migration, equality, education policy, practical implementation

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and Problem of Study

One of the challenges and goals of the 21st century and more specifically of the Agenda 2030 of the United Nations is to offer inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UNESCO, 2024). Nevertheless, in many parts of the world, nations struggle to correspond to this goal as internal and external factors seem to stand in the way. Culturally diverse societies formed by the ever-existing phenomenon of migration (Bowskill et al., 2007) constitute the focal factor of this study. Finland is a country with a proportionally considerable immigrant rate, only in 2020, the 8% of the population consisted of people who have arrived from foreign countries (Helakorpi et al., 2023). One of the country's aims is to reach population growth in the next few years and support the labour market of Finland (Finnish Government, 2019). According to Statistics Finland (2023, May 24) nearly 50,000 immigrants have been residing in Finland in 2022, a fact that put pressure on the authorities to update the education policies in order to be more inclusive and reach equality not only among the native people, but among the whole population (Finnish Government, 2019).

Education is considered a human right universally, according to the 26th article of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Assembly, 1948) and the 28th article of the Convention on Rights of Children (Unicef, 1989). Moreover, education is perceived as a global public good that should be characterized by equality and non-excludability (Menashy, 2009), while it can be used as a tool to achieve social integration of minority groups. In this regard, Finland's latest National Core Curriculum of Basic Education (2014) indicates that basic education intends to offer equal and quality education for all, as well as create favourable conditions for students' growth, development and learning. However, in practice things seem to be more complicated and difficult to realize.

Statistics conclude that almost 7% of students in Finland discontinued their studies leading to a qualification or a degree in 2020-2021 (Statistics Finland, 2023,

March 20). Furthermore, PISA results in 2018 demonstrate an increasing learning gap between higher and lower socio-economic status (SES) pupils, as well as between native and migrant pupils (Ennser-Kananen et al., 2023). Comparing with data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, it was found that Finland has the largest gap between migrant, or migrant background, students and non-migrant students in literacy. Migrant students were almost three years behind other pupils in literacy and pupils with a migrant background were about two years behind (Ennser-Kananen et al., 2023).

“This gap is described as attribute of an ineffective and systematically problematic support system rather than a gap in pupils’ abilities” (Ennser-Kananen et al., 2023, p. 360). The gap on the learning performance and opportunities of pupils between different school environments in Finland questions the educational equality promised through the Finnish education policies. “The egalitarian and universal ‘one size fits all’ approach of the education system in Finland seems to be increasingly unable to overcome the growing differences” and challenges of the modern society (Ramos Lobato & Bernelius, 2023, p. 237).

Following a survey initiated by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2018; FRA, 2023) regarding immigrants’ experiences of discrimination, Finland is perceived to be one of the most racist countries in the European Union (Yle, 2018; Yle, 2023; Askew, 2023; Teivainen, 2023; Mikander, 2023) and the Finnish Non-Discrimination Ombudsman verified this fact with a survey of identical results (Mikander, 2023). The FRA survey (2018) further revealed that Finland holds the highest record of racist harassment and racial discrimination on the school grounds, as reported by parents (Mikander, 2023). Still the report by the Finnish Non-Discrimination Ombudsman (2020) presents that black people in particular experience harassment, threats and physical violence more in Finland than in any other EU country, while the majority of the respondents (2/3) have such experience in education environments (Mikander, 2023). “Not only do migrant students and students

with migrant background perform more poorly, but they are also bullied more in school” (Helakorpi et al., 2023, p. 319).

The goal of this research is to support the development of the provided education services of a selected municipality of Central Finland by sharing information collected by empirically driven data on the relationship of theory and practice in education and in regard to migrant students. Hopefully, this research can offer insights of the grassroots level in primary education and a direction for local and school initiatives (policies and practices) development.

1.2 Research Purpose and Research Questions

Researchers conclude that there is an urgency for further research that seeks to understand the factors that expose students with migrant backgrounds to vulnerable positions in the comprehensive education (Helakorpi et al., 2023), as well as to examine the outcomes and effectiveness of inclusive policies and practices of the Finnish education system (Jahnukainen et al., 2023). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to review how migration is positioned within the education legislation, to examine the practices for inclusion of migrant students on the grassroots level in primary education, and to analyse the relationship between education policies and practices for migrant students’ equal opportunities. In addition, the study attempts to identify challenges and to seek for alternative solutions. The study focuses on a primary school in municipal setting in Central Finland acquiring data from both the school with a high migrant rate of student body and the municipality.

There were three research questions to be addressed in this context:

1. What do education policies state about migrant students?
2. What happens in practice in grassroots-level primary education in regard to migrant students?
3. What is the relationship between education policy and practice?

The phenomenon of migration is explored in the education context through different interrelated concepts, such as diversity, inclusion, equality, and equity, and through the lens of a wide range of actors in grassroot-level education targeting a holistic review of the phenomenon. In the first phase, a systematic and content analysis of national, local and school policy documents targets to identify the provisions of the Finnish education system in regard to migrant students safeguarding equal access to quality education. In second phase, a content analysis of multiprofessional interviews sheds light on the practices and challenges recorded on the grassroot level opening further a dialogue with policy provisions and omissions that appoint gaps and development proposals to the Finnish education system.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This section illustrates the background of the research positioning the phenomenon of migration in the scope of education both examining general literature findings and zooming in the case of Finland. Furthermore, the key concepts for the understanding of the research framework are defined, including education policy and its practical implementation, as well as definitions around migration, focusing on the one that is used throughout this research. Finally, it is considered crucial to examine the key terms of equality, equity, and inclusion through the scope of conceptualisation and manifestation of migration in an education setting in order to better understand the orientation and target of this study.

2.1 Migration and Education

The World Migration Report of 2022 observes that the world is developing to be more mobile and diverse, as rising percentages of populations are moving, migrating and seeking better work and life conditions abroad (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). Nevertheless, migration is still reflected in policies and society norms as a temporary and circular situation that often receives minimum attention and degraded status (Hajisoteriou & Neophytou, 2022). The European Policy Network mentions in the school leadership report (EPNoSL, 2015, p. 16) that one of the ground values in education systems in Europe is “the ideals of fairness and inclusion for all, irrespective of their race, nationality, gender, economic, social or cultural background, sexual orientation or health condition”.

Literature recognises that migrant students present to school a backpack of additional challenges compared to those of native students’, as shown in the significant performance gap presented by OECD (Hajisoteriou & Neophytou, 2022). This gap is explained by factors related to xenophobic attitudes, the structure, and traits of the education system, resource inequality, language barrier and the family socio-economic status (Hajisoteriou & Neophytou, 2022).

Moreover, it is highly likely that migrant students will face economic, cultural, and social discrimination within and outside the school premises (Lopez, 2004). The inequalities in the education system are not only created, maintained and increased by the policy makers and societal factors, but also by schools and school staff (EPNoSL, 2015).

Since migrant population is still considered “an invisible minority” that needs “vigilant and concerted commitment”, it is suggested that educators should ensure equal opportunities for all the pupils adopting “culturally responsive or congruent teaching methods” instead of assimilationist approaches (Salinas & Franquiz, 2004, pp. xi, xiii). Research suggests that educational institutions can play a crucial role in the development and lives of migrant children through policies and practices that account for quality education targeted to marginalized and disadvantaged groups (Lopez, 2004).

Looking towards remedial practices and stakeholders’ initiatives, research led by OECD shows that implementation of highly selective migration policies and the efficacy of nurturing pupils’ abilities, irrespectively to their cultural backgrounds, can display a positive impact on migrant students’ academic performance (Hajisoteriou & Neophytou, 2022). Equity-driven policies, upgrade of teachers’ professional development and education, employment of internal and external quality evaluation systems in order to identify and monitor student progress and hindrances, as well as communication between research findings, policymaking and practice level of education are some of the recommendations OECD is encouraging (Hajisoteriou & Neophytou, 2022).

Moreover, mechanisms should include “diversified and advanced funding strategies” to schools with high percentage of disadvantaged pupils (Hajisoteriou & Neophytou, 2022, p. 140). National, regional, and local policies should define explicit guidelines and objectives for migrant education, and vice versa, performance data of migrant students and the effectiveness of those policies should define the further development of the policies (Hajisoteriou & Neophytou, 2022).

On the classroom level, interculturally differentiated teaching, intensified host and home language teaching, adaptation and flexibility of curriculum and teaching methods, school leaders' and teachers' professional training on diversity issues and encouragement of a strong, accepting and welcoming school-family-community collaboration are recommendations for equitable and inclusive practices directed to school units and educators by OECD (Hajisoteriou & Neophytou, 2022).

In addition, research data display a growing disparity in the OECD countries "between an increasingly diverse student population and a largely homogenous teacher workforce" (Nusche, 2009, p.24). Therefore, Nusche (2009) argues that increasing the presence of teachers with migrant or ethnic minority backgrounds in classrooms and school grounds will enhance the representation of minority populations which can have positive impact on students' self-confidence, motivation and perceptions that ultimately is shown to lead to improved education outcomes.

Furthermore, embracing and celebrating migrant students' mother language and cultures is an integral part of intercultural education that enhances inclusion as pupils feel that their cultures are equally valued with the host one and not ignored on the altar of assimilation that presents as integration (Brind et al., 2008).

The importance of parent involvement and active participation in school is advocated in numerous literature sources presenting benefits for both sides, the school community, and the migrant families. Lopez (2004) determines parents' participation as a transformational tool of school reform and school accountability highlighting benefits to students' self-esteem, academic performance and attitudes, as well as to parent-child, parent-teachers and within school community relationships. Raising the voice and needs of migrant pupils in school community by encouraging parents' involvement in decision-making opportunities leads to more collaborative and less hierarchical schools (Moles, 1993).

However, migrant parents are involved less in the school affairs than the native-born parents, mainly due to language barrier and alienation feelings of an unwelcome school environment and community (Turney & Kao, 2009). Marginalised parents not only find it challenging to attend school meetings, events, and activities, but also to support their children at home both in form of homework supervision and discussing about the school experience (Nusche, 2009).

Schools should develop an egalitarian and caring culture where celebrated diversity and shared decision-making are daily practices (Lopez, 2004). Acknowledging the multiple factors of challenges that migrant families face in the host country and seeking remedial solutions would be the initial step for parents' involvement and therefore pupils' (Lopez, 2004).

Effective parent involvement programmes presuppose that the school community is welcoming, open-minded and nonjudgmental, adopting a variety of practices that are not limited in school getting together events (Lopez, 2004). Home visiting programmes and parents' encouragement to be involved, as well as the effort to minimise parents' challenges in participation are the first steps forward (Lopez, 2004; Nusche, 2009). Moving from theory to practice, Driessen (2000), stresses the importance of national and regional structures to ensure the practical implementation of intercultural education in school level.

Research findings acknowledge that diversity in education requires additional resources and efforts, expertise in differentiation and intercultural awareness, as well as tailored-made policies and assessment structures in order to provide equal, equitable and inclusive education to everyone (Hajisoteriou & Neophytou, 2022). Therefore, the question of whether states are willing to sacrifice funds for such investment is reasonably risen, as the norm of standardisation in education through prescribed, broad curricula and exam-centred teaching seems to be the easy and cheap solution (Hajisoteriou & Neophytou, 2022). Furthermore, failure to take action or define targeted policies is considered as a form of public policy, eternalising and not confronting the problematic situation (EPNoSL, 2015).

2.2 The case of Finland in relation to migration and education

In Finland, education is free for everyone and available irrespectively of the public or private administration of the educational institutions and the socioeconomic background of the pupils (Sahlberg, 2011). In year 2019, there were around 300 municipalities in Finland that enjoy a fair level of autonomy due to the decentralized education system (Thrupp et al., 2023). The Finnish education system is considered highly egalitarian while built on values of equity and equality allowing pupils to correspond to their potential (Helakorpi et al., 2023). Nevertheless, national and international reports indicate that pupils with migrant background are imposed with vulnerable learner identities, as they are less likely to reach their educational potential despite demonstrating more positive attitudes towards schooling compared to non-migrant students (Helakorpi et al., 2023).

Taking a look into the historical development of Finland's education system and the state of equality encouraged by its policies, there can be a better understanding of the image of the education system now. During the 1970s, Finland adopted an education reform according to which most of the private schools were transferred to the ownership of the respective municipalities with the hope to safeguard equality and uniformity in education and to establish a two-fold model governance that authorised the blending of national and municipal decision-making. Following the same lines in the 1990s, the national welfare system was decentralised into local structures enabling local decision-makers to respond more effectively to resources and population changes (Kalalahti & Varjo, 2023).

The decentralised system allows agency to municipal and regional decision makers, as well as school leaders, in the implementation process adapting policies and funds to local priorities. Although the national policies are issued by the National Board of Education and the Ministry of Education, municipalities and school units enjoy abundant autonomy on designing and issuing their own curriculums, as well as conducting education and initiating decisions over enacted policies (Alava et al., 2023). This non-linear but horizontally interactive

education structure is based on negotiation, co-construction, and multiple level simultaneous function, founding their development on evaluation data (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

Since the 2000s, education policies issued on the municipal level have been increasingly separated from the national ones leading to locally separated school systems that differentiate aspects of curriculum and accessibility to services, threatening the equality of the system on the national level (Kalalahti & Varjo, 2023). Ennser-Kananen et al. (2023) note that municipalities have control over organising education, and thus, pupils' opportunities are depending on municipal politics and ideologies.

Finland paves towards an equitable, high-quality education with decreased differences in learning outcomes and equal opportunities for learning according to the education policy report of the Ministry of Education and Culture (2021, April 8). The programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin (Finnish Government, 2019) and the development programme "the Right to Learn" (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019) encompass a plan towards a more equal and equitable country that offers equal opportunities to everyone and focuses on reducing the gap of educational achievement and skills between vulnerable groups, including migrants, as well as strengthening the provided support for learning.

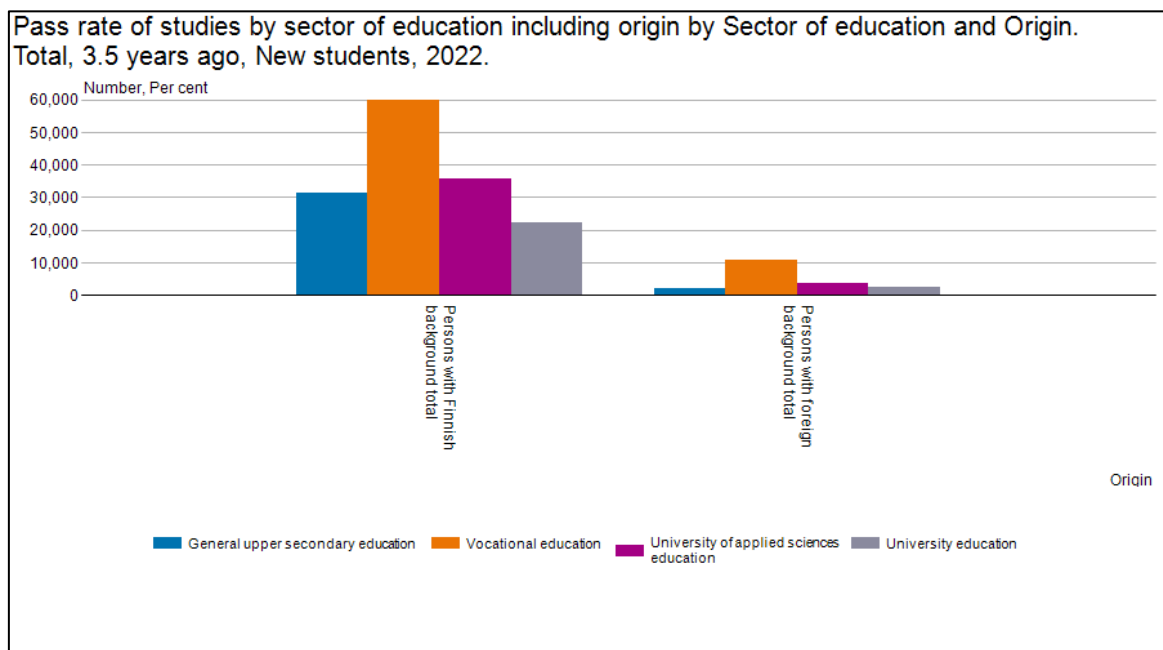
The programmes focus on narrowing the learning gaps by allocating funds for effectively inclusive practices, multi-professional cooperation, reinforcement of teachers and principals' knowledge and skills, as well as continuous professional development, equal assessment criteria, equal implementation of curricula and accessibility of learning support (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019), as well as resources for positive discrimination, flexible teaching, and tools to prevent, identify and fight any form of bullying (Finnish Government, 2019).

However, the 2022 PISA results (OECD, 2023) show that immigrant students in Finland tend to have a more disadvantaged socio-economic profile than the non-immigrant students. Performance differences in reading and

mathematics between immigrant and non-immigrant students was found to significantly favour non-immigrant students. Between 2012 and 2022, the gap in mathematics performance between the top and the bottom 25% of students in terms of socio-economic status widened in Finland, while the average gap across OECD countries remained stable (OECD, 2023). According to Statistics Finland (2024), there is a significant difference in the pass rates of studies in various sectors of education between students of Finnish and foreign backgrounds, greatly disfavours the latter, as shown at the diagram below through Figure 1.

Figure 1

Pass rate of studies by sector of education including origin (Statistics Finland, 2024)



Taking into consideration the rising political stances favouring extreme-right ideologies in Finland, the systematic scoring of the country as one of the countries in Europe with the highest rates of racist harassment (FRA, 2018), the quite stiff, homogenous society, but also the phenomenon of increased migration (Sommier & Roiha, 2018) reasonably raise the question of how much impact this national level racism has on the inclusion and equitable confrontation of migrant

students in the policies and practices of the popular and high-scoring education system of Finland.

The recently published book “Finland’s famous education system” (Thrupp et al., 2023) has abundant mentions of research findings that explain the highest scoring of the country on racist incidents. The historical analysis of the Finnish exceptionalism and superiority of whiteness, as well as the intruding of racism in education displayed in various forms incorporated into the system reproduces and upholds a racial hierarchy (Mikander, 2023). Such cases in school context include the socio-spatial segregation of schools, as well as the attitudes of native parents to avoid schools with high percentages of migrant students stigmatising the school area and the status of the school (Sommier & Roiha 2018).

Furthermore, other institutionalised forms of racist manifestation include the underrepresentation of migrant teachers, stereotypical cultural examples in textbooks (Sommier & Roiha, 2018) portraying the superiority of West on the rest of the world (Mikander, 2023), and racist attitudes and ignorance towards migrant students on the school level reported through teachers’ views (Helakorpi et al., 2023). Structural racism can also be referred to the omissions of anti-racism policies and guidelines, as well as non-interference by teachers in racist incidents (Mikander, 2023; Helakorpi et al., 2023; Peltola et al., 2023).

Another critical view on the Finnish education system is shaped through the research that Sommier and Roiha (2018) have conducted with an analysis of the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education and the general system that seems to omit an explicit anti-racism education and approach.

Attention is given to the misleading effort of using intercultural differences instead of interracial inequalities overlooking the existence and importance of raising awareness on racism and instead citing culture to everything related to inequalities (Sommier & Roiha, 2018). More specifically, the authors refer to the mentions of the curriculum on cultural competence and judge the neutral, unproblematic nuance that the document appoints to the concept of culture as the foundation of cultural racism and eternalisation of stereotypes and inequalities (Sommier & Roiha, 2018). This manoeuvre of words to avoid openly

addressing racism is observed in practice when schools omit adopting anti-racist policies and overlook racist behaviours, eternalising racialised inequalities or even incorporating them to their own practices (Peltola et al., 2023).

2.3 Definition of the key concept “education policy”

According to Adams (2014), education policy is a subset of social policy, as education is included in the services that the state provides to people in the form of welfare and social protection. Thus, it would be wise to review the term social policy before proceeding to the education one, for a better understanding of the definitions. Social policy includes not only the written form of a statement (Trowler, 2003) and the close relation to the government but also the practical implementation of the theoretical part stated there, meaning the decision of the stakeholders to act or not to act (Adams, 2014).

As social policy is usually open to various interpretations (Trowler, 2003), the outcome of the social policy construction might be abstract and disable the deliberate practice and interrelating forces, especially in case that there are no guidelines for practical implementation included in the statement. This creates questions, such as who enacts the policies and who are referred to with these decisions.

Rizvi and Lingard (2009) explicitly state that policy is a body of decisions defined by political actors in the authority positions of the state, implying that this is a process entirely generated by the government. However, the enactment of policies can also be initiated and directed by other organizations or institutions, either attached to the private sector or fulfilling a voluntary purpose (Adams, 2014). The policy itself should define the level of state involvement, the actors that initiate the policy, those that direct possible training for the implementation process, as well as the actors that monitor and report the progress of the implementation (Adams, 2014).

Educational policy is the ways and means by which educational intentions are translated into actions and can be found in text, in discourse, in action and in

culture (Jenkins, 1978). According to Hecló (1972), education policy refers to something bigger than particular decisions, however, to smaller than general social movements. Rayou and van Zanten (2015, as cited in Viennet & Pont, 2017, p.19) define education policy as “programmes developed by public authorities, informed by values and ideas, directed to education actors and implemented by administrators and education professionals”.

Educational policy making should be hierarchical, expert-driven and goal-oriented (Adams, 2014). However, equal input and diverse representation should not be disregarded as expertise shades light only to one side of the coin.

Lastly, educational policy is a complicated process, as it assimilates the social, political, cultural and historical aspects of the referred country (Adams, 2014). This is also the reason why international policies are the fruit of uniform decision-making that are general and abstract in order to include the various needs and differences of nation-states, avoiding thus the increase of isomorphism and convergence of educational national systems degrading their cultural identities (Wiseman et al, 2010).

Policy-creation follows a standardized procedure where its actions and outcomes are not pre-determined. According to Jenkins (1978), this procedure is determined by seven steps: initiation, information, consideration, decisions, implementation, evaluation and termination. However, Hogwood and Gunn (1984), include in the procedure further steps, such as defining issues, forecasting, as well as setting priorities and objectives. The policy itself, apart from sharing the vision and the objectives of the respective reform, must define in detail, but also in a flexible way, the task allocation of the key stakeholders and the accountability mechanisms in a given education system (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

Furthermore, determining multiple policy tools for policy designers and implementers to realise education policy in practice, ranging from mechanisms of command and control to capacity-building and school-community partnerships, as well as to designate the amount, quality and distribution of allocated resources are integral parts of the implementation plan included in the policy planning (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

Last but not least, engaging stakeholders in the policy design process, as well as monitoring mechanisms that support the policy objectives and provide public information on the development of the implementation procedure contribute to facilitating the implementation and ensuring transparency, as well as providing an open discourse between the theory and practice level stakeholders towards developing more effective and meaningful policies (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

Education policies are mainly compounded in written form and influence the practices and decisions of nations that sign them and are bound to them (Wiseman et al., 2010).

There is a big number of organizations that are responsible for defining those policies and promoting their enacting by the nations. For instance, the European Education Policy Network (EEPAN) is a group of organizations that promote cooperation in education and policy development. Likewise, Sirius is a policy network that develops policies for migration in the EU. In the context of this research, the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) introduced in 2012 the right to access quality education for refugees, known as the Global Education Strategy (GES), that has influenced the inclusion of refugees' education in the national curriculum in many nations (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019).

While doing research in this area, the concept of Human Rights and Education should not be excluded as it is related to the obstacles concerning the access to education (as funding problems, or issues related to equality usually towards minorities), discriminations and violations of human rights that take place in an educational context (i.e. corporal punishment, inclusion, religious and gender diversity), pedagogical and philosophical questions (i.e. subjectification, relationality, power and narratives) and the National legislation, International Conventions and Treaties, International NGOs and programs, as well as citizenship, peace and cosmopolitan education (Adami, 2018).

2.4 Education policy implementation

Education policy implementation is a complex and challenging process to manage, due to its purposeful, multidirectional and contextualised character. It includes the orientation of the implementation process in bringing change according to the policy objectives, the influence of a variety of actors in different points of the education system, and the impact that institutions and societal trends have on shaping and translating policy into practice (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

Four general dimensions positively affect the effectiveness of the implementation: smart policy design (that is well justified, logical and feasible), inclusive stakeholder engagement, conducive institutional, policy and societal context, and a coherent implementation strategy to reach schools (Viennet & Pont, 2017). Viennet and Pont (2017) recognise the various levels of policy implementation, as they interpret education policy implementation into the measures that national policy makers need to execute (on the national level) in order for districts and schools to change priorities and allocate resources (on the municipal level) and finally for educators to adopt everyday practices for managing school situations, teaching and learning (on school and classroom level).

The implementation process presupposes that the policy already explicitly proposes the means through which the set goals will be achieved and includes an implementation plan of clear priorities and specific, countable and realistic targets. It is noteworthy that the implementation process also opens a new policy discourse through an open and interactive dialogue of information driven from the regular data collection, and the monitoring and analysis of the processes. Collaboration between stakeholders and interrelations among the various stages and actors of policy planning and implementation secure a more representative and efficient policy interpretation as ground level practices. (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

In this context, the agency of educational leaders, meaning all the stakeholders that have direct and indirect relation with the activation of

education policies are very important for the practical implementation of the policies (Wiseman et al, 2010). International and national organizations, trade unions, institutions, national leaders, and more are responsible for realizing in practice the various documents that define in theory the rights of migrants in the field of educational and social integration.

Finding ways to actively engage not only the migrants but also native population and promoting inclusion and equality without engaging the state and national sources is a challenge that educational actors have to struggle with. Although, there is a huge variety of ways that actors can put into practice the signed policies, the process of implementing them also contains several challenges. The character of the refugee population itself that it is by definition on the move, but also the immigrant population that needs extra support in the integration process, constitute one of the fundamental challenges of policy implementation. (Simopoulos, 2019).

The process of enacting policies in practice is complex due to the multiple level factors that embed efficient implementation. An OECD report on the education policy implementation determines the key elements that can define the outcome of that process and proposes ways towards a more efficient and transparent policy implementation process. One of the hindrances of the policy implementation process is the incomplete character of the policy level procedure that ignores the need to define in detail the implementation steps, mechanisms and responsibilities of the actors, leading to confusing and ambiguous questions of the education leaders and operators who need to figure out the logistics by themselves. (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

Policy planning stakeholders seem to ignore that the core of change is the involvement of the human factor. This might be proven challenging if policy operators display resistance in complying with the assumed policy implementation, as may happen if they are clashing with their belief systems, values, established practices, or in case the policy language is not clear enough and understood by the actors. (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

The operation process of the policy documents further requires the presence of key resources, such as funding, technology, and knowledge on how to implement the theoretical guidelines, as well as guidance on the amount, quality and distribution of the referred resources (Viennet & Pont, 2017). Lastly, Viennet and Pont (2017) agree that in order to meet the demands of the constantly updated and complex governance systems, implementation frameworks need to be revised and adapted.

Although scholars agree that policy implementation needs to be evaluated and monitored, practices of policy monitoring are sparse and greatly dependant on political influences. Policy monitoring should be considered a governance activity that collects and analyses data related to the effectiveness and transparency of the implementation process of a policy or project. (Schoenefeld et al., 2019).

The monitoring mechanism can serve as a national tool of policy evaluation, but also expand to international agreements and policies implementation tracking. Nevertheless, the agency of national leaders can set a hindrance to the transposition of international or European implementation according to the in power political directives. (Schoenefeld et al., 2019).

2.5 Definition of the key concept “migration”

For defining ‘migration’, this research follows the definitions for the terms that concern human mobility as established from the International Organisation of Migration (IOM, 2019). Thus, the term migrant includes all the spectrum of people who have been moving from their countries, either to another country or in the same one, voluntarily or by force due to unpleasant circumstances. This conception covers all the terms that fall under the umbrella of human migration including immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, economic migrants, political migrants etc. (IOM, 2019).

In particular, the IOM (2019) defines these terms separately, but uses the term migrant as a passepartout that can be used alternatively for people moving

across an international border away from their “habitual place of residence, regardless of the person’s legal status, whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary, what the causes for the movement are, or what the length of the stay is” (Douglas et al., 2019, p. 1).

However, in order to better understand which people this term includes, it is necessary to cite the specific terms for the different groups of migration minorities. In this regard, a refugee is considered as someone who is unable or unwilling to remain in his/her country of origin due to the fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions (Douglas et al., 2019).

On the other hand, an economic migrant or immigrant is considered someone who voluntarily leaves their country in order to find better opportunities in a foreign one, and an asylum seeker is considered to be a person who has not obtained yet the status of a refugee from the international or national services of the country he/she fled to (Douglas et al., 2019).

In this way, the concept of a migrant accommodates all the people who have been moving without distinguishing them according to the reason or form of their mobility. It was chosen to be used in this research, as there is no need to separate the students according to the reason they were found at that school, but their needs and the flexibility of the system to adapt in the given situation. Therefore, this study will try to focus on the phenomenon of migration in relation to education policies and practices on the grassroots level.

The target group is considered to be students or pupils with migrant backgrounds; thus, this term will be consistently used to cover this spectrum along with migrant students/pupils, including first and second generation of migrants. Finally, it is important and useful to mention that the phenomenon of migration is connected with a plethora of intertwined terms (analysed in the next section) that are mentioned along this study while their connection with the relevant policies and practices is examined.

2.6 Definition of other key concepts

In this research, one of the focal points is on identifying what practices are used towards *inclusion* of migrants in the educational system of Finland, as well as the state of equity and the equal opportunities offered to all students. Part of the research is also focused on how easy it is for migrants to socially *integrate* in school and general community, and whether the system encourages assimilation instead of inclusion. In order to better comprehend the referred concepts, it is deemed crucial to analyse their meanings and the aspects included in this research.

Riddell (2009) positions *social justice* in an educational context as the effort to acknowledge and remedy cultural and economic injustices that incubate socially marginalised groups. Through essential redistributive measures including environment adjustments and barrier removal, people's economic, social or cultural impairments do not impede their functioning and performance (Riddell, 2009). Likewise, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) recognise that all children access education from different starting points due to the diverse economic, social and cultural capitals they are born with. Eliminating the existing barriers and positioning everyone on the same level challenges the de facto inequalities and safeguards equal opportunities and outcomes for everyone (Riddell, 2009).

Furthermore, *equity* in education implies that personal or social factors, such as gender identity, ethnical backgrounds, socio-economic circumstances don't constitute "obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness) and that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion)" (OECD, 2012, p. 2). Highly performing education systems are able to alleviate the impact of inequalities, resulting from the above-mentioned factors, on the opportunities and performance of students combining equity with quality education (OECD, 2012).

Culturally diverse environments are closely related to concepts of *integration* and *assimilation* when approached through the education lens.

Bowskill et al. (2007) define *integration* as the process of maintaining one's own culture while positively reacting and interacting with other cultural groups. On the other hand, *assimilation* presupposes that the contact with other cultures results in rejection or negative response to cultural maintenance of one's own culture (Bowskill et al., 2007). "Integration has come to be privileged as the optimal acculturation strategy" (Bowskill et al., 2007, p. 794) while egalitarian educational systems adopt *inclusive* policies that reflect on teaching approaches and are implemented through redistributive measures (Riddell, 2009).

3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

3.1 The Context of the Study

This case study was conducted in a municipality in Central Finland in an effort to understand the phenomenon of equality, equity and inclusion of pupils with migrant backgrounds on the primary level of education, meaning grades 1-6 of basic/comprehensive school.

The Finnish education system has acquired popularity through the high scores of international standardised tests and it is considered to be driven by values of equality and equity. Nevertheless, literature suggests that the phenomenon of increasingly rising migration in the country proves that the system fails to maintain equal opportunities for a diverse student body. Therefore, this research aimed to identify the relationship between the policy provisions and their implementation, including the beneficial practices used for migrant students and the challenges that inhibit the process.

In order to acquire a holistic view on the phenomenon of policy implementation and efficacy of education policies in regard of offering equal opportunities for pupils with diverse backgrounds, the study followed a qualitative research approach that encompasses two phases. The first phase examined the education legislation, identifying beneficial and missing provisions, and the second phase explored the practices applied in grassroot level while spotting the hindrances of the policy implementation process.

An assortment of various data (data from policy documents, interviews, information posted on webpages) was collected, as the research approach is to acquire data from different perspectives and levels of implementing education policies. The triangulation and multivocality used in this research through the plethora use of diverse methods and sources of data lead to the qualitative credibility of the study (Tracy, 2010). The convergence of diverse methods and data sources included in this research allowed to explore different perspectives

and to acquire a deeper understanding of the understudy phenomenon (Tracy, 2010).

The research fits to the qualitative approach so that the voice of the participants can be better heard and that the complex interaction of factors during the implementation process can be more thoroughly understood. Finally, the study is based on the theories of empiricism and scepticism, as the knowledge produced is based on evidence directed by the collected data and the researcher is critically evaluating the information presented on documents and interviews, as well as is aware and tries to separate the own personal biases during the report process of findings.

The participatory analysis of the interview findings and the inclusion of multifaceted views from different actors in education and target group are contributing to the multivocality of the research that “provides space for a variety of opinions” taking into consideration the diverse backgrounds and attributions of each participant in the study (Tracy, 2010, p. 844).

3.2 The Research Participants and the Data Collection

The first research question focused on the national, municipal and school policy framework of education considering migrants. The research sample was encompassed by education policy documents that define education and special provisions determined for migrant pupils. The sample was supported with data collected from official websites of the policy issuing authorities. To answer the second research question, data were collected through interviews from different actors engaged on the grassroot level comprehensive education aiming at a multiprofessional view of the understudy phenomenon. The data collection started in June 2022 in cooperation with the respective municipality and completed in December 2023.

3.2.1 Educational policies

The legislation of educational policies on national level in Finland are mainly directed by the National Board of Education and the Ministry of Education and Culture. Municipalities, as education providers, are required to adopt the national education policy documents and incorporate them in local legislation defining further education according to the needs of each respective municipality. Schools in their turn are required to follow the guidelines of national and municipal policies while determining additional matters corresponding to the individual case of each school.

The primary data of this part of the study are displayed in Table 1 along with information on their publication. The National Core Curriculum of Basic Education and Basic Education Act of Finland were the first collected and analysed documents, based on which other policy documents were acquired. The Compulsory Education Act and Municipality Curriculum were provided by the research supervisor and the annual school plan and equality plan of the school were provided by the principal of the school. Finally, the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, the Non-Discrimination Act and the Pupil and Student Welfare Act were retrieved through personal research and links from other policies.

Table 1*Background information of analysed policy documents*

Policy documents	Background information					
	Total pages	Total number of chapters	Author/publishing authority	Publication year	Access	Issuing language
National Core Curriculum	813	15+3 appendices (67 subchapters)	Finnish National Board of Education	2014	link	Finnish, English
Basic Education Act	24	9 (49 sections)	Finnish Ministry of Education	1998	link	English
Compulsory Education Act	10	6 (26 articles)	Finnish Ministry of Education	2020	link	Finnish
Act on the Promotion of Migrant Integration	23	11 (90 sections)	Finnish Ministry of the Employment and the Economy	2010	link	English*
Non-Discrimination Act	8	6 (29 sections)	Ministry of Justice in Finland	2014	link	English*
Pupil and Student Welfare Act	15	5 (28 sections)	Ministry of Education and Culture	2013	link	Finnish
Municipality Curriculum	Non countable	15+4 extra sections	Municipality's administration	2016	link	Finnish
School Annual Plan	18	8	School's administration	2023	Private access	Finnish
School Equality Plan	3	6	School's administration	2023	Private access	Finnish

*Unofficial translation, binding only in Finnish and Swedish

Furthermore, secondary data were collected from official websites of the National Board of Education, the Ministry of Education and Culture, as well as of the respective municipality. They define and elaborate further on the education policies and provisions on national and local level, as well as present concrete initiatives targeted to migrants. In addition, a curriculum reform of the basic education published in 2016 was included in the analysis process. The secondary data provided a supplementary perspective on the analysis of the policy documents examining further the context of the analysed legislations and additional initiatives.

It's important to note that during the policy review and analysis process, there were many new policies linked to the already analysed ones that engaged in this research and offered more insights in the situation. Of course, it was not possible to review them all but there was quite a committed effort to include most of them in the study.

Regarding the availability of the documents, some of them were provided by the research supervisor and the contact person of the understudy school, as it was impossible to find them due to the language barrier or inaccessibility of the document to public. In particular, the school plan and curriculum required a password in order to be accessed and became available only after personal contact with the principal of the school. Other policies, such as the Basic Education Decree, were planned to be included in the analysis process, but they weren't publicly available at the time that the research was conducted.

The policies that were not available in English, were translated through the translation tool that Google provides and analysed based on the retrieved translation. The translation followed the Swedish version of the policy documents, as it was deemed closer to the original compared to the translation originated from the Finnish version. Having that in mind, it is essential to be aware that the results of the key word search and the content of the translated policies might have been misinterpreted or might include a bigger percentage of error than the analysis of the other policies.

Finally, it is crucial to mention that some policy documents were excluded from the analysis and report process, as they were found not to correspond to the criteria of this research. Such examples are the Equality Act which is narrowing the scope of equality only to gender identity and expression equality. Likewise, there were considerations to similarly exclude the school's equality plan for the same reasons but taking into account that the section 6 of Non-Discrimination Act requires all education providers to enclose an equality plan in their local administration, it was therefore analysed and considered as an important data source.

3.2.2 Grassroot interviews

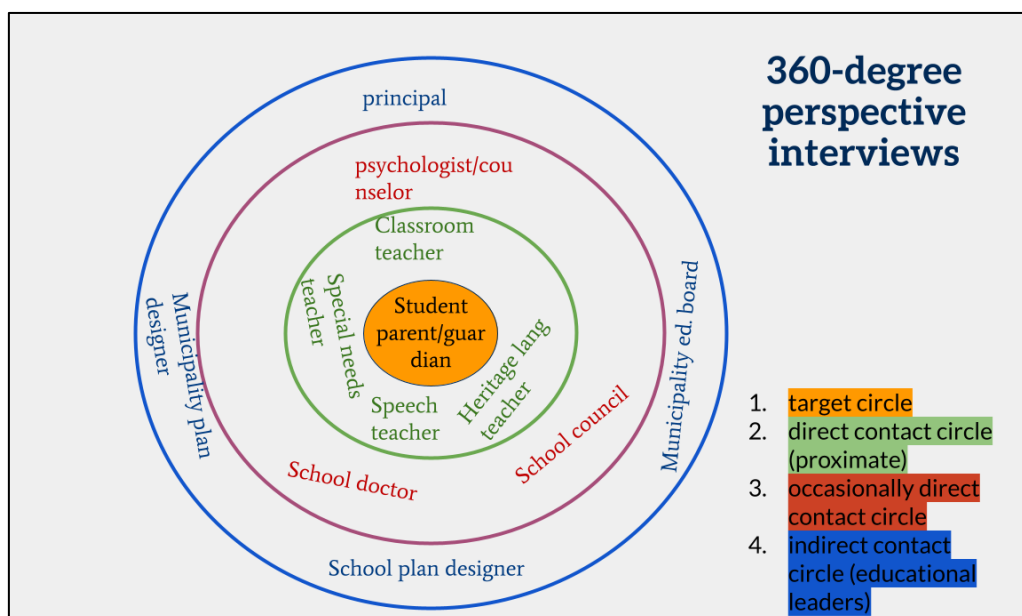
On a second level, the focus narrowed down on a case study of an interpretive phenomenological research of how people see the phenomenon of migrant education through a multi-professional view in a specific school and municipality in Central Finland. The interpretive approach was followed in this part in an effort to understand the social world people have produced and which they reproduce through their continuing activities while interpreting the social reality (Blaikie, 2000). In this case, people are seen as the primary data source that gives information on the interpretation of reality according to their individual meanings (Mason, 2002).

The reason why interviews were chosen as the method for acquiring information on the grassroot level education was because interactive dialogue can allow in-depth and rounded access to people's views, understandings, experiences and perceptions, encouraging them to contextually reflect, create connections and construct their understanding of the social reality the research is exploring (Mason, 2002). This method allowed a fairer, freer and less controlled representation of interviewees' perspectives that otherwise structured approaches would have not permitted. It is important to keep in mind that in the research setting and methods applied, the researcher is no neutral collector of information but actively constructs knowledge through intellectual, analytical and interpretive interaction with the data and data sources (Mason, 2002).

The main aim was to examine in a well-rounded way the situation of the grassroots level education in regard to migrant students, including the views of various people around that student that directly or indirectly affect their education. A diagram of all the actors that could provide a round view on how students with migrant background are being perceived and included in primary education was constructed. The diagram enabled the selection process of interview participants depending on their level of influence and engagement with students in practice and through the designing of school and municipality level policies. The figure 2 describes the relationship and level of engagement of the interviewed actors with the target group of migrant students and effectively parents.

Figure 2

Diagram of categories for 360-degree interviews



The data collection process for this part proved surprisingly challenging and it was the main reason for the extended length of the data collection and analysis process. All the participants were found through personal connections and even then, sometimes it was challenging to arrange an interview or even come in

contact with the agreed participants. The primary challenges that participants suggested were the lack of available time and feeling uncomfortable with the language of the study. The staff in the school (in particular classroom teachers and school psychologists) were difficult to find, as none of the contacted people responded to the invitation. There were more than 50 possible participants reached by email communication, from which barely 10 responded.

There were two interviewees from each category (see Figure 2) participating in the study, except from the occasionally direct contact circle, where no participants were found available and willing to join the study. The participants of the study were all (apart from the municipality representative) connected to a specific school chosen due to its large percentage of migrant students.

Subsequently, the following people were interviewed: from the education leaders circle a municipality representative and the assistant principal of the school, from the proximate circle the heritage language teacher and the special education teacher, from the target circle two migrant students (whose interview hasn't been used in this research, as it was not judged purposeful) and their guardian. Table 2 presents the profiles of the participants including their role in the school or municipality and their tasks.

Table 2*Participants profiles, roles, tasks and other information*

Participants	Background information			
	abbreviation	role	tasks	other information
Municipality representative	MR	Coordinate and organise language learning and migrant education	organise general administration for basic education, organise transition process from pre-school to primary school, make timetables for the language learning lessons and religion lessons for all the schools in basic education, is part of designing local curriculum and local plan, lead process for the language learning, preparatory class and heritage language learning	Additional tasks resembling principal's tasks
Heritage Language Teacher	HLT	Offers education in mother tongue	Design and implement teaching according to 5 axes of the curriculum (reading, writing, speaking, listening, culture)	Each students receives an hour and a half per week
Assistant Principal	AP			
Special Needs Teacher	SNT	Offers part time education to any student that needs it	Support students in an individualised way, support teachers in differentiating their teaching to better support students	Teaching in small, flexible groups that might change daily
Guardian	G	Migrant parent		Originally from UK, has 2 children in the 4 th and 6 th grade of comprehensive school

Before contacting the participants, the interview questions (see appendix 1) were designed and structured on an Excel document following the objectives of the three research questions and findings from the literature review. The interview

questions followed a semi-structured form, as they were divided in two parts where the first one included common and general questions addressed to everyone, and the second part was completely differentiated and tailor-made to each interviewee's profile, profession and role in education. This enabled the interviewees to situate their knowledge and experience on specific areas of their everyday life (Mason, 2002) and in relation to the phenomenon of migration, examining it from the suggested concepts (equality, inclusion, discrimination, diversity) and ascertaining the connection of these issues to their perceptions.

In qualitative semi-structured interviews, the data are constructed through dialogic interaction involving the researcher and the interviewees and do not constitute raw facts that are reported in the interview setting (Mason, 2002). The interviewer directs the focus of the discussion on specific contexts and through topics, themes or issues that function as starting points for discussion (Mason, 2002). The interviews are semi-structured, as they follow an interactional exchange of dialogue in a relatively informal style (Mason, 2002).

The participants were contacted through email. In the same way, all the necessary documents were shared to the participants, including the privacy policy of the University of Jyväskylä, the research notification with information about the purpose and objectives of the study, as well as the consent to participate in the research. In addition, a document including the rules of the interview and the interview questions was attached to the email encouraging the participants to become familiar with the specific questions of the interview.

Before the beginning of the interview process, interviewees were introduced to the topic, framework and purpose of the study communicating the meaningfulness of the research and their connection to it, while following a thorough introduction to their rights and anonymity in relation to their participation in the study. Participants were encouraged to ask questions, interrupt the process if needed and interact freely with the interviewer according to their needs. There was space given for questions or clarifications already before the start of the interview considering the information from the shared documents they received.

The interviews were realised on a fairly unstructured and relaxed setting where interviewees openly shared their experiences and opinions corresponding to the research questions. Although the interview questions provided guidelines for the topics to be discussed, they didn't constitute a pre-scripted plan for the interview, as interviewees were guiding the sequence of discourse through their answers focusing on and analysing matters, they judged more important. The interviewer mainly maintained a listening and observing role, avoiding interrupting the interviewees and responding to the verbal and non-verbal cues appropriately and respectfully to the participants (Mason, 2002).

In the first part of the interview, the participants were asked general questions, common to everyone, regarding their role and their opinion on the overall state of equality of the school, as well as challenges in achieving ethnic equality. On the second part, the interviewees were asked special questions regarding their impact through their personal initiatives and their opinion on what needs to be changed. Lastly, the interviewees were presented a series of slides with the findings from the document analysis and were asked to comment on sections related to their role. At the end of the interview, there was space for further discussion, questions or other additions completely open to be guided by the participant.

There were several efforts to collect data from the migrant students, but their interviews were judged to be problematic and not purposeful for this research. Their interview conditions didn't offer adequate ground to pupils for unrestrained discussion and communication of their feelings and views. On the other hand, the interview with the guardian compensated for that flaw, as it offered remarkable insights on the schooling experiences of migrant students and associated problematic matters. The migrant guardian participated in a supplementary interview that further aimed to identify the level of reachability and applicability of the respective policies that determine special services and provisions for migrant students. The reason for the supplementary interview is found at the open discussion of data, as policy document analysis revealed

findings that required additional data from the specific participant to support the research.

3.3 Data Analysis

This thesis consists of a two-phase case study that investigates the phenomenon of migration within its real-life context (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Thus, the study is driven by an interpretive phenomenological approach. The first phase includes systematic and content analysis of policy documents in order to define the theoretical framework of the researched topic. The second phase includes inductive content analysis of in-depth-interviews in order to identify the practices of policy implementation and to understand the phenomenon from diverse individual perspectives (Hammarberg et al., 2016).

Inductive content analysis was used both for the policy documents and interviews. This analysis encloses the ability to break down the data in small groups that are coded and named according to their shared content (Korstjens & Moser, 2018), in order to interpret the meaning of the texts collected both from the transcripts of interviews and the policy documents. Moreover, constant comparative analysis allowed to compare the data and draw themes in order to reach interrelations (Thorne, 2000). These secondary analytical methods were used in order to fill in the gaps and weaknesses of the primary ones and offer a different representation of the data which generated findings that reflect different aspects of the same phenomenon.

It is crucial to highlight that this was a case study, meaning an intensive analysis of a single example (Flyvbjerg, 2011), and it aimed to identify the practices that were used in this very specific school and municipality in order to include students with a migrant background and offer equal opportunities. Thus it did not aim in drawing generalised conclusions for the broader community, but only to provide some hypotheses that could be further tested systematically (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

3.3.1 Policy document analysis

In order to answer the first research question, the data that were reviewed were Finnish national policies that define the backbone of formal education in Finland. The analysis of the policy documents followed firstly a systematic analysis based on a key word search of terms interlinked with migrant education that were deemed crucial in order to draw an overall picture of the policy background (Cardno, 2018).

A common thread of information was collected from all the documents that were reviewed in this part of the research, including information such as the author and publication year of the policy document, the total number of pages and chapters, the number of total key word search relevant findings of the words 'migra', 'inclu', 'refuge', 'equal', 'integrat' and the number of separate sections or defined provisions for migrants corresponding to concepts that relate to the under-study phenomenon and the frequency of this usage in determining a particular context (Stemler, 2015).

Secondly, the education policies were analysed individually based on their content and textual data providing in depth knowledge about inclusion of migrants in education, identifying the specific sections that define provisions and directions shaping equal education. It is crucial to mention that the majority of policies were not available in English, thus the analysis followed unofficial translated versions. The policies were reviewed multiple times and a summary of their content, as well as of information for the provided services were drawn up for each policy separately. During the document analysis, gaps and missing points of the policies were identified and further reported in relation to the data retrieved from the interviews, as well as discussed in the last chapter of this thesis.

In addition to the policy documents, secondary data were also analysed including the webpages of education providers such as the municipality, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the National Board of Education (EDUFI) that concerned basic education in general and basic education for migrants. It is already worth mentioning that most of the pages concerning basic education,

including the municipality curriculum website, weren't provided in English, therefore those were analysed based on automatically translated versions. The meaningful findings for this research were collected and reported in a unified section.

3.3.2 Interview data analysis

In order to answer the second research question, the examination of data followed inductive content analysis that aimed in examining in-depth each case separately before proceeding to the patterning and comparison of the cases, so that the experiences of the participants can be interpreted towards identifying the underlying structures and meanings of the described experience (Eatough & Smith, 2017). This method was chosen due to its subject-centred approach that facilitates insights of individuals in a given context for a specific phenomenon.

In order to effectively explore the complex social world in a more accurate and inclusive way, Clarke et al. (2015) suggests that different perspectives of the phenomenon can shape holistic and multilayered understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of the understudy phenomenon. Engaging in interviews various actors of grassroot level education achieved a 360-degree view on the researched topic. The interviews were analysed separately, as the interview questions differed for each participant although they were following a common direction.

The first step was to transcribe the interviews and all the parts of the recordings, so that most of the details could be captured in the transcripts. Replaying the recordings allowed filling any gaps in the transcripts and to document the conversation in detail. An automatic transcription system was initially used, and manual corrections were later made to support the accuracy of transcriptions. After transcribing and organising the data, a preliminary exploratory analysis was achieved by rereading the transcripts and obtaining a general sense of the data (Creswell, 2015). The transcripts were reviewed allowing further familiarisation with the data and identification of patterns while the parts that corresponded to the research questions were highlighted with four

different colours representing the first basic categories (practices, challenges, recommendations, other interesting findings).

A combination of manual coding through colour-based groupings and drawings of interconnections on paper and on the other hand virtual grouping by categorising hierarchically the findings, copy pasting and merging into more general categories followed as steps of the analysis. The data moved around, and the groupings changed multiple times in order to better correspond to the research question and to inductively occurring links from the data.

The interview data were initially coded according to common points reported between the interviewees describing a similar phenomenon, belief or practice (Tracy, 2013). As Tracy (2013) suggests, the primary cycle of coding was generated by labels that depict the content of what was reported while later on, the second level coding shifted the focus towards interpretations based on cause-effect progressions and dynamic interrelations of the data. During the whole process, constant comparative method was applied in order to compare and alternate the groupings or code labels so that they better fit the emerging new data (Charmaz, 2006).

Regarding the analysis of this specific research, the interview questions already were focused on two main categories, identifying the practices that are implemented in grassroot level education considering migrant students (on municipal, school, classroom, and individual level) and the problems that are observed in this regard. Groups and categories in first level coding changed many times, as further connections were noticed and merged groups under upper categories served better the coherence of the report.

In order to answer the third research question, interviewees were asked about their opinion on the presented policy document findings, as well as to indicate the challenges they recognise in achieving ethnic equality while suggesting changes. The coding of this part of the interviews was based on conclusions and interpretations with cause-effect reasoning. The two different sets of data were combined exploring the relationship between the findings from the policy document analysis and the reports of the interviews on these findings.

This part revealed the phenomena that were considered in the school and society context as problematic by the participants, and the policy level gaps that seemed to be accused of supporting these phenomena. Lastly, at this point, the participants proposed what needed to be changed to effectively correspond to the objectives and values of education sealed in the fundamental legislation to equally include migrant students in education.

Although patterns and groupings were somewhat clear through the interviewees' reports and the relation to the findings from the document analysis, the connection to the framework and research questions was challenging, as the first attempt to report the findings proved misleading and was deviating from the research focus. Noting the categories of findings on a paper and drawing connections between both sets of data analysis findings (policy documents and interviews) enabled the interpretation of the findings in a way that connections were made clear and were corresponding both to the literature review and to the meanings and concepts interviewees wanted to highlight. Revisiting the literature review and theoretical framework further enabled these connections as the dynamics of education policy and grassroot level paradigm were already described in previous research and verified by the interview reports.

After the data collection from interviews and the first review was completed, it was judged that there was missing analytical information to support the research, thus there was an additional round of data collection that retrieved supplementary data from the guardian. After the data were analysed and conclusions were drawn for the study, the findings acquired from the interviews were shared with each interviewee individually in order to validate their accuracy, aiming to a participatory elaboration and cross-reviewing of the data analysis minimising the possibility of distorting the reported data and excluding personal biases of the researcher in the participants' voice. In most cases there were no additional comments, thus the findings were used as such, while relevant adaptations on the analysis findings were made based on clarifications proposed by the interviewees to better represent their views.

Throughout this whole process there was collected an analysis diary and memo in parallel with the analysis procedure. This aimed in recording what was acquired from the study, thoughts over the content and methods used, as well as the learning outcomes as a researcher and challenges of the process. In addition, the memos included reflections over the process of coding, interpreting, and analysing the data, as well as brief descriptions of the findings and comments on those during the analysis process. The findings are reported in the three results chapters following the three research questions of the study.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Multiple ethical questions have been created throughout the whole research designing and implementation process ranging from the anonymity of the participants and the protection of their identity to the implications of the study on the emotional or mental state of the participants due to the sensitivity of the understudy topic. The various ethical considerations are discussed below accompanied by the applied solutions in hope to alleviate any significant implications.

One of the ethical questions that rose while designing the interview process was the feelings that the understudy phenomenon might create on the participants, as some of them were in the target group of migration and affected gravely by the challenges of the system, or, on the other hand, non-migrant (as defined in this thesis) participants might feel at blame when talking about the impact of racism and privilege of whiteness.

In order to ease uncomfortable feelings and self-blame, the invitation to participate was open to be declined at any stage of the interview process and there was no pressure of time put on the participants. Lastly, acknowledging the language barrier as a possible discomfort factor, the interviewees were encouraged to use translation tools during the interview.

The researcher tried to sympathise with the expressed views during the interview and constantly reminded the participants that were not required to

answer to all the questions, and they might not do so without giving any reasoning. Avoiding making assumptions or suggestions and initiating discourse over racism (although it was mentioned from all the participants at some stage) during the interview process was one of the ground rules of the researcher when preparing for the interviews.

Safeguarding the free expression of the participants' opinions and the integrity of their identity the research was conducted in terms of complete anonymity. The anonymity of the participants and the adaptation of the thesis background so that it protects all the possible identification factors (name, gender, residing municipality) was ensured and promised to the interviewees from the very first approach. The findings are reported in a way that the individuals' backgrounds can't be identified and there is mention to both genders (her/his) for all the participants. Their names were not revealed through the whole process and only their roles are reported in the writing process.

The citation of the municipality curriculum and other webpages cannot be provided in this document due to anonymity reasons aiming to protect the identity of the municipality and the participants. In order to prove the credibility of the relevant reported results, all pages that enclose used data from these webpages are saved in pdf forms and can therefore be reviewed in case of questioning. After the data collection, the data were stored in a private, safe place that was not shared with anyone else apart from the researcher and were deleted before the due date defined in the research notification.

While preparing the interview ground, the researcher ensured that the participants have access to all the materials used during the interview enabling them to familiarise with the topic and interview questions. The materials (interview questions in a pdf format and the presentation slides used in the interview including a background of the study, interview rules and the interview questions) were sent well in advance to allow adequate time for reviewing and communicating possible questions or concerns.

In addition to the questions related material, the consent form, privacy notice and research notification were further sent ensuring the legitimacy of the

study and providing information on the background and purpose of the research. The information that the research was done in cooperation with the administration of the understudy municipality was also shared to the participants adding significant value to the motivation of the participants due to the development-oriented objective of the study for the respective municipality's benefit.

Another ethical consideration during the data collection process was the designing of age and background appropriate questions for the student focus group interview, as well as ensuring a comfortable, safe and confiding setting for the minors to open up and express without reservations to their genuine opinions. For that to be achieved, the input of the guardian during the interview question designing and her/his presence during the interview process were judged necessary and crucial.

Nevertheless, this factor was proven to not be enough, as according to the guardian, one of the pupils was holding back and didn't share her/his representative view in the matter. Accessing and reporting the traumatic experiences of that student proved to be more challenging and even unnecessary in regard to the emotional discomfort that it might have caused. In the aftermath, a more frequent and consistent contact with the pupils before the interview, as well as less direct questions and more diverse materials used for the collection of data would have been probably beneficial both for the minor interviewees and the research findings.

In order to exclude the researcher's own biases on the topic during the data analysis and report process there were many preventive tools used such as repeatedly accessing the interview transcriptions to cite the interviewee's own words and interpretation closer to the shared views. Being self-aware of the researcher's own experiences and beliefs and separating them from the ones presented during the interviews allowed to report the data with self-reflexivity (Tracy, 2010) and the awareness of possibly allowing personal biases to intrude in the study.

An effort to include all the presented aspects and not separate between relevant and non-relevant according to researcher's opinions was consistently kept with the exception of completely irrelevant to the topic matters discussed.

Finally, the most significant tool to avoid misinterpreting and distorting the data shared by the interviewees was the incorporation of participatory analysis as the final stage of the findings' interpretation. The participants were individually contacted once more and received the final version of the results chapter that corresponds to the presented points of their interview and asked to review the document and comment or edit any misinterpretations or omissions.

Considering that the language of the interview is not the mother tongue of the researcher neither most of the interviewees, it is crucial to consider the possibilities of misunderstandings generated through the communication, analysis and report of the interviewees' perceptions, experiences and opinions. Moreover, the convergence of facts and contexts from the social interaction of the interview emphasises its complexity implying non-standardised interpretation of questions and therefore non-standardised articulations of meanings (Mason, 2002).

4 EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORK IN REGARD TO MIGRATION

The findings from the main official education policies in Finland and their relation to defining education for migrants are reported in the following sections where each individually analysed policy is reported stating their objective, citing the sections that correspond to provisions for education and other interesting findings. Brief information about the policy documents is presented on Table 1 (see chapter 3.2.1.) and, at the next section, the Table 3 displays the results from the key word search. Finally, at the end of the chapter, there are findings from the analysis of supplementary data.

4.1 Findings from systematic analysis of key word search

The policy documents were systematically analysed based on the frequency of appearance of the following key word terms: migrant/migration, inclusion, refugee, equal/equality and integration. The terms have been searched on their etymological root version enabling more findings, subsequently narrowing down to the ones that correspond to the theme of this thesis. The findings from the systematic analysis of key word search are displayed on the Table 3.

Table 3*Findings of key word search on policy documents*

Policy documents	Key word terms				
	migra*	inclu*	refuge*	equal*	integrat*
National Core Curriculum	17	4	0	68	8
Basic Education Act	2	1	0	4	0
Compulsory Education Act	2	0	0	3	2
Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration	128	4	6	6	211
Non-Discrimination Act	0	0	0	21	0
Pupil and Student Welfare Act	1	1	0	1	1
Municipality Curriculum	-	-	-	-	-
School Annual Plan	0	14	0	7	0
School Equality Plan	0	0	0	21**	0

*the terms have been searched in this version and only the cases that correspond to the theme have been taken into account

**referred specifically to gender equality

According to the systematic analysis based on the key word search, all the analysed policy documents, with the exception of the *Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (2010)*, have sparse, if any, mentions to migrant students. In particular, the minority of refugee students is solely mentioned in the same act without being addressed in any other education policy document. Likewise, the terms inclusion, equality and integration were rarely being addressed in these documents, again with the exception of the *Act on the Promotion of Immigrant*

Integration (2010) where there were abundant mentions to the search term 'migra' and 'integrat'.

Equality and inclusion were mentioned as concepts in the *National Core Curriculum of Basic Education* (2014) and in the Annual School Plan, without specifically defining the context they are referred to. On the contrary, the School Equality Plan has abundant mentions to equality, exclusively protecting gender diversity. Lastly, the Municipality Curriculum was not issued in one coherent document, thus the systematic analysis was not applied in this case.

4.2 Findings from policy document analysis

The analysed policy documents were reviewed separately and after being systematically analysed based on the key word search, they were analysed in regard to their content. Information collected from the review and analysis of policy documents were in regard to the objective of the policy and beneficial provisions for the migrant students in primary education. The information that was deemed useful for this study is reported for each policy document separately announcing the objective of the act and citing the articles that define provisions for migrant students. Lastly, attention is also given to whether the policy documents omit or not separately defining education for migrant students and inclusive education.

4.2.1 National Core Curriculum of Basic Education (2014)

The *National Core Curriculum* (2014) contains the objectives and core contents of teaching for all school subjects, and describes the mission, values, and structure of education. It describes the concept of learning and goals for developing the learning environment, school culture and working methods. The curriculum was issued by the Finnish National Board of Education, and it encloses articles from a big variety of national and international education policies.

In the very first chapters of the curriculum, the values of inclusion, equity, equality and justice are mentioned as the main principles and tasks of basic

education (chapter 3.1.). In addition, prevention of inequality and exclusion accompanied by promoting gender equality is the main mission of education (chapter 3.1.). Gender equality is further analysed in the curriculum without equally appointing sections for ethnic or other forms of equality. In the same chapter, there is a mention for encouraging cultural competence and supporting the development of pupils' cultural identity as a way to understand cultural diversity.

It was found that the core curriculum did not enclose any chapters devoted to diversity, inclusion and equality, neither to migrant education and special provisions for them. Instead, there is a subchapter for plurilingual students (9.4) and a chapter for bilingual education (10), as well as an appendix for learning in pupil's mother tongue (appendix 3). The terms inclusion only seems to concern special needs education pupils. Sections for instruction provided to ethnic groups such as Saami and Roma are defined in the curriculum.

It's interesting to note that according to the key word search, there were barely any mentions of migrants and inclusion, but there were abundant mentions of equality and integration. However, most of the equality mentions were regarding gender equality and most of the 'integrat' search stem from the word integrated that referred to irrelevant information.

4.2.2 Basic Education Act (1998)

The *Basic Education Act* (1998) defines pre-primary education, basic education, before and after school activities and provisions for instruction preparing immigrants for basic education (section 1.2.). Among the objectives of education defined in this act is to promote equality in society and "secure adequate equity in education" (1998, p.1). Local authorities are appointed accountable for providing schooling in pre-primary and basic education.

Some sections of the Act define conditions that regard the language of instruction, possibility of arranging teaching in other languages than the official ones, arranging religious education of a particular religious group and provision of remedial teaching for pupils who have "temporarily fallen behind in studies

or need short-term support” (p.7) and enhanced support for pupils who need “regular support in learning” (p.7). The two last ones are vaguely defined without targeting specific cases or student profiles. Two sections that could be given attention due to their provisional character towards inclusion are the section 29 and 48a where provisions are correspondently defined for a plan against violence, bullying and harassment that should be issued by the education provider, and before and after school activities that promote inclusion and equality in society.

This act omits defining migrant education separately and stating the importance of inclusive practices, as well as assessment tools of equality, equity and inclusion in education environments. The Section 1.2. promises to define instruction for preparing immigrants for basic education, but the only follow-up mention was on section 9.3. that determines instructions corresponding to one-year syllabus for immigrants.

Moreover, there was no focus on migrant pupils needs, nor provisions for encouraging, enhancing, respecting and supporting their cultural identity and acknowledging their needs in services such as the individual learning plan, guidance counselling, pupil’s assessment and workload, home schooling, enhanced support and remedial teaching. On the other hand there were further provisions for other ethnic groups such as Saami or Roma. Finally, there was a question risen from Section 25.1 defining that permanently residing in Finland children are entitled to compulsory schooling, leaving unanswered the case of refugee children and asylum seekers.

4.2.3 Compulsory Education Act (2020)

The referred Act defines the spectrum of compulsory education and the services it provides within it, as well as conditions that interrupt, suspend or withdraw the study rights. In the objectives (article 1) of the compulsory education defined in the act are included the reduction of differences in learning, promotion of equal opportunities and equal treatment.

According to article 15, compulsory education can be arranged in a language other than Finnish or Swedish following the individual's wishes and skills. Furthermore, the Act provides extension of fee exemption to students that have participated in preparatory education or that have been delayed in completing the basic education allowing time for students to keep up with studies considering their specific needs. Questions of equality rise in paragraph 19 when housing allowance is offered to students only if the language of instruction is Finnish or Swedish, excluding thus students with teaching in other instruction languages. In article 5, it is mentioned that the National Board of Education has prepared a recommendation of curriculum for education for migrants which after thorough search was found that it doesn't exist at any web space.

Following the results of the researched terms, there is not many mentions once more in any of those, neither separate sections for provisions or focused services on inclusion and migrant education. However, it's once more observed that Saami education is defined in a separate section (paragraph 4 and 20) and receives extra attention in legislation.

4.2.4 Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (2010)

This Act is de facto concerning immigrant students (possessing a valid residence permit) and its purpose is focused on the integration of immigrant students in social and later on working life. As fair part of the act is devoted to adult migrants, the analysis will be limited to the ones concerning the minors, due to the focus of the current research. The act includes a plethora of references to migrants (a total of 128, according to key term search). However, there are relatively sparse references to equality and inclusion, as well as to refugees.

The information enclosed mainly defines the available services to migrants during school life, but later on, too. It is interesting to highlight a part of section 7 (1, 2) where it is mentioned that "immigrants are also provided with information about the service system and the measures promoting integration", implying the obligation of the state that all migrants should be made aware of

the services meant for them by the authorities issuing decisions on their residence permit.

Moreover, the section 8 appoints municipalities and offices of employment and economic development as responsible for providing guidance and advice concerning measures and services to immigrants. No further implementation provisions or requirements are made at this point. Likewise, section 17 requires local authorities to provide information to immigrants regarding the obligations and rights connected to the integration plan that aims in equipping them to “play an active role in society as an equal member of society” (p. 4, section 11. 1.).

Important services that are theoretically provided through this act are native language courses, work life skills training, social, cultural and life management skills training, interpretation services, information about rights and obligations to the Finnish society, appointing a legal representative in case the minor is residing in Finland without a guardian, child welfare aftercare measures, initial assessment, integration plan and guidance on working life, as well as integration assistance (during enactment of integration plan). Lastly, it is worth mentioning that Chapter 9 introduces a pilot scheme under the name “Participative Integration in Finland” that was in force during 2011-2013 and wished to explore more effective purchases and arrangements of integration training.

The stretch of the act is on integration of migrants in social and work life, but as it is mentioned in Section 3.1, it is also directed towards maintaining their own culture and language, references that are unproportionally rare in the Act.

The third chapter determines the objectives and duties of municipalities in promoting integration and supporting internationalisation, gender equality, non-discrimination, as well as encouraging “good ethnic relations and dialogue between cultures and participation of immigrant groups” (p. 9, section 29.1.). Municipalities shall further publish an integration programme for immigrant integration with specific contents based on what is laid down in section 33.

4.2.5 Non-Discrimination Act (2014)

This act that is issued and legally binding only in Finnish and Swedish but was, however, available in English by the issue authorities, is defining provisions to promote equality and prevent discrimination, as well as to provide protection and coverage to those that have been discriminated against (Section 1). The Act does not include vocabulary based on the search terms 'inclu', 'migra', 'integrat' or 'refuge', but refers to equality fairly frequently (21 relevant references to key search term 'equal').

The main part of the Act defines what is included in discrimination and what is not qualified as a discriminatory behaviour. The by-word definition that includes both direct and indirect discrimination is stated in section 8, as follow: "No one may be discriminated against on the basis of age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activity, family relationships, state of health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics" (p. 3). Although there are many subsections (ex. Section 8.2, 10, 13, 14, 16) defining further what is considered as discriminatory behaviour, there are also plenty of sections (ex. Section 9, 11) offering grounds for justified discrimination-looking actions that are not considered as such if there is a reasoning laying in law or proportionate measures of a legislative objective.

As it is stated in section 5 and 6 of the Act, the authorities and education providers should evaluate the situation of equality and acquire measures to promote and protect equality in general and in the education institutions respectively. The authorities should draw a plan with effective, expedient, and proportionate measures for the realisation of equality. The education providers should possess a plan that includes the necessary measures that promote and safeguard equality (section 6.2) in the measures of which the voices of pupils and guardians should be taken into consideration (section 6.3). No further information is offered in this regard.

The situation of non-discrimination and appliance of the provisions defined in this Act, are supervised by the National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal (section 18) at which victims of discrimination can bring a matter to

justice (section 21). Along with the forementioned, the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman and the local occupational health and safety authorities are responsible for the supervision of compliance with the provisions of this Act (section 18). The Ombudsman is accountable for supporting the victims of discrimination by pursuing their complaints and taking reconciling action.

4.2.6 Pupil and Student Welfare Act (2013)

The act has been translated by Finnish through online translation services, as there was no available copy in English by the official authorities. The Act is mainly focusing on the study care services provided to students including plans and provisions to support their well-being, studies and development. There are almost no references to the key search terms.

One of the purposes of the Act is to ensure the accessibility (chapter 1, section 2, point 2) and equal availability and quality of study (point 3), as well as the cooperation between home and educational institution (point 2). Parts of study care are directed to interaction and inclusion of students (section 4), as well as prevention of exclusion (section 6). In section 11, the importance of education providers to inform students and guardians about the available support measures at the education institution is separately highlighted, as well as is the obligation of school staff to assist students in acquiring the benefits and services that are curated for them.

Student care psychologists and curators, as well as sufficient support and guidance are stipulated by section 15 towards an effort to eliminate study or developmental difficulties. Among the plans that are designed and implemented for students' welfare, the study care plan (drawn by the education organiser and in accordance with the curriculum) is required to enclose a plan to protect students from violence, bullying and harassment (section 13). Finally, it is remarkable that most of the services and plans should be evaluated and carried out by multidisciplinary expert groups, acknowledging the diverse facets of students needs and the importance of a multi-professional evaluation of each case.

4.2.7 Municipality Curriculum

The local curriculum serves as a manifestation of the goals defined in the national legislation for basic education and offers a guideline on the daily school practices and activities. The Municipality Curriculum is not available in English and can be found in Finnish at the official website of the municipality. It includes 15 chapters and 5 extra pages at the end of the contents, as additional information. One of the additional websites (not included in any of the 15 chapters) defines preparatory basic education for migrants. The analysis was based on a version of automatic translation provided by online services. The chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 13 were analysed more thoroughly, as they were judged to be more relevant with the topic of this research.

According to Chapter 1.3 ('Evaluation and development of the local curriculum'), the education organizer is responsible for "evaluating regularly and monitoring the implementation of the local curriculum and academic year plan". Defining further evaluation forms, chapter 4.2 requires evaluation information from each school community that will be addressed by the student care community. Furthermore, the same chapter requires that "the operators of the area meet at least once per school year to jointly consider goals and implementation methods related to the operating culture". Feedback from students, teachers and other actors are collected and considered in the planning and evaluation of annual plans and reports (chapter 4.4).

The goals and tasks of basic education are set on the third chapter of the local curriculum. Among them, inclusion, accessibility and equality are some of the principles underlined in the chapter. Teaching should be focusing on building pupils' own cultural identity, respecting cultural diversity and promoting interaction within and between cultures, according to the fundamentals of the basic education curriculum (chapter 2.2.). Likewise, chapter 3 defines the objectives of education and the importance of building an "operating culture that promotes growth, learning and effective student care".

According to Chapter 2.1 "when planning, organizing and deciding on basic education, the best interest of the child must be taken into account.

Teaching must be in cooperation with homes". Likewise, the school and classroom practices should be oriented towards the needs and interests of the pupils, while encouraging pupils' active participation and creating a safe atmosphere (chapter 4.3.).

The curriculum recognises that a key for developing the operational culture is an open and interactive discussion that respects others and involves all members of the community and builds trust. The activities of the school should consider the individuality of each pupil, as well as the cultural diversity. Language awareness and support of multilingualism is referred to in chapter 4.2. as a principle for inclusive learning environments.

A discouraging principle towards discriminations is defined in the same chapter, according to which "bullying, harassment, violence, racism or other discrimination will not be accepted, and inappropriate behaviour will be dealt with", without defining further the measures and approach of managing these situations. Equality is given special focus in the principles of the operating culture separating it from same treatment and relating it to equity and consideration of each individual's needs. However, equality is then specified to gender equality and the next provisions recommend gender-aware teaching approaches, without directing proportionate focus on ethnic equality.

The local curriculum devotes space in Chapter 9.4 to raise awareness on multilingual pupils and requires that teaching considers the backgrounds and starting points of the pupils, such as the mother tongue, culture and migration period. Furthermore, chapter 13.1 sets guidelines for maintaining the mother tongue of pupils and raising awareness on the multilayered identity and diverse backgrounds of students. Interdisciplinary cooperation in the school unit, versatile ways of language learning, encouraging the use of mother tongue in all classes, cooperation with home, flexible and supportive feedback and development of all different language skills are some of the practices suggested on chapter 13.1 about language education.

Provided support for learning is thoroughly defined in chapter 7 and separated in three different levels according to the needs of the students: general

support, enhanced support and special support. In the general support provisions, it is stated that, “even minor difficulties for pupils, as well as pupils with immigrant backgrounds and foreign-language speakers, should be taken into account in teaching and assessment situations” in order to provide general support (7.2). The curriculum recognises that differentiation in teaching is one of the most important preventive tools and form of general support.

The preparatory basic education curriculum, as an additional section at the end of the local curriculum, defines 9 sections with provisions for immigrant students that can receive preparatory education before integrating into pre-primary and basic education. The aim of the preparatory education is acquiring necessary Finnish skills in order to transition to basic education, as well as promoting integration in the Finnish society. The same section defines that additional goal of the preparatory education is maintaining the native language of the pupil through language teaching in pupil’s mother tongue.

Finally, another one of the additional sections of the curriculum cited after the last chapter is devoted to relevant attachments where one of them defines the goals, content, and assessment of the student’s learning in their own mother tongue teaching that supplements basic education. Concretely, all students with a mother tongue other than Finnish, Swedish or Saami can develop their own mother tongue in a separately funded course that aims to support their multilingualism and integration into the Finnish society. Furthermore, mother tongue teaching is required to support and encourage students to use their own language versatily in lessons of different subjects and in other school activities, thus assimilating and communicating the contents of school subjects in their own mother tongue. In this regard, the municipality prepares a local curriculum (in the same webpage) based on the sections referred to native language and literacy education that defines further the learning environments and working methods, as well as guidance, differentiation, support and evaluation of the student's learning.

4.2.8 Annual School Plan

The annual plan of the understudy school, issued in 2023, defines sections for the development of the school's operations and for harmonising the practices between different service areas of the school guaranteeing equality and quality education. It consists of eight chapters some of which specify activities in the year 2023-2025, support measures and directions of the school culture. According to the key word search, the document ignores completely the phenomenon of migration and multiple mentions of inclusion and equality were found.

Some of the core values that the school plan embraces and highlights from the national basic education curriculum is inclusion, the sense of community, participation and advocacy for a democratic society and sustainability. In the values of the municipal strategy, as mentioned in the annual school plan, are the humanity, openness, safety, responsibility, and courage, while the mission of the school is 'to promote the well-being, inclusion and community of residents' (chapter 1). In that same chapter, it is also mentioned that the school plan has been renewed in order to develop its role and practices towards equality, which is ensured by the provision of diverse services and adequate resources (chapter 4.4.).

The school annual plan has a chapter devoted to equality (n. 8) which according to the analysis is referred to the equality plan drawn by the school, the Equality Act between Women and Men and the Non-Discrimination Act. The equality plan defined in chapter 8.1 encloses a survey on issues of equality that arose through the year and sets objectives for the school including being aware of prejudices and enabling open dialogue on them, as well as engaging students in planning and discussions. It is notable that the school plan includes in the calendar year one fixed day as a Culture Day and a week called Tolerance Week. No more information is included in the annual school plan in regard to what this entails.

At subsection 4.2, there is a mention that guidance resources along with special education will be equally provided to pupils of grades 1-9 when needed, while support measures are flexible, adequately offered and serve the best

interests of the child (section 4.3.). The voices of students can be heard through the advocacy structures that the school annual plan defines, such as pupils' parliament, Youth Council and Student Council of Schools where students can defend and promote their rights and needs.

In the internationality section (7.1) there is a reference to the diverse cultural and linguistic school environment that should be taken into account when planning international activities. In the same section, it's reported that the school has a 15% of a minority group of pupils that has a native language other than Finnish and whose cultural backgrounds and starting points are well taken into account. The main stress of internationality in basic education is given on developing a global citizenship to students and using the home internationalisation as a practice for pupils to develop cultural competence and interaction skills instead of intending to ensure ethnic equality, inclusion, and equity. In subsection 7.4., an executive culture officer is defined, and events teams are organised to plan the cultural activities in the year.

4.2.9 Equality plan of the school

The equality plan of the under-study school is a manifestation of the provision from the *Act on Equality between Women and Men (2014)*, as well as the *Non-Discrimination Act (2014)* that require educational institutions to prepare a relevant plan. The goal of the plan is to "prevent discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression" (section 2 & 3).

The main direction of the document is to define measures and provisions for gender equality narrowing the scope of this concept and limiting mentions of other forms of discrimination in only two parts of the whole document; section 1 states that "everyone has the opportunity to work and study without discrimination on the basis of gender or other personal reasons" and section 2 connects the corresponding legislation from the Non-Discrimination Act that reacts to the obligation from EU to oppose to all form of discrimination. Apart from these two mentions, the document solely focuses on defining gender discrimination and measures to ensure gender equality. Lastly, it is crucial to

mention that the 6th section of the school's equality plan requires the communication of the document to school staff and pupils while teachers are guided to present an equality act to the students.

4.3 Findings from supplementary data analysis

According to the website of the National Board of Education that summarises the objectives and core values defined in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (EDUFI, 2019), the national curriculum is the general guideline for local curricula in order to assure the implementation of equality in all parts of the country. Some notable areas of the curriculum that are highlighted in this website is the focus on pupils' participation and development of cultural competence, interaction and self-expression. Furthermore, the curriculum seems to normalise the use of various languages in the school environment and activities, as well as to support the cultural diversity and language awareness as key principles.

On the other hand, there are no mentions on how to implement the respective measures and no reference to equitable measures, migrant or anti-racism education. The webpage mentions a curriculum reform in 2016 that was designed to "ensure that the knowledge and skills of Finnish children and youths will remain strong in the future, both nationally and internationally".

The official website of the Finnish National Agency of Education (EDUFI, 2004a) analyses basic information regarding primary and secondary education in Finland, including a section about education and support for pupils with migrant and multilingual background. The referred section (EDUFI, 2004b) defines preparatory education, teaching of Finnish or Swedish as a second language and the pupil's own mother tongue.

Furthermore, one of its focal points is directed towards language awareness and it suggests strategies to develop language aware schools through a digital tool, available through a link on the website. On the national level a manifestation of inclusion and equal opportunities is the funding policy for pre-primary and basic education (EDUFI, 2013) that aims to even out local differences taking into

consideration for instance the number of foreign language speakers in the municipality. The state offers subsidies to municipalities which have full autonomy on fund management and defining each school's level of autonomy accordingly.

Lastly, the Ministry of Education and Culture (2021, January 27) in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health published an action plan that aims in preventing bullying, harassment, teasing and violence and foresees training of staff and management of school units for the next three years in regard to its aims. The safety and wellbeing of pupils are the priority of the action plan while zero tolerance towards bullying in schools is its foundation. The plan encourages the engagement of youth workers and the designing of a separate programme devoted to strengthening pupils' emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills in the early childhood education stages, as tools to prevent bullying.

Zooming in the provisions defined on the municipal level, the respective municipality devotes numerous pages on defining education for migrant pupils and for multicultural programmes, as well as integration in the society. The website of the municipality encloses information about the provisions regarding preparatory education during comprehensive school grades and native language teaching. The preparatory teaching is offered for one year to "all foreign students", while native language teaching can be attended after school hours in classes of various age groups.

It is worth mentioned that the interested in heritage/native language teaching families are required to fill a form through this website which was found not to be available. Furthermore, migrant students are addressed under the term "foreigners" at the title and in the content of the information displayed.

The municipality seems to be quite active in international affairs initiating various projects for integration of migrants in the area. Apart from the curriculum being very informative on plurilingual and multicultural students, the city adopts an integration programme (following the binding requirement of the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, section 32 that obliges

municipalities to draw up an integration programme that is reviewed every four years) which aspires to promote integration of migrants in the area and ethnic equality.

“Integration means opportunities for inclusion, agency, and employment in the new society. Inclusion is a broad concept that includes both a sense of belonging and participation in a community.” The programme was designed in 2013 by a working team in contact with people with migrant backgrounds and associations representing migrants and is available only in Finnish. The integration plan includes a separate ethnic equality plan. It focuses mainly on migration matters among youth and adults, as well as integrating in social and work life Finnish community.

5 GRASSROOT-LEVEL EDUCATION IN REGARD TO MIGRATION

The results in this chapter are presented in two main themes reflecting the purpose of the second research question that aimed at exploring the grassroots-level education practices related to migrant students, as well as at observing problematic phenomena that were examined through the multi-professional interviews. The first theme analysed the practices that were adopted from education operators as part of the policy implementation and beyond. The second theme cited the phenomena that were observed on school grounds, were linked with migration and were judged problematic by the interviewees towards equal and safe education.

To protect the anonymity of the participants' identity, both pronouns (she/he) will be used when referring directly to an interviewee. Furthermore, there are blanks used in the place of the school's or municipality's name when there was such a reference in the results or a direct citation from the interview transcription. Finally, in order to avoid repetitive use of the complete profession or role of the interviewees, relevant abbreviations derived from the first letters of each word are used, for instance SNT for the special needs teacher, MR for municipal representative, etc.

5.1 Education practices considering migration

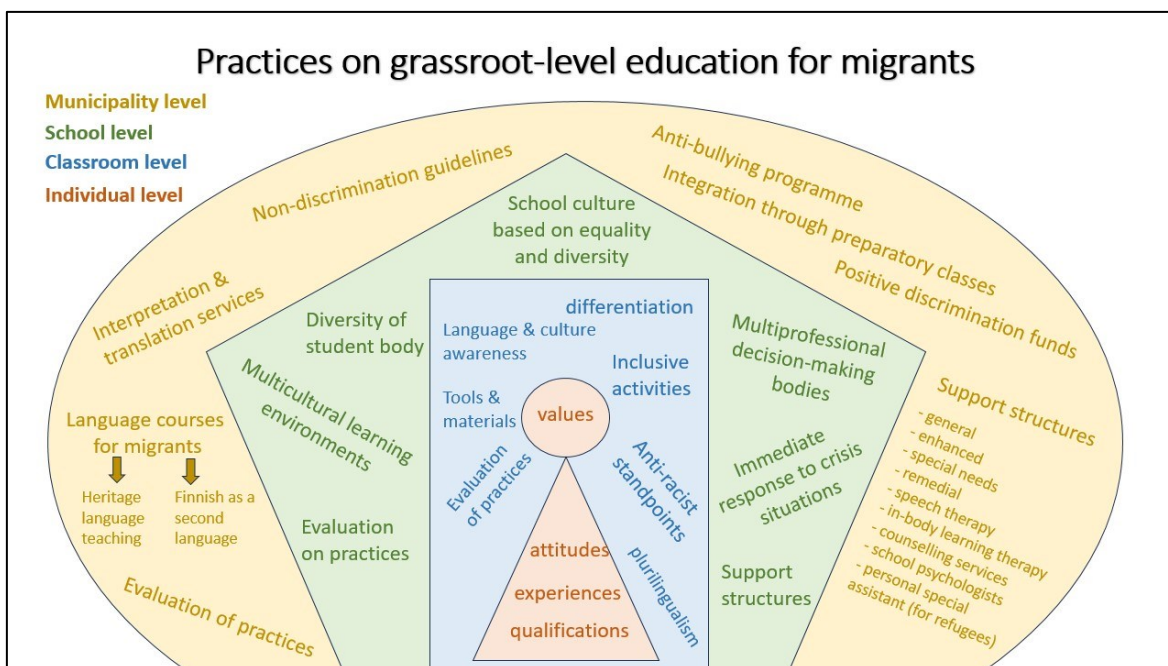
The interviewees were asked to elaborate on in what ways, and through which practices they supported inclusion, equality and non-discrimination in the education environment and how they accounted for the needs of migrant pupils.

There was a plethora of answers regarding individual, classroom, school, and municipality level practices (displayed in Figure 3) initiated by the education operators, some of which included very important services as manifestation of relative policies. Unanimously they raised their voice on the importance of culturally diverse school environments and the composition of education staffs'

profile. Lastly, they all mentioned examples of how they used self-reflective practices and feedback as an assessment of the effectiveness of their practices.

Figure 3

Practices on grassroots-level education for migrants



Note. The figure illustrates the education practices on the municipal (yellow shape), school (green), classroom (blue) and individual level (pink) considering migrant students, as described by the interviewees.

5.1.1 Individuals' profiles and initiatives

The two interviewed teachers (Heritage Language Teacher, Special Needs Teacher) and the guardian emphasised the importance of teachers' profiles, constituting of their personal experiences and values, but also of their education and professional development background, in creating equal spaces and opportunities for learning. The teachers agreed that being a model to the students is one of the most significant roles of their profession and practice towards equality.

Being openminded and confronting all the students as equals were the stances of HLT and SNT, who admitted that they could only be accountable of

themselves, as they were not sure if all school staff acted accordingly. Continuing this point, the SNT underlined the importance of being aware of the different cultural backgrounds while preparing the lesson content. The HLT noted that having personal experiences of migration and being in the centre of discriminatory, even racist situations helped them to better understand the needs of their students and to position inclusion and non-discrimination as a priority in their classrooms.

The SNT directed the focus of attitudes towards the education leaders highlighting that their standpoints could have a significant impact on the direction and development of the school. Furthermore, the SNT had repeatedly suggested that the qualifications of the school staff were gravely shaping the experiences students would have in their education path, while the guardian pinpointed the individual's personal beliefs, proactive attitudes and exposure to diversity, bringing an example of personal experience of her/his children verifying these factors were directly affecting the level of involvement in and the response to discriminatory situations.

Being as an educator open to feedback and using various ways to evaluate their work was one tool to assess and update the efficacy of their practices according to the HLT and the SNT. Acquiring feedback through the everyday situations, the progress of the students in the class and their personal opinions on the lessons designed by the teacher, as well as open communication with the parents and offering a variety of platforms for students to give were examples of ways to reflect on the efficiency of teachers' practices and to target blind spots that could contribute in teaching development.

5.1.2 Classroom-level initiatives

Focusing on the classroom-level initiatives, the interviewees recognised plenty of beneficial practices towards the enactment of inclusion and equality in the classrooms. Most of them focused on creating a safe and bonded student community in the classroom, preparing activities, and using tools that

correspond to the needs of the students and accounting for diversity when planning and evaluating the learning.

For the teachers (SNT, HLT), it was crucial that students become part of the class team and engage socially by encouraging discussions, teamwork activities and group play by mixing the groups and ensuring that no one is left out. The MR highlighted the teachers' efforts to shape a safe environment that students can trust and feel comfortable, a priority that SNT and HLT agreed that is of utmost importance in the classroom. Avoiding being judgemental while on the contrary trying to empathise with the students and their experiences was a daily practice incorporated in HLT's teaching.

The values of the teacher translated into the activities and materials used in the classroom is depicted by the examples by HLT in the interview. The selection of learning and teaching material was targeted to initiate discussions and to raise awareness over topics such as cultural identity, inclusion, and discrimination with the superior goal to learn about and respect each other's cultures.

I have a book that I start every year off with and it's called our classes are family and it actually has[...]really beautiful pictures[...]and it's very diverse classroom with students of all different backgrounds and different special needs. And it's all about how we help each other and how we are together, even though we are different, and we celebrate each other's differences, and we need to learn about them. (HLT)

The first graders we read a book called the invisible string and its about how no matter where you are in the world, there's a string that ties around your heart and connects you to the people that you love[...]then we're like, OK, so who do you have invisible strings with? And I give them a paper, they got to draw pictures of who they had invisible strings with. And in this case, we got a chance to talk[...] about our identities and our cultural backgrounds and how diverse they all are. (HLT)

The SNT directed the focus on the linguistic and cultural background of the students which was taken into consideration during the lesson designing process and in the selection of the teaching tools. For instance, using visual materials describing the daily structure of the lesson, adapting their speech techniques to the level of the students, allowing the use of translation tools and a big variety of

materials for the better comprehension of the concepts by the students are some examples of practices that can alleviate difficulties in learning caused by the language barrier. On the other hand, collecting information about the students' backgrounds from the guardians and the students themselves, teachers can modify and better prepare the teaching session eliminating chances of triggering some negative feelings or sensitive memories from pupils' past.

Acknowledging the importance of plurilingualism in the classroom context, the SNT presented examples of practices that encourage students to maintain and develop further their mother tongue in parallel with Finnish during the classroom activities, such as incorporating daily greetings in all the different languages that students use at school or at home, encouraging reading in the mother tongue of the student, whenever that's possible, and sharing parts of their cultural identity with the classroom body. Lastly, the teacher mentioned the use of a very useful and beneficial tool (Manabua) that is not anymore in their availability due to lack of resources. It was about a video library through which students could learn about a subject unit by watching a video in one of the students' mother tongue and add Finnish subtitles. In addition, through this tool the teachers could print information and material about the subject in the mother tongue of the student, enabling better understanding of the concepts.

According to the heritage language teacher's (HTL) report, the phenomenon of migration is linked with discrimination based on race. Thus, adopting an anti-racist standpoint and implementing that with the choices of materials being used and the open discussions on topics of racism, discrimination, cultural identity and equality while addressing immediately discriminatory situations when they arise both with the students and the parents were some of the methods that the HLT implemented in the classroom towards equal and non-discriminatory learning environments. "I actually opened up discussion that we talked about racism in Finland... We need to talk about that and why that's not OK" (HLT).

When it comes to migrant pupils' assessment, both the heritage language teacher and the special needs teacher noted that each student is approached

separately and the goals are set on each students' personal level, taking into consideration their starting point and different backgrounds. Furthermore, the students were asked to fill a self-evaluation of their progress which always ended up having the same view with the teacher, according to HLT.

When I am assessing all my students regardless of if they are migrant to Finland or they lived here all their life, I think about them and then I think about how they grown and change throughout the year and I will like look up what they've written, what they've like read, and I try to adjust my assessment per each student, not necessarily being like every student has to be at this level and that means a ten. It's individually looking at each student. (HLT)

The SNT agreed that for migrant students to be assessed fairly and not allow the language barrier to affect the evaluation of their progress, teachers differentiate the exams adjusting them on each case. Students are allowed to use translators and there is the option that an assistant can support them during the examination process. The type of evaluation can be written, oral or a combination and the records of the students' evaluation can be differentiated as well, using a pass statement which means that the student has reached the goals and can move to the next grade, instead of numerical scores. Lastly, the recommendation from the superior of the HLT was to include different types of assessment in order to have a holistic image of their progress.

There are different types of assessment, there is like formative assessment, there is summative assessment and then there is individual assessment and she/he is very strong in that you need to do all of them[...]You can't just be that like, oh, I looked at their books and the grammar wasn't great in the books, and so they're going to get a low grade. No[...] I need to think about where that student was. And I need to think about how the students have grown and I need to pick and talk to the students themselves and hear what they have to say. (HLT)

The teaching was modified to reflect the existing knowledge and the language level they possess, as the special needs teacher marked. There was cooperation among the teachers in designing and implementing the plan, including the

general classroom teachers, the preparatory classroom teachers and the special needs teachers.

5.1.3 School- level initiatives and ecosystem

On school-level, the interviews revealed a variety of practices initiated by the school staff and a huge effort to provide an open and equal learning environment for everyone. The majority of interviewees noticed that the diversity and the values of the school ecosystem has a great impact on its state of equality. Furthermore, school-based practices and migration focused activities were additional examples of the school's agency on supporting equal opportunities.

According to the AP, the SNT and guardian, the relevantly good level of equality at school was attributed to the high percentage of migrant students and cultural diversity that this specific school had. The 1/3 of the student body had a migrant background and even in some classrooms the majority of students consisted of migrant pupils which led to the necessity of acknowledging diversity and learning to respect it.

Our school is very multicultural, we, as a school respect these other cultures and let them be how they are and let them dress how they want and express their own culture. And show an example that we embrace that, that they can show that cultural (aspect), if it's language or if it's dressing or if it's food or their identity. (SNT)

[...] we have here really many languages in our school, and when you're on the recess you can hear different kind of languages and it's not all Finnish and it's a good thing that we can hear different languages and maybe through that learn also to respect the different languages, and it's also fun to observe when the students teach each other. (SNT)

The G highlighted the importance of multicultural school environments in students' mental health by sharing her/his oldest child's experience from two different schools where in the first one he experienced bullying due to his background and language level while teachers did not act proportionally and effectively to that. "Since going to school with a bigger population of children

from other countries with a more proactive and inclusive attitude, things are a lot better", she/he admitted.

According to the AP, the school's aim was to build one common culture through its values of equality and diversity, despite the cultural differences, and to support everyone's well-being by offering a comfortable environment to be in and learn. As a practice to celebrate this diversity, the school organised over the years international days where "students would come together and talk about their own culture and, for example, prepare their traditional food, and present their culture, their language" (AP).

The MR hoped that the schools would encourage students to develop their cultural expressions (by using ethnic language, dressing) and appreciated the school initiatives to demonstrate their multicultural character and shape learning environments in a welcoming to other cultures way.

In some schools there are simple maps in the school building, which shows from which part of the world the pupils are coming, there are greetings, and different kind of posters at school where is written in every language hello or this kind of simple things. (MR)

The guardian recognised the school's efforts to be inclusive through practices such as offering language lessons to support migrant students' Finnish language skills, organising social events especially addressed to migrant parents, openly communicating through the online platform used and confronting migrant students as beneficial to the school community. In addition, the SNT referred to the school's effort to consider the social integration of the migrant student by positioning them to a classroom with already familiar to them students.

The support structures of the school enabled immediate and efficient response to crisis situations such as cases of bullying, racism and violence. The SNT, AP and MR agreed, and the guardian verified, that through immediate and appropriate reaction to these situations, engagement in constructive discussion with the parents, students, and school staff, as well as external actors, such as police officials and local youth workers, the school fought discriminatory or racist situations.

The above-mentioned interviewees presented the role of the “behaviour counsellor” (“kasvatusohjaaja”) as an integral part of the school. Her/His role was to be present and observe the pupils in different settings while engaging and assisting in situations that needed attention in the facilities. Lastly, the SNT presented as an additional example of the school’s support structures, the School Welfare Group that consisted of various school staff (among them principals, school nurses, school social workers, psychologists, special needs teacher) who met monthly and planned to support the well-being of students at the whole school level dealing with school-based phenomena, such as bullying, intoxication and students’ wellbeing.

As reported by the assistant principal, the leadership of the school was consisting of thematic teams (including teachers, learning assistants and other staff members) that were responsible for making plans and decisions on different topics. These teams were gathering at the end of the year to evaluate their performance and reached goals, so that at the beginning of the next academic year they could plan and adapt accordingly their policies and practices. On top that, the guardian had observed that the school reflected on its performance considering data from annual evaluation surveys sent to parents.

Overall, the interviewees agreed that the school did its best to include and integrate migrant students, given the resources they were provided with.

5.1.4 Municipality-level initiatives

Likewise, on the municipal level, the municipal manager stated that the city did its best to ensure that migrant students had a good start in education, explaining that their stance was to equally welcome everyone and to not allow any form of discrimination, a guideline particularly emphasised in the municipal anti-bullying programme. Initiatives by the municipality included courses for migrant students’ development of mother tongue and Finnish language skills, interpretation services for the parents and support structures for the pupils. Lastly, development projects of the city and attraction of special funds to enact those were highlighted by the MR.

The municipal representative (MR) stated that heritage language learning was of outmost importance for the families of different cultural backgrounds. After the interview with the heritage language teacher (HLT), it was clear that this was the place where migrant students were feeling the most comfortable and confident, as they were becoming part of a community that understood them, they were able to easily communicate with their peers and teacher their needs and experiences, while their culture and identity was cherished and celebrated.

The provision for 1-2 years preparatory teaching prepared the students to learn and write in Finnish, to acquire other important for studying skills and to support them in socially integrating with the general class step by step, according to the MR. The MR continued that the municipality offered in-service training to teachers in order to develop their teaching strategies when integrating students from preparatory class to general teaching and while supporting the literacy skills in reading in Finnish. Another very important service, according to the interviewed guardian (G) and the special needs teacher (SNT), was the availability of interpretation and translation services that could be requested during the meetings between the teacher and the pupil's parents.

The SNT explained that the education system enabled three levels of support that all students had the right to request if there was a need and this was divided into the general level (*yleinen tuki*) where students could get some extra hours of support from the classroom or special needs teacher, the enhanced support (*tehostettu tuki*) where students could receive additional support as part time education and use differentiated materials and teaching, and at highest level was the special needs support (*erityinen tuki*) that could be offered full time. Finally, apart from these three levels of support, the special needs or classroom teacher could provide remedial teaching (*tukiopetus*) to students as individual guiding support.

The SNT noted that in Finland there is no requirement of an official diagnosis in order for pupils to receive any kind of support; everyone has equal right to use the support services. The municipal representative (MR) supplemented further the provision for speech therapy and in-body learning

therapy offered by request and the always available counselling services and sessions with school psychologists in the school facilities. In addition, refugee students, only, could be supported with a personal special assistant if there was a physical or psychological diagnosis, according to MR's positioning.

The MR accentuated the importance of allocated funds by the state to develop their practices towards equality, equity, and inclusion. The municipality received extra funding support from the Ministry of Education and the National Agency of Education, as positive discrimination to alleviate inequalities based on social and unemployment indicators of the respective municipality.

During last academic year we have had a project funded by National Board of Education, so we have developed those ways to integrate preparatory class children to the other classes. (MR)

Feedback for the applied practices was received through various ways on the municipality level, as the MR reported. There were two annual questionnaires distributed to all students of basic education; one designed by the municipality (koulutyytyväisyyskysely) that aimed in capturing the level of satisfaction of the students from their schooling experience and one provided nationally (hyvinvointikysely) evaluating the general practices, for instance the democracy in the classroom. The manager has been reflecting on her/his own practices on a daily and annual basis, analysing the efficient performances and the ones that required further development and improvement. In the municipality there were employees who evaluated statistically the development of the projects and the efficacy of the official decisions.

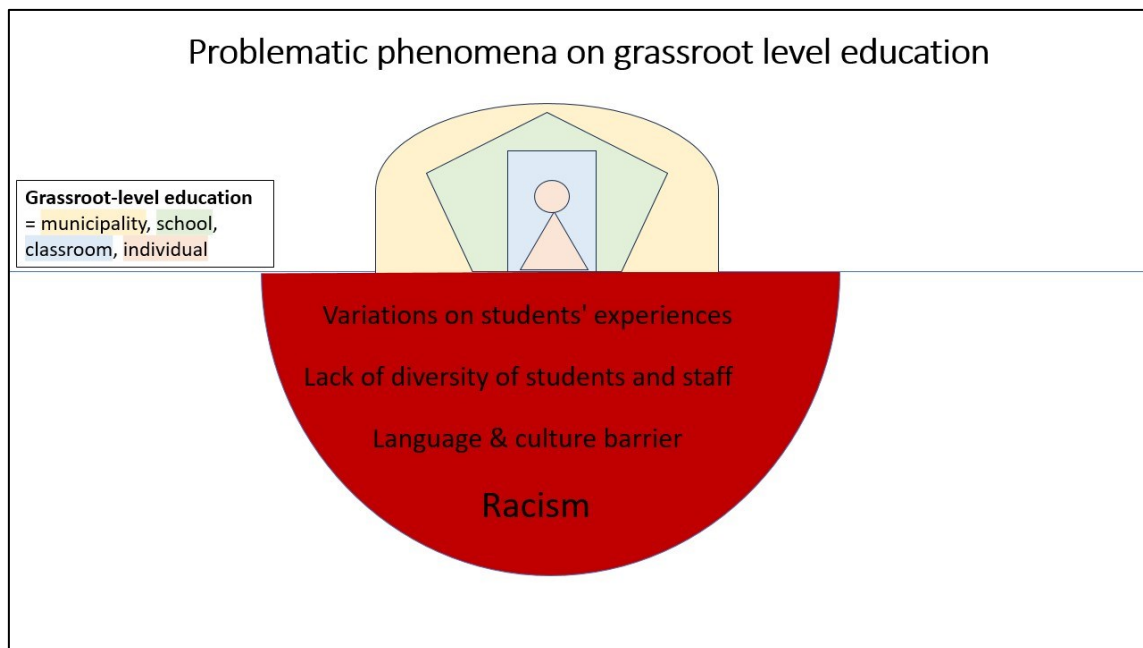
5.2 Problematic phenomena on the grassroots-level education

While municipal and school education operators do their best to offer an equal, inclusive, and welcoming environment to migrant students, there are quite many factors that prohibit this initiative, and which can be better described through the context of four phenomena observed in this study. It is not only the school that is linked to migration and corresponding issues judged to be problematic,

according to the interviewees. Figure 4 presents these problematic phenomena that are observed on the grassroots-level education.

Figure 4

Problematic phenomena on the grassroots-level of primary education



The Figure 4 shows the four main problematic phenomena that are observed on the grassroots level education, including racism in social and educational environments, language and culture barriers, lack of diversity of school students and staff and variations on students' experiences. These phenomena were identified by the interviewees on the municipal and school grounds. The phenomena are analysed in detail through the next sections.

5.2.1 Racism in social and educational environments

All the interviewed participants had shared their personal experiences or of people close to them that had been victims of racism, bullying or discrimination in school environments in Finland, or in general as well. Unanimously, they agreed that racism is a social and structural phenomenon in Finland that threatens school environments, as a plethora of narratives revealed.

The interview with the guardian of two migrant pupils shed light to the phenomenon of bullying based on racism in school grounds and in discriminatory behaviour and inequalities in the Finnish society. Both examples refer to the previous school of the oldest of her/his children where she/he was bullied mainly for the level of his language skills while the school did not react appropriately to the incident.

Discrimination and bullying in my sons old school, there was racist graffiti on the walls, regular bullying. Also, many children in the class said that my son spoke Finnish like a baby, and he stopped speaking almost entirely in the classroom. He would never ask for help or anything, because he was worried about his accent in Finnish and he had like quite a lot of bullying that we tried to raise with the school and it didn't really go anywhere. The teacher was crossed that he didn't ask for help when he needed help and didn't understand that he couldn't ask for help because he was scared of speaking in front of the other class children, and being, like, laughed out for his way of speaking. (G)

My son was suffering from violence and bullying and harassment that in the previous school he was in the school didn't really do anything about it. And eventually I took him out of that school and they did ask me was it because of the bullying? And I said 'yes, it wasn't just the bullying, it was the reaction to it and always kind of downplaying it' and, yeah, kind of not really doing anything about my son getting like pushed into puddles and having his like coat taken away and hidden and all of this stuff that kept going on and he was very, very unhappy through for a long time. (G)

The HLT reported in the interview that quite many of their students had received some kind of bullying or discriminatory behaviour in the school environment. One experience of a migrant student that had been bullied in the under-study school and the effect it had in his development was illustrated by the HLT as follow:

He was in a regular Finnish classroom, but when he finally got the confidence to start speaking Finnish a lot of the other boys in classrooms made fun of him for speaking baby Finnish, because his Finnish was out of much lower level than theirs and then he got a lot of bullying. He had huge self-confidence problems that he actually ended up having and then the school didn't do anything, the school said 'Maybe he needs to learn how to speak Finnish, a bit better and how to be a bit more of a boy and then he'll fit in it better' and then

actually it ended up being that he had to change again school, because that school wasn't doing anything to help. And now the kid loves the school and has a lot of friends. And actually that school[...]it's a lot more diverse than this school he was before. (HLT)

The assistant principal stated that at school there were fights between different cultural groups and that it was challenging to identify the racist situations, as there were cultural variations on what was perceived as a severe bullying or racist incident. The AP claimed that most of those fights were initiated due to misunderstandings that were based on the language barriers between the students. However, the municipal representative could clearly identify that there was racism at schools, both between students, due to political tensions of their cultural backgrounds, and between students and teachers.

For example, some teacher won't sit during the lunchtime in the table where there are migrant peoples, although the same teacher has to teach all children in the lesson[...]Those for second generation migrants, although they speak the same heritage language or mother tongue, they still can bully the first generation migrants, because they think that they have been longer here in Finland. They are Fins. [...] For example, refugees from Afghanistan who have been placed in Iran, but have never got an official refugee position in Iran and who have been bullied in Iran, when they come to Finland they take very much distance with the people from Iran[...]I have heard that there have been problems with the Somali and Russian kids. So, basically the traditional white against black, if I would say in this way and, but there are plenty of stories. (MR)

The SNT explained that these problems (of racism and bullying) were usually coming from home and not from the students themselves, as they were rooted in society, but affected greatly the school community that needed to deal with the consequences of racism.

If racism is seen in a society, it affects on schools as well and as long as there is even in the micro level it is seen here because these children come from homes where it can be very different kind of values that we teach in here. They are in social media, they see and hear all kinds of things. They see bullying in social media or see or face it in the social media or in their like living area stores and streets and[...] Of course we can do something in schools, but as long as it's there, like in the bigger picture is really hard to like do something about it in schools. (SNT)

The teacher also added that even if students made it through school, they might still confront discriminatory situations while for instance getting a job or renting an apartment due to their different ethnical backgrounds, explaining that “opportunities are not the same, it can be harder (for migrants)” and acknowledging racist attitudes as a “social construct”.

There is racism in Finland, it is in our society, is a social construct. [...] I have this kind of like a feeling that Finns are not the most tolerant people. And we have the prejudices towards differences and different ethnicities. (SNT)

The MR and AP agreed with the SNT that “there is structural racism in our culture in general, and of course that penetrates the schools as well” (AP). Two narratives of the principal’s experience and two additional of the MR’s described below in detail illustrate the “glass roof phenomenon” of racism, as “there are no official obstacles, but still exists” (AP).

If you have for example foreign name and you want to call and ask the work,[...] the company's doesn't answer even your phone call or e-mail when it comes from the person who have a foreign name. So, in the theory, they have the same possibilities and opportunities, but then comes to the practise. (MR)

When you are searching work, if you don't know the Finnish, as a foreign, you can have more experience and more skills and you would be more suitable for certain jobs. But, the companies are hiring the Finnish person [...] who has no working experience only because of the Finnish language. (MR)

I have a friend of mine who moved to Finland when he was already an adult. He is a special education teacher. One of the first teachers in Finland with migrant background that were allowed to teach Finnish, in Finnish. Usually, it's so that, ok, you have a migrant background, you are perfect to teach migrant students. But had a fully Finnish classroom and he was a special education teacher teaching Finnish children. But then because he has an Arab name, so he kind of stands out, it happened 15 years ago that we applied for the same position. I didn't know him then, but we had applied to the same position and from my viewpoint at that time he was more qualified than I am. But since he has an Arab name, although he speaks [...] excellent Finnish, I was chosen to that position. I don't know whether that was, but I think there was structural racism in that. And he told me that he

got sick and tired of applying to principal positions in Finland because he didn't even get the invitation to the interview because of his name, basically. (AP)

I was working actually in the institute, I had a colleague who was doing his PhD. And He was cleaning toilets in X (municipality's name) centre or he was cleaning the movie theatre. I was going to say that only in Finland do we have people with PhDs cleaning toilets and that's a waste of Human resources, I mean, and the only fact was the Finnish language. Immediately when he left Finland, he was appointed professor in Cameroon, of course he has a PhD, but then I mean in that sense people with migrant backgrounds have hard time getting employed in Finland. (AP)

A bit further from personal experiences, but publicly known, the example of the University of Helsinki was brought by the heritage language teacher. In detail, she/he mentioned that quite many employers did not hire candidates "because their last name was not Finnish".

You know, because their name looks, you know even like the University of Helsinki got trouble with that, cause they were doing like, I think this was just not even a year ago, but they were doing that, they needed some interns or some kind of workers for some programme at the university of Helsinki. And the Faculty got in trouble because they were only selecting applicants to be interviewed with Finnish last names. (HLT)

5.2.2 Language and culture barrier

All the interviewees (HLT, SNT, AP, MR, G) had identified language as a barrier for migrant students learning experience and focused on the age as a significant factor on the impact the barrier had on the students' performances at school and on their opportunities later in life. The cultural identity was introduced by the guardian as a barrier as there was a need to assimilate and not to encourage spaces for other cultures in the school. The guardian, HLT and SNT further extended the negative impact of the language and culture barrier on the parents' participation in school affairs, social inclusion in school community and in their children's learning path.

The HLT, SNT and G specified that the language barrier could stand as a hindrance in the social inclusion of migrant students, as they might not be able

to engage in social interaction with their peers, might not feel confident to join school initiatives, such as the Student Council, and after school activities. The guardian further demonstrated that the language barrier is interconnected with the school performance of the migrant students and the lower expectations of the teachers to them that reflected on the academic choices they were pushed to make and the kind of jobs they would be able to acquire.

There's an assumption that the language skills won't be as good, and that children aren't necessarily given as many opportunities as they could be, or pushed academically as much as they could be. (G)

The MR and AP agreed that Finnish language skills was a prerequisite for school and academic success, underlining the opportunity gap that the language barrier created in school and work life contexts.

To do well in school, you would need to master the language quite well, and if you're struggling with the language, that kind of affects your learning throughout the academic subjects. (AP)

Learning the language is the first step to integrate in this area in Finland. You can act differently when you live in Helsinki. But if you want to get a job in (name of the municipality), you need to know the Finnish language. (MR)

If you are 14 and only know how to read and write in your own mother language, you need to start the school from point zero. Of course, it takes 10 years to achieve the same with those kids who are Fins and were born here and have achieved at the same time. (MR)

For the language learning, the MR added that the way that teachers approached the language in the classrooms was inadequate and inefficient. All students from different grades and different language levels were put in the same classroom and there were only differentiated tasks. There was no adopting of pedagogical methods, such as CLIL, that could enforce students' performance in the general classes and development of the Finnish language skills.

The guardian further introduced the cultural diversity of migrant students that sometimes could become a hindrance to participation in activities, as well as

inclusion in school community, if students did not comprehend some parts of the culture. According to the interview, the migrant students might try to hide their cultural identity in order to fit in in the school community and not feel like foreigners/outsideers. The youngest child of the guardian had not mentioned in the class her/his origin, according to the guardian's report, raising concerns that the system encouraged assimilation to Finnish culture and not maintaining the home culture. "From my own children is not necessarily that much in terms of celebration of other cultures. It's more a case of how quickly we can make them as like Finnish as possible", an argument also supported by the SNT that observed that there has been too much focus on Finnish language and culture forgetting to show interest in the diversity of cultures and languages in the school.

Furthermore, most of the interviewees (G, SNT, HTL) reached consensus on the impact of language and culture barrier on the role of parents in basic education, as they have not been able to offer support to their children during homework and be part of their learning experience and progress.

Parents are left out and I think parents are like such a key part to...any child success in education[...]And if parents can't properly support their child in education, then that is also a massive thing you know the child could be getting all the support they need at school, and be getting like the best education ever. But then if their parents can't help them at home, then,... it becomes like this student has a life at school but that's a life at school and life at home and they do not overlap. (HLT)

If they (native Finnish students) have parents, guardians, families, grandads, uncles, aunts around who can help them to do out of school activities and clubs and things, those children will have an advantage. There is homework given from first grade pretty much every night. That homework is harder for the parents who don't speak Finnish very fluently. It's harder for the parents to help those children with the homework. (G)

If parents don't necessarily speak Finnish, they can't help these students at home and their homework. And if their parents are not included in our society, they are always in their own family or friends, and in the same ethnic group that students don't get this model from them like how to be in part of the society. (SNT)

The interviewees further identified the challenges of the language barrier on the social inclusion of the parents in school community and activities, as well as the communication between school and parents pointing out that the main platform of communication and the majority of materials sent to parents were issued in Finnish only. The exclusion of parents from the education process was clearly present in the national core curriculum, as their role was completely ignored in the primary and basic legislation of education, according to the HLT.

The messages that get sent home on Wilma, are always in Finnish. And so, I think that doesn't have any interpretation or assistance services for the parents to understand, [...] So parents need to reach out and try to find somebody who can help. [...] The parents aren't important part of integrating students into the Finnish education system and there is also nothing about parents in the core curriculum. (HLT)

[...] where everyone's together and they're talking about how to benefit the class and how to everything that parents might feel extremely left out, they may not even want to participate. (HLT)

That's quite hard as a parent without the language skills to get involved in (school-based activities), even if you would want to be involved in it. (G)

Lastly, the guardian admitted that it has been extremely challenging to find solutions and to get support, as there was no information openly provided to families on where to seek assistance and what kind of services were offered to them. "You have to speak up if you want help rather than the help is given straight away" (G).

5.2.3 Lack of diversity of school students and staff

The HLT, the AP and the G, all, noticed that most of the school environments were lacking diversity in regard to students' and teachers' ethnic and cultural backgrounds, a phenomenon that was recognised as a challenge in achieving ethnic equality at schools, due to the lack of representative role models at school and the inability to experientially understand migrant students' needs, according to the guardian. The interviewees do recognise that their school is unique and an

exception of that rule, as the student body includes a considerable percentage of migrant students.

The HLT underlined the negative impact of non-diverse classrooms on the state of equality and non-discrimination of schools, stating that most of the classrooms in Finland are homogenic and differ a lot from the completely diverse student bodies in heritage language classes. The AP explained that there was a significant deviation of highly and deficiently diverse classrooms and schools, as the population of minorities was gathered in certain areas creating polarisation due to socioeconomic factors.

The guardian and assistant principal further analysed the phenomenon of lack of ethnic diversity in teachers and school staff as problematic while the AP blamed the extremely challenging process of recognition of teaching qualifications in Finland. They both recognised that this lack of diversity resulted in the inability of school staff to recognise and be aware of what the students are experiencing, as well as to identify inequalities.

We need to recognise sometimes for simple structural racism is harder for me to detect than someone who is actually experiencing that. (AP)

People have to do really, really well through the Finnish education system to become a teacher, and typically immigrant background students don't do very well in the Finnish education system. And if they're not then becoming teachers, they're not able to be in the education system. They're not able to affect change and to say "wait a minute, this is something that this student is experiencing". So, I do think there needs to be all the way up through education and it's not just education, it's every layer of society. (G)

The interviewed guardian added that students had only native Finnish school models to look up to and identify as valuable for these positions. She/He also highlighted the impact of the lack of representation of school role models on how children's views and experiences were shaped and on the difficulty of relating themselves with such positions.

I would say the vast majority, if not all, of the school staff are of Finnish background. There's not necessarily anybody present in the school that the children might be able to

relate to as second language learners or as people who haven't always lived their whole life in Finland, and I think that our representation really matters for children. And if they see that all of the teachers and all the people in the positions of power are Finnish people who have always lived in Finland, then they may end up wondering, what do people like me do. I think it has a big impact on how children see themselves as well. (G)

I think, but definitely, in terms of the students, it would really help if there were people working in the school that maybe could identify with their experiences and give them some understanding and some support and have a bit of like internal knowledge of what they might be going through. [...] no one is seeing them. And the people who are seeing and experiencing the problems may not have the language, the authority or the agency to actually get those problems addressed in the way that they need to be addressed. (G)

5.2.4 Variation of students' experiences

As it is resulted from the analysed data, the HLT, AP, G and MR recognised the impact of individuals' values and mindsets in teaching practices and therefore to the variation of experiences migrant students have.

This impact can be an asset if the practices are directed by open-minded and proactive attitudes, experience of multicultural environments and exposure to diversity. However, they can also be a problem if teachers are ignorant, unexperienced and culturally unaware, not willing to include students with migrant backgrounds and driven by racist standpoints. Interviewees recognised that the root of the problem was identified in the teachers' (and not only) autonomy which allowed individuals' ideologies and attitudes to create a vast gap on the learning and schooling experiences of migrant students.

There is a distinct difference I have noticed, not just between schools,[...] but also different teachers. Because teachers have a lot of autonomy and a lot of control over what they teach and don't teach in the classroom[...] there is considerable variation in how an immigrant student will be included in the class, because if you have a teacher who is very proactive, very understanding, quite-open-minded and experienced, then your child is going to have a much better time in school and be more included if the teacher is not open minded, does not want to understand, perhaps like they're not interested in their job anymore or something. (G)

If you have very conscientious teachers who really want to look into their own prejudices and who do want to be open and positive and want to involve students in planning and things, then those teachers will go ahead and do that and they will make sure that they do that and they will put their energy and effort into doing it, and it will show in their teaching and engagement with the children. But if teachers do not want to do this and they don't feel like they should have to and their like not positive about these things, then they can just go right ahead and be like that. (HLT)

6 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLICY AND GRASSROOT LEVEL EDUCATION

This chapter examines the third research question regarding the relationship of theory (policy provisions) and practice (grassroot-level initiatives) based on combined findings from the content analysis of policy documents and the 360-degree perspective interview process. Apart from the comparison of the two data sets findings, this chapter presents the participants' opinions on challenges faced in the grassroot level education prohibiting equal confrontation and inclusion of migrant students. In addition, the findings presented in this chapter stem from the interviewees' comments on the policy document findings displayed to them as part of the interview process. Lastly, the participants proposed recommendations to stakeholders towards more equitable measures and inclusive policies.

Replying to the question on whether migrant students have equal opportunities with their native peers, unanimously the interviewees admitted that this was not implemented in practice, although policy documents theoretically promoted equal quality education. Furthermore, deficiencies in policy level and ineffective policies that did not serve the practice (summarised in Figure 5) were accused as accountable for the opportunity gap and for allowing space for the manifestation of problematic phenomena on school grounds, according to the interviewees. The relationship described above is illustrated in the Figure 6. Lastly, in an effort to envision a better future for equal, inclusive, and equitable education for migrant students, the interviewees proposed a variety of policy reforms and implementation measures.

Figure 5

Policy gaps observed on policy level education

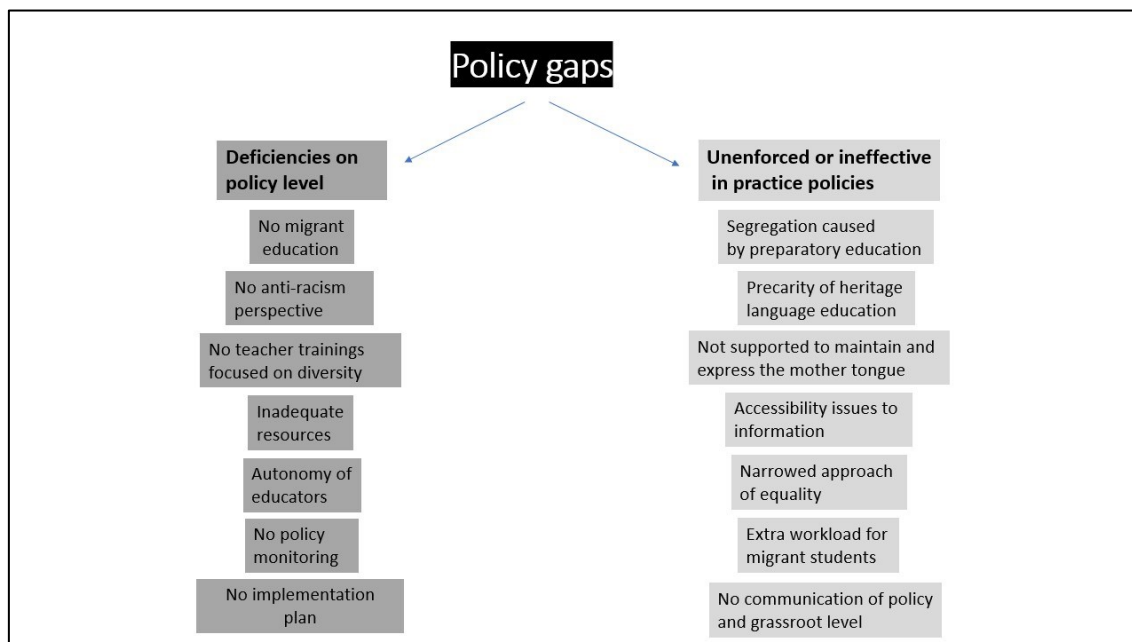
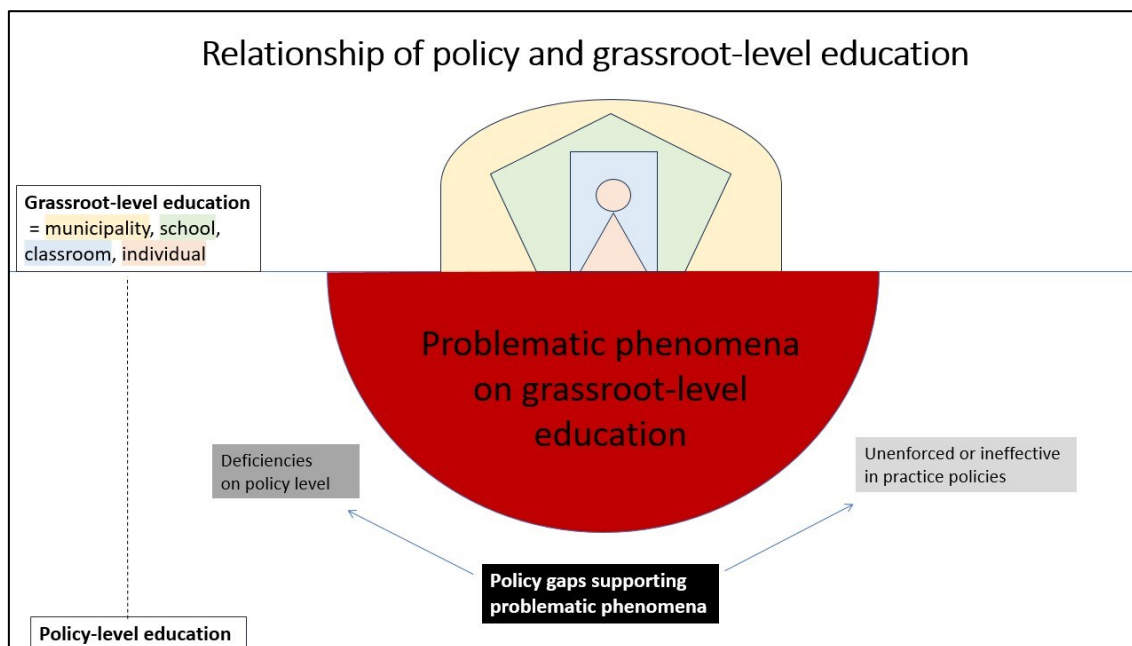


Figure 5 aims to display the total of policy gaps recognised by the interviewees when they were shown the findings from the policy document analysis and asked to state their opinion in regard to accountability on challenges observed at grassroot level education. The data provided by the interviewees were categorised in two themes according to the root problem: deficiencies on policy level and unenforced or ineffective in practice policies. Sections 6.2. and 6.3. of this thesis analyses in detail these gaps.

Figure 6

Relationship of policy and grassroots-level education

Note. The figure presents the problematic phenomena observed in grassroots-level education (displayed in detail in Figure 4) that are supported by the policy gaps (analysed in Figure 5).

This Figure aims to depict the relationship of education policy and practice through a graph that includes the summary of Figures 3,4 and 5. The grassroots level education includes all the initiatives and practices used in municipality, school, classroom, and individual level education (displayed in detail in Figure 3). Below that, the gap that carries the observed problematic phenomena that are expressed in grassroots level education (displayed in detail in Figure 4) is supported by the policy gaps that encompass policy deficiencies and unenforced or ineffective in practice policies (displayed in detail in Figure 5).

6.1 Equal opportunities in theory, not in practice

According to most of the interviewees, migrant students do not have equal opportunities with their native peers, although policy documents promise that education should promote equal opportunities and equality in society, as defined by the *Basic Education Act* (1998, section 2.2.) and the *Compulsory Education Act* (2020, section 1). According to the SNT and AP, the school tries its best to provide equal access to activities and individualised learning, to be welcoming and inclusive while cherishing the culturally diverse student body in the school; however, the interviewees recognised many hindrances in achieving equality in practice, both on school level and after school years when entering the labour market. The HLT, SNT, AP and G identified the opportunity gap between migrant and native students blaming belief systems, such as prejudices, but also deficiencies on the policy level.

They (migrant students) finish with like lower grades and lower results, even if the language is not necessarily something that they are concerned about. In terms of career options and things that, it can be that they are advised to go for jobs which are maybe like lower paid or less prestigious than the other classmates [...] It's been found that there are differences in the achievements of students who come from an immigrant background. [...] And the lack of interest, it seems (to be) almost from Finnish education in immigrant students. (G)

According to the special needs teacher, there is no true equality yet because students are on different levels from many aspects and because there are prejudices towards different ethnicities and cultures. Following the AP's report, students with migrant backgrounds do not have the same opportunities with other students at the school and later in life. Opposing to this argument, she/he claimed that school activities were offered to all students, but if students did not participate due to the language barrier, "that's a separate thing".

The language might be small barrier, but it's not deliberately there. And teachers they often even encourage students to participate. (AP)

Interviewees seemed to agree that students who come at a younger age to Finland have more chances of having equal opportunities with native Finnish speaker students at school and later in life. Having more time to adapt into the Finnish culture, to understand the Finnish working life and to absorb Finnish quicker seemed to be the reasonings the heritage language teacher gave.

The phenomena observed in grassroot level education include racism, language and culture barriers, lack of representation of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds in school staff, as well as the variations on pupil's experiences based on the teachers' attitudes. This proves, according to the guardian and the heritage language teacher, that the schools are not provided with adequate tools, measures and guidelines to minimise the impact of the problematic phenomena, to effectively include migrant students, and to offer equal opportunities and equitable learning.

6.2 Deficiencies on policy level

The findings from the policy documents and interviews showed that the deficiencies on the policy level are reflected in the education on the grassroot level. As deficiencies were described the omissions of important legislations to specifically define migrant education, to adopt an anti-racist approach, to train educators on diversity and equity, as well as to provide preventive and restorative tools against discriminations, and to implement supervision bodies. Subsequently, these omissions support the autonomy that the broad nature of the education legislations offer to local and school level authorities and operators which in turn allows the individual beliefs and attitudes to create significant deviations on the learning and teaching experiences pupils acquire, and the manifestation of problematic phenomena in education (see section 5.2.).

Following the findings from the policy document, it is concluded that there are not many mentions on migrants and those that refer to them are mentioned either indirectly or are restricted to language (for example, chapter 9.4. and 10 from National Core Curriculum of Basic Education) or to integration

perspectives (for instance the main objective of the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration). The fact that there is no inclusive education directed towards migrants in the very basic and primary legislation (see 4.2.1.), was also observed by the HLT who also identified this gap, as a policy deficiency that allows further space to municipalities to completely ignore and omit defining migrant education in separate sections, and subsequently school units and teachers can act accordingly.

This shows how much Finland is just like so not used to having immigrants and having migrant students. They left it out of the whole curriculum. And I think that when talking about immigrants in the national curriculum, they don't think about the social inclusion. They don't think about the cultural changes. They don't think about any of that. They just feel like okay language. That's it. And that's why I think there's only there (mentioned in the curriculum). There are the chapters talking about plurilingualism and talking about heritage language classes, but there's nothing about everything else, that comes with living to a new country. (HLT)

Another commented finding from the policy document analysis was that the main national policies (National Core Curriculum, Basic Education Act, Compulsory Education Act) that define the general guidelines for education in Finland do have separate sections with special provisions defining education for the Saami and Roma ethnic groups. The MR justified that those are the main minorities in Finland and that's why there are given separate attention, while for all the rest, education is defined through a separate section referred to plurilingual pupils, a problematic feature of the specific policy.

Following the discussion on the interviews regarding the presence of adequate and effective tools to fight discriminations and racism at school grounds, according to the heritage language teacher, the education policies do not define such provisions and mechanisms, thus this is left on the judgement of each school and municipal area separately. "The school and municipalities have their own policies about how they handle these situations, so I think it's different from each school and each municipality" (HLT). The assistant principal (AP) verified that there were not enough tools to identify and address racism at school,

due to inadequate resources at the school. The guardian, on her/his part, also declared that there were no preventive or restorative measures against discriminations. In particular, the heritage language teacher stated that in her/his opinion talking about racism is a huge blind eye in education in Finland, explaining that there is a lack of anti-racist perspectives and measures to fight racism.

Like everything seems to be like tell us about your culture and your life [...] I don't think that there's actually again anything really written to stop racism. It's all about, like, inclusion, and let's celebrate (diversity), which is great. But there you have you have to be vigilant to fight against racism as well. You can't just be like I love everyone and then... That doesn't make racism go away. And I think that's a strong missing point. (HLT)

The two interviewed teachers reported that the migrant inclusive and anti-racist approach they followed was based on their personal judgment, experiences, and agency, acknowledging that this was not the case for most of the teachers in Finland, as there were no teacher or professional development trainings focused on inclusion, diversity, equality, and equity nor incorporated in the teacher training programmes or as prerequisite part of teachers' qualifications. Likewise, the assistant principal also supported that there were not enough resources for student supports and staff training, as well as focused teaching. The AP further explained that inclusive education costs more than segregation, as there is need for differentiation, additional school staff and workforce, as well as teacher trainings.

The teachers, guardian and assistant principal seemed to agree that the autonomy of teachers results in students having very different learning experiences depending on their attitudes and whether they are willing and openminded towards diversity. The HLT and G further recognised that the lack of quality control on teachers' practices and legislator provisions towards equal and inclusive treatment for all results in allowing space for non-inclusive and diversity friendly education approaches.

But if teachers do not want to do this (look into their own prejudices, be open, positive and involve students) and they don't feel like they should have to and their like not positive about these things, then they can just go right ahead and be like that and there will be no one noticing that, no one assessing it. (HLT)

Lastly, the document analysis revealed that the education policies in Finland don't enclose sections defining the policy implementation process nor provisions for policy monitoring. According to the guardian, these deficiencies support teachers' lack of accountability and of motivation to implement inclusive practices in their teaching.

So, you can write as many nice policies as you like, but if you're not impacting that teacher on a personal level and they are not motivated to be inclusive, then they will not be inclusive and there doesn't seem to be a huge amount of accountability or ways to call them out on that. And if there is a gap between policy and implementation, it might just be the teachers' attitude and the schools' attitudes to immigrant students that are going to make that huge difference. (G)

6.3 Unenforced or ineffective in practice policies

Findings from the data analysis demonstrate the existing gap between policy and practice that is manifested through policies that don't serve the grassroots level education or are not implemented in practice at all. Naming those cases, most of the interviewees seemed to agree that preparatory classes create social segregation while some well-meant policies that are meant to prevent discrimination create further inequalities. In addition, although many agreed that the heritage language classes are beneficial and very important for the migrant families, they emphasised the precarity of the courses and separation from the core education, an argument seconded by the deprioritised position it possesses in the national and local curricula. Lastly, important policies that enclose information on services and provisions for migrants, as well as tools to prevent and fight discrimination are not actively communicated with the targeted groups and education operators.

The majority of interviewees (HLT, MR, AP, G) agreed that preparatory classes, that are defined on *Basic Education Act* (1998, section 1.2.) and in the *Compulsory Education Act* (2020, section 3), are in a way problematic and don't serve in practice. The HLT criticised the provision of preparatory classes as discriminatory, contradicting with the special education classes where students are not excluded from the rest of the school unit, but instead are immersed in the classroom with students of different backgrounds. However, the HLT, MR and AP explained that migrant students are sent full-time for a year or two to a separate integration classroom, most of the times travelling to another specific school which results in social segregation. The AP supplemented the challenges of preparatory classes with the exclusive social interactions with non-Finnish speakers which impedes the language learning of the migrant students.

But if a student takes a taxi and arrives to (name of school) for the preparatory class, and then mixes and mingles with only the students from that preparatory class, they don't really integrate into the community, or because you learn the language from your peers, you don't really learn it. Well, of course you learn something from the teacher, but the most important things in relation to the language, you learn from your peers, you learn from the everyday situation at an interaction with your fellow students and if all your fellow students (in the heritage language class) are other migrant students, you use maybe a common language or you use your own mother tongue. (AP)

According to students' complaints through the heritage language teacher, the integration classes are not exciting, as the taught content is too easy and familiar for the students which slows down their learning progress, and makes them lose interest and feel unfairly treated, as instead of learning new, exciting things, they follow the content of younger classes in order to learn better Finnish. Moreover, some students have repeatedly reported that they feel lonely and unhappy in the school, as in the integration classes they are not allowed to speak any other language than Finnish and most of the students there might not even speak English, thus it is hard to make friends and communicate with the peers.

I feel sad for my students for the like integration programmes and how they feel sad there. School is not exciting for them. It's not happy for them because they can't be with their (friends), they don't know how to communicate with their classmates. (HLT)

The negative reputation of integration classes had reached to the interviewed guardian upon her/his arrival to Finland, a fact that led to avoiding sending her/his children to integration classes.

I was told by several other parents and teachers "do not let your child go to the integration class, see if they can go straight into the main class because there will be consequences for that". (G)

The HLT and the guardian shed light to the precarity of heritage language classes, as "it's frequently under threat of not being funded" (G) and due to its non-equal confrontation with other taught subjects, as it is located in the appendix of the *National Core Curriculum of Basic Education* (2014, appendix 3) and in a separate section following the official chapters of the municipal curriculum. This results in excluding heritage language teachers from important documents in the background and away from the progress of pupils, from the planning and assessment processes, as well as from the communication platform that the school uses.

I'm one of the students' teachers, you know, I spend like 2 hours a week with that kid at least, every single week and I'm not included at all in how their learning is going. My job is on that level, then why am I not treated the same way? Why can I not access (Wilma)? [...] It's something that could assist me a lot. If I could know that one student is struggling with ADHD in school or has autism and is working on [...] learning how to do that or this student has been living in Finland for two years but is still struggling with writing in Finnish, that would help me a lot to know these things. (HLT)

The provision of the *National Core Curriculum of Basic Education* (2014, chapter 9.4., appendix 3) defines that students should be encouraged to maintain and express their native languages. The interview of the guardian revealed that this does not happen in practice, as the migrant students do not feel comfortable to share their cultures and are not supported by teachers to read material in their mother

tongues, justified by the example of the exclusion of English language books in a school reading challenge, criticising this attitude as pejorative towards other languages.

I do think there's definitely a feeling of "Yeah, it's nice that you can read English, but we're trying to read Finnish here and that's what's important". I don't think that there's enough encouragement of children to read in their mother tongue, or necessarily understanding that reading skills in one language will also help reading skills in another language, is not necessarily seen as beneficial to their reading. So, that could be better supported. (G)

According to section 7.1. of the *Act on Promotion of Immigrant Integration (2010)*, "immigrants are provided with information about the service system and the measures promoting integration". The supplementary interview with the guardian revealed that the information on the provisions and services offered in theory in policy level is not shared systematically nor openly communicated to migrant families. Most of the information on services has been accessed by the guardian through websites on social media and familiar local acquaintances.

Other actors that are providing guidance and services to migrants are independent, not related to municipality organisations and based on charity or external funds. Information about acts that condemn discrimination and promote equality seem not to reach the grassroot level actors, as when asked about the provisions of the Non-Discrimination Act and School's Equality Plan, the HLT, SNT and guardian were not aware of their content nor their existence.

Another accessibility and therefore equality challenge is the language barrier met on policy documents throughout all the levels of legislation, since national, local and school policies are exclusively issued in Finnish with very limited exceptions. It is worth mentioning that in chapter 5.1. of the Annual School Plan (only issued in Finnish) there is a reference to communication tools between schools and parents for the better cooperation and inclusion of families with the school unit. However, the daily communication tool, Wilma, between parents and school is only available in Finnish, as there is most of the material sent to the parents, according to the interviewed guardian.

As it is concluded from the data acquired from the Equality Act and the School's Equality Plan, as well as mentions in the National Core Curriculum for basic education, equality in Finland means equal treatment and opportunities between people of different gender, gender identity or gender expression. There is a narrowed approach on a very specific aspect of equality that excludes completely provisions on any other kind of discrimination. It is worth mentioning that the Equality Act was renamed after the initial name "Equality Act between Women and Men", acquiring later a more general title, but without changing the content of the act, and thus remaining deceiving.

On school-level, according to the *Non-Discrimination Act* (2014, art.6) each education provider and school is required to have an equality plan adopted by the school or municipality unit that condemns all form of discrimination. However, the researched school's Equality Plan clearly states at the introduction (section 1) "Equality in this plan refers to equality between women and men in accordance with the Equality Act". And later on, when defining the objectives of the plan (section 3), it is confirmed that the aim of this policy is to "prevent all forms of gender discrimination".

According to the *Basic Education Act* (1998, section 24, p. 11), "the pupil's workload in basic education must be such as to allow him or her enough time for rest, recreation and hobbies over and above the time spent in school, school travel and homework". According to the guardian's views, the children that have to attend heritage language teaching as after-school activity are deprived of this extra time of rest which would have been equalised if the classes were part of the official school hours.

If I'm taking my children to these groups (heritage language), it cuts the amount of time that we have in the evenings for homework and everything else and resting. And I've previously had to ask teachers, if my children don't do all of their homework on the night that they're at these clubs, language classes, that could they perhaps do it the following night because they are essentially doing an extra two hours of school on those days and so they're going to be a bit more tired and can be a bit more difficult. [...] some teachers have been (flexible), some haven't. Yeah, they generally prefer that the homework is done every time. (G)

Lastly, the representative of the researched municipality drew attention to the distance and lack of communication between the situations at school and the municipality. She/he admitted that they are not aware of what kind of practices teachers are implementing at schools and they are only informed of serious problems that take place at the school grounds, thus they do not have a clear image of the everyday situations and they do not have access in the evaluations that the schools are initiating which would have supported them in improving the local policies accordingly.

6.4 Recommendations from grassroots level actors to decision-making bodies and policy makers

Taking into consideration the deficiencies in the current policy framework and the negative consequences of the problematic phenomena that are indirectly allowed to intrude the school grounds through the gaps policies create and affect the migrant pupils' experiences, the results of this study emphasise the need for immediate action, more effective measures, proactive and targeted solutions. The vast majority of the interviewees admitted that there is something that needs to be developed in the education system and in the policy documents in order to provide equal opportunities in theory, but also in practice to migrant students. Guidelines for quality migrant education and provisions that raise awareness of the complexity of the migration phenomena were proposed by the interviewees.

The recommendation proposed by the guardian to compensate for the broad and abstract guidelines of the national core curriculum for basic education, would be to offer policy implementation plans and concrete examples of interpretation of the curriculum, as well as monitoring of the practices being used, already in the policy documents. That would allow teachers to preserve their flexibility, but also limit the agency of operators on crucial matters to be ignored. Finally, the experience of the guardian of different schools and the variety of teachers' mindsets suggests that "external evaluation and monitoring" could have positive results in having consistent school cultures and eliminating the opportunity gap for inclusion and equity.

(There should be) a lot more restrictions and a lot more training and understanding for teachers that they need to be inclusive, and they need to be working on encouraging children to be proud of who they are and their backgrounds and things. (G)

The HLT, SNT and guardian highlighted the urgency to redirect the approach of education towards inclusive policies and practices, instead of assimilative ones. Currently, the encouragement of maintaining and expressing the migrants' cultures and languages is limited in segregated environments and not strengthened in general while the focus is solely on the Finnish culture and language.

We focus so much on how students learn Finnish, so we forget to embrace their own language.[...]But we forget so easily to cherish their own culture and language, is very important for their identity and how they feel about themselves. Because I can imagine what it feels like to be like in...someway outsider, because you come from a different background and you have to learn to be part of this different kind of like surroundings and culture, there's so many things that you have to learn. (SNT)

The guardian further recognised the crucial difference between equality and equity and wished to see education policies that promote equitable measures, such as differentiation in pupils' assessment, explaining that integrated students are left with no extra support and that teachers have the same expectations from them as with the native speakers, not acknowledging that they might still struggle.

Specifying migrant education in the National Core Curriculum is an expectation unanimously arisen, as well as is the inclusion of heritage language learning in the main chapters and not as an appendix. The HLT emphasised that the "migrant students' voices, needs and cultures should be heard, respected and celebrated". In order to achieve this, the SNT and G supported that the policies should reflect the need to raise awareness on diverse cultural backgrounds, to differentiate teaching in respect to linguistic backgrounds and to migrants' needs and to encourage flexibility and mobility in the education system.

In order for migrant education to work, the interviewees recognised that the representation of migrants' voice is a crucial part for the designing and enactment of effective policies. The MR and G recommended that the inclusion of staff with migrant backgrounds in the school grounds and decision-making bodies would support the development of the education system in regard to migrant pupils' needs.

It would really help if there were people working in the school that maybe could identify with their experiences and give them some understanding and some support and have a bit of internal knowledge of what they might be going through. (G)

Some cities they have these cultural workers, they call them "kulttuuritulki", culture interpreter. It's school assistant from migrant background who is doing the cooperation between school and home. [...] This kind of person working in basic education helps in all cases the school and integration of migrants. I have not yet succeeded to sell the idea to our schools. And I agree that it would be helpful to have workers with such experience and background. (MR)

The G, MR and HLT further accentuated the importance of publications and research in identifying the gaps of the ground level situations while acquiring information on efficient practices and therefore developing the designed and implemented practices to better support and include migrants in education.

I think that we need to go to the researchers, and we need to understand from the researchers what works best. You know and, I think that is one strength from Finland is we do listen to research when designing these documents. (HLT)

The value of the anti-racism approach as a manifestation of migrant education was underlined by the HLT and SNT who believed that openly discussing racism and taking concrete initiatives to eliminate racism would support pupils' feelings of safety. The HTL highlighted that the priority of schools should be to make sure "that there is no bullying, and the students feel safe and comfortable". Nevertheless, the HTL and G noticed that racism is not openly discussed and that there is no explicit anti-racism education, as well as provisions to condemn racism in municipality and school's policies.

Although racism is a phenomenon that is based on personal beliefs and values and therefore difficult to change, according to the MR, there can, however, be concrete practices on local and school grounds towards positive interaction and involvement of diverse cultural groups. According to the SNT and MR, migrant parents and students should be actively included in the school society, and the system should take more initiatives to include them in the community. There should be more chances for students to cooperate and to get together outside of the classroom, learn from each other and be parts of society.

If the overall atmosphere would be more welcoming and we would accept more diversity and there would be no structural racism, maybe people would spread out more evenly throughout the cities and maybe areas would be more alike, but this polarisation is one big challenge. (MR)

One of the most important recommendations that interviewees highlighted systematically in their reports was the need for more resources, including financial, but also essential resources, meaning tools, platforms and methods, as well as human resources for the workforce.

I hope that it's seen like in the municipal and state level that we need more like focusing here to the main things and more time and resources and we need more adults here to help every student and help these migrant students to be part of the society so they can have like the best possible outcomes. (SNT)

We don't have time to stop and discuss and evaluate what we have done well. The everyday life is too hectic. [...] I would have a colleague with whom I could work here. Now, I'm doing this work, and organising everything by myself. (In bigger cities), there are different people to organise the foreign language learning and different person to organise the migrant education. Now I'm doing everything by myself. (MR)

The SNT, AP and MR agreed that there are not enough resources for student supports and staff training, as well as for focused teaching. The AP further explained that teachers are paid hourly, thus they do not have the time to deal with additional to the teaching situations. Providing all schools with staff that are

not involved in teaching, but they are responsible for dealing with everyday situations and social hindrances would be “an excellent resource” (AP).

Elaborating further the need for teacher trainings, the interviewed teachers specified that in order to be able to identify and fight discriminatory situations and provide effective and adequate support to migrant students there should be “extrinsically pressure for involvement in lifelong learning programmes” for teachers through which they could “continuously educate ourselves about how to be with students and how to address diversity and how to address racism and how to support migrant children” (HLT). The SNT and AP further supplemented these trainings with a focus on language awareness perspective in teaching while MR complemented the importance of CLIL education.

The MR further elaborated on the CLIL method and language awareness, suggesting that the language learning should be divided into Finnish as a second language for the second-generation migrants or those who have been in Finland before schooling starts, and then Finnish as a foreign language that is completely CLIL-led for those who come from the preparatory class. Additional modifications on the preparatory classes encompassed the immersion approach by the HLT and MR in order to avoid social marginalisation, as well a chance to extend the period of attendance on preparatory class if that is deemed necessary.

7 DISCUSSION

This chapter aims to discuss the progress of the study, to capture the most significant results of the research and to connect with the literature review, as well as to propose concrete guidelines for policy makers in accordance with the research findings and scholars' views. Furthermore, this chapter evaluates the fulfilment of the research purpose and the suitability of the chosen research methods while proposing suggestions for future research in relevance with the acquired findings.

7.1 Summary of research

My research aimed to review the education policies in Finland about migrant students and to collect insights from the grassroots level of primary education about the inclusion of migrant students and equal opportunities offered to them. In addition, my research aimed to explore the relationship between education policy and practice on primary education. In order to achieve this, a two-phase case study was conducted and contextualised on a selected school with a high migrant rate in the student body composition and the respective municipality acquiring data from national, local, and school policies, as well as from various actors including education practitioners, educational leaders, and migrant families.

In the first phase, policy documents defining primary education in Finland were reviewed and analysed following a systematic analysis based on key words search and subsequently a content analysis of the textual data of the policy documents to identify the provisions concerning migrants and possible gaps in the policy level education. In the second phase, multiprofessional interviews were collected and analysed following inductive content analysis to acquire a 360-degree perspective of the grassroots level education about the practices that are used in primary schools to equally include migrant students while identifying possible challenges. Lastly, the data sets were combined to define the

relationship between education policy and practice while proposing recommendations for limiting the gap between these two different levels. Both phases of the study presented a plethora of findings that offered answers to all three research questions.

The first phase, reviewing and analysing policy documents, mainly proved that the policy level education in Finland is not defining education for migrants well enough, if at all. Migrant students are approached only from the linguistic perspective and in few cases of documents defined through the lens of culture. However, none of the documents defined migrant specific provisions while references to migrants as a minority were sparse in most of the documents. On the contrary, education for Saami and Roma minorities is defined on separate chapters and receives extra attention in legislation, an argument that inductively leads to the expectation of an equal reference to migrant education as well.

Another important finding was the failure of the policy level education to safeguard equality, equity, and inclusion for all. Through the policy document analysis, it was found that equality in Finland refers to a narrow definition of equality concerning exclusively gender identity and expression. For instance, the Equality Act in Finland defines provision to safeguard equality between different genders. On the other hand, the Non-Discrimination Act sets a valuable example by condemning any form of discrimination and requiring educational institutions to adopt a plan to prevent and fight discriminations. Despite this guideline, the understudy school has designed and adopted an equality plan that safeguards only gender equality, as it states in its very first section.

The findings from the second phase of the research, analysing multi-actors' interviews, converged toward multiple level initiatives on grassroot level education that aim to equal confrontation and inclusion of migrant students. The practices included initiatives on classroom, school, and municipality level education, as well as individually driven initiatives by educators as described by the interviewees. The research showed that professionals in primary education try their best, with the available resources they have, to approach students as

individual cases and to correspond to their specific needs differentiating their teaching and offering adequate support when needed.

Nevertheless, all the interviewed participants identified a series of problematic phenomena, observed on the grassroots level education, curated or maintained by policy level deficiencies and blind spots. The main challenges observed on the grassroots level education were described by the interviewees as incidents of discrimination and racism in school grounds and later in life against migrant students, the linguistic and cultural barriers that prevent social inclusion, the lack of ethnic diversity in staff and student population, as well as the very different profiles, values and mindsets teachers have that reflect on their strategies and therefore on students' experiences of schooling and learning.

Finally, the research revealed a problematic relationship between the policy and grassroots level education when combining the two data sets and analysing data mainly collected from the interviews. Interviewees were asked about their opinion on the findings derived from the policy document analysis, as well as their opinion on the challenges of education, both in policy and practice level. Finally, interviewees were encouraged to give recommendations towards a more equitable and inclusive education.

According to the data collected, policy level education is significantly accountable for any challenges and deficiencies displayed in grassroots level education. In particular, policy level education was judged as deficient in defining special provisions for migrants and promoting anti-racism perspectives in education. Furthermore, many initiatives adopted in policy level were judged to be ineffective or non-applicable in practice. For example, the one-year integration classes for migrant students were considered problematic from most of the interviewees while services that are designed for migrant students defined in the Non-Discrimination Act were not offered in practice according to the interviewed guardian.

In an effort to identify the root of the problems and suggest solutions, interviewees recommended a plethora of changes and initiatives that policy level should develop. For instance, such recommendations are defining measures that

remedy the challenges and offering concrete guidelines towards an effective inclusive and equitable primary education. The recommendations were ranging from instruction on diversity, inclusion, equity, equality, and anti-racism incorporated in teacher training programmes to more specific guidelines limiting the autonomy of educators but assuring the equal confrontation of students as a whole. Envisioning a more equitable education system, interviewees agreed that stakeholders need to assure the communication of policy and grassroot level education and correspond to the education objective of Finland promising to provide quality equal education for all.

7.2 The gaps between education policy and practice

Already from the policy document analysis it became clear that legislation does not enclose any targeted guidelines defining education for migrants but rather approaches the minority group from the aspect of language and sparsely from their cultural backgrounds. Education policies, as proved by the document and interview analysis, do not propose any implementation plans for the sections relevant for migrants' education.

Many of the defined services in the act's sections are not followed by concrete ways to be enacted and controlled, allowing gaps of doubt on whether migrants receive the services designed for them, or even information about them. Moreover, most of the analysed policies did not define the level of state involvement and the actors that initiate the policy. Even worse, all the policies included in this research did not define actors or institutions that direct possible training for the implementation processes, or that monitor and report the progress of the implementation, as it is referred in the guidelines of what education policies should look like (Adams, 2014).

Nevertheless, not having specific guidelines and applications of the national policies allows space to each corresponding municipality and education provider to emit cases that fall out of their attention or are not descriptively indicated in the policies they are based on. For example, there are several sections

in all the fundamental education policies (National Core Curriculum, Basic Education Act, Compulsory Education Act) that raise awareness on the minority of Saami and Roma students allowing education providers to plan separate strategies to equally include them in education.

Likewise, most of the analysed policies are further raising awareness on gender equality while the Equality Act exclusively protects gender identity imposing measures to safeguard gender equality on education providers. Education providers and practitioners are thus aware that this is a special section that should be considered and intentionally include them in planning and practices. Equivalent awareness was not raised for migrant students through the policy documents.

First and foremost, policies need to be defined in a clear and unambiguous way, not allowing space to evict certain roles and functions of the school or allow blanks for individual ideals and attitudes to spoil equal and equitable education (EPNoSL, 2015). Jahnukainen et al. (2023) mentioned that national policies are the cornerstone of defining concrete guidelines that are translated into procedures on the municipal and school level without allowing space for inclusion myths and misrepresented equality.

Douce & Pont (2021) recognise that the gap between policy and practice prevents progress in education and suggest that a way to bridge this gap is through open and effective communication between education practitioners and policy makers, further recommending that the last ones should acquire grassroot level experience before developing policies and guidelines. In addition, Järvinen et al. (2023) indicate that countries with less standardised education system have higher levels of inequality of educational opportunity based on pupils' socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, resulting in pupils not developing their potential in full and in leading to an unequal for the pupils, but also inefficient for the society, education system.

Universalism has been expressed through distribution of resources to level out the diverse conditions of learning and detailed regulation on the uniformity of schools and differences in learning outcomes, as well as inclusion of pupils in

special needs and general education (Kalalahti & Varjo, 2023). Nevertheless, a decentralised school administration and municipal autonomy can be interpreted as a way to “cut funding to education and shift the responsibility for regrettable decision onto municipalities” (Kalalahti & Varjo, 2023, p.30).

Reflecting on the research literature, as well as on the findings from this specific research, it is clear that “education continues to reproduce inequalities related to social class, racialisation and gender” (Peltola et al., 2023, p. 212). Migrant students do not have equal opportunities and, even worse, they openly face racism in their everyday school life, and later on, in social encounters and work environments (Peltola et al., 2023). Peltola et al. (2023) explain that the reproduction of racializing assumptions is linked with the phenomenon of normalising racist behaviour by not recognising it by teachers and other school staff, as well as lacking appropriate interventions, preventive and remedial practices.

Jahnukainen et al. (2023) underline the importance of a detailed definition for inclusive education in relevant legislation and determining the implementation practices considering various factors, such as resources, knowledge and attitudes. In addition, Mikander (2023) highlights the importance of anti-racism pedagogy in education that will enable awareness of power relations, critical reflections of racist discourse and of establishing a safe space condemning any racist remarks. Lastly, the importance of school and family cooperation, and the involvement of students as school stakeholders, raising their voice and participating in decision making on school level are recommended towards more equitable, innovative, and sustainable learning environments (EPNoSL, 2015).

Taking a step towards defining anti-racism education practices, Sommier and Roiha (2018) recognise that small steps and changes in the attitudes and knowledge of how culture is utilised, as well as critically reflective discourses on ready-made, homogenising and unrepresentative descriptions of culture can reduce the prejudices and stereotypical perspectives of cultures. Focusing on similarities and acknowledging that there are no essential gaps between different

people, approaching differences with curiosity and as new learning experiences or perspectives are essential content parts of anti-racism education, instead of appointing negative nuances of abnormality and exotic oddities (Sommier & Roiha, 2018).

Lastly, investigating the expressions of banal nationalism in the form of teachers' attitudes and stereotypical views of culture, as well as students' assumptions derived from media exposure and family socialization are crucial so that education can raise awareness on these matters, challenge mindsets and highlight the equal value of different cultures along with well-defined anti-racism education (Sommier & Roiha, 2018).

7.3 A message to stakeholders towards equitable and equal education

Various scholars have already been indicating a plethora of ways for states to offer quality education considering migrant students (OECD, 2012; Hajisoteriou & Neophytou, 2022; EPNoSL, 2015), aligning education policies with government policies such as housing and welfare, considering the multifaceted aspect of the phenomenon of migration and the hindrances to equal opportunities in the education setting, labour market and social justice (OECD, 2012). In order to alleviate the unequal starting conditions based on the diverse backgrounds of pupils, an assessment system with school-specific composition characteristics and more effective support mechanisms are considered crucial in identifying each school's needs and in allocating funding and resources more effectively in challenging school contexts (Ramos Lobato & Bernelius, 2023).

Hajisoteriou and Neophytou (2022) seem to agree with the research participants on the negative impact of preparatory classes foreseeing that they can reinforce school and social segregation. On the other hand, Nusche (2009) suggests that preparatory classes should be short and transitory in nature, while Sommier and Roiha (2018) supplement that the classes should not be separated from the school community allowing pupils to participate in common projects and activities. Au (1998) explains that language and cognitive development are

interconnected and work best when learners use the language meaningfully. Thus, it is not desirable to postpone academic teaching until the student becomes fluent in the host country language (Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000).

The majority of the interviewees appointed the blame of unequal opportunities for students partly to the preparation of teachers and the deficiencies of the teacher education programmes. Literature respectively shows that the decontextualization of the research-based teacher training programmes result in disconnection from the school reality and grassroot level challenges, suggesting an agenda of unrealistic promises and silencing the true dilemmas emerging in everyday practices at schools (Säntti et al., 2023). Säntti et al. (2023, p.116) introduce “the idea of the marriage of convenience between theory and practice” that will enable teacher educators and active teachers in schools to draw research- but also practice-oriented programmes for the better understanding of grassroot level problems and preparation of future teachers to respond effectively on those.

Helakorpi et al. (2023) agree that teacher education and the Finnish education system in general should be critically reviewed and challenge the current power relations, while Nusche (2009) highlights the importance of ongoing professional development in intercultural education. Training of pre-service teachers related to linguistic minorities and immigrants should be a priority in the teacher education programmes (Nusche, 2009). In parallel, an anti-racist, inclusive and critical multicultural education should be a prerequisite for teacher training and development that aim at raising awareness of social justice and eliminating power differences, marginalisation and racism in Finnish education (Helakorpi et al., 2023; Mikander, 2023).

Another point for stakeholders to consider when designing and enacting education policies is the importance of quality language education and efficient integration courses. Helakorpi et al. (2023) report that migrant students that have been residing long enough in Finland might still not possess adequate language skills to perform well at school, a fact that is blamed on learning difficulties by teachers, while the National Audit Office report indicates that this is a failure of

the system to provide equal access and support for Finnish language learning to all migrant pupils. Ramos Lobato and Bernelius (2023, p. 237) highlight the significance of engaging multilingual tutors in creating favourable conditions for pupils' successful learning.

Furthermore, Ennser-Kananen et al. (2023), propose "several reforms in teacher education and a more systematic, long-term, national supervisions of language education policy in the service of equitable multilingual education" (p. 351). Analysing further the wish to the policymakers, they (Ennser-Kananen et al., 2023) propose that the curriculum should encourage multilingual and multicultural pedagogies moving away from the exclusive focus on the national language and acknowledging all languages and cultures in society. Integrating Language Aware Multilingual Pedagogy and translanguaging in learning spaces, accounting for proactive research-based measures, professional development, support and resources for teachers, encouraging co-teaching and teacher cooperation, and finally applying national supervision to educational reforms that depend on the local and individual judgement would promote linguistic, cultural and social equity (Ennser-Kananen et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the system needs to be shielded with protective mechanisms and remedial measures against factors that can lead to educational exclusion, such as social and spatial segregation provoked by dynamics of socio-economic and ethnic diversity (Bernelius & Kosunen, 2023). Policy makers should reconsider the freedom in school choice that seems to feed the more and more popular phenomenon of school segregation, and the "rejected-school phenomenon" according to which families of higher social classes avoid schools with negative reputation or high percentage attendance of disadvantaged groups in the student body population (Bernelius & Kosunen, 2023, p. 183-186). Balancing the owner-occupied and social housing from municipalities has been found to reduce the social-spatial segregation which consequently has a positive impact on the level of educational equality narrowing the performance gaps between schools and stabilising institutional quality throughout all schools (Bernelius & Kosunen, 2023).

Redefining school autonomy, accountability and distributed leadership, as well as focusing on the preparation and professional development of school leaders, building collaborative partnerships between school units and enhancing the school and regional community, as well as involvement of agents and actors from different organisational levels and backgrounds can contribute to a remedial impact on the policy challenges of equity and learning achievement in schools, promote social justice and transparency in decision-making (EPNoSL, 2015).

7.4 Evaluation of current research and space for further research

This research was structured in alliance with the three research questions in order to initially in-depth understand the policy context of education in relation to migrant students, next examine the situation on the grassroot level identifying implemented practices, but also observed problems that embed inclusion of migrants in equal quality education and finally combined the findings to explore the complex relationship of education theory (policies) and practice (experiences and observations of practitioners) in order to identify the root of the problematic findings and propose recommendations for remedial measures to the problems. The chosen methods responded adequately to the needs and expectations of the study illuminating the desired aspects of the understudy phenomenon.

Although the data collection process was particularly challenging and problematic at parts, there were plenty data acquired in the end that allowed a 360-degree examination of the topic and multiprofessional aspects enabling insights from multiple levels of grassroot education. Findings on the practices were abundant while participants shared a significant number of challenges confronted on school and social structures surpassing the expectations and fulfilling the objective of this study. Furthermore, identifying the current problems of the grassroot level education and indicating interrelations with the deficiencies in policy level, the study encourages policy reforms and offers ideas

for further research in this field. Finally, the research was complied with the scientific criteria for qualitative studies and considering ethical aspects and limitations of the process.

Researchers in qualitative studies should be mindful when using the conventionally established concepts of scientific criteriology, as applying generalizability and reliability are judged as irrelevant by Denzin and Lincoln (2003) while evidence based on data is seen as problematic by Mason (2002) considering that qualitative research does not generate a neutral body of objective data. Tracy (2010) agrees with the irrelevant character of the above-mentioned traditional principles, further condemning objectivity in qualitative research as illegitimate. However, these key principles can be used in the broader sense, examining the application of validity, generalisability and credibility, as the criteria that are judged relevant for this study.

For this research, the interviews and policy documents constituted the valid data source that demonstrated insights of the phenomenon of migration in relation to education in the very specific context in which it was examined. Although it has been mentioned that this study is quite particular and idiosyncratic to the specific school and municipality context that it examined, some level of generalisability cannot be ignored, as participants of the study and literature have systematically referred to the observed problematic phenomena on the grassroot level education and to the existing gap between policy and practice.

At this point, it is also worth mentioning that the profiles of the interviewed students and guardian, as well as the selected school were not a representative example, as situation seems to be much worse on any other school at the referred municipality, according to the interviewees. The interviewed family admitted that they had the privilege of their children being somehow already integrated as they started their school in Finland early and that their origin and cultural identity does not stand out that much, as it is quite popular in Finland. Concerns by the guardian revealed that the situation might be gravely worse for migrants

with coloured skin or from cultures with even more divergent features from the Finnish culture.

Nevertheless, this research made a committed effort to explore the migration in an education setting both at policy and grassroots level. Despite the non-representative sample in part of the study corresponding to the second research question, the overall findings present general claims that can be nationally contextualised based on the theoretical resonance. The relationship of the gap between education policy and practice with the challenging phenomena on grassroots level education, as well as the negative effect of omitted policies to safeguard equal and inclusive education for migrants on their performance and possibilities is widely proven in literature and verified in this study.

The new knowledge generated by this research was directed to be used in practice, as the study was initiated in cooperation with the municipality. Therefore, these results will hopefully be beneficial both for this municipality and also for other municipalities, in developing their services according to the needs that the results display. The transferability of the findings is relatively high, as the participants and literature review already revealed that the problematic phenomena and deficiencies on policies are observed on the national level. Thus, the remedial measures and policies suggested in this study can benefit a wide range of education contexts in Finland.

The credibility of this research is examined through the consistency of the chosen research methods, the plan of the analysis and the report of the findings, as well as the communication of the results with the participants for external and additional verification of unbiased, objective analysis of the acquired data. Nevertheless, interpretation of data is always subject to a complex range of personal interests, values, ethics, and experiences. Thus, the ethical considerations during the study only aim to minimise the intrusion of these factors, acknowledging that the researcher is not detached from the interpretation, analysis and report of results (Tracy, 2010). Sharing the results with the participants allowed space for confirmability and credibility of the

study, minimising the possibilities of spoiling participants' views with personal biases of the researcher during the analysis and report of the data.

Furthermore, this study was designed and implemented in accordance with the ethics of the University of Jyväskylä. The data source for the examination of the second research question included an interview sample from the participants that were invited in interviews after being thoroughly informed for the study and requested to review the required documents and to sign the consent form for the study. Moreover, the anonymity of the participants was of outmost importance for the research and a priority when designing and reporting the data collection and analysis. Lastly, the data acquired from the interviews were handled with sensitivity, discretion, and accountability from the researcher, stored in safe places and erased by the due date.

Although the interviews were targeted in examining the grassroot level situation and allowing a glimpse in how migrant students are included in education, it is crucial to acknowledge that all the reports are based on the observations and views of the actors in direct or indirect contact with the students, but not on what students actually feel and experience in the school grounds. That constitutes a limitation of the study, as the main goal was to acquire a multilayered perspective on the phenomenon and not to explore insights from the target group. Furthermore, the effort to interview students was proven ineffective, as the conditions of the interview didn't allow students to feel completely safe and comfortable to share their genuine views. Therefore, this study doesn't demonstrate findings of the objective true situation, but rather outsiders' views that might differ a lot from how migrant students experience it in reality.

While reflecting on the need to better communicate the needs of the grassroot level with the policy making bodies, this research suggests to further examine the experiences of migrant students of education. We must explore more efficient mechanisms to access the genuine opinions and feelings of the students acknowledging the difficulty in creating a trustworthy space for them to open

up, for us to provide further insights on the grassroots level assessment, on the needs of migrant students and on the objectives for inclusive education policies.

Further research that includes participants from the target group can evaluate the policy implementation and the gap between theory and practice examining whether the services defined in policies are offered in practice. This can assist in improving the efficacy of the policies and practices of stakeholders while underlining the importance of the implementation plans for policies. Policies need to provide tools and guidelines that support the implementation process and guarantee the fulfilment of their objectives.

Furthermore, policy implementation needs to be monitored and occurring data should function as a form of constructive policy evaluation towards the development of more efficient and beneficial policies. Further research could explore the enactment and monitoring tools of the policies, as well as the stakeholders that are accountable of these processes. In this regard, the role of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman and the Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal of Finland could be explored on the level of engagement and accountability for reassuring equality and equity in education.

Lastly, acknowledging the universality of the phenomenon of migration and the systematic underscoring of migrant students compared to native ones, despite their higher aspirations and more positive attitudes (Helakorpi et al., 2023), there reasonably arises the need for international structures that account for equitable and equal education universally not allowing legislation gaps on national level policies that threaten social justice. International monitoring mechanisms can further evaluate state's initiatives and intervene to assure the equal access in quality education, a universal human right defined by the article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) and the article 26 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, 1948).

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Interview Questions

The interview questions were prepared on a spreadsheet and colour coding was used for the better organisation of the general and individualised questions. Later, the interview questions were prepared separately on a word document for each participant, including instructions for the interview process. [Here](#) is an example of the interview questions that were sent in advance to one of the participants.

Appendix 2 Example of Interview Presentation

The presentation was used during the interview to facilitate participants' understanding and to offer visual aids regarding the policy document findings. The example of the presentation used can be found [here](#).