



UNIVERSITY OF
EASTERN FINLAND

A Comparison of Finnish and American Perspectives on
Home-school Cooperation for Early Foreign Language
Learning

Kristina Rexford

Master's Degree Programme in

Early Language Education for

Intercultural Communication

University of Eastern Finland

Philosophical Faculty

School of Applied Educational

Science and Teacher Education

15.10.2024

University of Eastern Finland, Philosophical Faculty

School of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education

Early Language Education for Intercultural Communication

Rexford, Kristina B.: A Comparison of Finnish and American Perspectives on Home-school

Cooperation for Early Foreign Language Learning

Thesis, 82 pages, 5 appendices (9 pages)

Thesis instructor, Professor Ritva Kantelinen

15 October 2024

Abstract

The collaboration between home and school plays a significant role in a pupil's early foreign language learning. It is therefore important to obtain a deeper understanding of the parents'/guardians' perspectives on this matter.

This thesis aims to take a closer look at the existing home-school cooperation regarding early foreign language learning in the USA and Finland. It is a continuation of research conducted in the course "Research in Early Language Education, Spring 2023" in the school of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education at the University of Eastern Finland, in which 20 student-researchers from 9 different countries interviewed parents from their home countries to address the question: "What are parents'/guardians' interests and needs for home-school cooperation in the children's early foreign language learning?". This study investigates parents'/guardians' experiences in the USA and Finland with home-school cooperation regarding their child's early foreign language learning and asks what changes or improvements they would like to see implemented in the future.

To obtain the parents'/guardians' viewpoints, a qualitative research approach was adopted through nine semi-structured interviews. Due to the language proficiency and the location of the author, the interviews were conducted in English and in-person or over video calls for the five Finnish parents, and in English over video calls for the four American parents. The interviews were transcribed, and the relevant portions were used for content and comparative analysis.

The upcoming findings will provide insight into the frequency, types, and content of the home-school cooperation in both countries. They will also provide awareness to key stakeholders such as educators and administrators on what changes parents think are

needed to improve these interactions for their child's early foreign language learning success. At its conclusion, the findings will be shared via digital leaflet to the staff working at university affiliated teacher training schools and to my professional network.

Keywords: Early foreign language learning, home-school cooperation, parents'/guardians' interests, Finland, the USA

Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely express my gratitude to all who made my time at the University of Eastern Finland a remarkable experience.

First and foremost, I owe my deepest thanks to professor Ritva Kantelinen for her unwavering support. As a professor, mentor, and at times, a colleague, I could always turn to her for her wisdom and expertise. I would also like to thank my other teachers and professors for their knowledge, all of whom, in one way or another, have prepared me to pursue this research.

Similarly, I would like to thank my colleagues at the UEF Teacher Training Schools, especially those involved with the “From School Path to Global Citizen’s Highway – III” project. Thank you for welcoming me into your classrooms and sharing your practices. I will always cherish the time I spent working in the Finnish classrooms, and plan to share what I have learned about the Finnish school system with my American colleagues.

Additionally, I would like to thank my tutors and classmates studying in the Philosophical Faculty, with whom I participated in deep discussions about international educational systems, their own teaching experiences, and their future wishes for our field. Thank you all for sharing your insights and feedback, and in some cases, a pot of tea or a meal. Many of you have become lifelong friends, and I am grateful for the time we spent together. I would also like to thank the wider community of international students, especially my flat mates, neighbors, and my fellow board and active members of Joensuu’s Exchange and International Students (JEIS). Thank you for making Joensuu feel like home; for creating such a warm and welcoming community, and for supporting each other through the highlights and challenges of moving to a new country. I look forward to staying in touch.

Finally, I would like to thank my immediate and extended family, without whom, this journey would not have been possible. Thank you to my parents and my sister for their dedicated love and support, and for instilling in me the confidence to follow my dreams. I would also like to thank my international family members– to my family in Denmark for hosting me for Christmas, and to my family in Greece for inviting me to come see the sun during the winter months. Thank you to my fiancé, Ioannis, for his constant encouragement, some of which saw me through the most challenging times of my personal and professional lives. I am deeply grateful for his love and support and am honored to have him as my partner as we navigate these next chapters of our lives together, regardless of where that will be.

Abbreviations

CPH	Critical Period Hypothesis
EDUFI	Finnish National Agency for Education (in Finnish: Opetushallitus)
EFL	Early foreign language learning
FI	Finland
FL	Foreign language
FLL	Foreign language learning
FNBE	Finnish National Board of Education (in Finnish: Opetushallitus)
HSC	Home-school cooperation
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics (USA)
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	The Programme for International Student Assessment
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
RELE	Research in Early Language Education
TENK	Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (in Finnish: Tutkimuseettinen neuvottelukunt)
USA	United States of America

Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abbreviations.....	iv
List of Figures.....	8
List of Tables	9
1 Introduction.....	10
1.1 Context of research	10
1.2 Concepts and Definitions.....	12
2 Theoretical Framework: Home-School Cooperation and Early Foreign Language Learning.....	14
2.1 Bronfenbrenner’s Ecology of Human Development Theory	14
2.2 Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence.....	17
2.3 Home-School Cooperation and Early Foreign Language Learning.....	20
3 Country Specific Background Information	22
3.1 Education in Finland	22
3.1.1 The existing home-school cooperation frameworks in Finland.....	23
3.1.2 Foreign language learning in Finland.....	25
3.2 Education in the USA.....	27
3.2.1 The existing home-school cooperation frameworks in the USA	27
3.2.2 Foreign language learning in the USA.....	29
3.3 A comparison of Finnish and American educational systems and frameworks.....	31

4	Research Questions.....	34
5	Methodology	35
5.1	Research Process	35
5.2	Locate Participants	36
5.3	Develop working relationship with the participants	40
5.4	Conduct research and data collection	40
5.5	Data analysis	42
5.6	Research ethics, validity and reliability	44
5.6.1	Ethics	44
5.6.2	Validity in Qualitative Research.....	45
5.6.3	Reliability in Qualitative Research	46
6	Findings and Discussion	48
6.1	Home-school cooperation as experienced and reported in Finland	48
6.1.1	Levels, forms and details of home-school cooperation – Finland.....	49
6.1.2	Desires, interests and needs of home-school cooperation – Finland.....	53
6.2	Home-school cooperation as experienced and reported in the USA	57
6.2.1	Levels, forms and details of home-school cooperation – USA.....	57
6.2.2	Desires, interests and needs of home-school cooperation – USA.....	61
6.3	Similarities and differences between experienced cooperation in Finland and the USA	66
6.3.1	Similarities and differences in the levels, forms, and details of home-school cooperation in Finland and the USA.....	66

6.3.2	Similarities and differences in the desires, interests, and needs of home-school cooperation in Finland and the USA.....	71
7	Conclusion	75
7.1	Evaluation of the research.....	76
7.2	Implications	77
7.3	Future studies	78
	References	79
	Appendices.....	84
	Appendix I: RELE Poster as presented at LinguaPeda Conference 2023.....	84
	Appendix II: List of areas of home-school cooperation in Finland as described in Finnish law (<i>Basic Education Act, 1998</i>)	85
	Appendix III: Call for Volunteers	86
	Appendix IV: Participant Letter	88
	Appendix V: Informational leaflet to be shared with professional network	92

List of Figures

Figure 1: An illustration of Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Theory.....	15
Figure 2: An illustration of Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence	18
Figure 3: Summary of the two educational systems under examination. Left: Educational system in the United States, (NCES, 2001a), Right: Education system in Finland, (EDUFI, 2022).	32
Figure 4: The educational research process I followed as suggested by Cohen, Mannion, and Morrison (2018)	36

List of Tables

Table 1: Six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 2009) and their examples	19
Table 2: PISA Parental involvement indicators (OECD 2023a, 2023b).....	33
Table 3: Interviewee background information (*- Parent and child(ren) immigrated to Finland from a different country **- language not applicable to all children).....	39
Table 4: Duration of interview recordings	41
Table 5: Methods of cooperation– Finland.....	49
Table 6: Frequency of home-school cooperation – Finland	50
Table 7: Who initiates the home-school cooperation – Finland	51
Table 8: What the home-school cooperation entails – Finland.....	52
Table 9: Parent interest in home-school cooperation – Finland.....	53
Table 10: Parent satisfaction with the home-school cooperation – Finland	55
Table 11: Methods of cooperation– USA	58
Table 12: Frequency of home-school cooperation – US	59
Table 13: Who initiates the home-school cooperation – US	59
Table 14: Parent interest in home-school cooperation – US.....	62
Table 15: Parent satisfaction with home-school cooperation – USA.....	64
Table 16: Common contents of home-school cooperation in Finland and the USA.....	70
Table 17: Similarities in parent interest in home-school cooperation – Finland and the USA	71
Table 18: Parent needs for home-school cooperation	73

1 Introduction

The partnership between a child's home and their school has been extensively studied over the past few decades (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Epstein, 2009; Guedes et al., 2024; Hakyemez-Paul, 2020). Educators and non-educators alike have agreed that home-school cooperation plays an integral role in a child's early years in education. Studies have shown that when the school and the home work in cooperation, it is more likely that there will be an improved school climate and better school and family services, which in turn leads to better student academic skills and outcomes (Epstein, 1992, 2009; Sanders & Epstein, 2000). Additional studies have indicated that parental involvement in their child's education leads not only to better academic skills and outcomes, but increased cognitive skills, better interpersonal relationships, and improved well-being (Avnet et al., 2019; Castro et al., 2015; Kocayörük, 2016; Sadownik et al., 2022).

In this study, I will build upon the existing literature on this topic and combine it with the existing home-school cooperation and language learning structures in both Finland and the United States to learn more about parent perspectives on home-school cooperation for early foreign language learning.

1.1 Context of research

This research is largely inspired by my coursework from the University of Eastern Finland. In the course "Research in Early Language Education, Spring 2023", in the school of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education, my classmates and I undertook the research project entitled "What are parents' or guardians' interests and needs for home-school cooperation in the child's early language learning?". In this project, we explored the existing home-school cooperation in nine different countries from three different continents. In our background research, we found that some countries, like Finland, have mandatory home-

school cooperation as it is a part of their Basic Education law and 2014 National Core Curriculum (*Basic Education Act*, 1998; FNBE, 2016). Meanwhile, the majority of other studied countries do not mention home-school cooperation in their national or local guidelines. In addition to asking parents and guardians about the current levels of home-school cooperation, we asked parents/guardians what changes they would like to see, such as if or how they would like to change their own cooperation, and if or how they would like the school to change their cooperation. An overwhelming majority of the interviewed parents agreed that home-school cooperation is needed and has a positive impact on their child's early language learning. Most parents/guardians also expressed that they were dissatisfied with the current levels of cooperation, communication, and collaboration. At the conclusion of the project, we found that parents would like to see improved means of communication and effectiveness of home-school cooperation, and that parents in some countries would like to see legislative changes regarding this matter. The research findings were then compiled in a poster, see Appendix I, and presented at the LinguaPeda 2023 Conference¹ in Jyväskylä, Finland (Rexford et al., 2024).

This study, combined with my personal experience as a foreign language learner and later, a foreign language teacher in both the United States and in Finland, inspired me to further pursue the topic of home-school cooperation in regards to foreign language learning. I have a combined 22 years of experience of learning a foreign language; as an early foreign language learner learning French as a child in the US, continuing my French education as a teenager and young adult, and learning Greek and Finnish as an adult. Additionally, I have three years of experience as a kindergarten French immersion teacher in the USA, and two years of experience as an English teacher to grades 1-6 in Finland. While I have many first-hand experiences learning and teaching languages in different contexts, I find myself

¹ LinguaPeda 2023 Conference - a two-day conference focused on multilingualism held in Jyväskylä, Finland: https://converis.jyu.fi/converis/portal/detail/Project/177099714?lang=en_GB

wondering more about what the parents think about their involvement in their child's language learning process.

1.2 Concepts and Definitions

In this section, I will define and describe the terms frequently used throughout this thesis report. In the scope of this thesis, **home** in home-school cooperation refers to the child's primary caretakers, in this case their parents/guardians. It should be noted that while guardians were welcomed to participate in this study, all participants were the biological mothers or fathers of the child or children in question. Therefore, I will refer to them as the parents. As mentioned in the title, this thesis investigates the perspectives of both American and Finnish parents. In the scope of this thesis, **American** refers to the parents who are currently living in and have a child or children attending school in the United States of America. Similarly, **Finnish** refers to the parents who are currently living in and have a child or children attending school in Finland. As used in this thesis, the words "American" and "Finnish" do not necessarily describe the parents' or children's nationalities, nor do they represent the thoughts, feelings and experiences of all parents living in those countries. As this is a small-scale case study, I am not attempting to generalize of the American and Finnish populations as a whole.

Conversely to home, **school** refers to all the adults working at the school, whether they be classroom teachers, language teachers, administrators, or other personnel. As such, the term **home-school cooperation** describes the multi-faceted working relationship between the home and the school. In other bodies of literature, home-school cooperation may be called "parental engagement", "parental involvement", "home-school partnerships", etc. This may include all communications and collaborations initiated either by the home or the school such as emails, messages, phone calls, meetings, newsletters, etc. This cooperation may take place in-person or through other means of correspondence.

Additionally, in this research, **foreign language** refers to a language the child is learning at school that is other than their mother tongue. In the context of this study, this may include the national or second national language of the country where the child is living, or additional language(s) in the curriculum offered by the school. For reference, **mother tongue** can be described as the child's home language. It is the language they first learn, and depending on their household circumstances, it is possible for a child to have multiple mother tongues. As such, **early foreign language learning** refers to the first five years in which a child is learning a language at school that is other than their mother tongue. The term "early" does not refer to the child's age, but rather the first years they have been learning the language. Finally, **home-school cooperation for early foreign language learning** refers to any and all the cooperation that takes place between the home and the school regarding the child's early foreign language learning.

2 Theoretical Framework: Home-School Cooperation and Early Foreign Language Learning

The collaboration between home, school, and community is very important for a child's education as when those three factors work as a cohesive unit, children can benefit in terms of their social, emotional, and academic development as described by Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986, 1994) and Epstein's (1992, 2009; 2000) theoretical frameworks. In this thesis, I will focus specifically on the dynamics between home and school. The following section will discuss the relevant and widely used theories that encourage home-school cooperation and how they relate to a child's early foreign language learning.

2.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) is a world renowned expert in developmental psychology, widely known for his contributions to developmental research, including over 300 publications, over 50 years of teaching, and countless awards won domestically and abroad (Lang et al., 2005; *Trailblazers: Urie Bronfenbrenner*, n.d). His groundbreaking work has helped shape decades of social and behavioral research and influenced policy changes such as the introduction of Head Start ² in the USA.

Bronfenbrenner's most well-known theory is "The Ecology of Human Development Theory". This theory describes how a child grows within, is affected by, and affects the environment around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 1994). The environment is a complex, consisting of an embedded system of co-contained concentric systems. These systems are

² Head Start – a federal early childhood education program that ensures high quality education for all children, regardless of their household's income <https://nhsa.org/>

referred to as the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and chronosystem. My understanding of the systems is illustrated in Figure 1 and further described in the subsequent paragraphs.

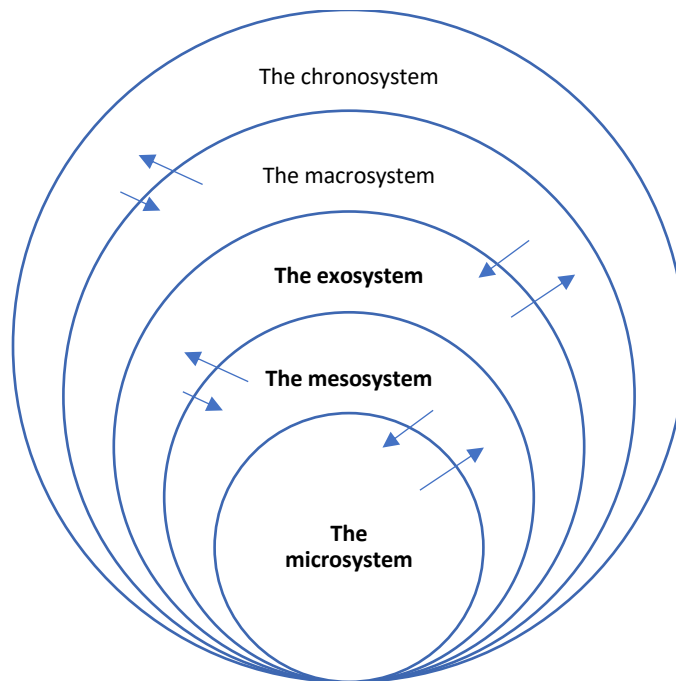


Figure 1: An illustration of Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Theory

Though home-school cooperation can take place at all levels on the environment, for the purposes of this paper I will focus on the microsystem, the mesosystem, and the exosystem, as those are where the most direct forms of home-school cooperation occur.

The microsystem is made up of the activities, roles, and interactions a person experiences in any given setting. A child generally interacts with multiple microsystems, for example their families, their school and places of other activities such as socializing, sports, or worship (Kennedy & Laurillard, 2024; Pherali et al., 2020). Due to the rapid rise of technology use in both the home and the schools, Navarro and Tudge (2022), suggest in their neo-ecological theory that the microsystem should consider both in person and online interactions. In the context of home-school cooperation the child has a microsystem

at home with their parents, and a microsystem at school with their teachers and foreign language teachers. The parents have great influence over a child's home microsystem and teachers have great influence over a child's school microsystem.

The mesosystem refers to when people from two or more of the microsystems interact with each other. This also includes their attitudes about one another. This is where activities that take place in one microsystem, for example the school, can have a direct impact on their activities in another microsystem, for example the home (Kocayörük, 2016). In the context of home-school cooperation, this commonly includes parents visiting the school for an orientation or parent-teacher conference, or sometimes includes a teacher visiting a child's home or after school activity (Kennedy & Laurillard, 2024; Pherali et al., 2020). It could also include online communication between the parents and the teachers in regard to the child's learning. The mesosystem is where the bulk of home-school cooperation occurs.

The exosystem is a setting that directly impacts a child, though the child is not an active participant. In the context of home-school cooperation, this could include the parents attending a parent association meeting. Though the child is not directly involved, the decisions made within this system have an impact on their learning and thus their life. When home-school cooperation takes place at a high level, both parents and teachers can advocate for children's needs in their own exosystems, thus having a greater impact.

Though the Ecology of Human Development Theory was originally published over 40 years ago, it is still widely used by researchers today. The theory provides a framework for home-school cooperation for both parents and teachers alike. It suggests that the home and the school do not operate as separate entities, but rather as nested systems with direct links to one another. There are many places where home and school can and should overlap for the benefit of the child.

2.2 Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence

Joyce Epstein is a leading sociologist, whose on-going work including over 150 publications, co-direction of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, and teaching at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education has helped shaped policy, research and practice regarding home-school cooperation (*Joyce L. Epstein, PhD, n.d.*). One of her most well-known theories is the "Overlapping Spheres of Influence" theory.

Similar to Bronfenbrenner's theory of "The Ecology of Human Development", Epstein's "Overlapping Spheres of Influence" theory recognizes the intersecting impacts that the home and the school have on a child. In Epstein's theory, she describes that there are three main domains of influence in a child's life: their home, their school, and their community (Epstein, 1992, 2009; Sanders & Epstein, 2000). These domains can either be connected or disjointed. Epstein suggests that when the domains are disjointed, this frequently leads to a "you do your job, I do my job" mentality held by the home and the school alike. This type of mentality ultimately does not benefit the child. However, when all domains primarily focus on the growth of the child instead of their individual contributions in isolation, the educational climate drastically improves. My understanding of the "Overlapping Spheres of Influence" theory is illustrated in Figure 2. The home, school, and community all have areas where they overlap, but the child is always in the center.

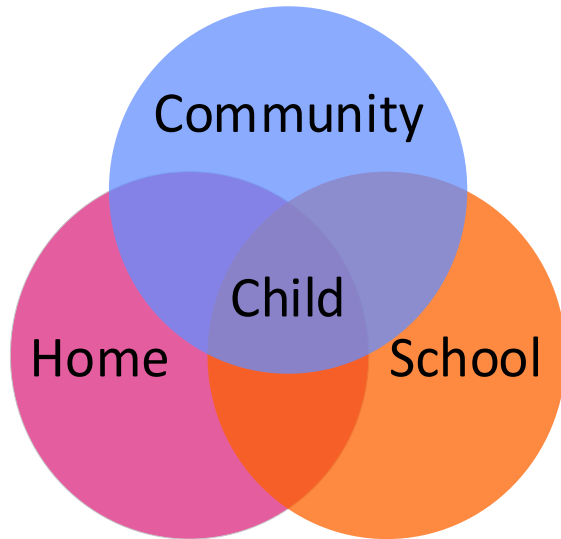


Figure 2: An illustration of Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence

This concept is further supported by the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The PTA advocates that when parents are involved, it creates a more positive environment for the students. As stated in the subsection “How PTAs benefit Schools” of the PTA webpage, increased parental involvement in turn leads to “improved academic performance, better attendance rates and reduced behavioral issues” (PTA, n.d-a) But the involvement is not a one-way street; the parents’ involvement does not only benefit the children. Parental involvement also supports the parents, the schools and the teachers, for example, by fundraising for extra resources, by organizing volunteers, and by advocating for the students’ and school’s needs to the wider community (PTA, n.d-a, n.d-b).

As previously mentioned, in the scope of this thesis I will focus specifically on the overlap that occurs between the home and the school. While the child is the main contributor to their own success, when there are home-school partnerships, the child is better supported and thus more likely to achieve that success. For example, early home-school cooperation has a positive influence on school readiness, learning outcomes, and later academic achievement (Olivia-Olson et al., 2022). Additional research supports this claim and suggests that the cooperation leads improved academic skills (Avnet et al., 2019; Castro et

al., 2015; Kocayörük, 2016), improved cognitive skills (Castro et al., 2015) and increased student well-being and improved interpersonal relationships (Guedes et al., 2024).

There are many forms of home-school cooperation. Epstein (2009) defines six types of parental involvement described in the Table 1. The examples come from the literature (Epstein, 2009) as well as personal experience as both a student and a teacher.

Table 1: Six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 2009) and their examples

Name	Explanation	Examples
Type 1- Parenting	Parents are responsible for the child's health and safety. The schools can help families by sharing information child development and practices that support a child's education at home.	- School sharing information about immunizations - Home visits from school employee when needed
Type 2- Communicating	School-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and child's progress.	- Report cards - Individual communications such as emails or Wilma messages
Type 3- Volunteering	When parents share their time and resources to support the school, classroom, and teachers. Also, when teachers/administrators share their time and resources outside of their normal working hours.	- Parents volunteering in the classroom as an assistant - Parents acting as chaperones during field trips
Type 4- Learning at home	Where the school shares ideas and information to help students with their academic work.	- Parents helping with homework at home - Parents reading to/with their child at home
Type 5- Decision making	When families participate in decisions about school programs that affect their own children	- Parents and teachers becoming members of the PTA - Voting in local/ national elections
Type 6- Collaborating with the community	Any collaboration activity with the community that encourages cooperation between home, school, and community	- Local businesses sponsoring school activities - Food drives/ clothing drives at school for local community shelters

2.3 Home-School Cooperation and Early Foreign Language Learning

Both the home and the school must work together for a child's early foreign language learning. For example, in Krashen's Monitor Theory, he states that second language acquisition is similar to first language acquisition in that the language learner constructs meaning based off of the input they receive (Krashen, 1982; VanPatten et al., 2020). As such, there is a difference between second language acquisition, where the second language learning is acquired through underlying innate processes, and second language learning, where the language is learned through explicit systems focused on grammar and vocabulary (VanPatten et al., 2020). In this case, the home and the school are likely working separately from each other. For instance, in the case of children learning Greek at home with their Greek parent(s) the child is likely learning the language implicitly. In this case, the language learning responsibility falls on the parent/home. In the case of learning a foreign language at school, the teacher is most likely using explicit instruction to teach the language, teaching both grammar and vocabulary as outlined by many foreign language curriculums. In this case, the teacher/school would shoulder most of the language learning responsibility. In these situations, the home and the school are working separately from each other. However, more recent studies, such as Muñoz 2014 have discovered that early exposure to the foreign language alone is not sufficient, and that both the home and the school must work together for a child's early foreign language learning.

To learn a foreign language, children must be exposed to informal learning environments in the language, such as at home and on the playground, and in formal contexts such as the classroom or other formal learning environments. They must receive both implicit and explicit instruction. As such, both parents and teachers play an important role in the child's early foreign language learning. More frequent exposure to the foreign language in a variety of settings gives the child ample opportunities to hear and practice the foreign language. In early foreign language learning, both the amount and quality of input of the foreign language is key (Muñoz, 2014). This is true even in cases of simultaneous

acquisition, where a child learns two languages from birth. Even in these cases, bilingualism will only be reached if “opportunities are regularly available to practice and develop competence in both languages” (Pinter, 2017 , p.34). This is especially important for parents who have children with multiple household languages, and for parents who are living in a country that speaks a different language than their child’s mother tongue. While their child may be exposed to a foreign language(s) either at home or at school, to help them become fluent in said language, the parents, even those who do not speak the foreign language themselves, must work with the school to provide both the formal and informal opportunities for language learning. As such, the collaboration between home and school plays a significant role in a pupil’s early foreign language learning.

In summation of this chapter, home-school cooperation plays a beneficial role during a child’s school years. As noted by Bronfenbrenner and his Ecology of Human Development Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 1994), and by Epstein and her Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory (Epstein, 1992, 2009; Sanders & Epstein, 2000), there are many places where the home and the school can and should overlap for the child’s overall well-being and academic performance. Though there is not as much literature on how home-school cooperation directly impacts foreign language learning, research suggests that to learn a new language, the quality and amount of exposure is paramount. As such, one may assume that it would be beneficial for the child if the school and the home cooperated in this regard to provide a child with more opportunities and settings in which to interact with the language. In this thesis, I will explore the topic of home-school cooperation regarding a child’s early foreign language learning more deeply.

3 Country Specific Background Information

In the following chapter, I will describe the educational systems and existing home-school cooperation frameworks in Finland and the USA. At the end of this chapter, I will highlight key similarities and differences that exist between the two countries.

3.1 Education in Finland

The Finnish educational system is internationally renowned due to the student's consistent success on the PISA test since 2000 (Niemi et al., 2012; Ustun & Eryilmaz, 2018). In addition to the student's high achievement, the country is well known for their high quality, equitable and accessible education, well-educated and highly trained teachers, and their dedication to lifelong learning (Alasuutari, 2010; EDUFI, 2021, 2022; Niemi et al., 2012; Ustun & Eryilmaz, 2018).

The Finnish education system consists of seven parts: early childhood education and care, pre-primary education, primary and lower secondary education, upper secondary education, higher education, adult education, and non-formal education (EDUFI, 2022). All students aged 6-18 attend at least pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education (EDUFI, 2022). This education is provided either by municipality schools or private schools (private schools are still government dependent), however the vast majority of students attend municipality schools. In 2017, there were 85 state-owned or private schools compared to 2,269 municipality or joint municipality schools (EDUFI, 2019b). Home-school cooperation begins in early childhood education and care (Purola et al., 2022) and continues through upper secondary school (EDUFI, 2019c). However, as this thesis primarily focuses on Finnish students enrolled in basic education, I will mostly focus on the home-school cooperation that occurs at that level.

Primary and lower secondary education currently follow the 2014 National Core Curriculum (EDUFI, 2022; FNBE, 2016) published by the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) for the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI). The curriculum contains the objectives, core subjects and transversal competencies, and other topics such as special education, assessment and pupil welfare are also addressed (EDUFI, 2021; FNBE, 2016) (EDUFI, 2022). Education providers are then able to draw up their own local curricula that fits within the framework of the national core curriculum. This includes, for example, which language program will be used.

3.1.1 The existing home-school cooperation frameworks in Finland

The Finnish education system places a strong emphasis on cooperation and collaboration between parents, teachers, and the community (Alasuutari, 2010; Hakyemez-Paul, 2020). As such, there are many types of home-school cooperations practices in place in Finland. This cooperation includes group meetings, one-on-one meetings, information such parental workshops and seminars, regular student feedback, frequent online communication through online communication (such as Wilma³), and involvement in parents' association and networking activities (FNBE, 2016). Generally, teachers, student-teachers, and parents alike feel positively towards the cooperation (Orell & Pihlaja, 2020; Perälä-Littunen & Böök, 2019; Purola et al., 2022). However factors such as lack of parent interest in cooperation and lack of parent and/or teacher time may sometimes affect this cooperation (Perälä-Littunen & Böök, 2019; Purola et al., 2022).

The basis for home-school cooperation comes from Finnish law, more specifically, the Finnish Basic Education Act. As stated in chapter 1, section 3: "Those providing education shall cooperate with pupils' parents/carers" (*Basic Education Act*, 1998). The home and the

³ Wilma - Wilma is a popular education tool in Finland <https://www.wilma.fi/>

school cooperate in many areas regarding a child's education. These areas include but are not limited to the language of instruction in cases where education is being provided in more than one language (Section 10), the choice of which religious or ethics class to attend (Section 13), and a pupil's special needs support (Sections 17). The full list of areas for home-school cooperation as outlined The Basic Education Act can be found in Appendix II.

The 2014 National Core Curriculum (NCC) expands upon the Basic Education Act and provides specific details on the home-school cooperation. In Section 5.2, the FNBE states that home-school cooperation is needed to support a child's healthy growth and development (FNBE, 2016). Though the parents are primarily responsible for raising their child or children and ensuring that their child or children complete their compulsory education, it is the school's responsibility to support them on both an individual and communal level in this task. This support includes, but is not limited to, the school providing the home with information regarding their child's learning and growth, notifying them of any absences, and keeping them abreast of other key issues such as the curriculum, learning environments, and support for learning (FNBE, 2016). The NCC also notes that it is the school's responsibility to foster an environment conducive to cooperation, an environment built on trust, equality, and mutual respect. Home-school cooperation continues into upper secondary school. In Section 3.5 of the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education, home-school cooperation is a general part of upper secondary school culture; however, the students are now more actively involved in the process. In upper secondary school, both the students and the parents cooperate with the school and are informed of student work, progress and well-being (EDUFI, 2019c). In addition to the basic and upper secondary National Core Curricula, schools provide local curricula. It is in these school level curricula where "cooperation with homes and instruction of pupils requiring special support or belonging to different language and cultural groups are defined in more detail" (EDUFI, 2022 , p. 9). Overall, there are many opportunities for the home and the school to engage in meaningful cooperation.

In spite of the systems in place supporting home-school cooperation, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results of 2023 showed that Finland followed the global 2018-2022 trend of a decrease in parental involvement in learning (OECD, 2023a). According to the report, only 16% of students aged 15-16 attended a school where at least “half of all families discussed their child’s progress with the teacher on their own initiative” compared to the 38% in 2018 (OECD, 2023a , p.7). Similarly, 59% of teachers initiated the discussion in 2022 compared to 72% in 2018. The drop in home-school cooperation did not seemingly affect the students’ academics; students in Finland still scored above the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average in math, reading, and science.

3.1.2 Foreign language learning in Finland

The Finnish educational system places a high value on all language learning. This language learning includes a pupil’s mother tongue, learning the second national language, and learning a foreign language (EDUFI, 2019a; FNBE, 2016). In special cases of language and culture, this language learning may also include the Sámi language, the Roma language sign-language, or the home languages of other plurilingual students (FNBE, 2016).

Finland has two national languages, Finnish and Swedish. Under the Basic Education Act, the language of school instruction is either Finnish or Swedish (*Basic Education Act*, 1998; FNBE, 2016). All students learn their mother tongue (either Finnish or Swedish), the second national language that is not their mother tongue (either Finnish or Swedish depending on which is their mother tongue) and at least one foreign language at school (EDUFI, 2019b). However, as stated in section 9 of the NCC, the language of instruction may also be Sámi, Roma, sign language, or another language as long as the language of instruction does not deter from the achievement of the NCC’s objectives. In these cases, the language objectives

also include supporting the pupil's identity as that language speaker, and supporting their awareness of their history and culture (FNBE, 2016).

The growing population of students who speak neither Finnish nor Swedish, nor Sámi, Roma nor sign-language as a mother tongue are also taken into consideration. In 2017, 6,8% of the Finnish population spoke a language other than Finnish as a mother tongue (EDUFI, 2019b). These pupils, as long as they are enrolled in Finnish basic education, may receive instruction in their mother tongue for up to two hours a week as long as there are at least four pupils with that mother tongue and the school is able to offer instruction in that language (EDUFI, n.d). In 2017, 60 different mother tongues were taught to over 18,000 pupils with Russian, Somali and Arabic being the most common languages (EDUFI, 2021). To further support these students, they may receive Finnish as a Second Language instruction. This may be either through a preparatory program which focuses on the Finnish language to allow for easier integration to the mainstream classroom, or supplemental Finnish as a second language classes in addition to the mainstream classes (EDUFI, n.d).

All students, regardless of their mother tongue, also learn a foreign language. According to the EDUFI, 100% of pupils learn at least two languages by the end of their basic education (2021). As of 2020, pupils enrolled in Finnish basic education begin learning either a foreign language or the second national language by the spring semester for first grade (EDUFI, 2019b; Hahl & Pietarila, 2021). In grades 1-2, the foreign language objectives as described by the EDUFI in their amendments and additions to the NCC are primarily focused on fostering positive pupils' attitudes towards foreign languages and cultural diversity, and providing pupils with opportunities to practice their language learning skills (EDUFI, 2019a). As the students get older, the foreign language learning goals are to strengthen pupils' multilingual competences and their linguistic awareness (EDUFI, 2019b;

Hahl & Pietarila, 2021). 99% of pupils in 6th grade study English, and other common foreign languages include German, French, Spanish and Russian (EDUFI, 2021).

3.2 Education in the USA

The American school system is noticeably different than the Finnish school system. To begin with, the American school system is much larger. In the 2021-2022 school year, there were approximately 128,900 elementary and secondary schools, 99,200 of which were public schools and 29,700 of which were private schools (NCES, 2024). There are 50 states, and 12,546 independent school districts (*Public School Systems by Type of Organization and State*, 2022). Due to the size, most educational decisions happen at the local and state level instead of at the national level (*Federal Role in Education*, n.d). There is no national curriculum, and who is and what is taught varies from state to state, and school district to school district. For example, different states have different age requirements for school. In some states, students begin kindergarten, the first year of primary school, as early as 4 whereas in other states, they do not begin their primary education until the age of 7 (NCES, 2017a). In some states, students are required to take four years of foreign language, where in other states no such requirements exist (Devlin, 2018). In spite of the state differences, most of the school systems in the USA follow a similar overall structure: preschool (ages ranging from 0-6), primary school (ages ranging from 5-12), middle school, sometimes referred to as junior high school (ranging in ages from 11-14), high school (ranging in ages from 14-18), then either some form of vocational school, community college, or university (NCES, 2001b).

3.2.1 The existing home-school cooperation frameworks in the USA

As there is no national curriculum, there are not many whole country standardized practices in the country. One of the most widely applicable laws that concerns parental

involvement and home-school cooperation is the legal rule of compulsory education (Yeban, n.d). Each state has legal requirements for what ages children must attend school, typically 6-16 (NCES, 2017b). Though not standardized, other forms of parental involvement include school newsletters, emails/phone calls with teachers, parent-teacher conferences, participation in the PTA, attending a classroom event and helping with homework at home (NCES, 2022). Data shows that parents are most involved when their children are in grades K-2, with parents in grades K-2 (ages 5-8) showing more participation than parents of grades 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12 (Hanson & Pugliese, 2020) . In short, the parents have to send their children to school but are otherwise free participate as much or as little as they would like.

Parental involvement in their child's education is just one side of home-school cooperation; the schools have a responsibility to initiate conversations with the parents as well.

According to the "Every Student Succeeds Act" under Title I, section A, colloquially known as Title I, whose goal is to provide funding to schools with lower income students to make education more equitable and accessible for all in order to receive funding from the government schools must meet certain criteria ("Every Student Succeeds Act," 2015; OESE, 2018). These criteria include, but are not limited to, clauses about communication with parents. This includes providing adequate outreach to parents so parents can make informed decisions on student services, making assessment reports available to parents in and understandable format and in a language, they can comprehend (section 1006), and provide necessary support in planning and implementing family involvement activities to improve student school performance (section 1010). Under the law, Title I schools must also consult with various stakeholders including the parents before filing for grants. As of 2021, 63% of traditional public schools and 62% of public charter schools were eligible for Title I support based on the school levels (NCES, 2024).

Other forms of home-school cooperation are outlined by the "Parents Bill of Rights Act" (2023) which was passed by the US House of Representatives, but has not yet been passed by the Senate or become law. According to this act, the parents have seven rights: the right to review the curriculum of the child's school, to know if the state alters its academic standards, to meet with each of their child's teachers at least two times per year, to review the budget of their child's school, to inspect the books and other reading materials used in the library, to address the school board of the local education agency, to receive information regarding violent activity in the child's school, and to know if their child is not grade proficient in reading by the end of 3rd grade (typically ages 8-9) ("Parents Bill of Rights Act," 2023). While some of these rights involve direct home-school cooperation for the child's academic progress such as meeting with their child's teachers, others are less direct, such as reviewing the budget. In addition to this bill of rights, each state and each school district, and even each school may also have a similar bill of rights with more specific state and school information.

According to the OCED PISA test, parental involvement in the USA decreased from 2018 to 2022. In the USA, the percentage of students aged 15-16 who attended a school where the principal reported at least half of the parents initiated a discussion with the teacher dropped from 43% to 31%, and teacher-initiated discussions dropped from 53% to 45% (OECD, 2023b).

3.2.2 Foreign language learning in the USA

The United States does not have an official language, however, standardized English is the primary, if not only, language taught in the majority of schools. Foreign language education is not mandatory, and any language education other than English is not prioritized. It is not surprising that as reported by the Pew Research Center, American workers ranked "knowledge of a foreign language" last (net 36%) compared to the other seven technical

and soft skills needed to be successful in today's economy (*The State of American Jobs*, 2016). For reference, "having a detailed understanding of how to use computer technology", "being able to work with people from many different backgrounds", and "training in writing and communicating" were deemed as the most important skills with a net 85% each.

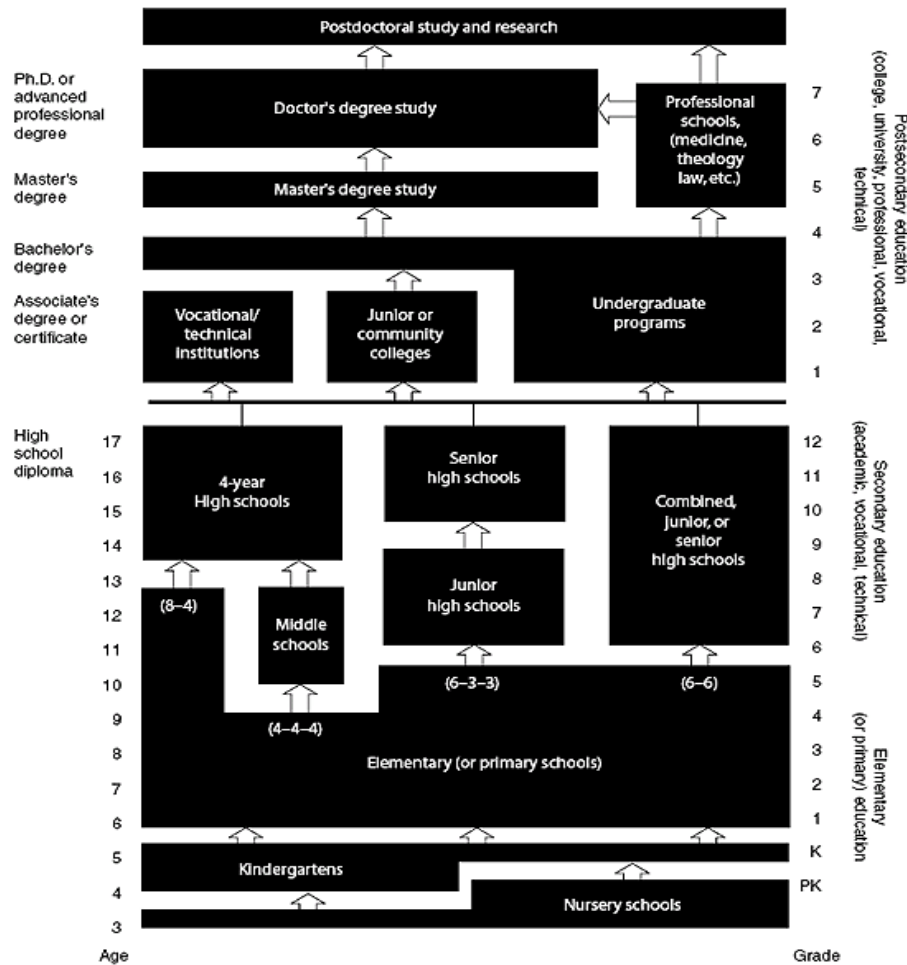
Foreign language learning is not prioritized in the USA. As of 2017, approximately 20% of students in the USA at the K-12 level were enrolled in a foreign language course, whereas the European median was 92% of students (Devlin, 2018). Additionally, the majority of those who do learn a foreign language in the USA begin so in middle or high school, ranging in ages from 10 to 18 (Pufahl et al., 2001). The majority of those students receive 45 minutes of foreign language instruction daily as an extracurricular class, and depending on the school system, they are enrolled in foreign language classes for only one to four years. For students who do begin learning a foreign language earlier, they are often enrolled either in private school or in a school with a language immersion program. Approximately 0.001 percent of American primary school students attend a language immersion program where they have access to foreign language learning from an early age (Swain & Johnson, 1997), and while this percentage is growing, it remains a minority. Immersion programs are relatively new compared to other second language teaching methods and are not widely available in the US. Though there are not many elementary immersion programs, the program is slowly growing: in 1995 there were 187 programs in twenty-five states and the District of Columbia, (Met & Lorenz, 1997), and in 2011, the Center of Applied Linguistics (CAL) reported that there were 337 elementary immersion programs. In some areas, language immersion programs are more popular. For example, the state of New Jersey has 51% students learning a foreign language, whereas the state of New Mexico has 9% of students learning a foreign language (Devlin, 2018).

Though the US does not provide much support for learning foreign languages, they do support students needing to learn English. Children to immigrant parents, children who have immigrated to the country, or international children adopted by American parents may often have a different language as a mother tongue, though this language education is not supported in schools. The most common languages include Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese. These students receive extra support from an English teacher until their English level is sufficient enough for them to succeed in the general classroom without extra support. In 2021, English Learners made up 10.6% (approximately 5.3 million students) of public school elementary and secondary students. Of these students 93.1% of them received services in English language instruction programs provided by the school (NCES, 2024).

3.3 A comparison of Finnish and American educational systems and frameworks

Despite the differences between the Finnish and American educational systems, there are some similarities. Firstly, the overall school structure is roughly the same. In each country, there is some sort of early childhood education and care, then primary school, middle school and high school. The end of high school is the end of compulsory education, after which one may decide to pursue post-secondary education such as vocational school, undergraduate studies, graduate studies, and/or postdoctoral studies. However, one can observe that unlike in Finland, there is much more variety in the nation's K-12 education system (known as primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary school in Finland. Both school systems are shown in Figure 3

Figure 1. The structure of education in the United States



NOTE: Adult education programs, while not separately delineated above, may provide instruction at the elementary, secondary, or postsecondary education level. Chart reflects typical patterns of progression rather than all possible variations.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Annual Reports Program.

EDUCATION SYSTEM IN FINLAND

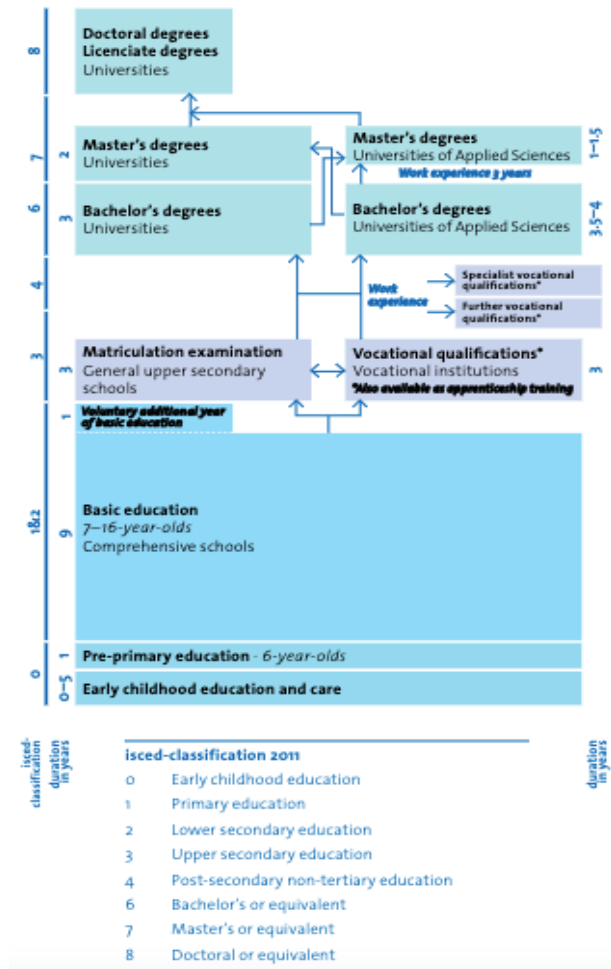


Figure 3: Summary of the two educational systems under examination. Left: Educational system in the United States, (NCES, 2001a), Right: Education system in Finland, (EDUFI, 2022).

In addition to overall structure, both Finland and the USA scored similarly on the 2022 PISA test, both countries followed the global trend of a decrease in parental involvement from 2018 to 2022. However, overall, the USA has a higher percentage of parent initiated home-school cooperation whereas Finland has a higher percentage of teacher-initiated cooperation. This finding is not surprising because as mentioned in the 2014 Finnish National Core curriculum, it is the teacher's responsibility to develop the preconditions for home-school cooperation (FNBE, 2016) These findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: PISA Parental involvement indicators (OECD 2023a, 2023b)

Country	2022 PISA Parent-initiated	2018 PISA Parent-initiated	2022 PISA Teacher-initiated	2018 PISA Teacher-initiated
United States	31%	43%	45%	53%
Finland	16%	38%	59%	72%
The percentages of students ages 15-16 who attend a school where at least half of the school population reports parental involvement (OECD, 2023a, 2023b).				

Overall, the Finnish educational system supports both home-school cooperation and foreign language learning more than the current systems in place in the USA. Though there is nothing explicitly mentioned in terms of home-school cooperation for a child's early foreign language learning in either country, as foreign language learning is a part of the Finnish NCC, one may assume that there is some home-school cooperation in that area. However, one may not make any assumptions about the USA as both the curriculum and the type of foreign language instruction vary drastically depending on the location. Later in this thesis, I will explore the perspectives of both the parents living in Finland and in the USA to determine what their experiences with home-school cooperation specifically regarding their child's early foreign language learning has been regardless of the systems put in place by the countries in which they live.

4 Research Questions

Drawing from the theoretical framework, literature review, and country-specific background information, I know that home-school cooperation is an important factor in a child's education. Additionally, there are existing frameworks for this cooperation in both Finland and the USA. However, there is not as much specific information regarding the home-school cooperation specifically in regard to a child's early language learning. As such, I aim to obtain and then compare small-scale Finnish and American parent perspectives on home-school cooperation, especially with how it relates to their child's early foreign language learning. I will be investigating the following research questions in this research:

- **RQ1:** What are parents' experienced levels and forms of home-school cooperation related to their child's early foreign language learning?
- **RQ2:** What are parents' interests and needs regarding home-school cooperation in early foreign language learning?

5 Methodology

The primary aim of this study is to obtain and compare small-scale perspectives of parents living in Finland and parents living in the on the home-school cooperation that takes place during their child's early foreign language learning. As mentioned in the definitions and concepts at the beginning of this thesis, the goal is not to make assumptions about American or Finnish parents. To achieve this goal, I explore both the existing levels and forms of home-school cooperation for early foreign language learning, as well as the parents' wants, interests, and needs regarding future cooperation.

In this section, I will describe and justify the research methods used, as well as address the validity, reliability, and ethics of this research.

5.1 Research Process

Educational research is a "deliberative, complex, subtle, challenging, thoughtful, activity" with no best way to plan and conduct the research (Cohen et al., 2018 , p.3). As such, prior to the start of my research, I had to select a methodology and research plan that fit the goals of my research. In this research, I aim to understand parents' perspectives on home-school cooperation related to their child's early foreign language learning. I am looking to understand more about a certain situation, in this case the home-school cooperation, from the perspectives of a few parents involved. This follows a qualitative phenomenological approach, also known as an interpretive approach, where the research goal is to understand a social phenomenon directly from the perspectives of those who experience it (Taylor et al., 2016).

In this research, I followed the nine-step approach to qualitative research as suggested by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018). In the introduction and literature review chapters, I

already provided information regarding step 1 (identify the topic) through step 4 (locate my role in the research. In the following sections, I will provide a detailed explanation of step 5 (locate participants) through step 7 (conduct interviews). In later chapters of this thesis report, I will go into more detail regarding step 8 (conduct data analysis) and step 9 (report the results). All the nine steps are illustrated below in Figure 4.

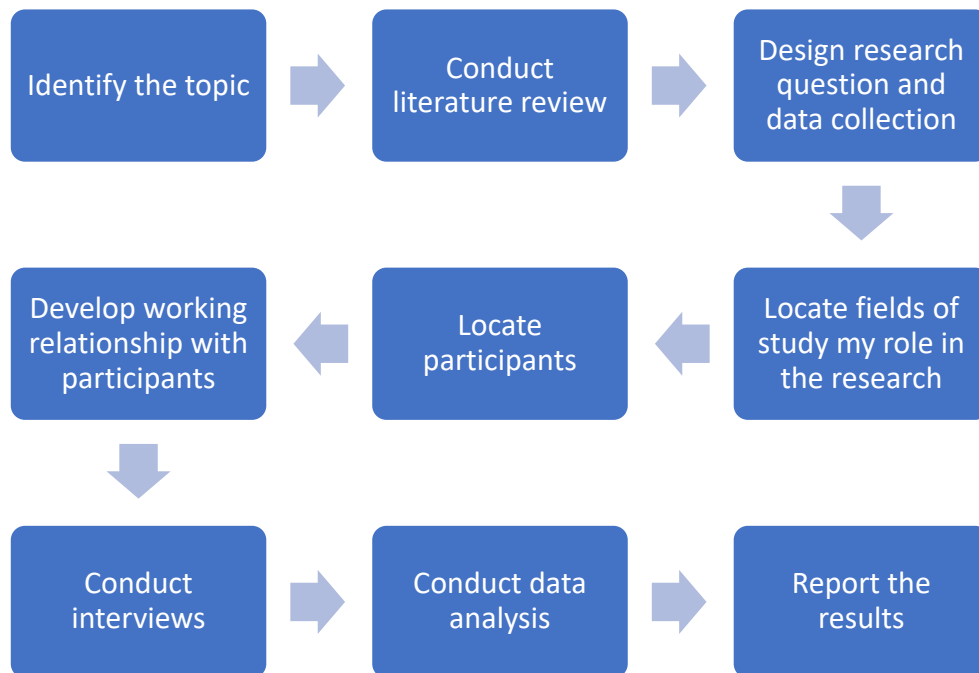


Figure 4: The educational research process I followed as suggested by Cohen, Mannion, and Morrison (2018)

5.2 Locate Participants

Similar to many other qualitative researchers, I am not attempting to make generalizations about the wider population (Cohen et al., 2018). Since my data does not need to be representative of the population as a whole, I utilized a non-probability sample. More specifically, I used volunteer sampling, a sampling method where the researcher depends on volunteers from their personal network or those who answer an advertisement (Cohen

et al., 2018). I chose this sampling method as it allowed me to find parent volunteers without having to go through the more time consuming and complex process of getting permission for schools to share parent personal information. This sampling method also allowed me to collect a wide variety of data as the research was not concentrated on a specific school, region, language, or type of foreign language learning program.

To find the parent participants in Finland, I posted a call for volunteers who has experience with home-school cooperation and early foreign language learning in Facebook groups such as "Joensuu's English Speakers" and the University of Eastern Finland's Viva Engage page. To find the American participants, I posted a similar call for volunteers in neighborhood newsletters, Facebook groups, LinkedIn, and I emailed different PTA groups of schools that have language learning programs. Regardless of where I was posting, I was specifically looking for parents with children in their first five years of learning a foreign language at school. Examples of the posts are included in Appendix III.

After finding few participants who had a child currently in their first five years of learning a foreign language at school, I expanded the search to parents who had a child currently learning a foreign language at school, or who had a child learning a foreign language at school within the past 5 years. I made this modification as these parents would still be able to reflect on the home-school cooperation that occurred during the first five years of their child's foreign language learning. As aforementioned in the introduction, the child's/children's ages were not a focus for this study. After five months of posting, I had nine volunteers: five parents living in Finland and four parents living in the USA. Of the nine participants, there were eight mothers and one father. Of the parent's living in Finland, they had children learning Finnish, English, Swedish, Spanish and Russian as foreign languages at school. Of the parents living in the USA, they had children learning French, Spanish and Hebrew as foreign languages at school. Some of their demographic information, as well as some of the background information about their child's early foreign language learning is

provided in Table 3. As seen in the table, even though some of the children currently live in the same country, there are several differences in terms of their backgrounds, what languages they speak at home, what languages they are learning in school, what type of school they attend, and what type of foreign language learning program. In the scope of this thesis, there is no singular type of "Finnish" child, nor is there a singular type of "American" child. All the parents' experiences and perspectives are valued.

Table 3: Interviewee background information (*- Parent and child(ren) immigrated to Finland from a different country **- language not applicable to all children)

Parent Code	Country of residence	Child(ren)'s home language(s)	Child(ren)'s current age(s)	Years of HSC for FLL experience (parent)	Child(ren)'s school FL	Type of FLL program(s) in which the child/children is/are enrolled
P1	Finland*	English Dutch	11	3	Finnish	Finnish primary school with Finnish as a second language support and English class
P2	Finland	Finnish	4, 7	4	English	English speaking daycare, English as a foreign language class in Finnish primary school
P3	Finland	Finnish Russian	15, 17	9	English Swedish Spanish**	Bilingual Russian-Finnish primary school, English as a foreign language and Swedish as the second national language lessons during Finnish primary school, Spanish as a foreign language in upper secondary school.
P4	Finland*	Russian	4, 6, 7, 9	5	Finnish English**	Bilingual Russian-Finnish primary school for the older children, Finnish daycare for younger children
P5	Finland*	Spanish	7	3	Finnish English Russian	English speaking kindergarten, Finnish primary school with support of Finnish as a second language classes, English club and Russian club at school
P6	United States of America	English	3, 5.5	3	French Spanish	Private pre-school with weekly French and Spanish instruction, older child now in kindergarten where they get 1-2 days of full Spanish immersion a week
P7	United States of America	English	11, 12	6	Hebrew French Spanish	Private school with Hebrew lessons 4 times a week since second grade and French and Spanish lessons 4 times a week since 5 th grade
P8	United States of America	English	20, 23	6	Spanish French**	Public high school with Spanish as a foreign language (45 minutes a day), younger child taking university French lessons
P9	United States of America	English	11, 14	9	Spanish	Public school Spanish immersion since kindergarten, partial immersion (3 hours a day) starting in 6 th grade

5.3 Develop working relationship with the participants

As a qualitative researcher, it is important to build a trust and rapport with the participants. The information interviewees chose to share may depend on how they view me as an interviewer (Taylor et al., 2016). As such, before the interview, I took time to develop a working relationship with them.

Once the parents expressed interest in participating in my study, we engaged in email correspondence. In this correspondence, I first introduced myself and then insured that they met the participation prerequisites. Then, I shared a letter with more information about the study, Appendix IV. In this letter, I provided background information about the study, ethical information about informed consent, and the interview questions. I then asked if the participant had any questions about the informed consent or the interview questions. Once any questions were addressed, we moved forward with scheduling the interview at the participant's convenience. Two of the interviews took place in person in Joensuu, Finland, and the remaining seven took place online over Zoom video calls.

5.4 Conduct research and data collection

Qualitative research is dynamic and flexible in nature (Taylor et al., 2016). As such, I decided to employ flexible data collection method. I collected the data through semi-formal interviews. This allowed me to gather information that could not be observed directly from a relatively large range of people (Taylor et al., 2016). Since the topic of this study is home-school cooperation, a complex topic involving multiple participants and means of communication, I would not have easily been able to gather a similar amount and quality data through observations.

The interviews consisted of two parts, each divided into subsections. The first part was the logistical part where I shared more about myself and the study and then shared information about how their answers will be used and obtained verbal consent to voice record the interview. The second part, the interview, consisted of three parts: collecting background information (Appendix IV, questions 1-7), their current experiences with home-school cooperation regarding their child's early foreign language learning (Appendix IV, questions 8-12), and their interests and needs regarding home-school cooperation for their child's early foreign language learning (Appendix IV, questions 13-16). Though the background section consisted of necessary direct questions, the other two sections consisted of purposefully nondirective and open-ended questions that allowed the interviewees to answer comfortably. Based on their answers to the opening questions of each section, I did not always need to ask each question. Additionally, if needed, I would follow-up with more specific questions or ask them to elaborate on certain parts of their answers. The interviews varied in length based on how many children the interviewee had, and how many years of home-school cooperation for early foreign language learning they had experienced. The shortest recorded portion of the interview was 14 minutes and 13 seconds, and the longest recorded portion of the interview was 51 minutes and 32 seconds. Two participants also followed-up on their own accord to provide more information via email. This email information was included in the data analysis.

Table 4: Duration of interview recordings

Parent code	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9
Duration of interview (minutes: seconds)	21:49	20:22	51:32	45:56	22:09	18:08	18:12	14:03	30:32
Average time of parent living in FI interview: 32:19 Average time of parent living in the USA interview: 20:13 Average time of interview: 26:57									

5.5 Data analysis

Noted previously in section 5.4, qualitative research is flexible in nature. As there is no one correct research design (Cohen et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2016) there is also no one correct way to analyze the data (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 643). However, qualitative analysis is inductive by nature: qualitative studies “develop concepts, insights and understandings from patterns in the data rather than collecting data to assess preconceived models, hypothesis, or theories (Taylor et al, 2016, p. 8). As such, I used an inductive approach to analyze my collected data.

Like many qualitative researchers, I simultaneously conducted data collection and data analysis (Cohen et al., 2018). During the interviews, I conducted preliminary analysis by taking notes. After the interview, I prepared and organized the data (Cohen et al., 2018). I transcribed the audio files verbatim, with the exception of removing a few filler words for clarity. To ensure transcription accuracy, I listened to the audio at 0.5 speed and would pause and rewind as needed. For the interviewee’s anonymity, I transcribed the interviews myself and replaced their names with an assigned number, for example “parent 1, parent 2”. To make the analysis easier, parents living in Finland were assigned Parent 1-5, and the parents living in the USA were assigned parents 6-9. As it was a small-scale study, it was easy to remember which parent was which and I did not need to use more specific parent codes. Additionally, while transcribing, if any children names were mentioned, I only wrote the first initial as a place holder. This was then replaced by “my child” if that portion of the transcription was coded. At no point were any full names used during this process. Afterwards, I transferred the transcriptions to ATLAS.ti⁴ for analysis.

⁴ ATLAS.ti- a software used for qualitative data <https://atlasti.com/>

The next step was to analyze the data (Cohen et al., 2018). After reading through all the transcriptions multiple times, I coded using inductive reasoning using the patterns that emerged. As I re-read, I modified and reformulated the codes. After checking that I included all of the data and that the categories were mutually exclusive (p. 644), I had the five following codes regarding the home-school cooperation for early foreign language learning:

1. Examples of existing home-school cooperation (examples of HSC for EFLL)
2. Factors affecting existing home-school cooperation (factors affecting HSC for EFLL)
3. Feelings towards the existing home-school cooperation (feelings towards HSC for EFLL)
4. Wants and needs for future home-school cooperation (wants and needs for HSC for EFLL)
5. Rationale supporting home-school cooperation (Rationale for HSC for EFLL)

Since this research is a comparison between two countries, I then split the codes by country, I had one category for the five Finnish parents' answers and one category for the four American parents' answers. This allowed me to do a side-by-side comparison of the coded portions of the text based on country.

I then connected the data back to the research questions. To answer my first research question, *What are parents' experienced levels and forms of home-school cooperation related to their child's early foreign language learning?*, I used the codes 1-3. To answer the second research question, *What are parents' interests and needs regarding home-school cooperation in early foreign language learning?*, I used codes 4-5.

5.6 Research ethics, validity and reliability

In the subsequent sections, I will discuss the steps I took to have an ethical, reliable, and valid research project.

5.6.1 Ethics

Following ethical guidelines is incredibly important, especially in the field of education. As noted by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, ethical guidelines can vary based on the situational context (2018). As a researcher in Finland, I followed the guidelines set forth by the University of Eastern Finland (UEF) and Finnish National Board on Research Integrity, otherwise known as TENK. In Finland, all research with human participants must respect the dignity and autonomy of the participants including their right to privacy. Additionally, all research must not cause significant risk, damage or harm to the participants or their communities (TENK, 2019, 2023). I complied with these guidelines by having the interviews either in-person in a public and mutually agreed upon location or online over encrypted channels, by storing the interview data locally on a password protected device, and by not sharing any names or identifying information about any of the participants during the course of this project. Furthermore, the data itself has been anonymized, as discussed in previous sections.

Furthermore, in accordance with UEF and TENK, all participants were given informed consent. This includes that their participation is voluntary, that they have the right to discontinue their participation, that they have the right to withdraw their consent, and that they are to be given truthful information about the aims and use of the research (TENK, 2019, 2023; UEF, n.d). I accomplished this by sending out the research participant letter in Appendix IV which included this information to each participant prior to their interview. Before recording each interview, I asked again if they had any questions about the informed consent and double checked that they consented to be recorded and for me to

use the recording for the use of thesis only. The practices mentioned above also follow the best practices in educational research ethics described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018).

5.6.2 Validity in Qualitative Research

Researchers have argued over the definition and appropriateness of the validity metric in qualitative research (Cian, 2021; Leung, 2015; Morse et al., 2002; Spiers et al., 2018). In general, “validity” means that a particular instrument measures what it intends, and that the interpretations of the data are warranted by the theories used (Cohen et al., 2018). However, in qualitative research, the researcher themselves is the instrument, and therefore true objectivity and accuracy is not possible. As such, in qualitative studies, the term “validity” more so refers to appropriateness and quality of the research (Cian, 2021; Spiers et al., 2018); it measures if the research met its intended objectives.

To form the validity framework for this research project, I followed several principles compiled by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018). One consideration for validity is that “the researcher is a part of the researched world” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 247). As an educator who has cooperated with parents in both the USA and in Finland regarding their child’s early foreign language learning, and as a master’s degree student who continues to learn early foreign language pedagogy, I consider myself to be a suitable researcher for this topic.

A second consideration for validity is that “data are descriptive” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 247). As discussed in section 5.4, the data consists of informal interviews composed of open-ended questions. The interview questions were carefully written to answer the research questions and were open-ended with the purpose of collecting rich data. These questions were then peer reviewed by my program classmates and thesis supervisor. When

designing the interview, I avoided leading questions, and during the interview I followed the suggestions of Taylor et al. (2016) to be non-judgmental, attentive, sensitive, and non-interruptive (p. 116-117).

Another third consideration is that “data are analyzed inductively rather than using a priori categories” (Cohen et al., 2018, p.247). As previously discussed, I used inductive content analysis where I formed the codes after seeing the emerging patterns in the data rather than the other way around. However, as mentioned by Taylor et al. (2016), pure induction is not possible as one cannot remove all of their assumptions about the world (p.9). I strived to remove as much personal bias as possible and honor the words and their intended meanings of the interviewees. I accomplished this by listening to the interview recordings as many times as needed to transcribe the interviews verbatim, by proofreading the transcriptions, and then by only using direct quotations from the transcriptions and any additional emails sent by the parents for the analysis.

5.6.3 Reliability in Qualitative Research

Similar to “validity”, researchers have also argued over the definition of “reliability” in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2018; Leung, 2015; Morse et al., 2002; Spiers et al., 2018). In general, “reliability” refers to the replicability of the study, however as noted by Taylor et al., (2016), “it is not possible to achieve perfect reliability if we want to produce meaningful studies of the real world” (p. 10-11). Qualitative research depends on the researcher, and try as one might, it is not possible to completely remove oneself from the data (Taylor et al., 2016). Should another researcher use the same methods with the same sample, due to the nature of human relationships and differences in experience, the research will not yield the same results. The fact that the study cannot be replicated is a strength rather than a weakness (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 270). As such, “reliability” in qualitative research is replaced with terms such as credibility, dependability, trustworthiness (Cohen et al., 2018).

One way to achieve reliability is check the stability of observations, meaning that the researcher would have reached the same conclusions if they had been observed at a different time or place (Cohen et al, 2018, p. 270). To check the stability, I read through the transcriptions over the course of several weeks and adjusted my codes and categories as needed. I also reviewed all the quotes in each code to check for clarity and accuracy. If a quote no longer fit the code, it was either moved to a different code or the original code was reworded.

Another way to achieve reliability is to employ parallel forms, which is where a researcher would have made the same interpretations or observations from the data if they focused on other phenomena during the observation (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 270). To accomplish this, I recorded the interviews in addition to my original notes. These recordings allowed me to listen to the interview multiple times and focus on different answers. This allowed for accurate transcription which then allowed me to use the interviewees direct words rather than my own paraphrasing of their words in the analysis and data presentation.

This research has been planned, conducted, and reported according to the standards of the academic community (UEF, n.d). Overall, I have taken steps and considerations to ensure that this thesis is ethical, valid and reliable to the best of my ability.

6 Findings and Discussion

In the subsequent sections, I will answer the two research questions using the data I collected and analyzed. For the reader's convenience, the research questions are restated here:

- **RQ1:** What are parents' experienced levels and forms of home-school cooperation related to their child's early foreign language learning?
- **RQ2:** What are parents' interests and needs regarding home-school cooperation in early foreign language learning?

To answer these questions, I will start this chapter by exploring home-school cooperation for their child's early foreign language learning through the eyes – and most importantly the words – of parents currently living in Finland. Next, I will pivot and report on the same topic but from the point-of-view of parents currently living and raising their children in the USA. Finally, I will highlight some similarities as well as differences observed across the two groups. For improved readability, in the subsequent sections, I will use the term “home-school cooperation” or “cooperation” to refer to home-school cooperation for their child's early foreign language learning unless noted otherwise.

6.1 Home-school cooperation as experienced and reported in Finland

This section will be divided into two core categories; the is “the facts” of home-school cooperation. For example, how do the teachers and parents communicate, how often, about what, etc. The second subsection is more subjective and will discuss how the parents perceive this cooperation, what changes and actions they feel are needed, etc.

6.1.1 Levels, forms and details of home-school cooperation – Finland

While home-school cooperation is not uncommon, it is not always targeted towards early foreign language learning. For example, only 3 of the 5 interviewed parents have received direct, personalized feedback from a classroom teacher or foreign language teacher regarding their children's foreign language progress. On the other hand, all parents have had direct communication with their children's classroom teacher about issues not including foreign language learning, for example, classroom behavior, general classroom updates, and student progress in their mother tongue or mathematics class. In the instances where the language targeted cooperation does occur, the parents identified the following pathways:

- Wilma messages
- Parent-teacher meetings
- Parent-principal meetings
- Emails
- Newsletters
- Handouts/leaflets from language teachers
- Helping with homework at home
- Organizing additional language lessons at school

In addition to the list above, additional language lessons were initiated by the school's faculty for the students who did not have Finnish as a mother tongue, and these lessons provided an opportunity for parents and teachers to discuss and identify key areas where the children needed extra language support. All the methods of cooperation as well as by which parents that cooperation was experienced are further described in Table 5.

Table 5: Methods of cooperation– Finland

Method of cooperation	Parents reported
Wilma messages	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Meetings with the classroom teacher or principal	1, 3, 4, 5
Helping with homework at home	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Extra language lessons at school	1, 4, 5
Newsletter/handout from class	2

Regarding the frequency of cooperation, we can observe a relationship to the language being learned. For example, 3 of the 5 parents whose children were not born in Finland and who are learning Finnish as a foreign language report higher numbers of communication from the Finnish as a second language teacher as opposed to teachers of other languages (i.e., English, Spanish, Swedish, etc.). In addition, parents whose children are native Finnish speakers report at best monthly direct communication, and at worst no direct communication at all. However, this lack of communication was not always regarded as a negative thing: 2 of the 5 parents believe that communication should happen as necessary instead of it being constant. As said by Parent 1, "If it's okay, it's okay". More parent quotations regarding the frequency of the cooperation can be found in Table 6.

Table 6: Frequency of home-school cooperation – Finland

Parent	Quotation from the interview
Parent 1	The teachers write stuff, not every day, it's unnecessary, if it's okay it's okay.
Parent 2	Maybe a couple of times a month. It's really hard to give an exact number. Because of the teacher's absences.
Parent 3	I probably never met the Swedish teacher, I know I have maybe spoken a couple of times with the English teacher, but we never discussed [the children's] language learning...
Parent 5	I think every class. He has one class per week. Every week we receive (feedback).

As for who initiates these language related conversations, we can observe a variety of answers. For example, 3 out of the 5 interviewed parents provided examples of both the home and the school initiating the cooperation. As said by Parent 1, “it depends who notices a problem”. However, in the case of parents 2 and 3, while they did provide examples of both the home and the school initiating, the school initiated general cooperation, such as sending a newsletter, whereas the home initiated direct cooperation. In the case of parents 4 and 5, they stated that it is the school who initiates most or all these interactions. In this case, we may observe a relationship between the time spent in Finland to who initiates the cooperation. Parents 4 and 5 have been living in Finland for three years or less, whereas parents 1, 2, and 3 have been living in Finland for three years or more. More examples of who initiates the cooperation are described in Table 7.

Table 7: Who initiates the home-school cooperation – Finland

Examples of parent quotes where the school initiates the cooperation	Examples parent quotes where the home initiates the cooperation	Examples parent quotes where both parties initiate the cooperation
In the beginning of the school year, he sent a message that in the Russian classes, “our aim is this and that and we will be doing this and that” and that kind of thing. (Parent 3)	When we had those problems, I was the one to contact the teacher and ask if we could do something about it. (Parent 3)	It depends who notices a problem or help is needed. It works both ways. (Parent 1)
I think it was the teacher at first. And also, it was like we just got here... they provided support and guidance about the school and also language learning. (Parent 4)	If needed, I can communicate, and they answer almost immediately. It's incredible here. (Parent 1)	Both parents and the teacher... We initiated cooperation initially, but the newsletters, we do get them when the teacher is present on a weekly basis. (Parent 2)
She always starts. Sometimes at the beginning at the course we received a message asking us what		

Examples of parent quotes where the school initiates the cooperation	Examples parent quotes where the home initiates the cooperation	Examples parent quotes where both parties initiate the cooperation
kind of topic (our child) needed to improve. (Parent 5)		

In terms of what the cooperation entails, we can observe a trend similar to communication frequency, discussed above where children learning Finnish as a foreign language get more direct and specific feedback compared to their native Finnish speaking counterparts. For example, Parent 4 received specific examples of what web applications they can use at home, whereas Parent 3 received general information about how the subject is graded. In some cases, the parents provided examples of both individualized and general cooperation. Parent quotations regarding what the cooperation entails can be found in Table 8.

Table 8: What the home-school cooperation entails – Finland

Examples of parent quotes with individualized cooperation	Examples of parent quotes with general cooperation
The teacher contacted me and said it would be good if (my child) could write more, and they tell me, "If they write the word three times, he learns them a lot", and I realized that it is right, that is correct. (Parent 1)	The teacher always let us know the test date well in advance. (Parent 1)
(The teacher) would send messages in Wilma saying what web applications or phone applications we can use, and that he's making progress, or that he needs to revise some words. (Parent 4)	She did send weekly schedules and implementations of the subjects that they were learning and how they changed them around. (Parent 2)
From the Finnish as a second language teacher – she says the topic that he studied, and she emphasized a lot he did very well, he did amazing, these kind of things.... Sometimes she has sent a	Language teachers maybe once in a semester usually send one message about how their subject is graded, what is the portion of the grade that is based on the exams, what is the classroom activity share...if they have some special things

Examples of parent quotes with individualized cooperation	Examples of parent quotes with general cooperation
message like today we worked on the vowels with the dots. (Parent 5)	going on or visits to somewhere or things like that. (Parent 3)
	It's kind of notifications of what's going on next week, or events or anything like that, and sometimes there are personal messages if something is wrong or anything like that. (Parent 4)

6.1.2 Desires, interests and needs of home-school cooperation – Finland

All the interviewed parents showed an interest in home-school cooperation for their child's early foreign language learning. There were no noticeable differences observed based on the parents' prior experiences with home-school cooperation. For example, four of the five interviewed parents shared similar statements such as "home-school cooperation is really necessary" (Parent 1) and "it's very important" (Parents 4 and 5). While Parent 2 did not directly answer the question, they stated that they were struggling due to not knowing their child's level and that information regarding her child's progress would be "really good". More parent quotations regarding their interest in the cooperation can be found in Table 9.

Table 9: Parent interest in home-school cooperation – Finland

Parent	Quotation from interview
Parent 1	Home-school cooperation is really necessary! It works in both ways. Parents needs to invest time in checking their kid's schoolwork. School is not a cheap baby-sitting...
Parent 2	I struggle with the level that (my child) is at. I am not quite sure what kind of reading materials I should provide her with, and yeah, the level is mainly the issue at the moment because she is still quite in the beginner stages, just general information on how she's progressing would be really good.
Parent 3	Of course, I think it is useful and meaningful. Afterall, it is our children that the school is taking care of, and we are all adults are trying to provide our children and adolescences with the necessary skills to flourish in the future.... I think it is important that there are channels and that the threshold to

Parent	Quotation from interview
	contact the school is low so that whenever there is a need, it is easy to do both ways.
Parent 4	I'm not a teacher of my children. I don't know how they really do in class or what kind of problems they have... She sees what's going on, and if she has anything to offer, I am glad to hear about it of course. Or if something maybe, they don't have enough resources to offer extra learning, extra tuition, at least I want to hear about the problems, maybe I will solve them by hiring a tutor or going to a Finnish class. I want to hear about it. It's very important.
Parent 5	Yes, because I think in the education process of a child, it's not only the school who is in charge of these processes, as a parent, we need to guide and collaborate with this process. Because yes, this is a whole process, not only with one part in charge. It's very important, the cooperation.

While processing the interview data, a few common regarding the factors affecting the parent's interest and availability to participate in the cooperation emerged. These factors either led to an increase in the cooperation, or a decrease:

- **Parent availability:** Parent 1 noted that as a stay-at-home mom, they have ample time to dedicate to their child's language learning, whereas Parent 4 mentioned that they are overwhelmed and do not wish to engage more.
- **Integration into Finnish culture:** Parents 1 and 4 mentioned that they plan to stay in Finland and therefore are invested to helping their child learn Finnish.
- **Language differences:** In the case of parents speaking a different language than the one being taught, there is a noticed decline in parent engagement. Though there is a similar result, this happened on two different levels. In the case of Parent 3, while their level personal level of cooperation decreased, their household level did not as they delegated all cooperation with the Russian teacher to their ex-husband, a native Russian speaker himself. In the case of Parents 4 and 5, their cooperation is limited as it is mostly in Finnish, and they do not speak Finnish themselves. While Parent 4 is able to translate the online messages as needed,

Parent 5 attended a meeting at the school in which no language services were provided. As a result, they were not able to participate in the meeting.

- **Online resources:** By actively using Wilma, the parents do not feel the need to initiate personalized cooperation with their child's language teachers. As mentioned by Parents 1 and 3, they are able to see specifics on what their child is learning on the system.

Other unique factors that affected the levels of cooperation were teacher illness and child's age. In the case of Parent 2, they mentioned that their child's teacher has frequently been absent due to illness, and that neither the teaching assistant nor the substitutes have access to Wilma. As such, Parent 2 mentioned significant disruptions in communication. In the case of Parent 3, now that their children are in secondary school, they note that their communication with the school has decreased. However, this decrease is caused by an increase in their children's abilities to effectively communicate with their teachers.

These factors, as well as the previously described experiences, have also affected the parents' levels of satisfaction with their experienced levels of cooperation. For example, two of the five interviewed parents found the current levels of cooperation satisfactory, stating that they are "really happy with the cooperation" (Parent 1) and that the existing levels are "enough" (Parent 4). On the other hand, three of the five interviewed parents have been dissatisfied, mentioning that they are "really disappointed" (Parent 2) and "it is not enough" (Parent 4). More parent quotes regarding their satisfaction levels are given in Table 10.

Table 10: Parent satisfaction with the home-school cooperation – Finland

Parent	Quotation from interview
Parent 1	I really am happy with the cooperation. Coming from (home country) I am really not used to such a level of commitment from the teachers.
Parent 2	I've been really disappointed...the existing level is not enough.

Parent	Quotation from interview
Parent 3	I think it was enough... I have always helped my daughters with their school tasks when they have asked, but I have never had to push them or urge them to do their homework. They have been good students, and they have independently taken care of their homework. And I also think that's the way how it's supposed to be.
Parent 4	For the purposes of language learning, I think it is not enough. I mean I understand that they are doing their best and they try everything, but I think the children need more...
Parent 5	So, this is kind of exclusion. We understand that most parents, one of them, understand Finnish or speaks Finnish, but we don't. The first meeting at the school that I remember, it was terrible.

As the parents have different experiences and levels of satisfaction regarding the home-school cooperation, it is not surprising that they have different needs. However, when analyzing the data, the following patterns of needs emerged:

- **Increased accessibility to the school:** In the case of Parent 1 and Parent 5, they expressed a need for increased accessibility for foreign parents. Parent 1 noted that the school should take a moment to explain to foreign parents how to use Wilma, as the system can translate the messages sent by the teachers and when used correctly, it is a “really really great tool”. Similarly, Parent 5 expressed a desire for more language support, but through one-on-one and in-person meetings with the teacher. In the case of Parent 2 and Parent 3, their requests were more generalized. Parent 2 would like the school to provide a contact-tree for who to contact when their child’s teacher is absent. Parent 3 would have liked the opportunity to meet the language teachers face-to-face to make it easier to contact them if needed.
- **Increased language level updates:** Some parents expressed a confusion regarding what level their child currently is, and as such would like more updates. For example, Parent 2 would like more news about their child’s English progression and Parent 3 would have liked a more explicit answer on if their children’s language skills were advanced enough to be in the native Russian speaker’s class.

- **More language related activities:** Parent 2 and Parent 5 would like the school to provide more guidance and homework-like exercises that they can use at home to support their child's English learning.
- **More language learning opportunities:** Parent 5 would like the school to organize trips abroad so that the children can practice "speaking English in reality". Parent 4 would like the school to organize more language learning classes for newcoming students.

6.2 Home-school cooperation as experienced and reported in the USA

This section follows the same format as section 6.1. In this section, I will start with "the facts" of home-school cooperation, such as how and how often teachers and parents communicate. In the second subsection, I will discuss more subjective matters, such as how the parents perceive this cooperation, and their hopes, wishes, and needs for future cooperation.

6.2.1 Levels, forms and details of home-school cooperation - USA

The parents living in the United States recounted that while there is home-school cooperation, the majority of it is not regarding their child's early language learning. For example, of the four parents interviewed, only two had met their child's language teacher in-person, whereas all the parents have met a classroom teacher or advisor. Note, in the case of Parent 9, their child's classroom teacher was also their child's foreign language teacher as their children attended a Spanish immersion school.

In the cases where cooperation for early language learning that does occur, the parents identified the following methods:

- Parent-teacher meeting

- Parent-advisor meeting
- Email correspondence
- Checking progress reports/ grades
- Volunteering
- Helping with homework at home
- Participating in a language exchange
- ParentVUE ⁵

All experienced methods as well as which parent(s) reported that method is further detailed in Table 11.

Table 11: Methods of cooperation– USA

Method of cooperation	Parents reported
In-person meeting with a teacher, language teacher, or advisor	6, 7, 8, 9
Email correspondence with a teacher, language teacher, or advisor	6, 7, 8, 9
Newsletter	6
Monitoring language progress reports / grades	7, 8, 9
Helping with homework at home	6, 7, 9
Volunteering at the school	9
Participating in language exchange	9

In terms of the frequency of this cooperation, we can observe a standardized practice of attending parent-teacher conferences. The interviewed parents have regularly scheduled twice-a-year meetings, either with a language teacher or other teacher, but their child's language learning is addressed regardless. In the case of parent 9, who has one child in elementary school and one in middle school, for their middle school child, they only have

⁵ ParentVUE – an online tool used by American school systems
<https://www.edupoint.com/Products/ParentVUE-StudentVUE>

these meetings once a year. However, age does not seem to affect the frequency of the other parent's cooperation, as parent 7 also has children in middle school, and parent 8 had children in high school and they both met with their children's language teacher or advisor twice a year. More parent quotations regarding their experienced frequency of cooperation are displayed in Table 12.

Table 12: Frequency of home-school cooperation – US

Parent	Quotation from interview
Parent 6	We have a pretty comprehensive meeting with the teachers twice per year, and foreign language is always covered in that conversation.
Parent 7	We'll get progress reports in the middle of term and end of term grades, and we will have student-teacher conferences...We'll talk about every subject, language included.
Parent 8	Two times a year we're able to go to the school and meet the teachers.
Parent 9	Basically, just at the parent-teacher conferences, so those happened twice a year in the early years. For middle school you just do it once a year.

In addition to these scheduled meeting times, the parents stated that they were able to engage in home-school cooperation with a class teacher, language teacher, or advisor on an as-needed basis when problems arose. For the frequency of this type of cooperation, the parents were not able to provide specific numbers.

In terms of who initiates the cooperation, the three out of the four interviewed parents provided examples of both the home and the school initiating the cooperation. As said by parent 6, both parties are "perfectly comfortable reaching out". Only one out of the four interviewed parents, Parent 7, mentioned that it was only the school initiating the discussions regarding their children's language learning. A sample of parent quotes regarding the initiation can be found in Table 13.

Table 13: Who initiates the home-school cooperation – US

Examples of parent quotes from the interview where the school initiates	Examples of parent quotes from the interview where the home initiates	Examples parent quotes from the interview where both parties initiate
We will get emails if things are going badly, we'll get emails if things are going particularly well. (Parent 7)	If he gets a bad grade, we reach out to the teacher. (Parent 8)	I'm perfectly comfortable with reaching out, they're perfectly comfortable reaching out to me. (Parent 6)
The school organizes those events. (Parent 8)	I was certainly initiating, just via email, I would email the teacher in English, and say 'how is this working, what should I do, how can I help?'. (Parent 9)	
All the teachers were wonderfully responsive, and were always sending, giving the parents the latest studies... (Parent 9)		

As for that this cooperation entails, we observe a variety of answers. In analyzing the data, the following patterns in cooperation emerged:

- Language related resources and activities** – Parents 6, 7 and 9 reported getting “references or recommendations” (Parent 7) from the school to help support their child’s foreign language learning at home. For example, Parent 6 received “songs from her teachers (and) some counting videos.” Parent 9 was told have her children read to her in Spanish at bedtime and was given access to a free Spanish subscription of e-books.
- Individualized updates on the child’s language learning** – Parents 7 and 9 also reported getting child-specific feedback. For example, Parent 7 states “we’ve gotten occasional emails that say our children are doing particularly well in Hebrew”. Parent 9 received feedback such as “they are in the top third, the middle third, or

the lower third". Parent 8 mentioned they would email the teacher if their child got a bad grade.

In addition, to the above-mentioned contents, there were unique types of cooperation:

- **Parent 6** received general updates about their child's language learning classes. They shared that "they send home a newsletter at the end of every week, and they go over...what the kids have done and that will include what they had in their foreign language class".
- **Parent 9** also engaged in cooperation regarding the school's language exchange program. They state, "There were a lot of discussions and parent groups and parent/teacher groups around language and culture, in support of the exchange program... it was literally the parents and the teachers in the trenches working that out together."

6.2.2 Desires, interests and needs of home-school cooperation – USA

Two of the four interviewed parents expressed a great interest in home-school cooperation for their child's early foreign language learning. For example, parents appreciate the consistency (Parent 6) and the resources and support systems (Parent 9) that are a result of home-school cooperation. The other two parents were not as interested. Parent 7 stated that while the cooperation is useful, he would not raise it to the level of meaningful, as foreign language is not something he can deeply engage in with his children. Parent 8 expressed no interest, stating that their children were very independent, and they did not need to get involved. This is not to suggest that parents 7 and 8 were not involved in their children's learning, just that they do not feel the need to deeply engage with the school regarding their foreign language learning. A sample of parent quotes regarding their interest in the cooperation can be found in Table 14.

Table 14: Parent interest in home-school cooperation – US

Parent	Quotation from interview
Parent 6	Whatever we are learning whether is it a foreign language or anything else, having that consistency from home to school and school to home so that, you know, they are constantly emerged in their learning...that's what we do with the math activities from the school and the phonics learning the letters, is really important. It also keeps the kids excited about both going to school and coming home, because they're getting consistency.
Parent 7	I think it is useful because they are telling us what they are learning, and that is useful. It wouldn't rise to the level of meaningful. And again, if I had a choice of something that I could get from the school, where the school wants to tell me something about what's going on in my child's educational life, I would rather get them to send a current events, or what they've read in their humanities class and talked about, than a page of emojis that has the names of all of the emotions in Hebrew or Spanish. And that's just because, I'm glad that that's something that (my child's) learning, I don't find it to be something I can really engage deeply with.
Parent 8	No, my kids were very independent, so I didn't have to get involved very much.
Parent 9	I definitely think it's useful and meaningful and fruitful, and for me as a non-Spanish speaking parent, I had a lot of questions and you know, needed access to some of the resources and support systems... it's very valuable. And not just in terms of educating the parents, but it also builds the community around the immersion community around the students, and just the immersion community in general. That is really special.

In addition to the parent's interest, there are other factors affecting the current levels of home-school cooperation. These common factors include:

- **No language concerns** – Three of the four interviewed parents mentioned that they do not feel the need to increase their cooperation as their children as doing well with their foreign language learning. For example, Parent 6 stated “we have not had to have any intervention. (My child) is doing great with their Spanish”. Parents 7 and 8 both mentioned that their children are very independent and took care of

their language homework themselves. As parent 8 said, “they did it all by themselves”.

- **The type of school/ language learning program** – the type of school the child is attending or which foreign language program they are in caused either an increase or a decrease in parental participation. In the case of private schools, Parent 7 said that they get lots of communication from the school, and that the school does not expect the parents “to do much of anything”. He later clarified that they are “free to do as much you want or not want” and that these are parents who are not going “to sluff off communication form the school to them”. He did not feel the need to be more involved. In the case of public schools, parents 8 and 9 said that those attending language immersion schools had, and needed the most home-school cooperation. As said by Parent 9, “The immersion teachers are their own special breed of people, and they are very committed to immersion learning, and they really want to help support the students as much as they can, and their families” and that the families are all similarly involved and engages and “buying into” the program. This sentiment was also reflected by Parent 8, who said “if they had gone to like a full immersion program in grade school, I think then that kind of communication would be much more necessary, but since they didn’t, there just wasn’t a lot of communication”. Since Parent 8’s children began their early foreign language learning in high school and did well with their language learning, they did not feel the need to engage more with the school.
- **The prioritization of other subjects** – as said by Parent 8 “our country doesn’t value foreign languages”. This sentiment is reflected by the thoughts and experiences of parents 6 and 7. Parent 6 mentioned that they do not get much cooperation from the school regarding their child’s early foreign language learning and that “it’s more math and English language because she’s learning to read now”. Parent 7 stated that they do not need to engage more because, “they’re learning as much as they’re going to learn. There’s only so much that a sponge can absorb. And

so, we think that's what they're getting. And frankly if we're looking at the things, we would like them to spend more of their time on, it's math".

Additionally, Parent 9 listed the use of technology as a factor affecting their home-school cooperation. They share that they did not need to frequently engage in direct cooperation such as contacting their child's language teacher as "now with ParentVUE, I just look at the app, and I can see exactly how my child is doing".

In terms of the parent satisfaction levels with the home-school cooperation, three of the four interviewed parents expressed satisfaction with the current levels. In the case of parents 7, 8, and 9, they said while there is not a lot of direct cooperation, they do not need any more. As said by Parent 9, now that their children are older, "I don't feel that I need it". Only in one case, Parent 6, was the parent dissatisfied with the current levels and wished for improvement from both the school and themselves, saying "I think we could certainly benefit". A sample of parent quotes regarding their satisfaction with the current levels of cooperation can be found in Table 15.

Table 15: Parent satisfaction with home-school cooperation – USA

Parent	Quotation from interview
Parent 6	... now that you're getting me to think a bit more, I think we could do a better job of communicating both ways and maybe getting more activities we could do."
Parent 7	(The school) makes good decisions and they communicate them well. Their communication with us, from school to home, is very good"
Parent 8	...the teachers were very accessible.
Parent 9	...at this point there is none, but I don't feel that I need it. And to the extent that I do, someone body would get back to me.

As the interviewed parents had different interests in and satisfaction levels with home-school cooperation, most of the needs found in this study were individual. However,

despite their different experiences, the following common needs from the schools did emerge:

- **Provide language learning opportunities** – Parents 7 and 8 would like the school to provide their children with more language learning opportunities such as participating in a language exchange or encouraging students to take a semester abroad. “That is absolutely something I would love my children to do” (Parent 7). Additionally, Parent 8 would have liked their children to have the opportunity to begin learning a foreign language earlier, for example, for them to “start as early as kindergarten”.
- **Provide more language level updates** – Parents 6 and 9 would like more clarification on their children’s foreign language levels. As said by Parent 6, “I’m not really clear about what exactly (my child) is learning, what the benchmarks should be for foreign language, where (my child) is and where (my child) should be”. Similarly, Parent 9 expressed a need for “more communication, more touch points, more check-ins when you’re able to, for a non-Spanish speaker like me, for parents like us to just have a gut check from the teachers. Like ‘yeah, on target, nope off target.’” While Parent 9’s children are now older and they are more comfortable and independent with their Spanish, this is not a current need for Parent 9, but something they feel they would have benefited from in the earlier years of their children’s foreign language learning.

As for the individual needs regarding home-school cooperation, the parents had the following ideas:

- Parent 6 – would like an opportunity to meet their child’s foreign language teachers in person and would also like for the school to provide more language activities that she can use at home with her child. She said, “They send activities for math and English, reading, phonics, but I think we could certainly benefit, especially because I

don't speak more than being able to count to 10 in Spanish, so she's not getting anything here (at home). So yeah, I think that would be a really good resource that I should be asking for".

- Parent 9 – would like to see more standardized practices in the immersion community. For example, "it would be nice to have...some type of coordination happening at the district level that was insuring uniformity across all the programs... They are just sort of these little programs and in some communities, they are very well known and very respected, but in some they're kind of forgotten." They elaborated, saying "We actually tried to start a cross-county immersion advocacy group for the parents to advocate as a whole across the whole county. Right now, it's pretty much organized school, by school, by school, but we tried to do the whole county so that we could be a voting bloc. And really push the school board for more and better immersion resources". They stated that if they had more time and personal resources that this is something they would actively like to take-part in.

6.3 Similarities and differences between experienced cooperation in Finland and the USA

Now that the parent experiences and needs have been described, in the subsequent sections, I will compare the trends that emerged in the Finnish parent answers to compare them to the American parent answers, and vice-versa. I will then refer to the literature to discuss why these similarities and differences may be occurring.

6.3.1 Similarities and differences in the levels, forms, and details of home-school cooperation in Finland and the USA

The interviewed parents living both in Finland and in the US had some similar experienced forms of home-school cooperation in regard to their child's early foreign language learning.

In both countries, the parents engaged in Type 2: communicating, and Type 4: learning at home, of Epstein's parental involvement framework (Epstein, 2009). In both countries, this included online communication with a teacher or advisor either through online correspondence (Parents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9), meetings with a teacher, principal or advisor to discuss language learning (Parents 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9), and/or receiving a newsletter which included information about language learning (Parents 2, 6). The school was communicating to the home about the child's language learning progress and parents were able to voice any concerns when if, or when, they arose. These findings align with the findings of the NCES that state that the most common type school communication is through school-wide notices or emails (89%), or individual notes or emails (66%) (Hanson & Pugliese, 2020). In the case of this study, Wilma messages can be placed in the same category.

In terms of Type 4: Learning at home, parents in both countries assisted their child with their language homework at home (Parents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9), and two parents (4, 9) received extra language learning activities to do at home such as using language learning apps or using e-books. Parent 8 is the only parent who did not engage in Type 4 parental involvement, but I strongly believe that this is because their children started their early foreign language learning in high school at the age of 14. As the children were older and as noted by their parent "very independent"; they did not require as much assistance from their parent. Similarly, Parent 3 in Finland, and Parent 9 in the US, noted that their involvement in home-school cooperation in regard to their child's early foreign language learning lessened as their children got older. This is supported by researchers who agree that generally speaking, parental involvement in their child's education decreases as the child gets older (Guedes et al., 2024; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Jafarov, 2015). However, Hornby and Lafaele note that American adolescents still wish for their parents to be involved in their learning at home in ways such as "show their parents what they learned or

did well on at school, ask parents for ideas for projects, listen to parents tell them about when they were teenagers, and take-home notes, notices and newsletters” (2011, p. 43).

One difference between the interviewed parents, was that the parents living in the US seem to have more opportunities to go to in-person events at the school. In Finland, only parents 1, 3, 4, and 5 mentioned going to the school for an in-person meeting where foreign language learning was discussed. However, Parent 3 only attended this type of meeting when their children were in primary school. Now that their children are in secondary school, they no longer attend in-person meetings regarding their child’s language learning. All the parents living in the US went to the school 1-2 times a year for a meeting with a language teacher, classroom teacher, or advisor. This is not surprising of the American parents as the most frequent type of parents participating in an in-school activity is by going to a parent-teacher conference or an association meeting with 89% of parents (Hanson & Pugliese, 2020). Regardless of who the meeting was with, language was a part of the discussion. Additionally, Parent 9 went to the school, engaging in Type 3: Volunteering of Epstein’s parental involvement framework (Epstein, 2009). Parent 9 volunteered in their child’s language class to help the teacher, but also to observe their child’s language learning:

“I volunteered in the classrooms a lot... I mean obviously any opportunity I would get to go into the classrooms I would go. I don't speak Spanish, so there's a lot that I could not observe, or didn't assess. I could observe but not assess how well kids were or were not doing, and so if I had questions, I would ask...At one point I was worried about how my older child was doing, so I made up some needs to go into the classroom to volunteer, but more so I could see what was really going on with him.” – Parent 9

While parent 3 from Finland and Parent 6 from the US also shared about volunteering at their children's schools, this volunteering was not related to their child's early foreign language learning, so it was not considered.

In terms of frequency and initiation, it seems that overall, the parents living in Finland have more frequent cooperation than the parents living in the USA. However, as previously noted, of the parents living in Finland, this was largely because Parents 1, 4, and 5 had children who are currently learning Finnish, the language of the mainstream classroom. This can be compared to Parent 9 in the US, whose children attend a Spanish immersion program. Similar to the Parents 1, 4 and 5, Parent 9's children did not speak the language of the classroom when they started the program. Parent 9 expressed that they had previously engaged in more cooperation: "as a non-speaking parent, I had a lot of questions and you know, needed access to some of the resources and support systems". However, now that their children are older and more capable with the language, they no longer participate in home-school cooperation as much. As for the other parents, there was still more home-school cooperation for early language learning taking place in Finland as Parent 2 shared that the cooperation was monthly, whereas Parents 6, 7, and 8 mentioned that it was only a few times a school year. As for initiation, parents living in both countries had examples of the school initiating, of themselves initiating, and examples where the communication went both ways, with some parents (1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9) having examples of all three. This slightly contradicts the 2022 PISA findings, previously described in sections 3.1.1 and 3.2.1. These findings would predict that the parents living in Finland would have less experience of the home initiating the cooperation (16%), than their American counterparts (31%), and that both parents living in Finland and the US would have more examples of the school initiating than the home initiating (OECD, 2023a, 2023b). However, as these parents took part in volunteer sampling, they may have had extra interests or motives for taking part in this study (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 222). One may assume that they have had more experiences or involvement with home-school cooperation regarding their child's early

foreign language learning, or more involved in home-school cooperation than the average parent. Additionally, this exploratory research does not intend to represent that of the wider population, but rather to gather information on a small-scale level.

As for the contents of the cooperation, the answers of parents living in both countries covered similar themes. The common content of the cooperation mainly included receiving language resources and activities from the teacher, general language class updates, more personalized reports regarding language progress, and addressing specific parental concerns. Parent 4 from Finland and Parent 9 from the US also participated in home-school cooperation to plan and participate in language exchange programs, however in the case of Parent 4, the language exchange did not occur. An overview of the contents of home-school cooperation experienced by both parents living in Finland and the USA is shown in Table 16.

Table 16: Common contents of home-school cooperation in Finland and the USA

Common content of cooperation	Experienced by parents
Specific parental concerns	1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9
Language resources and activities	1, 4, 7, 9
General language class updates	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8
Child-specific language learning progress	1, 4, 5, 7, 9
Planning for language exchange programs	4, 9

Overall, despite the different country-specific regulations, types of schools, and language learning programs, the experienced levels and forms of home-school cooperation regarding their child's early foreign language learning by parents living in Finland and the US were similar. For example, even though most of the participating parents had not met their child's current foreign language teacher in person (parents 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7), all had direct communication with a language teacher either through Wilma or email correspondence. Though some parents participated in more cooperation than others, and

some parents received more specific feedback, the overall topics and frequencies of the cooperation were not largely different.

6.3.2 Similarities and differences in the desires, interests, and needs of home-school cooperation in Finland and the USA

As this topic is more subjective, and there were more noticeable differences within the countries, it is no surprise that there were further differences in the parents' answers regarding their interests and needs for home-school cooperation regarding their child's early foreign language learning. Based on the collected answers, these differences stem mostly from societal beliefs surrounding language learning, the factors affecting their current levels of home-school cooperation and their overall satisfaction with those levels.

Of the parents living in Finland, all showed a strong interest in home-school cooperation regarding their child's early foreign language learning. The majority of the parents stated that the home and the school must work together, and that it is neither the home nor the school's job to educate the child alone. This might be attributed to the culture of trust between homes and schools that exists in Finland as described in documents by the EDUFI and researchers alike (Alasuutari, 2010; EDUFI, 2022; Purola et al., 2022). The parents living in Finland clearly trust their child's teachers and value what they have to say.

Additionally, parents supported the cooperation to engage with their child and support their foreign language learning at home. Of parents living in the US, parents 6 and 9 held similar beliefs supporting home-school cooperation to those living in Finland. These similar beliefs, as well as which parents hold those beliefs, can be found in Table 17.

Table 17: Similarities in parent interest in home-school cooperation – Finland and the USA

Interested in the home-school cooperation because...	Expressed by parents
...a child's education is the responsibility of both the home and the school	1, 3, 4, 5
...it supports the parent in supporting the child's language learning at home	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9

Two parents living in the US did not show as much interest in home-school cooperation regarding their child's early foreign language learning. As previously described in section 6.2.2, this ambivalence comes from the fact that their children are doing relatively well in their foreign language learning, so they do not feel they need to get more involved.

Additionally, Parent 7 went on to say that he would rather the school send home resources in math or English. These findings are consistent with the Pew Research Center's findings that only 36% of Americans reported that knowing a foreign language was extremely important or very important for workers to be successful in the American workforce, and that foreign language learning is not prioritized in the American school system (Devlin, 2018; Pufahl et al., 2001). Again, this is not to say that these parents are not interested in their child's education, but rather that their child's language learning is not one of their top concerns.

There are split satisfaction levels of the parents living in both countries. Five parents were satisfied (parents 1, 3, 7, 8, 9) and four parents were not satisfied (parents 2, 4, 5, 6) with their current experiences with home-school cooperation in regard to their child's early foreign language learning. Of the parents that were satisfied, this satisfaction largely stems from previous positive interactions with the school and the parents not having concerns regarding their child's foreign language learning progress. As for the dissatisfied parents, this dissatisfaction comes from extenuating circumstances such as the teacher being ill (Parent 2), a desire for more language learning opportunities (Parent 4), language barriers and a need for more in-person communication (Parent 5), and a lack of inclusion of foreign

language in the newsletters (Parent 6). Though the child's age was not explicitly mentioned, interestingly, the parents who were dissatisfied with the current levels all have children in second grade or below. Since their children are young, they may have expected more cooperation from the school.

All parents, regardless of their interest in or their current satisfaction levels with home-school cooperation regarding their child's early foreign language learning had at least one need in regard to future cooperation. Overall, there were five distinct categories of needs from the school for home-school cooperation for early language learning: increase accessibility, provide more language level updates, provide more language exercises and provide more language learning opportunities. The needs, examples of those needs, and which parents expressed those needs are detailed in Table 18.

Table 18: Parent needs for home-school cooperation

Needs for cooperation from the school	Expressed by parents
Increase accessibility (i.e.: have the opportunity to meet the language teachers in person, have language support for foreign parents, have a clear contact list for the school)	1, 2, 3, 5, 6
Provide more language level updates (i.e.: provide more progress reports, share what foreign language benchmarks the school is using)	2, 3, 6, 9
Provide more language exercises (i.e.: provide activities such as songs, videos, worksheets that the parents can use at home with their children to support their language learning)	2, 5, 6
Provide more language learning opportunities (i.e.: more language classes, organize class trips abroad, host language exchanges)	3, 4, 7, 8
Develop universal program practices	1

The needs found in this study aligned with two of the three main needs found in the "What are parents' and guardians' interests and needs in home-school cooperation for the child's early language learning" poster. In the poster findings, parents from different countries expressed a wish for more means of communication such as direct contact with the

language teacher either through online or in-person meetings. They also expressed a needs for more effective cooperation such as providing more frequent and detailed cooperation from the school regarding their child's language learning progress and more ways for parents to support the child's foreign language development either in-school or at home. (Rexford et al., 2024). In this study, we can observe that the parents would also like more ways to contact the teacher and/or school, and they would also like to be provided with more information on how their child's foreign language learning is progressing, and what they can do to support that progress at home. The major difference found between the poster study and this study is that the poster reported parents wanting more laws and legislation to support home-school cooperation. This may not be as applicable to the parents living in Finland and the US as there are already existing home-school cooperation frameworks, especially in Finland as home-school cooperation is mentioned in the NCC. However, these thoughts are somewhat echoed by Parent 9, who would like to see more county-wide standardization of the immersion program. While more research is still needed, it seems that overall parents are interested in participating in home-school cooperation and would like to receive receiving more home-school cooperation in regard to their child's early foreign language learning.

7 Conclusion

Drawing on my personal experience as an early foreign language learner in the US and a foreign language teacher in both the US and Finland, the goal of this study was to obtain parent perspectives on home-school cooperation regarding their child's early foreign language learning. I obtained information on the experienced levels and forms of this cooperation as well as the parents' interests in and needs for this cooperation through semi-formal interviews. Though this is a small-scale qualitative study not meant to form conclusions about American or Finnish parents as a whole, this data is valuable to current educators, prospective teachers, and researchers alike.

This study explores that while the contents of cooperation are not standardized in either country due to the differences of each child, there are similarities in the current levels and forms of cooperation. In Finland, this includes the active use of Wilma, whereas in the United States it includes in-person parent-teacher conferences. The study also shows that there is parent interest in participating in home-school cooperation for their child's early language learning. Though parent satisfaction with the current levels and forms of this cooperation may vary due to a variety of factors, all parents have some sort of wish or need to improve future cooperation. The most mentioned needs include the school providing more language learning exercises, more language learning opportunities, and clearer and more consistent updates regarding their child's language learning progress. As such, this should be considered in current teacher professional development training, and in teacher-training programs.

As a researcher in this field, I plan to share my findings to stakeholders such as teachers and parents alike by disseminating this information through my professional social network. This research will be shared with school principals in both Finland and the US, as

well as the parent participants as requested. The dissemination material can be seen in Appendix V.

7.1 Evaluation of the research

While the data gathered here is not all-encompassing or entirely representative of either population, it includes rich and diverse data. As for the families living in Finland, this study includes families from immigrant and non-immigrant families living in Finland, including mixed cultured families, families that speak Finnish at home and those who do not and families' students ranging in early childhood education and care through upper secondary school. As for the parents living in the USA, this study includes data from families who have a parent who speaks a foreign language and those that do not, with students in public and in private schools, with students learning different languages in different programs, and students from preschool through university. As such, this study provides an overview and shows the diverse experiences with this type home-school cooperation.

Similar to how this research included data from students in Finland learning Finnish, it would have been nice to compare their parents' experiences to those of parents living in the US whose kids are learning English. Though this study did include a parent whose children are in Spanish immersion, and therefore did not speak the language of the classroom when they first started, their experience cannot be compared to that of an immigrant family. However, many immigrant parents do not speak English themselves and/or may not have felt comfortable participating in a study. As such, if a future researcher who spoke multiples language could interview these parents, I think those perspectives would be most valuable. Additionally, it would have been nice if there had been more parents living in the USA with their children learning a foreign language in

primary school to make a more direct comparison of the experiences, but as noted in the country specific background information those students are more difficult to find.

7.2 Implications

For current and prospective teachers, it is important to know that the parents are interested in more targeted home-school cooperation for early foreign language learning, and that they are interested in supporting their child's language development at home. As such, educators must consider how often they are communicating with the parents about language learning and what those conversations entail. Based on this study, parents would like to receive more child-specific feedback rather than more generalized whole-class feedback. As most language teachers have many students in multiple grade levels, this is a difficult task. As such, teachers must examine their current practices and see how they can provide this information to parents. In terms of child-specific language level updates, this may mean that the parents need help accessing the online platforms such as Wilma or ParentVUE to see their child's detailed reports. In terms of providing more language related activities, this could be done through grade-level collaborative planning with the classroom teacher. For example, they could co-write a newsletter including resources that can be used at home. As teachers already have an incredible workload, they must think how to effectively communicate this information.

For future teachers, and teacher training programs, this study implies that teachers should be trained on how to effectively communicate with the parents. For example, this might mean allowing student-teachers (also known as teacher-students or teacher trainees) to attend parent meetings and allowing the student-teachers to view examples of online messages sent to parents so they can learn what information to include and practice those conversation skills. Though this seems to already be in practice in the teacher training schools in Finland (Perälä-Littunen & Böök, 2019), as a student-teacher in the USA I had

very little hands-on practice with home-school cooperation prior to graduating with my teaching degree.

For school administrators, they may be interested in the results of this study so they can better support their teachers in communicating with the parents. Especially regarding the school's accessibility and providing more language learning opportunities such as extra classes or trips, that is not a task the teachers should have to carry alone. In regard to supporting the parents who do not speak the mainstream language of the school, this may mean providing professional development for teachers in intercultural communication, or by allocating funds if needed to hire translators. With more support from administration, the school may be able to respond to some of the parent needs.

7.3 Future studies

As home-school cooperation is a complex and multi-faceted procedure, it can be explored by many angles. Future research may choose to focus on more specific demographics or take a closer look at some of the factors affecting the cooperation. For example, still from the parent's perspective, one may choose to further explore the effect of parenting styles, social-economic factors or immigration may have on home-school cooperation. Future research may also choose to seek a different perspective, such as exploring the teacher's perspective, the administration's perspective, or even the student's perspective. Overall, though it is generally agreed that parental involvement and home-school cooperation has many benefits for the child, the parents, the teachers, and the school, there are still areas that warrant future research.

References

- An act to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to ensure that every child achieves., Pub. L. No. Public Law 114-195, (2015).
<https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf>
- Alasuutari, M. (2010). Striving at partnership: parent–practitioner relationships in Finnish early educators' talk. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 18(2), 149-161. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13502931003784545>
- Avnet, M., Makara, D., Larwin, K. H., & Erickson, M. (2019). The impact of parental involvement and education on academic achievement in elementary school. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, 8(3), 476-483.
<https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v8i3.20249>
- Basic Education Act*. (1998). Finland Retrieved from
<https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1998/en19980628.pdf>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Harvard University Press.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv26071r6>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the Family as a Context for Human Development: Research Perspectives. *Developmental Psychology*, 22(6), 723-742.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. *International Encyclopedia of Education*, 3(2).
- Castro, M., Expósito-Casas, E., López-Martín, E., Lizasoain, L., Navarro-Asencio, E., & Gaviria, J. L. (2015). Parental involvement on student academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Research Review*, 14, 33-46.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2015.01.002>
- Cian, H. (2021). Sashaying Across Party Lines: Evidence of and Arguments for the Use of Validity Evidence in Qualitative Education Research. *Review of Research in Education*, 45(1), 253-290. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x20985079>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (Eighth edition. ed.). Routledge.
- Devlin, K. (2018). Most European students are learning a foreign language in school while Americans lag. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/08/06/most-european-students-are-learning-a-foreign-language-in-school-while-americans-lag/>
- Devlin, K. (2018). Most European students are learning a foreign language in school while Americans lag. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/08/06/most-european-students-are-learning-a-foreign-language-in-school-while-americans-lag/#:~:text=In%20a%202016%20Pew%20Research%20Center%20report%20on,last%20out%20of%20eight%20skills%20for%20workers%E2%80%99%20success.>

- EDUFI. (2019a). *Amendments and Additions to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 Regarding the Instruction of the A1 Language in Grades 1-2*. Finnish National Agency for Education.
- EDUFI. (2019b). Facts Express 1C/2019: What languages do pupils study in basic education? In: Finnish National Agency for Education.
- EDUFI. (2019c). *National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education 2019*
- EDUFI. (2021). Facts and Figures on Basic Education in Finland. In: Finnish National Agency for Education.
- EDUFI. (2022). Finnish Education in a nutshell. In: Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Agency for Education.
- EDUFI. (n.d). *Education and support for pupils with migrant and multilingual background*. Finnish National Agency for Education. <https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/education-and-support-pupils-migrant-and-multilingual-background>
- Epstein, J. (1992). *School and Family Partnerships. Report No. 6*. C. Center on Families, Schools, and & C. s. Learning. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED343715.pdf>
- Epstein, J. (2009). *School, family, and community partnerships : your handbook for action* (3rd ed.). Corwin Press.
- Federal Role in Education*. (n.d, May 23, 2024). U.S Department of Education. Retrieved 2024 from <https://www.ed.gov/about/ed-overview/federal-role-in-education>
- FNBE. (2016). *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014*. Finnish National Board of Education.
- Guedes, F. B., Cerqueira, A., Marques-Pinto, A., Branco, A., Galvão, C., Sousa, J., Goulao, L. F., Bronze, R., Viegas, W., Gaspar, T., Moreno, C., & Matos, M. G. (2024). School and family ecosystem: Incentives and barriers to school–family communication. *European Journal of Education*, 59(2). https://doi.org/https://doi.org.ezproxy.uef.fi:2443/10.1111/ejed.12620open_in_new
- Hahl, K., & Pietarila, M. (2021). Class Teachers, Subject Teachers and Double Qualified: Conceptions of Teachers' Skills in Early Foreign Language Learning in Finland. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 13(5), 713-725. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26822/iejee.2021.223>
- Hakyemez-Paul, S. (2020). A Brief Introduction to Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education in Turkish and Finnish Contexts. *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education (NJCIE)*, 4(2), 84-91. <https://doi.org/10.7577/njcie.3762>
- Hanson, R., & Pugliese, C. (2020). *Parent and Family Involvement in Education: 2019*. N. C. f. E. Statistics.
- Hornby, G., & Lafaele, R. (2011). Barries to parental involvement in education: An explanatory model. *Educational Review*, 63, 37-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2010.488049>
- Jafarov, J. (2015). Factors Affecting Parental Involvement in Education: The Analysis of Literature. *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 18, 35-44. <https://jhss-khazar.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/3.Javid-Jafarov-1.pdf>


- Joyce L. Epstein, PhD. (n.d). Johns Hopkins School of Education.
<https://education.jhu.edu/directory/joyce-l-epstein-phd/>
- Kennedy, E., & Laurillard, D. (2024). Transformative Online Education in Challenging Contexts. In *Online Learning Futures: An Evidence-Based Vision for Global Professional Collaboration on Sustainability* (First Edition ed., pp. 151-179). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Kocayörük, E. (2016). Parental Involvement and School Achievement. *International Journal of Human Behavioral Science*, 2(2).
<https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.19148/ijhbs.65987>
- Krashen, S. (1982). Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition.
- Lang, S. S., Ceci, S. J., Steinberg, L., & Garbarino, J. (2005). In *Appreciation: Urie Bronfenbrenner*. Association for Psychological Science.
<https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/in-appreciation-urie-bronfenbrenner>
- Leung, L. (2015). Validity, reliability, and generalizability in qualitative research. *Journal of family medicine and primary care*, 4(3), 324-327. <https://doi.org/10.4103/2249-4863.161306>
- Met, M., & Lorenz, E. B. (1997). Lessons from the US immersion programs: Two decades of experience. In *Immersion Education: International Perspectives* (pp. 243-264). Cambridge University Press.
- Morse, J., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., & Olson, K. L. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1.
- Muñoz, C. (2014). Starting young - is that all it takes? *Babylonia*, 22-25.
- Navarro, J. L., & Tudge, J. R. H. (2022). Technologizing Bronfenbrenner: Neo-ecological Theory. *Current Psychology*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-02738-3>
- NCES. (2001a). Figure 1.- The structure of education in the United States. In: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- NCES. (2001b). The structure of education in the United States. In: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- NCES. (2017a). Compulsory school attendance laws, minimum and maximum age limits for required free education, by state: 2017. In: Education Commission of the States.
- NCES. (2017b). Table 1.2. Compulsory school attendance laws, minimum and maximum age limits for required free education, by state: 2017. In: Education Commission of the States.
- NCES. (2022). *Family Involvement in Education-Related Activities Outside of School* (Condition of Education, Issue. U. S. D. o. Education.
<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/sga>
- NCES. (2024). *Characteristics of Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Condition of Education, Issue. U. S. D. o. Education. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cla>.
- Niemi, H., Toom, A., & Kallioniemi, A. (2012). *Miracle of Education : The Principles and Practices of Teaching and Learning in Finnish Schools* [Book]. Brill.

- <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=478116&site=ehost-live>
- OECD. (2023a). *PISA 2022 Results: Factsheet - Finland*. O. Publishing.
- OECD. (2023b). *PISA 2022 Results: Factsheet - United States*. O. Publishing.
- OESE. (2018). Understanding the Every Student Succeeds Act: A Parent's guide to the Nation's Landmark Education Law. In O. o. E. a. S. Education (Ed.). Washington, D.C: U.S Department of Education.
- Olivia-Olson, C., Estrada, M., Ansari, S., White, A., & Matera, J. (2022). Family Engagement in Early Childhood: Policy and practice in the United States. In *Parental Engagement and Early Childhood Education Around the World*. Routledge.
- Orell, M., & Pihlaja, P. (2020). Cooperation Between Home and School in the Finnish Core Curriculum 2014. *Nordic Studies in Education*, 40, 107-128.
<https://doi.org/10.23865/nse.v40.2224>
- Parents Bill of Rights Act, (2023). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/5>
- Perälä-Littunen, S., & Böök, M. L. (2019). Finnish teacher-students' views on home-school cooperation. *International Journal about Parents in Education*, 11(1), 37-49.
<https://ijpe.eu/article/download/14120/15613/30654>
- Pherali, T., Moghli, M. A., & Chase, E. (2020). Educators for Change: Supporting the Transformative Role of Teachers in Contexts of Mass Displacement. *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, 5(2), 147-175. <https://archive.nyu.edu/handle/2451/61009>
- Pinter, A. (2017). Learning Second Languages at Home and at School. In *Teaching Young Language learners* (2 ed., pp. 33-40). Oxford University Press.
- PTA. (n.d-a). *Why schools need PTA*. National PTA. <https://www.pta.org/home/About-National-Parent-Teacher-Association/Benefits-of-PTA-Membership/Why-Your-School-Needs-a-PTA>
- PTA. (n.d-b). *Why Your School Needs a PTA*. In (Vol. 2024). Alexandria, VA: National PTA. *Public School Systems by Type of Organization and State*. (2022). U. S. C. Bureau.
<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2022/econ/gus/2022-governments.html>
- Pufahl, I., Rhodes, N. C., & Christian, D. (2001). Foreign Language Teaching: What We Can Learn from Other Countries. *ERIC Digest*.
- Purola, K., Harju-Luukkainen, H., & Kangas, J. (2022). Parental Perspectives in the Finnish Early Childhood Education Context. In *Parental Engagement and Early Childhood Education Around the World* (pp. 90-). Routledge.
- Rexford, K., Chen, P., Mehr, S. A., Akhter, S., Bui, D., Buldu, C., Corcho, J. C., Gao, Y., Hou, S., Kahraman, A., Katsuki, M., Matban, N., Pirsahbedel, S., Lima, I. R., Saarinen, E., Aragón, I. S., Takahashi, N., Guisado, C. T., Xu, L., & Yamada, S. (2024). What Are Parents' or Guardians' Interests and Needs for Home-school Cooperation in the Children's Early Language Learning. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11349969>
- Sadownik, A. R., Phillipson, S., Harju-Luukkainen, H., & Garvis, S. (2022). International Trends in Parent Involvement of Sayings, Doings, and Relatings. In *Parental Engagement and Early Childhood Education Around the World*. Routledge.

- Sanders, M., & Epstein, J. (2000). Building School-Family-Community Partnerships in Middle and High Schools. In M. G. Sanders (Ed.), *Schooling Students Placed at Risk : Research, Policy, and Practice in the Education of Poor and Minority Adolescents* (pp. 339-361). Taylor & Francis Group. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.uef.fi:2443/lib/uef-ebooks/reader.action?docID=474644&ppg=252>
- Spiers, J., Morse, J. M., Olson, K., Mayan, M., & Barrett, M. (2018). Reflection/Commentary on a Past Article: "Verification Strategies for Establishing Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research" [Article]. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1), 1-2. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918788237>
- The State of American Jobs*. (2016). P. R. Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2016/10/06/the-state-of-american-jobs/>
- Swain, M., & Johnson, R. K. (1997). Immersion education: A category within bilingual education. In *Immersion Education: International Perspectives* (pp. 1-16). Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, S. J., Bogdan, R., & DeVault, M. L. (2016). *Introduction to qualitative research methods : a guidebook and resource* (Fourth edition. ed.). Wiley.
- TENK. (2019). The ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland. In F. N. B. o. R. I. TENK (Ed.), (3 ed.). Helsinki, Finland: Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK.
- TENK. (2023). The Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland 2023. In: Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK.
- Trailblazers: Urie Bronfenbrenner*. (n.d). Cornell University. <https://www.human.cornell.edu/about/trailblazers/bronfenbrenner>
- UEF. (n.d). *Research ethics*. University of Eastern Finland. <https://www.uef.fi/en/research-ethics>
- Ustun, U., & Eryilmaz, A. (2018). Analysis of Finnish Education System to Question the Reasons behind Finnish Success in PISA [Journal Articles; Reports - Research]. *Online Submission*, 2(2), 93-114. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED591431&site=ehost-live>
- VanPatten, B., Keating, G. D., & Wulff, S. (2020). *Theories in second language acquisition : an introduction* (Third edition. ed.). Routledge.
- Yeban, J. (n.d, January 5, 2024). *Compulsory Education Laws: Background*. FindLaw. <https://www.findlaw.com/education/education-options/compulsory-education-laws-background.html>

Appendices

Appendix I: RELE Poster as presented at LinguaPeda Conference 2023




UNIVERSITY OF
EASTERN FINLAND

**WHAT ARE PARENTS' OR GUARDIANS' INTERESTS AND NEEDS
FOR HOME-SCHOOL COOPERATION
IN THE CHILDREN'S EARLY LANGUAGE LEARNING?**

University of Eastern Finland, School of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education, Course of 'Research in Early Language Education', Spring 2023
Kriszta Bedford, Peiying Chen, Samira Ahmadi Mehr, Sakha Akhter, Duang Bul, Can Bulku, Jorge Clemente Corcho, Yujie Cao, Siqi Hou, Aygje Kahraman, Monzika Katsuki, Narin Matban, Saeedeh Pirsahbedi, Izaskun Rangel Lima, Emma Saarinen, Irene Santana Aragon, Naoki Takahashi, Cesar Tojoro Guisado, Lu Xu, Shino Yamada

The home-school cooperation plays an essential role during the student's early stages of learning a new language. Therefore, this study investigated the current perspectives on this topic across three continents. There were 40 parents from nine countries who participated in this research. The data was collected by a total of 20 student-researchers of the course 'Research in Early Language Education' through online interviews. The data was analyzed utilizing qualitative content analysis with Atlas.ti software. The findings demonstrate that in the existing home-school cooperation, the majority of parents expressed dissatisfaction due to little communication and support from the schools. At the same time, the study shows that efficient and regulated cooperation has a potential positive impact on the student's language learning.



Means of communication

Most parents expressed they only have contact with their child's classroom teacher, and they have a desire to be in direct contact with their child's language teacher either in-person or online.

However, it would be nice to meet the language teachers face-to-face.
Finland parent

I think it is important to make the most of online and SNS so that we will be able to easily exchange opinions with each other whenever we want.
Japanese parent

Effectiveness of home-school cooperation

Through monthly learning process, teachers can report on the learning situation or whether there are any problems at school, any difficulties, they must also discuss with parents.
Vietnamese parent

This can include early identification of learning problems, implementation of support programmes and collaboration to create an individualised curriculum for the student.
Spanish parent

I hope that the teachers at the school can send us more resources for learning foreign languages, because if some parents, like us, well, it's hard to judge the resources from the internet.
Chinese parent

...and some seminars related to communication with their children, lots of parents need to learn how to help their children.
Turkish parent

...parents need to feel involved in the educational process of their children and have the opportunity to actively participate in school life.
Spanish parent

Inviting grandparents to visit the classroom, or setting up opportunities for parents to come read to the kids.
American parent

The majority of parents wish for more frequent and more detailed communication with the teachers, both regarding their child's language learning progress in school, and instructions for how they can support language learning at home. Some parents also voiced a desire to get directly involved in school activities.

The need for legislation for home-school cooperation

Parents asked for more laws to help regulate home-school cooperation for all parties involved. They hope that the quality of the cooperation would improve under new legislation.

One more thing I want to add is if there were any laws and guidelines by the government about cooperation and learning more foreign languages, then the school authorities would be more serious about the cooperation.
Bangladeshi parent

It would be nice if there was some regulation regarding home-school cooperation for all schools as there does not seem to be a comprehensive law on this topic.
Iranian parent

Appendix II: List of areas of home-school cooperation in Finland as described in Finnish law (*Basic Education Act, 1998*)

- The foundation for education (Section 3)
- Determination of a pupil's school (Section 6)
- Language of instruction (Section 10)
- Religious education and ethics (Section 13)
- Enhanced Support (Section 16a)
- Special needs support (Section 17)
- Special teaching arrangements (Section 18)
- Pupil assessment (Section 22)
- Completion of compulsory schooling (Section 26)
- Right to pre-primary education (Section 26a)
- Right to instruction (Section 30)
- Pupil welfare (Section 31a)
- School travel (Section 32)
- Disciplinary matters and enforcement of suspension (Section 36a)
- Confidentiality and the handling of personal data (Section 40)
- Appeals against a decision (Section 42)
- Fees for before and/or after school activities (Section 48f)

Appendix III: Call for Volunteers

Example of text used to locate parent participants in Finland as shared on VivaEngage, Facebook and WhatsApp:

“Are you a parent living in Finland whose child is learning a foreign language at school?”

If you are a parent / guardian with any parenting experience about children’s early language learning at school, you are warmly welcomed to participate in an interview for my master's thesis regarding the home-school collaboration in regards to your child's foreign language learning.

All interviews will be in English and will take 30 minutes to an hour depending on your answers.

If you wish to take part in this research project or if you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me (kreford@uef.fi). I look forward to working with you!”

Example of text used to locate parent participants in the US as shared via email, LinkedIn, and personal social networks:

“Are you a parent living in the USA whose child is learning a foreign language at school? If you are a parent / guardian with any parenting experience about children’s early language learning at school, you are warmly welcomed to participate in an interview for my master's thesis regarding the home-school collaboration in regards to your child's foreign language learning.

All interviews will be on video calls scheduled at your convenience, and will take 30 minutes to an hour depending on your answers.

If you wish to take part in this research project or if you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me via email: kreford@uef.fi. I look forward to working with you!”

Example of image used to locate parent participants living in the USA as shared on personal social networks:

Participants wanted!

Is your child learning a foreign language at school or do you know someone whose child is learning a foreign language at school?

•••

I am looking for parents living in the USA to participate in a qualitative study regarding **home-school cooperation for foreign language learning.**

DM for more details



Appendix IV: Participant Letter



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

Dear parent / guardian,

I request to arrange an interview in English at your convenience where we will discuss your experiences, interests, hopes, and needs for home-school cooperation for your child's/children's language learning. I am especially interested in your experience with your child's foreign language teachers during the first couple of years they have foreign language studies at school.

If you are a parent / guardian with any parenting experience about children's early language learning at school, you are warmly welcomed to participate in the interview.

All information is confidential research data which is to be used exclusively for the purposes of the research work in the context of my master's thesis dissertation and presentation. The identity of interviewees is not revealed in the reporting of results.

Data is collected from both the United States and Finland, and results are also to be shared internationally with the aim to develop language education.

If you wish to know more about this research project and its data collection, do not hesitate to contact: krexford@uef.fi . I look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,

Kristina Rexford

Early Language Education for Intercultural Communication, 2024

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study related to parents' hopes of their child's/children's early language education
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that only the interviewer has access to the original audio recordings. Recordings will be transcribed and retained by the interviewer until the results of the research findings are published (latest the end of 2024)
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for six months after the results are published (latest the end of 2024)
- I understand that I am free to contact the interviewer and the research leader in the UEF to seek further clarification and information.

Please, send your consent to participate in research directly as a reply to this message.

Interview Questions. Please note that due to the semi-formal format of the interview, some questions may be changed, added, and/or omitted.

Questions regarding your background information

1. How many children do you have?
2. How old are your children?
3. Which language or languages do you speak at home?
4. Which foreign languages have your children learned in school?
5. Which grade and age have they started to study FL in school?
6. How many years have they been studying a FL?
7. In which type of program have they been studying a FL? (for example, immersion program, dual-immersion program, foreign language, ESOL)

Questions regarding the current levels of home-school cooperation related to your child's/children's early language learning

8. Describe your own experiences with home-school cooperation related to your children's early language learning so far. Please share anything you are willing to share related to this topic, such as positive and negative experiences, details and bigger issues or topics.
9. How often do you cooperate with your children's school or teachers related to your children's early language learning? With whom?
10. In what ways? Which activities does it include?
11. Who starts/initiates the cooperation? How?
12. Do you think the existing level of cooperation is enough? Why?

Questions regarding your Interests and needs for future home-school cooperation related to your child's/children's early language learning

13. Do you think home-school cooperation is useful / fruitful / meaningful and why?
14. How would you like to improve your cooperation? Why?
15. How would you like the school to improve their cooperation? Why?
16. Do you have any other hopes, wishes, ideas, comments related to home-school collaboration?

Appendix V: Informational leaflet to be shared with professional network



UNIVERSITY OF
EASTERN FINLAND

AMERICAN AND FINNISH PARENT PERSPECTIVES ON HOME-SCHOOL COOPERATION FOR EARLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Kristina Rexford - Master's Degree Programme in Early Language Education for Intercultural Communication - 2024

The collaboration between home and school plays a significant role in a pupil's early foreign language learning (EFL). For my thesis project, I obtained and then compared small-scale Finnish and American parent perspectives on home-school cooperation (HSC), especially with how it relates to their child's early foreign language learning.

Five parents living in Finland and four parents living in the USA who have experience with HSC in regards to their child's EFL participated in semi-structured qualitative interviews. The children of the interviewed parents began their EFL ranging in ages from 3 to 14 and were learning English, Finnish, French, Hebrew, Spanish, Swedish, or Russian as foreign languages.

Parents' experienced levels and forms of HSC in regards to their child's EFL

The parents living in the US and in Finland experienced **similar methods, frequency, and contents** of HSC. Similarly, there was an even distribution of examples of times when the schools initiated the cooperation and when the homes initiated the cooperation. Despite the differences in Finland's and the United States's current framework for language learning and home-school cooperation, no major country-based differences were found in this case study.

Methods of cooperation: **online communication** with a teacher or advisor, **meetings with a teacher, principal or advisor** to discuss language learning, and/or **receiving a newsletter** which included information about language learning, **assisting their child with their language homework** at home.

Content of cooperation: **general whole-class updates**, **child-specific language learning progress**, sharing **language resources and activities**, addressing **specific parent concerns** regarding the language class or their child's language progress, and planning for **language exchange programs**.

Parents' interests in for HSC in regards to their child's EFL

5 out of the 9 participants were **satisfied** with the cooperation. Some factors that affect the cooperation include, but are not limited to: **parent availability**, **language differences**, in which **type of language program** the child is enrolled, the **current level of concern** regarding the child's language learning, and **parent interest** in the cooperation. In terms of interest, all interviewed parents living in Finland show **interest** in the cooperation. Only 2 of the 4 interviewed parents living in the USA show interest, due to the prioritization of other subjects and the high independence of the child. Regardless of satisfaction or interest, all interviewed parents had needs regarding HSC for EFL.

Parent needs for HSC in regards to their child's EFL	Expressed by parents
Increase accessibility: provide in-person meetings with language teachers, provide language support for foreign parents, provide school contact list	FI1, FI2, FI3, US5, US6
Provide more language level updates: share more progress reports and/or what benchmarks the school is using, and what the language learning goals are	FI2, FI3, US6, US9
Provide more language learning opportunities: offer more language classes or class trips	FI3, FI4, US7, US8
Provide more language exercises: share songs, videos, worksheets or apps the parents can use at home to support their child's language learning	FI2, FI5, US6