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Educational Experiences through Narrative: Immigrant Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Finland

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Tiivistelmä - Referat - Abstract <p>Immigrant parents with children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) face unique challenges when their children navigate the educational system. This study uses qualitative method to explore the lived experiences of immigrant parents of children with ASD. Specifically, it examines how immigrant parents perceive and feel the effectiveness of the educational support their children received from school and the interaction with school in Finnish basic education.</p> <p>Using a narrative inquiry approach, this qualitative study analyzed the in-depth narrative of one immigrant mother. Data were collected through 3 semi-structured interviews and analyzed by the approach of thematic narrative analysis. Data analysis is grounded in Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional space framework. The findings revealed three thematic dimensions: temporal dimension, personal-social dimension, and place dimension. Through these three dimensions, three research questions, about the effectiveness of educational support, the home-school communication and the influence of language and cultural difference, are discussed.</p> <p>This study highlights the value of integrating immigrant parents' narratives into the design of inclusive and culturally responsive educational policies. By bridging individual experiences with broader systemic structures, it contributes to the theoretical discourse on narrative inquiry and offers actionable insights for educators and policymakers. These findings advocate for transparent policies, accessible support services, and enhanced cross-cultural communication strategies to foster equity and inclusion for children with ASD in educational systems.</p>		
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1 Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a common, highly heritable, neurodevelopmental disorder which affects a child's social interaction and behavior throughout life (Gillberg and Billstedt, 2000; Lord et al., 2020; Volkmar et al., 2004; APA, 2013). In recent years, more children have been diagnosed with ASD at a global level. According to a study published by Autism Speaks in 2022, the global prevalence of ASD has increased to approximately 1 in 100 children, a rise from earlier estimates of 1 in 162 children in 2012. The disorders have created major challenges for these children, their families, their learning and daily life (McCracken et al., 2002; Lord et al., 2020; Lindsay et al., 2013; Patel et al., 2022).

Finland is also seeing a rise in the number of children identified with autism. Hinkka-Yli-Salomäki et al. (2014) report that there is an eightfold increase in the incidence rates of diagnosed ASD in children born between 1987 and 1992 according to inpatient register data. This increase may have been influenced by the adoption of more precise diagnostic criteria and evolving practices in diagnosing autism. The prevalence of ASD in Finland for 7–9-year-old children in 2015 was approximately 1 in 130 children (Delobel-Ayoub et al., 2019).

At the same time, the number of immigrant children in Finland has increased, and they now make up around 10% of Finland's total child population in the 7 to 14 age group (Statistics Finland, 2024). While specific statistics on the prevalence of ASD among immigrant children in Finland are currently limited, Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare (THL) indicates that immigrant parents, living in Finland, face more stress when raising a child. Compared to local parents, immigrant parents face more difficulties in accessing external support and services than local parents, which lowers their satisfaction with family quality of life (Millau et al., 2019). These challenges are often linked to language barriers, cultural differences, and unfamiliarity with the service system (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2024).

In effort to better understand how these challenges shape the experiences of immigrant parents of children with ASD, it is critical to determine whether the educational support that they receive in Finnish schools is accessible as well as effective. Education should consider the diverse background of the children and family, in order to improve the outcomes of the delivery and assessment of the educational support. This study adopted a narrative inquiry approach using semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of

immigrant parents with children with ASD. It investigates how immigrant parents of children with ASD are supported by school personnel in Finnish basic education and focuses on the effectiveness of educational support. It also examines how they perceive about home-school communication and how language and cultural differences affect their ability to navigate the system.

2 Context: Children with ASD, Immigrant Parents, Finland and Educational Support

Finland, known for its high-quality education system and emphasis on equality, has also experienced significant demographic shifts over recent decades. Historically characterized by a largely homogenous population (Martikainen, 2013), Finland's cultural and socio-economic landscape has been reshaped by increasing immigration, especially since the twenty-first century (Habti & Koikkalainen, 2014). This demographic change has been reflected in the education sector, as mentioned earlier. As diversity becomes a more pronounced feature of Finnish schools, addressing the needs of all students, including those with ASD and those from immigrant backgrounds, has become an essential challenge. In this chapter, the concept of "children with ASD" and "immigrant parents" is discussed and defined. Additionally, research is reviewed related to the policies and curriculum of educational support in Finland for children with special needs.

2.1 Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

In the early 20th century, autism was considered as a manifestation of schizophrenia (Manolova & Achkova, 2014). In 1943, autism was first studied as an independent neurodevelopmental disorder by Kanner. According to his essay "autism disturbance of affective contact", children with autism are born with "extreme loneliness". Based on the observation of eleven children from highly intellectual families, Kanner concludes the similarities of children with autism and describes autism disorder as an "inability of relating themselves in an ordinary way to people and situations" (Kanner, 1943). Apart from this inability, these children also lack the ability to use language to convey meanings to others.

At the same time, Asperberg, an Austrian pediatrician and medical educator, finds a type of children with autism who have typical autism syndromes but with higher levels of functioning independently (Mesibov et al., 2002). For example, they have difficulty in

social interaction but are not isolated from people and environment, as Kanner summarized. The early studies by Kanner (1943) and Asperger (Mesibov et al., 2002; Tantam, 1988) laid the foundation for diagnosing ASD, highlighting the diversity in social abilities and functional levels among individuals.

In 1994, the DSM-IV first included Asperger's syndrome under the autism spectrum, recognizing a wider range of conditions in this category. Later, the DSM-5 combined autism disorder (AD) and Asperger Syndrome (AS) into one group called autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This adjustment aimed to develop more inclusive diagnostic criteria that align more effectively with clinical practice (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, 2013).

The DSM-5 describes ASD as a neurodevelopmental disorder with persistent deficits in social communication and repetitive, restricted behaviours (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These symptoms usually appear in early childhood and continue into adult life, significantly affecting an individual's quality of life (Volkmar et al., 2004; APA, 2013).

In Finland, diagnoses of ASD primarily follow the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) framework (Kielinen et al., 2005; Hinkka-Yli-Salomäki et al., 2014). The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2024) announced that ICD-11 would be introduced gradually between 2023 and 2026, replacing ICD-10 in its healthcare system. In clinical practice in Finland, the diagnosis of ASD in children usually comes after a comprehensive, multi-source assessment process, including medical, educational, and psychological evaluations, to ensure that the child's support needs are thoroughly understood (Kielinen et al., 2005). Similar to the DSM-5, ICD-11 defines the key features of ASD as persistent difficulties in social interaction and communication, and restricted and repetitive behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; World Health Organization, 2024). However, ICD-11 comprises more detailed classifications, incorporating functional levels and cultural considerations, whereas DSM-5 emphasizes concise and standardized symptom descriptions (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; World Health Organization, 2024).

A review of the relevant literature (Mesibov et al., 2002; Volkmar et al., 2004; Manolova & Achkova, 2014) reveals that the academic community has used various terms when discussing autism, such as "Autistic Disorder," "Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD)," "Asperger Syndrome." and ASD. However, as research began to reflect a deeper understanding of autism as a complex neurodevelopmental disorder (Hyman, 2001),

researchers increasingly prefer the term “ASD” to encompass the entire autism spectrum. Currently, “autism” is used as a simplified expression to refer to ASD (World Health Organization, 2023). In this study, children with ASD refer to those studying in elementary school and diagnosed with ASD in Finland.

2.2 Immigrant parents

The existing literature largely presents a consistent definition of “immigrant parents.” Most studies describe immigrant parents as individuals who were born outside the host country and have migrated. This definition highlights the unique challenges faced by individuals with a migration background, particularly in coping with new social systems. These challenges are often compounded by language barriers and cultural differences (Shorey et al., 2019; Magaña et al., 2015).

The literature frequently highlights the obstacles immigrant parents face, including language and cultural barriers, limited access to suitable services, and adapting to the social norms of a new environment (Khanlou et al., 2017; Silwal et al., 2019; Habib et al., 2017). For parents of children with ASD, these concerns become even more pronounced as they affect their interactions with social and educational service providers (Munroe et al., 2016; Sakai et al., 2019; Rivard et al., 2019; Barrio et al., 2019).

In this study, the term ‘immigrant parents’ is used to describe individuals who have migrated from their home country to Finland and are raising their children in Finland. Refugees and parents born in the host country, even though they may have strong cultural connections with their country of origin, are excluded from this definition. This term focuses on first-generation immigrants who face unique challenges as they navigate unfamiliar education and other social systems, especially when advocating for children with ASD.

2.3 Policy and curriculum on educational support on children with special needs

At the international level, there are several documents that mention the right to education for children with disabilities. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares all individuals’ right to equal access to education (United Nations, 1948). Principle 5 of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child specifies that children with special needs due to mental or physical conditions should be provided with suitable treatment, education, and care (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1962). These declarations establish a

foundation for ensuring that children with disabilities have the equal right to receive educational support from school.

Additionally, article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) further specifies the type of education to be provided. It states that individuals with disabilities should not be excluded from the general education system, with effective and individualized support that address their specific needs (United Nations, 2006). Although CRPD points out the importance of inclusive education, it defines disability very broadly and does not explicitly reference autism or other specific disabilities (Roleska et al., 2018).

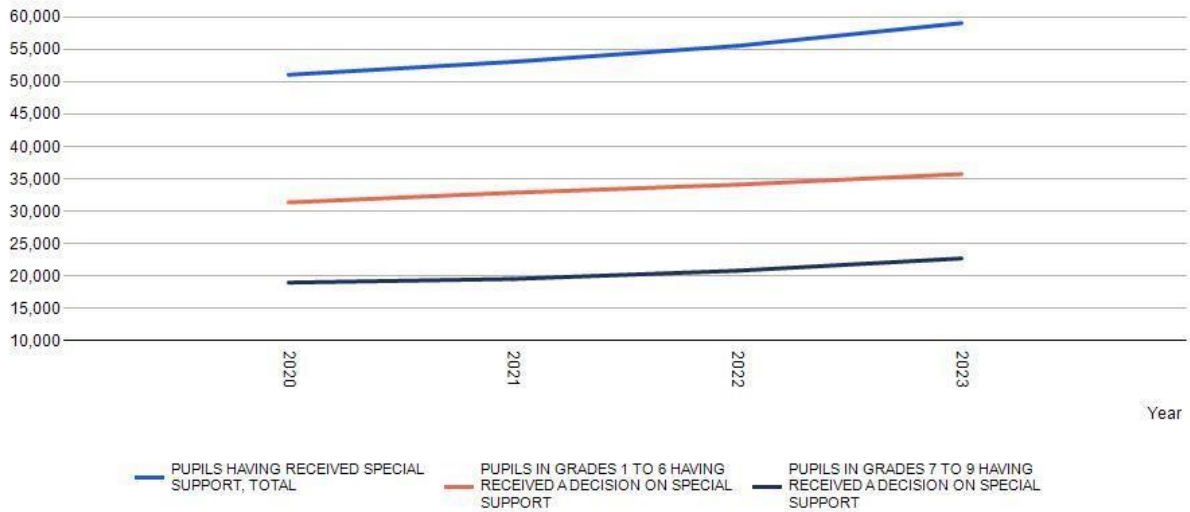
At EU level, influenced by the international documents, more detailed policies related to educational support to individuals with disabilities are proposed. Inclusive education has been made a top priority on the EU's educational policy agenda (European Commission, 2021). For instance, Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030 calls for EU countries to support learning in "inclusive mainstream settings", to adapt curriculum to the needs of individuals with disabilities, and to train teachers on inclusive education (European Commission, 2021).

Finland's educational support policies are largely guided by the EU's inclusive education framework. Finnish Basic education act and Finnish national core curriculum for basic education are two most important documents ensuring children with ASD receive educational support through the approach of individualization.

To ensure the accessibility of all children, including children with ASD, to individualized support, a three-tiered support model is introduced to the Finnish comprehensive school system (Basic Education Act 642/2010, Basic Education Act 628/1998). General support (the first tier) is aimed at offering flexible personalized assistance; intensified support (the second tier) is based on assessments and creates learning plans for students who require frequent or diverse assistance; special support (the third tier) targets students who still face difficulties despite the first two tiers of support, providing the most intensive personalized interventions. The three-tiered support model is structured in a flexible way, both the nature and extent of the support can be adjusted according to the students' needs (Finnish Basic Education Act, 642/2010). As shown in the figure 1, the number of students receiving special support in basic education keeps increasing since 2020.

Figure 1: Comprehensive school pupils having received special support by duration of compulsory education by information and year

Comprehensive school pupils having received special support by duration of compulsory education by Information and Year.

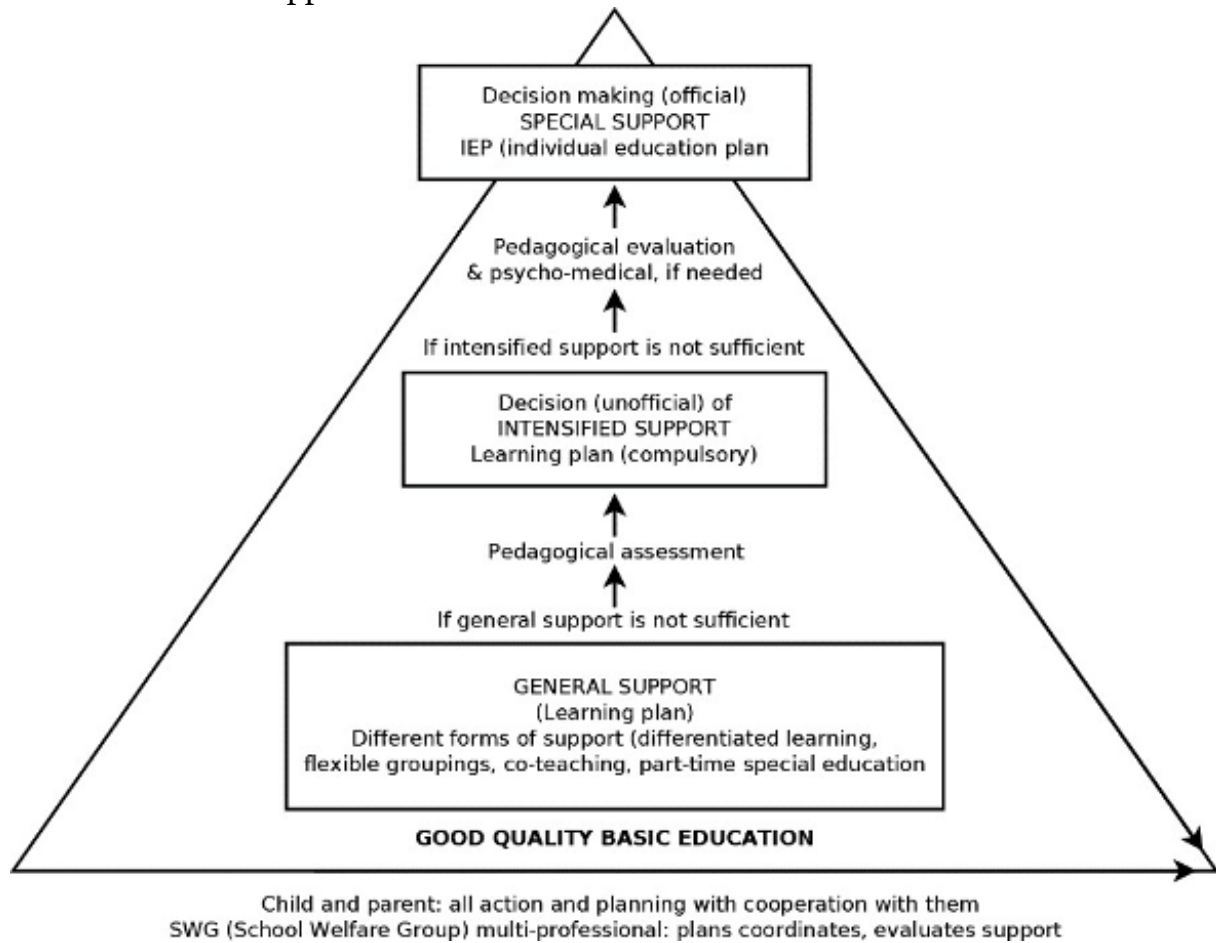


Note: Data from Statistics Finland, 2024

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture, the new legislation on support for learning in primary and lower secondary education will introduce individualized translation and assistant services for students with special educational needs from August 1, 2025. It will also simplify procedures for teachers in implementing support measures. Both of these amendments aim to enhance students facing challenges in learning or attendance to receive support more timely and efficiently (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland, n.d.).

Under the three-tiered support model, more specific approaches such as individualized education plan (IEP) and pupil welfare group (PWG) are proposed by Finnish special education policy to support children who need the third-tier support (special support) (Sabel et al., 2011). For students who need full-time special education, such as those with ASD, classroom and special education teachers cooperate with parents and make individualized education plans for them. The responsibility of the pupil welfare group is to regularly monitor the implementation and the effect of the plans. Usually this group consists of the principal, psychologist, school nurse, and special education teacher. They work closely with class teachers. Moreover, this group acts as a bridge which connects the school with agencies in and outside the education system, for instance, municipality and hospital (Sabel et al., 2011).

Figure 2: Three-tiered support model



Note: From Kärnä & Pesonen (2019), modified from Thuneberg, Vainikainen, Ahtiainen, Lintuvuori, Salo, & Hautamäki, (2013, p. 69).

Additionally, the Finnish National Core Curriculum set the basis for organizing individualized curriculum for children with ASD (Kärnä & Pesonen, 2019). Two types of syllabi are provided by the core curriculum for basic education: one is subject-based syllabi, which includes 18 subjects and is for all students; another one is functional based syllabi, which is normally for severely disabled students (Finnish National Board of Education, 2021). Most students with ASD follow the general syllabi, but the amount of the subjects they receive in individualized ways and the starting time or length they receive this individualization may differ according to their needs and strengths (Kärnä & Pesonen, 2019).

Up-to-date information on the number of children with ASD who have individualized subject syllabi is currently lacking. However, data from Finland's Education Statistics indicated that Finland's basic education system provides subject-based learning support in diverse forms for children with ASD. As shown in statistics that a majority (56.6%) of

students receiving special support in 2019 followed the general education syllabus across all subjects. Additionally, 11.2% had individualized support in one subject, 12.0% in two to three subjects, and 15.8% in four or more subjects. A smaller portion, 4.4%, received special support through functional area-based instruction (Education Statistics Finland, 2019).

Figure 3: Comprehensive school pupils having received special support by Area, Information and Year

	2020	2021	2022
All education in special education groups or classes, total, %	33	33	32
1-19% of teaching in a general education group, total, %	13	12	13
20-49% of teaching in a general education group, total, %:	10	11	11
50-79% of teaching in a general education group, total, %	11	8	9
80-100% of teaching in a general education group, total, %	33	37	36

Note: Data from Statistics Finland, 2023

Furthermore, as proven in Figure 3, nearly half of students received at least 50% of their instruction in the general group (Statistics, 2023). This reflects the effort of Finnish basic education in supporting the equal learning right for students with special needs through an integration approach (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2007).

Apart from the special support, students from immigrant families are provided with preparatory education by Finnish basic education, which are Finnish/Swedish as a second language courses and native language education. These programs are designed to help them acquire the language of instruction and other essential skills (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2024).

In summary, Finnish educational support for students with special needs, including those with ASD, are designed to ensure inclusivity and individualization through comprehensive legal and curricular frameworks. The three-tiered support model and measures such as individualized education plans demonstrate a strong commitment to addressing the diverse needs of students, while collaboration across sectors enhances the effectiveness of these support. However, whether these policies adequately meet the needs of children with ASD from diverse backgrounds remains an open question.

3 Literature Review

3.1 Literature search and selection process

This study focuses on the experiences and perspectives of immigrant parents of children with ASD regarding educational support in Finland's basic education system. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this topic, which incorporates education, psychology, and sociology, a semi-systematic literature review approach was employed. This approach allows for synthesizing results from these diverse research traditions, rather than strictly adhering to a specific research methodology. A semi-systematic literature review also enables the inclusion of research from various disciplines and allows for tracking the evolution of these studies over time.

The aim of this literature review is to identify themes, theoretical perspectives, and common issues within existing research on how immigrant parents of children with ASD experience educational support, also helps reveal gaps and future research directions. In conducting the semi-systematic literature review, this study selected three commonly used databases in educational research: ERIC, Google Scholar, and Helka, the latter of which includes more Finland-based research.

I initiated the search on Google Scholar with the keywords 'Children AND ASD', aiming to cover the past decade's research and some of the early classic literature studying autism. This broad search resulted in a large number of articles. Firstly, these were filtered to exclude studies unrelated to education. Then articles with fewer than 100 citations were also removed. This process resulted in a core set of 48 relevant studies.

For a more detailed exploration, I turned to the ERIC database, using phrases like 'Children with ASD AND Educational Support' and 'Parents AND Children with ASD'. Limiting the search to peer-reviewed articles from the past ten years initially resulted in a substantial number of results. Applying strict exclusion criteria to remove irrelevant topics narrowed this to 12 and 30 studies, respectively.

To capture the unique experiences of immigrant parents, I conducted additional searches on Google Scholar with the term 'Immigrant Parents AND Children with ASD'. This targeted approach filtered out studies that didn't focus on immigrant families, ensuring the collected literature covered their unique cultural and social dynamics. After further refinement, 22 studies were added to the collection.

To ensure that the Finnish context was well-represented, I searched the Helka database with terms such as ‘Children with ASD AND Finland’, ‘Children with Autism’, ‘Immigrant Parents AND Finland’, ‘Children with Special Needs AND Educational Support AND Finland’, and ‘Children with ASD AND Educational Support AND Finland’. After exclusions were applied, the result was a total of 22 studies. These studies, relevant particularly to the educational landscape in Finland, were selected.

In order to further identify key papers that were shaping the discourse on immigrant parents and ASD, I made use of Google Scholar’s citation search. During this process, other studies were also reviewed, and some were added. After careful exclusion of irrelevant studies, 16 more were included. With strict standards applied during this process, the final total of studies reached 150.

However, only 104 studies were used in the final references in the thesis. The final selection was based on thematic relevance, quality of method, and academic impact. Accordingly, 68 studies were used directly in the literature review for providing depth to the discussion. In addition, the other studies were employed in contextual background, methodology, and discussion, to contribute theoretical foundation and empirical analysis.

The review of these 68 studies is what follows, discussing key points and research results about immigrant parents and their children who have ASD, particularly from the side of education system. What this intends to do is to see recent progress and point out places where the research still lacks, which will help provide a more whole view of what studies now say.

3.2 Children with ASD in the field of education in Finland

WHO (2023) estimates that approximately one out of every 100 children are diagnosed with autism. The prevalence of ASD in Finland for 7-9-year-old children in 2015 was approximately 1 in 130 children (Delobel-Ayoub et al., 2019). For children, ASD often has an impact on their education opportunities.

In educational settings, the features of ASD manifest as the difficulties in interacting with peers, challenges in nonverbal communication, and resistance to changes in routines (McCracken et al., 2002; Lord et al., 2020). Children with ASD experience significant struggles in emotional regulation, adhering to instructions, and engaging in lessons (Lindsay et al., 2013). As a result, the characteristics of children with ASD complicate their

educational needs and create challenges to teachers and school (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008; Symes & Humphrey, 2010). One of the major challenges for supporting them is to plan social skills training, with the intention of developing improvement in their peer interaction capacity and social communication abilities (Reichow et al., 2012).

The European Commission (EC) (2021) highlights that there has been a lack of systematic research on the factors that contribute to the success of learners with disabilities. This gap is particularly evident for those with less visible disabilities, “such as autism, dyslexia, or hyperactivity”. One focus of research on children with ASD in the field of education in Finland is about the supportive approaches on these children, including early intervention, individualized education, and inclusive practices. Although the number of studies is limited, they provide valuable insights. These studies reveal Finland’s unique strategies and models to address the educational needs of children with ASD.

Early identification and intervention are seen as crucial. They significantly improve educational outcomes for children with ASD. In a study from northern Finland, Kielinen and colleagues (2005) highlighted that the importance of timely diagnosis and intervention. They found that early support can greatly enhance children’s functioning and quality of life. However, providing adequate services is challenging in remote and resource-limited areas.

Additionally, creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment is important for including children with ASD in general class or study group (Horrocks et al., 2008). In Finnish schools, teachers use various teaching strategies to support children with ASD. Common methods include structured teaching, the Training and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children Approach (TEACCH), the Lovaas method, and outdoor programs like Hanging Out Program (HOP) (Poikola & Kärnä, 2019). These strategies create structured and behaviorally supportive learning environments. They aim to improve engagement and learning outcomes. While effectiveness may vary, experts agree on the importance of individualized and structured teaching.

However, implementing inclusion faces many challenges. One key factor influencing the efficiency of support is teachers’ professionalism. Research by Paju et al. (2015) shows that general education teachers often lack proper training. This limits their ability to meet the special educational needs of children effectively. Rämä et al. (2020) also noted that teaching assistants are not necessary for the interaction and learning of students with ASD. The study

found that teaching assistants' effectiveness depends on their training and dedication, which highlights the need for quality professional development.

As a result, in practice, inclusive education remains slow; many children with ASD cannot attend general classes or groups (Xiaoyi Hu et al., 2019). To improve the effectiveness of inclusive education, Hotulainen and Takala (2013) point out that parents' opinions should be considered. It is necessary for educators to communicate effectively with parents about the aspects of integration they value most.

Additionally, support strategies should be tailored to the differences of children with ASD to be more effective (Volkmar et al., 2004). As Regier et al. (2019) suggested, educators and policymakers need to recognize the diverse needs of individuals with ASD, which vary not only in behavior and communication but also in cultural, age, and gender factors.

In conclusion, limited research in Finland's education field on children with ASD has revealed progress on how Finnish society, especially school, supports children with ASD. However, there are still areas where research is lacking. For instance, the study on a specific group of children with ASD, such as the children from immigrant background is lacking. Although existing studies have included some immigrant children in their samples, their unique experiences and challenges have not been examined in depth. Delving deeper into their needs and experiences could offer valuable insights and inform more tailored policies and practices to better promote equity and inclusivity within Finland's educational system.

3.3 Immigrant parents in Finland

In Finland, significant immigration flows only began in the 1990s, which is relatively late compared to neighboring Nordic countries (Turtiainen et al., 2022; Pareliussen et al., 2016). However, the population of children and adolescents from immigrant families has seen substantial growth over the past decade (Statistics Finland, 2017). By April of 2024, foreign-born individuals accounted for 6.1% of the total population (Statistics of Finland, 2024). Among the reasons for migration in 2024, family reasons comprised 40% of cases (Finnish Immigration Service, 2024).

This demographic shift has brought attention to the unique challenges immigrant parents face as they navigate Finland's welfare, education, and social systems. Due to the limited research specifically focused on Finland, studies from other Nordic countries, such as Denmark and Norway, are included to provide broader theoretical insights. Although these

countries differ in culture and policy, their research findings provide useful comparative insights into the experiences of immigrant parents in Finland.

In Nordic countries, welfare rights are often closely connected to conceptions of “deservingness” and national identity (Vähä-Savo, 2020). When immigrant families seek welfare services, this connection has resulted in the challenges of establishing their legitimacy and sense of belonging. For instance, Nordberg (2020) highlights that immigrant mothers in Finland, especially those in full-time caregiving roles, face subtle exclusion from the labor market. And their professional qualifications and skills are frequently unrecognized. Instead of supporting their career goals, welfare agencies typically direct them toward gendered and lower-skilled jobs, like nursing (Nordberg, 2020). This systemic bias limits their career development and exacerbates their marginalization within welfare institutions.

Apart from welfare access, immigrant parents also face challenges when they support their children in schooling. For example, for Somali immigrants in Finland, Ismail (2018) identifies three key obstacles to supporting children. These obstacles are limited understanding of the education system, language difficulties, and cultural differences. These challenges not only hinder effective collaboration between parents and schools but also restrict academic opportunities for immigrant children.

In addition, mental health emerges as a critical concern for immigrant families, impacting both parents and their children. During the initial stages of migration, many immigrant mothers experience feelings of isolation and disconnection. This is particularly evident among single mothers and mothers facing language barriers (Nordberg, 2020).

Such challenges in parental well-being also influence the psychological health of their children. Research indicates that first-generation immigrant youth are more likely to exhibit generalized anxiety symptoms at a statistically significant level compared to the second generation (Abdulhamed et al., 2022). Particularly, it has been shown that 42% of the first-generation immigrant youth had no one to confide in on matters relating to personal concern; this depicts low levels of social support and mainly low levels of communication with parents (Abdulhamed et al., 2022). The above pressures faced by the youth, therefore, could enhance the emergence of intergenerational mental health issues; thus, the well-being of the first immigrant generation will impact the family as a unit (Abdulhamed et al., 2022; Schwartz et al., 2015). Similar results were found by Silwal et al. (2019), who noted that the

role of parents, particularly fathers, of immigrant origin in their children's development of mental health is crucial. The migration background of the father, his country of origin, and the timing of migration are crucial in the intergenerational transmission of trauma. These findings highlight the interconnectedness of cultural adaptation, mental health, and family dynamics in immigrant families. In summary, research on immigrant parents highlights the various challenges they face in Finland.

However, these studies have notable limitations. They often depict immigrant parents as passive recipients of systemic influences, overlooking the proactive strategies they employ to overcome difficulties. Furthermore, there is limited evaluation of the long-term impact of Finland's welfare and education policies on immigrant families, which restricts the ability to provide evidence-based recommendations for policy improvement. Future research should address these gaps by incorporating diverse immigrant perspectives, examining family dynamics, and evaluating the effectiveness of current policies in promoting integration.

3.4 Parents of children with ASD

Parents play an important role in children's cognitive, behavioral, social and moral development (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). How to be a parent is a private matter, but it is also public, since parents share, discuss, and develop norms on how to raise children with friends, teachers from school and other communities.

For children with ASD, parents act as the primary caregivers as well as an intervention actioner at home (Girolametto & Tannock, 1994). Parents' high acceptance of ASD and the early start time for intervention possibly contribute to the good outcome for intervention (Kielinen et al., 2005).

Parents' educational expectations for children with ASD have an important impact on their academic and social development (Bush et al., 2017). According to them, nearly half of the parents of children with ASD hold "mostly positive but with some concerns" educational expectations for their children. Factors influencing these expectations can be categorized into three levels: child, parent, and school. At the child level, external behavioral issues, such as aggression or attention deficits, play a significant role. Parents tend to have higher expectations for their child's school performance when these behavioral problems are minimal. At the parent level, higher parental education is strongly associated with more optimistic expectations. At the school level, trust in teachers and positive interactions

between parents and educators significantly enhance parents' confidence in their child's potential at school.

In recent decades, there are a number of studies focusing on the parents of children with ASD (Pondé & Rousseau, 2013). First, parents of children who have been diagnosed with ASD usually experience more difficulties and challenges than parents of typically developing children (Burrell & Borrego, 2012; Hayes & Watson, 2013). These difficulties and challenges are manifested in the forms of caregiving burdens, social isolation, and health related issues (Kersh et al., 2006; Gray, 1993; Stein et al., 2011). Gray & Holden (1992) indicates that caregivers of people with ASD experienced low efficacy in parenting.

Similarly, Al-Farsi et al. (2016) show that parents of children with ASD in different populations have poor psychological states, characterized as stress, depression, and anxiety. Moreover, these states tend to be particularly pronounced in low-income families or when the children are between the ages of 6 and 12, with parents in these situations reporting a heavier psychological burden (Patel et al., 2022).

Enea & Rusu (2020) attribute these negative effects in the complex nature of caregiving and the children's behavioral problems. They indicate a cycle where both factors reinforce each other. Specifically, a child's challenging behaviors increase the stress levels of parents, and the ways parents cope with this stress may, in turn, exacerbate the child's behaviors (Enea & Rusu, 2020). Furthermore, such a cycle diminishes the parents' quality of life and profoundly impacts the overall dynamics within the family (Patel et al., 2022; Al-Farsi et al., 2016).

To overcome these difficulties, studies indicate that parents of children with ASD need support from family, friends and school and other social agents. Researcher shows that family members and friends can effectively increase a parent's well-being by providing educational strategies, available resources and reducing stress (Ekas et al., 2010; Boyd, 2002). Krakovich et al, (2016) prove that apart from these individual-based support, the collaborative relationships between parents and school also helps to reduce stress of parents.

Regarding the relationship between parents and school, studies show that there are international differences in parent satisfaction on educational support for children with ASD. For example, 92% of parents of children with ASD in Bosnia and Herzegovina are dissatisfied with the educational support provided by preschools, citing insufficient professionals as the main reason (Mujkanovic et al). In contrast, approximately 90% of

parents in the United States are satisfied with educational support from school, including speech therapy, behavior management programs, learning strategies and study skills assistance (Bitterman et al., 2008).

One key factor influencing parents' satisfaction with the educational support from school is the approach of involving children into mainstream class. For instance, they worry that their children may experience social exclusion, which can negatively affect their mental health and overall well-being (McKinlay et al., 2022). As a result, parents need a more responsive and personalized support from school and expect a more informed school response regarding the specific needs of a child with ASD. As Anderson (2020) implied, school support could be improved through adaptive educational approaches and tailored special educational resources provision. School-parents' cooperation with children with ASD will be discussed in more detail in chapters to follow.

3.5 Immigrant parents of children with ASD

In recent years, with increased diagnoses of ASD and a growing immigrant family presence, research on children with ASD in immigrant families have become a prevalent academic focus. These studies highlight the important role played by cultural differences in shaping how ASD is understood and managed. They investigate, in addition, the interplay among language environments, service access, and family wellbeing. In a review of studies relevant to them, most of such work is concentrated in two principal areas.

The first one touches on the reality that cultural differences, and specifically cultural beliefs, is at the root of parental perception and response to an ASD diagnosis. These beliefs influence whether parents interpret their child's symptoms as ASD or attribute them to developmental delays or non-medical causes. Studies consistently highlight a discrepancy between professional medical diagnoses and parental interpretations. For instance, some immigrant parents may resist formal diagnoses, often due to cultural norms or a desire to maintain hope for their child's future, leading to delays in seeking intervention (Lee & Zhu, 2021; Sakai et al., 2019; Pondé & Rousseau, 2013).

Additionally, cultural differences influence parents' satisfaction with educational support from school and the school-home collaboration (Fontil & Petrakos, 2015; Lee et al., 2020). On one hand, the lack of cultural sensitivity in schools often leaves immigrant parents feeling that the education system fails to meet their expectations. At the same time, educators hold preconceptions about immigrant parents. They are perceived as "stressed and confused" to

meet local parenting standards due to cultural differences (Padovan-Özdemir & Day, 2020). On the other hand, cultural differences can hinder the establishment of strong relationships between immigrant parents and teachers. For instance, Asian immigrant parents frequently avoid confronting teachers, as it is considered impolite in their cultural context. This tendency, however, reduces their active contribution to educational processes (Lee et al., 2020). These two factors unveil the need for service providers to understand such cultural settings and adapt supporting approaches in a similar way (Heer et al., 2012).

The second area emphasizes that language barriers and immigrant parents' limited health literacy affect the effectiveness of the diagnosis and intervention process. Rivard et al. (2019) studied how ASD diagnoses happen among immigrant children and found that the process is often slow because there is not enough proper communication between healthcare providers and parents. Due to the long time taken for the timely intervention to start and for the diagnosis to be made correctly, the early-stage intervention for children with ASD might not be as effective as it could have been, possibly causing the symptoms of ASD in these children to become more serious (Valicenti-McDermott et al., 2012; St. Amant et al., 2018; Lim et al., 2020). Especially for families that do not primarily speak English, finding and understanding health information and accessing medical services turn into a more difficult thing, especially in areas with limited health literacy and medical resources. In such cases, these families may find themselves in a state where they do not understand well or feel unsure about the process of diagnosis and treatment, leading them to a position of greater confusion.

Another example was revealed by Lee et al. (2020), where it was found that immigrant parents, when Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings were happening, could not understand or ask questions at all, and this was because of language competence that they lacked. However, in some cases, exceptions were seen—like when immigrant parents' educational background was higher than native parents or when integration programs worked in a way that helped immigrant parents with language skills in an effective manner (Millau et al., 2019). Because of difficulties with language and differences in culture, immigrant parents, when compared with native parents, find it harder to obtain support from external sources or access services, which then leads to the lowering of family quality of life (FQOL) satisfaction (Millau et al., 2019).

In summary, in studying immigrant parents with children with ASD, qualitative approaches, such as semi-structured interviews and focus groups, have been most prominently utilized

in practice. These approaches provide a better grasp of immigrant families' subjective experiences and the role of cultural contexts. However, small sample sizes and restrictions in the availability of data in existing studies restrict the generalizability of their findings. Additionally, detailed analysis of immigration experiences is missing. These factors include the length of time since immigration, reasons for immigrating, and experiences before and after migration. Longitudinal studies are necessary to understand how these parents adapt and what their needs are at various time points. Further, much of the research is focused on specific locations or with particular cultural groups, so cultural and geographic diversity is lacking. These limitations offer opportunities to explore the educational expectations and perceptions of parents from varied backgrounds.

3.6 The interaction between parents of children with ASD and educational support from school

Based on the literature, educational support for children with ASD includes three general categories: support through educational strategies (e.g., IEP), support through educators (e.g., teacher assistant, class teacher) and support through other educational resources (e.g., being able to attend general education group) (Dharan, 2020; Mithimunye et al., 2018). Their attitudes towards educational support reflect a mix of satisfaction and criticism, indicating the possible approaches to enhance the quality of educational support for children with ASD.

IEP, as an indispensable strategy to support children with ASD, has a significant impact on parents' perception of the quality of educational support in schools. Based on a survey of 148 parents of children with ASD, Slade et al. (2018) found that about half of them are satisfied with all aspects of IEP, including the purpose of IEP, the actual effect of IEP, the consistency of implementation and the effectiveness of IEP team (teacher and professionals). However, the gap between planning and execution leads parents to perceive a lack of systematic effort and accountability, which undermines their trust in the school's ability to support their child effectively. As proved by Slade et al. (2018), 46% of parents expressed dissatisfaction with the content of the IEP, 47% were unhappy with the actual services provided and 40% of parents rated the effectiveness of the IEP team as low.

Parents also remain critical of the scope and implementation of educational strategies. Parents have complained that school support is too academically and behaviorally focused, with not enough consideration for non-academic development goals such as social skills and

self-care skills (Houser et al., 2015). Other parents mention that teachers require more autism-specific knowledge (Dharan, 2020), especially when they design and implement IEP (Houser et al., 2015). These findings suggest that schools need to broaden educational objectives beyond academics, enhance educators' competencies in meeting the special needs of children with ASD (Houser et al., 2015; LaBarbera, 2017).

Beyond assessing the educational strategies, parents are concerned about the communication with educators. Research indicates that while both parents and teachers recognize the importance of communication in fostering effective homeschool collaboration, significant differences exist in their areas of focus (Azad et al., 2018). Parents are specifically concerned with the content of communication, for example, their child's academic progress, daily behavior, and relationships with specific teachers. Teachers, however, are more concerned with the mechanisms of communication, and they prefer structured approaches such as written reports, emails, or parent-teacher conferences. For some parents, the process of communicating with teachers makes them feel as if their opinions are not taken into consideration in education decisions, and so they see themselves as passive participants (Houser et al., 2015). For more effective communication, parents hope the communication mode can be more diversified. And they hope that they can play a more active role in the interaction (Houser et al., 2015), and teachers can acknowledge and value their observation and opinion about their children's needs (Azad et al., 2018).

The third significant area of concern to parents, particularly in disadvantaged areas, is the equity of resource allocation. Through interviews with 40 parents of children with ASD in four school districts in Cape Town, South Africa, it was found that the limited number of special education schools has led to severe challenges (Mithimunye et al., 2018). Children with ASD in some areas have no nearby suitable schools, parents face long travels to other regions for their children's schooling which messes up family routines. Sometimes it takes years before a school accepts a child with ASD. Also, the small provision for special education means parents must often face hard choices about special versus regular schools for their kids (Mujkanovic et al., 2017). To better support their education, school systems need more room in special schools, easier admissions steps, and to make regular schools more inclusive.

To summarize, parental worries about educational support focus mainly on the effectiveness of educational strategies, how to communicate with educators, and how resources are given out. Studies that exist show weak execution in education strategies, parent-school

communication and in distributing resources for supporting children with ASD. There are specific suggestions like more teacher training, better parent-school collaboration setups, and fairer resource distribution. These conclusions offer real ideas for future studies, underlining how important it is to view things from the parent's angle to push broad changes meeting different needs of children with ASD.

4 Study Aims and Research Questions

This study will investigate immigrant parents' personal experiences in a bid to discover their perception and attitude towards educational support of children with ASD. Specifically, the first aim of this study is to explore immigrant parents' experiences and perceptions of educational support for their children with ASD within the three-tiered support model and in the context of their child's Individualized Education Plans (IEP). The second aim of this study is to examine immigrant parents' views on home-school collaboration and communication. Third, this study aims to add to the discussion of the role of cultural difference and language barriers in accessibility to educational support and home-school communication.

The research with immigrant parents of children with ASD is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do immigrant parents of children with ASD perceive the effectiveness of educational strategies implemented within the Finnish basic education system?
2. How do immigrant parents of children with ASD experience and perceive their communication with schools within the Finnish basic education system?
3. What is the role of language and cultural barriers in shaping parents' access to educational support and home-school communication within the Finnish basic education system?

5 Methods

This chapter provides details concerning the study methods. Also included is a reflection on ethical considerations and the researcher's positionality.

5.1 Research strategy and research design

Nature needs to be explained, while man needs to be understood.

—Wilhelm Dilthey

This study adopts a qualitative approach. The goal of a qualitative approach is to describe and clarify specific experiences (Lochmiller & Lester, 2015). This study examines the subjective experiences of immigrant parents raising children with ASD in Finland. It particularly emphasizes their perspectives on educational support. The education and immigration settings afford a crucial context ground for grasping the phenomenon and further validate the qualitative research approach. Under the approach, the study adopts a narrative inquiry process and metaphorical three-dimensional space analytical framework to investigate the phenomena under consideration.

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method that examines how individuals construct meaning from their experiences through storytelling (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It emerged as a response to the limitations of quantitative research in capturing the richness of human experience (McAllum et al., 2019). Grounded in Dewey's (1925) view of experience as continuous and shaped by interactions with the world, narrative inquiry explores both individual and social dimensions of lived experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It prioritizes words over numbers, acknowledges the significance of personal experience, and values diverse perspectives (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). In educational research, narrative inquiry has been widely used to examine teachers' professional identities (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988), students' learning experiences, and parents' engagement with educational systems within social and cultural contexts. By capturing parents' stories, it provides insights into their challenges and perspectives, making their voices more accessible for educational policy discussions (Riessman, 2008). Given its ability to explore diverse cultural backgrounds, narrative inquiry is particularly suited for investigating immigrant parents' experiences in education.

This study is concerned with immigrant parents of children with ASD and their attitudes towards the educational support offered by the schools. Such attitudes exist within an implicit value system, developed over a period of time and through experience, and indicative of the way in which individuals respond to their environment as well as internalized assumptions. Due to their complexity, such attitudes are difficult to be fully explained by numbers and statistics. This is the reason that narrative inquiry is an effective method of exploring the in-depth experiences of immigrant parents whose children have ASD. It facilitates researchers and educators' understanding of these experiences.

Based on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) study, the three-dimensional narrative inquiry model provides an effective method of examining participants' in-depth stories. The model

spans the broad agendas of narrative inquiry and close data analysis. It addresses three major concerns of lived experiences. The first is temporality, which examines how experiences of the past, present, and future constitute a person's narrative. The second is the personal-social dimension, which explores the interaction between internal subjective thoughts and feelings and external social forces, like interactions with institutions and communities. The third is place dimension, which means the physical locations where things occur, such as home, school, or social environment.

In particular, in this study, the dimension of temporality deals with how immigrant parents' experiences of education support evolve over time. It is concerned with how things in the past, present, and future plans are linked. It also shows how parents' experiences are lived as the contexts change. The personal-social dimension, however, looks at both the personal aspects, i.e., parents' values, beliefs, and feelings, and also the social aspects, i.e., their relationships with the teachers, school administrators, and school system. It looks specifically at how these relationships grow, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse environments. The dimension of place concentrates on resources scattered within the school setting, which are associated with children with ASD. Through the use of this multifaceted method, this research seeks to obtain participants' entire narratives and represent them in an authentic way when analyzing.

5.2 Participants

The research employed a purposive sampling technique in identifying participants who had a lot to say on the topic of the research in the form of rich and reflective information. In order to ensure the validity and intensity of the findings of the research, the following inclusion criteria were set for this research: participants must be immigrant parents of children who are diagnosed with ASD and currently enrolled in compulsory education in Finland; besides, participants must have direct experience of their children's education and be willing to tell the process and experience involved in detail. Parents that do not fit into these categories will be excluded from this study.

When planning the research question, the researcher encountered a participant in an online social media group where she had posted about her life experiences of having a child with ASD in Finland. After contacting her through a private message, the researcher explained the study, its purpose, procedure, and ethics. Following some discussion, the participant was ready and willing and gave consent to take part in the study. She was given a privacy notice

and consent form and ample time to comprehend her role appropriately prior to her consenting to take part. In doing this, her involvement was voluntary and ethically open.

The participant is an immigrant mother (pseudonym “Anna”) whose case is well addressed with narrative inquiry, whose intention is to explore individual experiences in detail. Anna has a ten-year-old boy (pseudonym “Ethan”) with a diagnosis of ASD. The family migrate from their native country and resides in Finland during the interviews. Ethan studies in a public primary school in a special educational group.

Anna’s experiences, living through immigrant parental life in Finland’s educational environment, have useful information for this inquiry. Her dual role both as an immigrant parent moving into a new environment and a caregiver searching for individualized educational support for her child with ASD make her voice particularly valuable for consideration in this inquiry. Ethan’s journey in the basic school context and Anna’s efforts at engagement with the school system make a significant portion of the study’s consideration of immigrant parents’ experiences with educational support.

Although this is a single-participant study, narrative inquiry prioritizes depth over breadth. With a deep analysis of Anna’s experiences, understandings can then arise in relation to the research question even with a small participant group.

5.3 Data collection

To ensure that interviewing was conducted in a thorough and comprehensive manner with all information pertinent to the problem, a review of literature and consultation with supervisors informed the creation of an interview guide (Appendix A). The guide functioned as a guideline for structuring the interviews in a respectful manner towards participant autonomy in expression but with no presumptions and no participant’s answer restrictions through predefined contents and forms, with a view to collecting rich and in-depth narrative information.

Three semi-structured interviews with participant Anna were conducted over a span of two months. All sessions ranged between 60 and 90 minutes long. This method allows for an adaptability in having key concerns in the study addressed. The interviews were conducted in a non-English language and later partially translated into English for analysis. To protect the participant’s privacy, the specific language is not mentioned, as the participant requested. Only the portions of the transcripts relevant to analysis were translated into English, while

full transcripts were left in the original language to preserve contextual meaning. The portions that were translated were returned to the participant to verify for correctness and ensure that their intended meaning had been preserved.

Guided through a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework, data collection focused on capture of the participant's narrative's temporality, personal-social and place dimensions. In an effort to obtain a complete picture of her lived experiences as an immigrant mother in Finland navigating its educational system, this approach was employed.

Sample Questions:

Temporal dimension (Past): What sort of educational support did your child receive in your native country, before your migration to Finland?

Temporal dimension (Present): How do you respond to your child's IEP strategies? Do you trust them to work, or not? Why?

Temporal dimension (Future): Do you have any expectations for the educational support from school? What could be improved?

Personal-social dimension (Personal): How did you react when your child received a diagnosis? What were your feelings at that point, and how did you cope with them?

Personal-social dimension (Social): How often do you communicate with teachers? What is discussed?

In addition to guided questions, "burrowing" techniques were utilized in an effort to penetrate deeper into the narrative's emotion layers. According to Kim (2016), burrowing focuses on a specific incident, and through deeper analysis of emotion reaction and subjective meaning, one can unveil deeper layers of a narrative. For example, in describing an incident of a diagnosis, participant, Anna, and then a follow-up question from the researcher, "Why did this diagnosis make you relieved" By employing such a technique, a deeper level of feelings and subjective experiences could be reached, and rich information about participant's individual meaning of events could be gained.

The interview session conformed strictly to ethical standards. As a precondition for participating, the participant signed a consent form stating the purpose of the study, use of data, and protective measures for privacy. In the conduct of the interviews, care was taken to monitor closely the participant's emotional reaction, with a view to creating a relaxed and

safe environment. The researcher explicitly informed the participant of her right to withdraw at any point without any consequences.

The interviews were conducted both face-to-face and remotely, in terms of availability and scheduling needs of Anna. One of them happened at a public site, offering a homely and relaxed environment, and three happened over an online platform. In an attempt to establish trust and a relaxed atmosphere, casual conversation happened beforehand, preceding formal interviews.

In addition to the interviews, a social media analysis of Anna's posts, in the form of individual daily logs, was conducted with her consent. Her posts supplemented information about her lived experiences, providing spontaneous statements and reflection not captured in a semi-structured interview environment. The analysis focused on identifying trends and themes regarding her immigrant parent experience and experiences with the Finnish school system. Only public posts were examined, and direct consent was gained for them included in the study. In this way, ethics and privacy were guaranteed, and value in information collected was increased. With social media reflection incorporated, the study captured aspects of Anna's experiences not addressed in the interviews specifically.

5.4 Data coding and analysis

This study employs thematic narrative analysis in processing and analyzing interview data. According to Riessman (2008), such analysis targets "what is said" in a narrative, with a view to identify and group themes in a way that keeps contextual and overall character of a narrative in mind.

This method was utilized because it conforms to tenets of qualitative research and enables a participant's narrative to be represented with integrity and in detail. It works in single case studies, in that it deals with individuality in a case and captures complexity in a participant's narrative (Riessman, 2011). Thematic narrative analysis collaborates with three-dimensional narrative space framework, in that it considers a participant's temporality, personal-social and place dimensions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). By putting them together, a strong theory-data relation and a contextual-sensitive interpretation is guaranteed.

The interview recordings were transcribed into text by using Microsoft word, producing 50 pages of data. The researcher carefully reviewed and verified the transcripts line by line to

ensure accuracy and completeness. To protect the participant's privacy, all identifiable information was anonymized. Following this step, the researcher conducted multiple readings of the transcripts, identifying key narrative elements, emotional expressions, and their potential connections according to the metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework.

Building upon open coding, the researcher applied in vivo coding to highlight key phrases and significant excerpts from the transcripts, centering the participant's voice (Saldaña, 2013). For example, the statement, "When my child studies in Finland, I feel like I don't have to worry so much," was coded in vivo as "not worry so much." This code was later categorized under the temporal dimension, reflecting the participant's current experiences with reduced parental burden. Similarly, statements related to interactions with teachers were coded and categorized under the personal-social dimension, capturing the relational aspects of the participant's experience.

After initial coding, the researcher systematically validated these themes against the broader narrative structure to ensure alignment with the participant's lived experiences. Extended excerpts from the participant's account were included in the results (Polkinghorne, 1995), to preserve narrative coherence and emotional depth. For instance, within the theme of "challenges in communicating with schools," the researcher not only cited specific statements but also provided their contextual background.

Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher-maintained reflexivity, acknowledging that narratives are often participants' reinterpretations of their experiences within specific contexts, rather than objective reproductions of events (Riessman, 2011). To address this, detailed records of coding and theme development were kept, enhancing the transparency and reliability of the analysis. Furthermore, discussions with the supervisor in analysis and initial observations aided in minimizing biases and strengthening the interpretative validity.

5.5 Ethical consideration and positionality

Planning and conduct of the study adhered to basic ethical requirements, including informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality. The participant was informed about the intention of the study and agreed. Information was anonymized, kept in a secure environment, and sensitive information kept safe. There have been efforts towards creating respectful and reciprocal relations with participants, in accordance with qualitative ethics of research.

As an international student and a mother, my positionality influenced this research in several ways. Sharing a common linguistic and cultural background with the participant gave me a sense of familiarity with language and culture that allows open and honest conversation during interviewing. This shared background helped me build relationships and trust, and a deeper examination of the participant's narrative could then occur. Nevertheless, such a shared background posed its own challenge. It could have led me to unconsciously assume shared experiences and understandings. And a loss of critical analysis of the participant's individual narrative could have happened.

To mitigate such biases, I adopted a reflexive approach in the conduct of the research. I maintained a reflexive log of my observations, reflection, and assumptions during analysis and data collection. This practice helped me reflexively examine how my role as a researcher influenced the study. Repeated consultation with my advisor supplemented this reflexive practice through providing an external perspective with which I could evaluate my interpretations and conclusions.

As a mother, I resonate with participant's experiences of having a child in a cross-cultural school community. In enriching my awareness of experiences shared, I kept a critical distance in an endeavor not to transpose my own experiences onto participant's narrative. By employing open-ended questions and inviting the participant to elaborate on their own terms, I hoped to preserve the participant's voice at the center of the research.

Through this positioning and reflexivity, I have sought to counterbalance my dual impact, for example, not over-empathizing and assuming in the analysis process. In adhering to principles of qualitative research, this study has taken care to present participant's narrative with integrity and in detail.

6 Research Results and Interpretation

This section is detailing the analysis of the results of this research. The findings obtained from the thematic narrative analysis of the three interview transcriptions and the interpretation of the data using the framework of metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework are presented.

6.1 Temporal dimension: changes and transitions in educational support experiences

The temporal dimension outlines the changes in Anna's experiences with educational support across different stages. It highlights the transition from challenges and exploration in the country of origin to the gradual establishment of educational support after migrating to Finland.

This process unfolds in three distinct stages: exploration and confusion prior to diagnosis, psychological adjustment following the initial diagnosis, and the progressive establishment of support after relocating to Finland. These stages also reflect the stark contrast between the educational systems of the two countries.

6.1.1 Exploration and confusion prior to diagnosis

Before Ethan entered elementary school, Anna had already observed notable differences in his development compared to other children. For instance, she recalled:

He liked playing alone and didn't interact with other kids. In kindergarten, there was even a nursery teacher assigned to hold onto him every day to make sure he wouldn't run off.

During his kindergarten years, Ethan's unique needs were less pronounced, as the relatively flexible and inclusive environment allowed him to adapt without major difficulties. However, the transition to first grade marked a turning point. The structured school environment placed increasing demands on Ethan to conform to disciplinary norms, which amplified his struggles. Anna explained:

When Ethan first started the first grade, the teacher often called me to say that he was having conflicts with classmates, not following the rules (like wandering around during class), and sometimes even lying on the ground outside. Because of all these discipline issues, the teacher asked us to take him home, which really affected our work.

Anna described feeling unsupported:

Both his dad and I were working—I'm a nurse, and his dad is a teacher. The teacher would call during class hours, and I couldn't leave work. His dad had to leave his school to pick him up.

The situation reached a turning point when Ethan began to exhibit signs of psychological distress.

Then, we took Ethan to the hospital. The psychologist said Ethan showed signs of depression. Ethan was just over six years old. They gave us a month's sick leave for him, but then he didn't want to return to school. (Anna)

This is the crisis point in Ethan's learning where the imbalance between systemic failings and his individual needs puts the family under unsustainable pressure. The absence of any clear guidance or integrated support within the school system contributed to Anna's perplexity and suffering.

We were unsure what was happening and what we were meant to do before the diagnosis, Anna stated.

This quotation captures the utter uncertainty and emotional pain Anna experienced in navigating a system that provided very little direction. Eventually, this period of upheaval ended with the diagnosis of Ethan, which proved to be a watershed in the family's life.

6.1.2 Psychological adjustment following initial diagnosis

Following diagnosis, Anna and her family moved from a state of not knowing to knowing, which enabled them to discover more appropriate ways of supporting Ethan. During the two months that Ethan attended primary school in their home country, he had initially been diagnosed with depression and ADHD tendencies. Additional evaluations later confirmed a diagnosis of ASD. The diagnoses helped to make Anna aware of Ethan's needs.

When it was finally diagnosed, I felt relieved. I had an explanation for the way he was.

My initial response was, "So it's true." It confirmed that he really was different.

The diagnosis alleviated some of the psychological burden on Anna and her husband, allowing them to reassess their educational goals. They shifted their focus from academic achievement to Ethan's overall well-being.

After the diagnosis, the specialists gave us advice on how to deal with a child like him. They told us not to have high expectations for him just because both of us have good jobs, like hoping he would go to college someday. We immediately lowered our expectations, and the pressure reduced significantly. We felt that none of that mattered anymore—his health was what mattered most.

However, educational support remained largely reliant on family resources and parent-led organizations. Despite their adjusted expectations, the lack of institutional accommodations for children with special needs pushed the family to explore alternative options, including

relocation. During the second semester, Ethan's reluctance to return to school highlighted deeper challenges. Anna recounted:

As soon as we got to the school gate, he would cry and throw a tantrum, refusing to go inside. He was very resistant. We attempted it for some days, taking him to class while I stood at the gate of the school. I was too scared to go away, but he would soon run out. The teachers told us that they could not manage and asked us to accompany him as a shadow teacher. I personally also believed that if he was not even willing to go in, my presence would be of no use. We thought then of trying to find a school that would be more flexible. Someone even proposed sending him to a school in the countryside, but as both of us worked, that was not a possibility.

This resistance, coupled with subtle discouragement by the teachers, highlighted the systemic weaknesses in addressing Ethan's needs. As Anna elaborated:

The teachers were very dissuasive. They would not say so in so many words because we were in the school district, and they couldn't tell us point-blank to leave. But the implication was there. They felt like Ethan wasn't the best fit for the public school environment. The teacher would not say straight out that he couldn't stay—they would just imply that it wasn't the best fit for him.

Insufficient access to special classes or shadow teacher supports compelled Ethan to leave mainstream education, they resorted to home schooling and informal schooling networks, although these were under considerable policy limitation.

Then, Ethan stayed home and started home schooling, which went on for a few years. When we first started home schooling, it wasn't just us. We joined a group with other families—most of their kids were normal, but their parents didn't want them to study in public school. They set up their own educational group. But home schooling wasn't allowed under the policies in our country. If it had been, we might not have had to leave. Eventually, as part of an effort to reduce academic pressures, the government shut down private tutoring and extracurricular programs, and our group was closed because they treated it as an unauthorized tutoring service. After that, we had to home school Ethan at home by ourselves.

Home schooling presented significant challenges. Both parents worked full-time, leaving limited time for Ethan's education. Moreover, Anna believed that it was beneficial for Ethan's social development in mainstream education.

Ethan needed to be with other kids. Home schooling him alone at home is not feasible for him.

6.1.3 Gradual establishment of support after relocating to Finland

Moving to Finland introduced Ethan and his family to a new level of educational support. Ethan's integration into the Finnish education system was a gradual process: first enrolling in a language school (Anna call "preparatory school for immigrants" as "language school"), then transitioning to a second language school in another city and eventually joining a special class at a public primary school. This experience underscored both the promise and difficulty of transition to a new school system.

After the move, Ethan was registered at a preparatory language school close to the family's new home. This was purely on the basis of geographical location and without the need to present documentation of Ethan's special needs.

No evidence or documents were needed for the application, nor did we need to declare any special needs.

During this time, Ethan's parents began making attempts to reach school staff and medical professionals. They provided diagnostic reports from their native country and organized reevaluation in Finland. This reevaluation confirmed Ethan's ASD diagnosis, correlating his condition with the Finnish healthcare and education systems.

As the school needed a medical check, we went to see the school doctor and told them about Ethan's condition. We were referred to a specialist by the doctor, and we also included the diagnostic report from our home country as a reference. The local assessment reconfirmed the ASD diagnosis. (Anna)

This proactive approach laid the foundation for Ethan's transition to public primary education. After completing the initial semester, Ethan's family moved to a neighboring city, necessitating his transfer to another language school. This was a difficult transition; in that it takes time for the family to deal with the exchange of medical and school records between school districts.

The schools belonged to a different district, and they were not networked either. We had to manually transfer all the medical records from the old district to the new one. It was a time-consuming process, with follow-ups at regular intervals. The school also required us to have Ethan reassessed.

Despite these hurdles, Ethan continued his language education, benefiting from a structured preparatory program designed to support immigrant children. Ethan's journey in the

Finnish education system reached a milestone when his teachers at the second language school applied for his placement in a special class within a public primary school. Anna described the transition:

When we finished the language school, the teacher, knowing about Ethan's situation, applied for a special education class for him. It required the approval of the government, which would issue a letter declaring that he could be registered for the special class. He was subsequently enrolled in a public school with a special class.

Anna's reflections also reveal the systemic challenges in her home country and the contrast with Finland's approach:

Special schools in our hometown are extremely few—there aren't many, and the places in them are even fewer. They only take children with more severe disabilities, so children like ours can't even gain admission. In Finland, we don't need to fight over resources or use any social networks. The application is extremely open, transparent, and clear. And there is no necessity for backdoor deals.

This statement highlights the systemic issues for parents within a framework of limited educational services for children with special needs. It also conveys Anna's relief in dealing with Finland's open and inclusive system.

It's where all the schools, the health care and social services are together in one place. We didn't need to bid for the resources ourselves.

Anna's experience illustrates a change from dependence on personal networks to institutional systems. Yet, it needs to be stated that these changes entail active participation and adaptation, which can differ between families.

The temporal dimension illustrates the transformation that Ethan's family underwent in both their home country and Finland's educational systems. From encountering barriers and uncertainty at home to increasingly receiving educational support in Finland, Anna's testimony captures her acknowledgment of the difference between the two systems. Specifically, compared to the limitations they encountered at their home country; Finland's extensive system of educational support offered Ethan more opportunities.

This dimension addresses research questions 1, illustrating how Anna perceives the educational support provided by school at different times.

6.2 Personal-social dimension: home-school communication and collaboration

This dimension focuses on the dynamic interactions between parents and schools in their communication and collaboration. It analyses the features of home-school communication, teachers' supportive behaviors and the impact of language and cultural differences on home-school communication. Through thematic narrative analysis of the interview transcripts, this section reveals how immigrant families navigate challenges in working with schools and gradually establish trust and cooperative relationships.

6.2.1 The frequency, content and tool of home-school communication

Parental cooperation with schools plays a crucial role in helping immigrant families adapt to the educational environment. The national core curriculum for basic education emphasizes that education should be “organized in cooperation with guardians” to ensure students receive the support needed for their development (Opetushallitus, 2016).

During Ethan's first two weeks in primary school, Anna's communication needs with the school were high, driven by incidents involving Ethan and his teacher. In the early two weeks, the teacher called Anna directly whenever there was a conflict or issue, sometimes asking her to pick Ethan up early. This period saw frequent in-person conversations to address specific concerns. Over time, as Ethan adapted to the school environment, Anna found that simpler, less frequent communication became sufficient. The communication shifted to regular updates through occasional greetings at pick-up times.

If there's nothing special going on, the daily communication is just a quick greeting. The teacher will let us know if Ethan had a good day or not. The teachers are very responsible—they personally walk him down to meet us and say hello every day. If there's an urgent situation, the teacher will call us.

This shift in communication—from frequent updates to more targeted exchanges—highlights the school's ability to adapt its approach based on the student's progress and the family's evolving needs. By tailoring communication frequency and content, the school demonstrated a commitment to fostering a supportive and responsive relationship with families.

Additionally, the Wilma platform serves as a key communication tool. Parents use it to contact teachers and other school staff and receive timely updates about their child's activities.

Every day, the teacher updates us on how Ethan is doing in class through Wilma. I check it daily to stay informed about his school activities, like what classes he's attending or any notable events. The teacher only notes things that are either really good or not so good—ordinary situations usually don't get written down. There's no set frequency for updates; sometimes there are multiple messages in a single day. The updates come in message form. This app also lets me see what classes he has each day, and school announcements are posted there too.

The interview revealed that the class teacher serves as the central figure in home-school communication, and other roles, such as the principal or assistants, appear to have limited involvement in daily interactions with families. Apart from these, Anna gets professional advice about Ethan's development from school nurses and psychologists sometimes. This may reflect the school's structural design or priorities in communication. Anna noted:

I've never seen the principal or the assistants. All my communication has been with the class teacher. At the parent meeting, the psychologist and nurse answered some of our questions. For example, the nurse explained issues like the child's health and medication side effects, while the psychologist reviewed Ethan's upcoming study plan from the teacher to see if it was workable.

The interview also revealed that the content of home-school communication was multifaceted, addressing both academic and non-academic concerns. Anna shared specific examples that illustrate the diverse topics covered in her communication with the class teacher. The teacher provided personalized suggestions, such as tailoring Ethan's learning goals to his progress.

Ethan is good at math. He can finish the assignment on the book very quickly. Then the class teacher will adjust textbooks for him. And the teacher also suggested Ethan to change the Swedish course into English when he found Ethan was not interested in Swedish.

This reflects the school actively tailor academic support to individual needs. Anna further shared one discussion with the teacher regarding the management of electronic device:

There was a time when Ethan started bringing his computer home and got really into it, almost to the point of being addicted. The teacher told us he'd work with us to limit how much he used electronic devices at school. Eventually, the teacher took Ethan's computer away and decided he'd only use it when absolutely necessary. Teacher also mentioned using printed materials as much as possible.

This instance underlines the school's willingness to extend guidance beyond the classroom and to cooperate with parents to address behavioral issues. Apart from these support in school context, Anna mentioned that the class teacher provides information for the parents to apply more social support, including school car service and benefits for children with special needs.

In summary, the content of communication between Anna and the school ranged over academic performance, behavioral management, to social support. By addressing specific concerns and keeping the daily communication going, the school alleviates Anna's pressure on supporting Ethan at school effectively. Such features of communication meet the principles provided in the National Core Curriculum, emphasizing the role of collaborative engagement in promoting students' development.

While Anna was satisfied with the current home-school communication, she also expressed her expectation. Compared with the communication with the teacher from language school, Anna thought the current communication lacked some emotional interaction, fostering trust and support with regular updates.

The teacher of the language class, he is really very nice, especially on the emotional part. The teacher was talking about his own life. His child is somewhat similar to my child, so sometimes he would give us tips from his life too. He also has some experience of living abroad. I think that he was very open in his communication with us.

Anna thought that the feedback from the class teacher is only the general and roughly of the child's situation at school. She expects she could know more about the details and to engage in Ethan's schooling more.

The teacher from language school is very active, for example, if there is a situation (at school), he will not call me. He will make an appointment to ask me to come to school and communicate face to face. If there are some activities that he feels the need for us to accompany Ethan, and he will also ask for our opinion. But over here (in the current primary school) I feel like I'm not so needed.

Additionally, there is a pupil welfare group (PWG), as outlined in the national core curriculum for basic education, are flexible teams assembled to assess individual student needs and provide tailored support. The group composition is determined by specific cases and may include school staff, psychologists, social workers, and other professionals (Opetushallitus, 2016, p. 83). In practice, Anna noted:

I know about this working model, but I'm not familiar with what it's specifically called. For example, they [the school] said they would arrange a personal assistant for him [Ethan]. The teacher told me that we would need to have a meeting with the principal about it. Also, when we first joined this school, the teacher mentioned having a meeting to discuss whether my child would fit into a special class. This is all I know about this PWG.

This account reflects the practical application of PWG principles, such as cross-sectoral decision-making and tailored support allocation. However, Anna's limited understanding of the PWG framework highlights a communication gap between policy and parental awareness, suggesting a need for improved transparency and engagement to align practice with policy intentions.

6.2.2 The role of language and culture in communication

Language and cultural differences played a dual role of challenge and opportunity in Anna's communication with the Finnish education system. While some barriers did exist, Anna's experiences reveal a complex interplay between adaptation, institutional support, and cultural norms that shaped her engagement with the school as the parent of a child with ASD.

One of the troublesome incidents was when parent meetings in groups were held only in Finnish. Anna was not always able to keep up with what had been uttered due to the quick speaking and absence of translation:

At the parents' meetings, everything was in Finnish, and it was difficult to understand. It was extremely fast, and there was no interpreter.

This highlights the language barriers immigrant families face in communicating with the school system, emphasizing the necessity for more inclusive communication policies. In light of these challenges, teachers employed alternative strategies to keep Anna in the loop. They advised her against attending such meetings and instead offered to personally communicate essential information in English or through other accessible formats.

This strategy highlights the Finnish educational system's interest in maintaining open lines of communication reserved for the purposes of guardians as per the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education. The curriculum calls upon Section 9(4) of the Pupil and Student Welfare Act, which makes it compulsory for schools to supply understandable and clear information in an effort to ensure pupil welfare as well as enhance parental activity

(Pupil and Student Welfare Act, Section 9(4), in Opetushallitus, 2016). Anna's experiences with one-on-one support illustrate the flexibility of the system.

The teacher knows my Finnish is beginner level. So, they use easier words for me. This makes everyday communication easier, though deeper conversations are still difficult.

Her situation highlights the significance of cultural awareness, as the teachers' understanding of her country of origin eased some of the language challenges. By simplifying communication and adapting to her needs, the school demonstrated a commitment to inclusiveness, which aligns with the principles of cultural inclusion emphasized in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education.

For formal and in-depth discussions, Finnish schools provided translation services to facilitate effective communication with parents. If better communication is needed, they arrange a translator for formal meetings. This made understanding much easier. This approach aligns with the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014, which emphasizes cross-sectoral cooperation and individualized support as integral to pupil welfare. Chapter 8 of the curriculum explicitly underscores the importance of collaboration between schools and guardians, ensuring that communication is accessible and tailored to diverse linguistic and cultural needs (Opetushallitus, 2016, p. 81).

Despite systemic efforts, Anna noted that her limited participation in group settings sometimes led to a sense of disconnection.

I would like to be more active in Ethan's schooling, but most of the parents-involved activities are in Finnish. Because of the language barrier, I don't have the sense of engagement. Over time, I've adapted to the communication patterns. As an immigrant, this is what I should adapt.

This example shows how cultural awareness, institutional support, and personal adaptation intersect. Anna's situation shows the ongoing need for improving how we handle linguistic and cultural diversity, especially in group settings such as meetings. There is a need to keep improving things. It is important to mention that translation services are offered, and some strategies for communication are adapted, which is a sign that there is effort on the part of the Finnish education system. They try to make an environment where immigrant families can fit in more easily, which is good, but there are still things to improve.

When it comes to Anna, her situation is a bit more complicated because, as a parent of a child with ASD, her challenges don't stop at language and cultural adjustment alone. For her, clear and detailed communication is needed about her child's specific needs. The use of simplified Finnish by teachers does help with regular communication, but it may not be enough when dealing with things that are more critical, such as Ethan's specific behaviors and needs. The question must be raised here: Are the current translation services enough to deal with the complexities involved in discussing educational strategies for a child with ASD? The policy aims to promote cooperation between sectors, but the challenge is in making sure that the support offered reaches people like Anna. Only then can parents fully participate in these essential, specialized conversations regarding their children's needs.

6.3 Place dimension: resource allocation in school practice

This dimension addresses the resource allocation of environments, in this case schools, in which children with ASD receive educational support. Anna's story reflects the practical consequences of resource allocation on Ethan's educational experience.

The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education emphasizes that courses should "be flexibly adapted based on students' abilities and needs" and support student development through Individualized Education Plans (IEP).

Anna values the individualized approach, which allows children to take courses based on their abilities. This flexibility caters to Ethan's special needs.

The teaching method at Ethan's special group is more like individual tutoring. Every child gets attention. The teacher adjusts the content based on each child's abilities, so everyone gets something different. The teacher knows which areas each child should focus on and develop. For kids with special needs, they focus on building their strengths.

However, she also raised concerns about the effectiveness of certain courses in practice. For instance, the slow pace of teaching in special classes might restrict the child's potential for growth.

Currently, the class is moving very slowly. Even the teacher admits she's struggling because higher grades require subject-specific teachers. She feels Ethan is ready to learn seventh-grade material and hopes he can join regular classes with other kids for math.

This situation pointed out that achieving individualized education requires more resources, particularly in supporting children with special needs.

Another child in the class was able to join a regular class. He has no issues with intelligence, but he has selective mutism and doesn't speak. I guess he got the chance either because he was scheduled earlier or because he's Finnish.

Later, after the second diagnosis, (which was conducted after Ethan transferred to his new primary school in the current city) the social worker (of this city) quickly contacted us and came to our home to talk. He said that having a teaching assistant depends on the school's decision and their available resources.

Anna's experiences also shed light on the structural and relational challenges within the Finnish basic education system. Despite policies emphasizing inclusion and support, Anna noted the practical difficulty in accessing these benefits:

The teacher was very straightforward with us, saying that there are some benefits we can't apply for because we're international and not local residents. For example, there's a benefit where someone accompanies the child to class individually. This kind of support isn't available to families who haven't paid taxes, as not paying taxes means we haven't contributed to the society.

Anna's observation that certain benefits were inaccessible to international families due to their tax status highlights a potential misalignment between her lived experiences and the principles outlined in the Pupil and Student Welfare Act. While The Act grants education providers flexibility in allocating resources (Pupil and Student Welfare Act, Section 1(3), as cited in Opetushallitus, 2016), there is no explicit mention in the policy linking resource access to tax contributions. However, Anna's experience illustrates an observed practice of operation where access to some support services is tied to contribution to society, making it hard for immigrant families like hers.

This practice contradicts the Act's expressed intention of equality of access to pupil welfare services. An example is where the Act stresses universal access to learning support, wellbeing, and development (Pupil and Student Welfare Act, Section 9(4), in Opetushallitus, 2016). For Anna, barriers associated with tax payment complicate access to these services and demonstrate the challenge immigrant families face in such systems.

This tension between flexibility for providers and the wider principle of equity addresses policy enactment issues. Anna's story shows the difficulty in ensuring that policies aimed at promoting inclusiveness will actually address the diverse needs of all families. Her story poses fundamental questions about how education systems can address the gap between

policy intentions and their everyday effects on immigrant families, particularly children with special needs.

7 Discussion

The chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the results analyzed in the study, critically exploring the findings in relation to the wider academic and policy literature. Through an exploration of strengths and limitations in the study, connecting the findings to the wider literature, and exploring implications for future practice, this section reaches research discussion conclusions.

7.1 Limitation and critical reflections

The primary limitation of this study is that it focuses on just one participant, making it difficult to generalize the findings to a broader group. While this approach offers valuable insights into one parent's experience, it does not fully capture the diversity of immigrant parents raising children with ASD. Narrative research prioritizes depth over breadth, which naturally limits generalizability. However, this study contributes to existing literature by providing a nuanced account of an immigrant parent's journey through the Finnish educational system, complementing broader statistical studies that may overlook individual experiences. Future studies could address this limitation by including a more diverse sample or adopting a longitudinal design to track how experiences evolve over time.

Another limitation is the possibility of researcher bias, as the researcher and participant share a common linguistic and cultural background. This likely facilitated trust and openness but may have also influenced the interpretation of data. Reflexivity measures, such as maintaining a research diary and consulting a supervisor, were implemented to mitigate this risk, yet the lack of independent review remains a concern. This limitation aligns with previous research on researcher positionality in qualitative studies (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), highlighting the need for future studies to involve multiple researchers or external reviewers to enhance objectivity and reliability.

Self-reported data is another limitation, as participants' recollections and interpretations may be influenced by social expectations or memory recall issues. While thematic narrative analysis and in vivo coding helped preserve the authenticity of the participant's voice, this study, like other qualitative research on immigrant families (Lee et al., 2020; Sakai et al., 2019), faces challenges in verifying subjective experiences. Future research could address

this by triangulating data with additional sources such as teacher perspectives, school records, or observational studies to enhance validity.

Additionally, interview transcriptions were not independently verified, introducing the potential for minor errors. While every effort was made to ensure accuracy, transcription inconsistencies could have impacted the analysis. Similar concerns have been raised in previous narrative studies on immigrant parents (Fontil & Petrakos, 2015), where language barriers and translation nuances may affect data interpretation. Future studies could incorporate independent verification of transcriptions and translation processes to improve reliability.

Another limitation of this study is the reliability of the data analysis. Since the data analysis was conducted solely by the researcher, there was no independent reviewer to verify the coding process. This may have led to certain themes being identified through the researcher's subjective lens. While measures such as maintaining a coding log and consulting with a supervisor were implemented to enhance transparency, future research could consider employing multiple researchers for collaborative analysis or introducing peer review to improve coding consistency and ensure the reliability of findings. Independent coding verification would help minimize potential bias and strengthen the robustness of the analysis.

Using only one case study also limits the scope of the conclusions. While the findings align with existing research on immigrant parents of children with ASD, a single case cannot fully represent broader policy or educational contexts. Research by Rämä et al. (2020) has shown that educators' understanding of special needs children is often static, whereas this study highlights the fluid and evolving nature of parental experiences. Future research could adopt a comparative approach, studying multiple cases across different policy environments to deepen these insights.

Furthermore, this study does not account for differences in challenges and support systems among various immigrant communities. Cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences can shape experiences with educational support, meaning the findings may not be universally applicable. Prior research (Ismail, 2018; Sakai et al., 2019) has emphasized that immigrant parents' access to support services varies based on factors such as country of origin and level of acculturation. Future research could explore how these experiences differ

across cultural and policy settings to distinguish between universal and context-specific barriers.

A theoretical limitation of this study is its reliance on a single case to analyze systemic interactions. Narrative inquiry is effective for capturing emotional and identity-based experiences, but it is less suited for drawing broader theoretical conclusions. While the three-dimensional narrative framework proved useful in analyzing this case, its effectiveness in studying multiple participants has yet to be tested. This aligns with critiques from Nordberg (2022), who argue that while narrative research provides rich, detailed insights, it often struggles to connect individual experiences to broader policy implications. Future studies could incorporate a comparative or mixed-methods approach to address this gap.

Given these limitations, future research could take several directions. First, longitudinal studies with a diverse group of immigrant parents would provide a more comprehensive view of how parental experiences evolve. Second, cross-cultural comparisons could help distinguish universal versus context-specific challenges in navigating special education systems. Third, incorporating educators' and policymakers' perspectives could offer a more holistic understanding of systemic challenges. Lastly, future research could examine the long-term effects of inclusive education policies on immigrant children with ASD, ensuring that policy implementation aligns with intended outcomes. Expanding research in these areas would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how policy, culture, and individual experience intersect in shaping educational support for children with ASD in immigrant families.

7.2 Strength and implications

This study makes some significant contributions to the literature on ASD education within immigrant families. It extends current research by not only revealing systemic barriers but also exploring how immigrant parents actively resist and redefine themselves within the educational system. Previous work (e.g., Turtiainen et al., 2022) has emphasized the structural challenges of these families, but none have taken into account the temporal nature of adaptation—a gap filled by this research using Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework. By mapping the experiences of immigrant parents of children with ASD, across stages of their experience, this research illustrates how expectation, engagement strategy, and self-identified obstacles shift over time.

At the practice and policy level, the findings are highly relevant to special education. First, special teacher training programs could incorporate cross-cultural communication strategies, which will equip teachers with the ability to communicate effectively to multicultural families. Second, translating services could become institutionalized in order to cater to immigrant parents of children with special needs, whose Finnish skills are weak and translate for them professionally in decision-making, particularly at IEP-related meetings. Third, schools could formalize immigrant parent mentoring programs, under which experienced ones mentor first-timers how to navigate within the system. Such targeted interventions are endorsed by Lee et al. (2020), who suggest that there must be systematic, institution-based support mechanisms for ensuring parental engagement in a responsive manner.

Beyond these empirical concerns, this study also informs theoretical understandings of parental agency within bounded institutional contexts. The shifting position of the participant—moving from passive recipient to active advocate—suggests that parental engagement is not an unchanging category but a process of institutional interaction and individual adaptive strategies. This challenges traditional approaches of insufficient immigrant parental engagement and invites future research to consider the agency of parents in building inclusive education policy.

7.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study highlights the central role of narrative inquiry in facilitating a deeper understanding of the lived experience of immigrant parents of children with ASD within the Finnish basic education setting. By situating personal narratives within broader structural and cultural contexts, the research foregrounds both the challenges and potential inherent in supporting children with ASD. The study contributes to the existing body of research on immigrant parents of children with ASD in addition to offering practical recommendations for supporting children with ASD in educational setting. By shining a light on the lived experiences of immigrant families, this study calls for us to come together to transform educational systems as places of inclusion, equity, and empathy. It is a step toward not only understanding but also doing something about our shared obligation to foster each child's unique journey. By its focus on depth, reflexivity, and context analysis, this research contributes to our understanding of the experience of immigrant parents of children with ASD and also offers a basis for future research to learn from these findings and apply them to drive meaningful change in education systems.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 The Interview Guide

1. Diagnosis Results

1.1 Could you tell me about your child's second diagnosis? What did you learn from the results?

1.2 How is this diagnosis different from the previous one? Did the school make any changes in their support after this diagnosis? Could you share an example where you noticed the school adjusting their approach based on these results?

2. Educational Support for Child

2.1 Understanding of the Educational Support

2.1.1 How many educational support strategies do you know for children with special needs in Finnish basic education? How do you perceive the differences of these strategies?

2.2 Views on Inclusive Education

2.2.1 What are your thoughts on inclusive education? For your child, do you think being in a general classroom or a special class works better? Why do you feel that way?

2.2.2 Could you tell me about a time when you had to decide between inclusive education and a special class? How did that decision affect you and your child?

2.3 About Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

2.3.1 How was your child's IEP created? Did the school consider your feedback or specific aspects of your child's situation?

2.3.2 What changes or efforts have you seen from the school or teachers in carrying out the IEP? Could you describe one specific instance that stood out to you?

2.3.3 What kind of goals are set in your child's IEP? Have these goals had a noticeable impact on your child's development? Could you share a specific example?

2.4 Role of the Pupil Welfare Group (PWG)

2.4.1 Have you interacted with the pupil welfare group? How do you understand their role and responsibilities?

2.4.2 How do you perceive the effectiveness of PWG? Or, without this group, what kind of support will you not receive?

2.5 Curriculum Design and Support

2.5.1 What subjects are your child currently taking? How were these subjects selected?

2.5.2 How do you perceive these subjects and the process of selecting subjects?

3. Experiences with Home-School Communication

3.1 Topics and Frequency of Communication

3.1.1 How do you perceive the professionalism of the educators? Do you think they have enough professional knowledge and skill to support children with ASD?

3.1.2 When you talk to your child's teachers, what are the main topics of discussion? Does it cover things like academics, emotions, or behavior? Is there anything you feel neglected during the communication?

3.1.3 Are you happy with how often you communicate with the school and the methods they use? If not, what would you like to change?

3.2 Challenges in Communication

3.2.1 Have you ever felt that your concerns weren't fully heard during your communication with the school? Could you tell me about a specific instance and how it made you feel?

3.2.2 You've mentioned that in your home country, parents rely on social networks for resources, while in Finland this isn't necessary. Could you share a moment that highlighted this difference for you?

3.3 Ideal Communication Model

3.3.1 If you could redesign how the school communicates with parents, what would you change? How do you think these changes would help your child?

4. Cultural and Language Challenges

4.1 Impact of Cultural and Language Differences

4.1.1 Have cultural or language differences ever caused you difficulties? How did these challenges affect your child's education or your experience to cooperate with the school?

4.1.2 Could you share a specific example of a challenge you faced because of cultural or language differences? How did you handle it, and did the school provide any support?

4.1.3 What support has the school provided for immigrant families like yours? How has this made a difference for you?

4.2 Improvements in Language Skills

4.2.1 Since learning Finnish, how has your experience communicating with teachers changed? What kind of change? Could you describe a specific situation where it made a difference?

4.3 Unique Challenges for Parents of Children with ASD

4.3.1 As an immigrant parent of a child with ASD, what challenges do you face that might be different from local Finnish parents? Could you provide a specific example?

4.3.2 How have you dealt with these challenges?

Appendix 2 Consent Form

Consent form for participation in the study

Title	Educational Experiences through Narrative: Immigrant Parents of Children with ASD in Finland
Age of participant	I declare that I am over 18 years old, legally competent and I want to participate in the research conducted by Liping Shao, who is supervised by Professor Joseph Calvin Gagnon.
Purpose and methods of the study	The purpose of the interview is to investigate parents' perspectives and experiences regarding educational support from school for children with ASD in Finland. It takes about 60-90 minutes for the interview.
Procedures	I agree to participate in the interview. I express my consent by reading and signing two (2) copies of the survey consent form. One of the copies will be for the researchers and the other will be kept by me.
Confidentiality	Participation in this research is confidential, and information security is taken care of in the processing of the material in accordance with good information security practices. Only researchers have access to information that can be linked to me. No personal information is attached to the publications made from the research, so persons cannot be identified from the publications. Only the project researchers are able to connect the names and code numbers to each other. All collected and analyzed material is kept in a locked cabinet in a locked room. All electronic data is encrypted/encrypted for security reasons. The data will be destroyed seven (7) years after the end of the project.
Risks	Based on all available information, the study does not include any mentionable risks for the participants. The researchers will do their best to protect the identity of the participants. Participation does not give me any privileges.
Benefits, withdrawal from the study and the possibility of additional questions	This interview is intended to investigate immigrant parents' perspectives and experiences regarding educational support from school for children with ASD in Finland. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and I do not have to justify my withdrawal.

Contact persons:

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact Liping Shao (liping.shao@helsinki.fi) or Professor Gagnon.

If you want to voluntarily participate in this study, please sign this form.

Date:

Participant's signature:

Print name:

Principal Investigator: Liping Shao Date:

Supervisor:

Date: