

Immigrant Parents' Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Care Practices in the Finnish Multicultural Context

**Anna-Leena Lastikka
University of Helsinki
Finland**

**Lasse Lipponen
University of Helsinki
Finland**

ABSTRACT: Although the number of immigrant families is increasing in Finland, the research on their perspectives on early childhood and care (ECEC) services is scarce. The objective of this small-scale case study was to increase the understanding of immigrant families' perspectives on ECEC practices. Through the qualitative content analysis of interview-based data, four themes emerged as particularly important for working with immigrant families: (a) fostering dialogue and mutual understanding; (b) promoting cultural and linguistic diversity; (c) encouraging cooperative partnership; and (d) providing support and individualized attention. This study contributes to the development of more inclusive and supportive ECEC practices in order to better support families with immigrant backgrounds.

KEYWORDS: early childhood education practices, inclusion, immigrant families, parental perspective, Finland

Embracing Immigrant Parents' Perspectives
Method
Data Collection and Analysis
Results
Discussion
Notes
References
Author Contact

International recommendations (European Commission, 2014; OECD, 2012) advise that, within early childhood services, family involvement should be encouraged and valued, especially the involvement of immigrant parents who may face segregation and exclusion. These parents may also struggle with other issues: for example, not having a social network (Osman & Månsson, 2015); being labeled as deficient (Kim, 2009); having difficulties in adapting to Western child development practices; or encountering barriers to services, language difficulties, different cultural beliefs, and adverse perceptions of care providers

(Poureslami et al., 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to listen to immigrant families' perspectives and understand what early childhood education and care can do to support their everyday life.

Embracing Immigrant Parents' Perspectives

Research evidence shows that the following practices successfully support immigrant families, particularly low-income immigrant families: appreciating cultural strengths, developing a positive and inclusive classroom environment, encouraging bilingual and bicultural competencies, providing immigrant families with leadership opportunities, providing teachers with professional development opportunities on mental health and poverty, and promoting integrated supports for the family (Isik-Ercan, Demir-Dagdas, Cakmakci, Cava-Tadik, & Intepe-Tingir, 2016). Additionally, it is found to be important that immigrant families have access to quality early childhood education programs that build relationships with these parents and their families and support their identity development and representation in the community. Within those programs, staff development is also crucial (Vesely & Ginsberg, 2011).

Furthermore, Tobin, Arzubiaga, and Adair (2013) found that immigrant parents had much to contribute to the dialogue of preschool practice and policy when they were given an opportunity to discuss their concerns. However, teachers had little or no training for working with immigrant families and their attitudes, beliefs, and levels of experience varied extensively. Teachers tended to be unwilling to change their practices to engage with parents in nonhierarchical forms of dialogue. In addition, the ideas of immigrant parents differed from those of the educators: for example, the parents emphasized a more academic curriculum and a more authoritative pedagogy than teachers did. Therefore, the researchers argued that it was necessary for teachers to examine their paradigm when working with immigrant families.

Despite the growing body of research, current knowledge is scarce on the perspectives of immigrant families and suitable early childhood education and care (ECEC) practices for immigrant families (e.g., Adair, 2015). This is also the case with Finnish ECEC. Despite the fact that the foreign population has grown rapidly in Finland (European Migration Network, 2014), the multicultural dimension in educational policy is still new (Ojala, 2010). For example, in ECEC services, there is no formal recommendation at the national level for immigrant children's ECEC (Tervola, 2015). There is a need for improvement to ensure equity in education for immigrants (Blakeslee, 2015). It has been argued that the perspectives of immigrant parents and multicultural families should be better taken into account in Finnish ECEC (e.g., Kuusisto, 2010; Niemelä, 2015; Ojala, 2010; Paavola, 2007). In this paper, we report on a study of immigrant parents' perspectives on ECEC practices in Finland in order to help close the existing

research gap and gain insight into good educational practices when working with immigrant families.

Method

This study utilized a qualitatively grounded interview method to explore immigrant parents' perspectives of early childhood education and care practices (ECEC) in Finland. We posed the following questions:

1. What are the most important ECEC practices for the immigrant families?
2. How do these practices help and support the families in their everyday life?

Setting and Participants

In Finland, early childhood education program and care (ECEC) employs the “educare” model that combines care, education, and teaching. All children under school age have a right to a place in ECEC provided by the local municipality. One year before compulsory education, children participate in pre-primary education that is compulsory and free of charge (National Board of Education, 2016). Despite the accessibility, Finland’s rate of ECEC participation is lower than the EU average (84% compared to 93.9%) (European Commission, 2015). This may be due to the fact that parents receive substantial home care subsidy if they take care of their children at home when the children are 0 to 3 year old (Bennett, 2012).

Despite the lower ECEC participation rate in Finland, cultural diversity has increased in daycare centers. Therefore, the need is evident for early childhood education teachers to learn how to work intentionally with children and parents from different cultural backgrounds (Jokikokko & Karikoski, 2016). In regard to families with immigrant backgrounds, the National Curriculum Guidelines (2005) advises that special attention be paid to informing families about the goals and principles of the curriculum, as well as supporting the integration of children into Finnish society. Parents and ECEC personnel are expected to work together to prepare children’s individual learning plans that contain ways to support their culture, background, and customs. As for the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (National Board of Education, 2014), it takes into account children’s different language and cultural backgrounds and abilities. Pre-primary education aims to support the languages and cultural identities of children and to teach them to respect different languages and cultures represented in Finland.

Our qualitative interview study was part of the international Includ-Ed Project (2006–2011). The general aim of the project was to analyze educational

actions contributing to social cohesion and to understand practices leading to social exclusion. In the Finnish context, the focus was on early childhood education, particularly 5- to 7-year-old children and their families and teachers, in order to develop social and educational interventions to reduce inequalities and marginalization (Ojala, Niemelä, & Lastikka, 2010).

Our participants included thirteen parents with immigrant background, whose children attended a daycare center in Helsinki, the capital city of Finland. We selected our interviewees by applying chain sampling (Patton, 1990; 2015). Initially the daycare center suggested the most information-rich examples among the immigrant parents with whom the center worked. Overall, six mothers and seven fathers volunteered for the study. These individuals were interviewed between 2007 and 2010. All participants were immigrants except for one Finnish father with an immigrant spouse. Only one parent, a father, was interviewed twice during the research project. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the parents' background. "N/A" refers to cases where parents were not willing to provide information about their religion and/or employment status.

Table 1.

Interview participants

Participant code	Sex	Country of origin	Religion	Employment status	Interview year
Mother 1	Female	Kosovo	Islam	N/A	2007
Father 1	Male	Bangladesh	Islam	Employed	2007
Father 2	Male	Russia	Orthodox	Employed	2007 & 2010
Father 3	Male	Estonia	N/A	Employed	2008
Father 4	Male	Russia	Orthodox	Employed	2008
Father 5	Male	Iraq	Islam	Employed	2008
Mother 2	Female	Somalia	Islam	N/A	2008
Mother 3	Female	Somalia	Islam	Student	2009
Mother 4	Female	Somalia	Islam	Stay-at-home mother	2009
Mother 5	Female	Somalia	Islam	Stay-at-home mother	2009

Father 6	Male	Somalia	Islam	Employed	2009
Mother 6	Female	Russia	Orthodox	Employed	2010
Father 7	Male	Finland, Thailand (spouse)	N/A	Employed	2010

The daycare center served 67 children in four groups; 52% of the children had an immigrant background and came from families with a low socioeconomic status. The goal of the center was to cooperate with parents in supporting children's growth into functioning members of the community. The daycare center had multicultural personnel working with children and families.

For this study, some concepts require clarification. The words *immigrant* and *migrant* (as well as *foreigner*) are generally used synonymously, although the dictionary distinguishes immigrants, as those who are or intend to be settlers in their new country, from migrants, as those who are temporary residents (Anderson & Blinder, 2015). In this study, immigrants refer to foreign-born people who are living in Finland as well as Finland-born or foreign-born children who live in Finland with at least one immigrant parent (UNICEF, 2009). When talking about immigrants, we want to emphasize that immigrants do not belong to a uniform group but consist of people belonging to several different nationalities or ethnic groups. Therefore, we are aware that immigrant parents consist of people who identify themselves differently according to their context (Machart, Byrd Clark, & Dervin, 2014).

Data Collection and Analysis

This study adopted an approach that emphasized the relevance of including the voices of all agents in research and acknowledged research as an egalitarian dialogue. In this approach, researchers contribute scientific knowledge while social agents contribute their own knowledge on the reality being analyzed. This kind of dialogue includes the construction of knowledge based on intersubjectivity and shared reflection between researchers and social agents. In this study, the aim of the cooperative interview between the researcher and each parent was to achieve an agreed interpretation of the family's reality. Therefore, the project started with the goal of generating the product of an equal dialogue **with** social agents, not a dialogue **about** them (CREA, 2012).

Before interviewing, all the parents were given written information about the study and a consent form, as well as an option to use an interpreter. In addition, voluntariness, confidentiality, and anonymity were stressed to the participants. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher asked if the interview could be recorded. The research data consisted of 14 audiotaped

interviews of parents. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. In order to obtain responses to specific key questions while offering flexibility to explore other topics that could not have been anticipated, we used a combination of a standardized, open-ended interview format and an interview guide approach (Patton, 1990; 2015).

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using Atlas.ti software, applying an inductive content analysis to identify meanings and consistencies through patterns, themes, and categories (Patton, 1990; 2015). The data relating to the research questions organized into 23 different topics followed by the identification of preliminary categories. After rereading and rechecking the coding consistency, the four final themes were determined. For this article, the Finnish excerpts were translated into English by the authors of this paper.

Results

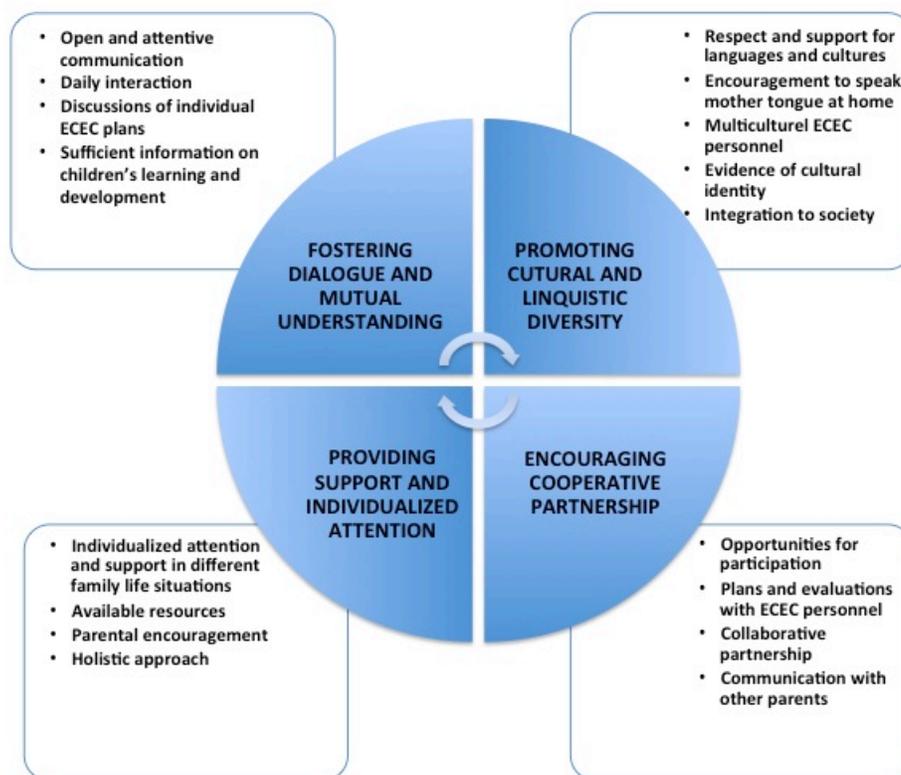


Figure 1. Immigrant Parents' Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Care Practices in the Finnish Early Multicultural ECEC Context

Through the interviews, parents shared their perspectives of ECEC practices and mentioned what they found especially supportive. Four major

themes emerged from the analyses: (a) fostering dialogue and mutual understanding; (b) promoting linguistic and cultural diversity; (c) encouraging cooperative partnership; and (d) providing support and individualized attention. In Figure 1, we summarize the four themes addressing the perspectives of immigrant families of supportive ECEC practices. Each theme is explained in greater details in the following subsections.

Fostering Dialogue and Mutual Understanding

All parents expressed their satisfaction with the communication and interaction between the daycare personnel and families. The notice-board, written notes, parent meetings, questionnaires, discussions of children's individual ECEC plans, and diaries were seen as central tools for communication and interaction. The parents mentioned that the personnel provided information whenever needed and they appreciated the daily interaction that provided information on the children's day at the daycare center. This helped the parents to discuss any incident that had taken place during the day. The parents described the personnel as listening, open, easy to talk with, and receptive to divergent opinions.

Parents highlighted the fact that they wanted to be aware of everything concerned with their children, so that the parents would be able to discuss with the personnel the areas in which the children needed support at home. Some parents also emphasized that it was crucial that children knew that the parents and the personnel shared the same views, so the children obeyed better and did not try to change the rules depending on the context. The importance of mutual understanding was highlighted: it appeared that the personnel and parents had created a mutual understanding that included an exchange of information, reciprocity, agreement, and understanding of each other (e.g., Tveit & Walseth, 2012).

The data analysis revealed that the dialogues between personnel and parents were not always easy, but through dialogue mutual understanding was reached. This suggests that the personnel had positive attitudes towards diversity and perceived working with diverse families positively (see also Shuker & Cherrington, 2016). Partnerships were created based on mutual trust and respect (e.g., Rouse, 2012), as indicated by Mother 2.

But for some reason I was told that he is not yet ready to go to a normal 1st grade and it would be good if he would go to a grade 0 or to a preparatory class [instead]. It was suggested to me that way, but I refused it because I would have liked my child to go to normal classes, even though the children are a bit older than he is. And they [school personnel] respected my idea and what I proposed was accepted. (Mother 2)

Although the majority of parents regarded interaction and communication positively, there were some remarks about scarce information on children's

learning and development and about conflicts between children. It was revealed that some parents would have liked to receive more detailed information on their children's academic progress. This might have been due to the fact that immigrant parents, in general, emphasize academic activities (e.g., Tobin & Kurban, 2010) and may be unfamiliar with the approach to learning through play in Finnish ECEC practices (Stakes, 2005).

Overall, the daycare center seem to have succeeded in fostering a dialogue, which required acknowledging and addressing the power symmetries, negotiating, and showing a willingness to compromise (Tobin, Arzubiaga, & Mantovini, 2007). The personnel had also succeeded in taking the parents seriously and accepted the disagreement that is inevitable in respecting diversity (Elkader, 2016; Vandebroek, 2009).

Promoting Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

The data showed that the personnel seemed to display a strong cultural competence by demonstrating practices that respected cultural and linguistic diversity. The parents stressed that the center had offered language and cultural support by various practices, which had helped them. These practices included acknowledging and respecting different religions, languages, and cultures. For example, children were not obliged to attend Christmas parties or go to church, and dietary restrictions were accommodated. Furthermore, greetings were written in different languages in the classroom, songs were sung from other cultures, and Somali families were asked to make food for parties. Offering language support for children and families was also highlighted: for example, there were Russian, Estonian and Somali language clubs for children, interpreters for parents, and parent meetings for immigrant families. Furthermore, children were encouraged to speak their mother tongue at home. One parent expressed strongly that the daycare center was the only center in which she was able to show her own cultural identity and did not have to hide it from the personnel. Father 7 also supported the center's approach to home language use:

There are still these issues relating to the language because the mother still has a bit of a bad habit of mixing Finnish and Thai in her speech, and it is a little difficult for the children. Perhaps the mother should speak only the Thai language to her children and try to maintain it. (Father 7)

Language and culture support, offered in both mother tongue and Finnish language, had a major role in the practices of the daycare center. The dual language and culture approach struck a chord with immigrant parents who worried that children would lose their mother tongue while wanting their children to learn the language of their host country. In this study, the possible reason for parents not having to worry about children's loss of mother tongue may be that the majority of immigrant families were from Somalia and Russia and the daycare center offered Somali and Russian language clubs. In addition, the parents

stated that they emphasized learning of the mother tongue at home by speaking it, reading books, and singing songs. The practices in the daycare center are in agreement with research findings that support using the mother tongue as a resource for literacy learning (Soltero-González, 2009) and suggest that bilingualism is a mental asset (Kroll & Bialystok, 2013). Additionally, the general attitude of learning Finnish was very positive and seen as essential; moreover, the importance of children knowing Finnish when they start school was highlighted.

The parents also talked about integration, separation, and the need of having a common culture. One parent thought it was essential for children not to be separated from other children because of their religion. She emphasized that it was really important to belong to a group and not to be isolated. She also expressed her happiness that her children had learned to eat different kinds of food, which was not the case when the children started at the center. For another parent, creating a shared and mutual culture in the daycare center was significant. These insights told us something about successful adaptation in which integrative strategies have been used in order to accommodate each other (Berry, 2005).

And it is good that the daycare center informs people on these aspects of religion, and then we'll tell them the right way to handle our religious matters. But otherwise, it is good that children play and embrace their own culture and learn about different cultures, and then there is a third culture being formed, which is not the same culture, which every child has at home. (Mother 4)

Having multicultural personnel was highly appreciated; the parents in this study felt that the multicultural personnel helped children understand each other and provided feelings of safety and confidence. Parents found the multicultural personnel to be helpful in communication; some of the parents emphasized that the multicultural personnel should also assist Finnish families with learning from other cultures and reducing prejudice. Teachers from non-dominant backgrounds can also play an important role in supporting immigrant families (Adair, 2015), which seems to have been the case in this study.

Although the majority of the parents had positive experiences of their culture and language being supported, some parents felt that their own culture was not recognized enough. One parent had not discussed cultural issues at all with the personnel, and another parent felt that the different customs of his culture were not recognized at the center. A few parents would have liked religion to be included in the curriculum or wished that children could visit a church of their own religion. Research has shown that teachers tend to be ignorant about parents' wishes and beliefs on matters such as religion or food (e.g., Tobin & Kurban, 2010). In the Finnish ECEC, uncertainty was noted on the implementation of religions and worldviews, and some personnel had difficulties with incorporating different religions (Kuusisto & Lamminmäki-Vartia, 2012).

Encouraging Cooperative Partnership

The data revealed that immigrant parents' participation in school functions helped parents learn about their children's learning and the center personnel develop ideas for activities and partnership. Ule, Živoder, and du Bois-Reymond (2015) confirmed our finding that parents were aware that the future of their children depended not only on the teacher's work, but also on the parents' efforts as co-educators. A father articulated his awareness of necessary partnership between parents and the center personnel as follows:

So, we have had three children here at this center, and now the youngest is here. Yes, they are followed from the beginning to the end, and the child's strengths and weaknesses are discussed. I would say that attention should be invested in what areas the child needs support. In a sense, as a joint effort, things are being brought up about [the differences and similarities] of how things are shown at home and what is shown here. (Father 6)

Some parents also mentioned that one benefit of participation was making the acquaintance of other families from the daycare center: they highlighted learning from others' experiences or helping with resolving conflicts between children. Some parents would have wanted more organized occasions to communicate with other parents. This response confirms the finding by Issari and Karayianni (2013) that sharing and comparing information, concerns, and parenting practices with other parents helps support parents.

The activities parents engaged in included parties, Father's and Mother's Day coffee mornings, parent meetings, discussions on ECEC plans, excursions, and feedback questionnaires. The general opinion was that there were enough opportunities to participate and that they would not want or have time to engage in more. On the contrary, some parents expressed bewilderment at the thought of participating actively. As Chan (2011) discovered in another study, it was possible that parent participation was a foreign concept to some parents.

The parents also found that they had chances to make decisions and influence the curriculum because they were asked for their opinions and for ideas about field trips and developing cooperation. They felt that the goals and decisions were made together with the personnel. Many parents mentioned an individual ECEC plan as an important area to influence.

For example, recently we had two big concerns about what we discussed in the autumn. In the daycare center, there was a Somali staff. The Somali employee had supported children in their own language. But her work was supposed to stop, so we asked if she could continue working. Our request was granted. In another case, we asked the school personnel to tell us what the skills are needed in kindergarten *before* a child advances from the 5-year-old group to the kindergarten. If we learned about them *after*

the child starts a kindergarten, it would be too late and the child would not be able to go to mainstream education. We wanted to get that information earlier, which could be dealt with earlier. Both concerns of ours, and all other concerns and requests, have been addressed here. (Mother 5)

The parents talked about partnership as being helpful: good cooperative partnership allowed parents and personnel to monitor children's development together and to better influence ECEC matters. They described partnership as being open, fluent, appreciative, and trusting. Parents felt that the personnel accepted their opinions even though sometimes their views were conflicting.

Doucet (2011) found that parents created distance between themselves and schools: this did not emerge from our data, perhaps because the parents had already lived in Finland for a while and were already familiar with the ECEC system and had some "insider knowledge." The partnership in this selected daycare center resembled "shared power," (DeMulder & Stribling, 2012), in which parents experienced increasing connections and the development of their own ability to contribute. One mother noted, "I have not had any problems; everything is easy to face, because we know each other. It is good to educate each other" (Mother 3).

Although the results showed that parents were generally satisfied with the amount of participation, some parents would have liked to participate more. For example, they wanted to participate in test situations or preschool activities, in order to know more about their children's learning, development, and the routines in the center. Some parents stressed that they would have liked more influence on decision-making (e.g., Gatt, Ojala, & Soler, 2011) and participating in planning the curriculum (e.g., Rouse 2014).

The ability to co-construct knowledge with children, parents, and colleagues is crucial for early childhood professionals (Peeters & Sharmahd, 2014; Peeters & Vandenbroeck, 2011). For this reason, it would be helpful for center personnel to understand the parents' wish that the center had more stress on academic subjects such as English and religion, as Tobin and Kurban (2010) discovered in their study, and that the parents could plan and participate in more activities for children and have more information on available hobbies.

Providing Support and Individualized Attention

In relation to children, the parents talked about the help the center had offered to families when children needed support in various situations. They also talked about their children's learning, development, and enjoyment in coming to the daycare center, which affected the well-being of families.

Overall, eight families stressed the support they had received from the center: it positively changed their lives when having problems with their child or personnel or needing special resources (e.g., special assistant, speech therapist,

interpreter, or psychologist) or guidance with finding work or attending courses. The parents, who did not highlight support as such, stressed the feeling that they would have been able to speak freely about troubling issues, if they had occurred, and knew that they would receive help from the personnel.

Furthermore, some parents mentioned that the personnel had increased their self-confidence as parents and improved their quality of life. In addition, many of the parents highlighted the fact that the daycare center had taken into account the different demands and life conditions of families. Clarkin-Phillips and Carr (2012) have also found that offering personalized opportunities for families is important in increasing family agency. The parents we talked with indicated that the individualized attention was much appreciated:

They have encouraged me to think that I can do some work. I have lived in Finland for a long time and my skills in the Finnish language are a bit weak. They have guided me to study the Finnish language and given information about where the Finnish language groups will begin. Now that I think about that...I want to become a professional. (Mother 3)

The majority of the parents underlined the qualities of the personnel, who were described as friendly, positive, caring, encouraging, attentive, and helpful. Swick (2007) stresses that caring is the core value that empowers families and early childhood professionals; the parents appeared to have been empowered by the personnel and played an active role in their children's education (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

It's my opinion that the cooperation with them is so good at all times. Whenever there's discussion of important issues, it's talked about positively. (Father 5)

The professional skills of the personnel were highly appreciated, which emerged in statements that stressed the support the families had received from the personnel; they praised the high-quality of the activities provided and their children's willingness to come to the daycare center. Furthermore, the parents appreciated resources made available to them: interpretation, speech and language training, and special teacher services. Multiculturality, consistency, and a high adult-to-child ratio were also considered to be important.

When I brought the oldest girl, it was a bit of a problem because she was lacking some, words; actually, a lot of words were missing. I wanted her to have a special assistant who paid a close attention to her. She did receive one in the kindergarten when she went there. (Mother 1)

Although the general attitude of personnel's support to parents was positive, parents made a few requests that the center personnel provide more training to help parents improve their parenting skills and affirm their good parenting. Gillie (2011) emphasizes the importance of parenting training and good feedback. A mother articulated her request as such:

When goals are set, and when they're met, it would be good to be told, to receive good feedback. It would be good if the staff would tell or give

feedback that relates to education with our children, what we have done, what kind of education we give. If we do well, they could say, 'You're a good mother.' (Mother 4)

Parents found it important that the elementary school was in the same building as the center and that the preschool children had common activities and lunch in the school cafeteria. The parents highlighted that the close connection with the school had a positive effect on children's learning and well-being. They talked about learning writing and reading as well as feeling secure when beginning the elementary school because children already knew the school teachers and environment.

The results showed that all the parents appreciated their children's learning and development. They expressed their pleasure about their children's learning of reading, writing, mathematics, social skills (e.g., ability to play with others and integration to the group), Finnish language, music, physical education, and skills related to crafts, dressing, eating, and concentration. The parents said that the children enjoyed and felt comfortable at the daycare center; they named friends, excitement of learning, drawing, coloring, swimming school, physical education, and outdoor play as being important to their children. The parents also mentioned that the good cooperation between personnel and parents positively affected children's well-being in the daycare center. The parents appreciated learning and development not only for their children's readiness for primary schools (e.g., Tobin et al., 2013), but also for the consideration of their general well-being.

Discussion

The study has moved us toward identifying and understanding the perspectives of immigrant parents, recognizing the good practices of working with immigrant families, and communicating this knowledge to the research field of early childhood education. Four actions emerged from the data as being particularly important: (a) fostering dialogue and mutual understanding; (b) promoting cultural and linguistic diversity; (c) encouraging cooperative partnership; and (d) providing support and individualized attention for the whole family.

It was evident that the personnel of the daycare center communicated openly with parents and acknowledged parents' opinions, even when they were in conflict with those of the personnel. They responded to the needs of children and families in supportive ways by allowing the parents to monitor children's development together as co-educators and building a cooperative partnership. Additionally, the cultural competence of the personnel made it easy for parents to express their cultural identities and receive the support they needed. The parents also reported that they had obtained support for finding work or attending courses and increased in their parental self-esteem and quality of life. The results

showed that these facilitative practices had positive consequences for the well-being of the entire family. Our study supports previous research (e.g., Tobin et al., 2013), arguing that families with immigrant background have much to say about their children's early childhood education and that care and support for immigrant families has a positive effect on them. Creating a cooperative partnership between educators and immigrant families helps them engage in open dialogue and establish a mutually respectful and shared understanding of children's development. Such a partnership allows conflicting and difficult views to be accepted. As Elkader (2016) states, the objective of dialogue is not necessarily to achieve an agreement, but to learn more about each other. Based on the findings of this study, we recommend that educators develop partnerships with immigrant parents grounded on two-way dialogue, respect of diversity, and shared power through the multicultural education of ECEC professionals.

Although the parents in this study were generally satisfied, some practices hindered success. For example, relational difficulties occurred between parents and personnel, which may be linked to the "expert model" (see Bernhard, Lefebvre, Kilbride, Chud, & Lange, 2010; Karila & Alasuutari, 2012), in which professionals are positioned as experts and parents are subordinated and marginalized. We recommend that more emphasis be put on caring (e.g., Swick, 2007; Swick, Da Ros, & Kovach, 2001) and self-empowering (e.g., Rouse, 2012), where educators are encouraged to build their own strengths and abilities to reflect on themselves and their identities and, in turn, support parents' empowerment as equal collaborators.

Another hindrance may lie with the current ECEC-related law in Finland. For immigrant families, ECEC services may be their first and only connection to the society in which they lived. Therefore, we need to examine critically the potential negative impact of the new law in Finland (Government Programme, 2015), which restricts children's right and access to full-day ECEC if their parents stay at home (on parental leave or unemployed). This decision can potentially endanger the right for equal education and participation for children and may hinder the integration of immigrant and refugee families into the Finnish society.

This study has some limitations such as the small sample size and the make-up of the parent cohort interviewed for this study. The small sample prevents the study result to be generalized to a larger population. In addition, the selected parents could have been those who tended to be quite satisfied with the practices. Despite the limitations, this study contributes to the early childhood education research by illuminating parents' perspectives, especially those of immigrant families, and providing practical implications for developing inclusive and supportive ECEC services to families with immigrant background. We, however, want to emphasize that parents, whether immigrants or natives, do not speak with one voice; they must be seen as active agents who have rich and diverse knowledge and hopes for opportunities for their children.

For future research, we recommend that discourse analysis and narrative inquiry methods be added for data analysis. The discourse analysis may help researchers discover various discourses used when immigrant parents discuss

their experiences with different ECEC services. The narrative inquiry method may enable researchers to collect rich and in-depth stories of the immigrant parents. In addition, international comparison would give useful insights. Furthermore, in order to have a better and more holistic understanding of immigrant families' perspectives on ECEC practices, it would be important to include the voices of immigrant children.

Notes

1. This work was supported by the Finnish Cultural Foundation.
2. The authors are grateful to the children, the parents, the personnel, and the other professionals for participating in the IINCLUD-ED research project.

References

- Adair, J. K. (2015). *The impact of discrimination on the early schooling experiences of children from immigrant parents*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/impact-discrimination-early-schooling-experiences-children-immigrant-families>
- Anderson, B., & Blinder, S. (2015). Who counts as a migrant? Definitions and their consequences. *Migration observatory briefing*. Oxford, UK: University of Oxford. Retrieved from <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/who-counts-migrant-definitions-and-their-consequence>
- Bennett, J. (2012). *ECEC for children from disadvantaged backgrounds: Findings from a European literature review and two case studies: Final report*. European Commission. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/school/doc/ecec-report_en.pdf
- Bernhard, J. K., Lefebvre, M. L., Kilbride, K. M., Chud, G., & Lange, R. (2010). Troubled relationships in early childhood education: Parent–teacher interactions in ethnoculturally diverse child care settings. *Early Education and Development, 9*(1), 5-28.
- Berry, J. W. (2005). Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29*, 697-712.
- Blakeslee, A. (2015). Educating for the future: Finland and multiculturalism. *Euromentor Journal Studies about Education, 5*(1), 9-22.
- Chan, A. (2011). Critical multiculturalism: Supporting early childhood teachers to work with diverse immigrant families. *International Research in Early Childhood Education, 2*(1), 63-75.

- Clarkin-Phillips, J., & Carr, M. (2012). An affordance network for engagement increasing parent and family engagement in early childhood education setting. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 20(2), 177-187.
- CREA (2012). Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from education. Final Includ-Ed report. Retrieved from: http://creaub.info/included/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/D25.2_Final-Report_final.pdf
- DeMulder, E. K., & Stribling, S. M. (2012). A big door opened for us: Parents' perceptions of comprehensive preschool. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 13(4), 328-343.
- Doucet, F. (2011). (Re)constructing home and school: Immigrant parents, agency, and the (un)desirability of bridging multiple worlds. *Teachers College Record*, 113(12), 2705-2738.
- Elkadern, N. A. (2016). *Dialogic pedagogy and educating preservice teachers for critical multiculturalism*. Faculty Publications and Scholarship. Paper 5. Retrieved from http://source.sheridancollege.ca/fhass_comm_publ/5
- European Commission. (2015). *Education and training monitor. Finland*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/docs/2015/monitor2015-finland_en.pdf
- European Commission. (2014). *Key principles of a quality framework. Proposal for key principles of a quality framework for early childhood education and care*. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf
- European Migration Network. (2014). Annual report on migration and asylum policy. Finland 2014. Retrieved from http://emn.fi/files/1227/EMN_Annual_report_ENG_final_low.pdf
- Gatt, S., Ojala, M., & Soler, M. (2011). Promoting social inclusion with everyone: Learning communities and INCLUD-ED. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 21(1), 33-47.
- Gillie, V. (2011). From function to competence: Engaging with the new politics of family. *Sociological Research Online*, 16(4), 1-11.
- Government Programme. (2015). Finland, a land of solutions. Strategic programme of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's government. Government Publications. Helsinki, FIN: Edita Prima.
- Isik-Ercan, Z., Demir-Dagdas, T., Cakmakci, H., Cava-Tadik, Y. & Intepe-Tingir, S. (2016). Multidisciplinary perspectives towards the education of young low-income immigrant children. *Early Child Development and Care*, doi: 10.1080/03004430.2016.1173037

- Issari, P., & Karayianni, T. (2013). Greek mothers' narratives of the construct of parental involvement. *The European Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 2(1), 17-32.
- Jokikokko, K., & Karikoski, H. (2016). Exploring the narrative of a Finnish early childhood education teacher on her professional intercultural learning. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*, 5(1), 92-114.
- Karila, K., & Alasuutari, M. (2012). Drawing partnership on paper: How do the forms for individual educational plans frame parent–teacher relationship? *International Journal about Parents in Education*, 6(1), 15-27.
- Kim, Y. (2009). Minority parental involvement and school barriers: Moving the focus away from deficiencies of parents. *Educational Research Review*, 4, 80-102.
- Kroll, J. F., & Bialystok, E. (2013). Understanding the consequences of bilingualism for language processing and cognition. *Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, 25(5), 497-514.
- Kuusisto, A. (2010). *Kulttuurinen, kielellinen ja katsomuksellinen monimuotoisuus päiväkodissa: Haasteita ja mahdollisuuksia* [Diversity of cultures, languages and worldviews in the kindergarten: Challenges and opportunities]. Helsinki, FIN: The Department of Social Services and Health Care.
- Kuusisto, A., & Lamminmäki-Vartia, S. (2012). Moral foundation of the kindergarten teacher's educational approach: self-reflection facilitated educator response to pluralism in educational context. *Education Research International*, 1, 1-13.
- Machart, R., Byrd Clarke, J., & Dervin, F. (2014). Perceived differences, exhibited 'diversity', and overlooked individualities. *International Journal of Identity, Bias and Diversity in Education*, 3, I-VI.
- National Board of Education. (2016). Early childhood education and care. Retrieved from http://www.oph.fi/english/education_system/early_childhood_education
- National Board of Education (2014). *National core curriculum for pre-primary education*. Retrieved from http://www.oph.fi/download/153504_national_core_curriculum_for_pre-primary_education_2010.pdf
- Niemelä, R. (2015). *Inclusionary practices in a Finnish pre-primary school context* (Doctoral dissertation). Helsinki, FIN: University of Helsinki.
- OECD. (2012). *Starting Strong III: A quality toolbox for early childhood education and care*. OECD Publishing. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/startingstrongiiiqualitytoolboxforearlychildhoodeducationandcare.htm>

- Ojala, M. (2010). Developing multicultural early childhood education in a Finnish context. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 4(1), 13-22.
- Ojala, M., Niemelä, R., & Lastikka, A-L. (2010). Case study of the Finnish local project working towards social cohesion in 2010. INCLUDE-ED. Project 6. 4rd round (WP 22). Helsinki, FIN: University of Helsinki. Department of Teacher Education.
- Osman, A., & Månsson, N. (2015). "I go to teacher conferences, but I do not understand what the teacher is saying": Somali parents' perception of the Swedish school. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 17(2), 36-52.
- Paavola, H. (2007). *Monikulttuurisuuskasvatus päiväkodin monikulttuurisessa esiopetusryhmässä* [Multicultural education in a multicultural kindergarten pre-school group] (Doctoral dissertation). Helsinki, FIN: University of Helsinki.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Peeters, J., & Sharmahd, N. (2014). Professional development for ECEC practitioners with responsibilities for children at risk: Which competencies and in-service training are needed? *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 22(3), 412-424.
- Peeters, J., & Vandenbroeck, M. (2011). Childcare practitioners and the process of professionalization. In L. Miller & C. Cable (Eds.), *Professionalization, leadership and management in the early years* (pp. 62-76). London, UK: Sage.
- Poureslami, I., Nimmon, L., Ng, K., Cho, S., Foster, S., & Hertzman, C. (2013). Bridging immigrants and refugees with early childhood development services: partnership research in the development of an effective service model. *Early Child Development and Care*, 183(12), 1924-1942.
- Rouse, E. J. (2014). *Effective family partnerships in early childhood education and care: An investigation of the nature of interactions between educators and parents* (Doctoral dissertation). Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia.
- Rouse, L. (2012). Family-centred practice: Empowerment, self-efficacy, and challenges for practitioners in early childhood education and care. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 13(1), 17-26.
- Shuker, M. J., & Cherrington, S. (2016). Diversity in New Zealand early childhood education: Challenges and opportunities. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 24(2), 172-187.

- Soltero-González, L. (2009). Preschool Latino immigrant children: Using the home language as a resource for literacy learning. *Theory into Practice, 48*, 283-289.
- Souto-Manning, M., & Swick, K. J. (2006). Teachers' beliefs about parent and family involvement: rethinking our family involvement paradigm. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 34*(2), 187-193.
- STAKES. (2005). *National curriculum guidelines on early childhood education and care in Finland*. Retrieved from <https://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/75535/267671cb-0ec0-4039-b97b-7ac6ce6b9c10.pdf?sequence=1>
- Swick, K. J. (2007). Empower foster parents toward caring relations with children. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 34*(6), 393-398.
- Swick, K. J., Da Ros, D. A., & Kovach, B. A. (2001). Empowering parents and families through a caring inquiry approach. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 29*(1), 65-71.
- Tervola, J. (2015). Maahanmuuttajien tuen käyttö 2000-luvulla [Use of child home care allowance among immigrants]. *Yhteiskuntapolitiikka, 80*(2), 121-133.
- Tobin, J., Arzubiaga, A. E., & Adair, J. K. (2013). *Children crossing borders*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Tobin, J., Arzubiaga, A. E., & Mantovani, S. (2007). Entering into dialogue with immigrant parents. *Early Childhood Matters, 108*, 34-38.
- Tobin, J., & Kurban, F. (2010). Preschool practitioners' and immigrant parents' beliefs about academics and play in the early childhood educational curriculum in five countries. *Orbis Scholae, 4*(2), 75-87.
- Tveit, A. D., & Walseth, L. T. (2012). Quality assurance of decision-making in conversations between professionals and non-professionals: Identifying the presence of deliberative principles. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research, 14*(3), 232-253.
- Ule, M., Živoder, A., & du Bois-Reymond, M. (2015). Simply the best for my children: Patterns of parental involvement in education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 28*(3), 329-348.
- UNICEF. (2009). *Children in immigrant families in eight affluent countries*. Italy: Unicef Innocenti Research Centre. Retrieved from https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/ii_immig_families.pdf
- Vandenbroeck, M. (2009). Let us disagree. *European Early Childhood Research Journal, 17*(2), 165-170.
- Vesely, C. K., & Ginsberg, M. R. (2011). *Exploration of the status of services for immigrant families in early childhood education programs*. Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved from http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/Vesely_Immigrant.pdf

Author Contact

Anna-Leena Lastikka: anna-leena.lastikka@helsinki.fi

University of Helsinki, Department of Teacher Education, PO Box 9
(Siltavuorenpenger 5), FI-00014, Finland

Lasse Lipponen: lasse.lipponen@helsinki.fi

University of Helsinki, Department of Teacher Education, PO Box 9
(Siltavuorenpenger 5), FI-00014, Finland