

Part-time special education from the point of view of
Northern Savonian English teachers

Bachelor's thesis
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| <p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Vuonna 2013 voimaan astunut perusopetuslainmuutos uudisti suomalaista erityisopetusta ja toi mukanaan kolmiportaisen tuen. Uusi tukimalli koostuu kolmesta eri asteesta, yleisestä, tehostetusta ja erityisestä tuesta. Useiden asiantuntijoiden mukaan uudessa tehostetun tuen asteessa osa-aikaisen erityisopetuksen rooli korostuu ja sen toimivuus määrittää myös tuen toimivuutta. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli saada kokemuseräistä tietoa tuen toteutumisesta Ylä-Savossa, ja tuoda esille englannin opettajien näkemys osa-aikaisen erityisopetuksen toimivuudesta ja toteutumisesta.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin teemahaastattelulla kolmelta yläsavolaiselta englannin opettajalta. Haastattelun teemoja olivat opettajien omat kokemukset osa-aikaisesta erityisopetuksesta ja kolmiportaisesta tuesta, tuen vaikutus omaan opetustyöhön ja millaisessa roolissa he ovat tuen suunnittelussa ja toteutumisessa. Aineistoa analysoitiin laadullisella sisällönanalyysillä, jonka pohjalta kokemuksia pystyttiin ryhmittelemään opettajien kokemuksiin tuesta, opetuksen suunnittelun ja toteutuksen kokemuksiin, ja opettajien näkemykseen roolistaan tukea suunnittelevassa moniammatillisessa yhteistyössä.</p> <p>Analyysin perusteella opettajat kokivat pystyvänsä vaikuttamaan tuen muotoutumiseen ja toteutumiseen. Pääasiassa opettajilla oli positiivisia kokemuksia tuesta ja sen vaikutuksesta omaan opetukseensa. Roolien näkökulmasta korostui aineenopettajien tärkeys tuen toteuttamisessa, jossa heillä oli suuri vaikutus itse tuntien suunnitteluun ja sisältöön.</p> | |
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1 Introduction

In 2013 the Finnish special education system underwent its biggest reform in decades. The reform overhauled the system and introduced a new model to give intervention for at-risk pupils. The new model gave teachers more tools to face the growing learning difficulties among Finnish pupils. One of the biggest changes in it was the introduction of a tier of support between general teaching and special education. In other words, the new program contains three tiers, general, intensified and special support. Due to these three tiers, the new system was named the three-tier support model.

Even though the model added a new level between general teaching and special education, it did not introduce any new methods for intervention. However, the role of part-time special education is emphasized in intensified support. In the context of the present study, part-time special education means that a pupil is taught by a special needs teacher in a small group for some of his or her lessons. In other words, both a subject teacher and a special needs teacher teach the pupil at different lessons. According to many experts, the functionality of intensified support defines how well the new system is put into practice and how well it functions. Therefore, it has received its fair share of research. For example, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (2014) and the Trade Union of Education (2013) have released reports on the state of the Finnish special education system.

These extensive studies have described the system through statistics whereas the research on the experiences of people implementing the system in their everyday life has remained marginal. Additionally, even though the three-tier support model calls for co-operation between all the school staff, most of the people who have taken part in the research have been headmasters and special needs teachers. (for example, Jahnukainen 2014, MEC 2014). In other words, the point of view of subject teachers has come mostly from secondary sources. Therefore, the present study will concentrate on the experiences of subject teachers on the three-tier support model.

Next, the reform of Finnish special education system in 2010's and the research on it will be discussed more in-depth.

2 Special education in Finland

Special education has been part of the Finnish education system since the 17th century. It has transformed from the education of the deaf and blind to giving intervention to all sorts of learning disorders varying from dyslexia to motor restlessness. As a matter of fact, this development in special education has been similar to other Western countries (Powell 2011, as quoted by Jahnukainen 2014: 59). However, from the point of view of the present study, the most important period of this history begins with the basic education reform in the 1970's (Jahnukainen, Pösö, Kivirauma and Heinonen 2012: 18). During this period there have been three distinctive events that have led to increase in part-time special education in Finland. To better understand special education in Finland and how part-time special education relates to it, it is beneficial to take a brief look at these turning points in the history of Finnish education.

The first event took place in the 1970's when the number of pupils in part-time special education from all of the pupils in education system rose from 10% to 15% (Kivirauma 2010: 43). In the 1970's, the government ruled that every child in Finland should receive basic education, thus the comprehensive school was established. From the point of view of special education, this meant increased demand and a wider array of developmental and education deficits to treat. Additionally, when the compulsory education also became longer, from the previous four years to nine years, the demand for drawing basic and special education closer together became more evident (Jahnukainen et al 2012: 18). Kivirauma (2010: 37) argues that this development increased the academic demands of education, which affected how special education should be directed. Special education had to intervene in increasingly smaller learning difficulties and to adapt part-time special education to fit the needs of the education system. The adaption of part-time special education was justified with giving easier access for at-risk pupils to receive the intervention (Kivirauma 2010: 39). Therefore, the reform of the education system is intertwined with the development of part-time special education.

The second increase in part-time special education happened after 1998 when it grew to include up to 25% of all the pupils in basic education (Kivirauma 2010: 43). Kivirauma (2010: 41) describes this period as the era of a neoliberal education system. In the system, pupils have the freedom to choose their school, which can lead to competition between schools. However, the huge rise can be credited to the Finnish

state and how schools are funded. According to the Finnish national audit office, in the late-1990's, schools received additional funds for pupils in special education, which led to an increase in the number of pupils in special education in order to receive more funding (FNAO 2012: 32).

The third increase happened in the 2010's when the new support model in special education was introduced. The reform began in 2007, as the Ministry of Education (ME) in Finland released a memorandum on the strategy of special education. The memorandum was based on different international treaties, most notably the Salamanca statement of UNESCO, in which the development of special education towards inclusive education was stated (ME 2007: 11). Additionally, special education had increased in Finland in the early 2000's, which also demanded a reform of the system (ME 2007: 38).

2.1 Three-tier support model

Based on their research, the ME (2007: 53-54) made proposals on how to develop special education in Finland. Firstly, in relation to the inclusive education dimensions, it was proposed that the support should be given at the pupils' local school when possible. Secondly, the stark division between basic education and special education was criticised as it left some pupils without adequate support. Therefore, it was proposed that special education should shift from remedial intervention towards more preventive methods. Hence, the second proposal led to the introduction of intensified support, which as a concept was between basic and special education. Due to these three distinct levels of support, the new model is called the three-tier support model. The national core curricula (NCC) (2014: 61) states that the three-tier support model is designed to be flexible and practical as it is meant to be altered to fit the needs of individual pupils. In other words, the support that a pupil receives is tailored to fit his or her strengths and needs. To point out, dividing support to different levels was not only done in Finland. According to Björn (2016: 60), Response-to-Intervention (RTI) model, which has also three levels, was already in use in the United States. Both models concentrate on prevention of learning disorders and early support. However, the main differences between the two systems are that the RTI model focuses more on diagnosing a learning disorder and in the Finnish model, special education services and general education are more intertwined.

Multiple studies have been conducted on the reform, but the focus has been on the perspective of headmasters and special needs teachers, not on the subject teachers. One of the studies was a survey conducted by the Trade Union of Education (TUE), in which the views of teachers and principals working in comprehensive schools on the realization of the three-tier support model were researched. It must be noted that only 29% of the participants were subject teachers (TUE 2013: 9). The results from those teachers were mixed. However, most of them had experienced an increase in their workload and 20% felt that their education did not correspond with their duties as a teacher anymore. This can be explained by the fact that the new system required that the situation of each individual pupil within the special education system must be observed. Pulkkinen and Jahnukainen (2015: 86) studied subject teachers and their role in the new model. The results showed that the subject teachers were not highly involved in the planning of the support. These two results indicate that the subject teachers take only a minor role in the planning of the support in the new system. Even though the study was extensive, it can be argued that the results of the analysis may be overly simplified and overstated as the data was collected in written form. This can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

2.2 Intensified support

The main idea of the new tier intensified support, is to strengthen the preventiveness of the support, as one of its main aims is to prevent learning difficulties from affecting a wider range of learning skills (MEC 2007: 56). Additionally, it is designed to be a continuum of general support when the general support is not sufficient for the pupil's needs. This stance can be seen in the NCC (2014: 63-64), which states that only when the general support is not enough a multi-teacher team can make a pedagogical assessment, which in turn allows the pupils to receive intensified support. The pedagogical assessment is an official document which outlines the overall situation of the pupil's learning, states the previous means of intervention in the general support and their effectiveness as well as the strengths and needs of the pupil. Oja (2012: 49) argues that since this tier includes a great deal of assessment on the pupil and the effects of the intervention, it prevents the pupil getting stuck with ineffective support and thus the model is more flexible than previously. On the other hand, Oja (2012: 48) reports that the intensified tier also received a lot of criticism from the teachers as it did not offer any additional resources to organize the support.

The Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) in Finland made an extensive report in 2014 on how the new model had been put into practice in schools nationwide. The results were that, overall, the intensified support was used as intended, as it was on a steady rise whereas special support was decreasing (MEC 2014: 23). Thuneberg and Vainikainen (2015: 140) had also noticed this trend in their study. The key figures from the study conducted by MEC (2014: 20-21) for the present study are that in Northern Savonia 4.8% of the pupils in general education received intensified support and of those pupils, 74% received a part-time special education. These numbers support Lintuvuori's (2015: 52) argument that the role of part-time special education is the greatest in intensified support.

2.3 Part-time special education

In the present study, the focus will be on part-time special education and how it fits in the three-tier support model. Education of part-time special education teachers began in the 1960's in response to increased academic demands and it was focused on correcting speech impediments in the beginning. However, especially lately, part-time special education teachers have also concentrated on supporting foreign language learning (Rytivaara, Pulkkinen and Takala 2012: 334). The role of part-time special education in the new model is not specified in the NCC. Per Björn (2015: 59), one of the key characteristics of Finnish school system is the broad autonomy of schools, therefore, it is the responsibility of individual schools to implement part-time special education based on their own needs. The NCC (2014: 73) does, however, specify that the main aims of part-time special education are to strengthen learning skills and prevent learning difficulties. It is also stated that it can be given individually, in small groups or during regular classes through co-teaching.

Rytivaara, Pulkkinen, and Takala (2012: 335) argue that in practice part-time special education has four focus points which are teaching pupils basic school skills, using evidence-based practices in intervention, teaching learning strategies and giving mental support. The National Audit Office of Finland (NAOF) (2013: 19) notes that since the contents and aims of part-time special education are not explicitly stated, it has resulted in variance in part-time special education between municipalities. Similarly, the TUE (2013: 4) points out in their survey, that there are differences between municipalities on how part-time special education is put into practice. Even though these regional differences can affect how the part-time special education is arranged and what kind of students receive the support, the studies have not concluded the severity of this problem or its impact on the system.

Additionally, the report by NAOF (2013: 40) states that part-time special education increases nationwide in secondary school. Huhtanen (2011: 22) claims that the increase is most evident in foreign language teaching. Takala (2016: 22) reinforces the argument by stating that especially individually given part-time special education is mostly used in foreign language classes. Thuneberg and Vainikainen (2015: 148) argue that the frequency of part-time special education is affected by the fact that it is explicitly mentioned as one of the means of intervention in the NCC. This argument is evident in the curricula of general education of Iisalmi, Kiuruvesi, Sonkajärvi, and Vieremä (2016: 48) as it states that part-time special education is included because it is listed in the NCC. Additionally, Takala (2016: 60-61) notes that the new support model focuses on earlier intervention in smaller learning disabilities which, in turn, has affected the frequency of part-time special education.

The report of MEC also surveyed part-time special education in Finland. The results show that Northern Savonia was the third biggest region in Finland in giving part-time special education (MEC 2014: 24). However, due to its scope of data, the results can only be taken as indicators of the amount of part-time special education on the municipal level. Additionally, a survey by the TUE also studied the views of comprehensive school teachers' and principals' experiences with part-time special education. The survey showed that almost 70% of the participants responded that resources directed to part-time special education were not sufficient (TUE 2017: 12). Based on the results, the TUE expressed concern on how the part-time special education had been put into practice and how it can influence the durability of the new model. As the present study focuses on part-time special education, it will, therefore, yield valuable information on how special education can be improved in Finland.

3 Present study

In the following section, firstly, the aims of the present study and the research questions are specified. Secondly, the data collection process and methods of analysis are discussed in detail.

3.1 Aims of the present study

To sum up, a reform of special education was done in 2011 that introduced a new model called the three-tier support model. In this model special education is split up into three tiers, general, intensified and special, which vary in intensity. General support corresponds with the support pupils received previously within general teaching, and special support corresponds with the support pupils received in special education. Intensified support is a completely new concept, which is meant to serve as a middle ground for pupils who have learning disorders too severe to be treated with general support, but special support is too intensive. The surveys on the new model showed that the model had been used accordingly, and that part-time special education is at the core of intensified support.

The first focus of the present study is on the relationship between part-time special education and English teaching, especially how the teachers view and experience it. The study is conducted in Iisalmi, which is the second biggest municipality in Northern Savonia. As it was previously shown, part-time special education has a relatively larger role in the region compared to other regions in Finland. However, the present study does not account for why it is more common in the area. The choice is based on the assumption, that the Northern Savonian teachers are more likely to have experiences with the part-time special education.

The second focus of the present study is on the subject teachers and more specifically on their views on the role of the part-time special education in their teaching. As mentioned above, part-time special education increases in foreign language teaching in the secondary school (Huhtanen 2011: 22). Therefore, the participants in the study are secondary school teachers of English. In addition, the survey by the TUE (2013: 9) and the results from the study conducted by Pulkkinen and Jahnukainen (2015: 86) showed that the subject teachers are a group that should be studied more. The findings suggest that further research on subject teachers' views will give a more in-depth look at the realization and functionality of

the three-tier support model. To conclude, as part-time special education is one of the major means of intervention, any research on it will produce valuable information on how the special education in Finland works and especially by giving voice to the subject teacher the study puts forward this important part of the educational system.

In conclusion, the research questions in the present study are the following:

1. What kind of views subject teachers have on part-time special education?
2. How does the part-time special education affect subject teachers' lessons?
3. What kind of role do the subject teachers take in the planning of support?

3.2 Method

As previously mentioned, the current trend in studies in the field of part-time special education in Finnish context has largely ignored the views of subject teachers. Therefore, the present study will be focusing on bringing forth this point of view, and thus, giving a voice to the subject teachers. Because of this focus, the data used in the study was gathered with a semi-structured interview. Per Dufva (2011: 133) this method is best used to gather personal experiences from the participants. Additionally, the choice of interviewing subject teachers also differs from the previous studies which have used surveys to gather data (Ministry of education and culture 2014: Trade Union of Education 2013). This distinction makes it possible to understand the views and the reality of the situation more in-depth.

Three teachers took part in the semi-structured interview. All of them taught English in Northern Savonia; two of them in secondary school and one of them in primary school. Even though work experience of the teachers varied from over 20 years to under five years, based on the analysis, previous studies of special pedagogy had an effect on how well the interviewees understood the system. In other words, two of the interviewees, one of the secondary school teachers and comprehensive school English teacher had done the basic studies of special pedagogy. Due to their background, the teachers had a more precise image of the scope and tools of special education. However, all of them reported having multiple experiences with pupils who were taught also in part-time special education. The semi-structured interview was a combination of three themes: First, what kind of views teachers had on part-time special education, second, how part-time special education had affected their teaching and thirdly, how they

were involved in the planning of the intervention. All the interviews were recorded for later analysis.

As the focus in the present study is on the personal experiences, the frame of the semi-structured interview included questions, which were neutral in tone and were used only to evoke conversation. As Dufva (2011: 138) notes, the way the interviewer forms the questions can have an impact on how the participants discuss the topic. Therefore, the neutral tone was chosen also to give room for the participants' own thoughts and make free discussion on the topic possible. Moreover, due to the context of the interview, the participants could also give answers that are socially acceptable (Dufva 2011: 142). This was taken into consideration, and the questions do not take a stance on the success of the intervention. What is more, there are only three participants in the present study. Therefore, it must be noted that the results cannot be generalized as universal truths. However, this is in line with the focus of the study, which is to give voice to the subject teachers' personal experiences.

Due to the nature of the data gathered from the interview, content analysis is the most suitable analysis method. Content analysis is used to give an objective perspective on the subjective views of the teachers on part-time special education (Tuomi 2002: 105). The objective perspective makes it possible to gain new information about the views of English teachers on part-time special education. The analysis concentrates on the data, rather than using previous theories to categorize the answers. Due to this approach, it is possible to gain specific information on the experiences of the Northern-Savonian subject teachers (Tuomi 2002: 111). Additionally, the approach also avoids the risk of just describing the situation and not giving any concrete findings (Tuomi 2002: 105). Thus, the analysis is used to make conclusions from personal experiences on the phenomenon.

4 Results

Next, the results from the interviews will be discussed per theme. First, the attitudes towards part-time special education are analyzed. The theme of attitudes overarched the conversation in the interview and can be seen from the perspective of the subject teachers as well as the pupils. Second, the effect on the classroom practices is discussed. As the more practical effects of the lessons are the most prominent dimension of part-time special education in the day-to-day life of an English teacher, much of the time in the interview was spent on this theme. Lastly, the role of subject teachers in the new support model is discussed. Currently, the network of support behind the pupils consists of many different professionals working in co-operation. Based on the analysis, the role of a subject teacher varies in different phases of the support. These different roles are discussed individually.

4.1 Part-time special education from teachers' perspective

When asked how the English subject teachers viewed the current situation in part-time special in their schools, all the accounts described the system to be working well in the light of current resources and funding. One of the secondary school teachers brought out the idea of more special needs teachers being hired if there were more recourses. Later in the interviews, all the teachers described part-time special education as being one of the tools that can be used to give support to at-risk pupils. In other words, part-time special education was viewed as a well-functioning part of the current special education system. These accounts seem to contradict the findings of TUE's (2017) survey, in which the teachers expressed concern that the resources in part-time special education were not adequate. However, it must be noted that these accounts are from the point of view of individual subject teachers and they only commented the issue from their perspective. What is more, the issue of socially acceptable answers (Dufva 2011: 142) during the interviews rose in the discussion on the experiences with the part-time special education. Initially, all the teachers reported only positive experiences with the system. However, later in the interview, the teachers expressed more critical point of view on the part-time special education.

Secondly, the teachers' descriptions of part-time special education brought up an interesting perspective on the relationship between general teaching and special education. In the eyes of the subject teachers, special education is something additional to their general teaching. One of the teachers described part-

time special education as “something wonderful that I could not do”, thus, part-time special education includes, in the eyes of subject teachers, something that they cannot provide. This view of incompetence reflects the findings of TUE (2013: 9). In their study, it was noted that one in five teachers felt that their education was outdated. It can be argued that in the new model the responsibility of giving intervention is shared by all of the teaching staff. Therefore, it may be stressful for some of the teachers to adapt to the new way of giving intervention. Similarly, this attitude shows a traditional view of the relationship between general teaching and special education, where special education is seen as something additional to the teaching given by subject teachers. Due to the reform of the special education system, the previous division between general teaching and special education has been bridged with the new tier of intensified support (ME 2007: 53-54). This shift is relatively new, and thus, the current attitudes still reflect the previous way of arranging special education. In the light of the views expressed by the teachers, it can be argued that the three-tier model has not been completely ideologically adopted by the teachers. However, one of the secondary school teachers stated that part-time special education gave her “peace of mind” because her pupils receive more individual attention in special education.

Lastly, the secondary school teachers presented also views on which of the pupils should receive a part-time special education. It was noted that, in general, the support was given to the pupils who needed it the most. However, the interviewees suggested that the part-time special education in their classes should be directed specifically to the pupils who had linguistic learning disorders, and the pupils who had behavioural problems should receive some other form of support. In other words, the teachers viewed behavioural problems as something that should not be dealt with in special education. From their point of view of these teachers, behavioural problems are something that takes away the part-time special education resource from the pupils who, in their opinion, need it the most. These seem to contradict the current interpretation of emotional and behavioural problems in special education. Currently, emotional and behavioural problems are viewed as one of the many learning disorders. On the other hand, per Epstein et al. (2008: 6), the best intervention for pupils with emotional and behavioural problems is a rapport with teachers and other pupils. In this regard, the research supports the view of the teachers, as being away from their general class might not be beneficial for the pupils with emotional and behavioural problems.

4.2 Part-time special education from pupils' perspective

In addition to the teachers' perspective on part-time special education, the interviewees also discussed part-time special education from the perspective of their pupils. All of them regarded part-time special education as having a positive impact on their pupils. In their opinion, one of the best parts of part-time special education was that it gave their pupils positive experiences from school and learning. Additionally, the secondary school teachers noted that part-time special education was important for their pupils as they often heard positive feedback on part-time special education from their pupils. For example, the pupils had told the teachers that it was easier for them to do exercises and attend classes in part-time special education. In the light of this view, it seems that part-time special education is used accordingly, since Rytivaara et al. (2012: 345) state that, in part-time special education, the pupil should receive mental support as well.

However, the teachers were also critical of the system. They stated that since part-time special education is given to the pupils who express observable learning difficulties, the low-achieving pupils who are struggling in general teaching are usually left without adequate support. Even though the NCC (2014:61) states that the new system is designed to suit the needs of individual pupils, it seems that, in the opinion of the interviewees, some of the pupils do not fit in the system. However, this can be seen also as an expression of the difficulties that subject teachers have in adapting special education to their teaching. In this example, it seems that the subject teachers do not view themselves capable of differentiating enough for the low-achieving pupils in their lessons. It can be argued that low-achieving students can be given adequate support on the general tier of the support model.

On the contrary, the teachers also discussed the problematic aspects of part-time special education on their pupils. Since part-time special education is usually given in a separate classroom, the elementary school teacher was worried that her pupils may not get enough linguistic input in the special needs teacher's classroom. As the part-time special education is given in a class, where also other pupils studying different subjects are taught by the special needs teacher simultaneously, it is a natural consequence that the special needs teacher cannot use the target language as much as the subject teacher in general teaching class. However, this worry contradicted her other views on part-time special education, as she did see part-time special education as being beneficial for her pupils. This seems to reflect the issue of how part-time special education is typically arranged in most Finnish schools. This raises the question whether part-time special education should be taught in cooperation with a subject

teacher and a special needs teacher. If both teachers would teach the same class at the same time, the issue of inadequate support and the issue too little linguistic input could be resolved. However, all the teachers acknowledged that with current funding the co-teaching model of part-time special education is not possible as it would mean hiring more special needs teachers.

4.3 Effects of part-time special education on English teachers' classroom practices

In this section, the effects of part-time special education on the classroom practices of the interviewees will be discussed. In the interviews, the teachers described the concrete effects that part-time special education had on their classroom practices and lessons widely, and most of the time in the interviews was spent on these accounts. This can be explained by the fact that these effects are how part-time special education comes up in the day-to-day life of a subject teacher. Overall, all the interviewees stated that part-time special education had little to no effects on their normal classroom practices and planning routine of their lessons. However, all of them described the indirect positive impacts that part-time special education had on their lessons. For example, it had improved the learning outcomes and learning strategies of the pupils who received a part-time special education. This section is divided into two parts, the effects part-time special education on the planning of lessons, and the effects on the lessons.

All the teachers interviewed claimed that part-time special education did not affect their usual way of planning the lessons. This was explained by that, on average, they had to adjust and adapt to each day so much, that thorough planning of each individual lesson was not seen as reasonable. Therefore, the addition of part-time special education in the planning phase had little to no effect on their regular planning practices. However, all the teachers noted that when planning they must be aware which of their pupils are in a special education each day. Consequently, all the teachers had formed routines and could memorize when their pupils had a part-time special education. In addition, the elementary school teacher remarked that she wanted to be aware what kind of exercises could be done with the special needs teacher. For example, she wanted to be aware whether it was possible to do oral exercises. All in all, the only effects on the planning of the lessons were practical questions. None of the interviewees discussed whether more planning of lessons should take place.

When discussing the effects of part-time special education on their lessons, all the interviewees noted

that part-time special education had a positive effect on their pupils' work in class and it improved learning outcomes. From this perspective the intervention is working well as, per Rytivaara et al. (2012: 345), learning basic school skills and learning strategies are at the core of part-time special education. All the teachers reported that their lessons were more peaceful and that they had more time for each individual pupil. This was the result of part-time special education more often being given to the pupils who have behavioural problems. Since the pupils who would most often disturb classes were not present, the lessons were more peaceful, and according to the teachers, more meaningful teacher-pupil interaction took place. This highlights the aforementioned problematic relationship between behavioural problems and part-time education in the school that the secondary school teachers were employed by. The teachers did view the part-time special education as being most beneficial to pupils with linguistic learning disorders, but in reality, it was heavily concentrated on behavioural problems. The juxtaposition between the ideal and the reality indicates that, from the point of view the subject teachers, the support system could work better.

Additionally, according to the teachers, their pupils had attained learning strategies from the part-time special education, which in turn reduced problematic behaviour stemming from difficulties during the lessons. This resulted in teachers spending less time addressing problem behaviour and individual instruction of pupils. Therefore, the teachers argued that these indirect effects helped their teaching in the long-term, as the pupils could apply these skills in different situations in the future. The secondary school teachers also noted that these skills could be applied across different subjects, thus helping all the teachers. For example, one of the pupils had learned how to do exam more efficiently in maths and this skill was later applied in English. As most of the pupils in part-time special education in English also received support in other subjects, it can be assumed that the whole support is regarded more widely. Therefore, it cannot only be seen as support in English but more as support for individual pupils.

4.4 English teachers' role in the special education system

In this last section, the role of English teachers in the Finnish special education system is discussed. As the support in the new three-tier support program is planned and conducted by a multiprofessional co-operation, also the interviewees reflected their position in this co-operation. This aspect of the special education system is discussed from the perspective of planning and implementation of the support from

the experiences of the interviewees.

4.4.1 Planning phase of support

When discussing their role and position in the planning phase of the support, all the teachers interviewed saw themselves as being a member of a multiprofessional team, which was led by a special needs teacher. The subject teachers' role was more of a reactive rather than active in the planning. In this regard, the teachers saw themselves as, somewhat, subordinate to the special needs teacher in the team. For example, one of the teachers described her job in the planning was to inform the team about the core content of her subject and, in the end, just sign the document. Correspondingly, Pullkinen and Jahnukainen (2015: 86) had similar results on the role of a subject teacher in the planning of the support. However, all the teachers regarded special needs as being expert in the special education system and in learning disorders, and themselves as experts in their subject. Therefore, in their opinion, the leading role of special needs teacher was justified. All the teachers had strong trust in the special needs teacher in the planning of the support.

In the new three-tier support program, it is the responsibility of every teacher to observe whether a pupil needs intervention. The English teachers reported that during their tenure they had observed and suggested on some occasions that a pupil might need support from special education. However, due to the special needs teacher's leading role in the planning, the subject teachers first discussed with a special needs teacher. These roles were furthermore reinforced as a special needs teacher also took a leading role in observation of learning disorders. For example, one of the secondary school teachers said that at the beginning of the school year, special needs teachers observed English lessons and after their assessment offered help for classes they deemed to be needing it the most. The other secondary school teacher justified the leading role of special needs teachers in the planning phase with their expertise in the field. In her opinion, it would be impossible for a non-expert to correctly judge the need for intervention.

4.4.2 Execution of the support

According to the interviewees, the distinction between the subject teacher and the special needs teacher is also present in the execution of the support. However, in this situation, the positions from the planning

phase are flipped and English teachers take more of a leading role. As the subject teachers regarded themselves as experts in the subject, they were responsible for the content of lessons. The special needs teachers' role was to implement the plan made by the English teachers. Therefore, the co-operation was more dynamic as the teachers interviewed expected the special needs teachers to adapt their plan for each pupil individually. The roles complemented each other: the subject teacher was responsible for the subject and the special needs teacher was responsible for learning.

It is also noteworthy that, in addition to the special needs teacher, the secondary school teachers reported multiple professions in the multiprofessional team behind the support: for example, resource teachers and "supporter (tsemppari)". "Supporter" is a youth worker who has a classroom where pupils can go to do their homework in peace. The two teachers also spoke about social workers and psychologists. Per their take, the current system has a lot of support to offer and multiple experts working in co-operation to give the pupils best possible support. In their opinion, the distinction between different professions was not negative as it was important to have different experts to make the support as functional and dynamic as possible. In other words, they viewed themselves as experts of language learning and teaching, and special needs teachers as experts in learning disorders and intervention.

5 Summary and conclusion

To answer the third research question, what kind of role subject teachers have in the planning of the support, the results were similar to previous studies. In the study conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2013: 84), it was stated that special needs teachers took a bigger role than other professionals in the planning phase of the support. This is in line with the findings of the present study. However, the present study sheds light on the execution of the support. In this context, the participants stated that their role grew, and they had a bigger impact on how to support, part-time special education in the context of the present study, was conducted. However, it must be noted that the participants did not see themselves as superior, but as equal members of a multiprofessional team.

In the first and second research questions, the interest was on how the part-time special education affects the English lessons and what kind of views the teachers have on part-time special education. The two studies conducted by TUE (2013, 2017) suggested that the increase in monitoring and documentation of the support could lead to stress and decrease in well-being at work among the teachers. The increase in the number of meetings and documents was acknowledged by all the participants in the present study. However, none of them reported any negative feelings towards this characteristic of the new system. All in all, all of them stated that intensified support and part-time special education had minimal effects on their lessons and teaching. What is more, to summarize the accounts of the subject teachers, part-time special education had a positive indirect impact on their lessons in the form of improvement in the learning strategies of the pupils and offering a peaceful working environment to both pupils and the teacher.

All in all, the findings in the present study were just subjective experiences of three English teachers in two Northern Savonian schools. The size of the study puts limitations on how largely these views can be generalized. Additionally, since all the accounts were subjective, it is possible that some of the answers are biased. By increasing the number of interviewees and possibly monitoring their work, further studies could provide a more specific and extensive perspective on how the three-tier support program is working in the municipality.

In conclusion, even with its limitations, the present study gives a point of view to better understand how

special education works in Finland. In the context of the municipality the present study was conducted in, the system is working accordingly, and it gives the teachers tools to face the growing number of pupils with learning disorders.

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