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The foreign language teaching profession in Finnish and Japanese society: A sociocultural comparison

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Kentän koodi muuttunut

The foreign language teaching profession in Finnish and Japanese society — a sociocultural comparison

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Abstract

The social basis of a teaching profession is created through behavioural and cultural patterns, specific artefacts, and their connection to certain institutional practices. The purpose of this study is to discover the conditions that structure the teaching profession in one cultural context and to find out what it is to be a foreign language teacher in Finland and Japan. Both countries have high educational equality but with contrasting patterns of management policies that are manifested in their teacher education curricula. Educational policy documents as well as teacher interviews and classroom observations were conducted in both countries and the findings compared by one Japanese and three Finnish researchers. The research themes are as follows: the foreign language teaching profession, teacher education paradigms, teachers' professional development, and pedagogical orientation in teaching. The results show that the cultural context and its strong implications for the teaching profession are prominent in both cultures.

Keywords: cultural context, curriculum**,** English teacher education, professional development, teaching

Introduction

The educational systems of many countries worldwide have been studied in international comparative surveys (e.g. TALIS 2014). The recent OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) focused on the working conditions of teachers and the learning environments in schools. TALIS was conducted in 2012 and surveyed teachers and school leaders in lower secondary education in 34 countries. Based on the TALIS data, the percentage of Finnish teachers who had never received a formal appraisal by other teachers was as high as 92%, whereas in Japan it was 41%. In Finland 59 % of lower secondary school teachers (n=2739) perceived their professional status as high. In Japan, 28% of lower secondary school teachers (n=3484) felt that the teaching profession was valued in their society. In contrast with Finland, more than half of the Japanese lower secondary school teachers reported undertaking observation visits to other schools (TALIS 2014). Hence, there would appear to be significant differences in the cultural contexts of these two countries which lead to differences in the ways in which they structure their teaching professions.

Comparing the outcomes of international surveys provides useful information at the national level when new policies and practices are developed to support teachers' professional competence. The problem is that extensive surveys highlight general guidelines but do not acknowledge or take into consideration the characteristics of the diverse historical, cultural, institutional, and social contexts in which teaching is practiced. Yet working conditions largely influence the development of issues that surround the teaching profession. In an era when students, teachers, teacher educators, and other educational interest groups from different cultures come together, comparative research can provide an understanding of how culture affects our teaching and learning practices (Planel 2008). In the teaching profession, however, the degree and nature of decentralisation of education systems will effect the development of teachers' professional competence.

In foreign language (FL) education, communication is central to the nature of the subject matter and the content knowledge that is taught. Language teaching involves not only teaching the language, but also the culture behind the language (Borg 2006). For example, Ito (2002) presents a framework of `culture teaching´[1] (teaching culture in English classrooms) that consists of a trichotomy of culture *around* language, culture *in* language, and culture *through* language, emphasizing their necessary interrelationships within a cultural syllabus. This paper involves research into the work of FL teachers in order to compare the conditions of their professional development in Finland and Japan. The following sections will describe the cultural patterns and practices that frame FL teaching in these two cultures.

Cultural context as a framework of the FL teaching profession

Concept of culture

Culture has been defined in different ways. Generally, culture is understood as a shared agreement that directs a person's behaviour and communication and, consequently, values, norms, and meanings (Kaikkonen 2001, 81). The individualism-collectivism dichotomy

between western and eastern cultures is no longer relevant in the contemporary world where all cultures have both dimensions. The common use of culture as a label to identify a nation or a group of people that `belong together´ by virtue of shared cultural trait, has been criticised by cultural researchers because of its static, consensual, and systematic properties (Azuma 2001; Cole 2000; Valsiner 2000). Differences between cultures lead to diverse constructs of the self, of others, and of their interdependence. For example, Azuma (2001, 33) believes that the concept of self, used by Markus and Kitayama (1991) as an intervening variable between the dichotomy and observed differences in behavioural variables, offers a better tool for multidimensional cultural comparisons. To be precise, an interdependent construct of self emphasises the interrelationship between individuals, implying more uniform behaviour patterns in society.

Sociocultural theories of teaching and learning have been adopted as the framework for language teacher education (Johnson 2009; Lantolf and Thorne 2006; Ortega 2009). According to Vygotsky (1978), daily practices are historically mediated through language that functions both as a cultural tool (e.g., learning theories in the form of curriculum) to be used to share experiences with others, thus binding experience to its context, but also as a psychological tool used to make sense of experiences (e.g., conceptual thinking). In sociocultural theories culture refers to the special medium of human life and behaviours, consisting of a set of interrelated artefacts or tools accumulated in the course of the history of certain cultures (Cole 2000). Goffman's (1983) concept of `frame´ offers a dynamic perspective for cultural comparison by emphasising the real life situations and the world of interaction phenomena that is based on cultural regulations, norms, and assumptions. Accordingly, harmonious contacts with others are valued in Japanese society where the behaviour and opinions displayed in public (*tatemae*) cannot be questioned (Trinidad 2014).

National educational policies have shifted the FL teaching profession toward communication-oriented outcomes so that the language is understood as something people *do*

rather than being something they *possess* (Johnson 2009). Furthermore, the various paradigms of teacher education control teachers' professional development and are manifested in the curriculum and pedagogy conducted in each culture (Korthagen 2004; van Huizen, van Oers, and Wubbels 2005). From a sociocultural approach, the national curriculum works as the most important factor in guiding the daily practices of FL teachers. In the educational context, the management of the teaching profession has been implemented in one of two ways: through centrally prescribed national curricula, or by teachers taking responsibility for the curriculum-making process (see Westbury et al. 2005). In the latter case, teachers are seen as autonomous agents who need to apply professional tools in different contexts. The strength of this kind of research-based perspective is its ability to connect both the theories and the practices of teacher education (Niemi and Isopahkala-Bouret 2015; Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen 2006).

However, the problematic issue in this inquiry-oriented attitude is that it refers to formal procedures that are applicable to many aspects of teaching but does not point to any essential aspect of teaching to which reflection or inquiry should be addressed (van Huizen et al. 2005, 270). More holistic approaches and tools that are used to combine language contents with interactive processes have been developed. The common focus of these models has been to create experience-based or practice-based tasks that integrate language and content learning. For example, linking classroom language learning with language use outside of the classroom has been the central aim of Ortega's (2015) task-based language teaching (TBLT) and Jaatinen's (2007) autobiographical stories. Authentic tasks offer a framework for the structuring of co-operative language actions. In addition, Kuure et al. (2016) have demonstrated the potential of educational technologies in mediating creative and collaborative language learning classroom practices.

Foreign language teaching means teaching cultural aspects of the target language. This has to be conducted multi-dimensionally, interlinking culture *around* language, culture *in*

language, and culture *through* language. More closely, in contemporary holistic language education, people's behaviour (*around* language), thought patterns (*in* language), and cultural information (*through* language) form the subject matter or content knowledge to be taught (Ito 2002). In Japanese society intercultural language (English) teaching also faces a potential risk of losing one's national identity (Aspinall 2011; McVeigh 2004). Hence, English is regarded more as a global tool than a global language with the aim of holistic language education (McVeigh 2004; Phan 2013). The same kind of cultural constraint is to be seen in the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET) (2010), launched by MEXT (The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan) to promote internationalisation at a local level. The nature and status of native English speakers, or those who speak English that is equivalent to native speakers, who work as assistant language teachers (ALTs) in schools is sometimes controversial (Aspinall 2011).

Teaching expertise and professional development

Teaching expertise is defined according to external criteria of competence, whereas the development of professional identity leaves more room for a personal interpretation of teachers' work. The concept of expertise has a long history (e.g., Coldwell and Simkins 2011; Day et al. 2006; Martin 2004), starting from the questioned classical stage theory from novice to mastery (Fuller 1969; Kagan 1992) and proceeding through studies emphasising the dynamic and horizontal character of the developmental process (Griffiths 2011). Akkerman and Meijer (2011) see that the development of teacher expertise or identity has been either assessed according to predefined professional standards or has been viewed as a far from linear process. In other words, an important limitation has been that most approaches to teacher expertise have considered 'the teachers as being the objects to be looked at, observed and assessed from above or from the outside' (Akkerman and Meijer 2011, 308).

From the sociocultural perspective, the development of expertise is a process of mediation between people and cultural factors. In respect of the teaching profession, Hatano and Oura (2003) favour studying the various types of expertise, as they see it important to consider the individual and situational determinants in obtaining expertise. In stable environments culture provides sufficient resources for executing routine expertise that is contrasted with *adaptive expertise* (Hatano and Inagaki 1986). Adaptive experts are able to verbalise the principles underlying their skills, weigh the different levels of their skills, and modify them according to local restrictions in varied educational contexts. However, a sufficient degree of variability is needed to further develop adaptive expertise (Lin, Schwartz, and Hatano 2005).

In western societies teacher identity lies at the core of the teaching profession. Generally, this refers to independent self-constructs whereby teachers give priority to their own perceptions, emotions, and actions (Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Norton 2013). Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) add the aspect of `agency´ to the definition of identity by indicating that identity is shaped through the individual's activities. By the same token, Norton (2013, 9) suggests that agency, through which identity is reframed, is primary to cultural conditions and social contexts in language learning or use. Agency is recognised as teachers' ability to implement pedagogical principles and understand what is educationally beneficial. In other words, teacher identities are regarded as teachers' understanding of themselves as professionals, including the personal and institutional aspects of being a teacher (Beijaard et al. 2004). Knowledge acquisition is part of teachers' identity construction (Kanno and Stuart 2011), and this includes both personal biographies and contextual reflection (Flores and Day 2006; Norton 2013, 2–3).

Conducting the study, data collection, and analysis

In this study, Japanese and Finnish FL education systems and practices were compared on the basis of data collected by means of policy document analyses, teacher interviews, and classroom observations. The data included:

1) the policy documents of MEXT 2010, FNBE 2004, TALIS 2014, and Opettajankoulutus 2020 2007.
2) interviews with 15 lower-secondary school language teachers, 8 of which were carried out in Japan in Spring 2012 and 7 in Finland in Spring 2014; interviews with 5 teacher educators (two university lecturers in Finland, one professor, and two assistant professors in Japan).
3) data of the field notes of two English lessons in Finland and four English lessons in Japan.
4) an interview via e-mail with one Finnish teacher of English working as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in Japanese lower secondary schools (12 pages).

All the interviewees had been working at least for ten years and were thus seen as competent and experienced FL teachers. The interviewees when cited in this paper are identified as follows:

- professor 1
- assistant professors 1 and 2
- teacher educators 1 and 2
- Japanese FL teachers 1 – 8
- Finnish FL teachers 1 – 7
- ALT FL teacher

The interviews were semi-structured (Bogdan and Biklen 2003) and based on all the themes considered relevant to our study: expertise in teaching profession, teacher education paradigms, professional development, and pedagogical orientation. One of the researchers conducted the interviews in Finland in Finnish and the other in Japan in English during her visiting research period. The interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes and were transcribed

verbatim. The observed lessons at school lasted 45 to 50 minutes. The collected data was dealt with and interpreted using content analysis (Newby 2014, 488–489). The data was used in this study to represent teachers' professional competence in the Finnish and Japanese educational and cultural contexts.

The analysis of the data was theory-driven and it was conducted using theoretical aspects and researchers' experiences (abductive reasoning), searching for specified components of the cultural contexts of Finnish and Japanese teacher education (Walton 2001). Thus, the analysis framework for this study was not designed in advance. The theoretical concepts were not chosen from the research data but from the main components of language education. In line with confidence criteria, the analysis progressed through steps of reading and re-reading the transcripts, identifying different components and connections across them, and observing how the data related to the theoretical framing of the study. As an indication of the depth of the analysis it should be noted, for example, that as the process went on, the categorisation structure was simplified by abandoning some data, such as descriptions of classroom lessons.

The purpose of this study was to compare cultural perspectives in the FL teaching profession in Finnish and Japanese contexts. On this basis, to better understand the culture of the Other (Lantolf and Thorne 2006; Moeller and Nugent 2014), but also that of our own, efforts have been made to describe (in an ethically relevant way) how the culture is reflected in teaching competencies. The participants taking part in the process gave their permission for us to use the data for research purposes. Confidentiality issues were agreed upon orally. The researchers guaranteed anonymity. All the participants were adults and free from any disadvantage with respect to this study.

Findings

The framework of the analysis is described in Table 1. It comprises four components: the status of the teaching profession, language teacher education in universities, teacher professional development, and teachers' pedagogical orientation in teaching (including their attitudes to education).

[Table 1 near here]

Teaching profession

In Japan, collective values and relational notions of the self are emphasised in teachers' educational and teaching objectives embodied in the Basic Act of Education (MEXT 2006). MEXT defines the course of study as broad standards for schools to organise their programmes in order to ensure a fixed standard of education. The course of study stipulates educational objectives and contents, including the number of vocabulary and grammatical items. This has two implications. First, the control that this exerts over FL teachers' work means that they are usually expected to act according to certain societal expectations whether they teach in the public or private sector. However, there remains a gap between the stated policies and what actually happens in the classroom.

> The future teachers, if they want to be hired by the prefectures, they have to obey the law because we are, in a way, public officers. We are expected to follow the national curriculum because this is a part of the law. If the school does not follow this curriculum, it may be sanctioned by the MEXT. (Japanese FL teacher 1)[2]

Second, societal expectations and certain historical traditions and scripts regulate the work of Japanese teachers. Neither the guidelines nor the national curriculum regulate teachers' daily work as much as the teaching certificate system. The latter mandates that all FL teachers undergo a novice teachers' and a 10-year experienced teacher training programme. At the graduation phase, Japanese prospective teachers pass the screening test

conducted by the local school board before they can work as teachers. Furthermore, recent educational reform has introduced a teaching license renewal system to update teachers' knowledge and skills and also to retrain incompetent teachers. Every ten years (at the ages of 35, 45, and 55) teachers have to renew their license, that is, attend some lectures and take a test at the end of each lecture. They are required to attend lectures for a total of 30 hours.

> The first year when you are hired by the board of education is like a training period. All the new teachers get together periodically and they have classes about education, counselling and the law. The biggest education is every tenth year – one or two days' special school visits where we observe, teach, and help. We videotape our class and comment and explain on how to improve the teaching. Also, every summer we have a couple of day lectures. (Japanese FL teacher 3)

Finally, at the school level the emphasis of FL teachers' work is on classroom management and the implementation of traditional teaching methods. This is sometimes the case in lower secondary schools where the examination system structures the teaching profession and tends to give them little room for pedagogical freedom. Because of the national examination system, teachers are obliged to teach English using the grammar translation method since they believe it is effective for pupils with low-motivation for whom the main goal is to develop reading skills. In addition, the duties of classroom management are prioritised in teachers' work owing to large class sizes (about 33–40 pupils in a class).

> Actually, one thing that has not changed is the testing system. We have to take the test to enter the high school or university. (*Author's comment: only half of the high school graduates go on to university!*). The goal of the English education focuses on the entrance examination for high school and university. So they often study for the tests. (Assistant professor 2)

A feature of the Japanese teaching profession is the numerous professional roles and responsibilities of the teachers. Accordingly, many teachers tend to feel their work is stressful and strictly defined. Even if teachers' work is not controlled by the state, it is difficult for them to work independently because they do not have enough time to reflect on their professional practices. The school culture and context, in the form of working obligations, is

rather strict in Japanese society. In addition to subject teaching, FL teachers are expected to supervise extra-curricular duties (e.g., sports activities), conduct moral education, and carry out numerous administrative tasks (or duties). The heavy workload is illustrated by the daily schedule of a typical lower secondary school teacher who is in charge of a school sport team.

7:00 Arrive at school to supervise sports activities

8:30 Staff meeting (whole school)

8:40 Start teaching lessons

14:20 Finish teaching lessons

15:00 Supervise the cleaning up of the classrooms

16:00 Supervise sport activities

19:00 Staff meeting (small groups)

20:00 Prepare for lessons

22:00 Leave the school

Furthermore, teachers have eight weeks' of summer holidays, two weeks' for winter and spring holidays, three official days off, and an official one-week New Year's holiday. During their holidays they are obliged to offer supplementary lessons, supervise sports activities on and off campus, and prepare for future lessons.[3] In all, Japanese teachers have 240 working days during a school year.

Kommentoinut [SA1]: teachers have eight weeks' of summer holidays NOT six weeks' …

In Finland, the curriculum plays an important role as a goal-oriented and pedagogical framework for learning and teaching. The Finnish National Board of Education draws up the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (FNBE 2004 and 2015) in order to secure the uniformity of teaching. The Curriculum includes the objectives and core contents of different subjects, the principles of pupil assessment, special-needs education, pupil welfare, and

educational guidance. Generally, schools and municipalities are responsible for the local curriculum that embodies guidance for teachers in the district. The educational aims and boundaries, including content and moral and social principles, are embodied in the curriculum. The teachers put the curriculum into practice in their daily schoolwork where the class size is approximately 24 pupils. In other words, they have considerable pedagogical autonomy in choosing the teaching and evaluation methods. Teaching is never fulfilled exactly as described in the curriculum because every teacher teaches through her or his personality and takes the different pupils' needs into account. Furthermore, the methods or forms of interaction are not prescribed or imposed by the authorities. In addition, the Finnish education system does not have testing by external authorities (Niemi and Isopahkala-Bouret 2015; Sahlberg 2007).

Teachers' pedagogical autonomy is enshrined in Finnish education policy and research papers where teaching is described as a well-qualified profession (e.g., Opettajankoulutus 2020 2007). Accordingly, professional FL teachers are assumed to have broad theoretical knowledge, the capacity to adapt their expertise to different types of situations both individually and collectively, and to be capable of understanding the social and cultural aspects of their work (Kohonen 2007; Opettajankoulutus 2020 2007, 12). Furthermore, as members of the school community the teachers are involved in the curriculum design process. In the Finnish data, teachers' reflections on the developmental process of their professional identity and independence are clear:

> My pedagogical standpoint is clear to me. I am able to rationalise why we are doing something. Although other people may not understand my argumentation, I can justify it to myself. When I am strong and sure about the justification of my pedagogical aims, my pupils get involved with the learning. They see that I have clear plans for teaching. Other teachers can think whatever they want about my teaching. (Finnish FL teacher 1)

Compared to the working days of Japanese teachers, Finnish teachers have greater autonomy in deciding their daily schedule. FL teachers mainly concentrate on teaching their subject(s) although they also have other duties. Formally, teachers' working time consists of classroom teaching, preparation for classes, and two hours each week to plan schoolwork with colleagues. On average, they enjoy a six-week summer holiday, a one-week winter holiday, a one-week autumn holiday, two-weeks holiday at Christmas, and four-day's holiday at Easter. In all, they have 190 working days during a school year. To conclude, whereas, on average, Japanese lower secondary school teachers have a 53.9-hour working week, the working week for Finnish teachers is only 31.6 hours on average (TALIS 2014).

Language teacher education in universities[4]

In this and the following sections we consider the case of Japanese and Finnish practices sequentially. Theoretically driven teacher education paradigms express different and to some extent conflicting thoughts on the educational ideal and the adjunct educational practices and forms of study. It is worth noting that the teacher training programmes vary in content across universities. The researchers have differentiated various paradigms in the history of teacher education curricula and pedagogy. These paradigms of professional development are located at the opposite ends of a continuum. The curriculum-based approach (also referred to as competency-based) includes public standards as the basis of teacher education, whereas teacher's professional identity is strengthened through reflection and inquiry in the research-based approach (Korthagen 2004; van Huizen et al. 2005).

In Japan, the competence requirement for the language teacher degree is Bachelor of Arts. The time required to complete a bachelor's degree (gakushi) is four years (124 credits[5] minimum), and consists of (1) general studies, (2) subject studies, (3) pedagogic studies, and (4) graduation thesis studies. Each educational faculty or university can decide the minimum

number of credits for each category of study provided that the minimum number of credits for subject and pedagogical studies specified by the teacher's license law are covered. The teacher's license law requires that students who wish to teach English in lower secondary school must achieve at least 20 credits for subject studies, 31 credits for pedagogical studies and 8 credits for either subject studies or pedagogical studies, 59 credits in total.

General studies consist of liberal arts studies (e.g., foreign languages, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, arts, and so on.) that are meant to form the knowledge base of a responsible citizen and, as such, should be taken by all university students. Naruto University of Education (NUE) requires its students to attain more than 22 credits of general studies. The subject studies focus on the student's area of specialisation. Prospective English teachers, for example, take courses on (1) English linguistics, (2) British and American literature, (3) English communication, and (4) cross-cultural understanding as subject studies. In order to obtain a license to teach English in secondary schools, students are required to gain at least 20 credits for subject studies, including one credit from each of the four fields of specialisation. NUE requires its students to attain at least 38 credits for the subject studies before graduation.

Japanese students who major in education during their undergraduate studies decide whether they want to be elementary school teachers or lower or upper secondary school teachers. Pedagogic studies consist of courses on (1) the philosophy of teaching, (2) basic educational theories, (3) school curriculum, (4) teaching methodology, (5) student guidance and counselling, (6) seminars on the teaching profession, and (7) teaching practice. The duration of teaching practice (five credits) is two to four weeks. All university students who have obtained enough credits for subject and pedagogic studies when completing the courses on education are granted a teaching certificate. Few students continue their studies to master's degree level, but those who do are granted a higher-ranking certificate (Naruto University of Education Guidelines on Course Enrolment for Undergraduate Students 2014).

Japanese FL teacher education at the undergraduate level reflects the competency demands from the world of work and policy-makers. This approach means standardised compulsory curricula and the guidelines for the course of study are oriented to transmitting knowledge, skills, and other competencies needed in the teaching profession. The content of pedagogical studies, which includes 5 credits' teaching practice (which is the equivalent of 225 hours of student work), reflects the values of the curriculum-based approach:

> Core subjects of educational practice are constructed in the 'Basic seminar in educational practice' that takes into account what a teacher should be, and 'The practical teaching of school subjects' that aims at fostering the necessary instructional abilities to be a teacher, such as, for example subjects about the understanding of textbooks' contents based on MEXT's guidelines, subjects about class construction, teaching methodology, and the understanding of children. ~~(Naruto University of Education Guidelines … 2014.)~~

Kommentoinut [SA2]: Maybe this reference is not necessary information according to the Japanese author!

Research-based approaches are not commonly included in the teacher training curriculum unless we consider the `action research´ that has to be undertaken by practicing teachers at postgraduate level. According to Eid (2014), the Japanese teacher education system as a whole is mainly based on knowledge transmission. The priority is to learn the main subject matter and there has been a lack of interest in developing research in education at the undergraduate level. This is the reason why practice and theory are not well integrated into the teacher education curriculum.

Indeed, many practicing teachers in Japan complained that the education they received at university was rather theoretical. However, the teachers who studied graduate courses as part of their in-service training were more interested in finding answers and tools for managing problems in their teaching practices. The perspective of an English teacher who had worked as a visiting researcher in Finland supports the findings:

> Japanese students may tend to avoid the theory or methodology of English teaching or second language acquisition. Some of them are eager to obtain some skill or technique in the lessons. That is a typical difference between them and the Finnish students. In general, they tend to look for the minor techniques and skills in their lessons when they come to this university for in-service learning. (Japanese FL teacher 1)

The curriculum-based teacher education paradigm also provides space for experimentation and social interaction. Research shows the importance of knowing what teachers think or what kind of beliefs they have, because the beliefs teachers hold with regard to teaching and learning determine their actions (Korthagen 2004). There are also signs of new teaching methods, such as learning diaries and micro-teaching. The instances of inquiry-based methods are the reflective diaries where prospective teachers can practice to connect their professional and personal lives.

> Next year the students have to write reflections and comments. We decided to give a kind of notebook to those first year's students. At the end of each year they write some reflections about all the courses they have taken during the first year. (Professor)

> Micro-teaching is working well because it gives the students some kind of sense of object. They have to prepare for the micro-teaching themselves, they have to present their lesson in front of their peers, they have to write a teaching plan, to prepare some materials and to discuss their teaching. (Professor)

There are three graduate universities in Japan that promote the development of teaching staff in the form of professional two-year degree programmes (MEXT 2010). English language teachers that take the master's degree courses have often had a teaching career spanning 10–20 years. The master's programme (30 credits) at NUE, which is one of the three universities strategically established by MEXT, consists of: (1) general studies in education, (2) advanced subject studies, (3) advanced pedagogical studies, and (4) MA thesis studies. (Naruto University of Education Guidelines on Course Enrolment for Undergraduate Students 2014).

For professional teachers, the focus of the master's degree studies is on practical methodological problems, although courses on English linguistics and literature are also offered. In our study, educational topics were chosen by professional teachers because of their teaching experience, or because of the usefulness of educational topics in school

practice. This tendency is evident in the content of the master's thesis that is related to the challenges of class management and teaching methodologies:

> I used one textbook for many years but I didn't know much about the other textbooks. Through the writing of the master's thesis I learned about the history of the Course of Study. Studying helped me to know why I need to choose other textbooks. So I think writing a master thesis is as useful as some practical lessons in our university. (Japanese FL teacher 6)

> Our trend is providing practical skills and knowledge instead of research needed to become a researcher at university level. So our teacher training courses are very practice-oriented even at the graduate level. (Professor)

In Finland, the impact of a research-based teacher education paradigm is that all prospective teachers have to attain a master's degree to qualify as a teacher. The combination of a three-year bachelor's degree (180 ECTS) and a two-year master's degree (120 ECTS) with appropriate subjects, including teachers' pedagogical studies (60 ECTS), provides a competence for working as a subject teacher at various levels of education. Furthermore, in some Finnish universities it is possible to undertake pedagogical studies to supplement a master's degree after graduation. Prospective FL teachers usually have a language as their major subject (60 ECTS) and pedagogical studies as one of their minors (e.g., Jyväskylä Teacher Education Curriculum 2010–2014). The pedagogical studies are usually part of both bachelor and master studies (Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen 2006).

The academic pedagogical studies consist of a number of courses in education and in-school practice based on dialogical and reflective learning approaches. The studies comprise basic studies in educational science, studies in subject-specific didactics and research, as well as supervised teaching practice, usually in a teacher training school. The teaching practice comprises one third of the teacher's pedagogical studies, that is, 20 ECTS (which is the equivalent of 540 hours of student work). The basic studies in educational science are mainly included in the bachelor's degree whilst the studies in subject-specific didactics and research, supervised teaching practice, and the personal didactic research projects form part of the

master's degree (Jaatinen 2015). The research studies and teaching practice are integrated and, thus, student teachers learn to design and conduct research-based teaching in teacher education.

Research-based practice has been the central mission of Finnish teacher education programmes since the mid-1970s (Westbury et al. 2005). The aim of research-based studies is to educate pedagogically thinking teachers who are capable of reflecting on teaching and learning and who are able to make improvements in practice when necessary. Research-based practice is manifested in the form of inquiry-based learning. This is illustrated in the description given by a lecturer in the Jyväskylä University Department of Teacher Education where the current focus of classroom teaching practice is on flexible teacher-student interaction:

> At this point, for us subject teachers, there has been a clear change. Now, the most important thing is effective interaction, how close to the pupils the teacher dares to go, whether the pupils will listen to her/him and whether she/he can get them motivated one way or another. You must try to avoid being too strictly bound to the textbook. You shouldn't settle for doing what is easiest, so that every day when pupils enter the classroom they already know that today we are on this page and will proceed like this, listening, reading and translating. You must use style! (Teacher educator 1)

The focus of pedagogical studies in Finland lies in communication and reflection. The inquiry-based approach emphasises `that professional repertoires are not established once and for all and are not given from outside a practice, but have to be continually reappraised, reaffirmed, or modified by questioning experiences in the light of standards of evaluation´ (van Huizen et al. 2005, 270). As an example of an interactive approach in teacher's pedagogical subject studies, the University of Jyväskylä offers the course module *Social interaction and group dynamics*. Students work in mixed groups where different theoretically oriented courses are studied instead of traditional lectures. The learning focus is on knowledge, skills of social interaction competence, and on the group process itself. The contents includes the following themes: getting acquainted with each other, encountering as a

key sense of belonging, facing challenging situations, the dual task of guiding a group, group processes in a classroom, and emotional work in groups. In addition, the students also perform tasks related to the application of the strategies learned as well as reflective reading and writing with a peer. (Rasku-Puttonen, Klemola, and Kostiainen 2011; Toomar, Salo, and Pollari 2011.)

Teacher professional development

There are a variety of ways in which teacher professional development can be implemented in centralised and decentralised societies. In Finland the development of teacher professional identity is already included in pre-service teacher education, whereas the expertise of Japanese teachers is supported during their whole career. As already mentioned, in Japan the teacher certification system is concerned with the continuous demand to sustain the development of expertise; peer collaboration, planning, and management drive Japanese strategies of professional development. There is a formal in-service training system called `lesson study´ that is offered by various institutions and organisations. The system is founded on an inquiry-based approach to professional development (Johnson 2009). It is conducted in many forms and venues, organised either regionally on a voluntary basis or by educational associations and institutions. Lesson study refers to teachers' researching their own pedagogical practice in school-based communities of inquiry.

In lesson study, a group of teachers take the responsibility for the success and development of a single lesson or for the entire school culture. The group generally works with the same goal and content for several years. Many practitioners observe the lessons (e.g., teachers, student teachers, researchers and academics from the local university) and attention is paid to joint observation and reflection (Arani, Fukaya, and Lassegard 2010). The

following extracts from the lesson study research are based on the lesson plan, observation of the classroom, interviews with the professor, and the FL teacher in charge.

> The observed English lesson was based on the goals planned and modified over three years. According to the basic idea of the national course of study (MEXT) the teachers have to develop the pupils' way of logical thinking. The goal of this writing lesson unit was to foster the skills of expression and comprehension of the English language by enhancing the pupils' learning from their own and peers' thoughts and from their mistakes. Instead of lecturing, here the idea was to use (a) different tools of writing instruction (structured worksheets, practical cards), (b) co-operative activities (pair and group work), and (c) interaction patterns (joint feedback). For instance, practical cards were adopted for pupils to check their own mistakes and reflect the outcome for further learning. (Lesson plan 'My Memorial Day')

> It was an ideal lesson because in most of the English classes in junior high school the teacher is only teaching them. But the class we saw – the pupils learn from each other. That's very different from other lessons. This teacher is very good in that management of students. (Assistant professor 2)

> At first I was following the guidebook of the textbooks. Then I changed my mind and I changed the teaching to make them use English and think in English. I say that we must not be afraid of changing the way of teaching. We have to brush up our own teaching. (Japanese FL teacher 5)

The lesson study practice reflects the collective values of Japanese culture, that is, the interdependent construct of teachers' work. An important aspect of this inquiry-based practice is to facilitate interpersonal collaboration, to develop common understanding and content knowledge among FL teachers. Furthermore, teachers are able to share responsibility and, above all, together develop new teaching methods and solutions for culture-bound problems relevant to their teaching practices (Arani et al. 2010). The lesson study cycle culminates in the form of a report that is made generally available. This report includes lesson plans, observed student behaviour, teacher reflections, and a summary of the group discussions (Johnson 2009, 103-104). Nevertheless, although the lesson study practice mediates teacher professional development it may also offer an ideal picture of the possibilities for developing pedagogical practices**.**

In Finland, the emphasis of inquiry-based learning lies in the continual development of teachers' professional and personal identity construction during their graduation process. An FL teacher describes her identity formation process during her working life as follows:

> My starting point is education, upbringing, and after that comes my own identity as a teacher (…). I think this decision offers me a better possibility to be more natural with my pupils. I do not need to reconsider my role because of my basic role as an educator. I can answer the question `who am I´ and it helps me to concentrate on my job. (Finnish FL teacher 1)

Finnish teachers are encouraged to reflect on their work in order to develop their professional identity within the framework of the national curriculum. Various individual, experience-based reflective tools for studying are used during pedagogical studies. For example, the students draw a picture of themselves as language teachers at a given moment and provide a short explanation of their drawing. They write a description of their own experiences as a pupil at school with the aim of identifying the reasons why they liked or disliked a teacher and to discover their own teacher identity. In the language teacher portfolio that students write throughout their pedagogical studies, they are expected to have developed a teacher identity based on practical (for example lesson plans) and theoretical (research) documentation. All these tasks are discussed either in small groups or privately with an experienced teacher.-The claim professional development is also included in the curriculum.

Muotoiltu: Älä lisää välilyöntiä samaa tyyliä olevien kappaleiden väliin

Kommentoinut [TB3]: Should this be 'aim'?? No, this is correct: The claim …

In Finland, teachers' in-service training is not organised systematically. There is no law governing teachers' professional development after graduation. In general each teacher must participate in three in-service training days during the school year and schools can autonomously decide the content of these days. After having acquired a teaching qualification, teachers are expected to continually develop their skills and capacities and are also responsible for the school development (FNBE 2004, 2015). However, as long as professional and school development depends on teachers' financial, emotional, or social resources it cannot be expected that all teachers will be committed to it. For example,

according to TALIS 2014, only 16% of all Finnish teachers taking part in the survey took part in a formal induction programme during their first regular employment.

Efforts have been made to develop innovative models of learning and teaching in order to promote teachers' collegial work. FL teachers take part in in-service training but the practices of Finnish in-service teacher education are, admittedly, diverse. There are voluntary in-service education programmes available for FL teachers, such as training events regularly organised by the Federation of Foreign Language Teachers in Finland, and various networking possibilities. However, teacher induction is an area that requires further development in Finland (Sahlberg 2011, 86) because some newly qualified teachers feel isolated in their working life:

> When beginning the work at school I was astonished at the liberty to work as it pleased me. I have been teaching independently. Nobody has asked my teaching methods. Nobody has given me advice, although I could ask for help if needed. (Finnish FL teacher 2)

Basically, when sharing experiences and uncertainties, teacher professional development would be enhanced through interaction. A culture of contributing to the practices of the community can emerge in projects involving participants in collaboration and in reforms in the working culture of the community. It would be of great interest to elaborate a lesson study session in Finland in order to see how this might function.

Pedagogical orientation in teaching

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is one of the objectives that has been mentioned in the policy documents of Japanese FL education since the 1990s. In practice, many FL teachers still follow the grammar-translation method. Although the guidelines stipulate that English lessons should be conducted in English, less than half of the teachers follow this recommendation (MEXT 2010). The ethnocentric attitude of Japanese culture raises

questions regarding the relevance of adopting the principles of agency and intercultural language education in a collectivist society where national values are emphasised. Due to Japan's isolated geographical location, English language proficiency poses a challenge to FL teaching.

If English teachers do not possess sufficient content knowledge, the ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) system offers an opportunity to utilise the contribution of exchange teachers who are native speakers of English or have an equivalent level of language proficiency. Most of the ALTs are novice teachers who have not specialised in education at university, but there are also qualified teachers. The primary duty of the ALT is to assist with classes taught by Japanese teachers of English (JTE) and they may be involved in lesson planning and other language teaching tasks (JET 2010). In practice, however, the expertise of ALTs is difficult to utilise in lesson planning and other language teaching tasks. Here, we confront the sociocultural constraints of two different cultures.

Traditionally, Japanese culture includes distinct hierarchical relationships between natives and foreigners, older and younger professionals, and teachers and pupils. Thus, coming from different cultures, ALTs are usually treated as experts in English culture and usage but are not necessarily able to work as experts in language teaching. The reason why the ALTs are not considered as equal partners in the classrooms is that they do not belong to or share the same culture and hierarchical system. In Japanese culture, face maintenance is related with avoiding interpersonal conflicts according to the dynamics of social interaction (Goffman 1983; Trinidad 2014). The experiences of a Finnish professional English teacher working as an ALT in Japan support such conclusions:

> In Japan, the teacher is always superior to the pupil due to age, position, and the superiority of skills. The teacher's word is law that you are not supposed to challenge. Sometimes pupils have to learn incorrect English language because it is impossible for many teachers to admit their mistakes. The most important thing is that the teacher keeps up her/his face (which she/he would lose if reminded in the presence of her/his pupils about the mistakes that she/he had made.) (ALT FL teacher)

Although the overall objective of Japanese FL education has been to foster a positive attitude toward the English language and communication skills, the cultural constraints have supported a pedagogical orientation towards the transmission of knowledge. The pupils are not used to self-directed, reflective, or autonomous learning. Research findings point out the lack of independence among Japanese pupils (Fukuda, Sakata, and Takeuchi 2011; Sakai, Takagi, and Chu 2010). A foreign ALT may have problems when trying to implement more interactive teaching methods, as his comment indicates:

> In practice, English language teaching is largely about memorising given phrases. Using the blackboard the teachers are trying to explain, though, how the English language works. New ideas are soon watered down, however, by making the pupils copy everything into their notebooks and memorising the example sentences used by the teacher. … The pupils are not used to having to think about something on their own. When I made them do exercises that I had elaborated myself, I was shocked when giving them an opportunity to make their own choices. I wanted them to write about things they like or what they want. We explained with the JTE the grammar and worked through some examples together. To help the task along I added to the worksheet the verbs 'like' and 'want' with the translation. Most of the pupils were unable to do the exercise. They repeated, but even though the teacher tried to ask what they liked, they couldn't speak a word. Most of them wanted to have the so-called right answers although none existed. (ALT FL teacher)

Japanese culture is characterised by the fear of standing out among pupils and colleagues even though what they are doing is correct. On the surface, people are quiet, but pupils' behaviour may be influenced by the class atmosphere (such as the lack of rapport between the parties), not necessarily by their communicative skills. Actually, the pupils are often more active in team-taught classes than in classes taught by single JTEs.

In Finland, the pedagogy of encountering and authentic learning means that the teacher is also a learner, one that encounters her/his pupils as persons and seeks to understand their world. Imperfection and mistakes, either those made by the teachers or the pupils, are regarded as a natural part of linguistic development. The teacher's aim is to provide pupils with authentic situations where they can also use the target language outside of the school. In

their comments below, Finnish FL teachers outline their pedagogical role, stressing the importance of meaningful learning:

> It is important to encounter the individual pupil. A teacher has to find her or his place among the pupils. Pupils need to be inspired and motivated. They must find learning fun. (Finnish FL teacher 3)

> Sometimes the seventh-graders [13-year-olds] are so excited about speaking that they forget the verb conjugation and the word order. But I let them speak even though it doesn't sound good to me. I think that it is better that they communicate rather than having me discourage them with my remarks and grammar rules. (Finnish FL teacher 4)

According to the FNBE (2015), teachers should seek to take pupils' interests and hobbies into account in order to motivate them in language learning. The encounter between the teacher and the pupil is regarded as an encounter between two people. For example, pupils are usually on first-name terms with their teachers, which signifies equality and close relationships between teachers and pupils. Finnish culture allows a rather familiar way of speaking as Finns do not have deeply-rooted hierarchical traditions. The pedagogy of encountering can be seen in the form of free interaction and joint activities, as noted in the following observation extract from a lower secondary classroom:

> The theme of the English lesson was storytelling. At first the teacher showed a picture of her daughter on the smartboard and told the pupils what they like to do together. In doing so, she gave an example of the structure of a story, but also painted a picture of herself as a person. The teacher then wrote down the sections of a joint story as the pupils fabricated it. After this, the smartboard was used for playing a game where pupils participated with nicknames.

Thus, teachers are free to choose the materials and methods to use in their lessons. However, many (but not all) teachers are more or less bound to the course textbook (Luukka et al. 2008), although nowadays the focus is more on oral skills.

As in Japan, Finnish teachers are ethically responsible for supporting their pupils' personal development to enable them to find their places in life. Listening to the pupils' voices and developing their identity is also a focus of FL education**.** Hence, the use of language and senses are of importance in thinking and learning. Pupils' positive emotions and

the joy of learning are seen to promote their learning and to inspire them to develop their capacities, as described by Finnish FL teachers:

> First you just have to create a good relationship and take care of them (pupils) and ask them how they are doing. Only after this it is possible for you to teach something. (Finnish FL teacher 4)

> As a teacher, I have to be able to provide my pupils with the knowledge and skills they need in life. Pupils must feel responsible for their own actions; they must be polite and kind. That's what they will need in working life. (Finnish FL teacher 1)

Although collaboration in the school community is emphasised (FNBE 2004) and the observation of lessons is allowed, Finnish teachers are used to working alone with their pupils behind closed doors. However, in the future the new curriculum will further increase the demand for a range of co-operative projects (FNBE 2015).

Conclusion

Using a socio-cultural perspective this paper has presented a comparative glimpse into the patterns and practices of the FL teaching profession in the Japanese and Finnish contexts. Our aim has been to contribute to the discussion about the public governance of educational systems; the contrast between centralised and decentralised management of schooling that is connected with different teaching paradigms (Korthagen 2004; van Huizen et al. 2005). Basically, Japanese FL teacher education reflects the goals of a curriculum-based approach. MEXT defines the Course of Study guidelines that serve as the fundamental standards for curricula throughout the country. It is noteworthy that the Japanese lesson study system has been acknowledged as being helpful in developing a more inquiry-oriented professional attitude. The Finnish teacher education paradigm has focused on research-based teaching and learning approach. In Finland there is no strict national curriculum but a core curriculum that is essentially a framework of guidelines. Hence, teachers are trusted, given responsibility, and

they have pedagogical autonomy. Finnish FL teachers are individually in charge of their in-service training, updating their professional skills and knowledge, and cooperative planning.

Teacher professional development follows different learning paths in the compared cultures. In Finland, the importance of facilitating the development of teacher identity, that is, the growth from student to FL teacher begins during pre-service studies that take at least five years. The identity of Finnish FL teachers is typically built up through personal biographies, social interaction competence and reflection on ethical and philosophical questions (see, Flores and Day 2006; Jaatinen 2007). Thus, FL teachers are familiarised with the research-based teacher education paradigm that supports the development of their pedagogical content knowledge (Niemi and Isopahkala-Bouret 2015; Westbury et al. 2005). From a different cultural perspective, an interesting question is: how meaningful is the development of professional identity for a teacher in a collectivist society that insists on the interdependent construct of self and where the display of true desires is culturally inappropriate?

Japanese lesson study practice offers FL teachers opportunities for professional development in the form of authentic content learning and social interaction with colleagues (cf. Arani et al. 2010; Johnson 2009). This practice is in keeping with the concept of adaptive expertise where FL teachers seek to gain an understanding of, and develop their teaching and procedural skills throughout their career (Lin et al. 2005). However, the work of FL teachers in Japan tends to be regulated by an integrated body of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are defined by policy-makers. Accordingly, the standardised curriculum paradigm emphasises the theories, knowledge, and other competencies (such as class management) that are needed in teaching. There is generally little room for an interpretation of the teachers' work either in the light of personal preferences or as a consequence of the specific demands and conditions of the situation in which the FL teacher is engaged (van Huizen et al. 2005).

Given that many of the values and norms in societies are hidden, and unwritten, comparative research requires both deep cultural knowledge and familiarity with the professional practices and contexts of FL teachers' work. Moreover, there is always a risk of misinterpretation because of the diversity of cultural meanings and the interpretations that people make within various frameworks. The practices of FL teachers also vary within a culture, no matter how controlled or uncontrolled their work may be. In other words, it is difficult to confirm how successfully the chosen extracts and documents describe the components of the FL teaching profession in these cultures. Hence, a larger body of evidence in terms of comparative data and knowledge of the interaction patterns of cultural contexts would be needed to be able to draw any strong and valid conclusions. However, it is evident that strategies such as the adoption of practices of simultaneous or co-operative teaching, for example, have promoted or will promote authentic content-focused teaching and learning in both compared cultures.

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Notes

1. In western countries intercultural language learning and teaching are included in language education. The core task of a teacher is to awaken pupils' curiosity and choose working methods that sensitise them to otherness and to one's own culture. It follows that the point of departure is no more the discrete form or communicative function but FL teaching is shifting toward helping pupils develop their capacity to interpret and generate meaning that are appropriate within particular contexts. (Nyman and Kaikkonen 2013.)
2. Many private schools do not follow the national curriculum as rigorously as the MEXT expects.
3. In Japan, most students participate in one of a range of school clubs that occupy them until around 6pm most weekdays (and also at weekends and often before school as well) as part of an effort to address juvenile delinquency.
4. In Japan, universities are divided into three categories by founder: national universities established by the Japanese government, public universities established by local public entities or public university corporations, and private universities established by educational corporations.
5. To convert the Japanese credits to ECTS you have to multiply the credits by two.