



# Cultural and Lingual Responsible Pedagogy as a Part of Teachers' Professional Competence in Vocational School

Kirsi Korkealehto<sup>1</sup>

Häme University of Applied Sciences, Finland<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*In Finland, the number of multicultural and multilingual vocational school students has increased in recent years, which has not been taken into consideration in teacher education enough. Multilingualism is a growing feature in our society; hence teacher students need to be provided with adequate skills to encounter students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In response to this need, Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education decided to fund DivEd-project [1]. The partners in the nationwide project are 8 higher education institutes. The aim of the DivEd-project is to find ways to prepare all teachers to work in the linguistically and culturally diverse world they live in, to develop and increase culturally sustaining and linguistically responsive pedagogy in Finland, increase awareness among Teacher Educators working with preservice teachers and to increase awareness and provide specific strategies to in-service teachers. As a framework, this study uses the linguistically and culturally sustainable teaching practices developed within the DivEd-project.*

*This study aims to presents vocational teacher educators' and vocational teachers' perceptions of multilingualism and multilingual educational practices. The participants are vocational teacher educators and vocational teachers. The data were collected by digital surveys and focus group interviews. The analysis was conducted through content analysis [2]. The findings indicate that teacher educators feel that they lack knowledge on linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogy. Moreover, they regard themselves in some extent incompetent in teaching multilingual and multicultural pedagogy for their vocational teacher students. However, both vocational teachers and teacher educators have positive attitudes towards multilingualism and multiculturalism in general. Therefore, teachers experience they need more training regarding multicultural and multilingual knowledge, competences and suitable pedagogical methods for teaching students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds [3,4].*

**Keywords:** *multicultural, multilingual, teacher education.*

## 1. Introduction

Cultural and lingual sensitivity and teaching practices should be an essential part of vocational teachers' and teacher educators' professional competence in the contemporary multicultural educational context. Multilingualism and multiculturalism are growing features in Finland and for this need DivEd-project was created. It is funded by the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education, and its duration is three years. The project is nationwide, and the actors are eight higher education institutions which provide teacher training and professional teacher training programmes. The overall aim of the DivEd-project is to prepare and train teachers to better respond to the needs of working in the linguistically and culturally diverse settings. Furthermore, the project aims to develop culturally sustaining and linguistically responsive pedagogy in Finland. It targets to increase awareness among teacher educators working with preservice teachers and to provide specific strategies to in-service teachers. [1] As a part of the project the project personnel created overarching framework for the teacher educators and formed a group of Community Ambassadors who conduct school visits in their corresponding municipalities. Their objective is to do needs analyses and provide professional development for teachers [1] As a framework, this study uses the linguistically and culturally sustainable teaching practices which were developed within the DivEd-project. Because the practices have two aspects, there is a need to define both terms. Linguistically sustainable teaching refers to the concept according to which teachers comprehend the interconnection between language, culture and identity and they value linguistic diversity in their teaching. [2], [3]. Culturally sustainable teaching in turn covers the idea that teachers' pedagogy should empower students comprehensively by utilising cultural referents to impart competences, knowledge and attitudes [4]. In addition, culturally responsive teaching enables students to connect their cultural knowhow to academic knowledge [5] and it enhances and develops students' home cultures in the school context [6]. This frame emphasises the idea that educational settings are environments where students should have feeling of belonging,



and they should feel themselves respected as individuals regardless of their background. Based on previous research, the DivEd-project selected seven themes to support linguistically and culturally responsive teaching. The themes cover the following: identity and cultural competence, teaching strategies, differentiation in assessment, multilingualism, linguistic requirements, collaboration between home and school and lastly educational.

## 2. Methodology

This study addresses two research questions: How do professional teacher educators perceive their competences regarding culturally and linguistically sustainable teaching practices? How do vocational teachers perceive their competences regarding cultural and linguistic sustainable teaching practices? This qualitative study uses a questionnaire and focus group interviews as data. The questionnaire was created with Microsoft Forms and it was sent to the professional teacher educators. The focus group interviews were conducted face-to-face, and they were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants were 8 professional teacher educators and 8 vocational teachers. The professional teacher educators (n=8) answered to the online questionnaire which included 13 questions regarding their perception of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices. The vocational teachers (n=8) were interviewed in pairs, and the interviews regarded their perceptions of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices. The data were analysed by content analysis method [7].

## 3. Findings

The results are presented according to the seven themes of culturally and linguistically responsive practices, one by one. This research had two groups of participants, professional teacher educators and vocational teachers., the results of both participant groups are presented together.

### *Identity and cultural competence*

The vocational teachers estimated, that they understand the importance of tolerant and neutral attitude towards students' cultural background, but they felt they do not have enough knowledge of the ways to support students' identity building in terms of gender, religion, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, abilities and socioeconomic background. Furthermore, the teachers' role to foster students' intercultural skills, that is, students' ability to understand people with different backgrounds was considered minimal. The teacher educators in turn reported that the support the holistic view of an individual and they guide and support their teacher students according to their teacher students' individual abilities and requirements. In addition, the teacher trainers emphasised the importance of understanding their own culture and identity when supporting teacher students in their identity building and in providing teacher students with methods to support their own students in turn.

### *Teaching strategies*

Regarding the teachers' strategies in terms of interaction and collaboration as well as integrating all language competences – listening, reading, writing and speaking – into teaching, the vocational teachers stated that they were aware of the demands, but they saw that not all language aspects were easy to implement in practice. They regarded that listening skills are the most used in the classroom and reading should be focused on more. On contrary to vocational teachers, the professional teacher educators stated, that reading in several languages is a requirement in the studies. Moreover, both written and oral interaction are used in student collaboration and student-teacher interaction. Further, teacher students are required to use sources in various languages in their own assignments and reflective learning diaries, which increases their multilingualism.

### *Differentiation in assessment*

According to the vocational teachers, the students can demonstrate their competences in various ways and their language skills have no effect on grading. In addition, the students are allowed to use dictionaries when needed. The professional teacher educators regarded that they assess their students in various ways considering the students own abilities and language skills. They were prepared to chance the assessment methods according to student's individual needs and language skills.

### *Multilingualism*

According to the responses, the vocational teachers encourage their students to use all the languages they can in order to deepen their learning and understanding of the subject matter. They stated that their students can use freely their mother tongue or another language in group work and interaction with other students. The professional teacher trainers considered themselves tolerant when it comes



to students' own mother tongue usage in assignments or collaboration, but they encourage their students to use Finnish.

#### *Linguistic requirements*

The vocational teachers manifested that they recognize the lingual challenges their students face. In accordance, the teachers consciously use clear and simplified structures and vocabulary and avoid complexity that is typical to academic language. Furthermore, the teachers emphasise the use of pictures and graphs in clarifying the message and explaining the content in several different ways. The teachers also reported that they asked the students questions in order to ensure their understanding. The teacher trainers in turn stated that academic context cannot be simplified without losing its profound and complex meaning. On the other hand, they regarded, that they aim to talk clearly and welcome clarifying questions from their students. And they also aim to pass the message using multiple modes and paraphrase their speech.

#### *Collaboration between home and school*

Since the students are adults, the teachers considered the collaboration between home and school irrelevant. The students are responsible for themselves. But the teachers take into account the students' background including cultural, social and lingual aspects, and collaborate with the students' inner circle if necessary. The situation is similar in the teacher trainers' context; their students are adults as well.

#### *Educational justice*

In terms of discriminating attitude and behaviour, such as racism, homo-phobic behaviour, gender discrimination, the vocational teachers stated that they must be alert of these factors. In several cases they have had to react to unwanted behaviour, but they did not report of preventive actions they had taken. The teacher trainers manifested that they actively brought the themes of educational justice in their training but would like to have more material and knowledge in doing so

## **4. Discussion and Conclusions**

This research addresses the topical theme of cultural and lingual competences of vocational teachers and professional teacher trainers. It explored vocational teachers' and professional teacher educators' perceptions on the culturally and linguistically sustainable teaching practices that were developed within the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education funded DivEd-project. The findings indicate that the professional teacher educators and the vocational teachers consider that they have in some extent knowledge and competences in terms of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices. They acknowledge the importance of the topics that cover identity and cultural competence, teaching strategies, differentiation in assessment, multilingualism, linguistic requirements, collaboration between home and school and lastly educational justice. Both participant groups understand the terms and concepts, but they regard that their knowledge is rather superficial. They feel they do not have enough knowhow to implement culturally and linguistically sustainable pedagogy in their teaching context. Moreover, the professional teacher trainers regard themselves incompetent in teaching multilingual and multicultural pedagogy for their vocational teacher students. However, both vocational teachers and teacher educators have positive attitudes towards multilingualism in general. Therefore, they acknowledge that they need more training regarding multicultural and multilingual knowledge, competences and suitable pedagogical methods for teaching students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the teachers and teacher trainers lack competences to prevent cultural clashes in their class.

For further research, a larger participant number is required to gain more generable results. As data, reflective reports or class observations could generate a more comprehensive picture of the practises the professional teacher trainers and vocational teachers utilise in their teaching.

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