Thu Tra Tran

Intercultural communicative competence for English language learners at the primary school level – Finnish policy and classroom practice

University of Eastern Finland
Philosophical Faculty
School of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education, Joensuu campus
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This study is placed at the early phase of implementing the 2014 Finnish core curriculum for basic education. Considering language education for intercultural communication being an integral part of the curriculum and the academic autonomy Finnish educators are endowed with, the study aimed at bridging the gap between educational policies presented and the lived experiences of English language teachers in facilitating intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in primary school-age learners. This objective was achieved through investigating teachers’ perception of the objectives of instruction for English as a foreign language for grades 3-6 and their behaviors in the classroom to facilitate learners’ development of intercultural communicative competence. A multiple case study design with three Finnish teachers of the English language at the primary school context was applied. A qualitative approach with data collection methods of interview and observation was carried out. Descriptive analysis resulted from thematic coding of data provided an in-depth understanding of the relationship between the cases’ perception and their practice. The findings showed that the teachers’ academic freedom allowed them to interpret the curriculum differently across the cases. Their understanding of the curriculum and ICC for young learners matched with classroom practice. The results implied that if the curriculum is to be implemented thoroughly, two questions of why and how should be addressed. The rationale behind its ideas should be made clear for teachers. While there needs to be examples of good practice to help teachers visualize how these ideas can be implemented in reality. In addition, the cultural and linguistic diversity in the school and classroom environment was regarded by the cases as advantageous. However, the results showed that teaching English from an intercultural perspective doesn’t depend exclusively on this factor, but rather on the teacher’s interest in pupil’s meaning making process and his/her willingness to invite noticing, comparing, reflecting and interacting from pupils.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale of the study

In today’s globalized world, people learn a foreign language not only to communicate with its native speakers but also with speakers across cultural borders. This is particularly true for English with its ever more significance as a lingua franca. Foreign language teaching has to take on a role of preparing learners for more than the exchanging of information and sending messages. The central aim of foreign language teaching in general and ELT in particular has shifted from communicative competence to gradually encompass intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Byram, 1997; Sercu et al., 2005). Byram (1997) argues that foreign language education is essentially intercultural as it seeks to connect learners to a world that is culturally different from their own. A native-like proficiency is no longer the desired goal of FLT but it is rather replaced with an intercultural speaker competence (Byram, 1997).

Byram (1997) also makes the case that though all foreign language educators are now expected to promote the acquisition of intercultural competence in their learners, in the case of young children of primary school age who are not likely to have developed adequately to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes of ICC, it is inappropriate to assess them as incompetent. It is thus necessary to define what ICC encompasses for each group of learners according to the nature of their contact, their cognitive ability and their immediate needs. This means to aim for certain competences which are achievable for each group of learners and set them as the objectives for the group’s language education.

There has been a long tradition of intercultural education in the Finnish system (Räsänen, 2007) and strong advocacy of plurilingualism in the new Finnish national core curriculum issued 2014 (Mattila, 2016). In addition, as explained in the Guide for the development of language education
policies in Europe – from linguistic diversity to plurilingual education (Byram & Beacco, 2003), in order for plurilingual individuals to acquire a capacity for living in the multilingual environment of contemporary Europe, the capacity for intercultural mediators and intercultural competence are the goals for language teaching. These factors have sparked the researcher’s interest in studying the objectives for developing learner’s ICC as set in the Finnish core curriculum for English at the primary level.

The culture of trust in Finnish educational system has enabled their teachers to be autonomous and respected professionals (Salhberg, 2011). The autonomy that Finnish teachers are endowed with suggests that they have a lot of freedom in implementing education policies. Although there have been a number of studies examining intercultural teaching and learning in various contexts (Garant, 1997; Moloney, 2007; Nguyen, 2013), there is a lack of empirical research on the relationship between language education policy and classroom practice on developing learners’ ICC at the primary level. Therefore, this research titled “Intercultural communicative competence for English language learners at the primary school level – Finnish policy and classroom practice” aims at examining how Finnish teachers understand and realize objectives set in the core curriculum to develop pupils’ ICC.

1.2 Context of the study

The Finnish educational system is one renowned in the world for its success, most notably reflected in their students’ good performance in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results. The first extensive education reform in Finland in the early 1970s is said to have laid the foundations for this success. Resulted from this reform was the birth of Finland’s comprehensive education – one composed of a nine-year compulsory basic education and a very detailed new national core curriculum for the basic school (Karjalainen, Kupiainen and Hautamaki, 2009).
core curriculum defines a general framework for providing and organizing education, which is then specified by education providers and schools in the local curricula in terms of local decisions and conceptualization. The curricula are realized at schools with their annual plans (Vitikka, 2015). This study is placed in the early state of the implementation of Finland’s latest curriculum reform. The curriculum was issued in 2014 and took effect in August 2016. The basis of the new core curriculum is transversal competence, which is a set of skills, knowledge, attitudes, values and will. The seven entities that make up transversal competence are (1) Thinking and learning to learn, (2) Cultural competence, interaction and self-expression, (3) Taking care of oneself and managing daily life, (4) Multiliteracy, (5) ICT Competence, (6) Working life competence and entrepreneurship and (7) Participation, involvement and building a sustainable future. Language education is an integral part of transversal competence in the core curriculum, with the development of a linguistic and cultural identity as its essence (Mattila, 2016). Alongside with helping students develop their own linguistic and cultural identities, cultural diversity is an essential part of the language education and the core curriculum. Students are guided to value and appreciate diversity as well as understand the interaction and development of cultures in others’ existence. They learn to cherish the relationship between language and culture and grasp the merits of linguistic knowledge in a culturally diverse society (Mattila, 2016). As all thinking and learning take place through language, language awareness can be seen as an integral part of language education and learning in general. Language awareness suggests a value placed on linguistic and cultural diversity, on seeing languages as a means of negotiating and mediating meaning and that languages are relevant for the development of multi-layered linguistic and cultural identities (Mattila, 2003, p. 2). This awareness also entails a positive attitude towards languages in general. One central concept in the new curriculum is active agency, which encourages students to
participate, influence and act in a democratic society. Active agency is promoted by students’ autonomy, taking part in their learning process, practicing self-assessment. With the new curriculum, cooperation is emphasized on various levels – local (classmates), national (Finnish schools of all education levels) and international levels. At the global levels of cooperation in language education, students are given opportunities to make use of the language repertoire, no matter which level of proficiency they have of the languages. Mattila points out that using language outside the classroom promotes authenticity, which helps build students linguistic and intercultural skills (2016, p. 3). In a nutshell, language education as defined in the new Finnish core curriculum is multifaceted, composing of interrelated skills, which are connected to intercultural competence and global competence.

According to Salhberg (2009) high quality teacher education with excellent teachers as an outcome has granted teachers in Finland with a significant level of trust and autonomy. Teachers are not subjected to external or formal evaluation but are rather autonomous of judgments regarding the curriculum, student assessment, professional development and reporting of students work. They are expected to work alongside fellow educators at schools to interpret the national curriculum and come up with a school-level curriculum, suitable for the students’ need and characteristics according to the pedagogical view of the educators. In addition to curriculum design, teachers in Finland are responsible for assessing their students, as there are no standardized system of evaluation nationwide (Salhberg, 2009, p. 12).

The emphasis put on students’ development of intercultural competence in the new Finnish core curriculum together with teachers’ key role in local curriculum design (Salhberg, 2009, p. 12) and their pedagogical autonomy in teaching and assessing students are contextual for this current study. The researcher finds that it would be fruitful to gain insights into how Finnish teachers understand
the objectives of instruction for English to develop learners’ intercultural competence and how they put their understanding in practice.
2. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

2.1 Language and culture in language education

Understanding culture

Teachers’ perceptions of language deeply influence their teaching practice and their understanding of student language development and the assessment of achievement (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 11). This sections present three different views towards what constitute language, namely language as a structural system, language as a communicative system and language as social practice, to conceptualize language for teaching and learning.

- Language as a structural system

Language from this view is understood as a set of linguistic structures. Language education is therefore the dissemination of a correct form of the language. The most notable approach to language teaching within this view is the grammar-translation approach, assuming that language proficiency can be gained through a mastery of its grammar. Language learning then focuses on intellectual exercises of recalling rules and reproducing language, whose form is the primacy and meaning is incidental, on the basis of those rule. The critique of this view is that it is a narrow one, which reduces language to a fixed and finite system and ignores its complexities. (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 12).

- Language as a communicative system

This view moves from understanding language as forms to a meaningful system for communication. There arises the question of what it means by communication and it has been pointed out that its definitions remained rather underdeveloped (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 3). Communicative-oriented views of language encompasses structural ones as they consider
communication a process in which an active speaker encodes a message for a passive listener. Communication, understood in this way, is the use of linguistic structures – grammar to express thought. The nature of language is seen, typically by communicative language teaching, as instrumental for the expression of functional meaning. This is not unproblematic as communication is not simply an exchange of information but also a complex performance of identity between interlocutors (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 13).

- Language as social practice

This view of language as social practice regards language as both personal and communal. Shohamy (2007) argues that from a personal perspective, language is creative and a living expression of self. Therefore it is inappropriate to require language users to conform to any prescriptive norm. Learners should be seen as language users who present themselves – portray their individual selves, construct and explore their worlds through language (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 14). Language is communal in the sense that it is used for social purposes in social contexts. People use language in their daily lives to express, create and interpret meanings as well as establish and maintain social, interpersonal relationships (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 15). Learning a language means involving in processes of meaning-making and interpretation with and for others. With language as such a complex communication system that is both personal and social, learners should be prepared to engage in the unpredictable aspects of language. Hence, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argue that it is necessary that learning of languages promotes exploration and discovery for learner rather than make them passive recipients of knowledge.

Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) draws a conclusion that for the conceptualization of language for teaching and learning, the above views should be seen as layers in an integrated whole. That is,
linguistic structures are elements of a communication system through which social practices take place.

**Understanding culture**

Culture has always been understood as inherent in language and thus relevant to language education. As culture is a broad and complex term, this sections will discuss how it has been understood in relation to language teaching and learning and how the study of culture can influence an intercultural perspective in language education.

- **Cultures as national attributes**

  This way of understanding associates a culture with the nation where it is found – American culture or Japanese culture, etc. Culture in this sense is often seen as confined by geographical boundaries and are constituted by the people within those borders in a uniform manner (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 18). This view of cultures reduces them to recognizable, representations of nations, inevitably with stereotypes. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) point out that such view has predominated in various approaches to the teaching of culture in language education, where cultural contents are usually presented through recognized images of national attributes. Cultural learning entails the study of a nation’s high culture – its valued artifacts of a particular national group, namely art, literature, music, etc., or in another approach, area studies of a country of the target language – its history, geography, and institutions.

- **Culture as societal norms**

  This view of culture is in alignment with studies of anthropology, which describe cultures in terms of the typical practices and values of the people within them. From this perspective, cultural competence is characterized as knowing the ways of life of the people from a given cultural group
and understanding the values inherent in those behaviors and beliefs. This paradigm leaves learners outsiders from the target cultures, who observe and interpret their interlocutors’ words and actions from their own cultural paradigm (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 20).

The above views of culture seem to present the idea that culture is logical, coherent, and uniform and does not subject to change. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argue that such narrow views on culture result in the teaching of cultural knowledge and offer limited usefulness for ongoing learning and communication. Culture should not be understood simply as a body of knowledge but a framework in which people live their lives, communicate and interpret shared meanings, and make decisions on actions to attain goals (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 22). Culture varies with time, space, social category for people across different ages, genders, religions, ethnicities and sexualities (Norton, 2000). Individuals can simultaneously be members of different cultural groups, each of which may and does influence their practices within the cultural context. Individual members of cultures can pay different levels of attention to the cultural norms and may refer to them as blueprint to act appropriately but not reductively in various social contexts within the same culture (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 23). This selective and dynamic notion of cultural behaviors suggests an importance of individual identity as a central concept in language learning. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argue that in a language curriculum it is more important to study culture as a process that learners engage rather than a closed set of information that they are required to ingrain. In learning a new language and culture, learners expand the complexity of their repertoire of knowledge and identities, which arises a need for them to be mediators between those languages and cultures (Byram, 1997), in other words, develop an intercultural communicative competence to facilitate such mediation.
The intersection of language and culture

The above discussion of language and culture has arrived at the necessity of ICC for language learners. Being mediators between languages and cultures means that learners should come to accept, firstly, that a person’s practices are influenced by the cultures in which he holds memberships and the same goes for his interlocutors. Secondly, there is no single valid way of doing things but all behaviors are culturally variable. Thirdly, learners should not only respect other cultures but also understand and value their own. Fourthly, considering the variability, complexity and subjectivity to changes of cultural conventions, it is not possible to cover them all in the scope of any classroom. Therefore, it is important that learners develop strategies of using language to explore culture and of using their existing knowledge of cultures to learn more about culture during the process of interaction in a cultural context (Liddicoat, 2002). Gaining insights into the way of living in a cultural context through engaging with its linguistic and nonlinguistic practices is essential in learning about a culture (Kramsch, 1993; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Yet, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argue that the scope of cultural learning should move beyond learners’ awareness and understanding to also encompass possible ways that learners may practice their cultural learning. Learners, besides the role of sensitive observers, should also be interculturally competent players. They should be able to negotiate meaning across cultural borders and to establish their identities as users of another language (Kramsch, 1993).

In discussing language and culture, we have come to understand certain fundamental points. Firstly, language does not function independently from the context in which it is found (Kramsch, 1993; Byram, 1988). Secondly, the cultural contexts in turn affect how language is shaped by interlocutors in a particular interaction, time and setting (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 24).
Finally, language education should embrace the mission to prepare learners to engage in communication across cultural borders.

2.2 Intercultural communicative competence in language teaching and learning

2.2.1 Constituents of ICC

In foreign language education, one of the most influential conceptual framework of intercultural competence is one proposed by Byram (1997). In his model, Byram proposes the concept of ICC through a notion of saviors or a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Sercu et al. (2005) argues that these five saviors should not be seen as isolated components but rather as an integrated whole. The first savoir, savoirs with a plural ‘s’, makes up the knowledge dimension of the conceptual framework. It is constituted of ‘knowledge about social groups and their cultures in one’s own country, and similar knowledge of the interlocutor’s country on the one hand, and similar knowledge of the processes and interaction at individual and societal levels, on the other hand’ (Byram, 1997, p. 35). Apart from culture specific knowledge, learners aiming for an ICC also need to acquire a certain amount of cultural-general knowledge, which enable them to deal with the variability of cultures they may encounter. Savoir-être refers to an attitudinal dimension in intercultural communicative competence and is manifested as curiosity, openness, and reflexivity. This savoir is ‘the capacity and willingness to abandon ethnocentric attitudes and perceptions and the ability to establish and maintain a relationship between one’s own and the foreign culture’ (Sercu, 2005, p. 5). It deals with attitudes towards those who are perceived as different from oneself and one’s own social group.

Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) point out that the central attitudes needed for successful intercultural interaction are curiosity and openness when one is willing to suspend belief in his own meanings so as to be able to view them from the perspective of others. Savoir comprendre and savoir-
apprendre together constitute the skills dimension of the conceptual framework. Savoir comprendre is the skill of interpreting texts, interactions, and cultural practices and relating them with aspects on one’s own culture. Savoir apprendre refers to “ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction” (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, n.d, p. 8). This means the individual makes discoveries about cultures, drawing on his existing knowledge, through engaging personally in social interactions or through texts. Savoir s’engager refers to the ability to make informed critical evaluations of aspects of one’s own culture and other cultures (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). It is the critical awareness that includes making sense of one’s own ideological perspectives and values in interaction and engaging with others on the basis of this perspective. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argue that though the model has been influential, it does not give enough elaboration on the important interrelationship between language and culture.

The Council of Europe (2001) includes these savoirs as constituents of the general competences in their description of the user/learner’s competences. They refer to savoir as declarative knowledge, savoir-faire as skills and know-how, savoir-etre as existential competence, savoir-apprendre as ability to learn. The second part of learners’ competences according to the Council of Europe (2001) are their communicative competences, which are made up of linguistic competences, sociolinguistic competences and pragmatic competences. To realize communicative purposes, learners need to bring the general competences and these more language-related communicative competences together.

Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) emphasize that ICC includes an awareness of the interrelationship between language and culture in the communication and interpretation of meanings, where all
interpretation is “governed by tradition and that all tradition is linguistic” (p. 44). They argue that ICC is manifested through language in use, through interpreting and expressing meaning across cultural borders when interacting with self and others, employing existing awareness and knowledge and keeping in mind the possibility for various interpretations of messages and the culturally embedded nature of meaning (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2010). This conceptualization of the intercultural positions the learners as the focus of language learning and teaching, they both take part in and analyze interaction, are both learners and users of language and culture (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2010).

2.2.2 Principles for teaching and learning languages from an intercultural perspective

Considering the above conceptualization of ICC, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) propose a set of five core principles as the basis for language learning from an intercultural perspective, namely, active construction, making connections, social interaction, reflection and responsibility. They argue that these principles are not constituents of an intercultural pedagogy but rather are starting points for one and need further development into practice.

- To teach for active construction means that the teacher creates opportunities for learners to engage actively and purposefully in interpreting, negotiating meaning in interaction with others while reflecting on themselves and others. It entails providing learners with opportunities to recognize the culturally embedded nature of language, to develop and explore their own interpretations and to tease out the way their responses are constructed by culture (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 57).

- To teach for making connections requires firstly to help learners acknowledge their existing linguistic and cultural frames and multiple memberships in various social domains they bring to the learning. This intraculturality is a first point of connection between the learner and the
new experience and offers an initial opportunity for interpretation in relation to the new language and culture. The connections learners are to make are intercultural in the sense that they need to engage with diverse cultures, identify similarities and differences between the old and the new and build interrelationships between the perceived similarities and differences (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 57).

- **Social interaction** refers to the fact that learning is fundamentally interactive and interaction with others is the ultimate purpose of language use. Learning emerges from purposeful language use that includes the processes of negotiating understanding, of accommodating or distancing from others’ understanding, of agreeing or disagreeing with others’ understanding and recognizing the source of such agreements or disagreement (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 57).

- **Reflection** comes from an awareness of how we think, learn, about language, culture and their relationships together with concepts of diversity, identity, experiences etc., Reflection from the perspective intercultural learning involves decentering, taking a new perspective to see and interpret things and accept multiple possible interpretations (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 58).

- **Responsibility** refers to the ethical commitment required of intercultural speakers to accept and value languages and cultures. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013, p. 59) argue that this principle recognizes that learning relies on the learners’ attitudes, dispositions and values developed over time, on their continuous effort to better understand self and others in the ongoing development of intercultural sensitivity.

**Practices for learning ICC**

The principles of teaching and learning from an intercultural perspective are developed by Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) into a cycle of interconnected processes including noticing,
comparing, reflecting and interacting to describe learners’ engagement with the intercultural. *Noticing* refers to students’ examining new information that they are introduced to in their own terms, and seeking to understand what it is they are experiencing. *Comparing* takes the form of identifying similarities and differences between learners’ own language(s) and cultures(s) with the targeted one. Comparison then provides a starting point for *reflection*, which is a process of learners making personal sense of experiences and constructs and evolving understanding of them. As interculturality is not only passive awareness and understanding but also manifests itself in active engagement with diversity, *interaction* is one of the essential processes. Interactions has multiple dimensions such as demonstrating understandings in performances, articulating reflections for others, and negotiating meanings from various perspective.

The above discussed principles for teaching and learning language from an intercultural perspective as well as the processes of engagement on learners’ part have also offer implications for teaching practice. Teachers, as facilitators of learning from an intercultural perspective, are to make pedagogical decisions on activities, learning resources and so on, in a way that “invites the noticing, comparing, the making of intertextual and interexperiential connections, and prompts reflection on the nature of language, culture, communication, and learning in diversity” (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 81).

### 2.2.3 Assessment of intercultural communicative competence

Assessment of intercultural communicative competence in language education has, until recently, mostly been on the assessment of learning or knowledge with the most common instrument of pen and paper examinations (Lazar et al., 2007). These objective tests are used as measurements of the degree to which students have acquired certain cultural facts. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argue that “developing an intercultural perspective is a long-term process of cumulative experiences and
reflection” (p. 132) and thus it is essential to develop continuous assessment procedures over a period of time. The teacher play the role of an observer of processes rather than of product only in which various sources of information should be referred to indicate learners’ competence. Example of such data sources include anecdotal records, observation checklist, observation rating scales, documentation of task-related behaviors, attitudes inventories, surveys, portfolios, journals, self-evaluation reports, collection of spoken and written work, interest inventories, logs, etc (Lazar et al., 2007; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

These assessment procedures are in alignment with the principles of dynamic, formative assessment that focus on supporting learners’ development rather than summing their learning outcomes. As explained in Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) all these assessment tools need to aim at encourage learners to decenter, which means to step back from the experiences of communicating and reflect on their personal meaning-making. They need to highlight for learners the interrelationship of language and culture, across their mother tongue and the target language. Assessment procedures in this sense need to be conducive to learners’ analysis, explanation and elaboration of their learning process. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013, p. 132) argue that assessment for learning from an intercultural perspective is close to the research process – a process of inquiry, in which eliciting learners’ learning is interpretive and focuses on understanding the meanings they make of or accord to phenomena and experiences.

In this section, the researcher has discussed the interrelationship between language and culture and the necessity of building an intercultural competence in language learners as required by this relationship. A conceptual framework of intercultural competence in language learning, constituted by the dimensions of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, has also been presented together with the principles of teaching languages from an intercultural perspective – active constructions,
making connections, social interaction, reflection and responsibility. These principles have been then transposed into a cycle of interconnected process of noticing, comparing, reflecting and interacting on learners’ part, which indicate their intercultural language learning. The nature of assessment for intercultural language learning as continuous and formative together with the various tools can be used to facilitate the process of assessment has been briefly discussed. These understandings of intercultural language learning and teaching will act as the guideline for later examinations throughout the study.
3. THE FINNISH PRIMARY SCHOOL CONTEXT

The aim of this section is to provide an analysis of intercultural elements in Finnish national core curricula, especially the latest one issued in 2014, together with indications of ICC as the objectives of English language education in the primary school years of 3 to 6.

3.1 Intercultural education in the Finnish core curricula

From the very beginning of the Finnish comprehensive school reform, education for international contexts has been the aims of Finnish education. The terms ‘international education’ has been used for longer than ‘multicultural’ or ‘intercultural education’ and stems from United Nations documents (Räsänen, 2007, p. 19). International education in the national curricula of the 1970s and 1980s encompassed education for peace, human rights, equality, development studies, environmental education and respect for other cultures. It was singled out as the core element of ethical education and the focus was on educating citizens with global concerns and responsibility (Räsänen, 2007). In the 1990s curricula, knowledge of cultures, growth to multiculturalism and values discussions received more of an emphasis. Fast societal changes and the unpredictable nature of the future were recognized; thus schools and teachers were encouraged to embrace an active role in shaping the future. Though international education was not explicitly discussed in the core curricula of the 1990s, it was emphasized that the main contents for ethical deliberations derived from United Nations documents such as truth, beauty and goodness (Framework curriculum for the comprehensive school, 1994; Framework curriculum for the senior secondary school 1994). The national curriculum issued in 2004 clearly acknowledged the multicultural nature of Finnish people and considers it a richness, instead of a burden when organizing education. It emphasized the importance of human rights, equality, democracy, natural diversity, and multiculturalism. Finish culture was considered the basis of instruction, while the
diversification of Finnish culture through the arrival of people from other cultures was also taken into account (National core curriculum for basic education 2004, p. 12)

These values were translated into the objectives of the cross-curricular theme ‘Cultural identity and Internationalism’. During their schooling, pupils are to know and appreciate their cultural heritages, understand the roots and diversity of their own cultures as well as the component factors of cultural diversity and their significance for the individual and community (National core curriculum for basic education 2004, p. 37)

In the new curricula of 2014, elements of intercultural education are more explicitly underscored as ‘cultural diversity as a richness’, ‘cultural competence’ and ‘cultural diversity and language awareness’ (National core curriculum for basic education, 2014). All dimensions of intercultural competence – skills, knowledge and attitudes, are stressed in the core curriculum. In terms of the attitudinal dimension, the curriculum states that education “reinforces creativity and respect for cultural diversity” (p.16). It stresses that there are encounters of people from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds in basic education, that diversity enables pupils to get to know many different customs, communal practices and beliefs. Thus, they have the opportunity to “learn to look at issues from the perspectives of other people’s life situations and circumstances” (National core curriculum for basic education 2014, p. 16). In addition, cultural diversity is guided to be seen as a “fundamentally positive resources… Pupils are educated to regard other people with respect and to have good manners” (p. 22). In terms of knowledge, “the pupils learn to know and appreciate their living environment and its cultural heritage as well as their personal social, cultural, religious, philosophical and linguistic roots” (National core curriculum for basic education 2014, p. 22). In terms of skills, the curriculum points out the school’s role in promoting pupils’ responsible action, which are rooted from an understanding and respect towards individuals and groups. From an
acquaintance with cultural traditions, pupils are encouraged and guided to “constructively discuss different ways of thinking and acting, and create new ways of acting together”. The relationship between language and culture is also highlighted in the core curriculum – “one manifestation of cultural diversity is multilingualism”. It points out that discussing attitudes towards languages and linguistic communities and understanding the key importance of language for learning, interaction and cooperation and for the building of identities and socialization characterize a community with language-awareness (National core curriculum for basic education 2014, p. 29).

3.2 Intercultural elements in the core curriculum for English as a foreign language from grades 3-6

The Finnish national core curriculum issued 2014 specifies 11 objectives of instruction for English in grades 3-6. They refer to what teachers are expected to do to help learners achieve certain competences for the subject that are set in the national core curriculum. This section examines these objectives from an intercultural perspective to see which ones aim at facilitating pupils’ intercultural learning.

O1: to guide the pupil to notice the linguistic and cultural richness of his or her surroundings and the world, and the status of English as a language of global communication.

O2: to motivate the pupil to value his own her own linguistic and cultural background and the linguistic and cultural diversity of the world and to encounter people without prejudices.

O3: to guide the pupil to notice phenomena that are similar and different in languages and to support the pupil in developing his or her ability for linguistic reasoning.

O4: to guide the pupil to understand that there is plenty of material available in English and to select material with suitable content and level of difficulty that promotes his or her learning.

O5: to explore the objectives of the instruction jointly and to create a permissive classroom atmosphere in which getting the message across and encouraging learning together have the most important role.
O6: to guide the pupil to take responsibility for his or her language learning and to encourage the pupil to practice his or her language proficiency confidently, also using ICT and to experiment to find the ways of learning languages that are the best suited for him or her.

O7: to guide the pupil to practice interacting in situations with many types of themes and to encourage him or her to continue regardless of possible temporary breaks in communication.

O8: to encourage the pupil to maintain a communication situation by using many different means of continuing the communication.

O9: to support the cultural appropriateness of the pupil’s communication by offering possibilities for practicing diverse social situations.

O10: to guide the pupil to work with spoken and written texts with many different levels of difficulty, using different comprehension strategies.

O11: to offer the pupil opportunities for producing speech and writing on expanding subject areas, also paying attention to essential structures and the basic rules of pronunciation. (National core curriculum for basic education, 2014, p. 237)

The first objective aims at developing learners’ awareness about linguistic and cultural diversity in their environments and the status of English as a lingua franca. As stated in the Common European Framework of Reference (2001, p. 102) intercultural awareness is part of the knowledge dimension of learner’s competence, it includes an awareness of “a wider range of cultures than those carried by the learners’ L1 and L2”. This objective, hence, appears to make up part of the knowledge dimension in the learners’ ICC when they are guided not only to notice their own and the target language but the diversity of languages and cultures in their environment. The second objective explicitly addresses the dimension of attitude – savoir-être of ICC when it highlights the importance of “valuing one’s own culture and other cultures” (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 24) and the willingness to withhold judgment about others. The assessment criteria for the third objective is learners’ ability to “make observations on the differences and similarities related to structures, vocabulary, and other features of English and his or her mother tongue or another
language he or she knows” (National core curriculum for basic education, 2014, p. 239). This objective embraces the skill dimension of ICC in terms of interpreting and relating or savoir comprendre. This operation can be understood as learning how to interpret and explain linguistic and cultural practices in target culture and compare them with aspects of ones’ own culture (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 49).

One operation of ICC – savoir-apprendre, which is part of the skills and know-how dimension in Byram’s framework (1997), is referred to in the Common European Framework of Reference (2001, p.105) as the ability to learn, and elaborated as the ability of observe and participate in new experiences and to incorporate new knowledge into existing one, and at times modify the latter if necessary. This operation of ICC can be observed in the fourth, fifth, and sixth objective of instruction set in the national core curriculum. The fourth objective refers to learners’ ability to “organize and use materials for self-directed learning” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 107). The assessment criteria for the fifth and sixth objective are respectively, “the pupil is able to describe the study goals, and he or she participates in completing group assignments” and “the pupil sets goals for his or her language learning, practices different ways of learning languages, also using ICT, and improves and assesses his or her skills” (National core curriculum for basic education, 2014, p. 239). We can observe that these objective address learners’ ability to “organize and use materials for self-directed learning”; their ability to “identify their own needs and goals”, use different “strategies and procedures to pursue these goals” and to “co-operate effectively in pair and group work” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 107). The rest of the objectives from 7th to 11th aim at realizing interactional purposes of using communicative competence.

The above discussion has shown that there are clear evidence that ICC is aimed at in the objectives of instruction as stated in the national core curriculum for basic education grades 3-6.
4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The specific objectives of the study are

(1) to examine teachers’ understanding of intercultural competence in the primary school-age learners.

(2) to examine teachers’ perception of the objectives of instruction which are set for English for grades 3-6 in the national core curriculum, their perception of how intercultural competence is aimed at through the objectives.

(3) to examine their realization of the objectives of instruction, their pedagogy to facilitate the development of an intercultural competence in their learners.

(4) to add to the qualitative understanding of the lived experiences teachers in terms of the challenges and supports they have in implementing educational policies.

Corresponding to the context, theoretical background and objectives discussed above, the current study focuses on the following research questions to frame the investigation. The research questions were designed to investigate the participants’ perceptions on aspects of intercultural competence in primary school-aged learners and their behaviors to realize the objectives of instruction that promote an intercultural competence in learner as well as the factors support or challenge the implementation of the curriculum. The study focuses on the objectives of instruction for English as a foreign language grades 3-6 because for the first two grades of 1-2, pupils in the Finnish system are not subjected to learning foreign languages. The study examines the following research questions:

(1): What is teachers’ understanding of intercultural communicative competence in primary English language learners?
(2): How do teachers perceive the objectives of instruction for English grades 3-6 in the Finnish core curriculum?

(3): What do teachers do to realize the objectives of instruction that aim to develop an intercultural communicative competence in learners?

(4): What are the factors that support and challenge the teachers in implementing the new curriculum?
5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Qualitative approach

A qualitative approach was adopted in this study. As pointed out by Merriam (1998), qualitative research strives to understand the meaning people have constructed – how they make sense of their world and their experiences. As opposed to quantitative research, which dissects a phenomenon to examine its parts, qualitative research aims at revealing how all the parts work together to form a whole (Merriam, 1998). The phenomenon of interest was understood from the participants’ perspectives, rather than the researcher’s. The product of a qualitative research, as it focuses on process, meaning and understanding, are rich descriptions, which are derived from various sources of data, namely participant’s own words, direct citation from documents, field observation and so on.

The researcher was interested in understanding how Finnish teachers of English language perceive intercultural learning at the primary school and their realization of the objectives stated in the core curriculum to develop ICC in learners. Teachers’ thinking – their beliefs, knowledge, attitudes about learning and teaching – to a large extent shapes their instructional behaviors (Sercu et al., 2005, p. 7). Sercu et al. (2005) also point out that it is difficult to influence teachers’ thinking and practice whether they are beginning or experienced teachers. Their thinking is largely implicit and is formed through their experience as both a teacher and a student. Therefore, it was necessary to employ a qualitative approach, which involved close interaction with the informants and observation of their natural instructional behaviors to find out about their perception and how they realize the advocacy of ICC teaching and learning in the curriculum.
5.2 Research design

The design of this research was multiple case study which refers to conducting the study of more than one cases in order to shed light on the phenomenon of interest. A case study design is of particular suitability if the researcher is interested in process (Merriam, 1998). One meaning of process which this study is concerned with is “monitoring: discovering the extent to which the treatment or program has been implemented” (Merriam, 1998, p. 33). In the scope of this study, the researcher would like to view the extent to which Finnish teachers implement the objectives of instruction as indicated in the national core curriculum as a process, which is elucidated by understanding of their perception on intercultural competence learning and teaching at the primary school level.

A case study is “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). Or as defined by Creswell (2013, p. 97) “The case study method explores a real life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information… and reports a case description and case themes”. In this study, the multi cases are Finnish teachers of the English language subject, working at the primary school context. The multiple nature of this case study offers a chance for observing variation across the cases included. With multiple case study the researcher can analyze data both within each situation and across situations (Yin, 2003). Another fact is that evidence created from a multiple case study is measured strong and reliable (Gustafsson, 2017).

5.3 Research participants

Participants in this research were three subject teachers of English in three different primary schools in Joensuu, Finland. The underlying purpose of choosing informants from different schools was to gain a comparative perspective of how their working environments may influence
the implementation of the curriculum. Although there is a common local curriculum which is jointly decided by education providers schools in the municipality, there can be variation in each school’s curriculum and annual plan of realizing it. All of the participants were subject teachers of English and not class teachers who also taught English. This was because the researcher would like to narrow the scope to cases who specialize in language teaching and might have more specific and in-depth insight into the objectives of instruction of English as a foreign language from grades 3-6. The cases chosen all taught pupils from grades three to six. However, the research chose only one class of fifth graders for each participants to carry out field observations. This was to enable comparable observations across the cases where teaching content, materials and activities should be made suitable for pupils of the same age group.

The following pseudonyms of the participants will be used in the following chapters to refer to the participants. They are namely, teacher Mia, teacher Tammi and teacher Helen.

5.4 Data collection methods

The methods of data collection are teacher interview and field observation of their lessons. The following table summarizes the data collection methods and their purposes in answering the initial research questions.

Table 1. Methods employed by researcher to answer research questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Data sources</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What is teachers’ understanding of intercultural communicative competence in primary | Teacher interviews | Audio recording, transcribed text of interviews and field notes | To identify the participants’ perceptions of intercultural competence that are the basis for their
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do teachers perceive the objectives of instruction for English grades 3-6 in the Finnish core curriculum?</td>
<td>Teacher interviews together with questionnaires collected during the interviews</td>
<td>Audio recording, and transcribed texts of interviews together with participants answers of questionnaires</td>
<td>To identify the participants’ perceptions of the importance of the objectives of instruction and how intercultural communicative competence in pupils can be facilitated through these objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do teachers do to realize the objectives of instruction that aim to develop an intercultural communicative competence in learners?</td>
<td>Classroom observations, teacher interviews together with questionnaires collected during the interviews</td>
<td>Field notes of classroom observations, audio recording of observations and interviews, transcribed texts of interviews</td>
<td>- To identify teacher’s actions to realize the objectives of instruction - To examine how their behaviors resonate with their understanding of intercultural communicative competence and the objectives of instruction in the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the factors that support and challenge the teachers in implementing the new curriculum?</td>
<td>Teachers interviews and classroom observations</td>
<td>Field notes of classroom observations, audio recording of observations and interviews, transcribed texts of interviews</td>
<td>To examine the internal and external factors that influence their implementation of the new curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher interviews</td>
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**Teacher interviews**

According to Merriam (1998, p. 74) the most common way of deciding which type of interview to select is to determine the extent of structure suitable, “at the one end of the continuum fall highly
structured, questionnaire driven interviews, at the other end are unstructured, open-ended conversational formats”. This study employed a mid-point of structure on the continuum, semi-structured interviews with the three participants were conducted. Prior to official data collection, a pilot study was carried out with one Finnish student teacher on the 6th of January. The interview lasted around 25 minutes and followed the semi-structured nature design for the real interview. The purpose of this pilot was for the researcher to examine intelligibility of the questions and the possible flow of them. The pilot interview confirmed that the questions were able to gain insights into the interviewee’s perceptions and that flexibility can be achieved to best collect the desired data.

The participants were asked a similar set of open-ended questions, sample of which is included in the appendices (Appendix 3). Furthermore, the sequence of the questions was flexible depending on the insights the informants were focusing on at the given moment. There were two interviews during data collection, one carried out before field observations of the lessons and the other after data of classroom observations was collected. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, which enabled thematic coding and analysis of data.

For the first interview, the questions were structured in order for the teachers to reflect on their linguistic and cultural competence, their aims in planning lessons, their understanding of intercultural competence and the objectives of instruction, and their actions to realize these objectives. Beside open-ended questions, one questionnaire was included in the interview (Appendix 4). The items are constructed on the basis of the 11 objectives of instruction for English as a foreign language grade 3-6. The questionnaire asked the informants to rate the importance of the objectives of instruction on a scale of 1-5, one as unimportant and 5 as very important. Through the questionnaire the researcher gained an understanding of the participants’ foci in implementing
the curriculum and their perception of how intercultural competence is aimed at through the objectives of instruction. The questionnaire also provided prompts on which the participants reflect on their actions in the classroom.

The second interview aimed at clarifying data emerging from the first interview as well as classroom observations. Though many questions were addressed to all the participants, specific questions were asked of each of them depending on the varying data collected. Another questionnaire was included in the second interview (Appendix 5). The items were derived from the descriptors of professional competences associating with facilitating children’s linguistic and cultural development. The original document is PEPELINO, which is the European Portfolio for Pre-primary Educators: The Plurilingual and Intercultural Dimension (Council of Europe, 2015). PEPELINO elaborates the professional competences of teachers into four domains and eight fields of competence, with each domain consists of two fields of competence. The descriptors illustrate the tasks described for a field of competence in terms of a combination of skills, knowledge and attitudes. The fact that eight fields of competence and the descriptors in PEPELINO were identified by incorporating the contents of various policy documents and academic papers by the Council of Europe has indirectly lent their validity. Two of the values set forth in these documents are “The usefulness of a gradual awareness of how language functions so that children can play an active part in their own linguistic development”, and “Support for children in developing intercultural competences and learning about the value of linguistic and cultural diversity” (“European portfolio for pre-primary educators The plurilingual and intercultural dimension”, n.d). These values align with the essence of the National Core Curriculum in supporting pupils to develop their linguistic and cultural identities as well as value cultural diversity (Mattila, 2016). Therefore, although PEPELINO was designed as a reflection tool for pre-primary educators on the development of
their professional competences, the researcher found its significance and adapted the descriptors into a data collection instrument relevant to the current research.

The participants were to reflect on the extent to which they were able to fulfil the descriptors, for example “I can convey to the children my interest in linguistic and cultural diversity”, from 1 as *I’m not sure exactly how to do* this to 4 as *I can do this fairly well*. The participant were also asked to mark the descriptors which they considered related to the objectives of instruction stated in the curriculum. The instrument did not impose a set of exhaustive and compulsory teacher’s actions to facilitate pupil intercultural competence. The purpose of the questionnaire was not to gain quantitative data of to what extent the teachers thought they could fulfil these competences, but it rather aimed at obtaining further insights into how the informants perceive the objectives of instruction and their actions to realize them.

**Classroom observations**

The observations were carried out after the data for the first interview was collected. The number of observations was adjusted among the informants so that there was an equal total amount of observation time. For one teacher, as the duration of each lesson was 75 minutes, three observations, $75\text{mins} \times 3 = 225\text{ mins}$, were made. While for the other two informants, observations of an equivalence of five lessons, $45\text{mins} \times 5 = 225\text{ mins}$, were made. An audio recording was made of each of the lesson observed. Alongside, the researcher noted down the sequence of the lessons and made field notes on the informant’s behaviors that matched with what they claimed to do in the interviews to support learner’s development of ICC. The researcher also highlighted teacher behaviors that seemed to facilitating intercultural learning – noticing, comparing, reflecting and interacting – in pupils, according to the principles of practice for intercultural learning put forward by Liddicoat and Scarino (2013). The field notes were later compared with the audio recordings.
of the lesson to specify quotations if needed, these notes were transformed into a word document and became the principal source of observation data.

5.5 Data collection procedure

Prior to data collection, the participants were contacted and informed about the content and process of the research with an information sheet of the research (Appendix 1) and a consent form (Appendix 2). Hard copies of the forms were presented in person afterwards. Consent was granted by all participants.

The data was collected during January and February 2018. All three interviews were made in January, from the 9th to the 19th. The next phase of data collection was allocated to field observations. Observations of the informants’ lesson were carried out from the 23rd of January to the 9th of February. After that, questions for the second interviews and the questionnaire were constructed. The second interviews were implemented on the 13th and 14th of February.

5.6 Data processing and analysis

The current research is a descriptive multiply case studies, which strives to shed light on the process of implementing the new Finnish national core curriculum for English as a foreign language at the primary level, with a focus on the development of learners’ ICC. The research aims to provide a detailed account of the phenomenon under study across three cases – three Finnish teachers of English as a foreign language. The phenomenon is seen by the researcher as a process starting with the participants’ understanding of the ICC for the primary learners, their perception the objectives of instruction in the new curriculum, and their actions to realize these objectives to facilitate the development of ICC in the pupils together with the supports and challenges that they may face. The study does not aim at constructing conceptual categories to support, challenge or illustrate theoretical assumptions held prior to data gathering, but rather at utilizing the relevant
concepts arising from the literature to elucidate the phenomenon in question, gaining an in-depth understanding of the relationship informants’ perception and their practice. Therefore, the analysis approach of this research is thematic coding of qualitative data. The themes were the informants’ understanding of ICC, their perception of the objectives of instruction, their teaching practice to facilitate the pupils’ ICC and the supports or challenges that they face in implementing the curriculum. The codes for each theme arose both from the literature of language teaching and learning for ICC and the participants’ narratives of their understanding of ICC and the objectives of instruction, and their actions. Comparisons were then made across the cases on each code.

**Thematic coding of interview data and observation data**

The coding of data collected from interviews with informants was based on transcribed texts and the questionnaires obtained in the interviews. Various aspects of ICC and teaching for the development of learners’ ICC from the informants’ perspectives were coded. The codes were named on the basis of the terms emerging from the theoretical framework. Besides, other codes related to the teachers’ actions were elicited from the objectives of instruction, which they claimed to focus on. These codes were later used as the tool for recording the informants’ actions during classroom observations.

Besides being analyzed by the codes identified early from the interview data, the teacher’s behaviors were coded according to the principles of teaching and learning languages from an intercultural perspectives, which are noticing, comparing, reflecting and interacting (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). This dimension of analysis is not directly deduced from the teacher’s perspectives, however, the researcher found that it offers an added vantage point to understand the teacher’s actions.
6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the study in accordance with the theoretical background and methodology presented in previous chapters. The analysis of findings is presented in order to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of the project.

A body of research have pointed out that teachers’ conception – or their beliefs, knowledge, preferences, mental images and other similar aspects of their mental structures – decide a large part of their instructional behaviors (Sercu et al., 2005). With the above research questions, this study aimed at delving into the depth of the teachers’ conception to figure out how their practice – their implementation of the new national core curriculum – is shaped, with a focus on developing ICC in pupils. Together with obtaining information on their perceived challenges and supports, the researcher attempted to construct a comprehensive picture of the lived experiences of three Finnish teachers of English as a foreign language at the primary school as they realize the latest national curriculum.

The findings reveal that the teachers’ practice mirrored their perception on intercultural competence and the objectives of instruction. Besides, their academic autonomy allowed them to interpret the curriculum differently and thus resulted in their diverse approaches in implementing the objectives of instruction. The study also found out that there were certain factors influencing the teachers’ practice of facilitating the development of intercultural competence in learner, the major one being their working environments. The working environment here refers to both the teacher’s professional collaboration with their colleagues, their specific duties and the extent to which their schools decide to implement the new curriculum as well as the linguistic and cultural diversity found in their pupils.
The following analysis will gradually answer the research questions in unveiling the multiple layers of the teacher’s conception, from their understanding of intercultural competence in the primary language learners to their perception of the objectives of instruction, their practice to facilitate their pupils’ intercultural competence development as well as the factors that pose themselves as supports or challenges to them in implementing the curriculum.

6.2 Teachers’ perception of ICC for the primary language learners

This section addresses the first research question, discussing the teachers’ understanding of ICC for the primary language learners, upon which their practice will be reflected.

The data shows that all three teachers reckoned an interrelated relationship between language and culture and that language education inevitably involves the studies of other cultures. Mia claimed that they are “closely related” and that in language education “you cannot have one without the other”, while Taimi’s observation “when you’re learning different languages then you get to know the other cultures too” echoed Helen’s emphasis “foreign languages actually open the children’s minds to other cultures so through the language they get to learn about the culture too and they are more open to people from different cultures.”

6.2.1 Constituents of ICC

When asked about the constituents of ICC, all three teachers mentioned the knowledge and attitudinal dimension. Mia seemed to think of the knowledge dimension as understanding of societal norms, the ways people of the target cultures are likely to do and the values they place upon certain ways of acting and beliefs (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). She reflected that “I try to inform them... that manners and taboos are different in different countries.” Helen also referred to the knowledge dimension as national attributes while saying that she introduced “the culture and history” whenever she could, “in small portions”. Taimi appeared to be the only of three informants
to consider the personal identities of pupils in the knowledge dimension, that learners belongs to different groups and they need to be aware of these memberships as well “we have different cultures in different families and not only being Finnish but...we have different identities depending on… being ice-hockey players”. Her understanding resonates with the sense that culture is dynamic, evolving and not easily encapsulated for teaching and that learners are to study culture as a process to engage in rather than a set of information for them to recall (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Taimi also approached the knowledge dimension as societal norms “we talk about how English people do things and how they see the world” but acknowledged that it is inevitable to have certain stereotypes and pupils need to be aware of this as well “not all English people do things in that way, we have to deal with stereotypes as well”.

All three teachers regarded the attitudinal dimension of ICC as having an open mind and grasping the idea of equality. Mia phrased it “I try to emphasize the fact that all the languages, all the nationalities they are equally important, equally valuable.” Her approach to developing the attitudinal dimension in pupils is to get them to “respect the representatives of other cultures and so that they would understand that there are differences but also similarities that in the end, people are the same with the same basic needs.” Taimi stated that the attitude should be “respecting” and that “we’re all different and that the kids would appreciate others and their differences.” For Helen, attitude in ICC means trying “try to cope with everybody, basically”.

When asked about the skill dimension of ICC, two of the teachers didn’t show solid understandings similar to those discussed in the theoretical framework of ICC. Both Mia and Helen referred to the attitudinal dimension as skills, Mia regarded them as the understanding that “no other culture is more valuable than another one”. While Helen expressed certain confusion and also refers to skills as a set of attitudes “I don’t know, what should I say? First of all you should have a common
language with other people and be polite. You must also appreciate other people’s views and things like that.” As for Taimi, she seemed to have an understanding of the skill dimension close to the skills of discovering (Byram, 1997) – making discoveries through drawing on their existing knowledge, and engaging personally in social interactions or through texts “maybe listening to other people is a skill. And trying to understand the way they see the world.”

6.2.2 ICC for the young language learners

When asked about their understanding of ICC specifically for learners at the primary level, whether they perceived it differently compared to ICC for adult learners, both Mia and Helen reflected on the attitudinal aspect – malleability of young pupils. Mia shared that “they don’t have any prejudices and attitudes yet and they are just curious. And if they learn to understand and to accept that it’s just the same there will be a lot less these prejudices and even racism, negative feelings towards other cultures and people.” She reckoned that pupils can easily be attached to their parents’ ideas. This opinion is resounded in Helen’s “I think their attitude might reflect the attitude of their own parents. Taimi, on the other hand, mentioned that ICC for young learners are simpler compared to that adults should acquire. This understanding explains her approach to the knowledge dimension when it comes to teaching young children “sometimes you have to simplify things more…when it comes to those stereotypes, we might have a few of those, but when they grow up you can start telling them that not all English people do this.”

6.2.3 Observation and assessment of pupil’s ICC development

The ways the teachers perceive what constitute ICC contribute to their observation and assessment of the ICC happening on the pupils’ part. All of them mentioned the attitudinal aspect, children’s being interested, as indication of their learning. Mia and Taimi put a stress on the discussions
through which they observe children’s interest. Mia revealed her approach of encouraging noticing, comparing, relating and interacting in the pupils:

“If you talk about things that are part of their experience like animals...they can relate those items to their own context and they start to make comparisons. Some of them have traveled extremely many countries and they get to share their experiences as well.”

Taimi highlighted the autonomy of pupils in their development of ICC, which resonates with her understanding presented earlier:

“The understanding of different cultures comes not only from what we’re doing in English class but when they start learning about different places in the world in geography and other subjects...their hobbies and what they’re doing in their spare time”.

They also stressed that ICC develops over time “when they gradually grow, they start thinking about things more” – Taimi, which is echoed in Helen’s saying that “these things develop personally according to individual experiences, through the years”. This understanding is also related to Helen’s explanation of the necessity for children to develop ICC from a young age:

“Later they must be able to cope in their working life and it starts from small steps. So of course here we can only offer the young learners the basic things, then hopefully later make them understand that in addition to commanding the language they need to understand many aspects of society and to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures”.

The understanding of development of ICC as a gradual and long-term process of cumulative experiences and reflection is crucial in building a continuous assessment procedure over time (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). With this in mind, all the teachers expressed the idea that written assessment for ICC in learners is irrelevant or unnecessary. Their noticing of the pupil’s attitude through discussion with them is more important. ICC manifests itself in the pupil’s interests, their
hobbies outside of class and their attitudes towards other languages and people from different cultures. Mia stated that:

“I know that some people, even they have given written tests, they ask about cultural matters. And I never do that. Because I think that this cultural knowledge, it has to do with to be lived, and be fun not something that has to be tested in writing.”

This attitude resembles one found in Taimi’s narrative when the researcher brought up the European Language Portfolio as a tool of assessment for ICC:

“I’ve been talking a lot with my colleagues about this and we haven’t been that enthusiastic about Kielisalkku because it’s a lot of writing for the kids and it’s much nicer to talk about these things than to write about them… They are interesting things and are really things you need to discuss about.”

It’s noticeable in the case of Helen that she seemed to regard the assessment of ICC as part of the teacher’s paperwork rather than a means to facilitate pupils’ learning:

“According to the curriculum I must take into account all the different parts of pupils’ language skills including this. I do my best, assessing also intercultural development as ‘pass or accomplished’ but actually I haven’t written it down anywhere because we don’t have any form to fill in. I’m also critical to some extent because how can we assess the pupils’ attitude and appreciation to intercultural communication? Is it even necessary, I think it is not necessary.”

This understanding didn’t seem to be in alignment with the principle of assessment as dynamic and formative that support the ICC development of pupils rather than summing their learning outcome (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).
6.3 Teachers’ perceptions of the objectives of instruction

This section addresses the second research question, discussing the participants’ understanding of the objectives of instruction, to be more specific – their familiarity to them, their perceived importance of the objectives, and those which they think aim at facilitating learners’ ICC.

6.3.1 Teachers’ familiarity with the objectives

When asked about their involvement in planning the school curriculum, the participants’ answers all indicated their familiarity with the objectives of instruction for English as a foreign language grades 3-6. However, the extent to which they were involved in planning the school or local curriculum varied across the cases, depending on the schools they work in. For Mia, working in a teacher training primary school, she was involved directly in planning the content of the school curriculum “as English teachers and primary school language teachers we discussed and planned the content of our school syllabus or curriculum and it was a very long process.” She also claimed that the intention of this process was for everybody to be involved and understand the objectives. For the other two informants, they only mentioned the planning at the municipal level and that schools use the same local curriculum in the city. Taimi said the process of getting to know the core curriculum started when she was working in the teacher training school “we had to familiarize with the national curriculum”. But she stopped working on the planning when moving to her current school “they continued the process when I moved here.” Helen mentioned getting familiarized with the curriculum through education days organized by local school authorities, professional teachers and teacher trainers “we have discussed the curriculum and we have criticized it and given our point of views and try to understand it”. She also revealed that it was those arranging the education days who “put everything together and made the local part of the curriculum”.

What is worth discussing is that for Helen and Taimi, the objectives of instruction in this new core curriculum were not much different from the last one, but were rather written in different terms. Helen stated that “the curriculum is written in a different way than before”. This was echoed in Taimi’s statement “when it comes to English I think that it hasn’t changed that much if you compare to the previous curriculum.” She elaborated that “communication is probably the biggest thing” when it comes to language studies along with “looking at different cultures and the world today”, which was also “in the past curriculum.” Mia, on the other hand, seemed to take into account all the transversal competences as the basis of this new core curriculum. She stated that ‘Cultural competence and self-expression’ is among these transversal competences. Compared to the past curricula, which was “very much grammar-based” this new one focuses more on pupil’s ability of “learning to learn, learning to interact in a global world”.

6.3.2 Importance of the objectives of instruction

In answering the questionnaire included in the first interview, the participants revealed their perception on the importance of the objectives instruction. In general, the participants all regarded a significance of the objectives. However, there are slight variations across the cases, which in turn influence their foci in implementing the objectives. Following is the chart demonstrating the rate of importance the participants assigned for the objectives of instruction, on a scale of 1-5, one as *unimportant* and 5 as *very important*:
Figure 1. Perceived importance of the objectives of instruction, O1 – O11 stand for the 11 objectives

Mia regarded all the objectives as almost “equally important”. However, there was one objective rated as of moderate importance, which was objective 10 – “to guide the pupil to work with spoken and written texts with many different levels of difficulty, using different comprehension strategies”. In explaining her choice, Mia shared that at the primary level, spoken activities received more focus in the classroom, while written ones come “further in their education” and “the higher you move, the more you concentrate on texts”. For the same reason she rated objective 11 as important, but made a note that the pronunciation aspect of the language at this level should be considered very important.

Taimi also claimed that she regarded the objectives as of equal significance “I’ll probably have five for everything”. However, O4 was marked as 4 for important – “to guide the pupil to understand that there is plenty of material available in English and to select material with suitable
content and level of difficulty that promotes his or her learning”. Taimi pointed out that the pupils are autonomous in finding materials in English, “they have already followed Youtube channels and things like that” thus there is less need for her to suggest them directly.

What’s worth noticing in Helen’s case is that though she rated almost all objectives as important or very important, O9 – “to support the cultural appropriateness of the pupil’s communication by offering possibilities for practicing diverse social situations” – was rated as unimportant. Helen referred to creating diverse social situations at school as “artificial” and that “social situations are something you learn somewhere else, not so much here”. Another point is that though Helen also rated O4 as of moderate importance, her reason was opposite Taimi’s in acknowledging pupils’ autonomy. She shared that “we have options in our textbooks…but the teachers do the choosing for the students, they don’t have to choose very much”.

6.3.3 ICC in the objectives of instruction

Discussed in this section are the perceptions of the participants on which objectives they think aim at facilitating pupils’ development of ICC and what they do to achieve these objectives. These were also used as tools to record field notes during collection of observation data.

For Mia, she regarded all objectives related to communication as facilitating ICC in pupils - “especially when it’s about communication”. She referred to O1 and O2 as “the basis of the competence”, and that “if you don’t value yourself and your own culture background, it’s very hard to value anybody else’s”. O5, with its essence as building the “permissive atmosphere” in the classroom, was also considered her basis in building ICC in pupils – “one of the corner stones of my teaching philosophy”. She understood O7 and O8 as concerning with encouraging pupils to overcome difficulties during interaction by using strategies to “go around with the issues”, “using other words” or “body language”. O9 was also selected as it deals with “the cultural
appropriateness of the pupil’s communication”. She emphasized the importance of pronunciation – part of O11 – as “if your pronunciation is unclear…there is communication gap and you can’t get your message through”.

When asked how she would realize these objectives in practice, Mia shared that she does a lot of drilling to practice pronunciation. For O5, Mia shared that to create a permissive atmosphere, the pupils know that they can make comments but “the main rule is that we help each other, we never laugh at anybody’s answer”. To facilitate O9, Mia designs activities with dramas, which are also opportunities to support O7 and O8 “and this drama thing, I always try to encourage them that ‘don’t worry, if you can’t say the exact word, you can mime; you can act. You can use your hands and make sounds…” To realize O1 and O2, Mia said that she makes use of pupils’ linguistic diversity by using them as her “assistants”. If the pupils are native speakers of English, and thus can easily get frustrated as they know everything already, she usually asks them to help pronounce new words instead of using recordings. In addition, acknowledging the richness their linguistic and cultural surroundings “we have loads of international exchange students and children from different backgrounds…intercultural communication comes naturally”, she makes use of the situation by matching pupils with observers and inquire after the observers about their cultural experiences. Besides, as discussed earlier in 4.2.4, Mia mentioned encouraging pupils to notice, compare, reflect on their experiences and share them with others “it’s always much more interesting if it’s a peer, a classmate who starts to share his or her information”.

For Taimi, her choices of the objectives that facilitate ICC development in pupils were O1, O2, O3, O5 and O9. Her approach in realizing these objectives, especially O1, O2 and O3 are through discussions “We discuss a lot with the kids...We talk about different languages and what they have already known...we talk about the role of English...what they hoped for in the English studies”.

She also mentioned that through discussion, pupils reveal their attitudes “sometimes they say things that are not appropriate…the prejudice comes there.” Taimi took an example of noticing and comparing different grammatical phenomena in languages with pupils, in realizing O3 – “to guide the pupil to notice phenomena that are similar and different in languages and to support the pupil in developing his or her ability for linguistic reasoning” – “in English, there are things that they want to emphasize like the –ing form, we Finns are like ‘why do they use that that much?’ Yeah, just a different way of seeing the world.” She also commented that the new curriculum emphasizes “the kids should be looking at the world and languages as if they were small linguists”, and “even though they don’t have many languages, but they can already start comparing things”.

To realize O5, Taimi focuses on “practicing learning together” with pair and group activities. In addition, she ensures a “permissive atmosphere” in the classroom, where “the kids have the courage to say things, otherwise…we can’t discuss”. O9 is realized with dramas, “we’ve been playing supermarket”. She also stressed that the guests are important in realizing this objective “we have people coming to see our class and the kids have a chance to talk to someone for real”.

For Helen, the objectives she reckoned as facilitating ICC in pupils were O1, O2, O5, O7, O8 and O10. Her approach in realizing O1 and O2 is to talk with pupils “, I say that you must take care of your Finnish language, it’s important…also I hope that they understand they must encounter other people without prejudice. We talk shortly about it when needed”. Besides, to get pupils learn that they should encounter people without prejudices, Helen guides them to work with all their classmates. She shared that “encountering diversities starts from very close up, you have to work with everybody in the class…so I keep changing their pairs”. To realize O5 and create a “permissive atmosphere”, Helen values the various answers from pupils “they keep asking me ‘if this is ok’ and I say ‘it’s ok’”. Besides, she emphasized that pupils respect their friends’ opinions
“no laughing to wrong answers, we don’t do that”. She thought that what should be done for O7 and O8 is self-evident, that they “answer themselves already…it’s already included here and I don’t have anything extra to say”. Helen understood that O10 – “to guide the pupil to work with spoken and written texts with many different levels of difficulty, using different comprehension strategies” supports ICC development in pupils because if they see the difficulties they have while trying to communicate, it might help them to be empathetic to others. Therefore, to help facilitate their ICC development she guides them to learn different strategies to comprehend spoken and written texts and use them “in their own communication situations”.

Having discussed what objectives the participants think aim at facilitating pupils’ development of ICC and what they do to realize them, the researcher summarized the information in the following table:

**Table 2.** Teacher foci to realize the objectives of instruction that facilitate pupils’ ICC development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives that aim at facilitating pupils’ ICC development</th>
<th>Mia</th>
<th>Taimi</th>
<th>Helen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O1, O2, O5, O7, O8, O9, O11</td>
<td>O1, O2, O3, O5, O9</td>
<td>O1, O2, O5, O7, O8, O10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s actions to realize the objectives</td>
<td>Permissive classroom atmosphere</td>
<td>Permissive classroom atmosphere</td>
<td>Permissive classroom atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Discussions</td>
<td>- Dramas</td>
<td>- Talks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Making use of pupil’s linguistic repertoire</td>
<td>- Discussions</td>
<td>- Using comprehension strategies to work with texts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pronunciation drills</td>
<td>- Noticing and comparing</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.3.4 Teacher intercultural professional competences connected to the objectives of instruction

This section discusses data collected through the questionnaire on teacher professional competences in the plurilingual and intercultural dimension. Quantitative data on the extent to which the participants are able to fulfil the descriptors of competences will not be the focus of analysis. Rather, the emerging data points out the various perspectives of the participants on which fields and descriptors of professional competences are connected with the objectives of instruction.

The four domains and eight fields of competence of, each involves a combination of appropriate knowledge, attitudes and skills, are summarized in the following figure (Council of Europe, 2015). The participant questionnaire with the specific descriptors can be found in the Appendix. The participants were asked to indicate the level at which they could fulfil the descriptors by circling a number from 1 to 4. 1 as I’m not sure exactly how to do this. I need to learn. 2 as I have thought about this and tried to obtain information but I still have questions about the practical implementation. 3 as I have made progress but I have more to learn. 4 as I can do this fairly well.
Figure 2: Teacher professional competences in the plurilingual and intercultural dimension (Council of Europe, 2015)

The following analysis elaborates on Table 3, which summarizes the teachers’ perception on the connection between the eight fields of professional competences in the plurilingual and intercultural dimension and the objectives of instruction.

Table 3. Summary of participants’ perception on the connection between the competences and objectives of instruction
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fields of competences and descriptors that are related to the objectives of instruction</th>
<th>Mia</th>
<th>Taimi</th>
<th>Helen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II. Responding positively to linguistic and cultural diversity</td>
<td>II.1(4), II.5(3)</td>
<td>II.2(4), II.3(3)</td>
<td>II.1(3), II.2(4), II.3(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Taking account of the way in which young children acquire languages</td>
<td>III.2(4), III.4(4), III.5(3)</td>
<td>III.2(2), III.5(3)</td>
<td>III.1(4), III.2(2), III.5(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Organizing activities on the theme of languages and diversity</td>
<td></td>
<td>IV.1(3), IV.2(4), IV.5(3)</td>
<td>IV.5(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Taking children’s individual needs into account:</td>
<td>V.1(4), V.3(4), V.4(4)</td>
<td>V.2(2), V.4(3)</td>
<td>V.3(4), V.4(4), V.5(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Supporting the linguistic development of children with other first languages</td>
<td>VI.3(4)</td>
<td>VI.1(3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Cooperating with the children’s families</td>
<td>VII.1(3), VII.2(3), VII.3(4), VII.4(4), VII.5(4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Working as a team</td>
<td>VIII.1(4), VIII.3(4), VIII.5(4)</td>
<td>VIII.2(4), VIII.3(4), VIII.4(4), VIII.5(4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above table summarizes the fields and descriptors of competence that the participants perceive as connected to the objectives of instruction and the extent to which they think the descriptors are fulfilled. For example, I.1(4) means that the teacher thinks descriptor 1 in the field I ‘Analysing and adapting how to talk to children’ is connected to the objectives of instruction and that she **can do this fairly** well. The data demonstrates the various ways in which the participants understand the objectives of instruction. It is noticeable that while Mia perceived the last two fields of competence – ‘Cooperating with the children’s families’ and ‘Working as a team’ – as connected to and required by the objectives of instruction, the other two participants, on the other hand, saw no connection between them. Mia referred to these two fields of competence as “of great importance” and that “you’re supposed to have this kind of collaboration”. In terms of collaborating with the families, the goal is that they are “aware of how the children are doing and they should also have the chance to come up with their own ideas and suggestions”. She appeared to actively try to engage the families in their children foreign language education “We’ve done this. There are many families with different cultural backgrounds for example this ‘language casserole’” – where the parents come and organize some cooking and language teaching activities with pupils. She also mentioned the families’ willingness to be involved “the parents would like to collaborate more closely with the school”. When it comes to cooperative work with her colleagues, Mia stated that according to the new curriculum, “you’re supposed to do a lot of team work to support this cross-curricular competences and to have this interdisciplinary learning units so it’s very important.” On the contrary, the other two participants didn’t seem to see cooperation with families as their direct responsibility. Taimi shared “I don’t know if it’s mentioned somehow but not in a concrete way” while Helen said that it is class teachers who work with the families and she mostly communicates with them through VILMA – the online collaboration website
between home and school – to keep them up-to-date with the pupils’ learning. Helen also shared that the descriptors in the fields VI and VII “would suit the class teachers, or special needs teachers better – those who are responsible for the children’s first language”, which explains why she didn’t reckon any of the descriptors in these fields as connected to the objectives of instruction for her subject.

The reasons why the other two fields of competence which Mia and Helen don’t regard as connected to the objectives of instruction are not specified. Another point worth discussing here is that for Mia and Helen, almost all of the descriptors they marked as relevant to the objectives of instruction are also indicated as 4 – I can do this fairly well. This illustrates the confidence in their ability to successfully implement the curriculum, as Helen stated that “I’ve been going through the curriculum again and I see I’ve done ok. I’m confident about my teaching at the moment.” As for Taimi, she indicated her ability to fulfil quite many descriptors as 3 – I have made progress but I have more to learn and 2 – I have thought about this and tried to obtain information but I still have questions about the practical implementation. This reflects her tentative evaluation of her implementing the objectives “They are all important things but as a teacher I’m not always able to do them all”.

6.4 Teachers’ actions to realize the objectives of instruction that facilitate ICC development in pupils

This section addresses the third research question of what the teachers do to realize the objectives of instruction that facilitate ICC development in pupils.

6.4.1 Teachers’ implementation of their foci

The participants’ foci to realize the objectives of instruction that facilitate ICC development in pupils were discussed and summarized in section 4.3.3. The foci were tools with which the research
record observation data in field notes. This section discusses the data emerging from observation and examine whether teachers’ behaviors resonate with what they claim to do in the interviews.

**Table 2.** Teacher foci to realize the objectives of instruction that facilitate pupils’ ICC development

<table>
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<th>Mia</th>
<th>Taimi</th>
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<tr>
<td>O1, O2, O5, O7, O8, O9, O11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives that aim at facilitating pupils’ ICC development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher’s actions to realize the objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Permissive classroom atmosphere</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Dramas</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Discussions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Making use of pupil’s linguistic repertoire</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Making use of linguistic and culture diversity in the surroundings</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pronunciation drills</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For Mia, it could be observed that all of her practices in the classroom matched with what she claimed to do in the interview. She focused on pronunciation and there were various incidents in which she let the pupils practice pronouncing individual words, phrases and dialogues (class observation, Jan 24, Jan 31, Feb 9). A permissive classroom atmosphere was also observed in all lessons where each pupil was asked for their opinions in different activities, as she claimed “nobody stays all quiet during a lesson, everybody speaks quite a lot. This is also to support their growth of confidence”. This permissive atmosphere was obtained through a range of pair and
group work or activities for the whole class, which facilitated their collaboration and “learning together”, as shared in the interview. Mia also made use of her pupils’ language repertoire while teaching. In relation to the topic of a ‘language shower’ – a school event in which the pupils were introduced to other foreign languages, Mia discussed with them about their knowledge of Swedish and Russian (classroom observation, Jan 24). A pupil with Russian as her mother tongue was asked to teach the class how to count from 1 to 10 in the language. From this incident, Mia raised the discussion on pronunciation in different languages. She elicited what the pupils had already known about “sound map” – one that allows people to learn pronunciation easily until the age of twelve. Thus, Mia encouraged her pupils to take advantage of their age and learn as many languages as they could. She went on discussing with the pupils about aspects of English pronunciation that might make it difficult for Finnish pupils to acquire. This was one example of facilitating their noticing phenomena, comparing, reflecting on them and also articulating their understanding with others (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). It was noted that Mia also made use of the linguistic diversity in the immediate environment when she referred to the researcher’s experience with learning English pronunciation. This was a facilitation related to O1 and O2 in the curriculum, to guide people to notice the linguistic and cultural richness of their surroundings. There were various incidents in all three observations where Mia drew on pupils’ understanding and experiences of languages and cultures, for example, their discussion on how much the pupils knew about Australia (classroom observation, Jan 31). It’s worth pointing out here that while eliciting pupils’ understanding, Mia always made use of materials found from the Internet and the technological devices available to illustrate or confirm the information. Thus, though she didn’t state that O4 – guiding pupils to understand that there is plenty of material available in English and to select
material with suitable content and level of difficulty that promotes his or her learning – was one of her foci, she did facilitate it thoroughly during each lesson.

For Taimi, her practice in the classroom also mirrored her perception as revealed in the interview. Observation data showed that Taimi facilitated a permissive classroom atmosphere in all of her lessons. This was achieved through a wide range of activities with pair, group work and activities with the whole class (classroom observation, Jan 23, Jan 24, Jan 30, Jan 31). Although no drama or practice of diverse social situations was observed, there were various activities where pupils were guided to use non-verbal forms of communication like miming, gestures to express their understanding, for example of directions or sports (classroom observation, Jan 30, Jan 31). In addition, mirroring her view in facilitating the practice of different social situations with visitors “the guests are also important that…the kids have a chance to talk to someone for real”, Mia encouraged the pupils to interact with the researcher during some of the activities (classroom observation, Jan 30, Jan 31).

Besides, there were incidents in which Taimi facilitated noticing and comparing as she claimed to do in the interview, on grammatical and vocabulary points, for example how to form ordinal numbers or directions in English and Finnish (classroom observation, Jan 23, Jan 30). Taimi followed quite closely content in textbook and digital material was always made use of. But the activities that she designed were not based entirely on the materials provided in the book, where they were practicing forming ordinal numbers, giving direction or learning about different sports (classroom observation, Jan 23, Jan 24, Jan 30, Jan 31). This reflects her view on the aims in choosing and planning activities “I try to have lessons that would be fun but not only fun but we need to have grammar too and things like that”.

It was also confirmed through observation that Helen’s actions in the classroom matched with her perception. Like the other two teachers, Helen facilitated a permissive classroom atmosphere through pair and group work, which was observed in every lesson. The activities ranged from reading aloud a dialogue with a partner to cross-checking exercises and playing games in groups (classroom observation, Jan 25, Jan 26, Jan 30). The activities observed were always based on materials in textbook. This reflects her view about Finnish textbooks when asked about how they facilitate pupils’ development of ICC. Helen stated that:

“There are lots of cultural information…that interest different age groups and that they are adapted…already…all the pictures are as authentic as they can be…so the picture materials support intercultural learning very well”.

Helen also shared that “I often trust my textbook because there are plenty of materials to choose from. It’s never boring actually.” Upholding her view that comprehension strategies build up pupils’ ICC, Helen placed much emphasis on the pupils’ understanding of spoken and written texts. There were many activities in which pupils were guided to make sense of texts through listening repeatedly, translating and learning explicit grammatical rules (classroom observation Jan 25, Jan 26, Jan 30, Feb 1). It was also observed that Helen facilitated O1 and O2 through different talks about other languages and cultural information, for example she showed a video about how some sounds in African languages were made and commented that “Finnish is not the only funny language there is”. Other incidents involved one in which she pointed out the word for ‘ambulance’ in Finnish is quite similar to one in English but is a completely different one in Russian. This practice resembled the practice she shared in the interview, in which she talks shortly with pupils when needed. The talks although pointed out linguistic and sometimes cultural phenomena, not much comparison and reflection on pupils’ part was facilitated.
6.4.2 Teachers’ facilitation of principles for teaching and learning from an intercultural perspective

Of all three participants, it appeared from observation data that Mia was the only teacher who taught from an intercultural perspective. As discussed in the review of literature, teaching foreign languages from an intercultural perspective means to make pedagogical decisions on activities, learning resources, in a way that “invites the noticing, comparing, the making of intertextual and interexperiential connections, and prompts reflection on the nature of language, culture, communication, and learning in diversity” (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p.81).

All informants facilitated noticing and comparing to some extent during their lessons. However, there were significant differences between the points on which teacher Mia’s draw the pupils’ attention to and the other two informants. Mia led the pupils to make connections about both linguistic and cultural elements. She didn’t stop at presenting the information but made use of it as an opportunity for pupils’ reflection and interaction. The interaction didn’t always happen in English but she encouraged pupils who understood to articulate their understanding and reflection for the others in Finnish. The phenomena which she draw pupils’ attention to were varied, from words to linguistic and cultural differences, but shared the similarity that they were all connected to pupils’ daily life, as Mia stated “I always try to relate things and experiences to their own personal life and surroundings. Because, otherwise, you don’t learn properly, if it’s just a thing which hasn’t got a context for them.” One example was the word ‘Kinder’ for a chocolate brand, which Mia pointed out to be the plural form of ‘Kind’ in German, meaning ‘child’ in English. Another example was her discussion with the pupils about Valentines’ Day and what it meant for Finnish people; or her sharing information of the birthday party for the Head of the school with them and eliciting from the pupils about related words on birthday. This practice is in alignment
with the implications for teaching from an intercultural perspective as she not only drew upon learner’s cognition, but also their emotions – their interests about what’s happening around them (Kramsch, 2009). She inquired after pupils’ experiences of learning languages, their preferences across topics from food to movies and asked them to make sense of those experiences, for example the way people from different countries speak English with different accents (classroom observation, Feb 9).

For the other two teachers, facilitation of noticing and comparing were mostly related to linguistic phenomena – grammar points and vocabulary, where the teachers pointed out differences about grammar rules in English and Finnish (classroom observation, Taimi, Jan 23, Jan 31; Helen, Jan 26, Jan 30). However, the noticing and comparing didn’t bring about much reflection and interaction on pupils’ part, though they were facilitated to make sense of the grammar rules and vocabulary.

6.5 Factors that support and challenge teachers in implementing the objectives of instruction

This section addresses the fourth research question. In implementing the objectives of instruction, each teacher regarded the factors that support and challenge them differently. However, there are several points on which their perceptions are comparable, which are the teachers’ own attitudes and interests, their colleagues and the linguistic and cultural diversity in their work places.

6.5.1 Teachers’ own intercultural competence

All teachers mentioned that their own interests and enthusiasm in languages and cultures helped them to realize the objectives of instruction. Taimi shared that “because I have a lot of languages myself, I easily want to talk about different languages and compare things and bring up the languages that the kids have”. Besides, in guiding the pupils to appreciate linguistic and cultural
diversity as well as their own backgrounds, Taimi claimed that “I think Russian language or Russia has been a topic that I’ve tried with my own attitudes to make them think that it’s nice that some people speak different languages.’ For Mia, she acknowledged the importance of teachers having their own intercultural competence:

“If you don’t have any intercultural competence you couldn’t be not only a language teacher but a teacher in the first place. So it’s very important that you’re able to convey this positive attitude and openness and this equality not only between cultures but also when it comes to different sexes and so on.”

Helen saw that her interests were useful “in the sense that I can tell examples for the kids, what has happened to me and then I’m responsive to the stories they tell me”.

6.5.2 Teachers’ working environment

When asked about the factors that support them, both Mia and Helen stated that their colleagues played an important role in helping them implement the objectives of instruction. Mia shared that:

“The richness of this work is that you learn from each other and of course you share the knowledge you have about the children. I’m very proud of my colleagues, I’m very lucky to have people around me who are willing to work a lot, who want to develop themselves, who are open to new ideas”.

This view was echoed in Helen’s saying:

“I think great special need teachers and special teaching system, they are very supportive, without it, it would be impossible as the whole age group is here and it means that we have a lot of kids with special needs. And I’ll also say that the great class teachers, they’re great support. This is a good team”.

When it comes to their working environments, it appeared that the linguistic and cultural diversity found there were perceived as advantageous in facilitating pupils’ ICC development, while the
lack of them was, on the other hand, challenging for the teachers. For Mia, she stated that “here at this school, we are in a very lucky position because our school itself is a very international one…for them, this whole business of intercultural communication comes naturally…we have an ideal situation here.” In Helen’s case, she shared that “most of the groups in our school are very ethnically homogenous… My pupils are still young, aged 9-13 so they have varied or limited experiences about different countries.” Helen pointed this out as evidence for the limited intercultural encounters that her pupils have. Vis-à-vis to her view that ICC develops according to “the person’s own experiences” and that “social situations is something you learn somewhere else, not so much here”, it can be inferred that Helen reckoned these conditions as unfavorable to facilitating pupils’ ICC development.

In the case of Mia, though she shared that the working environment was favorable to her in many senses, it nevertheless posed certain challenges. Considering the many responsibilities she had working in a teacher training school, where she was constantly sought out for participation in research and other training activities, there was always a lack of time for her teaching job. She stated that “If you want to develop your teaching, methods, materials, teamwork, you need to have peace and quiet every now and then… I know that the majority of my colleagues we feel stressed out because we can’t do our work as well as we would like to do. It is due to the lack of time.” This lack of time can also be linked to the way Mia perceived the two field of competences ‘Cooperating with the children’s families’ and ‘Working as a team’ as her direct responsibilities as stated by the curriculum (Table 3). She elaborated that according to “the renewed curriculum, you’re supposed to do a lot of team work to support this cross-curricular competences”. This entails that implementing the new curriculum means that the teachers need to take into account not only
the objectives of instruction for their own subjects but also work collaborative with other teachers to plan and carry out “interdisciplinary learning units”.

6.5.3 Teacher academic autonomy

The academic freedom that teachers have in Finland has been known to the researcher prior to carrying out the study (Sahlberg, 2009). However, it appeared from the data that the autonomy teachers are entitled to contribute in different manners to their implementation of the new curriculum, especially in the process of evaluation. For the new curriculum, teachers are supposed to come up with their own criteria of assessment rather than adhere to certain criteria given to them from above. Mia shared that:

“We from the grass-root level have agreed on certain criteria that we want to take into account when we evaluate. And you need to write ‘open’ what these criteria mean so that even the parents or the child will understand… we don’t use any grades anymore so we have an evaluation which is based on descriptions in writing.”

It appeared in Mia’s case that she’d been taking the initiative in developing the system of assessment:

“We want to get more action based evaluation, also the families, the children and the peers can also take part in it… it’s good that we can develop the assessment system all the time… I’m glad that we’ve been able to make some adjustments and improvements.”

It was indicated from Mia’s narrative that she had been working collaboratively with her colleagues on this aspect, rather than on her own “we’re meeting again with my language colleagues and we try to improve it even further.”

In Helen’s case, the development of the assessment system underwent a different process “implementing the assessment is a bit of an open question still cause we are doing it individually
again and everybody’s doing it in his or her own way.” She shared that one of her colleagues had done “a big job about this with all the objectives” and that she was about to discuss the method with the others. However, their autonomy allowed them see whether it would be sensible or not to implement the same method. It can be inferred that although Helen enjoyed to a great extent the autonomy that she had “we can decide things on our own…we have pedagogical freedom in Finland” it can pose challenges at the same time:

“I think we mostly do it but the curriculum is written in a different way than before. This is the biggest challenge for us… It helps on the one hand but on the other hand, why does it have to be so academic or vague.”

In Taimi’s case, her school seemed to enjoy the academic freedom collectively in implementing the new curriculum “we have a lot of liberty we can choose how to do.” She shared that at her school, the teachers were not stressed about the new curriculum:

“We haven’t changed that much. I know that some schools in some parts of Finland have changed everything and are really stressed because of that. But we thought that we’d just look how others do and then pick up the best and change a little bit but not everything at the same time.”

She also mentioned their approach to evaluation “It doesn’t change that drastically in this school because we didn’t want to give up the number.” She also referred to her implementation of the curriculum in general “it’s pretty vague…so I don’t feel that it orders me to do much…I have some sort of ideas in my head but I’m not looking at that [the curriculum] all the time.”

6.5.4 The textbook

When it comes to the textbook, all three cases claimed that it supported their teaching. Thanks to the cultural information and activities that were included in the textbooks, the teacher could save a lot of time preparing materials. However, while Mia and Taimi emphasized that they “don’t
totally rely on textbooks” and that “nothing can replace our conversations with the kids”, respectively; Helen shared that the textbook was sufficient to a large extent. She elaborated that it was because the book they are using right now was:

“based on the curriculum and made by a highly qualified team of professionals of course it is always interesting to use other sources such as the internet or literature in addition to instead of the textbook but mostly I would say that our textbooks are great.”

All their views were in accordance with the practice noted during classroom observation as discussed in 4.4 that while Mia and Taimi based their teaching partly on the textbook, Helen appeared to follow it more closely.
7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary of results

The researcher set out to bridge the gap of understanding between Finnish education policies in the 2014 national core curriculum and the English teachers’ practice in terms of facilitating ICC development in the young learners. On answering the four research questions with data from interviews and observations, the researcher provided a thick description of the teachers’ perception of ICC and the objectives of instruction, their classroom practice to realize these objectives and what challenge them in implementing the new policies.

In sum, all three teachers acknowledged the interrelationship between language and culture and that language education is inevitably and intrinsically linked to the studies of cultures. Their understanding of the components of ICC were focused on the knowledge and attitudinal dimensions. Therefore, their observation of pupils’ ICC development seemed to be directed to the attitudes pupils have. This also explains their view that written assessment is unnecessary and irrelevant as pupils’ ICC has to do with their lived experiences and should be something interesting to discuss about rather than subjected to testing. They understood that the development of ICC is a long-term process and thus it is essential for learners to build up their competences already from a young age.

All teachers confirmed their familiarity with the objectives of instruction for English as a foreign language grade 3-6. However, their ways of interpreting the objectives were different and thus led to their various approaches and foci in implementing them. Examination of their classroom practice showed that the teachers’ behaviors mirrored their understanding of the objectives of instruction and ICC for young learners. Out of the three cases, only one teacher – Mia – appeared
to teach from an intercultural perspectives according to the principles by Liddicoat and Scarino (2013).

The data showed that there were several factors that supported or challenged the teachers’ implementation of the new curriculum. The first one was their own intercultural competence – all three cases shared that their own knowledge, interests, experiences and attitudes towards language and culture support their facilitation of pupils’ ICC development. The fact that they mostly reflected on their knowledge, interests and attitudes is consistent with their view of the components of ICC. The second one was their working environments. On the one hand, the teachers reported receiving and appreciating support coming from their collaboration with colleagues. On the other hand, for their facilitation of pupils’ ICC development, they regarded the linguistic and cultural diversity found at their workplace advantageous in one case, while the lack of it in another challenging. The third contributing aspect of the teachers’ working environments was the collective approach of each school, most evident in this study through their implementation of the evaluation process newly introduced in this curriculum. One case reported the collaborative effort of all language teachers to develop the assessment system, with open descriptions of pupils’ competences, which resonated with the essence of the new curriculum. Another shared that the teachers in her school worked individually on the issue and each had a different approach to evaluating their pupils. One case revealed that her school decided to not change the old system with evaluation represented by grades. This also points to the fact that educators in Finland are entitled to academic autonomy meaning they have much room to interpret educational policies and implement them.

One teacher – Mia – mentioned the lack of time that she faced in fulfilling all the responsibilities that she had. This lack of time that she faced can be connected to the way that she perceived the
curriculum as a whole, not only the objectives of instruction for her own subject. ‘Cooperating with the children’s families’ and ‘Working as a team’ are seen as of great importance and the essence of the new curriculum.

In addition, one factor that the teachers regarded as helpful was the textbooks available in Finland. Two cases reported the usefulness of textbooks in saving them time to prepare for material, but they emphasized that they didn’t depend on the textbook alone and that discussions with pupils were irreplaceable. The other case showed more advocacy of using the textbook as she explained that the latest one was designed in accordance with the objectives of instruction. Thus, following the textbook in her opinion was sufficient to a large extent in implementing the objectives.

7.2 Implications of results

7.2.1 Implication for policy makers

The findings of this study showed that the teachers enjoyed substantial academic freedom, which allowed them to implement educational policies according to their interpretation of them. It should be noted that not all the cases followed the ideas introduced in the new curriculum. There are two reasons for that. The first one is that the teacher and the school didn’t find it necessary to change their practice according to the new curriculum. The second one is that the teacher and the school had difficulties interpreting the curriculum and figuring out ways to realize its ideas. The fact that the teachers appeared confident in their teachings, regardless of how thoroughly they managed to enforce the curriculum implies that there is a gap between education policies presented in the curriculum and the practice by educators. The gap is manifested as two questions of why the ideas in the curriculum are important and novel, and how these ideas should best be implemented in practice. Therefore, if the curriculum is to be realized effectively across Finnish educational contexts, the rationale for ideas presented in it should be made clear for educators. Besides, there
should be examples of good practice for educators to refer to so that the curriculum become more concrete and realistic rather than a massive document of ambiguous ideals.

7.2.2 Implications for teachers

From the case of Mia as observed and analyzed, the researcher figured out that teaching from an intercultural perspective doesn’t depend on the linguistic and cultural diversity found in immediate environment of the school and classroom. Although Mia stated that her teaching environment with international visitors and pupils from various linguistic backgrounds is advantageous for the pupils’ development of ICC, her teaching from an intercultural perspective didn’t rely much on this factor. As observed, Mia’s facilitation of the pupil’s ICC development through the principles of noticing, comparing, reflecting and interacting resulted from her enthusiasm in the pupils’ personal meaning making process of phenomena and experiences. She always tried to guide the pupils to relate their own experiences to the linguistic and cultural information they encounter during a lesson. She made use of ICTs to get access to materials resourceful for pupils’ learning, thus facilitated their reflection and interaction without the availability of direct communication with people from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This entails that though linguistic and cultural diversity in the immediate environment may have certain merits, it is not prerequisite when it comes to facilitating the principles of teaching foreign languages from an intercultural perspective. The conditions that Mia and her pupils enjoyed – textbook, access to materials from the internet – are also available across many educational contexts. Therefore, it is possible for pupils’ ICC development to be facilitated with the principles even in culturally homogenous contexts.
7.3 Ethical considerations, trustworthiness and limitations of the study

7.3.1 Ethical considerations

One of the ethical considerations ensured in this study is the informed consent of the participants. The informants were acquainted with the research objectives and procedure before data collection. They gave consents with the knowledge that they were under no obligation to continue participation against their will. The research closely followed the procedure explained in the information sheet for participants. Anonymity was also guaranteed throughout the research as the participants were addressed by pseudonyms and all data have been kept confidential. Classroom observations didn’t violate confidentiality of pupil and teacher identity as the recordings were in audio form only.

7.3.2 Trustworthiness of the study

Internal validity of the study

According to Merriam (1998), internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match with reality. In qualitative research, what is being observed are people’s construction of reality – how they make sense of the world. Therefore, as in this type of research in general and this current study in particular, the primary instrument of data collection and analysis are human beings, it can be said that interpretations of reality are accessed directly through their observations and interviews (Merriam, 1998). The validity of this study is established through the various means of uncovering the complexity of the participants’ perceptions and behaviors. The strategies employed in this study to enhance its validity is firstly triangulation. It is the use of “multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). Triangulation is achieved in this research through different tools of data collection, which are interviews, and field observations. In the interview method itself, multiple
interviews were carried out to confirm the emerging data previously collected. In addition, questionnaires were utilized to elicit information from the participants with more depth and breadth. The fact that observation data was gathered over a period of time at the research site also strengthens the validity of the study.

**Reliability of the study**

As reliability in the traditional sense of the “extent to which research findings can be replicated” is problematic in the social sciences for the variable nature of human behavior, Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p.26) suggest the use of “consistency” of the result instead. “Consistency” or “dependability” according to Lincoln and Guba, refer to the fact that the results make sense, given the data collected (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, the question comes down to whether the results are consistent with the data collected rather than whether the findings will be generated again. This current study strived to achieve the above dependability through stating the researcher’s position, which is one of the strategies suggested by Merriam (1998). Theories of ICC and teaching from an intercultural perspective were explained as the ground for the study. Besides, the context of the latest Finnish education reform, its essence and the culture of Finnish education was given as rationale for the study. The criteria for the selection of informants were also provided. Further descriptions of the informants are to be found in the discussion of findings. Moreover, the use of triangulation, especially in terms of employing multiple methods of data collection also strengthens reliability of this research (Merriam, 1998).

**External validity of the study**

External validity is concerned with how much the findings are applicable to other situations, which is the generalizability of the study (Merriam, 1998). This research attempted to achieve this
external validity through a rich and thick description of the situation, so that the readers can decide how closely their situations similar to ones found in the research and thus, whether the research finding can be transferred. In addition, with the multiple case design of this research, a comparative perspective was offered, which also enhanced the possibility that the results are applicable in other situations.

7.3.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

The current research, as others among the case study design, carries the limitation of lack of generalizability to every educational context. However, the researcher attempted to optimize the validity and reliability of this research through different strategies.

Another limitation is that this research could not study the phenomenon from the perspective of pupils. Due to the lack of proficiency in a common language between the researcher and pupils, gaining in-depth understanding of pupils’ ICC was impossible. Besides, the relatively short span of time over which the data was collected wouldn’t allow the researcher to draw any concrete conclusion of a correlation between the pupils’ competence and the teacher’s understanding and behaviors. This limitation was attempted to overcome by determining the scope of the study from the beginning, which was to provide a comprehensive picture of the implementation of the new curriculum through the perspectives of the teachers. Future research may take on the correlation between teachers’ understanding and behaviors and pupils’ development of ICC. Data collection should cover a long period of time to obtain evaluative result of how successfully the curriculum is realized.
REFERENCE


Byram, M., Gribkova, B., & Starkey, H. *Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching - A practical introduction for teachers.* Language Policy Division - Council of Europe.


APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Information sheet for participants

University of Eastern Finland

Philosophical Faculty

School of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education

Teacher participant information sheet

Research project

Title: Intercultural competence for English language learners at primary school level – Finnish policy and classroom practice

1. What is the study about?

The study is about how Finnish teachers of English language understand intercultural competence in the primary school-age learners. It is about how teachers perceive the objectives of instruction stated in the Finnish national core curriculum for English grades 3-6. It examines how teachers realize the objectives of instruction that aim at developing learners’ intercultural competence.

2. Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being carried out by Thu Tra Tran as the graduation thesis for the Master’s Degree Programme in Early Language Education for Intercultural Communication jointly implemented by the University of Eastern Finland and Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia.

3. What does the study involve?
The multiple cases study involves three Finnish teachers teaching in two different primary schools and one group of their 5th grade English learners. Data collection is proposed over January and February 2018.

a. Teachers will be involved in an approximately 40-minute interview in the beginning of January. The interview examine their perception on intercultural competence in primary school-age learners and the objectives of instruction in the core curriculum for English grades 3-6. An audio recording of the interview will be made.

b. Observation of the teachers’ lessons will be made for 3 periods of 75 minutes or an equivalence of 5 periods of 45 minutes. The classes will be recorded with a written observation scheme and audio recording.

c. A second 40-minute interview with the teachers will be made. The teachers will be presented with collected data for reflection upon any discrepancies and emergent issues.

4. **How much time will the study take?**

The study will take two 40-minute interviews and up to 4 hours of observation.

5. **Will anyone else know about the result?**

Information of participants and raw data will only be accessible for the researcher. A report of the study will be submitted to the Degree Programme and the University’s library but the informants will not be identifiable in such a report.

6. **Can I withdraw from the study?**

The informants are entitled to withdrawal from this study at any stage without any prejudice.

7. **Will the study benefit me?**
This multiple case study is an opportunity for the teachers to reflect upon their pedagogical understanding and behaviors regarding intercultural teaching and learning at the primary school level. The teachers will be involved in reflecting on the policy regarding the objectives of instruction, its connection to their real teaching conditions and their actual practice. The process of reflection will enhance their understanding of intercultural language education and bridge their gap of perception between policy and classroom practice.

8. Can I tell other people about the study? Yes.

9. What if I have further question?

After having read this information sheet, you may inquire further and raise any concerns you have about the research with Thu Tra Tran. She is to discuss it with you and answer any question you may have.

This information sheet is for you to keep.
Appendix 2: Consent form for participants

University of Eastern Finland

Philosophical Faculty

School of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education

Teacher participant consent form

I, ................................................................., give consent to my participation in the research project titled: “Intercultural communicative competence for English language learners at primary school level – Finnish policy and classroom practice”.

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I have read the Participant Information Sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher.

3. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher(s) now or in the future.

4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

Signed: .....................................................................................................................

Name: .....................................................................................................................

Date: .....................................................................................................................
Appendix 3: Questions for the first interview

University of Eastern Finland

Philosophical Faculty

School of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education

Interview questions

About you

1 Could you please describe your language and education background?

2 How long have you been teaching English?/ length of time at this school.

About you and your teaching

3 Why did you choose to teach L2?

4 What are your main aims in planning/choosing teaching content and activities?

5 To what extent does the core curriculum help you plan your teaching content and activities?

6 Do you involve in planning the school curriculum?/ could you please briefly describe the process of planning?

About you and your understanding of intercultural learning

7 What is your understanding of intercultural learning at the primary-school aged?

Why is it necessary for young learners to have an intercultural communicative competence?

What does intercultural competence in young learners constitute?
What should be the focus in developing intercultural communicative competence in young learners?

8 Which of the objectives do you think aim at developing learners’ intercultural communicative competence? Could you please say the number of the objective as you mark?

9 How do you realize those objectives in your teaching?

10 (How) do you think the textbook supports development of intercultural learning?

11 What kinds of intercultural learning do you see happening in your pupils?

12 What do you think would be ideal classroom situation be for facilitating greater intercultural sensitivity?

13 How do you assess students’ intercultural development?
Appendix 4: Questionnaire used in the first interview

University of Eastern Finland

Philosophical Faculty

School of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education

Participant questionnaire

How would you rate the importance of the following objectives of instruction for English learner grades 3-6?

Please indicate the level of importance for each objective by marking one number from 1 to 5, 1 as unimportant, 2 as of little importance, 3 as of moderate importance, 4 as important and 5 as very important.

O1: to guide the pupil to notice the linguistic and cultural richness of his or her surroundings and the world, and the status of English as a language of global communication.

1 2 3 4 5

O2: to motivate the pupil to value his own her own linguistic and cultural background and the linguistic and cultural diversity of the world and to encounter people without prejudices.

1 2 3 4 5

O3: to guide the pupil to notice phenomena that are similar and different in languages and to support the pupil in developing his or her ability for linguistic reasoning.

1 2 3 4 5
O4: to guide the pupil to understand that there is plenty of material available in English and to select material with suitable content and level of difficulty that promotes his or her learning.

O5: to explore the objectives of the instruction jointly and to create a permissive classroom atmosphere in which getting the message across and encouraging learning together have the most important role.

O6: to guide the pupil to take responsibility for his or her language learning and to encourage the pupil to practice his or her language proficiency confidently, also using ICT and to experiment to find the ways of learning languages that are the best suited for him or her.

O7: to guide the pupil to practice interacting in situations with many types of themes and to encourage him or her to continue regardless of possible temporary breaks in communication.

O8: to encourage the pupil to maintain a communication situation by using many different means of continuing the communication.

O9: to support the cultural appropriateness of the pupil’s communication by offering possibilities for practicing diverse social situations
O10: to guide the pupil to work with spoken and written texts with many different levels of difficulty, using different comprehension strategies

1  2  3  4  5

O11: to offer the pupil opportunities for producing speech and writing on expanding subject areas, also paying attention to essential structures and the basic rules of pronunciation

1  2  3  4  5
Appendix 5: Questionnaire used in the second interview

University of Eastern Finland
Philosophical Faculty
School of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education

Participant questionnaire

Please indicate the extent to which you are able to fulfil the following descriptors of teacher professional competences in the plurilingual and intercultural dimension. Please indicate how you assess yourself by drawing a circle around one of the numbers accompanying each descriptor:

1 as I’m not sure exactly how to do this. I need to learn.

2 as I have thought about this and tried to obtain information but I still have questions about the practical implementation.

3 as I have made progress but I have more to learn;

4 as I can do this fairly well;

I. Analysing and adapting how to talk to children

1. I can tell whether the language I am using is well adapted to the abilities and needs of children in this age group.

   1  2  3  4

2. I can react effectively when the children do not seem to understand everything I am saying to them.

   1  2  3  4

3. I can make each child feel involved in the discussions.
4. I can encourage children to participate actively in discussions.

5. I can use the language(s) that I speak with the children for achieving specific objectives in terms of their linguistic development.

II. Responding positively to linguistic and cultural diversity

1. I can convey to the children my interest in linguistic and cultural diversity.

2. I can respond positively when linguistic and cultural diversity is manifested in the way children express themselves or behave.

3. I can treat certain children’s plurilingualism and experience of different cultures as a genuine resource for the group.

4. I can take action to ensure that families who speak other languages or come from different cultures receive a positive welcome in the institution.

5. I can identify possible causes of misunderstanding due to differences of cultural behaviour and act as a mediator between children, parents or other adults.

III. Taking account of the way in which young children acquire languages
1. I can organise the classroom space in a way that encourages the children to join in with language-related activities and to interact with each other.

2. I can encourage the children to use non-verbal communication to support oral expression.

3. I can make use of each activity to foster the children’s linguistic development.

4. I can take account of the emotional dimension in linguistic exchanges with and between the children.

5. I can use the resources offered by information and communication technologies to develop the children’s language skills and cultural awareness.

IV. Organising activities on the theme of languages and diversity

1. I can draw on the presence of different languages and cultures in the immediate environment.

2. I can guide children in their encounters with different linguistic or cultural behaviour and encourage them to talk about this subject.

3. I can draw maximum benefit from the moments when the children start becoming aware of the workings of the language.

4. I can give a communicative dimension to moments of reflection about language.
5. I can stimulate children’s curiosity about writing.

1 2 3 4

V. Taking children’s individual needs into account

1. I can identify each child’s communication skills and language needs using appropriate observation instruments.

1 2 3 4

2. I can help each child progress at his/ her own pace.

1 2 3 4

3. I can ensure that each child is given the opportunity to speak.

1 2 3 4

4. I can help develop each child’s confidence in the use of languages.

1 2 3 4

5. I can respond to difficulties of oral expression that a child may encounter.

1 2 3 4

VI. Supporting the linguistic development of children with other first languages.

1. I can take account of the specific situation of children with other first languages in order to identify their individual abilities and needs.

1 2 3 4

2. I can take account in the support that I give these children of their particular linguistic or cultural competences and knowledge.

1 2 3 4
3. I can help children to build on their first language in order to make progress in acquiring the language used for exchanges within the group.

1 2 3 4

4. I can encourage exchanges between children with different levels of proficiency in the language being used.

1 2 3 4

5. I can react appropriately to verbal or non-verbal behaviour that may stem from different cultural traditions.

1 2 3 4

VII. Cooperating with the children’s families.

1. I can see to it that all the people with responsibility for the child feel welcome in the institution.

1 2 3 4

2. I can involve the families in teaching projects that are directly related to the children’s linguistic and cultural development.

1 2 3 4

3. I can exchange with the children’s families about the activities that are the most conducive to children’s language acquisition.

1 2 3 4

4. I can exchange with the children’s families about the children’s progress.

1 2 3 4

5. I can encourage the incorporation of resources existing within the families into the organisation of activities with the children.

1 2 3 4
VIII. Working as a team.

1. I can contribute to an exchange of practices and ideas between team members.
   1  2  3  4

2. I can collaborate with other team members on joint projects relating to the children’s linguistic development.
   1  2  3  4

3. I can accept remarks, queries and advice from colleagues and teacher educators and take them into account in my management of the group.
   1  2  3  4

4. I can provide colleagues and primary school teachers with useful information about the linguistic development of the children for whom I am responsible.
   1  2  3  4

5. I can make use of the resources offered by partnerships with other institutions or associations.
   1  2  3  4