Home-School Cooperation During the COVID-19 Pandemic - The Perspective of Elementary School Special Education Teachers in Finland

Olli Lukkari

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Faculty of Education and Psychology

University of Jyväskylä

ABSTRACT

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This qualitative study focuses on home-school cooperation during COVID-19 pandemic. The corona virus started spreading in early 2020 causing school lockdowns in most countries worldwide and affecting over 1,5 billion learners. Educational institutions had to quickly shift to online teaching.

Five Finnish special education primary school teachers were interviewed as to how the home-school cooperation aspect in their work changed during the pandemic. The transcribed interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.

It was found out that remote teaching had increased home-school cooperation, lowered the threshold for parents to contact special education teachers, and burdened teachers and parents alike; worry and welfare issues were reported by teachers. There were lots of technical difficulties, and the whole nature of the parental meetings changed when switched from contact to remote meetings.

How will (special) education continue in the post-pandemic world? There are still 3,7 billion people worldwide without access to internet connection. Those who continue to study online, how will they study? Who will develop education online platforms and own the educational data of the future? What will companies, schools or governments do with this educational data that could be gathered from children as young as few years old? What will be the role of home-school cooperation then? No one knows yet.

Keywords: home-school cooperation, parental involvement, remote learning, distance education, COVID-19, special education, Finnish education

ABSTRAKTI

Lukkari, Olli. 2021. Kodin ja koulun välinen yhteistyö koronapandemian aikana - alakoulun erityisopettajien näkökulma. Pro gradu -tutkielma. Jyväskylän yliopisto. Kasvatustieteiden ja psykologian laitos.

Tämä laadullinen tutkimus keskittyy kodin ja koulun yhteistyöhön koronapandemian aikana. Koronavirus alkoi levitä alkuvuodesta 2021 ja aiheutti koulujen sulkemisen ympäri maailmaa. Oppilaitokset joutuivat siirtymään vauhdilla internetin kautta tapahtuvaan etäopetukseen ja sulut vaikuttivat yli 1,5 miljardin koululaisen tai opiskelijan elämään.

Haastattelin työtäni varten viittä alakoulun erityisopettajaa siitä, miten pandemia on vaikuttanut kodin ja koulun väliseen yhteistyöhön heidän työssään. Litteroidut haastattelut analysoitiin temaattista analyysia käyttämällä.

Haastattelujen pohjalta ilmeni siitä, että etäopetus oli lisännyt kodin ja koulun välistä yhteistyötä, laskenut vanhempien kynnystä olla yhteydessä erityisopettajiin ja kuormittanut sekä vanhempia että opettajia. Teknisiä vaikeuksia oli paljon ja vanhempainiltojen luonne muuttui, kun tapaamisia ei voitu pitää kasvokkain vaan etänä.

Miten (erityis)opetus jatkuu pandemian jälkeisessä maailmassa? Tänä päivänä 3,7 miljardia ihmistä elää ilman pääsyä internetiin. Jatkuuko ja yleistyykö etäopiskelu - ja miten? Kuka kehittää tulevaisuuden nettioppimisalustoja ja kenelle on pääsy alustoista kerättyyn oppimisdataan? Mitä koulut, hallitukset ja yritykset tulevat tekemään tällä datalla, jota luultavasti tullaan keräämään vain muutamankin vuoden ikäisiltä lapsilta? Miten tämä kaikki vaikuttaa kodin ja koulun väliseen yhteistyöhön? Kukaan ei vielä tiedä.

Avainsanat: kodin ja koulun yhteistyö, vanhempien osallistuminen/osallisuus, etäopetus, etäoppiminen, koronapandemia, erityisopetus, suomalainen koulu(tus)

Content

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the warnings and forecasts of many virologists and visible businessmen like Bill Gates COVID-19 pandemic caught societies and health care professionals off-guard in 2020 (Cesco et al. 2020; Webster 2020). Schools around the world were forced to switch to remote online teaching from their traditional face-to-face classes. UNESCO's statistics (2021) show that in April 2020 schools and universities were shut down in 191 countries and in total, the lockdown impacted over 1,5 billion learners. Referring to Zimmerman (2020), Krishamurthy (2020) points out that never in human history have entire student bodies been suddenly shifted from face-to-face classes to remote instruction through the use of digital technologies. All these changes affect home-school cooperation as well. How do parents and schools communicate in these changing times? This is what I wanted to know.

It is interesting to note that, though a lot of research has been done about home-school cooperation, only few studies are done on the digital aspect of home-school cooperation (Korhonen 2017, 16, 85–86). Kuusimäki et al. (2019a, 1) state that although most parent-teacher communication is currently done through digital platforms, not much is yet known about the specific role that digital communication has in building parent-teacher relationships. The purpose of my thesis is to bring more focus on how the COVID-19 virus has influenced home-school cooperation in Finland. With the data I analysed from interviewing five Finnish special education teachers, I hope to present solutions and practises those teachers have already found helpful in home-school cooperation. This should be useful in case of further pandemics. I also wish to fill in the gap of talking about digitization and digital means of home-school cooperation.

I begin my thesis by introducing the Finnish education system and special education practices to the reader. I then go on to write about the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected the world of education. I continue by having a look at the various terminology around remote education and around home-school cooperation. After the theory section, I guide the reader through my research methods and choices and present the analysis of my study. I analysed the interviews using thematic analysis and formed several categories to divide the interview findings. In the final chapters, I present the reader with my insights from these interviews and go through potential consequences of how COVID-19 pandemic will affect the digital and special in the future and what ethical challenges are we thus facing. In the end, I go through the limitations and potential applications and further study options of my study.

2 FINNISH EDUCATION AND COVID-19

Finnish education system became known all over the world in the 2000s when Finland hit the top charts in the international PISA-tests (Programme for International Student Assessment). In this section we look at the Finnish (special) education system and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the educational landscape of Finland.

2.1 Education and Well-Being in Finland

The first PISA test came out in 2000, and the exceptional results of Finnish students in PISA in 2000, 2003 and 2006 in science, reading, mathematics and problem-solving. The outstanding results[1] have since aroused a great deal of international interest towards the Finnish education system (Halinen & Järvinen 2008; Kupiainen et al. 2009; Linnakylä et al. 2007). There have been many possible explanations for Finland's educational success, such as the Finnish basic school reform in the 1970s after which the first nine school grades were made compulsory to every Finnish citizen (see Morgan 2014) and the high quality of teacher education in Finland *("every schoolteacher must achieve a master's degree")*.

Other explanations include the freedom the teachers are allowed in their jobs[2] (*"in Finnish schools there are no inspections"*), the welfare model of the Finnish state *("the government offers, mostly free of charge, all types of services, particularly to children and young people"*). Finland also invests in special education *("organizing support classes and providing individual support")* and the school services are well-equipped in general *("schools are well furnished and well equipped").* (Malaty 2006, 59–65.)

The whole school system in Finland is public meaning no private schools exist (Björn et al. 2016, 59). Finland identifies itself with the principles and methods of Nordic welfare state, whose underlying philosophy is that the state is responsible for its citizens (Määttä & Uusiautti

[1] In the 2006 assessment of scientific literacy, the performance of Finnish youth was the best in the whole world. Not only this, but more students had excellent records and fewer students were qualified as academically weak than in any other country. (Halinen & Järvinen 2008, 78.) In the Finnish basic education system, only a small number of students (2 %) repeat grades. The average percent for class repetition is 16 % in the 37 OECD countries, with a percentage of over 30 % in countries such as France, Luxembourg, Spain, and Netherlands (Kupari & Välijärvi 2005).

[2] See Opettajat Suomessa 2008 [Teachers in Finland 2008] by Kumpulainen, T. (Ed.) for more info. Published in 2009, in Tampere, Finland, by Ministry of Education.

2012, 292). Education is considered a public service and is free of charge for the participants (Määttä & Uusiautti 2012, 293). Pupils in both basic and upper secondary schools have access to daily school meals provided by the schools. (Kupiainen et al. 2009).

The basic education, covering the first nine classes from ages 7–15, is compulsory by law to all Finns and as a result almost all Finnish children attend basic education provided by comprehensive schools (Kumpulainen 2015, 12). The overall educational standards are administered by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, but schools can freely implement them in their own curricula (Björn et al. 2016, 59). The goal of basic education in Finland is to provide equal rights to education for all. This includes the aim of reducing the risks related to low socioeconomic background and regional differences in educational outcomes (Orell & Pihlaja 2020). The differences between schools in Finland are among the smallest in the OECD countries; this is explained by the non-selective education system that provides all students with the same kind of comprehensive schooling no matter which school they attend (Määttä 2012, 295).

According to a study done by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (Lammi–Taskula & Karvonen 2014, 13) majority of the Finnish people report high levels of well-being. This is in line with the title *Happiest Country in the World*, that Finland has received due to its first place ranking in the United Nations country-specific reporting of happiness (Tenhunen 2020, 18-28). However, there exists a small minority in Finland who feel everything but well. The Finnish society seems to be dividing and polarizing - educated people with good income report a far better state of health than do their little-educated or little-paid counterparts (Vaarama et al. 2010).

Even though the general well-being of Finnish people has risen in the last decades, the differences in income, and the number of jobless people have also increased. Some families have difficulties that have followed them for generations. Among these challenges are illnesses, mental health problems, unemployment, use of drugs or substances, and poverty. (Lammi-Taskula & Karvonen 2014, 13.) These differences can of course be seen in the lives of children in schools, and they present challenges for the teachers and affected families alike.

2.1.1 Special Education and Special Teachers in Finland

Compared internationally, teachers in Finland are in quite a unique position. Tirri (2014) states that for the past few decades in Finland teacher education has been the first choice of many gifted students Indeed, the teaching profession is valued more in Finland than in many other

countries – teaching is even compared to 'prestigious' occupations such as practicing medicine or law (Punakallio & Dervin, 2015). Special education teachers even receive a slightly higher salary than classroom teachers (Takala et al. 2009, 163).

The idea behind special education is that some students need – or greatly benefit from – individualized and planned support and instruction (Sabel et al. 2011; Vellutino et al. 1996). Regarding special education, Finland has taken the path from going from more segregated environments –special schools with special students – towards more inclusive policy –special students in everyday classroom settings with other students – starting from the 90s (Jahnukainen 2011, 493–495; Saloviita 2020). Inclusion is the official education policy in the country and its goal is to make the school suitable for all pupils. This means the normal classrooms are filled with pupils with each of their individual needs.

To help with this state of matters, almost every school in Finland has one or more permanent special education teacher - although rural areas and smaller schools often cope with peripatetic teachers dividing their time among several schools. (Takala et al. 2009, 163). Hausstätter and Takala (2008, 123) bring out the notion that the national curriculum of Finland emphasizes early identification of learning difficulties; early support services is offered for the pupil in accordance with the parents. In 2017, almost every fifth student (17,5 %) in compulsory education were receiving intensified or special support (Statistics Finland 2018). Special support might be needed because of a pupil's learning difficulty, or because of an impairment, illness, or disability the pupil has. Pupils might also need social or psychological, or emotional support (Haussträtter & Takala 2008, 123).

Special teachers have traditionally been teaching individual or small groups of students. While teaching is the cornerstone of a teacher's work, the role of special teachers have become more versatile in the last years and decades. The role of a special education teacher in today's school environment also includes co-teaching, collaboration, and consultation in addition to individual or small-group teaching – thus the work title *special educator* has been recommended to be used instead of *special education teacher*. (Ström & Hannus-Gullmets 2015).

Based on her study of Finnish special education teachers working in normal mainstream schools, Takala (2009, 166) divides the work of special education teachers into three categories: background work (22% of monthly workload), consultation (12% of monthly workload), and teaching (66% of monthly workload). Unsurprisingly, teaching takes most of the teacher's time. On top of teaching, the special education teachers also attend school

meetings, write reports and individualized lesson plans (IEPs), participate in training, and design materials. For the consulting side, special education teachers collaborate with various people, such as parents, psychologists, and other school staff.

2.1.2 Special Education Teacher Training in Finland

All special education teachers need to obtain a master's degree worth five years of studying (Takala et al. 2009, 163). There are two ways to become a qualified special education teacher in Finland. To be able to work as a special teacher in vocational schools, one has first to have a graduate degree - 3,5–4,5 years of studies in the vocational university - and at least three years of experience in their field. Then they have to study the teacher's pedagogical studies for 10–16 months to get the 60 credits in the field to qualify them as capable special education teachers in the vocational school. (The Teacher Student Union of Finland 2020.)

To work in a normal school outside the vocational realm, one has to have a pedagogy degree from the university (300 credits; five years of studies), including teacher pedagogical studies (60 credits; one year of studies), and special education studies (60 credits). To apply for the special education teacher university program, one has to be selected through the entrance exam. There are also distinct studies for those wishing to work as special educators in early childhood education. (The Teacher Student Union of Finland 2020.)

In elementary schools, there are two kinds of special education teachers at work: part-time special need education teachers (*laaja-alaiset erityisopettajat* in Finnish) and special education classroom teachers (*erityisluokanopettajat* in Finnish). These two have different legal rights and duties. (The Trade Union of Education in Finland 2020).

Special education teachers are allowed to hold part-time special teaching lessons without an own class to be responsible for. This 'classless' special education can mean providing part-time education for students with speech, writing and math problems for example. Outside these special education classes, the students study normally in their respective classrooms with their home classroom teacher.

Special education classroom teachers, on the other hand, have a double qualification to teach both as primary school classroom teachers and as a special education teacher. Besides being qualified for the classless special education teaching, special education classroom teachers can also work with their own classes of special students where the students study all subjects in the same class for the whole year. (Haapakorva 2016, 6-7.)

2.1.2 Three Levels of Support

There is no formal diagnosis that would be necessary for a student to receive special educational services. No formal criteria for receiving support is stated anywhere and in more severe cases of support, each case is looked upon individually among professionals and parents together. Largest part of special educational services within schools are provided free-of-charge for the families and students. The Finnish special education framework is cut down to three levels: general, intensified, and special support. This framework can be quite freely used to help with a pupil's overall learning or with a definite learning issue such as in helping with reading for example. (Björn et al. 2016, 60–61.)

The first level of support is called general support or part-time special education. It is meant for pupils that need occasional help, usually within regular classroom settings. No official documents are needed at this point. In this stage, the pupil remains in their normal classes with their school mates during most of their classes and, under some subjects where they need help, – mathematics for example – the pupil goes to study with the special education teacher, usually with a few other students from different classes at the same time. The pupil continues to visit the special education classes weekly for as long as is needed, but they do not have any official special education status *per se* (Itkonen & Jahnukainen 2007; Takala et al. 2009, 163.)

In the second level, called intensified or enhanced support, the pupil needs support in a specific area, such as mathematics skills, for a prolonged time. Teachers have to make a literary education plan (according to the national core curriculum), and pedagogical assessment about the student is made, in cooperation with parents and other professionals, if needed. This stage of support might mean that the pupil goes to do reading exercises in the special teacher's classroom in a small group with a few other students for a few hours a week, for a few months. This stage resembles the first one, but the need for support is more severe and everything is officially reported and stated in paper.

The third level, special support, is applied for students needing altogether *individualized education plans (IEPs)* in one or more school subjects. A multiprofessional team writes pedagogical assessment about the student and their future learning outcomes (the IEP) together with the parents of the student, and the provider of the education must sign a literary conclusion over organizing the education. This conclusion has to be checked from time to time. (Björn et al. 2016, 60-61; Curriculum of basic education 2014, 63-68; Haustätter & Takala 2008, 123–124; Laatikainen 2011, 24–28)

2.2 COVID-19

"Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one [COVID-19] is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it." -Roy, Arundhati (2020)

2.2.1 Global Pandemic

The year 2020 saw a great change in global news, politics, and practises with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has even been called as a surprising once-in-a-generation "black swan event (Krishnamurthy 2020; Taleb 2007). The COVID-19 infection, named after it's relative SARS-coronavirus, was first present in China at the end of 2019 (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare 2021a). In January 2020 a massive spreading started in Wuhan, China. On 30.1.2020, a global health emergency was declared the World Health Organization Emergency Committee (Velavan & Meyer 2020.) By 24.3.2021, authorities in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) - India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan, and Afghanistan - had declared 1536 confirmed infections and 22 deaths. (Zulcifar et al. 2020).

The first death caused by COVID-19 outside Asia took place in France on 15.2.2020 (Oksanen et al. 2020). In Italy, the number of infections started to surge quickly in the last week of February (Remuzzi & Remuzzi 2020). By September 2020, the virus had spread to over 200 countries (Platto et al. 2020a). During March 2020, almost all European countries placed at least some restrictions trying to prevent the virus from spreading further (Oksanen et al. 2020). Up 22.3.2021, there had been 124,254,000 global cases and 2,735,386 confirmed deaths linked to COVID-19 (John Hopkins University 2021).

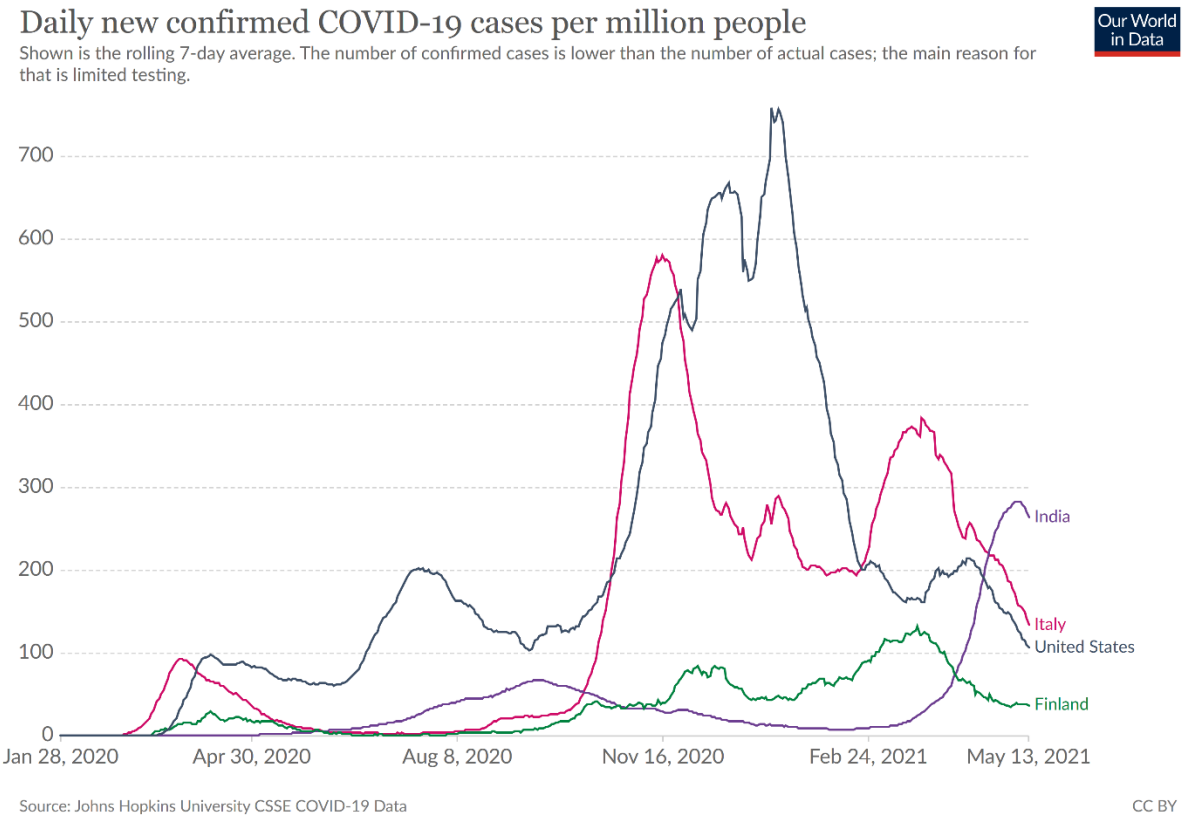

Figure 1: The cumulative confirmed COVID-19 cases per million people 22.1.2020-13.5.2021 in India, Italy, United States and Finland. Source: https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer. Accessed 14.5.2021.

The term coronavirus includes a large number of different viruses that have been found in people and in animals. The virus spreads through as a droplet infection when in close contact with an infected person. The general recommendations state that one can protect themselves from the virus - or at least minimize the risk of getting infected - by maintaining good hand hygiene, evading close contacts, and using face masks. (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare 2021a.)

In light of what we have since learned, the professionals say the fast phased spreading of the virus was indeed predictable. In other words, the spreading could have happened wherever the conditions that had allowed the virus to triumph could be duplicated. But what could not have been predicted, was the second transition of COVID-19, its transformation from a local epidemic to a global pandemic. (Platto et al. 2020b.) According to current knowledge, the virus originated in an animal from where it has transferred to humans (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare 2021a).

Though the global pandemic has a biological foundation, it has affected societies on a political-economic scale. Governments, states, and countries have administered different

measures to keep the virus from spreading. These measures have included stay-at-home orders, restrictions of mobility, lockdowns, financial rescue packages, closing of state borders and digital surveillance (Moisio 2020, 598). Over 2,6 billion people have been affected by the lockdown (Khan & Smith 2020). Crisis management has also amplified inequalities. The rich and middle-class workers can often choose to work remotely from their homes and computers, and they have access to better and less-crowded (private) health care than people with lower socio-economic status. People from lower socio-economic status are not only more likely to live in overcrowded accommodation and thus get more easily infected, but they are also more likely to be employed in occupations where remote working is not possible. This is the case in professions like supermarket and warehouse workers and public transport and bus drivers. (Patel & al 2020).

Because of the threat posed by COVID-19, educational institutions have had to change their in-class courses to virtual classrooms in a very short time. Many institutions have cancelled all face-to-face classes and students have been forced to study remotely from home. The students – as well as the teachers - have needed to learn to use new technologies rapidly, often without any formal training to do so. (Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2020; Krishnamutrhy 2020).

2.2.2 Special Education and Equality in the Post-COVID-19 World

Digitalization may aggravate inequality on a large scale – not everyone has the money or ability to use or learn to use digital devices. The first necessity for online teaching and learning is the availability of a broadband network infrastructure and the possibility to use at least one suitable hardware device - desktop, tablet, laptop, or mobile phone. Both the teacher as well as each student should have access to both to such a device, as well as to a network connection. (McGreal & Elliott 2008). On a global scale there are still 3,7 billion people without internet access. (Finnish Parliament Future Committee 2020a, 39). Furthermore, some studies have found that various online education platforms are not always easily accessible to students with disabilities (see Arrigo 2005; Laabidi et al. 2016). zubuike et al. (2021) mentions that those who do not actively engage themselves in digital equipment for learning purposes - who often might not have the choice to do - can become adolescent with limited digital skills, which can hinder their capabilities at the job market.

Different minority and marginalized groups, especially the most vulnerable groups such as children with developmental disabilities, have a heightened risk falling behind their peers during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. They might be at higher risk for neglect and

abuse, the situation was made more dire by the fact that the help could often be delayed due to protective care agencies working under extreme conditions. Thus, many groups worldwide have not received the help and support they would seriously need during the pandemic. (Witt et al. 2020, 2). Even though Finland has had its problems as well (*see 5.4. Hardhips*), the decision that pupils with special support decisions – and in some cases students with enhanced support decisions - could attend contact teaching inside schools has probably helped many pupils from falling too much behind (Basic Education Act 1998, §17).

Cluver et al. (2020) have noted times of hardship have the potential of creating opportunities to solidify stronger relationships between parents and children with special educational needs and disabilities. On the contrary, households that lack parental support for their children's education can be at a risk of falling behind and widening pre-existing gaps in inequalities among children with disabilities (Thomas & Rogers, 2020). Fegert et al. (2019) remind us the pandemic era can be an especially challenging time for children and adolescents with special needs or disadvantages such as trauma experiences and already existing mental health problems, disabilities, low economic status, and migrant background.

2.2.3 COVID-19 in Finland

The first case of coronavirus in Finland was diagnosed on 29.1.2020 for a Chinese tourist in a holiday resort in Lapland. On 13.2020., Government Decree on Communicable Diseases included COVID-19 in the list of generally hazardous communicable diseases. The larger epidemic is recognized to have started in Finland in mid-March - soon after WHO had disclosed the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic. (Tiirinki et al. 2020). The number of daily infections started increasing, peaking on the 6.4.2020 with 210 reported cases. 7001 people had been infected and 323 people had died by 8.6.2020. (Moisio 2020, 599.) By 3.1.2021 the cumulative number of reported deaths associated with the disease was reported to be 750 (THL 2021b). By 22.3.2021, there had been 72,713 confirmed cases and 808 deaths in Finland (John Hopkins University 2021). All in all, Finland is considered part of group of European countries with *"a relatively low COVID-19 mortality rate"* (Oksanen et al. 2020).

In this regard, Finland differs from other European countries, notably from its neighbour Sweden, which did not close its society and borders in Spring 2020, and where the COVID19 mortality rates have been high (Loima 2020; Paterlini 2020). In Finland, as in other countries, the infection has been concentrated more to larger cities (Uusimaa region) than to sparsely populated rural areas (Moisio 2020, 599–600). To prevent expansion of the infected cases, the

government closed schools, libraries, universities, restaurants, and museums for several weeks in Finland in Spring 2020. Also, national borders were closed – as was the Uusimaa province for a short time and the state banned more than ten people from gathering together. All in all, Finland was almost five months under the exceptional lockdown conditions where physical contact was restricted as much as possible. (Hannele & Kousa 2020).

2.2.4 COVID-19 and Finnish Schools

Finland closed its schools starting from 16.3.2020. On that same day, the state of national emergency was declared by the Finnish government. A significant number of people began to work from home. The school closure were approved by regional state agencies from 17.3.2020 onwards. Despite the school closures, it was decided that early childhood education and lower primary grades (1–3) were to remain open for families, in which parent(s) worked in critical sectors such as in the healthcare sector. All in all, eight (8) percent of basic education pupils ended up attending contact teaching during this partial closure as compared to 32–35 % of day-care children attending kindergartens. (Loima 2020.)

All educational institutions in Finland – from the early childhood sector all the way up to the higher education - were closed for two months from 18.3. to 14.5 in 2020. (Hannele & Kousa 2020). Teaching and education did not stop during these months at all (Cauchemezr et al. 2009; Loima 2020). All in all, teachers had but a couple of days to prepare for distance education. The media was quickly to report how fluently teachers were able to move on from traditional in-class methods to remote online learning; the schools seemed to continue to work well under the changed conditions. (Niemi & Kousa 2020.)

One explanation for this reportedly successful transition was that most Finnish teachers already had been working with educational applications and online in the past; teachers and parents had been using the online service *Wilma* to communicate between schools and homes for years before the pandemic (Visma InSchool 2020). The technological situation in Finland was also so comprehensive that all schools, as well as almost every home, had a high-speed internet connection and daily access to some digital device - mobile phone tablet or computer (European Commission 2020; Niemi & Kousa 2020; Statista 2020). The schools would also borrow digital devices if and as students and homes needed them during the pandemic. In the early stages of COVID-19 pandemic, Finnish schools arranged IT guidance and individual schooling for teachers. Many co-workers helped out each other and, in many cases, internet bandwidth was counted up, and teachers were given accessible software licenses. The Ministry

of Education and Culture and Finnish National Agency of Education also provided additional online support. Teachers invited their students every day to virtual classrooms using online platforms such as Google platforms, Zoom, Teams, or the school's own online communication channels. (Niemi & Kousa 2020, 343.)

Finnish teachers, in general, are reported being positive in their attitudes towards technology. A report, made by the Trade Union of Education in Finland (2016), shows that most teachers have a positive attitude towards digitalization. Possibility for versatile treatment of subjects, the modernization of pedagogical thinking and the deepening of learning are listed as benefits of digitalization in the context of teaching. These findings are in line with earlier studies that show that Finnish teachers are ready to adopt new methods and tools in their teaching if they align with the pedagogical goals (Mertala 2019).

The schools started opening again in stages. Basic education institutions (7- to 15-year-old students) opened around mid-May in 2020 and high schools and universities followed by opening their doors in mid-August, which marks the beginning of a new semester in Finland. (Niemi & Kousa 2020.) The same laws that made it possible to arrange education in exceptional ways in 2020, continue to be used - with small arrangements - in 2021. The basis in spring 2021 has been to continue classroom education and only switch to remote teaching if the COVID-19 threat makes it necessary to do so. (Finnish National Agency of Education 2021.)

Regarding special education, the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland (2021) has stated that even when students would continue their education via remote connections in spring 2021, special support students with their own IEPs could continue to study in classroom settings (Basic Education Act 1998, §17). Despite the right to face-to-face teaching, some parents have chosen to keep their special education children home to minimize the risk of infection or the risk of their children falling behind with their studies (Inclusion Finland KVTL 2020).

University of Turku conducted a 10-day web survey in late April 2020, where they asked primary school pupils about remote teaching, learning experiences, and welfare issues. Based on more than 50,000 replies, positive learning experiences were reported during the pandemic - including the total absence of bullying. On the other hand, pupils also reported missing their classmates, and being often worried about their guardians' well-being (Loima 2020, 66). About 60 % of pupils had managed all the work given to them during the lockdown learning period, and an additional 35 % reported having managed "almost everything". Using referrals (Basic Education Act 1998, sections 16–18; Liiten 2020), Loima (2020, 66) reports of the survey,

learning difficulties were present with the same pupils that had had decisions for enhanced or special support in close contact teaching before. On the other hand, these students had the legal right to attend contact teaching during the closure (Loima 2020; RSAA 2020).

3. REMOTE LEARNING AND HOME-SCHOOL COOPERATION

3.1 Remote Learning & Distance Education

No clear consensus still exists about when the term *distance education (DE)* came into existence. However, referring to other studies (Agostinelli 2019; Holmberg 1987; Jung 2019), Korkmaz and Toraman (2020) pinpoint the first generation of distance education dating as far as the 1850s. Quoting more recent studies (Simonson et al. 2019; Sumner 2010; Zhao et al., 2005), Korkmaz and Toraman (2020) note that, instead of learning via digital technology, decades ago distance education was done using different medias - mail, letter, radio, and TV. Besides distance education there are various terms used to refer to the same phenomena – learning done remotely. There also exist the terms *digitalization* and *digital transformation* that are used to describe the general process of society moving towards digital society (Korhonen 2017, 29). Saykılı (2018, 5) has defined *distance education* as

> *"a form of education which brings together the physically-distant learner(s) and the facilitator(s) of the learning activity around planned and structured learning experiences via various two or multi-way mediated media channels that allow interactions between/among learners, facilitators as well as between learners and educational resources."*

E-learning or *electronic learning* implies the use of electronic media in the context of learning; learning is done using electronic devices such as mobile phones, tablets, computers, and virtual environments (Rahiem 2020; Salloum et al. 2019). *M-learning* or *mobile learning* narrows even closer – here focus is on learning mobility and learning through portable technology (Mehdipour & Zerehkafi, 2013; Rahiem 2020, 18). With the use of mobile apps, learning can take place wherever and whenever (Crescente & Lee 2011).

The term *emergency learning (ERL)* or *emergency remote teaching (ERT)* has also been used to differentiate between well-resourced and thoroughly planned *online learning* from a more

trying-to-survive-type-of quickly organized remote learning (Hodges et al. 2020; Rahiem 2020). ERL would be a suitable term to describe the state of online education during the COVID-19 related remote teaching period in many parts of the world (Hodges et al. 2020, 7-8; Rahiem 2020)**.** Rahiem (2020) refers to Concannon et al. (2005, 18) when explaining that *blended learning* is an interesting term that means mixing up conventional lectures or tutorials and web-based material and utilizing more than one method, strategy, technique, or media in education.

Distributed learning (DL) means technology-mediated education that enables interactions among group members that can happen anytime and anyplace. Examples range from e-mail to various group support systems and online platforms (Alavi et al. 2002, 405). The word *educational technology* also but is not in much by contempt researchers (see Lazar 2015). In the context of parent-teacher communication, the term *digital communication (DC)* is used (Kuusimäki et al. 2019a, 1). *E-inclusion* refers to the use of technologies to support learning processes; how the new technologies can empower and equalize participators with disabilities towards a more equal society. In e-inclusion information and communication technology (ICT) is used to overcome pupil's limitations. (Parmigiani et al. 2020, 2–3).

Wen et al. (2021) talk about *home-based learning (HBL)* and *ICT-supported (information and computer technologies) home-based learning* in the context of COVID-19. This is something new as HBL has been a term before mainly used in the context of home-schooling, where parents are primarily responsible for their children's education (Harding 2011).

3.2 Home-School Cooperation

There are many ways of organizing and cooperating between schools and homes. In my thesis, when referring to *home* in home-school cooperation, I refer to home as *the active participants in the home-school cooperation* – parents or caretakers of the children – not to home as a physical place; *"a safe harbor"*, where *"the founding pillars for the children's place are built."* (Korhonen 2017, 32). When talking about families or parents, we must remember that these before-traditional terms have changed over the last decades; the number of divorces, and adoptions have gone up (Silva & Smart 1994, 4). Same-sex marriage has become legal and normalized over the years Thus, *parents* can mean whatever from nuclear, blended, and extended families to single parents or single parent families (Korhonen 2017, 35). Not every child lives with their parents and not every child's parents are known or alive. LaRoque et al.

(2011, 115) point out that parents cannot be viewed as a unified group. Knowing all this, I simply use the term *parent(s)* in my thesis when referring to someone who is taking care of the matters of the pupils outside school-

3.2.1 Terminology on Home-School Cooperation

The Finnish literature, articles, and sources on home-school-cooperation are partly quite outdated, dating from the 80s to the early 2000s (Seppälä 2002, 6). There exist of course materials on the topic dating as far as the 50s (Huuskonen 1953). In English, there is a lot of more up-to-date material on this topic (inter alia Orell & Pihlaja 2020). Throughout the years, home-school cooperation has been viewed and written from various perspectives - from the perspectives of the children (Ala-Luopa 2000; Partanen 1985; Seppälä 2002), parents (Kanste et al. 2016) and teachers (Perälä-Littunen et al. 2019) alike.

There are many terms used when referring to the roles of homes and parents in home-school cooperation: relationship, involvement, engagement, participation, collaboration, cooperation (Orell & Pihlaja 2020). Orell and Pihlaja (2020) note that *involvement* is regularly used as an umbrella term when talking about parental involvement in home-school. So even agreeing about the terms used is not always as simple. For example, Epstein and Sheldon (2011, 3–4) ponder whether we should talk about *"school, family, and community partnerships"* instead of just *"parental involvement"* (also known as PI)?

Referring to many articles (Cox 2005; Helgøy & Homme 2017; Hirsto 2010; Widding 2013), Orell and Pihlaja (2020) state common suggestions for umbrella-terms such as *cooperation*, *collaboration, engagement,* and *involvement*. Lehtolainen (2008) even mentions the term *school-home interconnection*. In Finnish, the term *cooperation* is often used as an umbrella term, encompassing both orientation and action (Siniharju 2003), and it has previously been used to describe school-centred orientation and action without specifying cooperation between home and school (Lämsä 2013). Shimoni and Baxter (1996) also mention the term *partnership with parents*. Referring various researchers (Averill et al. 2016; Barton et al. 2004; Fan & Chen 2001; Lee & Bowen 2006), Orell & Pihlaja (2020) conclude that the definitions of terms related to the relationship between home and school are often subjective, and no consensus of the definition and use of the terms can be found even among the researchers.

3.2.2 Roles of Parents in Home-School Cooperation

Bæck (2010, 550) mentions Nordahl (2007) distinguishing three forms of cooperation between home and school: representative cooperation (single parent representing the rest of the parents; committee), direct cooperation (directly between teachers and parents; parental meetings and conferences), and cooperation without contact (non-official and not very visible cooperation that goes on in everyday; conversations, encouragements, and other forms of support).

Macbeth and Ravn (1994) set apart two distinct roles for parents regarding school: the administrative role and the educational role. The administrative role is acted out by parents when they are represented in different decision and co-operative bodies in the school and to the parent's participation in school-related voluntary work. Macbeth and Ravn (1994) further paraphrase that normally only a small number of parents have an administrative role. Most parents act out their educational role in everyday interactions with their children through being educational role models for them, and through creating learning situations in their children's lives. Epstein (1997) points out the commonly regarded notion that regardless of how the homes commit to school, the families have a major role in the creation of a school environment, where their children can feel safe and nurtured.

According to Bæck (2010), parental involvement in school can include various different elements. Parents can attend parental meetings and conferences in schools, assist and guide their children with homework, provide their children a good place to study at home, and generally be interested in children's school life. Bæck (2010) also mentions the value of parents emphasizing the importance of education to their children. Orell and Pihlaja (2014) list that parents can be involved by schools through discussions, meetings, bulletins, theme-days, and celebrations, parental organizations and by sending notes through internet applications. According to the findings of Orell and Pihlaja (2014), references to home-school cooperation consist of four categories that are: supported through cooperation; cooperation based upon values; cooperation as a cultural meeting place; and cooperation to prepare for the future.

Hornby and Lafaele state (2011) that there exists a wide-ranging literature on improving parental involvement that teachers should take advantage of. There are materials such as templates for distinct PI activities, programs, workshops, and meetings. Several theoretical frameworks of PI have also been fostered. There is the framework of commitment, training, and variety by Sattes (1994) and the model by Lueder (2000), which calls for extension to the traditional roles of family support for school. According to Christenson & Sheridan (2001), the

four main elements for improving PI are: actions, approach, atmosphere, and attitudes. Hornby's (2000) more complex model and framework includes eight types of PI, whereas Epstein (2001) mentions six types of PI. (Hornby & Lafaele 2011, 38.) Keyes (2002) categorizes the roles of home-school cooperation as parent, school and partnership focused.

Considering all these forms of PI, it is clear that the role of the parents is often more demanding than parents being just *"homework supervisors of students' schoolwork"*, as the role of the parents is often described (Pang 2011, 5). Harris and Goodall (2008) even divide parental involvement to both home- and school-based PI. Emphasis on the importance of parental engagement can have effects both positive and negative; schools might be accused of not doing enough to integrate parents to cooperate with them and thus fail in getting better results. On the other hand, parents might be blamed for their children's academic failures (Baquedano-Lopez et al. 2013, 152).

3.2.3 The Importance of Home-School Cooperation

Referring to wide numbers of sources (Catsambis 2001; Epstein & Sanders 2000; Henderson & Mapp 2002; Sheldon & Epstein 2005a, 2005b; Simon 2004), Bæck (2010) mentions that research has shown that parental involvement and fruitful home–school cooperation can help improve student's attendance, grades, and general well-being in school. Henderson and Mapp (2002) point out that *"the importance of families playing an active role in students' education has been well documented."* One distinctive mark of a well-functioning cooperation programme has been found to be that cooperation with families exists as outlined as part of the curriculum as it does in Finland (Epstein 1995; Orell & Pihlaja 2020).

Wedding (2012) points out that - based on 30 interviews done with teachers and parents in a Swedish compulsory school -the parents' involvement is a key factor that affects the academic performance of pupils. Colombo (2006) highlights that it is impossible for schools to educate every child just on their own. Thus, schools and educators need and benefit from the cooperation between themselves and families and community groups. (Epstein et al. 1997). Hornby and Blackwell (2018, 109) point out that wide-ranging, dozens of decades long research literature (Epstein 2001; Hill & Tyson 2009; Hornby 2000, 2011; Jeynes 2005, 2007; Wilder 2014), indicate parental involvement being a crucial element of *"effective education for children of all ages."*

Hornby and Lafaele (2001, 109) further state that many reviews and meta-analysis highlight the effectiveness of parental involvement in aiding academic achievement. According to their

literature-review data of PI, additional benefits of good PI include improved teacher motivation and school climate, enhanced school attendance and better behavior and mental health of pupils. Other improvements included better parent-teacher relationships, increased parental satisfaction and confidence, and strengthened interest for pupils in their own education. (Hornby and Lafaele 2001, 109.)

3.2.4 Home-School Cooperation, Ethnicity, and Socioeconomic Background

Logistic reasons often inhibit some parents from effectively participating in parental involvement. It might be hard for a parent with an hourly job with inadequate health insurance and other benefits to participate in the school the same way that the parents with more salaries and stable employment can. Not being able to participate in school activities and meetings, these parents are many times left frustrated. Unfortunately, because of their nonattendance in school meetings, teachers often view these parents as difficult; the remarks of these parents were often disregarded as they were not viewed to have enough knowledge of the daily life of the school. The dismissal of the remarks of the parents can marginalize these parents and further withdraw them from championing for their children. (LaRocque et al. 2011, 116; Koonce & Harper 2005.) These insights are supported by other researchers as well; parents with higher levels of education are found to cooperate more with the school, thereby potentially having more influence in the school community (Bæck, 2010; Crozier 1997; Räty et al. 2009).

Using many references (Alameda-Lawson 2014; Baquedano-Lopez et al. 2013; McElderry & Cheng 2014; Strand 2011), Orell and Pihlaja (2020, 109) have pointed out that effort *"made by lower-class parents have been noted to have less impact on academic success"* than the effort made by parent's who share good status in society and are more in line with the school's vision. Quoting the international research literature (Epstein 2001, 2002; Hallgarten 2000; Hanafin & Lynch 2002; Lareau 1997, 2000; Useem 1992; Vincent 1996; Vincent & Ball 2006; Vincent & Martin 2000), Bæck (2010, 343) points out that parents with higher education are usually more eager and ready to participate in home–school cooperation than those with less education.

Teachers often face hardships when different cultures collide. Students of different minorities such as Muslim, Latino or Afro-American, continue to face prejudice from media

stereotypes and even teachers[3] alike (Sabry & Bruna 2007). Alanko (2018, 329) points out that the increasing number of immigrants in Nordic countries can contradict the traditional views on family life that many teachers have. Alanko calls for the importance of cultural sensitivity when collaborating with people from diverse backgrounds. While the population in many societies is becoming ever more diverse, many teachers in schools continue to be white and middle-class - at least in America and Finland (LaRocque et al. 2011). This state of affairs, while not a problem in itself, could create and fuse cultural misunderstandings.

3.2.5 Home-School Cooperation in Finland

Home-school cooperation has been a subject of discussion in Finland for decades (Seppälä 2002, 10). There exists literature dating even before the 19th century that encourages parents and homes to cooperate with schools (Niemi 1983). In general, there is a strong belief among teachers in Finland that it's important to cooperate with the families. A great majority of the families seems to see the cooperation in a positive light also (Räty et al. 2009; Siniharju 2003). Nonetheless, Finnish teachers have sensed for a long time that teacher education provided by the university does not help them develop the sufficient skills needed for cooperation with families (Niemi & Tirri 1997, 44). This notion goes against the general culture that has since the 80s been changing towards schools having more and more cooperation with the families (Siniharju 2003, 107–114).

Home-school cooperation is listed out as one of the most important points of focus in developing schools (see Epstein 2013; Epstein & Sanders 2006). In Finnish school culture, there has also been long demand and outcry to develop home-school, but so far, the methods in use are still quite narrow cooperation (Launonen & Pulkkinen 2004; Välijärvi 2005; Sormunen 2012, 41, 47). Schools have the legal duty to develop this cooperation (Basic Education Act §3) and that is what the parents also say – schools must make the initiative in this regard. But for this change in the school culture to happen on a large scale, it would need not only the approval of the surrounding communities, but also organized effort and strong vision and commitment from the schools themselves (Jóhannsdóttir 2018).

[3] However, there are inspiring teacher tackling these cultural differences. The British teacher Andria Zafirakou, who worked in one of the most ethnically diverse places in London was awarded the one-million-dollar Global Teacher Prize in 2018 for her efforts of reaching out to students of various ethnic minorities. Zafirakou indeed went as far as to learn greetings and some basics of the 35 languages spoken by her students. (Harding 2018.)

Finnish parents are found to be interested in cooperating with the school, and they are expected to take on the role of supporting and approving the work done at the school (Lehtolainen 2008; Metso 2004). According to an inquiry conducted by the Social and Health Ministry, nearly all parents considered cooperation with the school to be important, but less than 60 % of parents were satisfied with the prevailing engagement (Orell & Pihlaja 2020). One possible reason for the low number of satisfactions might be that only 40 % of parents felt that their opinions were heard by the school (Kanste et al. 2016, 79, 86). However, not all studies demonstrate such dissatisfaction (Räty et al. 2009).

Newer studies (Kuusimäki et al. 2019a, 2019b) have stated that Finnish parents and teachers are overall satisfied with the digital aspect of the teacher-parent communication; digital communication seems to provide the parents versatile information about their children's studies and happenings at school. However, parents' seemed averse to being informed about small or non-regular cases of their children's misbehavior (Kuusimäki et al. 2019a, 6). Nationally there has been lots of public discussion as to what are the various roles and responsibilities that school, parents, and societal institutions have in raising children. There have been discussions about the bad behavior of Finnish children and teenagers, and conversations about bullying, social exclusion, and marginalization of many young people in Finland. There have been various regional projects where municipalities, schools, universities, and organizations have divided responsibilities and worked together. (Korhonen 2017, 13–14.)

In Finland, the use of digital devices to help with home-school cooperation, was first listen in the official curriculum in 2011 in following words: *"Information and communication technology will be used to enrich and diversify the flow of information and communication between homes and schools."* Finnish National Agency for Education (2012) has also encouraged schools to develop and use digitals platforms such as blogs, wiki services and picture-sharing platforms to create online content for parents to follow. In the year 2014 curriculum it is mentioned, that in addition to in-person private and group meetings, ICT shall be used as part of home-school cooperation (Finnish National Agency for Education 2014). (Korhonen 2017, 15–16.)

Korhonen (2017, 16) points out that existing international studies show that - despite the access of digital devices, services and programs - technology in many cases has not come to be a natural part of everyday life in school in the pre-COVID-19 world. She continues - referring to studies by Binkley et al. 2012), Fu (2013), Hayes (2007), Hennessy et al. (2007) and Younie (2006) - that the possibilities of digital communications have not been fully realized and

systemically used in home-school cooperation. According to Korhonen (2017, 16), many studies examining the use of digital devices in home-school cooperation have been mainly done from the perspective of informing and reporting. Korhonen states we are still missing research that would include a wider range of participants, including parents, pupils, and teachers.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Questions

There have been lots of scientific papers and research written and done about the home-school cooperation in many countries (Ravn 2003), ranging from Norway to UK, from Hong Kong to the USA, from Spain to Finland (Baeck 2010; Garcia et al. 2019; Orell & Pihlaja 2020; Pang 2011; Prados & Lorca 2006; Street 2012), just to mention a few studies. Still, less studies have been done that would focus on the digital aspect of these home-school relationships. Kuusimäki et al. (2019a, 1) have brought out the notion that though most parent-teacher communication nowadays is *"done through digital platforms, not much is known about the specific role of digital communication in building parent-teacher relationships."*

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and remote school impositions around the world, the digital aspect of home-school cooperation has become even more important. Very few studies exist about this topic at all due partly to its correctness, less so in the context of Finnish education. I wanted to know how the pandemic situation has not only affected home-school cooperation, but also how teachers could prepare themselves for future pandemic situations. The COVID-19 is still yet to end, but medical professionals and virologists are already expecting new pandemics to occur in the post-COVID-19 world as well **(**Constable & Kushner 2021; Sridhar 2021). There has already occurred three pandemic causing significant mortality in the 20th century[4] (Guan et al. 2010) and as Kent (2021) states: *"the 21st century, with its urbanisation, overpopulation and international trade and travel, has created the ideal conditions for novel diseases to multiply and spread."*

To get more information about home-school cooperation during the COVID-19 era, I formed the following research questions:

[4] For a look at how the Spanish flu affected Finland in 1918–1920, see the book Espanjantauti Suomessa. Influenssaepidemia 1918–1920 *[Spanish flu in Finland: Influenza epidemic in 1918–1920]*. by Linnanmäki, Eila (2020).

1. How has the corona pandemic affected home-school cooperation in the context and perspective of primary school special education teachers?
2. Viewed by primary school special education teachers, how could the teachers and education sector better prepare themselves for possible future pandemics or similar types of restricted situations?

4.2 Approach

4.2.1 Qualitative Study - Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

I chose to do qualitative research instead of a quantitative one to be more open for new insights, and to go deeper to the subject itself by interviewing the participants. As for my theoretical approach, I chose *interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)*. Interpretative phenomenology is a quite recently developed, but often used approach used in the field of psychology, where it has quickly become one of the most commonly used and best-known qualitative methodologies. Despite IPA being an approach mostly used in psychology, it can be used in other fields as well. (Smith 2010, 9, 25.) IPA is theoretically rooted in the traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenology and it tries to understand what experiences – both personal and social – mean to the people who experience them. (Eatough & Smith 2017; Shaw 2017).

Hermeneutics is a method originally developed to interpret biblical texts, but it has since been developed into a widely used theory of interpretation (Shaw 2019, 186; Eatough & Smith 2017, 195–196). In hermeneutics, written documents are used as a source material for analysis. The approach is especially focused on texts that are written in another time or context that differs from our own as in the hermeneutic approach it is important not to look at the text as face-value, but to go deeper. The researcher needs to ask questions like what the historical and cultural context was the author lived in; what the writer truly wanted to communicate (Patton 2015, 136–138).

The phenomenological approach is rooted in studying life experiences - the goal *"is to understand the complexity of lived experiences."* In phenomenology, the focus is to look at an event from the subject's perspective; to analyze something in a complex way beyond the quantifiable aspects. (Guillen & Elida 2019; Patton 2017, 116–117.) Phenomenology can be seen as a methodology that tries to capture meanings for individuals through the analysis of

communicated language (Brinkmann & Kvale 2017; Langdridge 2007). As Van Manen (1990, 10) puts it: "*Phenomenological research is the study of essences."*

Interpretative phenomenological analysis, combining elements from both of these traditions was thus chosen as a suitable methodology for my research. As a method, interpretative phenomenological analysis has its focus on an individual level and thus it works well with the kind of source material I have – individual interviews where participants talk about their experiences and findings. Smith (2010, 10) points out that in-depth semi-structured interviewing, my chosen data gathering method as well (see *4.3 Data Collection*), is the most common method of collecting data when using IPA. The hermeneutic tradition's focus on the historical and societal context is also what draws me to use interpretative phenomenological analysis. According to IPA, we humans attempt to understand through our interpretations how we have come to the world. (Eatough & Smith 2017, 195). The COVID-19 pandemic offers a quite interesting historical moment to be living in.

The analyzing method for interpretative phenomenological analysis is also similar to thematic content analysis *(see below 4.4.1 Thematic analysis)*, which was used to analyze my transcribed interviews. (Saw 2017.)

4.21 Prejudices and Biases as a Researcher

I am a Finnish special education and primary school teacher student about to graduate. As a millennial or generation Y representative (born between 1981-96), I belong to the generation that stands in-between the digital natives (generation Z; born after 1997-2012) and the older generations (Dimock 2019, 4). I began to use the internet and mobile phone as a teenager and have grown up in my twenties using online services such as Facebook and Instagram. Using digital devices thus comes natural to me, although I have to constantly keep myself updated not to fall behind. I have been interested in technology and digital devices for some time and when my university professor suggested me, I could do my research about home-school cooperation, I jumped at the chance. As I have so far only worked as a short-time substitute teacher in schools, I have not yet gotten the chance to do any home-school cooperation myself. Taking all this into consideration, I was ready to learn more about home-school cooperation as well as its digital aspects.

Having studied special education and worked as a substitute teacher, school assistant and a summer camp instructor to special education adolescents and adults, my background positions me an insider towards the research of the topic. Thus, I am more aware of the reality that my

participants live in and thus qualified to understand the insider jargon and vocabulary they sometimes might use. I told the other participants about my studies when I was approaching them to be interviewed. They probably thus considered me more as *one of them* as if I had come to research the topic as a complete outsider. Due to my insider status, I might not be able to see my research topic as objectively as a total outsider maybe could. Also, due to having habitually used technological devices for more than a decade, it might be hard for me to put myself into the position of an older person for whom many technological devices seem foreign or even threatening.

I had already been living a year under the COVID-19 restrictions and reading news headlines and articles about the consequences it had on societies and on people's psyches. Armed with this knowledge, I expected some kind change also in the school environment when starting the research. Also, I had heard some stories of friends who were working as teachers during the pandemic, so I was not jumping totally blind into darkness, so to say, when starting out my research. The topic of immigrants or people from ethnic minorities were also present in this research; I have done exchanges and internships abroad myself, and speak several languages, so my multicultural attitude maybe gives a different kind of outlook to these topics as what someone else might have.

4.3 Data Collection

4.3.1 Interview as a Method and Philosophy

Interview as my data gathering method was chosen, because through conducting interviews, I can clearly have answers to my research questions. I didn't want to use too strict a method on my not-yet-much-researched topic so as to be open to new findings. Interview as a method is quite flexible; with open questions it's possible to repeat questions and definitions and thus clarify and correct possible misunderstandings (Silverman 2014, 166). Interview can be seen as a target-oriented conversation. The researcher starts this discussion and steers its direction (King & Huhg-Jones 2019, 121–123). Through interviews, it is possible to gain information, opinions straight from the target group itself (Patton 2002, 4). Classical methods such as *observation* were prohibited in my case because of the covid restrictions as I did not have the possibility of going to schools and classrooms.

I wanted answers to my research questions, in a not too strict but also not too vague manner

Thus, I chose the *thematic interview (TI)*, also known as *semi-structured interview (SSI)* method. I felt an in-depth interview, also known as an unstructured interview, would have been too vague (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2011, 75–76). The conversation could have become too unfocused and gone astray. In thematic interviews, participants are free to respond to the open-ended interview questions how they like while the researcher has the option to further inquire into these responses for clarification or additional details. (McIntosh & Morse 2015.)

Using thematic interviews, I could give the participants time to prepare for the interview by sending them questions beforehand. Before the interview, I told the participants that they can freely add insights and tell stories whenever they feel like it. In the traditions of thematic interview, it is necessary for the researcher to have some kind of previous knowledge or information about the topic to be able to choose the theme and form questions around it for the interview (Silverman 2016, 166).

My interview fits the pattern of *the traditional social science research interview*, where the interviewer asks ready-made questions while remaining objective and not controlling the conversations too much due to their own biases (Patton 2015, 433). In the tradition of thematic interviews, it's still an unclear and debated question whether all participants should be asked the same questions in the same order (using the same choice of words) or let the interview flow more naturally. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2011, 75.) As I had sent out the following questions beforehand for the participants, I felt it was only logical to go through the questions in the same order with everyone.

4.3.2 Conducting the Interviews

I conducted my five interviews in under two months between 26.2.-10.4.2021. In my interviews I chose to ask each participant the same seven base questions which I sent to the applicants beforehand and throwed in other questions during the interview if I felt the need for it. All the interviews were done in Finnish. I asked the following seven questions in Finnish (*see 7.1.1 Copies of the emails sent to teachers to do interviews in Finnish*) from every participant and added additional questions in between or after these seven questions if needed to. I purposefully chose to ask open-ended questions instead of closed ones to get more detailed responses from the participants (see King & Hugh-Jones 2019, 140; Patton 2015, 446–449).

1. How has the home-school cooperation been during the COVID-19 compared to the situation before the pandemic?
2. How and how often have you kept in contact with the parents?

3. What has worked and what not according to you?
4. Have you learned something new (about the cooperation), what? Has there been some pandemic-related ways of working/keeping in contact that you'd wish to continue after the pandemic as well?
5. What has been challenging in the cooperation? How have you succeeded?
6. Do you feel that your university studies have generally prepared you for cooperation with parents? If yes, in what ways? If not, what you wish you'd learned?
7. Anything else you wish to say or mention?

Three of the five interviews were done remotely through mobile phones, which is unfortunately against the norms of conducting thematic interviews that would favour face-to-face meetings (Kananen 2014, 77). This exceptional way of doing remote interviews was done because of the COVID19-pandemic.

I recorded my three remote interviews using the *Voice Recorder* and *Cube ACR* applications on my Android phone. These applications automatically recorded my phone calls, and I informed the participants of these recordings in my emails. I also managed to do two interviews face-to-face and these interviews were recorded on my Android phone using *Voice Recorder* software. During the face-to-face interviews - done using masks for safety measures - I did not take any notes[5], which maybe made the participants a bit more relaxed and more open to sharing their information with me. However, during one phone interview, I kept writing notes on my keyboard, which probably was heard by the participant through the call as well. I do not know if this affected the interview in any way.

Table 1: The interviewed participants.

Teacher	Time of the interview (month/year)	Type of interview	Type of special education teacher	Duration of the interview	Connection
Teacher 1	2/2021	Meeting	Part-time	23 min	Work
Teacher 2	2/2021	Meeting	Class	21 min	Work
Teacher 3	3/2021	Phone call	Part-time	37 min	Work
Teacher 4	4/2021	Phone call	Part-time	24 min	Recommendation
Teacher 5	4/2021	Phone call	Part-time	36 min	Email

[5] On notetaking during interviews see Patton 2015, 272–473.

4.3.3 Participants

I interviewed five (n=5) professional Finnish special education teachers working in primary schools in Finland during 26.2.-10.4.2021. Four of the participants worked in a normal primary school, whereas one worked in a special school, where there were fewer students and more professionals than in normal schools. Each of their students had their own individualized education plans and there were students studying on various levels. However, much of the syllabus of the students were on primary school level; it all fits the focus of the research.

I found the teachers through various ways: one teacher was found through emails I randomly sent out to teachers I had never met before. One participant was recommended to me through someone in my social circle. Some participants were people who had worked in the same school buildings or teaching environments as me before; I have a history of working and volunteering at various camps and schools around Finland. The teachers were all seasoned professionals who had worked in school environments for several years, and at the time of the interview, they were all either working as classroom special education teachers or as part-time special education teachers. Some participants had worked in other fields before becoming teachers.

I had contact with the teachers either through phone or email. I sent out the same email stating the interview question and my promise on the participants anonymity to every participant, including the participants I interview face-to-face.

4.4 Analysis Methods

Thematic analysis was chosen as an appropriate analysis method for the study because it is a commonly used method for *"describing, analyzing, and reporting themes and patterns in data"* (Braun & Clarke 2006). Thematic analysis does not include built-in theories or epistemological assumptions in itself, and thus it is easy to combine with various approaches such as interpretative phenomenological analysis (Freeman & Sullivan, 163–164). According to the much referred-to guide on conducting thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006), the researcher starts their analysis phase by transcribing their data and getting familiar with the data by reading it multiple times. While reading, notes should be made about the impressions on the data. During the word-to-word transcription process, the approximately 2,5 hours (141 minutes) of recorded interviews were turned into a Microsoft Word document of 5000+ words. All the interviews were done in Finnish and transcribed in Finnish as well. The quotations included in this research have been translated in English by the researcher. Finnish speakers

can find the original untranslated parts as a separate attachment at the end of the thesis (*7.1.3. Finnish Translations of the Quotes Parts of My Interviews)*.

Next, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher should come up with introductory codes to divide the data in a systematic fashion. *Coding* involves noticing patterns in the data and dividing the data to gain greater clarity about the researched phenomena (Joffe & Yardley 2004, 61–63). King and Horrocks (2010) remind that the data is never just discovered; rather it is always created, hence the highly subjective and interpretive nature of qualitative studies. The codes should then be collated into various *themes* that should be then described and named accordingly. As stated by Braun and Clarke (2008, 82), a theme is something that reflects something crucial regarding the research question.

The inductive 'bottom up' way was used to approach the data (see Braun & Clarke 2002; Patton 2015). The main purpose of the inductive approach is to let the findings and themes rise from the data itself, without any imposed prejudices or theoretical models. Inductive approach is meant to help in finding commonalities, categories, or themes from raw data. This process can be referred to as *data reduction.* (Thomas 2003, 2). In the end, there were six different main categories that arose from the data: themes about burden for the teacher (further classified into worry for the child and for the parent), understanding of parents towards the teacher (further categorized into understanding and non-understanding), the mention of digital devices (further categorized into mentioning a name of the software, connection problems, or mentioning the availability of the digital devices).

- Burden (by teachers – towards pupils or mentioning the fatigue of the parent)
- Understanding of parents (understanding or non-understanding)
- Digital devices (brand, problems, cons, availability, way of conducting meetings)
- Frequency of home-school cooperation (higher or same)
- Divide of pupils (two classes)
- University studies (answer or solutions)

Table 2: How the transcribed material was categorized.

Original expression	**Reduced expression**	**Subcategory**	**Main category**	**Combining class**
"Some of the children were at risk of social	Risk of social exclusion for the children	Worry about the child	Burden	How COVID-19 psychologically affected teachers

exclusion, that caused worry…"				
"Part of the parents openly shared, that now they're beginning to get fatigued…"	Parents sharing their hardships	Fatigue of the parent	Burden	How COVID-19 psychologically affected teachers
"Do you have parents to take care of you, do you have water or electricity at home?"	Basic needs of the children in question	Worry about the child	Burden	How COVID-19 psychologically affected teachers
"it [COVID-19] increased frequency of [home-school] connection…"	Increased frequency of connection	Increased contact	Frequency of home-school contact	Home-school cooperation during COVID-19
"Didn't prepare during my time, just that the topic was quickly mentioned."	University studies did not prepare for home-school cooperation.	Answer (regarding university studies)	University studies	Teachers' ideas and experiences on home-school connection as part of university studies
"It [home-school connection] could be part of some internship…]	Home-school connection as part of teacher student's internship	Suggestion	University studies	Teachers ideas and experiences on home-school connection as part of university studies
"and for me [as a teacher], that the days were eleven, twelve hours easily, so very, very long"	Long workdays	Amount of work	Burden	How COVID-19 psychologically affected teachers
"round-the-clock days"	Long workdays	Amount of work	Burden	How COVID-19 psychologically affected teachers
"It was impressive how much parents were ready to be flexible"	Impressed by parent´s actions and attitude	Understanding of parents	Understanding of parents	How COVID-19 psychologically affected teachers

4.5 Ethics

According to the principles of good research, the research should not in any way harm or endanger the lives of the participant. The thesis writer should guarantee the anonymity of the participants and protect their identities. (Brinkmann & Stale 2017.) To guarantee this, I do not specify where in Finland I have conducted the interviews. This is due to the fact that despite there are countless primary schools in Finland, there are not a myriad of special schools in our

country. I have left out all sensitive and location or person specific data, where participants or their students might be identified from. According to the principle of informed consent, accepting to do the interview was completely optional for the participants (King 2019, 35-38).

I contacted the participants either through phone calls or through email (see attachments). The participants were informed of the recording of the interviews before the interview. When asking the teachers to participate in the interview, I let them know that the interview would take around half an hour. Participants were sent questions before the interview via email so they could prepare their answers beforehand. Due to the COVID19-lock down situation of the university facilities, I did not loan a recorder from the university to record the interviews. Instead, I used two recording apps on my mobile phone. I made sure to have my phone on flight mode during and straight after the interviews to prevent cyber threats and leaking of the data. Straight after the interviews, I transferred the recorded audio files to my computer using USB cable and stored the files in an encrypted folder on my external hard drive using the open-source *Vera Crypt* software. As is the general recommendation I saved the audio files under code numbers to make recognizing the original names from them impossible (King 2019, 38–39). The recordings were deleted from my mobile after being transferred to my computer and they will be forever deleted after the approval and final feedback of my thesis. None of my participants were being compensated moneywise or through other incentives for attending the research.

I transcribed the interviews from audio files to text myself and in the process removed any dialectical expressions the participants might have used in their talk. Only I had access to the password-protected home computer where the audio files and transcriptions were kept. I participated in various writing online meetings hosted by the university and in these meetings, I did not share any sensitive data of the participants. Even if I would have shared something, such revelations would have been protected by the confidentiality of these meetings.

I was aware that when asking about home-school cooperation, sensitive topics, such as hardships with students and their home and family lives, might come up. Thus, I stated before the interviews that all the information the teachers shared with me would be confidential. I was also aware that some stories the teachers might tell me during the interviews might trigger unpleasant feelings and uncomfortable memories for them. These moments of visiting and relieving distressing memories could be distressing, but also, in a sense, offer therapeutic moments for the participants (Smith 1999). Hutchinson, Wilson & Wilson (1994) have identified that qualitative interviews can indeed have cathartic and self-awareness increasing

benefits for the participants. To not distort my findings too much, I have listed out my various possible prejudices and biases I might have towards my research topic. I have further reflected upon this topic at the end of this thesis (see *6.2 Trustworthiness*).

Table 3: How the COVID-19 affected home-school cooperation in regard to the interviews. Adaptation period includes the time to get used to technology and remote meetings and remote school, this period was highly burdening for parents and teachers.

SPRING 2020	**AUTUMN 2020**
-more home-school cooperation than before pandemic -remote teaching & parental meetings -extra high burden for parents & teachers -adaptation period to the pandemic	-continued the more frequent home-school cooperation trend of the spring -in contact teaching, remote & contact parental meetings - burden of the pandemic still present -heightened ICT skills for everyone

5. FINDINGS

There are two important time periods relating to teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic that arose from the interviews. First time period is the spring 2020, when all students and classes expect the first three grades (children from 7–10 year) and special education students with their own IEPs (individualized education plans) studied remotely from their homes. I refer to this time period as "*spring 2020*" or "*remote teaching period*" from now on. The second period, which I refer to as "*autumn 2020*" or "*in-class period*", consists of the autumn studying period of 2020 starting in the first or second week of August in Finnish schools, after the summer holiday. This time period can be deemed lasting all up to the time of the interviews – February, March 2021 -, since, during this time, the primary school students came back to school and studied in class. I refer to this new in-class teaching period as *"autumn 2020"* although, in reality schools went back to contact teaching already during spring. Schools opened their doors for two weeks before the summer holiday as this was the decision made by the Finnish government (de Fresnes 2020).

For the reader to keep in mind, even though the spring 2020 time period is solely called "*remote learning*" time period from this point on, in reality – in the context of special education teachers – the term "*hybrid teaching*" period might be more suitable. This is because, even

when most of the students attended their classes remotely, the special education students with their own individualized education plans had the chance and right to continue attending classes.

Thus, special education teachers had to indulge in both types of teaching – remote and in-class teaching – at the same time, which of course presented its own challenges. I have chosen to use the term "remote teaching period", because that term more highlights the differences between the spring and autumn teaching practices.

Figure 2: Used Medias in Home-School Cooperation (phone/video calls, Whatsapp, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, peda.net, Google Meet, Wilma, see Sources for the picture sources).

5.1 Used Media in Home-School Cooperation

The participants listed the following online platforms they used, in varying amounts, during the lockdown period: phone or video calls, Whatsapp, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, peda.net, Google Meet, Google Drive and Wilma[6] (see figure 4 above). From these media, phone, or video calls, Whatsapp, Google Meet and Wilma were mainly used for staying in contact with the parents on a daily or weekly basis. For more formal situations, such as online parental meetings, other platforms such as Microsoft Teams were used.

The other media listed were more in use when communicating with students or school staff. Teachers uploaded their exercises on many occasions to Google Classroom. Google Drive, Whatsapp, phone, or video calls and peda.net were also used with the students. Surprisingly, the Zoom-service developed by *Zoom Video Communications* was not mentioned, although that service has been used a lot in Finland and it has been the single most used app during the whole pandemic. Also, Microsoft Lynch, another popular service during COVID-19 in Finland, was left unmentioned. (Finnish Parliament Future Committee 2020b, 25; Solla 2020)

[6] Wilma is a safe web service where information can be shared real-time. The service is developed by Visma and Wilma as such is the most popular school administration software in Finland. (https://www.visma.fi/wilma/en/)

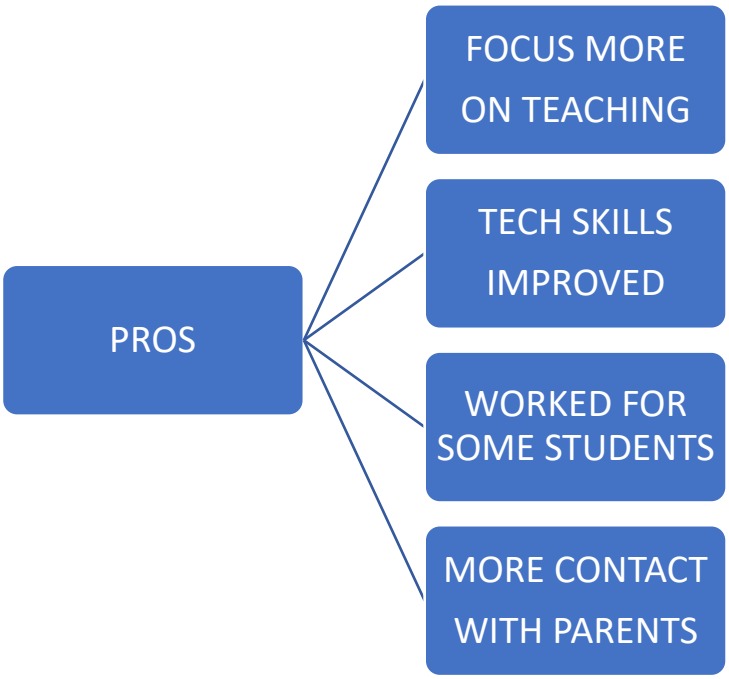

Figure 3: Pros of Remote Teaching for Special Education Teachers.

5.2 More Frequent Home-School Connection - A Double-Edged Sword

The frequency of contact to homes increased in many cases – but not in every case - during the remote school phase during COVID-19. The teachers were already used to picking up the phone and calling the parents also before COVID-19, but the remote teaching period of the spring 2020 made it all the more urgent to contact the parents. This was especially the case, when some of the students did not show up to classes at all in the beginning of the remote period. Teachers had to call the students to wake them up in the mornings and some of the students refused altogether to attend the remote classes. With these students, teachers had to send the school exercises to their parents, who would then do the exercises with their students after their own day at work Teachers were also delighted that the parents were able to see, for them for the first time, what was going on inside and during the classes. One teacher explained:

> *"What was exciting to experience during the remote school time was that quite many parents were present at the same time when their children were attending special education classes remotely. In this way, the outlook as to kind of what is being in special education classes somehow got clearer [for them]".*

Many parents watched the lecture for a little while at the start of the class to ensure everything was going okay, and to greet the teachers as well. Various parents gained a newfound respect for the schools and the teachers when seeing them in work – and when having to deal with their kids' tantrums and concentration difficulties during the school time also. Teachers also told they were delighted that since the COVID-19 there seemed to be a lower threshold from the parents to contact them.

All in all, the video calls to the homes seemed like a double-edged sword for the teachers. On the other hand, there was oftentimes this lower threshold for parents to contact the special education teachers and more frequent connection in general. On the other hand, the look inside the lives and homes of some of the students meant many teachers had to be quite sensitive to spotting alarming things. One teacher pointed out and continued:

> *"But then, that with some children when they were dropped of the call or other stuff, well then you were left thinking that what really was going on. And then you had to find out and, in many cases, well something really had happened, that the worries were real."*

Their concerns were met by the head social worker of Helsinki, Jonna Vanhanen, who talked about how many cases of home abuse and violence probably go unreported and concealed during the COVID-19 crisis (Yle News 2020). The interviewed teachers were worried with their special education students, because no one could go check in inside the homes to see how the kids were doing. A participant reported that a school counsellor would sometimes meet the pupils the teachers were worried about in outside surroundings such as parks and take a walk with them. These meetings and walks were done to try to check out how the kids were really doing at home.

5.3 Remote and Physical Meetings

Participants reported that the remote meeting possibility offered for many parent's who could not normally attend meetings - due to their working hours or having to attend to a new-born baby for example -, the possibility of attending one. Some attended the remote meetings from their workplace. Still, the participatory rate for the parental meetings was not guaranteed as not all parents showed up.

Teacher reported that sometimes the parents seemed to have forgotten the official nature of the meetings. Parents could conduct official educational or evaluation meetings with their kids

while having a family dinner or even while driving a car and ordering food through a drive-through at the same time. In the words of one participant:

> *"And also one can notice parent's not succeeding in relaxing their kids into these situations [online teacher meetings] somehow in their homes, like many teachers have explained that - - the kid couldn't act like that at all in the classroom, like they [the teachers] would say quite strictly that now you will sit here and will focus on this [whatever school exercise on hand] and we will deal with this now, like now, they [the kids] are playing with their phones [during the parental meetings]…"*

There were different practises for the parental meetings hosted by the school. All of the meetings were held online in spring 2020, but there were some face-to-face meetings arranged in some schools in autumn 2020. One school organized a face-to-face parental meeting in the school yard where parents and teachers met using masks and safe distance measures. One teacher said that some urgent teacher-parent meetings were held face-to-face – for example with immigrant parents to minimize the possibility of misinterpreting one another. The risk for misinterpretation is heightened in online meetings when people cannot read each other's body language or feelings as closely. In these meetings there was often an interpreter present either physically or remotely through a video call. Also, the availability of the adept interpreters varied, not all teachers could find an interpreter for their meeting.

The remote meetings on many occasions seemed to work quite well, but it was reported that of course they cannot replace real meetings. Teachers would miss contact meetings. *"That is what I miss, that I could host in-person parental meetings"*, confessed one teacher and lamented especially that the first parental meetings for the new first graders had to be organized remotely in autumn 2020. *"We had only the most critical ones [regarding the new students and their parental meetings] as physical meetings in the school area"*, they clarified. The no-meetings policy also affected the work community. *"The communality of the school has suffered a lot"*, summarized one participant.

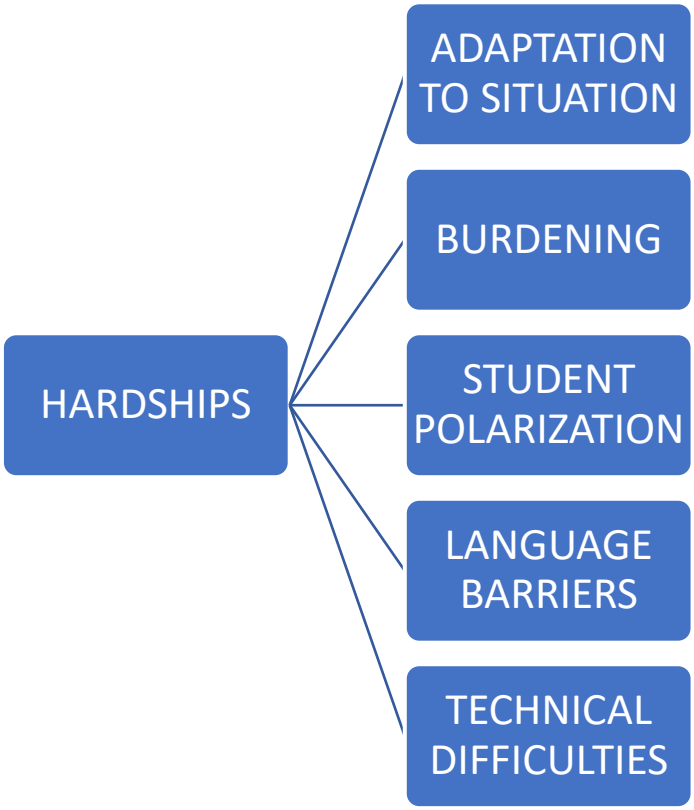

Figure 4: Hardships for Special Education Teachers During COVID-19.

5.4 Hardships – Adaptation Period, Technology and Fatigue

The remote school period came as a surprise for everyone. No previous models or practises really existed for this type of remote education done in masses. Thus, the whole idea of getting used to remote teaching and finding out the best and working ways to do it, took some time - for both parents and teachers alike.

One issue was the technical side. Many schools loaned out their electronic devices such as laptops or pads to homes in need of one – and before this could be done, some students had to solely study from their mobile phones, which was hard for both the teachers and the students. The internet connections did not always work when needed, and it took time for everyone to learn to use the new applications and online platforms. *"During spring, it was what it was… not everybody could get their faces to show on their digital devices for example"*, pointed out one participant.

Teachers reported that especially in the beginning of the remote school period they had to serve as digital advisors for the students and parents - without being trained to be as one; which

icon to click? How to get the sound to work? All this was difficult on its own[7] and became even more so with the immigrant students due to communication and language difficulties.

It took some weeks of experimentation for the teachers to find out what kind of remote school methods worked for them and their students. *"At first also the pedagogical side was challenging… to figure out what and what kinds of exercises to do and give out to students",* recalls one teacher. Another participant mentioned that it took them some time to realize they could give group assignments to the pupils - who could work together online - instead of just individual exercises. Many parents were understanding of this "adjusting time period" the schools and teachers had to go through, and participants highlighted the helpfulness and understanding of the parents. However, this was not always the case – it was mentioned that teachers would have hoped some parents would have been more understanding. On the other hand, it was reported that the adaptation period was tricky for the parents as well. Some parents could take their family on a visit to nature if it was a beautiful day, and then the teachers had to remind them that despite the beautiful weather, schoolwork still had to be done and the child had to attend school.

Overall, the remote teaching period was quite burdening for teachers and families alike. One teacher said that *"and for me [as a teacher], that the days were eleven, twelve hours easily, so very, very long"* and another mentioned *"that spring was shocking with its workload"* and. For the families, it was mentioned that:

> "*corona and remote schools… well it burdens both the families and the pupils very much, like how the pupils can focus on their studies, but also the family, when the children don't go out to their hobbies in the same way, and the whole family is kind of inside the four walls a lot more… well, it burdens the whole family*."

Unfortunately, the helping child welfare services had long queues, so the help on many occasions did not arrive immediately. One teacher reported:

> *"Some parents shared knowledge really openly and told that now they're beginning to get fatigued, now they understand your [teachers'] day to day life at school. And then when starting to contact the child welfare services for help, it was a long path, if they*

[7] *"The [Finnish] Ministry of Education and Culture launched a survey (Tanhua-Piiroinen et al., 2020) about school's digitalization and teachers' IT skills in basic education (7-to 15-year-old students covering primary and lower secondary schools) [in Finland]. According to that survey, 53 % of Finnish teachers had basic IT skills, but only 21 % had well-developed pedagogical IT skills. "(Niemi & Kousa 2020, 353)*

[the parent(s)] did not have an ongoing customer-relation there [at the social services]. - - So, to get help outside home, that was a looong way."

Also, the teachers reported that with some families and parents the everyday management skills were quite non-existent. The remote teaching period seemed to work very well for some students, but with others, the teachers and the student's parents were quite worried. For these students, their lives seemed to go totally off-direction. Some of the pupils were angry at first when the teachers called them in the morning to attend lectures – they could be still sleeping. There were also pupils who thrive in normal school environment, but who flourished during the isolation:

"and I noticed that some benefitted greatly from this [remote teaching] - - [the pupils] can be at home, don't have to come this [school] environment where there are so many distractions - - Because we have kids that get burdened by this terrible hustle and bustle and changes that are present and happen inside the school building all the time."

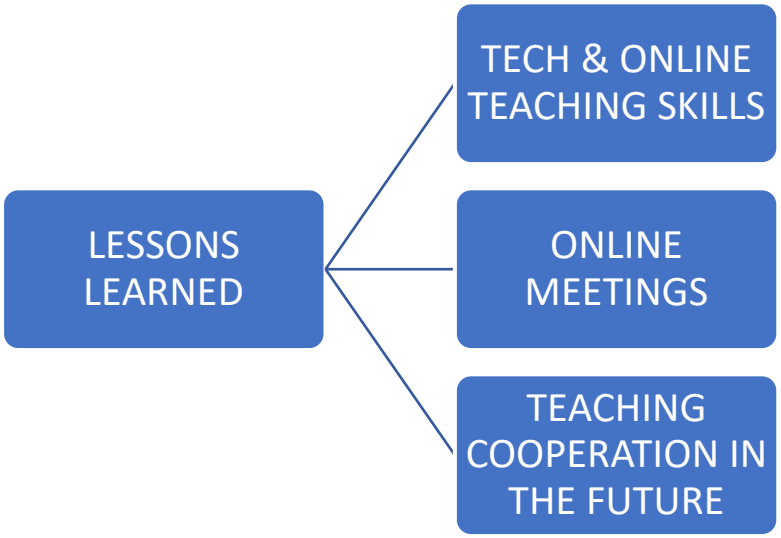

Figure 5: Lessons learned from the pandemic.

5.5 Lessons Learned for the Future

When asking about good sides and new things learned, teachers mentioned the familiarity and readiness in using technology for one. Teachers said they were now knowledgeable with various internet resources. Some were amazed by the free materials other teachers uploaded online during the COVID-19 and by the fact that major publishers could share their online platforms for free during the pandemic. The readiness and skills to use digital devices increased among teachers, parents and with students as well. Remote meetings were seen as a welcome

addition and aid to face-to-face meetings, as long as they did not totally replace the meetings in real life. In the words of one participant:

> *"But also, I don't want at all to get stuck in this remote meeting culture, that is actually a thing that worries me, that how much it [the remote meeting culture] will be the new norm, because meeting with people in real life can't be replaced with anything else."*

Another teacher has hopeful that some of the staff meetings could be done remotely in the future. *"It's healthy to leave this [school] environment, to go self to home and close the door and breath for a while - - no need for every adult to be in the same classroom space after an exhausting day and hold meetings"* It was mentioned that after the adaptation phase, it was in some ways easier for teachers to teach; now could solely focus on *teaching* during the lessons. *"Those quarrels that I used to have in schools, that what do we do, do we do anything, those were now done in homes"*, remembered one teacher and went on*:*

> *"I could just upload the exercises online and then the fight was at home… Like in that way it was easier, for two months there were no insults thrown at me, no physical restraint situations[8], nothing like that. I could focus more on just teaching, that was something."*

Now it was the parents who had to discipline their kids during the school hours and teachers reported many parents being completely exhausted and at loss with what to do with their own kids. Should a new lockdown occur in the future, the teachers, homes, and schools would now have the know-how on what to do. The adaptation period to a future pandemic would be much shorter. There would be less pedagogical difficulties for the teachers to host remote teaching. Also, as one of the participants pointed out that, based on the COVID-19 teaching experiences, the teachers would immediately be able to identify which families and pupils would need extra help and support.

One of the interviewed teachers also speculated if it could be possible to combine remote and in class study in the future. As some students clearly benefited from the possibility to study at their own pace in the quietness and peace of their own homes (it should be noted not all homes are quiet and peaceful), maybe there could exist a model of teaching in the future where some students could study remotely one or two days a week? This notion is especially

[8] Physical restrain is a controversial and debated method used in schools and hospitals to physically restrain people when they get aggressive or present threat to other people. For a review on research literature on the topic, see Physical Restraint in School by Ryan and Peterson (2004). For a historical outlook on the practice, see Physical Restraint: A Historical Review and Current Practice by Masters (2016).

important with special education pupils who might already have shortened school days and easier learning goals than their peers – and still find school exhausting and over-stimulating, for example due to sensory defensiveness.

I asked each of the teachers if they felt their university studies had prepared them for home-school cooperation, in other words, for working with the parents. The participants answered in unison that their studies had not done this enough – or at all. There was an outcry from the teachers to the universities regarding the university teaching home-school cooperation. *"For me it feels quite a bizarre thing, that everybody has to meet parents solely through their own persona",* confessed one participant.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Main Findings

6.1.1 The Ethics and Future of Online Education and Data Gathering

The corona pandemic has changed the world in many ways and only time will show how it will change the world of education. The pandemic forced schools to take an extraordinary digital leap (Iivari et al. 2020); where this all will go next? *Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)* had already been rising in popularity before the pandemic. (Bates 2012). Among the new frontiers of educational technology there are various *virtual reality (VR)* and *augmented reality (AR)* technologies, which are still yet to break to the masses.

In well-resourced schools with access to virtual reality headsets, there is already a possibility to virtually visit world famous museums and landscapes (Zoubola et al. 2008). Besides VR and VR, phenomena, and terms like *artificial intelligenc*e, *automation, IoT (internet of things)* and *machine learning* are at the forefront of digital discussion these days. The fears of diminishing in-class teachings have been brought forward. Why would expensive classroom teaching be needed when all the instruction can be found online? This could especially be the case in teaching theoretical subjects - why teach in classes the information that can already be found online? Online teaching is in many ways much cheaper than in class-education, but unfortunately online education is not suitable for everyone. Not everyone has access to the internet or technological devices, and online teaching could worsen the results of the students who need the most help. (Kujansuu 2020; Leikomaa 2020.)

An interesting societal aspect in digitalization of the schools is the aspect and future of gathering educational data. When normally parent meetings and classes have been held in-class and outside the reach of cameras, not that much data could have been gathered. But now using technological devices, we can have access data on the minutes of details. Just how many minutes and how often the teachers have collaborated with each parent? What kind of people finish their learning modules in time? How many minutes a day does a pupil spend using their virtual learning environment? Teräs et al. (2020) have brought up excellent notions and worries regarding the rapidly growing online education landscape, especially the private education technology, alias *ed-tech industry*. These worries concern the whole political ideologies and governing systems that in turn have the power to decide and form practices and contexts of our educational systems.

The data on online education will explode in the future as more elaborate online learning platforms are used and developed. The term *datafication* is being used and in the context of social media and smartphone applications; data has already become capital and a commodity to be collected and sold (Sadowski 2019). However, who owns this data and how will the data be used, will be big questions. Teräs et al. (2020) refer to Birch et al. (2020) and Zubof (2019) when noting that monetization (selling) of behavioral data is becoming increasingly normalized. Will the data be used to benefit the students, or to the profits of the companies making these services; can these be intertwined? What if the educational technology companies start offering platforms and educational services for free in exchange for having access to our personal data which is then sold to advertisers? What if these platforms and services become the educational standards so one cannot participate in formal education anymore without using the programs. Should not people have or decide whether they give up their private data or not? Can parents choose not to give in their own data or the data or their children? Is it ethical for companies to gather and sell data gathered from pupils as young as 4–7-year-old? What if advertisements will be shown in online learning environments? Do sponsors get to have a say as to what is being taught at these platforms? These have been valid questions to ask already before online teaching, and now these questions might become more important than ever. What if the educational data is used and governed by societies and governments who do not adhere to individual human rights? What if this data will be used to discriminate or exclude certain groups of people? (Teräs et al. 2020.)

Sadowski (2019) uses the terms *data-driven* and *digital capitalism* to paint these kinds of big possible societal changes and paradigms. The practical and societal consequences of gathering,

analyzing, and using big data - how all this affects equality, privacy, education, and democracy – have been receiving more and more focus of the international research community in the 2010s (inter alia Knox et al. 2020; Selwyn 2010; Slade & Prinsloo 2013; Williamson 2017*)*. Already before the COVID-19 pandemic, academics had brought out the need for urgently developing critical research on education technology (see Bulfin et al. 2015; Jandrić 2017; Salminen et al. 2010). Although more of a concern for countries with weaker functioning bureaucracies and markets for private schools, all this could concern Finland and Finnish education in the coming years or decades as well. Finland as nation is – at least so far - part of the European Union, and thus the laws and legislation done on EU level on data privacy, data protection concern Finnish citizens and its legal institutes as well (see inter alia Korpisaari 2019; Sirur et al. 2018).

6.1.2 The Digital Divide

Educational technologies have often been described as a non-stoppable force of nature in front of which schools only have two options: use and enjoy the technologies or be cruelly left behind in an ever-digitizing world (Mirrlees & Alvi 2020). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic many schools have had to embrace digitalization as never before. The skills of using technological devices will be even more important in the future as digital transformation will continue to happen on a more rapid and larger scale than ever before. The OECD (2001) has defined the *digital divide* as:

> *"the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities."*

The term *digital divide* was first used in 1995 in a number of newspapers and backed by data published by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (van Dijk, 2020). The divide is happening on a geographical level – between the more and less industrially developed countries, between the cities and rural areas.

Before talking about the digital divide, it has to be remembered that access to ICTs are preceded by access to basic telecommunication infrastructures, which are globally more available than ICTs. (Aissaoui 2021.) COVID-19 has exposed and further the *digital divide* and digital inequalities like never before (Aissaoui 2021; Beaunoyer et al. 2020). From a literature review on the digital divide, Aissaoui (2021) concluded that the digital divide is not

enough examined and exposed by researchers and stated that even much of the existing study is defective as it does not take into account the three types of digital divide that has been differentiated in the recent literature on the topic.

Based on all above data, and on my earlier notion that during COVID-19 the pupils were strongly divided into those who benefited from the remote teaching and to those who did not, there exists a potential threat of society dividing into two categories. There are those with access to devices and the internet and to those who do not have this access. But this is not the whole truth in itself. Bowie (2000) has stated that even if everyone globally would have access to a free personal computer and reliable internet connection, that would not be enough; just the access to the technology could not empower those who were for example illiterate and who lacked the know-how to use the devices.

6.1.3 Mental and Physical Health in the Post COVID-19 World

One aspect affecting home-school cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic and after it is of course the mental and physical health of the participants in this cooperation. How the parents are feeling at home is of course reflected in their children's well-being and learning capabilities as well as. The COVID-19 and remote teaching has increased the burden of teachers when even in "normal" pre-COVID-19 conditions burnout has been recognized as a serious occupational hazard for teachers (Loonstra et al. 2009; Salmela-Aro et al. 2019). Kalimo and Hakanen (2000) have brought out the notion that in Finland, among human services and white-collar jobs, teachers have the highest levels of burnout. An even higher risk of potential burn-out for teachers across the globe is not something to be taken lightly. In a smaller study done in Finland (Sainio et al. 2021), the teachers reported being worried about the loneliness, fatigue and learning difficulties and mental well-being of the pupils. This is in line with my own findings as well. In the same study home-school cooperation was highlighted as one the departments where more resources should be focused.

The notion of mental health rings true to parents as well, who have also been burdened by the lockdown restrictions and the work and money related problems COVID-19 has caused for many (see Brown et al. 2020; Lee et al. 2021). In a recent study (Lee et al. 2021), done in the US during the pandemic, two out five parents were qualified as having depression or anxiety disorder. There is a threat for a dramatic increase for mental health problems as well in Finland as the number of reported domestic violence cases increased in Finland in spring 2020 (Kirsi et al. 2020; Turunen 2020). Loneliness has been pointed out as a serious risk in COVID-19 era

and we already know that loneliness can have negative effects on functioning, health, and quality of life. (Jansson & Pitkälä 2021.) Prolonged periods of isolation often points towards anxiety, and trauma (Holmes et al. 2020; Holt-Lunstad et al. 2015). COVID-19 pandemic has raised the stress level of parents, and it is known that exposure to stressors can lead to cognitive, emotional, and physical fatigue (Deater-Deckard 2004). All this may of course strain the parent-child relationships in homes.

Two alarming trends related to COVID-19 are the rise of physical inactivity and sedentary behavior. These are related to the lockdown restrictions, the cancellation of hobbies and the closure of public sport places. The threatening questions thus are: Is COVID-19 making the people in the world physically move around and exercise even less than before? If so, how does that correlate to mental health problems? (Hall et al. 2020.) Khan & Smith (2020) have come up with the term *covibesity* to describe how COVID-19 lockdown and self-isolation have caused rapid weight gain among certain populations worldwide (see also Clemmensen et al. 2020). The shift in working conditions – from the ergonomics of the offices to the less ideal conditions in home offices – could promote the acceleration of ergonomic problems such as neck-shoulder pains (Davis et al. 2020).

6.1.4 The Future of Work, Teaching and Parenting

COVID-19 pandemic has brought changes in all sectors of society. The pandemic has not only greatly affected how pupils attend school, but also how their parents work. *Smart working – "working from home and online working"* - has become the desired working practice on many occasions and industries during the pandemic. This trend can be expected to continue after the pandemic as well. (Cesco et al. 2020, 290.) How will this affect home-school and the mental health of parents? No one knows. The responsibilities and ways of education, work and parenting are all subject to change in many ways and all this is affecting home-school cooperation as well. There are many questions left out in the open that only time will answer. Will the video calls and remote meetings continue in the post pandemic world despite the return to in-class teaching? That is to say, will the teachers continue to have a view inside the homes of the pupils? Will this affect the laws and roles between teachers and social workers and police in the long run?

Will the stress levels of the parents (see above section) settle or continue to rise in the future? How will this affect their children? Will marginalized groups of society benefit from the robust educational opportunities to study online in the future or will they be left without access to

digital devices and the internet? What about the special education pupils who find it difficult or impossible to work without adult interference and guidance -what if their parents cannot help them? What will happen with these pupils? What will happen to the revered Finnish teacher education itself? Will it rise or decrease in popularity; will Finland have as competent and motivated teachers in the future as it has now? This will probably depend partly on the lucrativeness of the teaching profession itself - will the work be less or more stressful? Will there be new responsibilities put on the shoulders of the teacher without an increase in payment in the post-pandemic world? Will the number of teachers experiencing burnout or wanting to change career paths increase or decrease (Huhtala & Tapani 2020, 7)?

Will the universities teach future teachers to embrace home-school cooperation or will it continue to neglect this issue? Indeed, international studies (Epstein & Sanders 2008; Evans 2013; Willemse et al. 2015) however strongly indicate that teacher education fails to prepare teacher students for home-school cooperation. Referring to Niemi and Siljander (2013) and Paulin (2006), Alanko (2017, 322) points out that new teachers in Finland have reported home-school cooperation being one of the biggest challenges they have faced at the start of their teaching careers. These findings seem to, however, contradict a bit with new Finnish research that points out that home-school cooperation has been discussed in several contexts in teacher education programs. However, it also mentioned in the research that universities only seemed to give basic skills for the teacher to cooperate with the families – most teachers reported real-world professional experience teaching them the useful skills necessary for home-school cooperation. It was encouraged that teacher training should guarantee more opportunities for the teacher students to interact with the families. (Alanko 2017, 329.) The nature of home-school cooperation might chance altogether in the future due to the experiences of online parental meetings. This would make it even more a priority to teach about the cooperation to new generations of teachers.

6.2 Trustworthiness

According to Pilot and Beck (2014), trustworthiness refers to *"the degree of confidence in the data, interpretation, and methods used in the study to ensure the quality of a study."* There is debate among experts as to what constitutes trustworthiness even though it is generally agreed that trustworthiness is a necessary part of scientific studies (Leung 2015). To reflect on the trustworthiness of my thesis, I have used the criteria laid out by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that

is accepted by many researchers (Connelly 2016, 435). The original criteria include the aspects of credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba 1985).

6.2.1 Credibility

Due to the peculiar lockdown situation which allowed no strangers to come inside school buildings - nor people to meet over coffee for example – it was a bit harder for me to find participants or conduct interviews with them than it would have been under normal circumstances. Still, through my existing contacts and through sending emails, I managed to get a hold of a necessary number of participants to conduct my research. All the participants were professional special education teachers that had been working in their job for years or decades. There were teachers from different cities and teachers working in different kinds of teaching positions, which adds versatility to the study. To protect the teachers' anonymity, I cannot unfortunately reveal more about the participants, which, on the other hand, lowers the transparency of my study. I sent out my questions to all the teachers beforehand and stated that the anonymity of my participants is guaranteed.

I have openly shared that I am a special education student myself and this could have affected the way teachers responded to me and my questions. Although I did my thesis in English, I conducted all the interviews in Finnish to draw genuine answers from teachers in a comfortable atmosphere. I also left the option open of conducting the interviews in English, but none of the participants seized this opportunity. When translating selected paragraphs to English to be quoted in this study, I have included the original phrases in Finnish *(see 7.1.3. Finnish Translations of the Quotes Parts of My Interviews).* As is the norm in the field of phenomenology and interpretivist research (Laverty 2003, 28–29), I have stated my own possible biases and prejudices in my thesis (see *4.2.1 My Possible Prejudices and Biases as a Researcher*).

6.2.1 Dependability

I interviewed the teachers and transcribed the interview material from the recorded audio files to text myself., which both raise the dependability of the study. The data gathering was done in a short period of time between 26.2.-10.4.2021, and thus the same themes were discussed with every participant. The point of time I did the interview, spring 2021, was not too far from the remote school period, spring 2020, and during the time of the interviews many lockdown regulations were still in place – teachers had to wear masks in schools, for example. The

memories of the teachers were still fresh; the passing time might alter the memories and stories if this kind of study was done years or decades later. I kept a private research log during conducting my thesis and I saved various versions of my thesis as I kept progressing in my writing. I used my semi-structured interview format the same way with each participant – asking the questions in the same order and using the same word choices. In reporting and categorizing data, I have tried to be as transparent as possible.

I attended four online group meetings with other thesis writers during the spring. All the students attending these university-hosted workshops were studying something education-related, but none of them was studying special education. From these students, I got feedback on my thesis - from the perspectives of outsiders. There were also analysis and reflection exercises I did about my thesis that were checked by other supervisors during the writing process. I also had my own supervisor to guide me and with him I had video calls throughout the writing process. I transcribed my interviews and listened to them various times before conducting the analysis. To get an outsider's perspective and clarity to my thoughts, I talked about my text and findings to friends and colleagues that do not study or work in the education - as much as I could remembering the confidentiality of the study. I kept a research journal, but not as extensive one as I could have (see Silverman 2005, 247–253).

6.2.2 Confirmability

In the reporting of data, I have tried to be as transparent as possible. Starting my thesis, I wrote down the possible biases and prejudices I might have towards my subject before beginning the coding phase of analyzing my data. I was aware that my chosen phenomenological and interpretivist approach is often criticized for its subjectivity and well, openness to interpretations. One could argue that my chosen half-structured interview format with my seven pre-selected questions already confined and steered the data to some direction.

The interview questions circle around home-school cooperation and remote schooling, a topic I've become familiar with through my studies and through working in schools as a teacher and assistant. I had also been following the news about COVID-19 for quite some time as well as I had I lived with the pandemic situation myself - while also doing teaching and assistant jobs at the side (I had to wear masks while working in schools as did all the other school staff as well). The research topic was suggested to me by my supervisor so even to start with, I had not a stronger bias or interest towards my research subject. All in all, I was maybe in a bit of a

hurry to get over my thesis, and thus I conducted my data analysis not in as thorough fashion as would have been preferable with this kind of study.

During the writing process, I got outsider feedback from other thesis writers and from my supervisor, but I was the only person who had access to the data itself - the interviews and transcriptions of them – was me. Also, I was able to find many research papers and news articles to verify the findings of my data, so at least some outside validation, however biased, was present to my findings. While I do plan to send the link to the published thesis to the participants of my study, I did not indulge in the process of member checking, where the report or description of themes would be shown back to the participants so they could provide context and possible alternative interpretations to research (Patton 2002, 561).

6.2.4 Transferability

I have described my own biases and assumptions towards my research topic and tried to be as open and unbiased as possible. I have detailed the process of my research and methodology to the best of my abilities. I have stated the peculiar time period in which I did my research, and how this all might have affected my results and findings. When I started my thesis, it was about after a year of the start of the pandemic and many lockdown restrictions were still in place. There had been lots of news about the effects of the pandemic, especially about the negative effects the restrictions had on people's psyches and how people were fed up with the absence of participating in hobbies and in meeting people. I suspect maybe these kinds of news somehow affected what kinds of findings I might get from my research. And the result indeed, fortified many such thoughts – the amount of fatigue among teachers and parents, for example. I have also provided much content for the reader to understand both the point of time in history (COVID-19), and the context - Finnish society and education system - we are currently living in.

Looking back at the questions I asked from the participants, I can see there was an assumption built into the questions – something that Patton (2015, 459) would name as *presupposition questions* -, an assumption that the COVID-19 changes *had* changed to home-school cooperation as well. This can be seen from the formatting of the first question; instead of asking if there were any changes at all, the question jumps straight into asking *how* the situation has been different now and before. When analyzing the themes and coding the data, I focused on the themes and contents of the interviews and did not look at whether I had equally included the same amount of data for each one interview. This could cause a bias towards the insights

of some participants being presented more than others. As with all reporting, there is also the risk that some fancy stories get over-notified in my report even though they do not represent the general state of matters (see Silverman 2014, 446–447).

6.3 Limitations and Further Research

This study's findings cannot be generalized, because the interviews were done one a very small number of teachers. When even starting to think about generalization on an international level, we must remember that the technological situation – meaning access to computers and other technological devices and to a functioning network connection – in Finland is quite good compared to other countries. Many countries do not also have a profession and field of study called special education. I could imagine my study being transferable to other developed countries where students have access to internet and technological devices through which to conduct their studies. This study could be best transferable to other Nordic countries who share the same ideals and practices of Nordic welfare countries, namely the large public education sector and existence of special education teachers and practices in them.

In many countries there have been lots of students who have been left completely unable to access digital networks due to lack of equipment, money or working infrastructure to provide stable connections. Therefore, further research would be needed on how home-school cooperation is done in other countries. Also, as this a qualitative interpretivist study, it could be impacted by personal viewpoint and values and thus the data might not be very representative. A national or international quantitative study about home-school cooperation and its digitalization is something that I hope to see in the future though.

In hindsight, I realize I could have prepared some more questions to ask the teachers, especially to better answer my second research question (see above). It would have helped me to have had questions like the following ones for example:

- Do you feel that you as a teacher are better prepared now for a possible future pandemic like COVID-19 now than you were before? In what ways?
- How could teachers better prepare themselves for future pandemics or crisis situations?
- How do you see the future of home-school cooperation in the following years or decades to come?

There were not any questions that would specify whether special education students with different levels of support – general, intensified, special – need more or different kind of help.

The logical conclusion would be to assume that students with intensified and special support would need more help and maybe different kind of help than students with general support. This would probably affect the home-school cooperation with the student's parents as well. To find more detailed answers on the topic, I would have needed to ask the participants questions like:

- How would you describe the level of need for help of your special education students among different stages of support?
- You teach students with three levels of support. Are there any differences in home-school cooperation regarding what level of support the student is?

Also, further research with accurate data could be done on technological devices in home-school cooperation. Now one teacher mentioned that she had written down that she used around 2-4 hours per week for home-school cooperation during spring and autumn of 2021. More accurate info on how much and how often certain platforms are used could be gathered. I will ponder the theme of data gathering and datafication of education more in the following chapter.

In international studies (see *3.2.4 Home-School Cooperation, Ethnicity, and Socioeconomic Background*), home-school cooperation with ethnical minorities is often deemed as a challenge for teachers due to cultural and language differences. More in-focus studies would be needed to find out how this affects (digital) home-school cooperation. In my study, I did not ask questions specifically about this topic and the only remarks that came about this theme was the need for interpreters – and physical meetings - and the language difficulties.

6.3 Conclusion

My study is so far one of the so-far one of the few COVID-19-related studies on special education done in Finland. It is one of the few studies that exist that touch on the digital aspect of home-school cooperation. The goal of my study was to bring light to how the exceptional COVID19-pandemic has affected or changed home-school cooperation in the context of elementary special needs education in Finland. And it was not just the increased frequency of the connection that was interesting, but also that the connection was in many cases done through videos. Thinking about it, normally teachers never get to see the homes of their students. Now they could, which I speculate, could have contributed to a more trusting relationship with the parents. On the other hand, the notion of worry and child welfare were very much present in the interviews as well.

In my thesis I also wanted to have a look at the various research around home-school cooperation and remote teaching. Home-school cooperation will surely benefit from the possibility of remote meetings. According to my interviews, parents who were unable to attend many parental meetings before – due to job schedules for example – will be able to attend the meetings online no matter when or where these meetings are. However, could these online platforms take something away from the human connection as well? What if too many of the face-to-face gatherings start getting replaced by online meetings, won't we lose something there? This was the fear expressed by the teachers as well.

Through my thesis I gained a glimpse to the digitalization of home-school cooperation; how for the first time, teachers could see inside the homes of their students. In addition to the many existing online platforms and media already in use in home-school-cooperation, I am sure that many more applications, platforms and media will be developed in the future. I hope my study has brought light on the handicap of teacher education in Finland – the too little emphasis on teaching home-schools cooperation in university teacher education programs. The suggestions of teachers interviewed to improve the current situations were good – that students could organize a parental meeting or deal with one family as a part of one of their school internships.

Clearly, more research is urgently needed about the digital devices in home-school cooperation and about how to prevent the digital gap from further widening. In the post-pandemic world, online education is likely to play a much larger role than in the world before COVID-19, and thus the roles and expectations between school and parents might be partly re-written in the future.

7. SOURCES

Due to the topicality, and thus the lack of research on COVID-19, I've used newspapers articles and news as sources more than is the norm in doing master's theses.

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7.1 Attachments

7.1.1 Copies of the emails sent to teachers to do interviews in Finnish

Olen Olli Lukkari, erityispedagogiikan opiskelija Jyväskylän yliopistolta. Teen gradua, ja tarvitsisin haastatteluun erityisopettajia. Olisinko voinut viedän noin 30 minuuttia aikaasi haastattelun tekemistä varten? Haastattelu voidaan tehdään puhelimitse (jolloin nauhoitan puhelun).

Gradun aiheenani on kodin ja koulun välinen yhteistyö koronapandemian aikana - alakoulun erityisopettajien näkökulma (*Home-School Cooperation During the COVID-19 Pandemic -The Perspective of Elementary School Special Education Teachers in Finland* eli gradu on siis englanniksi, haastattelun voi tosin tehdä suomeksikin).

Alla on kysymyksiä, joita haastattelussa esitän.

1. Miten yhteistyö on mielestäsi sujunut korona-aikana verrattuna ennen koronaa?
2. Miten yhteyttä on pidetty (puhelut, zoom, whatsap, teams tms.) ja **miten paljon** yhteyttä on pidetty?
3. Mikä on toiminut, mikä ei?
4. Oletko oppinut jotain uutta, mitä? Onko jotain asioita/korona-toimintatapoja työhön liittyen, joita olet oppinut ja joiden käyttöä haluat jatkaa pandemian jälkeisessä elämässäkin?
5. Mikä on ollut haastavaa? Millaisia onnistumisen hetkiä olet kokenut?
6. Koetko, että yliopisto-opinnot ovat yleisesti ottaen valmistaneet sinua vanhempien kanssa tehtävään yhteistyöhön? Jos kyllä, millä tavalla? Jos ei, mitä oppeja olisit kaivannut jo opinnoissa asiaan liittyen?
7. Vapaa sana/huomioita

Haastattelu tehdään luottamuksellisesti enkä gradussani mainitse ketään haastateltuja henkilöitä tai kouluja tai edes kuntaa/kaupunkia nimeltä. Jos haastattelussa puhutaan henkilöistä, käsittelen näitä henkilöitä peitenimillä tai tunnuksilla itse gradussani.

Haastattelun ajankohdista…

Kiitos, yst terv. :)
XXXXXX,
XXXXXX,
erityispedagogiikan pääaineopiskelija,
Jyväskylän yliopisto

7.1.2 English Translations of the Copies of the emails sent to teachers to do interviews

I am Olli Lukkari, a special education student from the university of Jyväskylä. I am making my master's thesis and I would need to interview special education teachers. Could I have had 30 minutes of your time to conduct an interview. The interview can be done through phone call (I will record the call).

The topic of my thesis is Home-School Cooperation During the COVID-19 Pandemic -The Perspective of Elementary School Special Education Teachers in Finland. So, the thesis will be in English, but the interviews can be done in Finnish as well.

Below are questions presented in the interview:

1. How has the home-school cooperation worked for you generally compared to the pre-COVID-19 times?

2. How the connection been maintained (phone calls, zoom, whatsapp, teams etc.) ja **how often** has to the connection been maintained?

3. What has worked, what not?

4. Have you learned something new, what? Are there some kind of things/workings related to your work that you have learned and that you would like to continue using in the post-pandemic life?

5. What has been challenging? What kind of moments of success have you had?

6. Do you feel that university has generally prepared you for home-school cooperation? If yes, in what ways? If no, what learning would have yearned for during your studies?

7. Free word/notions

The interview will be done confidentially, and I will not mention the names or even the names of the cities/municipalities of the participants.

For the times regarding the interview…

Thank you, with kind regards :)
XXXXXX,
XXXXXX
a special education student,
the university of Jyväskylä

7.1.3 Finnish Translations of the Quotes Parts of My Interviews

1. *"I was like the in-class teacher there at the school and the classroom teacher was [teaching] remotely - - there were [in my in-class classroom] for example students with an enhanced .... who were connecting from there [my classroom] to their own classes with their own [classroom]teacher"*
    - *"Mä olin niinku lähiopettaja tuolla koululla ja luokanopettaja oli etänä ja suurin osa luokan opetuksesta oli etänä niin sit siellä oli esim. tehostetun tuen oppilaita, jotka oli mulla lähiopetuksessa, niin ne saatto, oli sieltä [mun luota lähiopetuksesta] olla yhteydessä omaan luokkaansa tuota niinku sen oman opettajan tunneilla."*
2. *"What was exciting to experience during the remote school time was that quite many parents were present at the same time when their children were attending special education classes remotely. In this way, the outlook as to kind of what is being in special education classes somehow got clearer [for them]"*
    - *"Se oli mikä jännä tietysti kokea niin oli etäopetusaikojen aikana niin aika monet vanhemmat oli linjoilla yhtä aikaa kuulemassa kun lapset oli erkkatunneilla tunneilla etänä. Et sillä tavalla niinku se näkymä siihen et niinku mitä siellä koulussa erkassa tehdään niin kirkastu jotenkin."*
3. *"The parents kind of activated at that point when they were in their homes, during the springtime, well then especially the parents activated, they were worried for how their children were progressing, so they started contacting [us special education teachers]"*
    - *"Vanhemmat aktivoitu siinä vaiheessa kun ne oli siellä kotona niin vanhemmat aktivoitu, ne oli huolissaan siitä, että miten lapsi etenee ja he oli myöskin herkemmin yhteydessä erityisopetukseen"*
4. *"But then, that with some children when they were dropped of the call or other stuff, well then you were left thinking that what really was going on. And then you had to find out and, in many cases, well something really had happened, that the worries were real."*
    - *"Mutta sitten että tiettyjen oppilaiden kohdalla, kun lapset tippu linjoilta tai jotakin, niin siinä jäi miettimään, että mitä oikein tapahtui ja sitten sai selvittää, ja kyllähän siinä tapahtuikin, että huolet oli sillei todellisia"*
5. *"And also one can notice parent's not succeeding in relaxing their kids into these situations [online teacher meetings] somehow in their homes, like many teachers have explained that - - the kid couldn't act like that at all in the classroom, like they [the teachers] would say quite strictly that now you will sit here and will focus on this [whatever school exercise on hand] and we will deal with this now, like now, they [the kids] are playing with their phones [during the parental meetings]..."*
    - *"ja muutenkin huomaa sen, et vanhemmat ei saa niinku rauhotettua lasta siihen tilanteeseen jotenki siellä kotona et monet opettajan on sanonu sitä et - - se lapsi ei todellakaan luokassa vois käyttäytyä sillai et he sanois jo aika tiukasti niinku*

et sä istut nyt tähän ja me niinku hoidetaan tää asia nyt, niin nehän aina, kuka pelaa suunnilleen kännykällä samalla jotain tai jotain…"

6. *"That is what I miss, that I could host in-person parental meetings"*
    - *"Niitä kaipaan kyllä, et sais pitää niiku vanhempainiltoja"*
7. *"We had only the most critical ones [regarding the new students and their parental meetings] as physical meetings in the school area"*
    - *"Me otettiin vaan ehkä sillei kriittisimmät tapaukset sit siihen koululle"*
8. *"The communality of the school has suffered a lot during these times."*
    - *Koulun yhteisöllisyys on tässä ajassa kyllä kärsinyt.*
9. *"During spring, it was what it was… not everybody could get their faces to show on their digital devices for example"*
    - *"No se kevät, no se nyt oli mitä se oli… kaikki ei saanu kasvojaan sinne näkyviin kännykällä ja muuta"*
10. *"At first also the pedagogical side was challenging… to figure out what and what kinds of exercises to do and give out to students"*
    - *"Alussa myös haasteena pedagoginen… Hakemista, millaisia tehtäviä antaa keillekin oppilaille, mitä tehtäviä ja minkälaisia tehtäviä"*
11. *"And for me [as a teacher], that the days were eleven, twelve hours easily, so very, very long"*
    - *"Ja mikä itelle et ne päivät oli yhtätoista kahtatoista tuntia herkästi, aivan todella pitkiä"*
12. *"That spring was shocking with its workload"*
    - *"Se kevät oli järkyttävä työmäärältänsä"*
13. *"Corona and remote schools… well it burdens both the families and the pupils very much, like how the pupils can focus on their studies, but also the family, when the children don't go out to their hobbies in the same way, and the whole family is kind of inside the four walls a lot more… well, it burdens the whole family."*
    - *"Korona ja etäkoulut, niin kyllähän se rasittaa ihan hirveesti perheitä sekä koululaisia, et miten ne niinku jatkaa opiskella, mutta myös sitä perhettä, et ku lapset ei pääse harrastaan samalla tavalla ja ollaan siinä neljän seinän sisällä paljon enemmän niin… kuormittaa koko perhettä"*
14. *"Some parents shared knowledge really openly and told know they're beginning to burn-out, now they understand your [teachers'] day to day life at school. And then when starting to contact the child welfare services for help, it was a long path, if they [the parent(s)] did not have an ongoing customer-relation there. - - So, to get help outside home, that was a looong way."*
    - *"Perheet toi sitä tietoo osa avoimestikin, että nyt uupuu et ne he ymmärtää teidän arjen siellä et tää… et he ei saa toimimaan tätä. Sit ku lähtee hakeen sitä apua lastensuojelulta niin se on niinku pitkissä kantimissa, jos ei oo asiakkuutta sillä hetkellä. - - Niin ehkä se, että se kodin ulkopuolinen apu oli pitkissä kantimissa.*

15. *“And I noticed that some benefitted greatly from this [remote teaching] - - [the pupils] can be at home, don’t have to come this [school] environment where there are so many distractions - - Because we have kids that get burdened by this terrible hustle and bustle and changes that are present and happen inside the school building all the time.”*
    - *“Ja mä huomasin sen, että tästä hyöty osa tosi paljon. Siitä, että ollaan kotona, ei tulla tänne kuormittavaan ympäristöön, jossa on ärsykkeitä tosi paljon. - - Koska meillä on lapsia, jotka kuormittuu tästä aivan hirveestä hälinästä ja muutoksista ja tästä mitä tää koulurakennus jo sisäpuolella aiheuttaa.”*
16. *“But also, I don’t want at all to get stuck in this remote meeting culture, that is actually a thing that worries me, that how much it [the remote meeting culture] will be the new norm, because meeting with people in real life can’t be replaced with anything else.”*
    - *”et ku etäyhteyksien pito tullut ihmisille tutuksi niin ehkä semmoinen, mutta en mä missään nimessä halua jäädä kiinni tällaiseen etätapaamiskulttuurin, et se on semmonen mikä mul on vähän semmosen murheena, et kuinka paljon se tulee jäämään et ei ihmisten kohtaamista kuitenkaan pysty korvaamaan millään tollasella”*
17. *“It’s healthy to leave this [school] environment, to go self to home and close the door and breath for a while - - no need for every adult to be in the same classroom space after an exhausting day and hold meetings”*
    - *”On tervettä lähteä tästä ympäristöstä pois, mennä itekin sinne kotiin ja laittaa ovi kiinni ja vetää automatka henkeä, ei tarvi aina olla kaikkien samassa tilassa sen häslääväm päivän jälkeen, aikuisten enää ja palaveerata.”*
18. *“Those quarrels that I used to have in schools, that what do we do, do we do anything, those were now done in homes”*
    - *”Ja sit se tappelu oli siellä kotona niillä keillä oli”*
19. *“I could just upload the exercises online and then the fight was at home… Like in that way it was easier, for two months there were no insults thrown at me, no physical restrain situations[9], nothing like that. I could focus more on just teaching, that was something.”*
    - *”Senku laitto tehtäviä menemään ja sit se tappelu oli siellä kotona, niillä keillä oli, et mä pääsin sillä lailla helpolla, ei ollu pariin kuukauteen kiinnipitoja, ei haistatteluja, ei yhtään mitään muutakaan, teki vaan sitä opetustyötä - - toisenlaista, siinä oli ihan onnistumista."*
20. *“For me it feels quite a bizarre thing, that everybody has to meet parents solely through their own persona”*
    - *”Musta tosi hurja juttu, että jokainen kohtaa vanhemmat omat persoonansa kautta.”*