

Current Issues of Quality in Saami Language Education

Pigga Keskitalo

University of Lapland, Finland

Erika Sarivaara

University of Lapland, Finland

Abstract

This study examines key issues of equity and social justice in Saami education in Finland by considering various perspectives on quality in indigenous education and its desired outcomes as perceived by authorities, teachers, parents, students, and elders (N = 10). A content analysis of these perspectives and practices was conducted to determine the key features of successful teaching and identify developmental issues that arise in diverse settings. Furthermore, in the case study, video recordings and teacher-simulated recall are analysed in the context of Saami language education outside the Saami homeland to describe daily practices in Saami education. This case study is part of UNESCO international research on improving the lives of indigenous youth worldwide.

Keywords: Saami education, Saami language teaching, stimulated recall, interviews, UNESCO

Introduction

This study focuses on Saami education in Finland. The study is part of UNESCO's global research project, Reorienting Education and Training Systems to Improve the Lives of Indigenous Youth (2017–2022), which aims to improve the lives of indigenous youth in or from traditional communities by enhancing the quality of their

education.¹ This study examines the current educational situation of Saami youth in Finland. Saami languages have been defined as endangered; therefore, they constitute one of the core areas in Saami youth education. This study defines “youth” as children between the ages of 6 and 18 years who are receiving primary and secondary education.

The Saami people live in the central and northern areas of Sweden and Norway, northern Finland, and Russia’s Kola Peninsula. There are approximately 100,000 Saami, depending on the criteria used to define them, of whom approximately 30,000 speak some Saami language (Lehtola, 1997; Sarivaara, 2012). In Finland, there are approximately 10,000 Saami people according to current knowledge. No statistics are available for Saami ethnicity. Instead, statistics are available from the Finnish Authority Magistrate on Saami language speakers. These statistics are based on individual self-reports. According to these statistics, 1,700 people have reported that Saami is their mother tongue (Inari Municipality, 2020; Sarivaara, 2012). Not all Saami speakers have reported as Saami to the Finnish Authority Magistrate, so it is estimated that approximately 3,000 people speak at least one of the three Saami languages spoken in Finland (i.e., Northern, Skolt, and Inari Saami) as their mother tongue (Seurujärvi-Kari, 2011).

Saami language and culture had developed by the second millennium BC (Aikio, 2004, 2012). Saami livelihoods are traditionally based on nature. Originated in hunter-gatherer tribes, the Saami have been involved in fishing, hunting, and semi-nomadic reindeer herding. However, currently, only about 10% of Saami practice the latter (Solbakk, 2006). The Saami have experienced colonialism, a central manifestation of which is assimilation (Kortekangas et al., 2019). Assimilation is defined as the active merging of minorities into the mainstream population (Battiste, 2000). The Saami languages are endangered because of centuries of assimilationist policies and policy measures (Dannemark, 2018; Todal, 2002). Furthermore, rapid social change has negatively affected Saami health, including mental wellness. For example, the suicide rate among young reindeer herders has been high (Heikkilä et al., 2013; Kaiser et al., 2008).

Nonetheless, contemporary Saami people are part of the globalised and, to some extent, the urbanised world. Saami culture is diverse, and it accepts ongoing change on its own terms, which is a sign of lively and flourishing indigenous Arctic culture.

¹ See <https://unescochair.info.yorku.ca/unesco-chair/>

² Spelling Sami/Sámi also known.

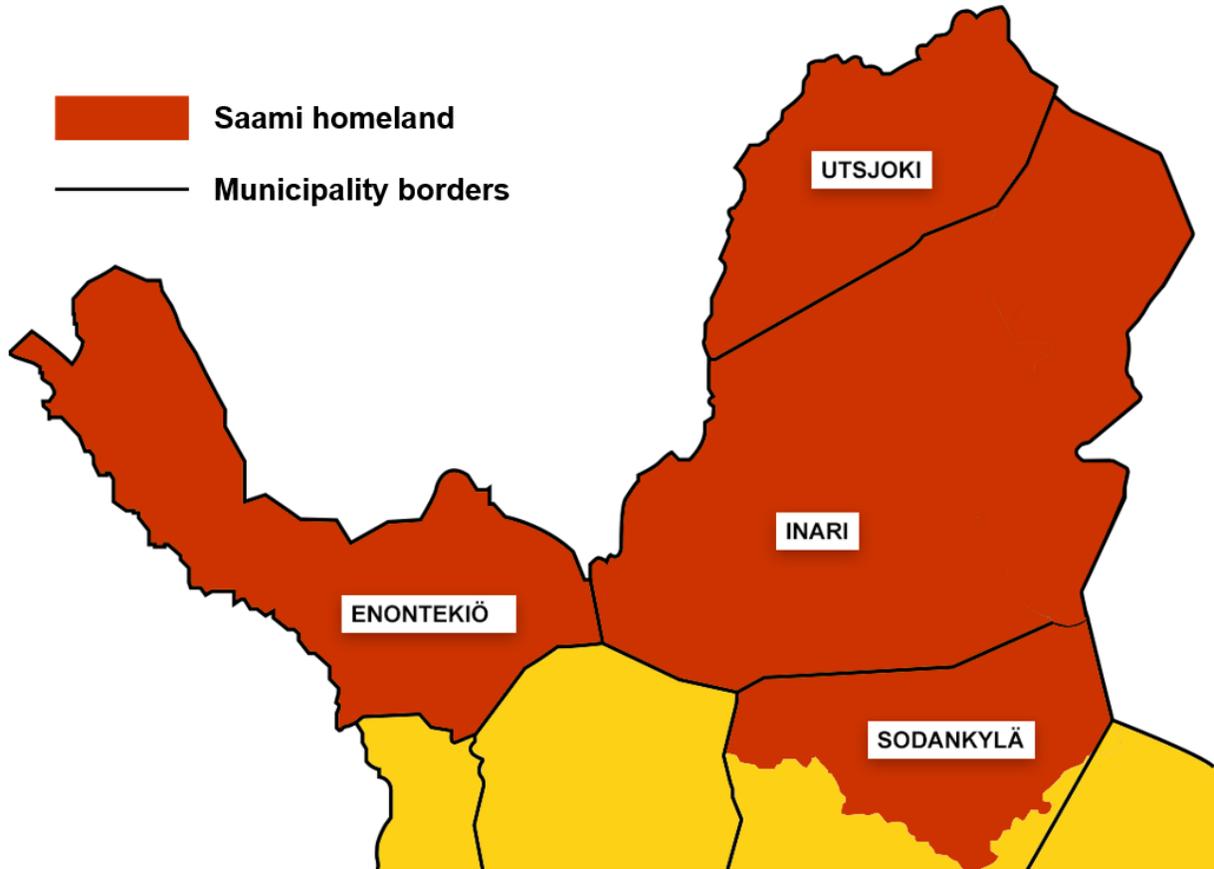


Figure 1
The Saami homeland in the northern municipalities of Enontekiö, Utsjoki, Inari, and Sodankylä

Migration and urbanisation are current phenomena among Saami people. This diaspora has affected the demographic structure of Saami people (Keskitalo, 2019). Sixty percent of contemporary Saami live outside the Saami homeland, including 75% of Saami-speaking children. For example, around 1,000 Saami live in Helsinki, the capital of Finland (Lindgren, 2000). Saami-speaking teachers and agents at various levels have been involved in developing Saami education. However, there is a lack of both human and economic resources in the field of Saami education development (Keskitalo et al., 2021; Rahko-Ravanti, 2016).

The history of Saami education can be divided into four phases. The early phase, which occurred in the 17th and 18th centuries, could be described as 'The Age of Missionaries'. During this era, the aim of public education was to civilise people, and in this respect indigenous people, and the main subject taught was Christianity. The second phase, which was from the mid-19th century to the 1970s in the 20th century, was characterised by linguistic and cultural assimilation, and the main subject taught was the official, majority language of the state. The third phase (1970–1990) was characterised by acceptance; the goal was to provide education for everyone, and

the Saami language was treated pedagogically as an auxiliary language, and in some cases, it also functioned as the language of instruction for Saami-speaking pupils. The fourth and current era, which began in the 1990s, is characterised by the revitalisation of indigenous languages. The dominant view is that, after the lengthy period of assimilation, schools must allow children to learn Saami language and culture (Lund, 2014). These four phases partially overlap, and their philosophies have been applied in diverse ways in different countries with Saami population.

The Saami people attend educational institutions in four countries Norway, Sweden, Russia and Finland, each of which has a specific educational system. In Finland, pupils receive compulsory nine-year basic education (i.e., grades one to nine in comprehensive school) from the ages of seven to 16 years. Pre-primary education is provided for children in the year preceding the beginning of compulsory education. They then can pursue an upper secondary education, which is either a general academic education or vocational education and training. Vocational education and training are designed for young people without upper secondary qualifications and for employed adults (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021).

In Finland, as indigenous people, Saami language and culture are included in the national core curriculum, which sets the main principles and subjects of education. The goals for Saami language instruction are set to the national core curriculum by a separate working group that comprises Saami members. Municipalities are responsible for creating local curricula within the framework of the national core curriculum. Thus, municipalities emphasise local goals, such as integrating Saami content into the curriculum. In the National Basic Education Act (628/1998), the Saami language is defined as a medium for teaching only within the Saami homeland: “Pupils living in the Saami homeland who are proficient in the Saami language shall be primarily taught in Saami” (10 §). Outside the homeland, Saami language teaching is organised based on a special decree by the Ministry of Education (1777/2009). The criteria for the state subsidy of the supplementary education of foreign-speaking, Saami-speaking, and Romani-speaking pupils in basic education and upper secondary education if the educational institutions do not provide mother tongue instruction are as follows: “If the organiser of the teaching has less than four Saami-speaking or Romani-speaking students, the minimum size of the group may be two students”³ (3 §). In this case, additional Saami language teaching is based on two hours of teaching, which may combine Saami-speaking pupils and those who have passive language ability at the beginner level. According to the decree, the same learning group may include pupils in different grades and different schools, as well as pupils in pre-primary education.

The Saami Parliament of Finland receives funding for the design of learning materials and provides recommendations for developing Saami education. Moreover, the Lapland Regional Government Agency monitors Saami education (Aikio-

³ Translation by the authors.

Puoskari, 2016). Indigenous self-determination is based on consultations and negotiations between the Saami Parliament and authorities about matters pertaining to the Saami Parliament Act (Laki saamelaiskäräjistä 17.7.1995/974), such as those affecting the status of the Saami as an indigenous people, who are defined as such in the Constitution of Finland (731/1999). The Ministry of Education and Culture decides the curriculum, which is based on core educational goals and subject-specific goals. Human rights and indigenous conventions recommend expanding the concept of indigenous educational sovereignty to include the practical, linguistic, societal, and cultural needs of indigenous people (Hirvonen & Balto, 2008).

The Finnish educational system is generally successful according to measures such as the results of the PISA (Sahlberg, 2012). However, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre has expressed concerns about the quality of nine-year compulsory education. The educational success of Saami children varies (Huhtanen & Puukko, 2016). Throughout Finland, girls generally perform better than boys (Pöysä & Kupiainen, 2018). Moreover, Saami boys generally receive statistically lower grades than other boys do (Huhtanen & Puukko, 2016; Keskitalo & Paksuniemi, 2017). In a recent report, The Ministry of Education and Culture emphasised the situation of Saami language teachers, Saami language textbooks, and the knowledge of Saami people conveyed in majority language textbooks, of which there is an overall deficit (Arola, 2020; Korpela, 2020; Miettunen, 2020).

This study was based on interviews with stakeholders and practitioners of Saami education at the elementary school level (politicians, authorities, teachers, parents, students, and elders). The study also used stimulated recall data, which was generated by video recordings of Saami language teaching and ensuing discussions between the researchers and the teacher who participated in the study (see Calderhead, 1981; Dempsey, 2010). It thus revealed various perspectives on quality education and its desired outcomes, as perceived by Finnish educators at various levels (i.e., both national and indigenous community authorities); principals and teaching staff; parents; students; and other stakeholders.

The study sought to address the following questions: (1) What issues do teachers discuss using the stimulated recall method? (2) What views do authorities, students, stakeholders, and teachers share about Saami education? (3) What are the micro and macro understandings of Saami education? The results of this research provide knowledge of the current situation and the needs of Saami education, particularly regarding the Saami language of instruction and the organisation of language teaching with diverse learners outside the Saami homeland. This study is grounded in the principle of social justice with regard to the ability of children to reach their full potential within their societies (Atwater, Russell, & Butler, 2013). Adherence to this principle leads to equity, including the equitable distribution of opportunities, which ensures that all citizens are provided with what they need to achieve their best (Anthis, 2020). We specifically refer to indigenous children's right to

receive education in their indigenous language. Quality indigenous education should be well-resourced, culturally sensitive, and aligned with students' learning needs, languages, priorities, and aspirations. Moreover, it should be delivered through culturally appropriate teaching strategies and settings (Cosentino, 2016).

Review of Current Pedagogical Practices in Saami Language Teaching

Nine or ten different Saami languages are spoken in the four countries Sweden, Norway, Russia and Finland in which the Saami people live (Dannemark, 2018). The Saami languages are considered endangered, which is the result of major language shifts during recent decades as well as in previous centuries (Salminen, 2007). Until the 1970s, the Saami languages were invisible, and they did not have official status in national education systems (Aikio-Puoskari, 2016; Dannemark, 2018). Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar (2010) examined the effectiveness and appropriateness of indigenous language curricula for children and adolescents across the globe. Their findings showed that if pupils did not receive linguistic and cultural support based on their own linguistic and cultural heritage, their competence may be negatively affected. Furthermore, inadequate teaching in the mother tongue could negatively affect the educational success, language acquisition, and development of the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010).

Outside the Saami homeland, the two hours allotted to teaching the Saami language is often based on a subtractive or diminutive model of bilingualism, in which Finnish as the dominant language predominates and replaces the Saami language, at least in part. Subtractive bilingualism may affect children who study in the majority language but receive little or no instruction in their mother tongue (Baker, 2001). If the amount of weekly Saami language teaching time is less than half the total number of teaching hours, a subtractive model is applied, in which Finnish is learned at the expense of Saami. This can threaten the mother tongue development of Saami youth and the future of the Saami languages. In contrast, the term additive bilingualism refers to a model in which both languages are valued and encouraged to develop equally (Baker, 2001).

Subtractive language teaching can lead to an unstable diglossic situation in which the use of language is differentiated. The term diglossia refers to bilingualism at the community level (Baker, 2001). For example, the Saami language is used in some contexts (e.g., at home), and the dominant language, Finnish, is used in official situations, such as at school. Later, the mother tongue is often replaced entirely by the dominant language. Subtractive teaching reduces the child's linguistic diversity rather than increasing it. Such educational models are called submersion models because the child is immersed in a foreign language without the opportunity to become fluent in it (Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010, p. 11). Today, however, the situation is not quite as black-and-white, as Saami-speaking pupils are often bilingual or multilingual,

depending on their linguistic backgrounds. As an endangered indigenous language, the Saami language can also be considered less proficient because of the history of the assimilation and colonisation of the Saami people (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2004).

Currently, however, the focus is on language revitalisation, and the negative effects of assimilation have been acknowledged (Salminen, 2007).

Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty (2008) posited three teaching models of bilingualism and multilingualism, depending on the results. A situation in which the pupil's mother tongue is not taught is called a "non-model" because it does not meet the requirements of either bilingualism or multilingualism, including the learner's mother tongue. The "weak model" resembles the subtractive teaching model. Although the weak model supports assimilation, it nevertheless leads to better language learning than the non-model does. However, the result is limited bilingualism, in which the pupil's mother tongue is subsumed by the dominant language in the pupil's linguistic and cultural repertoire (Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008). In this context, Saami youth do not acquire strong linguistic skills and do not learn their own cultural values (Hoëm, 2010). A "strong model," in which at least half the lessons are taught in the Saami language, which is the pupil's mother tongue, is the only teaching model that can achieve the goals of functional bilingualism and multilingualism (Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008). According to this model, Saami languages and culture are valued, which supports the strengthening of identity and cultural knowledge and skills among Saami youth (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2004). Internationally, the non-model and weak model are the most commonly applied despite their violation of linguistic and cultural human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010).

The teaching of Saami languages is conducted in a bilingual and multilingual context. Helander (2016) pointed out that in such contexts, language learning and teaching language awareness are particularly important. Language awareness has been defined as "explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use" (Association for Language Awareness, 2012; Ellis, 2012, p. 4). The basic education curriculum (National Board of Education, 2014) highlights cultural diversity and language awareness, drawing attention to the importance of language throughout schooling in all subjects and teaching units. According to Moate and Szabó (2019), it can be difficult for teachers to identify pupils' varying linguistic repertoires and to organise teaching in ways that develop their language awareness. Nevertheless, language-aware learning in classroom situations can be supported in different ways. In learning language skills, pupils must be given the opportunity to use the target language as often as possible and to ask questions from their own point of view using that language. It is important to provide pupils with real opportunities to use language authentically in various contexts, as language learning takes place not only through

modelling and imitation, but also through active use in speaking, doing, and listening (Moate & Szabó, 2019).

According to Gardner (2010), language awareness is influenced by six main variables: personal motivation, individual abilities, culturally relevant factors, educationally relevant factors, instrumentally relevant factors, and language fear. Language planning and attitudes towards language influence the success of teaching (Ramachandran & Rauh, 2016). According to Doğançay-Aktuna (1997),

[l]anguage planning refers to activities that attempt to bring about changes in the structure (corpus) and functions (thus, status) of languages and/or language varieties, using sociolinguistic concepts and information to make policy decisions and to implement them, in order to deal with linguistic and/or extra-linguistic problems at the national, international or community level. (p. 15)

Enlivening the linguistic richness of the classroom through the identification of different uses of language helps pupils consider the complexity of languages and languages as systems. Language makes the world meaningful and concretises pupils' thinking. Attention should be paid to the visualisation, concretisation, and versatile use of language in the classroom. This is especially true in minority language contexts, where the language is used relatively little outside the school and home (Linkola, 2014).

According to Lyngsness (2013), the use of the target language stimulates pupils' learning and understanding in the best possible way. The potential of pupils to speak their languages at home should also be promoted. This means that linguistic diversity should be encouraged by bringing pupils' languages—not only the national official language—into the visible, audible, and functional everyday lives of schools (Onniselkä, 2015). Doing so strengthens the atmosphere and pupil-specificity of multicultural schools, which entails the consideration of almost all the six variables of Gardner's (2010) language awareness (Moate & Szabó, 2019). According to Chambers (1991), the use of the target language in teaching meets the requirements of quality language teaching. The learning situation and pupils' language awareness can be pedagogically supported by various activities and materials that foreground the target languages in the classroom (Chambers, 1991; Moate & Szabó, 2019).

With particular regard to endangered minority languages, teachers require support in strengthening both their teaching and their identities as teachers. It is common for teachers to feel lonely and burdened in teaching endangered Saami languages (Rahko-Ravanti, 2016). Teaching endangered indigenous languages is burdened by the lack of teaching material, co-teachers, and stressful cultural situations (Hammine et al., 2018; Rahko-Ravanti, 2016). According to Efendi (2013), self-efficacy is one way to reinforce teachers' identities and practices. This concept involves social support, motivation, the availability of infrastructure, physical health,

competence, intentions, discipline, responsibility, and thankfulness (Efendi, 2013). Wheelan (2016) identified the importance of motivational factors in learning, suggesting that the functioning of the pupil group and the learning atmosphere may be influenced by pedagogical methods that create favourable conditions for learning. Rasmussen (2013) urged that there is a need for change on both macro and meso levels to enhance the revitalisation of Saami languages.

Diverse methods are used in indigenous teaching contexts around the world. According to the most recent research, immersion is considered an ideal model for indigenous language learning. Immersion is effective in countering the effects of assimilation, which severed intergenerational language transmission. A mixture of different methods, such as grammar-translation, direct and audio-lingual, communicative, proficiency-based, and radical input-based (Underriner et al., 2021), is a good starting point for indigenous language teaching.

Methodology

This study was based on a multi-methodological perspective, in which each perspective is intended to complement the others. This project was focused on elementary and secondary school education in Finland. Data were collected in two phases from stimulated recall video recordings and interviews. First, in 2018, data were gathered through telephone interviews (N = 3) with Saami and non-Saami authorities at the macro level of Saami education. These individuals were in or connected to various positions of national leadership. In the interviews, they shared their thoughts and suggested improvements concerning the current situation of Saami education. Interviews were conducted with teachers (N = 2), parents (N = 2), elders (N = 1), and students (N = 2). The people interviewed were of both Finnish and Saami origin, and they included both speakers and non-speakers of Saami.

In the second phase, which occurred in 2019, data were collected using the stimulated recall method. Video recordings were made of a Saami language teacher (N = 1) in the classroom (two hours) and in follow-up interviews (N = 2) (Patrikainen & Toom, 2004). The teacher first recorded an observation video of a Saami language class using an iPad placed at the back of the classroom. After watching the video, the researchers and the teacher identified and discussed pedagogically significant moments. The researchers' role was to support the teacher and help improve the pedagogy used to teach the language. The teacher's role was to reflect on the teaching and co-create, with the researchers, different practices and classroom language activities. The teacher then recorded a new video showing the use of the new teaching ideas that had been co-created with the researchers. The objective was to determine whether the teacher had succeeded in improving the teaching pedagogy.

This qualitative approach was chosen because it fits the purpose of generating an overall picture of the state of Saami education in Finland. The analysis was conducted to determine whether current Saami educational practices met the

standards of quality education for indigenous peoples and their rights according to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008)⁴ and whether the methods could be considered robust.

The data were handled by following general ethical principles according to the responsible conduct of research (TENK, 2012), EU data protection regulation (EU 2016/679), and Indigenous research ethics (e.g. Sámi allaskuvla, 2014). The data were analysed manually according to thematic content in relation to the research questions. The analysis was also based on the literature and the expertise of the authors of this study (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). In keeping with research ethics, the names of the participants were anonymised. Detailed information about the participants was not revealed.

Results: Significant Factors in Saami Education

Diverse Linguistic Repertoires in the Primary School Classroom

This study focused on Saami education outside the Saami homeland in the language teaching of primary school pupils. In the stimulated recall phase of the study, the focus was on the language of instruction and the organisation of the teaching. The teacher used Finnish as an auxiliary language during the lesson. However, based on the subsequent discussion, she considered using only Saami as the language of instruction. However, she was unsure whether the pupils would fully understand that language:

I have been very uncertain about which language to use when teaching the Saami language. I think that the pupils understand the Saami language quite poorly, so I decided to use Finnish. (Teacher interview 1)

According to the teacher, Saami language classes were not heterogeneous in terms of pupils' knowledge of the Saami language. Some pupils were more competent Saami speakers, whereas others had just begun studying it. The longitudinal language shift has caused Saami children to have diverse linguistic repertoires. There is a diverse range of competency among Saami language speakers (Aikio, 2016). Because some children have had access to linguistic resources, their linguistic competencies are more developed than those of other children. According to Chomsky (2006), the division between native-speaker and non-native-speaker is problematic, as it is impossible to define the competencies that are mastered by native speakers. To avoid essentialist understandings of

⁴ https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

language mastery, linguistic resources should be utilised and individual linguistic competency should be acknowledged (Lehtonen, 2015).

In the participant teacher's classroom, pupils aged 6–15 years attended the same lessons; therefore, the teaching situation entailed special pedagogical demands that the teacher found problematic:

I wonder how to organise teaching for such a diverse group of pupils. In addition, I find motivating pupils challenging. (Teacher interview 2)

In the second recorded lesson, the teacher modified her practice by using Saami as the language of instruction and engaging in activity-based learning with the pupils. In the second round of interviews, the teacher was still concerned that the pupils would understand the lesson taught with only Saami as the language of instruction. Teaching in the Saami language happened simultaneously in the same classroom, which included both mother tongue learners and learners with so-called passive Saami language ability. This situation confused the teacher, and she wondered how pupils might perform in difficult language situations.

The teacher considered the possibility of organising student-centred teaching, noting that implementing it and consistently developing teaching practices with little available teaching material would be challenging. In the discussions with the teacher, pupil motivation was identified as the greatest challenge. Pupil motivation varied and seemed to change as the years passed. The teacher felt the need for extra support

I consider organising the teaching to be very demanding, and I think I would need additional training and support in organising teaching. (Teacher Interview 2)

The analysis of the stimulated recall data showed that the teacher was struggling to organise her teaching in a demanding situation. Previous research supports this finding (Hammine et al., 2018; Rahko-Ravanti, 2016; Todal, 2002). Knowing how to teach pupils with diverse backgrounds has been shown to be problematic (Moate & Szabó, 2019; Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010). The solution could be to organise teaching in a student-centred manner, such that pupils use the target language regardless of their age (Leffa, 1991). Lotherington and Jenson (2011) put forward the ideas of multimodal and digital literacy (i.e., extended classroom borders, intergenerational connections, digitally mediated interactional spaces, and ludic approaches). More attention should be given to the essence of language learning in the classroom environment (i.e., interaction and dialogic communication) (Mercer et al., 2020). However, Hornberger (2008) found that schools alone were not enough:

Indigenous language revitalisation always occurs within an ecology of languages, in the context of other local and global languages with their

relative statuses and uses in domains and social fields such as employment, religion, government, cultural life, media, and others. (p. 1)

Regarding the context of endangered language education, it is important to focus on the pedagogy of language teaching (Hinton, 2011). The language teacher has a significant role in language maintenance, especially in using a consistent pedagogy in the endangered language. The main features of endangered language pedagogy and methodology concern using the full potential of pupils' learning capacities and their linguistic repertoires. Hence, the teacher's priority must be to consistently use the endangered language in the classroom. Teachers also need to have theoretical and pedagogical competencies in language teaching and their knowledge about language learning. Language ideologies, in addition to language attitudes, also need to be reflected in the teachers' tolerance of diverse language speakers' competencies and linguistic repertoires. They should be viewed as an opportunity and a core issue in meeting the needs of language learners in the context of their own language.

The Post-Elementary School Path

High schools have been provided in the main villages of the Saami homeland. A Sámi Education Institute is located in Inari, which organises programmes in vocational education (Keskitalo et al., 2020). Students can choose from the following vocations: Saami artisanship, information technology, cookery, nature-guiding, nursing, tourism, economics, reindeer herding, waiter and receptionist training, and Saami language studies.

If youths decide to take vocational education and training outside the Saami homeland, the long distances require them to be away from their homes during the week. The Saami language learning path often stops after elementary school. This ongoing situation is linguistically, socially, and economically harmful to many Saami youth (Rahko-Ravantti, 2017; Rahko-Ravantti et al., 2017). Some Saami language distance education is provided for high school students outside the homeland through a project conducted by the Utsjoki Municipality in cooperation with the Finnish Sámi Parliament (Keskitalo et al., 2021). The number of participants, however, is low. Only around 10% of the approximately 2,000 pupils living outside the Saami homeland participate in Saami language instruction there (Keskitalo et al., 2021). Despite the possibility of distance education, no effective language learning strategies target Saami youth who must leave their homeland if they choose to study a subject that is not offered at the high schools or in Inari.

One Saami student reported that she was obliged to move from her home community to the city, which was not a linguistic environment that supported the Saami language, because she wanted to pursue a vocational education programme that was not offered in Inari. Such unsupportive environments create a gap in the transmission of Indigenous traditional knowledge. However, the student had resolved to travel the long distance from the city to her home community every weekend.

I am not able to speak or study the Saami language in the city or in the school. I wish I could study the Saami language in my school. Also, I wish to use Saami with other people. I don't know any Saami-speaking people here in this city. (Student interview)

In the city, the student experienced challenges in living and studying because she was away from her family, which was tightly connected to the Saami language and traditional Saami livelihoods. Youth can be under 15 years old when they move to study in a vocational school. Rahko-Ravanti (2017) suggested that a support system should be created for Saami youth who study in cities outside the homeland. For example, the supervisors of multicultural youth in vocational schools should be aware of the challenges faced by their students. According to Rahko-Ravanti (2017), peer supervision has been suggested as a solution. Furthermore, a meeting place for Saami speakers is needed outside the core areas in the city. Students have wished that Saami host families would invite them to visit, talk with them, and enjoy each other's company (Rahko-Ravanti, 2017). All these measures are considered to increase the well-being of Saami youth and enable social justice and educational equity, including access to teaching in the Saami language. However, at present, the key issues of social justice and equity are not being addressed, which continues to negatively affect the quality of indigenous education (Anthis, 2020; Atwater et al., 2013; Cosentine, 2016). The nearest study places next to the Saami homeland should take the call to start and increase the access to Saami language learning seriously in post-elementary school because the Act makes it possible. There are few speakers of endangered languages:

According to my experience, the low number of Saami speakers prevents funding based on the views of teaching institutions on many occasions to serve Saami language studies outside the Saami homeland. (Parent interview)

The low number of speakers of an endangered language is the consequence of assimilation. To avoid language death and continuing assimilation, school authorities must understand the needs of endangered language speakers. Furthermore, the government should act quickly to revise its educational apparatuses to support endangered Saami language education in new situations where an increasing number of youths need education in the Saami languages.

The Role of Tertiary Education

The current situation in Saami language education is challenging because of the lack of competent teachers and the heterogeneous educational backgrounds of teachers. Some teachers have been educated in teacher education programmes at Finnish or other Nordic universities. Other teachers do not have formal teacher training in Saami language education. Overall, the situation poses challenges for Saami education (Arola, 2020).

Teacher education is offered in several formats. In Finland, Rovaniemi, at the University of Lapland, offers basic studies in the North Saami language, Saami pedagogy, and cultural studies in the faculty of education. In addition, there is an ongoing process of developing teacher education programmes for Saami language-speaking teachers. At the University of Oulu, it is possible to study the Saami language in a master's degree programme at the Giellagas Institute. At the University of Helsinki, Saami language studies are offered. There is a quota for Saami-speaking teacher students at the Universities of Oulu and Lapland. Giellagas has initiated a special project for Saami language teacher education, which is funded by the Finnish government. The Giellagas Institute has begun to organise remote teacher education studies in the Saami homeland, and the Sámi Education Institute organises Saami language studies in Finland regardless of where the students are located.

When studies are organised in the homeland, they are more accessible to potential students:

It is vital, as then the students do not need to travel or move to towns.
(Authority interview).

These educational innovations aim to produce more Saami language teachers and speakers.

In Norway, the Sámi University of Applied Sciences in Guovdageaidnu [Kautokeino], Norway has had a North Saami language teacher education program since 1989. Otherwise, it is possible to study South and Lule Saami teacher education at Nord University in Bodø, Norway. In addition, UiT-Arctic University of Norway offers the possibility to study Saami in its teacher education programme. In Sweden, Umeå University offers Saami language studies.

Currently, the migration of Saami people from their homeland is high. More than 70% of Saami children live in cities outside the homeland. Most Saami elders live in the homeland, whereas a majority of people have moved away. Because of this significant demographic change, many children live outside the homeland. However, according to the Act, the right to Saami language and mother tongue teaching in the classroom applies only in core Saami areas. (Keskitalo, 2019)

Among other challenges, in Finland, mainstream teacher education is not obliged to include knowledge about national indigenous issues although the

elementary school curriculum states that knowledge about the Saami ought to be taught. A cursory reading implies that every pupil in Finland should have basic knowledge about Saami issues. Support for teacher education regarding Saami issues at the national level could be provided, possibly online. Whether this education should be conducted as a project or as part of the existing system is worth exploring. A pilot project could be conducted before a permanent solution was established.

Universities have attempted to offer solutions to educating teachers who speak different Saami languages. Permanent Saami educational programmes in Saami language studies could offer stable and rich content in the future. Knowledge of indigenous culture and Saami language and pedagogy is imperative for Saami language teachers who work in demanding contexts.

Educational Authorities' Positive Attitudes Toward Saami Education

In this study, educational authorities at the macro level were interviewed to determine their views on the current situation of Saami education and their visions of its future. The national political climate in Finland is positive and supportive of Saami education. The Finnish government supports Saami language education, and it is willing to develop Saami education. This is a fruitful starting point. One macro-level authority stated that he aimed to improve Saami language teaching at every level:

I have worked hard to improve Saami education, and I can see the results in many ways; and I think I have succeeded in my work for Saami education in many areas. (Interview with an authority)

Authorities have conceded that Saami education needs improvement, but they remain satisfied with its progress and results to date. Despite positive attitudes, there are unresolved challenges regarding Saami education (Arola, 2020; Korpela, 2020). It is highly likely that the Primary Education Act will be reformed in the near future, and the status of Saami language education outside the Saami homeland will be closer to meeting current needs and the fact that most Saami children live outside the core Saami area. In addition, the core curriculum should be evaluated. The question is whether a separate inclusive curriculum that emphasises Saami issues should be established, which has already been implemented in Norway and Sweden.

Practical Challenges in Saami Education in Finland

In Finland, there is no separate Saami curriculum. In Norway, a separate Saami curriculum has been in use since 1997 (Keskitalo, 2010), and Sweden has had one since 2011 (Skolverket, 2011). However, Finland's national curriculum gives local schools and communities autonomy in constructing their curricula based on national curriculum guidelines, which enables Saami municipalities to create their own curricula. Creating a Saami curriculum in small communities and municipalities, however, has presented challenges. The main obstacle is the lack of human and

economic resources. Saami language teachers have mainly been responsible for municipal Saami language curriculum development. The few Saami language teachers are already overburdened because they often have to produce their own teaching materials (Rahko-Ravantti, 2016).

National curriculum development is organised somewhat differently among the countries inhabited by Saami. In Norway, there are two parallel school systems (i.e., the national system and Saami schools), each having its own curriculum. Large working groups of Norwegian officials and Sámi Parliament⁵ actors have been formed to develop the content of subjects on curricula. In Finland, the group responsible for the Saami language curriculum includes members of the Sámi Parliament, state actors and teachers, and other stakeholders. In both countries Finland and Norway, local curricula are planned according to locally agreed practices (Keskitalo, 2010; Keskitalo et al., 2013). In Sweden, the Saami school system functions in five places: Karesuando, Kiruna, Gällivare, Jokkmokk, and Tärnaby (Samiskt informationscentrum, 2021).

In Finland, Saami pupils and teachers would benefit from having their own curriculum because it would serve to develop and unify Saami education. It would also improve the quality of Saami teaching. One authority stated, “The Indigenous perspective could be more visible in current curricula” (Authority interview). He suggested that the national curriculum should include a theme day when all pupils in Finland could focus on learning about Saami culture.

Another major challenge to Saami education is the lack of teaching material, such as textbooks and digital material, which was recognised by the authorities interviewed in this study. Furthermore, some textbooks are outdated, and they do not follow the revised curriculum. The lack of resources and power in developing Saami education at the national level is still a concern of the Sámi Parliament. The Ministry of Education should develop new policies for the development of Saami education, which are focused on cooperation (Keskitalo et al., 2013).

Migration from the Saami Homeland and its Implications for Saami Education and Saami Languages

There have been significant demographic changes in the Saami homeland. Over 90% of Saami elders live in the Saami homeland, whereas 75% of Saami-speaking children live outside it (Heikkilä et al., 2013, 2019; Keskitalo, 2019). These changes have had consequences for the future of the Saami language, particularly because Saami-speaking children lack instruction in their mother tongue. Following this non-model in mother tongue education will lead to language shifts and further assimilation (Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008).

⁵ The Sámi Parliament is the official name of the Saami self-governing bodies in both Finland and Norway. In Sweden, it is called the Sami Parliament.

Urbanisation has posed new challenges for Saami education. The Basic Education Act does not provide broad, act-based protection for teaching Saami children outside the homeland, only for those within it. This lack of legal coverage does not fit the reality of the current situation. As a result, access to Saami language education outside the homeland is restricted. In Helsinki, since 2018, there has been one Saami language class in elementary school for young children in primary education. There is, however, a plan to start Saami language classes in Oulu and Rovaniemi. At present, children living in these areas study the Saami language voluntarily in an additional language class for two hours per week through online distance learning or face-to-face learning. Currently, a Saami language distance education project is administered by the municipality of Utsjoki, as elementary education can be provided only by municipalities (Keskitalo et al., 2021).

The Role of Traditional Saami Knowledge

According to Porsanger (2011), traditional Saami knowledge is based on the Saami theory of knowledge, worldview, and value system. Traditional Saami knowledge focuses on intersections between nature and culture, which raises the following question: In this context, what are the implications of migration for traditional knowledge and education (Kroik et al., 2020)? Traditional knowledge is not sufficiently protected by education systems in urban settings outside the Saami homeland, where the primary focus is on Saami language education as an additional subject. It is true that the Saami language consists of traditional knowledge in the form of terminology and a language system. However, one interviewee expressed that the role of traditional knowledge in Saami education is unclear: “I am not confident about the traditional knowledge in teaching, and I am not sure how I shall do it” (Teacher interview).

Because individual teachers and schools are free to include local content in their curricula, they tend to include some traditional knowledge. However, there has been no systematic development in teaching traditional knowledge. Furthermore, pupils outside the Saami homeland usually attend classes taught in Finnish by teachers who have no knowledge of the traditional Saami culture or ethos. The pressing question concerns how pupils will be socialised in Saami culture in their school systems in the absence of expertise and understanding of the significant issues of Saami language and cultural identity.

Support and guidance in Saami education-related matters should be available. Research in this area is being conducted at universities, learning materials are being produced as ordered by the Sámi Parliament of Finland, and control mechanisms are in place. However, the future challenge is to establish a resource centre for Saami education, where research and development are conducted to establish the foundation for the preservation and teaching of Saami values, culture, and languages.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has reflected the language teaching experiences of indigenous Saami people located in the circumpolar north of Finland in the context of Saami language education, where the weak and non-models of education are still used (Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008). The study identified several educational challenges. More than 75% of Saami-speaking children now live outside the core Saami areas. However, only a small number of these children attend Saami language classes. The additional two hours of Saami language lessons per week in primary school are based on a weak model of learning an indigenous language. Post-secondary students outside the Saami homeland are taught according to a non-model of Saami language education, which is detrimental to the quality of indigenous education.

Furthermore, practical pedagogical issues in language education emerged in the interviews, which indicated the difficulties faced by in- and pre-service teacher education in indigenous and bilingual/multilingual and intercultural pedagogy. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers understand bilingualism and multiculturalism/interculturalism and how to teach pupils with diverse needs (Banks & McGee-Banks, 2005). Teachers who are linguistically and culturally aware could offer insights into addressing these challenges. The fact that language learning takes place in interaction and dialogic communication is key in learning a language in the classroom environment (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Mercer et al., 2020).

Different kinds of development activities should be undertaken in schools. Hence, school principals should be knowledgeable about multilingualism and teaching based on linguistic and cultural awareness (Thompson & Cuseo, 2012). Because knowledge about Saami language education is sometimes insufficient, both top-down and bottom-up awareness and commitment are needed in seriously considering the Saami language situation. The need for new educational policies is obvious.

The overall goal of national education policies and practices is to provide fair and equal opportunities for all learners. In the context of teaching the Saami languages, there are particular barriers to achieving this goal because of the historical burden of colonisation and assimilation, regional, cultural, and linguistic peculiarities, and skewed power relations (Keskitalo et al., 2013). These barriers are linked to limited financial resources and a shortage of teachers and learning materials. The emphasis on economy and cost efficiency in education has jeopardised the goal of equality referred to in the Basic Education Act (Pihlaja & Silvennoinen, 2020).

In many cases, outside the Saami homeland, Saami language teaching is not accessible to every pupil, which is due to restrictions in the Act. Moreover, for some, attendance is a complicated matter. The Basic Education Act (628/1998) secures the linguistic needs of only pupils who live in the Saami homeland through the implementation of Saami language classroom teaching. The organisation and implementation of education outside the home region vary. The findings of the

present study highlight the need to expand the legal requirements of Saami language teaching outside the homeland. Urgent measures are required to ensure their education, including strengthening the status of Saami language teaching in legislation and organising the division of responsibilities for learning to ensure the continuation and long-term development and quality of teaching outside the Saami homeland.

The findings on the teaching of the Saami language confirmed that basic language and linguistic and cultural awareness must be taught in future in-service teacher training (Räsänen, 2015). Saami language education outside the homeland in a subtractive language learning context requires pedagogical development and support measures. The Education and Learning Materials Office of the Sámi Parliament produces learning materials in the Saami language and contributes to education policy lines, but it does not offer actual pedagogical guidance, which currently occurs incidentally through various community projects (Aikio-Puoskari, 2016).

The research data were also analysed to indicate the outcomes of the subtractive language teaching model in both the classroom and distance online learning. Based on the findings, it could be concluded that a subtractive teaching model in which the language is learned for only two hours a week as an additional language is not sufficient to ensure the survival of the endangered Saami languages (Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010). The findings also showed that it is also challenging to promote linguistic and cultural awareness because pupils are scattered across the country, and their Saami language teachers can only be reached remotely.

Language teaching appears to be heterogeneous in both contact and distance learning situations because pupils of different ages and with different language skills studying Saami as their mother tongue and as a “more passive” language are often in the same class. Furthermore, there is a great shortage of resources. It is difficult to find qualified teachers, and mother tongue and foreign language learning materials are not available for all age groups. Thus, special demands are placed on a teacher’s competency in teaching heterogeneous groups. As part of the transformation in learning environments, Skutnabb-Kangas’s (2004) model of effective teaching could be used in developing effective Saami language teaching.

However, Saami education has been successful from several points of view. The status and situation of the Saami language are comparatively better than they have ever been. Political attitudes are positive, and the public interest in studying the Saami languages is relatively high. The learning of the Saami language should continue to be promoted. The challenges for the near future are to increase the number of study options, educate a greater number of teachers, and develop Act-based support. Another valuable goal is to develop a specific curriculum for elementary Saami education, which would contribute to creating a positive environment for Saami language and culture. Equipping teachers to cope with diverse learners and training them to practice differentiated teaching are complex tasks that require further research and development.

In the face of outmigration, crucial tasks are to enhance language teaching strategies and maintain language learning and cultural connections outside the Saami homeland. Important factors include the status of teacher education, the lack of language teachers, the link between traditional knowledge and indigenous language, and attitudes towards indigenous languages. The present study has contributed to building knowledge in these areas. Quality indigenous education requires developmental measures, such as pedagogical support for teaching endangered languages and ensuring the future survival of the endangered indigenous Saami languages.

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Author Biographies

Pigga Keskitalo PhD has been a researcher at the University of Lapland, Faculty of Education and Adjunct Professor at the University of Helsinki, Faculty of Educational Sciences since 2014. Currently, she is a researcher for the Finnish Academy funded project, Socially Innovative Interventions to Foster and to Advance Young Children's Inclusion and Agency in Society through Voice and Story (ADVOST). She is also a researcher at the Sámi University of Applied Sciences, Guovdageaidnu [Kautokeino], Norway, and a network researcher at the Migration Institute, Turku, Finland. Formerly, she taught for 20 years in Saami teacher education at Norway's Sámi University of Applied Sciences. She supervises doctoral candidates on Saami educational topics in Finland and Norway. Her latest publication is *Indigenous Postgraduate Education: Intercultural Perspectives* (2020), which she edited with Professors Karen Trimmer and Debra Hoven.

Erika Katjaana Sarivaara PhD is currently a Northern Saami language and culture lecturer at the University of Lapland. She has conducted research on Saami identity, indigenous language revitalisation, Saami education and language didactics, and climate education. Her latest publication is "Indigenous Adult Language Revitalization and Education" (2019), which she authored with Professors Kaarina Määttä and Satu Uusiautti. Since 2020, Sarivaara has been an adjunct professor at the University of Helsinki, Faculty of Educational Sciences.