

# Teachers as Intercultural and Ethical Profession: Perspectives from the Intercultural Teacher Education (ITE) at the University of Oulu, Finland

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**Abstract** In response to the waves of globalization, higher education institutions around the world are experiencing the integration of the international dimension. Likewise, the changing demand for students in teacher education ought to be acknowledged as they face challenges to navigate through growing diversity in their future classrooms. Awhile education plays a critical role in seeking ways to co-exist with diversity, teachers in particular have responsibility to teach pupils about 'positive contributions' through the building of democratic communities. Drawing on the ongoing effort of Intercultural Teacher Education (ITE) program at University of Oulu in Finland, this article provides insights on preparing student teachers for growing multicultural environments but also as ethical professionals.

**Keywords** Intercultural Competence, Teacher Education, Finland, Multiculturalism, Higher Education

## 1. Introduction

In response to the impact of globalization, higher education is faced with the integration of the international dimension and this has dramatically increased in recent years. As visions of international political, social and educational systems of states changes in the contemporary world, the growing and complex notions of 'the globe' or 'the global' are prominent. Thinking of the changing educational climates, teachers are required to accommodate multiculturalism in schools and also

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to teach pupils about the interconnected world in the presence of the knowledge-based society. The purpose of this article is to first discuss educational challenges brought by globalization, specifically in the field of teacher education. An example case from the Intercultural Teacher Education at the University of Oulu, Finland will be introduced to demonstrate practices already in action to prepare student teachers for the globalized era.

## **2. Globalization and implications for teachers**

Undoubtedly, the discourses around globalization are prominent in various arenas of the contemporary era. As a response to intensified globalisation, there are heightened demands for ‘internationalized’ universities and the volume as well as the scope of international activities have dramatically increased and accelerated institutional internationalization in recent years (Maringe, 2010). In return, the growing international activities at higher education level have given impetus to globalization (Maringe, 2010) by increasing mobility of students, research cooperation and other academic initiatives in action.

In examining the implications brought by globalization and internationalization, the level of impact has to be acknowledged on students in teacher education who will be facing challenges to navigate through complex and diversity issues. Education plays an important role in seeking ways to co-exist with diversity but also in an effort to eradicate existing social inequality through socially just practices. Teachers in particular, have responsibility in teaching pupils about ‘positive contributions’ through the building of democratic communities. Along with a set of complex responsibilities, curriculums such as global education and global citizenship education are being introduced and thus it is crucial as addressed by Andreotti (Jääskeläinen et al, 2011) for pre-service teachers to be given opportunities to understand their situatedness in relation to others and social, cultural and historical factors. It is then crucial for students in teacher education to become ‘global citizens’ themselves

in order to teach 'global' related curricula effectively. Growing complexity in the knowledge-based society as well as intertwined global issues in the rapidly changing society entail teachers to obtain 'more' skills and perspectives (Niemi and Jakkusihvonen, 2006).

Intercultural and international encounters are no longer privilege for some, but it is becoming concern for everybody and for every teacher (Räsänen, 2007). Zeichner (1992) echoes this sentiment by stating that 'all teaching is intercultural' in nature, as students contain various 'microcultural identities' regardless of their cultural, social or historical roots. Culture is not only about ethnicity but it may include differences arising from gender, language, social class, and religion which are also part of diversity. Thus, it is important for all teachers to acquire intercultural competence, in order to teach students with either mono or diverse backgrounds.

One of many challenges that students in teacher education face today is to meet the growing diversity among the pupils' population. The waves of globalization led increase in migration and students from different cultural backgrounds are increasingly accommodated at the local schools. Awhile there are a wider range of diversity in terms of ethnicity, culture, language, and religion (Banks, 2004), teachers are required to understand complex needs of not only pupils but also their families who may have different cultural and social background to teachers' own upbringing.

Not only learning 'about' global citizenship (Davies and Pike, 2009), teacher education has the vital role to provide a meaningful learning for one to commence in search for one's citizenship. Since there is no 'one-size-fits all' approach or solution to overcome perpetuated social inequality in today's educational climate, it is important to invite discussions and explore dialogues among various scholars and practitioners who are seeking ways to prepare student teachers for unprecedented challenge. Acquisition of such attitude and reflexivity are utmost critical in ensuring ethical solidarity and to foster respect among pupils of their consciousness towards different ways of living, and perspectives. Räsänen (2000) emphasizes that teaching is an ethical profession thus educators should be equipped with "the knowledge and the skills required to effectively teach diverse learners in pluralistic

classrooms” (Ambe, 2006: 691). By consciously developing their critical engagement and embracing new or alternative perspectives, student teachers would ‘interculturally’ support pupils ability to foster ‘peaceful and coexistence and respect’ (Ambe, 2006).

### 3. Finland as a growing multicultural society

For a long time in Finland, language and cultural minorities only included: the Sami, the Romany and special needs population (Koivukangas, 2002). In recent years, numbers of migrants and refugees have increased. Although Finland being considered as a traditionally ‘homogenous’ nation is “more a myth than reality” (Jokikokko, 2009), the nation’s recent endeavour to embrace growing is prevalent, by acknowledging the minority groups and providing them with special attention for their educational need. Not only racial, ethnic or cultural differences, but religious beliefs, gender orientation and sexuality comprises diverse subcultures. Inclusive education in the Finnish society requires further discussion and efforts in order to take a step forward in forming a genuinely multicultural society.

Indeed, the development of intercultural competence is understood as an essential in educational arena and especially required for teachers at schools in which diversity is growing. The interest to cultivate intercultural competence through teacher education flourished at the end of 1980s, when the new immigration groups arrived (Jokikokko, 2009). The societal changes brought by globalization have lead Finnish teacher education to respond by incorporating ‘diversity’ aspect into the teacher training programs. The recent national education policy reform explicitly addressed the urge for teachers to “act as responsible educators in a multicultural society” (Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006). Although Finnish teacher education has been praised for the success in the PISA results (Sahlberg, 2007), researches indicate concerns in equipping student teachers with adequate knowledge and skills for a growing multicultural information society (Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen,

2006). In practice, various efforts and studies are being made on student teachers' intercultural competence, to examine attitude, process and potential attributes in relation to developing such competence necessary for accommodating needs of students and families in Finnish schools.

At Finnish teacher education programs, various approaches for cultivating intercultural competence of student teachers are in place: either through provision of individual course work or integration of intercultural themes across the curriculum (Jokikokko, 2009). The 'added-single' course provides a brief introduction to minority groups or special needs children in hopes to raise awareness of future teachers (Räsänen, 2007). Within limited hours of the coursework, student teachers are given opportunities for 'a critical examination of their deprivation' (Räsänen, 2007: 121). Courses prepare student teachers to become aware of issues and perspectives related to children from subcultures. Insightful lectures stimulate students to think further about their future practice. Some 'theme-projects' are another popular way to implement multicultural education at teacher education. Although these temporarily and superficial experiences may lead to 'pedagogical tourism' in which stereotypes and narrowed views can perpetuate thus should be problematized (Räsänen, 2007).

It is explicitly acknowledged that in Finland, teachers are an 'ethical profession' and value-laden, who work towards creating more democratic society that respects human rights and value social justice (Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006). As intercultural learning is increasingly valued for the 'global', Finnish scholars like Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen perceive intercultural understanding as a vital element in development of student teachers:

“Teachers need in their profession a concept of culture which includes cultural knowledge and intercultural understanding. They also need to understand the factors that create social cohesion and exclusion in a society and how the teaching profession plays an integral part in these processes. They have to be aware of opportunities and ways to work together with other partners and stakeholders in

formal and non-formal educational contexts in order to provide learning opportunities to learners at various age levels. They also need to be aware of value contradictions in society and educational institutions and they should be prepared to deal with moral and value-based issues.” (Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006: 64).

Jokikokko (2009) argues that intercultural competence is necessary, not only students who may strive to work in international setting or work with diverse population. It is also vital for student teachers who would be working in ethnically less diverse schools in Finland. As there are more themes in school subjects that dealing with global issues, it is important also for the ‘mainstream’ student teachers to acquire skills and attitudes that allows them to engage in perspectives that are different to them (Nieto, 1996).

#### **4. Becoming a primary school teacher in Finland**

Since 1971, various teacher education programs have been developed for training primary and secondary school teachers at the universities, aiming to provide quality academic learning and professional development (Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006). Students in primary school teacher education who are recognized as ‘class teachers’, are required to complete both Bachelor and Master’s degree in five to six years, majoring in Science of Education which include a submission of Master’s thesis (Sahlberg, 2007; Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006). Currently, teacher education programs for primary school teachers are provided at eight universities in Finland.

One of the unique natures of Finnish teacher education is its strength and focus on research-based curriculum (Sahlberg, 2007; Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006). The combination of Bachelor and Master’s degree program include understanding of various research methods and engagement with both theoretical and empirical studies. It enables teacher candidates to develop their professional knowledge and

skills from both pedagogical and subject-specific point of views that are indispensable for their future teaching (Hökkä and Eteläpelto, 2014). This emphasis on research-based programs encourages student teachers to develop their analytical skills, systematic approaches and also reflective practices (Hökkä and Eteläpelto, 2014). Through the experience of producing academic writings and to “study actively and to internalize the attitude of researchers” (Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006). Through the application of their theoretical and pedagogical knowledge from the curriculum, student teachers will complete the requirement of guided teaching practice which consists of approximately 20 ECTS (credits). The goal of teaching practices is to “support students in their efforts to acquire professional skills in researching, developing and evaluating teaching and learning processes” (Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006).

Its emphasis on academic orientation and the reputation of teaching profession have resulted in the fact that teacher education has been one of the most popular programs at universities in Finland (Hökkä and Eteläpelto, 2014 and Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006). Especially for class teachers, a large number of applicants compete to enter teacher education every year and a handful of candidates (10%-15%) are accepted into teacher education program. Accepted student are perceived as highly motivated, diligent and also outperformed others on competitive entrance examinations (Sahlberg, 2007; Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006; Niemi, 2000). According to Sahlberg (2007), the teaching qualification allows graduates not only to become class teachers but also provides potential employment opportunities in both public and private sectors thus the the attraction. In spite of other potential career opportunities, it is reported that teachers tend to remain in their teaching profession and continuously seek ways to improve their teaching practices (Niemi, 2000). Since the ‘Finnish miracle’ in 2000s, Finnish education has received tremendous attentions from the international media and educationalists around the world. Finnish success is often explained in relation to the competence of teachers and teachers’ autonomy, which are facilitated by 5-year-research intensive training . Finnish teacher education is designed so that independence and collaborative

learning are valued in learning environments which ensure space for pedagogical approaches to allow conflation of ‘theory and practice’ as well as ‘reflection and action’ (Järvelä, 2000: 150).

## **5. The Intercultural Teacher Education (ITE) at University of Oulu**

The Intercultural Teacher Education (hereafter ITE) at University of Oulu was established in 1994 by teacher educators who were inspired to transform Finnish Teacher Education (Järvelä, 2011). The ITE is a five-year program which focuses on multicultural issues and development of intercultural educator with a strong emphasis on ethics throughout the program. Student teachers in this particular program learn from interdisciplinary studies that include multi-dimensional discussions on diversity and will be provide a primary school teacher certificate upon completion of the program (Jokikokko, 2009). The ITE also specializes in variety of international education assignments, to respond to the various challenges brought by internationalization as well as multiculturalism.(University of Oulu, 2015). The language of instruction is English and it include tasks such as: “teaching multicultural classes in different countries, project leading and coordinating duties, international consultancy work, educational policy and administration duties, and taking part in multi disciplinary research projects”(University of Oulu, 2015). There quired courses include studies in educational sciences, school subjects, as well as four teaching practices, which can also be carried out in different countries. The ITE programme is based and draws on theoretical and empirical studies carried out by the EDGE (Education, Diversity, Globalization and Ethics) research group which initially started with an action research approach for developing teacher education. Theoretical approaches are fundamental in understanding challenges in multicultural society and the importance of theoretical work is emphasized for all students. It is also mandatory to include a study abroad for minimum of one semes-

ter to complete the degree.

It is challenging to point out any specific skills and competence concerning the development of intercultural competence or global perspectives, however, the ITE program interweaves 'ethics' by perceiving them as 'values' that will potentially guide student teachers' thinking and action (Jokikokko, 2009). To foster value-laden professionals, the ethical orientation is embedded in the ITE program in three ways mainly. Firstly, learning about specific international issues allows student teachers to have a greater awareness of societal and global challenge (e.g. human rights, peace, and migration). Feelings and opinions that student teachers construct during the program trigger them to critically reflect on their own surrounding and assumptions (Jokikokko, 2009). Examples can be found in courses such as global education and development (Weboodi, 2015a). Secondly, the relatively small scale group learning (approximately 20 students) is especially designed to create the general atmosphere that is caring, supportive and encouraging the dialogical relationship among students and lectures. Through the active interaction and discussions in the program, student teachers learn to realize the importance of care, trust and openness that welcome different ideas and opinions in their future work place. Thirdly, tutors in the ITE program provoke students to actively and critically engage with current trends in local, national and global level. They support the establishment of both strategies addressed above, in addition to their role as a facilitator in transformative learning. While some of the courses are same as the basic teacher education, specially designed courses for this ITE program include: orientation towards international education, international communication and negotiation skills (ICONS), educational policy and leadership, global education (peace and conflict research, equity and human rights, environment), educational philosophy and ethics, comparative education, development and education (ibid). Amongst the courses listed above, the ICONS is utmost simulating for student teachers in the first year of the ITE program as it provides: introduction to contemporary politics and its relation to education; understanding of key interests among domestic and international actors; understanding of theories used for conflict resolution; blending

learning using ICT; and opportunities to improve communication and negotiation skills in collaborative learning (Weboodi, 2015b). This course consists of challenging tasks for new student groups who will represent a nation that is different from their own in terms of educational, social, economic and political background. Tensions among and within groups encourage them to ethically and critically reflect on values at different levels (individual, national, international) in a form of experiential and blended learning. The following sections discuss three strategies that are important in fostering intercultural competence for student teachers in the ITE program.

### 1) The selection process

The selection process of the ITE is different and uniquely designed from the standard teacher education program as it consists of two stages. In the first stage of the entrance examination, candidates will be selected based on the documents required to prepare for the process. These documentations include ‘school-leaving examinations’ that are equivalent to the Finnish matriculation examination, and a motivation essay that is used to examine candidates’ aspiration and aptitude. The second stage of the entrance examination contains a written exam based on assigned readings on multiculturalism and global responsibility. An individual interview (30 minutes) in English will follow to examine their “potentiality and the kind of mind-set” expected for the future teachers (Järvela, 2011). The number of applicants varies every year (approximately 250-180 applications) then approximately 80 students are invited to take part in the entrance exam described above. Intake of the ITE program is 20 students every year, and there is a possibility for maximum of five to come from non-Finnish background.

### 2) The Curriculum Design

Thinking of the curriculum design, specific aims of the program and the selec-

tion of the candidates are oriented towards intercultural aspects of the teaching profession. The profiles of students in this program tend to have diverse backgrounds or/and experiences with diversity themselves: bicultural, bilingual, lived abroad for some years and a combination of many other attributes. There are also some students who did not have any of the above experience and also began the study after graduating from high school (Jokikokko, 2009). Needless say it is possible to assume of the existing interests towards multiculturalism and global issues among applicants for this specialized program. The ITE program is still the only teacher education program in Finland that has the special orientation towards intercultural learning and global education. The intercultural, ethical and global themes as well as the 'kind of holistic filter' are integrated into the entire program of the ITE.

### 3) The study abroad period

To prepare future teachers with: open-minded attitude; flexibility to embrace various perspectives; and awareness of global complexities, the ITE program requires student teachers to study abroad with a minimum of three months. This can be arranged with the institutions around the world where University of Oulu has exchange agreements. Students can also find their own placement for their study abroad either to study or to gain experience which contribute to their professional development as an intercultural teacher.

### 4) Reflection from the ongoing research

In the ongoing doctoral dissertation tentatively titled 'Global perspectives of students teachers: A comparative research in Finland and Japan', preliminary results of questionnaires have been reported (Uematsu and Nagata, 2015) which reflect voices of students in a rather traditional teacher education programs at University of Oulu and University of Hiroshima. Prior to the data collection, a pilot study was carried out to test the research instrument and 14 students in Intercultural Teacher Educa-

tion had participated in the online questionnaire. Students in the ITE program similarly but more strongly agreed to other students groups about the importance of having intercultural competence and global perspectives for their teaching profession (agree 35.71 %, strongly agree 64.29%). In the open-ended questions, their rationale for perceiving the value in those skills are explicitly aligned with human rights, ethics and other humanistic values (e.g. tolerance, peace, respect, equality, Further analysis and discussions must be incorporated to draw more nuanced analysis, however, it is clear that the strong emphasis on these thematic areas in the ITE program contribute to the development of future intercultural teachers.

## 6. Concluding remarks

Growing interconnectedness in the globalized world requires future teachers to navigate through growing complexities at schools. While the ITE program provided at the University of Oulu offers opportunities for students to gain multiple and diverse world views, it is crucial that the program's holistic and ethical approach are interweaved across the entire program. Rather than a single-course or one-time 'immersion' approach, the ITE program takes a unique approach from the selection of the teacher candidates to the mandatory study abroad experience. While some student teachers find themselves in local Finnish schools after their graduation, their intercultural competence and global perspectives support their development of their professional ethics as globally responsible teachers. It is then importance to perceive that their gain from the ITE program is not merely skills or knowledge, but rather attitude and dispositions which will support their continuous development as educators.

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## 이문화와 윤리적 직업으로서의 교사: 핀란드 오루 대학교의 이문화 교사교육으로의 관점

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**요약**\_글로벌화의 파도는 현재 '대학의 국제화'라는 형태로 고등교육에도 밀려오고 있으며, 교사를 양성하고 있는 다양한 고등교육기관에서도 현저하게 나타나고 있다. 동시에 종래의 교사들에게는 복잡해지는 사회에 대해 다양한 측면에서 교육하는데 필요한 지식과 자질이 요구되고 있다. 이것이 학교교육이 변화하는 사회에서의 '공존'과 '공생'에 대해서 학습하는데 있어서 중요한 역할을 담당하기 때문이며, 교사는 학생에게 자발적인 사고와 행동으로 사회공헌에 기여하도록 가르칠 필요가 있다. 본 논문은 핀란드의 오루 대학의 간문화 교사교육(이문화&#8228;글로벌 교육에 중점을 둔 교사양성과정)을 사례로 교사 양성이 어떻게 다양성과 이문화 교육을 도입해서 다양화가 진행되고 있는 교육현장에 대한 준비에 기여할 수 있을 것인가에 대해 심층적으로 고발한다.

**주요어**\_이문화 역량, 교사 교육, 핀란드, 다문화주의, 고등교육

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