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How Finnish teachers understand multilingual learners' language learning

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The number of students whose home language is different from the language of instruction is growing everywhere. Learning a new language while simultaneously learning different subjects in that language, is challenging and requires teacher support. However, research has shown that not all teachers have sufficient knowledge of language learning, how language learning influences the learning of content, or how to support multilingual learners in this context (Sullivan, 2016). In this study, Finnish teachers' (N = 820) understandings of certain processes related to learning an additional language were examined, including whether there were differences in understandings between different teacher groups. Over 80% of the surveyed teachers were knowledgeable about the aspects related to classroom interaction and language use that can be considered as essential for being a linguistically responsive teacher: for example, they knew that social interaction supports learners' language development. In this study, the less experience a teacher had in general, the more knowledgeable they were regarding language learning. Further, teachers of language related subjects had a better understanding of certain aspects of language learning compared to other subject teacher groups. Based on these results, professional development targeted at teachers who have been in the profession for several years is recommended.

Keywords: teachers, understanding, language learning, multilingual learners

1 Introduction

An increase in immigration has led to a higher number of students whose home language is not the language of instruction. In this study, we use the term multilingual learners to refer to these (mainly) immigrant background students who are learning Finnish as their additional language while attending school in Finland. Learning a new language while simultaneously learning content through the new language is challenging and requires teacher support. However, previous research has shown that teachers do not inherently have the necessary knowledge of language learning in general or how language learning influences learning other subjects, nor do they know how to support multilingual learners in this context (Sullivan, 2016). These areas are, nevertheless, crucial in order to be able to instruct students effectively (Lucas & Villegas, 2013).

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In this study, Finnish teachers' (N = 820) understanding of certain processes related to learning of an additional language will be investigated. Because understanding is based on both experience and education (Woods & Çakir, 2011), teachers' fields of expertise and backgrounds, including teaching experience, experience with immigrant students, and the number of immigrant students in their schools, were also examined in relation to their understanding. The matter is studied from the point-of-view of teacher education; as understanding language learning is an essential part of linguistically responsive teaching (Lucas & Villegas, 2011), based on the results, we hope to develop recommendations for teacher education in order to promote equal learning opportunities for all students.

2 What teachers need to know about learning an additional language

Language learning is an intrinsic part of multilingual students' schooling, as they are not only learning the language, they are also learning *through* the language (Cummins, 2001). In order to create an environment that is linguistically appropriate for these students, it is crucial that teachers are linguistically responsive (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). This encompasses a wide range of topics. Teachers need to understand language learning processes and the role of language in learning, as well as language use in a pedagogical context and the pedagogical skills needed to support language learners during content lessons (Coady, de Jong, & Harper, 2011; Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Additionally, linguistically responsive teachers actively advocate for their learners' language learning to maximize these students' academic success (Lucas & Villegas, 2013).

In this study, we looked at teachers' understanding of learning an additional language (see Lucas et al., 2008; Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2018) and what prerequisites they had for promoting language learning in a pedagogical context. For this purpose, six statements were used (see Table 3) that can be considered to reflect elements of linguistically responsive teaching. In order to create a supportive pedagogical environment for multilingual learners, teachers must consider a multitude of factors including the dimensions of language, how to provide affordances and to promote social interaction, as well as the importance of home languages and the link between anxiety and learning (see also Lucas et al., 2008; Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2018). Language learning is a complex phenomenon, and the list of factors presented above is not exhaustive. However, the listed factors are pertinent to this study and include important psycho-sociolinguistic and socio-cultural processes involved in language learning (see also Lucas et al., 2008).

Language dimensions refer to the way language is used in different settings. It is important that teachers understand that every-day conversational language differs from the way language is used in academic settings (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2018), and that learning academic language can be challenging for language learners and native speakers alike (Uccelli & Phillips Galloway, 2018). It follows that understanding the content of teaching may be challenging, even if students have a strong facility with conversational language or everyday interactions (Cummins, 2000; Lucas et al., 2008; Villegas, Saiz deLaMora, Martin, & Mills, 2018). It is typical that academic language skills develop more slowly than everyday language skills (Cummins, 2000; Villegas et al., 2018), and when students' home languages are different than the language of their instruction, they are both learning the language and through the language (Lucas et al., 2008; Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Moreover, language development varies for each individual, and it is influenced

by a variety of psychological, social, and contextual factors (Ellis, 2008). Thus, each learner may benefit from a different type of support. This is of importance, as it has been shown that when teachers are aware of how language affects the learning process, students' learning outcomes improve (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2012).

It is not just the structure of language that must be understood, but also the role language plays in the learning of particular subjects. According to Sullivan (2016), teachers are often not aware of the challenges of subject-specific language, in particular in identifying the discipline specific ways that language is used, and how this affects the learning process of multilingual learners. Teachers' own backgrounds and experiences also influence their understanding of the role that language plays in the classroom. Language teachers' acceptance of their role in helping multilingual learners understand how language works has been shown to be understandably higher than that of other teacher groups (Valdes, 2010). Teachers who are defined by their academic discipline feel that they are not sufficiently prepared to deal with language issues that occur while teaching their subjects (Lucas, et al. 2008; Schleppegrell, Achigar, & Oteiza, 2004). Furthermore, not all teachers consider language teaching to be their responsibility (Bunch, 2010). According to some studies, teachers do not necessarily pay attention to how the way they use language when teaching affects students' understanding of their subject, and other teachers overly simplify their language, which does not support learners in developing their academic language skills (Scarcella, 2003; Schleppegrell, 2002) and can result in lower learning outcomes (Goldenberg, 2008).

Linguistic responsiveness can be increased by paying attention to what van Lier (2000) refers to as affordances or supports that are an essential aspect of language learning. Affordances can be derived from multiple linguistic elements available in the environment, both visual and spoken. They can come from the organization of information in textbooks, visual images, tone of voice or accompanying gestures, or, for example, advertisements. For learning to happen, the affordances must be meaningful to the learner and slightly more challenging than the learner's current language level (Lucas et al., 2008). In order to make affordances accessible to every student, it is beneficial for teachers to know their students' language levels, and understand that language development is different for each individual.

One consideration for linguistic responsiveness is the importance of social interaction (Lucas et al., 2008; Teemant, 2018) to promote language production. Sourcing affordances from the environment is important, but it is not enough. Producing language is vital for language learning (Swain, 2000) and is facilitated even more when students are negotiating meaning (van Lier, 2000), which occurs when two discussants encounter a problem in understanding each other. For example, if there is an expression that the language learner needs but does not know and the other does, the speaking partner can support the learner. By working together to reach an understanding, the needed expression becomes available to the learner. This process requires that students are offered opportunities for authentic, learner-relevant, social interaction (van Lier, 2000).

Another aspect of linguistic responsiveness is recognizing learners' home languages as valuable resources and utilizing their entire linguistic repertoire for learning, for example in information retrieval and group discussions (Cummins et al., 2005; Lucas et al., 2008). During content instruction, it is important for a teacher to support, promote, and build on the linguistic resources of learners, so students can use all of their cognitive resources for learning (García & Hesson, 2015; Lucas et al., 2008). It follows that, the stronger the students' home language

skills, the better they will be at learning other languages and content (Cummins, 2007). Unfortunately, many teachers believe that the language of the instruction will only be learned if students' home languages are excluded and all school activities take place in the target language (Alisaari, Heikkola, Acquah & Commins, 2019; Valdes 2010). However, evidence suggests that including the home language in instruction is beneficial: it promotes better outcomes in maintaining the home language, learning the school language, and learning other subjects (Ganuza & Hedman, 2018; Ramírez, 1992).

Finally, studies have shown that anxiety may disrupt learning, affecting language detection, production, and processing (MacIntyre, 1998). Furthermore, learning a language causes more anxiety than learning other subjects, especially in oral communication situations, and anxiety can hinder both learning and performance (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Because of this, teachers should play an active role in reducing their students' anxiety related to language learning: when the learning atmosphere is perceived as safe, the learner can achieve better learning outcomes (Lucas et al., 2008).

The aforementioned elements of language learning and the relationship between teachers' knowledge were investigated in this study. The study sought to find the ways in which teachers' knowledge about these topics was related to what is known about creating a supportive linguistic environment for multilingual students (see also Villegas et al., 2018). Further, since the background and experience of the teacher are important factors in the promotion of linguistically responsive pedagogy (see also, Coady et al., 2011), the connection between teachers' backgrounds and their understanding of language learning was also examined. The background factors investigated included teachers' professional preparation, general teaching experience, experience with immigrant background students, and the number of these students at the teachers' schools.

3 Context of the study

The context of this study is Finland, a Nordic country with 5.5 million inhabitants. During the last three decades, immigration into Finland has increased considerably, and the current growth in overall population is based solely on immigration (Statistics of Finland, 2020). This demographic change has brought a change to many classrooms. In 2015, 5.7% of students in basic education (primary and lower-secondary) had a home language other than Finnish, Swedish, or Sami, the three national languages used for instruction in Finnish schools. By 2020, the number of multilingual learners has grown even more, especially in the larger cities (National Agency of Education, 2017).

The results of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) have shown that there is a significant gap between the learning outcomes of native Finnish students and those of first- and second-generation immigrant students (Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2014; Vettenranta et al., 2016). To respond to this discrepancy, core curricula, established in 2016 for basic and upper secondary education, introduced additional practices, such as linguistically responsive teaching, into Finnish schools. The guidelines require that every teacher considers both the role of language in learning and the challenges that language poses for learners. The current core curricula also require that all students are allowed to use their entire linguistic repertoire as a resource for learning (National Agency for Education,

2014, 2015). Thus, although language-related issues had not been systematically addressed in the teacher training of non-language teachers before fall of 2016, the current curricula require every teacher to have knowledge about language learning, regardless of the subject they teach.

In order to better prepare Finnish teachers to implement the current curricula, it is important to understand the knowledge that they already have about language learning and teaching multilingual learners. This study was framed by the following research questions:

1. How do Finnish teachers understand language learning?
2. Is there a difference in understandings among different groups of teachers?

The results of this study can be used to develop appropriate professional learning opportunities to enable all teachers in Finland to be better equipped to manage the changing demographics of the classroom.

4 Methods

4.1 Participants

Participants of the study were 820 Finnish teachers working mainly in basic education, which is approximately 4.5% of all teachers in Finland (Kumpulainen, 2017). Of these, 78% were female, 21% male, and 1% other, and their mean age was 41 years; this is reflective of the overall demographics of teachers in Finland (Kumpulainen, 2017). The distribution of different teaching areas, which are based on differences in education and the context where the teachers work, is presented in Table 1. As supporting language learning of both multilingual learners and native language students and effectively teaching content is the responsibility of all teachers, all teacher groups working in basic education in Finland have been included in the analysis.

Table 1. The distribution of the respondents (N = 820) within different teaching areas.

Area	Percentage of respondents
Classroom teacher in primary school (CL)	23.1
Subject teacher in secondary or upper-secondary school (SU)	44.3
Classroom teacher with additional qualification of a subject teacher (CS)	4
Special education teacher or a teacher of newly arrived migrants (SE)	14.9
Counselor (CO)	2.9
Principal (P)	5.7
Other (O)	3.6

The majority of the participants (44.3%) were subject teachers in secondary or upper-secondary schools. The second highest percentage of participants (23.1%) were classroom teachers who teach all subjects for a class of students in primary school. As it is linguistically responsive teaching that is being investigated, the subject teachers have been divided into groups loosely based on the way language is used in the different subject groups, with the understanding that there are differences in the ways language is used, for example, in mathematics and history.

The goal is to examine whether there are differences in teachers' understanding between teacher groups teaching languages (Finnish vs. other languages), theory-based subjects, and practice-based subjects. The distribution of the teachers within different subjects is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The distribution of the subject teachers (N = 420) within the different subjects.

Subject	Percentage of teachers
Finnish as a first or an additional language & literature	14.9
Foreign or second domestic language	10.2
Mathematics or theoretical subjects*	19.4
Visual art, music, handcrafts, or P.E (later: art and P.E.)	6.7

* Theoretical subjects include physics, chemistry, history, biology, geography, religious/worldview studies, philosophy, and social sciences.

Only 13% of the teachers reported having had some training related to linguistically responsive teaching as a part of their pre-service or in-service teacher training.

4.2 Instrument and data analysis

The data were collected in the spring of 2016 using an online survey. The survey was based on a preliminary version of a survey on linguistically and culturally responsive teaching by Milbourn, Viesca, and Leech (2017). Milbourn et al. (2017) created their survey according to the framework of linguistically responsive teaching developed by Lucas & Villegas (2013). The survey was then translated and adapted to fit the context of the Finnish educational system with the help of a colleague, Emmanuel O. Acquah, the National Agency of Education, scholars working in The Finnish Network for Language Education Policies, the Centre for Applied Language Studies, and statistician Eero Laakkonen. The reliability of the survey was tested by looking at Cronbach's alpha during the initial analysis (for the six statements under investigation in this study: Cronbach's a = 0.73–0.75).

The link to the survey and an informative cover letter were shared through email lists, social media, websites, and at the national educational fair. It was also sent to local education departments in Finland, who were asked to pass the survey on to all teachers in the area. The cover letter included information about the aims of the study, data protection, and consent to participate the study, which was implied by completion of the survey. Further, the term *multilingual learner* that was used in the study was defined as multilingual learners of the Finnish language who have an immigrant background. The participation percentage cannot be calculated, as it is unknown how many people received or saw the link for the survey.

In the survey, there were both Likert scale (1–5) statements investigating teachers' understanding of (n = 38) and practices (n = 21) related to linguistically and culturally responsive teaching, and open-ended questions (n = 11) to gain deeper understanding of teachers' experiences and attitudes related to teaching multilingual learners and their own professional development needs. This paper investigates six Likert scale statements (Table 3), which were used as a summed variable in another article (Vigren, Alisaari, Heikkola, Acquah & Commins, manuscript) from the same research project. In that study, three factors were found, among a total of 19 items (for a more detailed discussion, see Vigren et al., manuscript). The six statements used in this study formed a factor called

"*Understanding L2*", and they were thus considered relevant in the examination of teachers' understanding of language learning. The scale in the responses to the statements was: 1 = Completely agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Partly disagree, 4 = Completely disagree, 5 = I cannot tell.

Table 3. Statements included in the analysis.

1. Teachers should advocate for Finnish language development support for multilingual learners.
2. Social interaction in authentic communicative situations supports multilingual learners' Finnish language learning.
3. Multilingual learners benefit when the Finnish language is examined during the teaching of different subjects.
4. The process of learning an additional language is similar for all learners
5. Anxiety about operating with an additional language may violate learning.
6. Multilingual learners who maintain their home language have difficulty learning Finnish.

The data were analyzed with IBM SPSS version 26 by describing frequencies and using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). To investigate what kind of understanding regarding different aspects of language learning Finnish teachers have, the frequencies of the responses to the Likert-scaled statements were examined. Following this, one-way ANOVAs were calculated to examine whether teacher groups differed from each other based on their field of expertise or other background factors (teaching experience, experience working with students from an immigrant background, and the number of immigrant students in a school) were linked to their understanding. ANOVA tests were then calculated both for the sum variable of the six statements and for each individual statement. Finally, *post hoc* tests, specifically Tamhane and Bonferroni, depending on the distribution of the respective data, were used.

5 Results

In the following, teachers' responses to the individual statements, and the summed variable, related to different aspects of language learning are described, including the frequencies of the responses for the individual participants and the different subject-teacher groups. Additionally, the relationship between teachers' understanding of language learning and three background factors, their general teaching experience, teaching immigrant students and the number of immigrant students in teachers' schools, will be analyzed.

5.1 Finnish teachers' understanding of language learning

The teachers surveyed seem to be aware of the aspects related to classroom interaction and language use involved in language learning that can be considered essential for being a linguistically responsive teacher. The frequencies of teachers' answers are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The frequencies of the teachers' responses regarding their understanding of language learning.

	Completely disagree %	Partly disagree %	Agree %	Completely agree %	I cannot tell %
Teachers should advocate for Finnish language development support for their multilingual learners.	1.8	1.3	33.7	60.1	2.9
Social interaction in authentic communicative situations supports multilingual learners' Finnish language learning.	1.8	1.0	23.4	71.4	2.3
Multilingual learners benefit when the Finnish language is examined during the teaching of different subjects.	1.7	1.9	40.2	47.4	8.8
The process of learning an additional language is similar for all learners. (R)	41.3	39.7	6.2	2.2	10.7
Anxiety about operating with an additional language may violate learning.	3.1	3.2	43.3	39.7	10.6
Multilingual learners who maintain their home language have difficulty learning Finnish. (R)	56.6	29.5	3.2	3.7	7.0
Sum variable: Understanding additional language learning	3.1	10.3	47.9	37.7	0.9

R = Reversed statement

As can be seen, 95% of the teachers agreed that "social interaction in authentic communicative situations supports the multilingual learners' Finnish language learning," and 88% agreed that examining the Finnish language while teaching different subjects is beneficial for multilingual learners. Furthermore, 86% of the teachers disagreed that "multilingual learners who maintain their home language have difficulty learning Finnish."

5.2 Teachers' field of expertise and teachers' understanding of language learning

Next, the link between teachers' fields of expertise and their understanding of aspects of language learning reflected in the 6 items were investigated. The means of the different teacher groups' responses are shown in Figure 1.

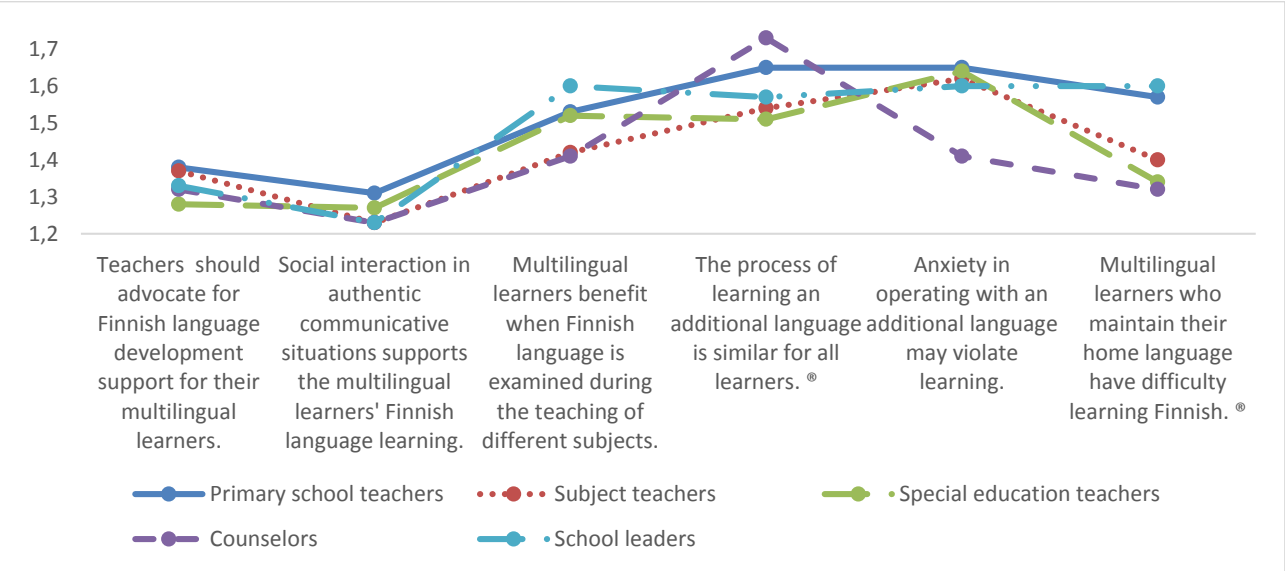

Figure 1. Different teacher groups' understanding of chosen aspects of language learning.

When considering the sum variable, the different teacher groups did not differ statistically significantly regarding their understanding of language learning. When looking at the individual items, there was a significant result for one statement: "Multilingual learners who maintain their home language have difficulty learning Finnish (reversed item)" (F=3.3, dF=5.749, p = 0.005). However, no significant differences were found between the groups in multiple comparisons.

Table 5. Differences between the subject-teacher groups (n = 420) in their understanding of language learning.

Statement	ANOVA	Comparison of the subject-teacher groups
Sum Variable Understanding additional language acquisition	F = 7.3 df = 3, 288 p < 0.001	FI (M = 1.3) vs. MA + TS (M = 1.5) p < 0.001 FI (M = 1.3) vs. A + P.E. (M = 1.6) p = 0.07
Teachers should advocate for Finnish language development support for their multilingual learners.	F = 5.8 df = 3, 409 p = 0.001	FI (M=1.3) vs. MA + TS (M = 1.5) p = 0.056 FI (M = 1.3) vs. A + P.E. (M = 1.7) p = 0.004
Social interaction in authentic communicative situations supports multilingual learners' Finnish language learning.	F = 3.2.7 df = 3, 408 p = 0.045	FI (M = 1.2) vs. MA + TS (M = 1.4) p = 0.027
Multilingual learners benefit when the Finnish language is examined during the teaching of different subjects.	F = 6.5 df = 3, 374 p < 0.001	FI (M = 1.4) vs. MA + TS (M = 1.6) p = 0.013 FI (M = 1.4) vs. A + P.E. (M = 1.8) p = 0.005 Lang (M = 1.4) vs. A + P.E. (M = 1.8) p = 0.034
The process of learning an additional language is similar for all learners. (R)	F = 3.7 df = 3, 371 p = 0.012	FI (M = 1.5) vs. MA + TS (M = 1.7) p=.089 FI (M = 1.5) vs. A + P.E. (M = 21.8) p = 0.034
Anxiety about operating with an additional language may violate learning.	F = 1.4 df = 3, 371 p=0.25	n.s.
Multilingual learners who maintain their home language have difficulty learning Finnish. (R)	F = 8.5 df = 3, 387 p < 0.001	FI (M = 1.2) vs. MA + TS (M = 1.6) p < 0.001 FI (M = 1.2) vs. A + P.E. (M = 1.6) p = 0.008 Lang (M = 1.4) vs. MA + TS (M = 1.6) p = 0.049

R = Reversed statement
FI = Teachers of Finnish as a first or an additional language
MA + TS = Teachers of mathematics and theoretical subjects
A + P.E. = Teachers of arts and crafts and P.E.
Lang = Teachers of other languages than Finnish

When the various subject-teacher groups were compared, significant differences in the understanding of language learning concepts were seen, both when considering the sum variable and all but one of the individual statements (see Table 5). Of the subject-teacher groups, those teaching Finnish as a first language and Finnish as an additional language were the most knowledgeable about aspects of language learning, especially compared with teachers of mathematics and theoretical subjects and teachers of arts and crafts and P.E. Also, the responses of teachers of other additional languages scored higher on two of the items. Thus, teachers of language related subjects clearly differed from the other groups.

5.3 Teachers' experience and understanding of language learning

Following an examination of teachers' area of expertise, the relationship between the teachers' backgrounds, including teaching experience, experience working with immigrant background students, and the number of immigrant background students in the school, and their understanding of language learning was analyzed. First, the relationship between understanding, coded as the sum variable, and general teaching experience was examined. It was found that teachers differed in their understanding based on their teaching experience ($F(2, 7566) = 4.4$, $p = 0.013$) between the following groups of teachers: 0–10 years teaching experience ($M = 1.4$) compared to more than 20 years teaching experience ($M = 1.5$, $p = 0.01$). In other words, less experienced teachers were more knowledgeable of investigated aspects of language learning.

When looking at the teacher groups based on their experience in teaching immigrant background students or the percentage of immigrant background students in their schools, there were no significant differences between teacher groups in their understanding of language learning.

6 Discussion

In this study, teachers' understanding of what a linguistically responsive teacher needs to know about learning an additional language was examined. The focus was on issues of language learning that are related to the socio-cultural processes that take place in a classroom, though it is acknowledged that there are many other aspects related to language learning that have not been touched upon. Over 80% of the surveyed teachers were aware of the aspects related to classroom interaction and language use that can be considered as essential for being a linguistically responsive teacher. It is therefore suggested that the surveyed teachers had the prerequisite knowledge for creating a linguistically supportive pedagogical environment and advocating for their multilingual learners.

Furthermore, teachers' awareness that multilingual learners benefit from examining the Finnish language during lessons on different subjects may be beneficial for supporting students' academic language development, as teachers' support is essential (see also Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2018). Further, implementing this practice could help in identifying the challenges of subject-specific language that language learners face. This understanding may be explained by the fact that, in Finland, all students must learn two additional languages in school, and thus, among the teachers, there is more personal experience of language learning. Since knowledge about language learning is an important part of linguistically responsive teaching (Lucas et al., 2008; Lucas & Villegas, 2010, 2011, 2013), the results of the present study suggest that at least most of the teachers participating in this study had the prerequisite understandings to promote this part of linguistically responsive pedagogy in their classrooms, as required by the current Finnish core curricula (National Agency of Education, 2014, 2015).

Whether various teacher groups differed in their understanding of chosen aspects of language learning was also analyzed. Comparing the teacher groups, namely primary school teachers, subject teachers in secondary or upper-secondary school, special education teachers or teachers of newly arrived migrants, counselors and principals, there were no significant differences

between the groups. Next, the differences between subject-teacher groups were looked at. As expected, teachers of Finnish, both as a first and an additional language, as well as teachers of other languages, displayed an advantage in their understanding of language learning. As language teachers have studied a given language at least for approximately five years and have also learned about language learning in their studies, this was not surprising. Furthermore, this result aligns with previous research (Sullivan, 2016), indicating that language teachers were more knowledgeable of school-related language issues.

Then, different teacher groups were investigated based on their experience. Interestingly, less experienced teachers were significantly more knowledgeable about the aspects of learning an additional language investigated in this study. Similar results have also been shown in previous studies (Sullivan, 2016), wherein teachers who had 2-5 years of experience showed a better knowledge of language learning. The indication seems to be that current teacher education in Finland addresses issues related to language learning more than earlier programs did, thus newly graduated teachers are more knowledgeable in this area. Moreover, this phenomenon can be explained by previous research (Ericsson, 2006), wherein it was suggested that people who have worked in the same position for a long time may have lower skills compared to those with less time on the job, and, further, that the development of expertise requires conscious training. To summarize, teaching experience does not automatically translate into understanding of language learning processes, although teaching experience in relevant contexts may promote this understanding. Nevertheless, teachers, especially in other than language-related subjects, need professional learning possibilities throughout their careers.

In this study, teachers' understanding of language learning was investigated based on six statements, which represent the minimum understanding that a linguistically responsive teacher should have (see also Lucas et al., 2008). However, it should also be acknowledged that the process of language learning is a complex phenomenon, and the statements used in this study cover only a small portion of it. The authors are currently working on a project covering linguistically responsive teaching that will widen the scope of teachers' understanding of language learning, as well as the practices that other studies have shown to be supportive.

When considering the generalizability and significance of the current results, the reliability of this study must be considered. It may have been influenced by the fact that the survey was voluntary; as a result, teachers who found the survey topic more relevant to them may have been more likely to respond than teachers with less interest in the topic, which may have distorted the results. However, the number of respondents was relatively high, and the demographics of teachers in the study reflect the demographics of the current teacher force in Finland (see also Kumpulainen, 2017). In addition, the survey was created as a preliminary research instrument and based on an international, existing survey, then adapted to the context of the Finnish educational system. It can be further developed with consideration for the results of this and other studies that investigate teachers' knowledge of linguistically responsive practices (see also Alisaari et al., 2019; Vigren, et al., manuscript).

The timing of the survey needs to be taken into consideration as well. At the time it was distributed, the current curricula for basic and upper secondary education had not yet been implemented, so teachers were not yet required to

focus on language learning in their teaching. Nevertheless, teachers' understanding of language learning in the aspects examined in this study was high, which provides a good basis for the current curricula. Also, the results of this study provide a baseline for further investigation into teachers' understanding of language learning after the curricula have been in place for a couple of years. In the future, it will be important to investigate how the requirements of the curricula are implemented in classrooms.

The pedagogical implications of the study point to a need for developing teacher education in certain areas, particularly for teachers of subjects other than language. Further, professional development should be offered to experienced teachers to increase their knowledge of language learning, thereby promoting more linguistically responsive teaching (see also Sullivan, 2016).

Understanding language learning is an essential part of being a linguistically responsive teacher. In order to promote educational equity and support democracy, all students should be provided with equal opportunities for learning. When teachers understand the role of language in classroom interaction and the ways the multilingual learners learn additional language, they are more able to support the learning of all the students. Thus, all future teachers should be taught the skills needed for teaching multilingual learners by the teacher education institutions.

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