



Perceptions about School Effectiveness
--Voices from the School Principal and Teachers in a
Swedish-speaking Basic Comprehensive School,
Finland

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Abstract

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<p>Introduction: Finland's performance in the PISA assessment has led to the perception that Finnish schools are functioning effectively. The concept of school effectiveness in Swedish-speaking school has been underexplored which has motivated me to carry out the research study. Thus, this study aims to understand the qualitative factors that enable the school to function effectively and how do the principal and teachers perceive the concept of school effectiveness. This study is based on the theories of Cheng's concept of School Effectiveness and Yrjö Engeström's theory of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT).</p> <p>Method: This is an ethnographic study involved observing of school and classroom activities and interviewing seven teachers and the principal of a Swedish-speaking basic comprehensive school in the city of Vasa, Finland. A matrix was created which consisted of five different themes with sub-themes. It was then used as a basis for analyzing data collected from the observation and the interviews. The five themes and their respective sub-themes that were pre-determined are: (1) Technical/Economic Function: Acquiring Basic Skills (2) Human/Social Function: Student-Teacher Relationship, Teacher Cooperation and Consensus (3) Political Function: School Ethos (4) Cultural function: School Ethos (5) Education function: Atmosphere Conducive to Learning, High Expectations for Children's Achievement, Frequent Monitoring of Student's Progress. School Leadership is also one of the sub-themes that has been placed within all five themes.</p> <p>Result and Discussion: Using the five school functions defined by Cheng, the perceptions of the principal and the teachers in this study have been understood as follows: Within the technical/economic function, acquiring literacy and social skills have been considered as important skill school should prepare students. In the human/social function there is a huge significance given building one-to-one relation with students, class teachers consider the role of assistant teacher of importance in the teaching-learning process mutual trust and keeping expectations clear. Class Teachers highlighted that they have the scope for taking decisions at their level with regard to classroom proceedings. The political and cultural function that consists of school ethos was understood through use of positive psychology in setting the values, beliefs and norms of the school. Various programmes have been designed to cater the well-being of students. The education function highlighted that teachers have the flexibility in designing the assessments, design the planning according to the learning needs of students along with having realistic expectations for the students.</p>	
Keywords: Effective Schools, Decentralization, School Functions, School Leadership	

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1. Introduction

A strong emphasis on equity of education gives different meanings to school performance and how it is measured. One of the most common ways to measure how well schools perform is through standardized testing. It creates a form of accountability for teachers and administrators. Pasi Sahlberg highlights that the quality of education systems or their schools cannot be determined by international standardized test scores. An education system's success should also include indicators other than test scores (Sahlberg et al., 2021, p. 128). This leads to the question of how school as an organization contributes to children's overall development.

Schools are formal organizations in which rules, culture and structure are deliberately and consciously set up and are then consciously maintained and regulated. The formal organizations (Weber, 1922/1946, as cited in Madan, 2019) are bureaucracies as there are explicit rules, clear hierarchy, repetition of certain tasks and the relations between people are impersonal (Madan, 2019, p. 87). Most public education systems across the world are governed by a central authority leaving very low scope for schools to make decisions at the school level. Cheng (1996) argues that decentralization of power from central authority to school level, school autonomy self-management and participation of school constituencies enables school development and school effectiveness. To adapt to the changing environment, it becomes significant to develop various aspects of the school such as school goals, staff, organizational structure, school process and technology in management, teaching and learning. Continuous school development is necessary for long-term school effectiveness (Cheng, 1996, p. 1).

In 1986 in Finland, a Committee on Government Decentralization made it possible for municipalities to decide how much money to invest in education. The National Curriculum Guidelines in the 1990s gave local schools and teachers more freedom to decide on pedagogical methods and even content. Hansen (2016) stated that it enabled a move of political control from the state to more or less temporal networks of different educational stakeholders (Kosunen & Hansen, 2018, p. 716). Furthermore, it increased the autonomy of the municipalities affecting the functioning of schools in the country. School Principals had more control over the school budget (Sahlberg et al., 2021, p. 161). Increasing the freedom of the municipalities was seen to require the development of evaluation methods for schools' self-evaluation and tools for measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of education to evaluate the functioning of a single school and the whole education system. The Permanent Secretary General of the Ministry of Education, Vilho Hirvi (1994, p. 208), strongly advocated the need to give the local level, especially schools and teachers, possibilities for creating success (Laukkanen, 1998, p. 124).

Cheng (1996) points out that period of 1990s embarked on reforms in education and school restructuring for educational effectiveness and school development. This took place in the West as well as in Asia-Pacific regions. As part of the reform movements, the various efforts include the search for effective schools, ensuring school education quality and shifting to school-based management (Cheng, 1996, p. 1). According to Cheng, School effectiveness is a vague concept because there seem to be no standard elements accepted by all concerned constituencies. However, he states that if we have to understand school effectiveness then we need to understand school functions first. Schools perform different functions or goals (Cheng, 1996, p. 7). According to Cheng, schools may prioritize certain goals and would have effectiveness accordingly. These goals are rather the aims of education as to what school wants their students to develop their capabilities in. He classifies five different kinds of functions that schools perform: technical/economic functions, human/social functions, political functions, cultural functions and education.

Technical/economic functions refer to the contribution of schools that help students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to survive and compete in modern society. The Human/social functions refer to schools enabling students to develop themselves psychologically, socially and physically and help develop their potential as fully as possible. Political functions refer to the contribution of schools to help students develop positive civic attitudes and skills to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Cultural functions refer to schools helping students develop their creativity and aesthetic awareness and to be socialized with the norms, values and beliefs of society. Education functions refer to schools helping students to learn how to learn and helping teachers to learn how to teach (Cheng, 1996, p. 9,11). Cheng elucidates the concept of school effectiveness further by stating the different levels these functions work which are at individual, institutional, community, societal and international levels. The main premise of this research study is to look at how school functions work at both individual and institutional levels.

Yrjö Engeström's Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) offers an additional theoretical lens for the current research. CHAT is a framework model that focuses on how individuals work together towards a collective goal. It helps to analyze how organizations work together as a whole rather than looking at a single aspect (Engeström, 2001). In this study, CHAT is employed to look at the school context: how different constituencies such as the school principal, teachers, parents, municipality functionaries like education officers, school director, and policies interact with each other in performing school functions effectively.

This study will integrate Cheng's concept of school effectiveness and its elements with Yrjö Engeström's Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Cheng's concept of school

effectiveness describes about various constituencies existing within a school context and their roles while Engeström's theory explores how the activities of these constituencies interact and influence one another. Cheng's definition of school functions, performed by the principal and teachers enabling students to develop their capabilities is explored in this research. Engeström's theory is understood from the lens of how the principal's work is affected by the policies, curriculum, politicians, parents and vice versa for teachers. Thus, this study using these theories aims to explain that although constituencies may have their respective goals they are affected and affect each other while working towards the same goal.

Rutter et al. (1979) have been considered the pioneers in developing the concept of school effectiveness. It is a known fact that in a school, children will come from diverse social backgrounds with various cognitive levels and despite individual differences existing, schools at the organizational level need to work towards improving academic and social outcomes (Ramberg et al., 2019, p. 57). In the organizational model of school effectiveness, the social actions of individuals are viewed as being constrained by the organizational structure of the school (Reynolds, 1985). However, a school can be effective if the constituencies involved can learn to deal with changes in the external changes in the environment. For instance, when the pandemic took place, schools had to reorganize their form of functioning within the school.

The concept of school effectiveness has most often been understood from a quantitative perspective but there is also a need to understand it qualitatively. There have not been many qualitative discourses about what makes schools function effectively. Hence, this study aims to explore the perceptions of stakeholders about the concept of school effectiveness. School effectiveness as defined by Cheng is about understanding how school functions are being held. Various constituencies such as school administrators, teachers, policymakers, politicians, and parents are involved in performing the school functions and Engeström describes that they affect each other's work that they do respectively. Understanding the perceptions of the stakeholders will provide us with deeper insight in knowing what factors contribute to school effectiveness.

Moreover, this study focuses on a Swedish-speaking school in Vasa, Finland, where the Swedish speakers are a minority language group. School effectiveness of Swedish-speaking schools in Finland is notably underexplored. This study also aims to highlight the need to look beyond standardized testing as a factor for assessing school performance. The schools should aim to promote the overall development of students which would require different constituencies to work together and systems to be created to facilitate schools to functioning effectively.

Finland has received attention due to its performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). However, there is a lack of discourse about Finland's comprehensive school reform in the 1970s and work for equity in education which has

contributed to the performance of PISA. According to Sahlberg, the basic starting point of equitable education is that all students must have access to high-quality curriculum, teaching and learning regardless of where they live or what school they attend (Sahlberg et al., 2021, p. 74). Thus, more equitable schools or school systems ensure that differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in students' family backgrounds (Sahlberg et al., 2021, p. 74). Finland's decentralization policy in the 1990s provided the scope for the municipalities to make decisions on administration and budget leading to schools having the same. Overall, it becomes essential to understand how a school as an organization function effectively as a result of the actions of various constituencies.

1.1. Research Aims and Question

The major aim of the study is to explore how the school principal and teachers understand and experience the concept of school effectiveness and the factors that contribute to the school's functioning effectively. The main research questions asked in the current research are:

1. How do school teachers and principals understand and experience school effectiveness?

The study was conducted at a Swedish-speaking Basic Comprehensive School in Vasa, Finland. The school places a big emphasis on developing students' Swedish language competency through different activities such as reading projects, individual support and so on. The focus of this study is primarily on the working of the whole school system, the role played by teachers and the school principal and how they perceive their role in contributing to school effectiveness. This was conducted through observation of school/classroom climate and interviews with teachers and principals.

School and classroom observation involved understanding the kind of values, norms and beliefs for school functioning, the student-teacher relationship that exists and the kind of system or structure that has been created to help in children's learning. Interview questions involved asking about how they help children attain basic skills, about expectations for children's learning, how they understand the progress made by children, challenges of collaborating teaching, the role of the school leader in establishing the values for the school, support from the school leader in their work. As children from immigrant families are joining the school, how does the school manage to integrate children whose first language is not Swedish or Finnish? The study tried to understand the culture in the school setting and seeks to answer these sub-questions:

- What values, beliefs and patterns characterize the working dynamics of teachers and the

school principal?

- How do the features of effective schools identified in the literature manifest in the Swedish-speaking school under investigation?
- In what ways do the various constituencies- teachers, school principals, parents, policies and school systems- interact to ensure effective functioning?

Given Finland's strong performance in international assessments such as PISA, there is a perception of Finnish schools as effective. However, this study aims to critically examine whether high performance equates to school effectiveness, particularly at the individual school level, where multiple stakeholders, including principals, teachers and students play integral roles. As such, this research is crucial for gaining insights into school effectiveness from the perspectives of key stakeholders.

2. Theoretical Framework

This research study is based on two theories of Yin Cheong Cheng's concept of School Effectiveness and Yrjö Engeström's theory on Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT).

2.1. Concept of School Effectiveness

According to Cheng, before understanding the concept of School effectiveness, we need to understand school functions. School performs different kinds of functions and depending on these functions their performance varies. For instance, some schools may prioritize developing student's personal development but some for developing skills that would help in working life. Based on some education goals from organization studies and development studies (Bolman and Deal, 1991a; Kazamias and Schwartz, 1977; Townsend, 1994), Cheng classifies school functions into five types: technical/economic functions, human/social functions, political functions, cultural functions and educational functions (Cheng, 1996, p. 9).

These five functions are also types of school effectiveness such as technical/economic effectiveness, human/social effectiveness, political effectiveness, cultural effectiveness and educational effectiveness. Cheng has created twenty-five categories of school functions by categorizing them into five different levels. The levels refer to individual level, institutional level, community level, society level and international level. So, he states that school effectiveness takes place at these five levels. However, considering the limitation of time and practicality, this study will look at the five functions at the individual and institutional levels. The table created below illustrates the five functions taking place at two levels used for this

study (Cheng, 1996, p. 9).

Table-1:

Five Functions and Two-levels for understanding School Effectiveness (Cheng, 1996, p. 10)

Level	Technical/ Economic Function	Human/Social Function	Political Function	Cultural Function	Educational Function
Individual	Different individuals such as teachers, principal, support staff, parents contribute to school effectiveness by performing the five functions.				
Institutional	The various individuals work together to perform the five functions.				

2.2. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

The research study is based on Yrjö Engeström's theory on Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). The theory of CHAT is based on Vygotsky's (subject-object mediating artifact) and Leontiev's work on different levels of activities. This theory helps to analyze individual and collective actions and how these actions can be revisited. This theory considers organization as a relational activity system wherein individuals carry out actions leading to a collective activity (Foot, 2014). So, if we think of this in a school context, the organization would be the school, the individual action would be teaching and the collective activity would be educating and preparing students for the society.

The Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) provides a framework for understanding professional work practices. It is a multi-dimensional and systematic approach that considers the dynamics of power, money, culture and history to evaluate professional practices. The three core ideas of CHAT are: learning, communicating and acting (Foot, 2014, p. 3). Moreover, it looks at the interactions taking place between the professionals working in an organization. It pertains not just to communicative aspects but also takes note of the cultural, historical, political and economic dimensions.

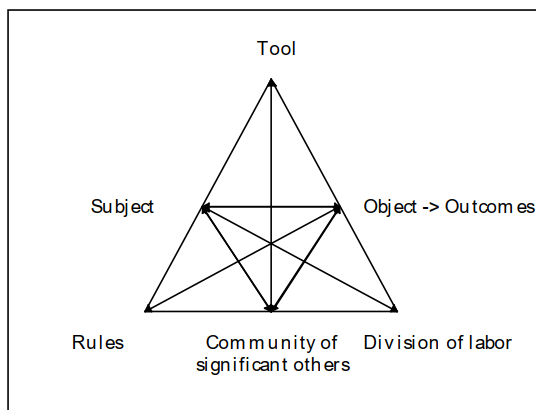
Within this framework, there are two models called Activity systems that show how various actors of differing roles, positions and perspectives interact with each other. There are six components to the activity system which are as follows:

1. Subject: which is the actor that impacts the object
2. Object: the actor upon whom the outcome is desired from
3. Tools: can be material or conceptual which is the method through which the subject affects the object

- 4. Community of Significant Others: are the other actors who share the involvement as that of the subject and object
 - 5. Rules: which govern the actions of the subject toward the object
 - 6. Division of Labor: the work done by various actors that contributes towards the object.
- (Foot, 2014)

Figure-1:

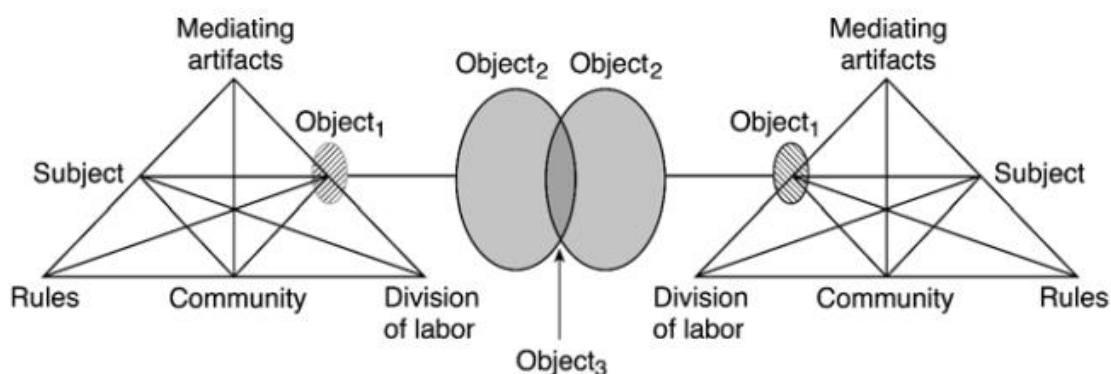
Model of activity system (Engeström, 1987, p. 78)



The basis of the activity systems model of the CHAT framework is that instead of focusing on individual actions, it rather focuses on how individuals work together towards a collective action. This framework helps to analyze how organizations work together as a whole rather than looking at a single aspect. Engeström designed the model in such a manner that two activity systems are interacting where two subjects affecting their respective objectives form a jointly constructed object (Engeström, 2001).

Figure-2:

Two Interacting Activity Systems (Engeström, 2001, p. 136)



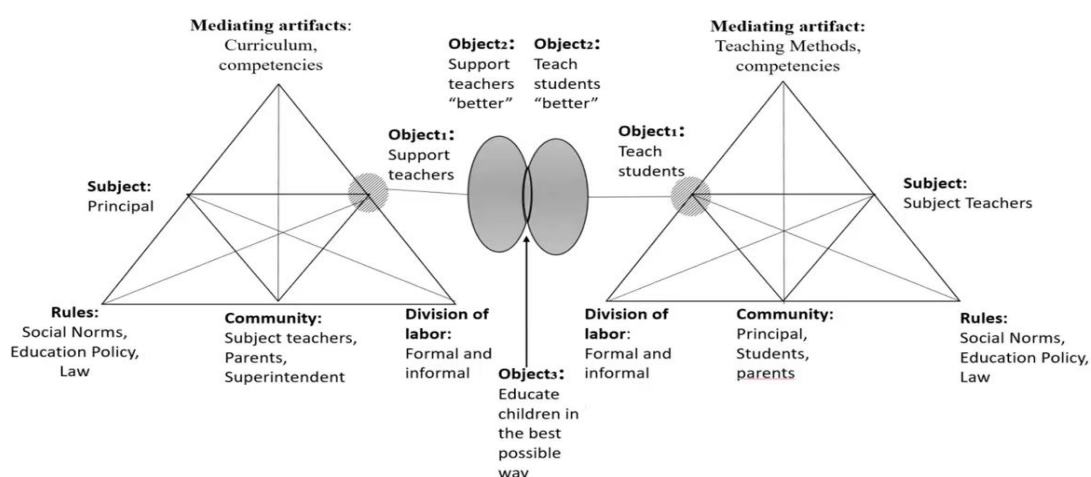
Engeström elucidates the two interacting activity systems by stating five principles of the model (Engeström, 2001):

1. The individual and group actions are goal-directed.
2. There is multi-voicedness within the activity wherein each component of the activity systems comes with its point of view, traditions, interests and history.
3. The activity system takes over a long period.
4. Contradictions between the two activity systems or within each system lead to change.
5. It eventually leads to the possibility of expansive transformations.

This research study would understand the interaction between the two actors (teachers and principal) through this model within the school system context which would look as given below:

Figure-3:

Two Interacting Activity Systems in the School Context- inspired by (Engeström, 2001)



As described above the six components of the activity systems model, the following elaborates on the aspects that will be looked into in the research study:

- Subject: As both principals and teachers are the focus of the study their respective object relations will be delved.
- Object: The principal's object or objective will be to provide mechanisms that support teachers while the Teacher's object or objective is to teach pupils.
- Tools/Mediating Artifacts: refers to the various mediums that teachers use in teaching such as teaching strategies, language, competencies, and technology. Similarly, on the left side of the model, the principal supports teachers using the same mediums.
- Community of Significant Others: On the right side of the model, it refers to the people who are involved in what a teacher is doing while the same goes for the left side of the model where different people such as parents, municipality members, educational functionaries affect their work.

- **Rules:** On the right side of the model, there are different kinds of rules which affect teachers' work including social norms, education policies and laws. For instance, a teacher is supposed to follow certain social norms of how one should behave. On the left side of the model, the principal is also affected by rules and regulations in one's everyday work.
- **Division of Labor:** On the right side of the model, a teacher has both formal works i.e. to teach and have informal duties such as being the supportive coordinator for a student club. On the left side of the model, a principal's work pertains to administrative tasks but also has to deal with several minor issues that can come up spontaneously.

2.3. Integration of Cheng's and Engeström's theory for School Effectiveness

This study will integrate both theories of Cheng and Engeström to understand the five functions of school effectiveness. Cheng's concept of school effectiveness lays down the definition of the elements and their respective function in the school context while Engeström's theory connects all the elements and their functions. Through this study, it will be understood how various functions are done by the two constituencies (teachers and principal) as they are the participants and how their respective work is interconnected with each other.

Figure 3 explains how the two subjects (Teacher and Principal) lead to affect their respective objects (Student and Teacher). If we look at the left side of the model where the principal is the subject and the teacher is the respective object, it shows that the principal's work is affected by the guidelines of the National Core Curriculum, which becomes the education function. The principal also has to look into the norms, policies, and laws of the Municipality and has to work in cooperation with teachers, parents, municipality representatives, and support staff. Since it is the teacher who teaches in the classroom, the principal has to support them, which becomes the technical/economic and human/social function. The principal also lays down the vision and goals for the school that become the political and cultural functions.

The right side of the model in Figure 3 shows the teacher as the subject and the student as the respective object. This part of the model shows how teachers' teaching method and the core curriculum guidelines affect their work, which comprises the education function, having norms and policies to follow, working in co-operation with the principal, assistant teacher, and support staff which comprise the technical/economic and human/social function. The teachers also contribute to working on the vision and goals of the school, which comprises the political and cultural functions.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Historical Evolution of the concept of School Effectiveness

The roots of School Effectiveness research date back to the mid-1960s and early 1970s when it was not given much relevance. According to Reynolds (1985), he points out the unimportance of research within schools. The majority of research is attributed to the home background as a determining factor for children's learning in school. Along with this, the sociologists highlighted that schools are institutions that further reproduce family and home-based inequalities. Another factor was due to the sheer practical difficulty of undertaking school-based research. It was challenging to decide what to measure within the school as there were numerous areas for research, which would be a laborious and time-consuming task (Reynolds, 1985).

However, Rutter et al. (1979) began to establish the relation of theory and research with practice in the area of school effectiveness. Rutter and colleagues are considered pioneers of school effectiveness research and in their empirical studies in England, it was found out that if educational environments are made enabling, it can help to counteract the negative effects of home conditions that children come from (Ramberg et al., 2019, pp. 57, 58). Edmonds (1979) has been another advocate of effective schools as he stated that the core issue behind effective schools is equity. According to him, American education failed to provide education for children due to the inequity that existed in American society. He argued that an effective school can bring the children of the poor to those minimal masteries of basic school skills that now describe minimally successful pupil performance for the children of the middle class (Edmonds, 1979).

Scheerens (2016) highlighted that since the 1980s, there has been a strong consensus within educational effectiveness research regarding the kind of school-level conditions that are of importance (Ramberg et al., 2019, p. 58). Cheng (1996) points out that by the 1990s, various reforms in education and school restructuring movements took place for educational effectiveness and school development in the West as well as in the Asia-Pacific regions. In those reforms, some of the trends that were observed are: there has been more emphasis on school development as environments were changing school goals, structure, and process; a shift from quantity to school education quality on whether it can meet the diverse expectations of various constituencies; shift towards school effectiveness rather than just maintaining everyday functions; schools having more possibility for taking decisions at their level; use of sophisticated technology on strategic management, development planning (Cheng, 1996, p. 1,2).

3.2. Functions of School Constituencies

Cheng (1996) defines school effectiveness as the capacity of the school to maximize school functions or the degree to which the school can perform school functions when given a fixed amount of school input (Cheng, 1996, p. 13). He highlights that School effectiveness is a vague concept because it raises the question of the basis of school effectiveness such as what criteria, whose criteria, effective for whom, who to define, how to evaluate, when to evaluate and under what environmental constraints. There has been no standard that has been accepted to define the concept across all the constituencies. Since a school is a changing and complicated social context with limited resources that involves various constituencies such as education authorities, school administrators, teachers, students, parents, taxpayers, educators and the public.

Hence, this raises the question: what is a school supposed to do? A school is an organization whose structures are meant to develop cognitive and psycho-socioemotional skills and critical thinking. According to the Finnish Core Curriculum (2014), the mission of basic education can be examined from the perspective of educational tasks, social tasks and cultural tasks. The educational task refers to supporting pupils' learning, development and well-being. The social task of basic education is to promote equity, equality and justice. The cultural task is to promote versatile cultural competence and appreciation of cultural heritage and to support pupils in building their own identity and cultural capital (Opetushallitus & Lingsoft (yhtiö), 2016). Hence, a school becomes the place that inculcates all these tasks by propagating it to the students with the help of teachers, the principal, parents and the community.

Although Cheng (1996) agrees with the formal goals or mission that a school is meant to serve, he also points out that schools also serve other implicit or explicit functions. It can enable social mobility but can also maintain class inequality within society (Cheng, 1996, p. 8). Thus, the functions stated by Cheng can be broadly understood as the aims of education. Now, we will delve deeper into the functions as classified by Cheng (1996).

3.2.1. Technical/Economic Functions

The technical/economic functions refer to the contribution of schools to the technical or economic developments. They help students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to survive and compete in modern society (Cheng, 1996, p. 9). In school, children attain various hands-on learning experiences such as arts, crafts, trades, sports and so on. The aim is to help build the skill with practice. It covers vocational training aimed at producing a

student competent to fill a job. It encompasses all education aimed at producing professionals and technicians such as lawyers, doctors, nurses, engineers, and teachers (Schmitt, 2005, p. 224). However, this also highlights the need for schools to be equipped with the required infrastructure for students at school. For instance, if students need to learn about technical craft, then it requires the tools and raw materials like wood and metal or if it is for learning a particular sport then it would require its respective sports equipment.

3.2.2. Human/Social Functions

The human/social functions refer to the contribution of schools to human development and social relationships. Schools help students to develop themselves psychologically, socially and physically and help them develop their potential as fully as possible (Cheng, 1996, p. 9). School is one of the significant places where students spend most time of their day. They interact with each other both formally and informally. During formal occasions they learn to work in groups or pairs and informally where they build friendships. Schools do play a significant role in learning to manage emotions. Students experience different kinds of emotions on various occasions such as examinations, sports matches, when something unfair happens, working on something as a group or while learning something new. Schools should help children deal with various kinds of emotions, even challenging and difficult ones (Lonka et al., 2018). Moreover, school is also a place where students learn to interact with peers who belong to different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Learning to work with diverse backgrounds is another important task for schools.

3.3.3. Political Functions

Political functions refer to the contribution of schools to political developments where schools help students develop positive civic attitudes and skills to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship (Cheng, 1996, p. 11). The fundamental rights and duties are always drawn from the Constitution of a country. It lays down the principles for how a society should function. The crux of the Constitution is that all humans are the same and we should see everyone at a deeper level with the same eye (Madan, 2021, p. 1). School is also a place where students discuss various political events happening in the country and understand the reason for certain events happening. Schools also provide the space for students to understand the different kinds of oppression occurring in society and enable students to prepare for social transformation. Understanding the rights of a minority group, for instance, Swedish is a linguistic minority group in Finland or the refugees in any country and having conversations about their rights is also an important part of the political function of the school.

3.3.4. Cultural Functions

Cultural functions refer to the contribution of schools to cultural transmission and development. Schools help students to develop their creativity and aesthetic awareness and to be socialized with the norms, values and beliefs of society (Cheng, 1996, p. 11). As school becomes the place for students to interact with diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, students learn to embrace and respect the cultures of each other. The values, norms and beliefs also called ethos are something that schools uphold and want their students to inculcate in their lives. For instance, it could be something like schools want children to be sensitive while interacting with special needs children and teachers having a conversation about it.

3.2.5. Education functions

Education functions of schools refer to the contribution of schools to the development and maintenance of education. Education includes all the other functions- technical, social, political and cultural. It represents learning and development. School plays a significant role in helping students learn how to learn and help teachers how to teach. It is considered the systematic place for teaching-learning and evaluation managed by the administrators and in preparing an entire generation (Cheng, 1996, p. 11,12).

A study conducted using the CHAT approach to understand the process of how children learn, showed that the main focus is not the learner the teacher or the environment but the joint interaction between the constituencies enabled a better understanding of the task being performed. Two examples where different kinds of learning situations took place were: one that had children learning about long division and the other was about reading comprehension. The interaction between the teacher and the student facilitated a better learning process (*Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (2010)*, n.d.).

3.3. Understanding of Effective School

Research studies conducted on effective schools have shown that school-contextual aspects play an important role in student's academic and social outcomes. One of the principles behind effective school is that how schools respond to the student level is essential for improving schools' teaching and learning environment. Scheerens (2016) points out that since the 1980s, there has been a strong consensus regarding educational effectiveness that school-level conditions contribute a significant role (Ramberg et al., 2019, p. 58).

Blair (2002) highlighted that several research studies show effective schools emphasize

the capacity of school principals to articulate the vision for the school and create a shared meaning and common goals to reach the vision. Therefore, the way how the 'higher' level of school structure provides necessary conditions for the 'lower' level, which is the teacher and student, affects the characteristics of school effectiveness (Ramberg et al., 2019, p. 58). In the study conducted on effective schools by Edmonds (1979) in 21 high-achieving and low-achieving schools, it was found that teachers in higher-achieving schools reported principal provided a great amount of support, there was more student monitoring processes, schools had higher levels of access to "outside the classroom" materials (Edmonds, 1979). In another study conducted by Brookover and Lezotte Study (1977), they use the term 'improving school' instead of effective school. Their study found that in improving schools there was a great emphasis on basic reading and mathematics, the teachers believed that all students could master the basic objectives. Edmonds emphasized in their study that effective schools are instructionally effective for poor children. He rejects the notion that a child's background can hinder them in acquiring basic skills. The aim of the school should be that it must be determined to serve all the pupils irrespective of their family background (Edmonds, 1979).

A similar observation has been found in the study conducted by Stringfield et al. (1985) where effective schools had principals who insisted on clear, present academic focus, teachers were well focused on how well students mastered basic skills, there was an emphasis on interactive teaching in the classroom (Teddlie et al., 1989, p. 233). Sammons et al. (1998) in their study on the process of effectiveness found that effective schools had high expectations and emphasis on academic achievement, the teachers had consensus and shared vision that the primary place of learning in school, the school leader in effective school was viewed as an "enabler" with the source of ideas and effectively communicates, the quality of teaching is fundamentally important and parental involvement was encouraged (Sammons et al., 1998, p. 305).

3.4. Features of Effective School

Edmonds (1979) proposed five salient features of effective schools that have been commonly observed: strong administrative leadership, high expectations for children's achievement, an orderly atmosphere conducive to learning, an emphasis on basic-skill acquisition and frequent monitoring of student's progress (Ramberg et al., 2019, p. 58). Based on these features of an effective school, this research study will focus on the following features:

3.4.1. School Leadership

The major tasks of a principal involve multiple administrative tasks and meetings, responsibilities related to the organization of school-level education, curriculum work and support for the development of the whole work community (FNBE, 2013 as cited in Lahtero et al., 2019, p. 340). Leitwood & Riehl (2003) defines school leadership as providing direction and exerting influence to achieve the goals that have been set for the school. When visions and goals are identified and articulated for the school as well as having a shared meaning to achieve these visions, it enables effective leadership and high-performance expectations for the staff. This would happen when the staff is provided with intellectual stimulation and individual support. A significant factor of effective leadership is when collaboration and the school culture is being strengthened. The effects of school leadership are indirect as they influence student learning by helping to promote vision and goals and ensuring that the resources and processes are in place to help teachers teach well (Ramberg et al., 2019, p. 58). Goldring and Pasternak (1994) found that when principals frame goals and establish clear missions, it leads to better school outcomes which are broadly the academic achievement. The goals and mission included giving significance to citizenship, personal growth, and good work habits among students and staff. Thus, goal setting in the instructional leadership tradition emphasizes the principal's capacity to help staff with the school's academic improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998, p. 172).

Principals also face various challenges in their schools. Lahtero et. al (2019) highlights distributive leadership on how principals solve their everyday work problems. Distributed leadership is defined as how principals delegate tasks as well as how they interact with teachers and other official and unofficial structures. Other research studies have found that distributive leadership supports the professional capacity building of teachers and develops their teaching and learning. Principals also see the importance of encouraging teachers to participate in leadership processes helps to create a meaningful aim for development. Successful leadership is tied to the active participation of teachers in the school's development work (Lahtero et al., 2019, p. 342).

A qualitative study conducted by Haiyan, Walker and Xiaowei (2017) showed that when leaders organized the teachers in "teacher research groups" where fellow teachers planned their teaching together, observed each other's classes, reflected collaboratively helped in building trust to establish productive learning environment (Postholm, 2018, p. 6).

3.4.2. Teacher Cooperation and Consensus

Eschler (2016) defines collaboration as involving two or more teachers who work interdependently to share information and knowledge, and plan and problem-solve to achieve a common goal (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019, p. 54). Teachers working in cooperation is

considered a key element in school effectiveness research. When individuals work together, there is an acquisition of new knowledge and new routines of action (Muckenthaler et al., 2020, p. 486). Collaboration includes formal and informal activities such as team teaching, peer observation and coaching, collaborative inquiry and research, team planning and working on joint activities across classes. Met Life (2010) found that when there is teacher collaboration, it leads to greater levels of trust and job satisfaction (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019, p. 54).

Teachers require cooperation and interaction to reach a consensus about various educational issues. Hence, both are interrelated with one another. It becomes important that teachers interact in planning educational content by sharing stories, materials, and experiences. Johnson (2003) found in his studies that most teachers do think that collaborating with fellow teachers provides support, enhancing teacher morale and more chances for learning from each other. Vangrieken et al. (2015) point out improved student understanding and learning when there is teacher collaboration. It is an important aspect of school effectiveness as it involves the exchange of ideas, developing and discussing new materials and receiving feedback from colleagues. Research also points out that this factor is contextual and can vary from school to school (Ramberg et al., 2019, pp. 58, 59). Chapman & Muijs (2013) in their study point out that when students' academic performance came out well, it occurred as a result of high collaboration and cohesion among teachers (Muckenthaler et al., 2020, p. 486).

Different forms of teacher collaboration include teachers gathering information and materials from their colleagues but working independently, another form is where teachers work autonomously but before that they agree on certain goals and subtasks and another form of collaboration is co-constructing knowledge and solutions to the problems which is an intensive form where there might not be individual autonomy but requires teachers to reach a common perspective (Muckenthaler et al., 2020, p. 488). Irrespective of how teachers collaborate, the onus is also upon the school leader who has to facilitate teacher relationships. However, a challenge that occurs in this aspect is that to meet the criteria of collaboration, there are chances for the focus to get shifted away from student learning (Lockton, 2019, p. 497).

In a study conducted by Vrikki et. al (2017) to understand how dialogues between teachers could enhance their learning. Dialogic moves such as requests for information, opinions and clarifications, building on ideas and providing evidence or reasoning. Various mediating artifacts are used in teachers' professional development processes which can be ideas and materials. Language and various forms of artifacts can enhance learning in the language used as a dialogue between teachers, principals and other stakeholders (Postholm, 2018, p. 10).

3.4.3. Student-Teacher Relationship

The teacher-student relationship is defined as the interaction between teachers and students that includes interpersonal demands experienced by teachers from students and the perception of teachers about their students. One of the significant roles in student performance is that of the student-teacher relationship. Moreover, it also affects teachers' well-being and the socio-emotional development of students. This does make teaching a stressful profession. Although the teacher-student emphasizes student achievement it does affect teachers' well-being (Falk et al., 2022). As Vygotsky (1978) points out the interaction between teachers and peers plays an important role in stimulating the cognitive development of the learner. This means that learning has to occur in an interactive environment. Hence, when a student gives a response, it gives the teacher guidance about the learning process which in turn influences the students' beliefs by giving a different result for teacher-student interaction. The motivation of the teacher as pointed out by Reeve (2009) explains the student's need for teacher support. When a student expresses their need for teacher support, it also indicates their willingness to learn (Choi & Han, 2023, p. 1). It is also understood that a positive student-teacher relationship would be beneficial to the development of school-age children's empathy. As school becomes the place after home for children's development of socialization skills and also helps to develop socio-emotional skills (Xiang et al., 2022, p. 2740).

3.4.4. High Expectations for Children's Achievements

Research does indicate that the expectations of teachers based on their expectations of the students can have different behaviour towards their students. This in turn can affect student outcomes, motivation and engagement. It has also been found that the way teachers behave based on the expectations they have for students has a direct impact on how students achieve. Urhahne (2015) found that through teachers' behaviour, they do communicate their expectations about students which in turn affects student motivation and thereby the achievement outcomes (Hornstra et al., 2018, p. 326). Moreover, research also indicates that teachers can have different expectations for students based on race, gender and social class. Reyna (2008) indicates that this can be a result of the attributions from stereotypes (Trang & Hansen, 2021, p. 154). One of the debated studies on this theme is conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobson's study, *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (1968) which described that if a teacher for instance has a negative expectation, and behaves accordingly with the student then the student will also act in accordance to it (Hornstra et al., 2018, p. 325). However, this theory has been heavily criticized.

3.4.5. School Ethos

School Ethos is defined as the distinctive range of values and beliefs, which define the philosophy or atmosphere of an organization (Donnelly, 2000, p. 134). The origin of term school ethos comes from the study on school effectiveness by Rutter et. al (1979) where they found that schools provided a positive experience for the students despite some common factors and were unable to find the link, which they termed as school ethos (Graham, 2012, p. 341). In a study conducted by Warin (2017) to understand care as part of school ethos, it found that it does require the school leadership to have the ability to inspire the shared vision across the staff, it should be a value that should have the capacity to withstand threats or breaking bonds especially in the case of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties and finally have the understanding that care as a school ethos is both means and end which would affect both pedagogy and curriculum (Warin, 2017, p. 198). Another study conducted by Hatton (2013), found out school ethos influenced to management of the challenging behaviour of students. Most often schools tend to exclude a student with difficult behaviour but the study showed that if schools have clarity about behaviour policy it means the school knows what needs to be done when there are students with behaviours difficult to be managed, a shared sense of responsibility within the school community can foster an inclusive school ethos and teachers treating pupils with respect as well as considering their views of children that indicates the presence of pupil participation (Ann Hatton, 2013).

3.4.6. Frequent Monitoring of Student's Progress

Students' progress is most frequently monitored in schools today. Research shows that when students are actively involved in progress monitoring through a sequence of performance feedback and goal setting it can lead to improved academic and motivational outcomes (Furey & Loftus-Rattan, 2022, p. 329). Moreover, this same study by Furey & Loftus-Rattan (2022), also highlights that when there are individualized education programs for students with learning disabilities, frequent monitoring becomes even more significant. Another aspect of monitoring student's progress has been in the case of monitoring student writing progress as it is also considered an important skill to be achieved. In the case of students with disabilities, it is more challenging. It suggests using a data-gathering process to help children achieve writing skills (Filderman & Austin, 2023, p. 2). The use of curriculum-based measurement helps to serve as an indicator of proficiency such as reading and this measurement helps teachers to make instructional changes (Stecker et al., 2008, p. 49).

3.4.7. Atmosphere Conducive to Learning

According to Edwards (1974), every student feels the need to be accepted while being in a group or has the feeling of wanting to be part of a group. In this situation, one can assume that a class characterized by congenial, supportive and harmonious social relationships is more conducive to academic achievement than one where it is not there (Younas et al., 2013). It is a kind of a climate that enables students to achieve better outcomes. Moos (1979) defines school climate as the school social atmosphere of the learning environment in which students have different experiences according to the protocols set up by teachers and administration. He highlights three aspects of social environment: one is a relationship that includes involvement, affiliation and teacher support; the second is personal growth or goal orientation which has aspects of personal development; the third is system maintenance and system change that includes aspects of environment, rules and procedures (Glover & Coleman, 2005, p. 254). School climate is more than an individual experience: it is a group phenomenon larger than one person's life. It includes both spheres of school life such as safety, relationships, teaching and learning, environment and larger organizational patterns such as 'shared' vision. There is a complex range of factors that impact both individual and collective experiences of school life both consciously and unconsciously. These experiences can be as a result of intrapersonal such as fear and hope and interpersonal experiences with peers, school personnel and family members (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 182).

3.4.8. Acquisition of Basic Skills

The current times that we are living in have raised the significance of twenty-first-century skills. Researchers and organizations have found that these skills are needed for children in their lives and work. Ananiadou & Claro (2009) highlight that employers and society expect the school to be able to produce relevant skills for the market. The broad set of skills includes elements of collaboration, communication, ICT literacy and social/cultural along with civic participation, critical thinking and problem-solving. Another aspect according to Aro (2009) has been that differences in school achievement in early years led students to value different school subjects which in turn contributed to their planning of future educational trajectories (Ahonen & Kinnunen, 2015, p. 395). However, it has also been found that teaching twenty-first-century skills is not easy as it needs to be made more relevant, and interdisciplinary, enhance higher-order thinking skills, the possibility for application of these skills in other aspects of life, explore how children learn, understand misconceptions, making teamwork as relevant and use technology to the maximum capacity (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012, p. 9).

3.5. Role of Policies in Empowering Schools in Finland

Mortimore (1991) points out that school effectiveness has led to major shifts in educational policy in many countries by emphasizing the accountability of schools and the responsibility of educators to provide all children with possibilities for higher achievement (Creemers & Reezigt, 1997, p. 397). The period of the 1990s was marked by changes in the decentralization and deregulation policy where the state steered the development of the municipalities by granting resources for specific uses. Thus, the municipality obtained the full right to decide themselves on the use and allocation of resources. Increasing the freedom of the municipalities was seen to require the development of evaluation methods for schools' self-evaluation and tools for measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of education to evaluate the functioning of a single school and the whole education system (Laukkanen, 1998, p. 124). Municipalities allocate resources for each school based on the number of students in the school as well as its special needs. If the school has more students in need of special assistance then the school budget will be larger (Saarivirta & Kumpulainen, 2016, p. 1270). Hence, the state's administration evaluates by making municipalities accountable and thereby schools accountable for their functions. The concept of accountability raises questions about the responsibilities of various functions and how power is linked with authority structures, control and ensuring quality.

Accountability also indicates the obligation to be answerable about providing information not only about the financial use but also about the use of public resources and actions taken. The professional accountability model developed by Kogan (1986), Lundgren (1990) and House (1993) is about hierarchy and accountability proceeding horizontally. The accountability is based on the norms in the profession. The objectives are set at the national level and their evaluation is decided according to the context of the school. Thus, the school's independence is quasi-independence. The Finnish education system follows the professional accountability model. Since 1994, schools have had the scope to develop their curricula, and teachers in the school have the responsibility of developing the curriculum further. It was considered essential that schools can evaluate their plans on the criteria of local and national expectations. Thus, schools should be able to have the scope to evaluate at their level as school-based reviews can give important findings and also contribute to national decision-making. The self-evaluation at the school or municipality level is derived from the core principles of decentralization of powers (Laukkanen, 1998, p. 127).

Finland has about 300 municipalities that are obligated to create a local curriculum based on the national core curriculum. This document becomes a guiding document instructing on how

schools should operate. Then, the school makes its curriculum based on both documents, making teachers and other education staff take part in the development. As the municipality is the organizer and provider of school services, schools are treated in the same way as other units like hospitals, maintenance officers etc. There is an obligation of the municipality to take care of the legal tasks. Basic education services that would include kindergarten, pre-primary, elementary and lower secondary schooling are also included in this legislation. There is a chief education officer within every municipality who manages the school principals but also delegates tasks such as the duties of making decisions to school principals (Saarivirta & Kumpulainen, 2016, p. 1272).

4. Methodology

4.1. Defining the Methodology

The methodology that is used in the research study is an Ethnographic study. Ethnography is a design of inquiry coming from anthropology and sociology. The researcher studies the shared patterns of behaviours, values, beliefs, language and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period. The data collection often involves observation and interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). An ethnographer focuses on the culture shared by the group that is being studied. An ethnographer examines the patterns of behaviour, beliefs and language of this group. How the group interacts with each other daily would be the basis for the ethnographer's study. The group being studied ranges from a few individuals to many who interact over some time, such as teachers in an entire school. Agar (1980) points out that the process of ethnography involves extended observations of the group being studied. It is done mostly through participant observation where the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people, observes and does interviews with the group being studied. Ethnography helps the readers to build a new understanding of group functioning. On an overall level, ethnographers study the meaning of the behaviour, language and interaction among members of the culture-sharing group (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

4.2. Methodology and Aim of the Study

Table-2:

Matrix to understand School Effectiveness

Technical/Economic Function	Human/Social Function	Political function	Cultural function	Education function
School Leadership	School Leadership	School Leadership	School Leadership	School Leadership
Emphasis on Acquisition of Basic Skills	Student-Teacher Relationship	School Ethos	School Ethos	Atmosphere Conducive to Learning
	Teacher Cooperation and Consensus			High Expectation for Children's Achievement
				Frequent Monitoring of Student's Progress

To understand how the school functions and the features of an effective school, a matrix has been created. The matrix allocates the features of an effective school within five school functions. The matrix will be used as a guiding factor for analysing whether the school to be studied is effective or not. These functions are descriptions of the rationale for placing each feature within a particular function:

- School Leadership is one such feature which has been highlighted by previous studies on how school leaders play a significant role in managing the administration of the whole school. They contribute to setting the vision and mission of the school that would help children to achieve basic skills, to become good citizens, to learn socialization and be sensitive to individuals irrespective of their identity and to achieve basic education.
- The feature of acquiring basic skills has been placed in technical/economic function because achieving skills that are needed for working life is one of the important functions of the school, something which has been described in research studies as twenty-first-century skills.
- The student-teacher relationship and teacher cooperation and consensus have been placed in human/social function as they deal with the understanding that students are helped to develop psychologically, socially, and emotionally by teachers, which

thereby enables better learning outcomes. Moreover, teachers working in collaboration can also lead to better learning for students.

- School ethos has been placed within both political and cultural functions as ethos refers to building norms, values and beliefs. Schools serve this function by teaching citizenship education.
- The Education function has been placed with the features of an atmosphere conducive to learning, having high expectations for children's achievements and frequent monitoring of the student's progress to contribute to improving the teaching-learning process.

4.3 Context and Participants

The sample selected for my research study is a Basic Comprehensive School in Vasa. I selected this school because it is one of the Swedish-speaking schools. As Swedish is the minority language in Finland, the selection of this school gives insight into the functioning of a minority language school. The school also provides a one-year preparatory course to students who are from migrant families, which is funded by the Vasa Municipality.

The school has classes specifically designated for special needs students. Based on the cognitive and psycho-socio emotional and physical needs students have been divided into five groups Group A, B, C, D, E and F with a class teacher and an assistant teacher for each student. The elementary grades are from Grade-1 to 6 with a class teacher and one assistant for the whole class.

Table-3:

Profile of the Participants of Interview

Teacher-1 (T-1)	Special Education Class teacher (Group-A)
Teacher-2 (T-2)	Special Education Class teacher (Group-B)
Teacher-3 (T-3)	Class Teacher of Grade-1
Teacher-4 (T-4)	Assistant Teacher (Group-F)
Teacher-5 (T-5)	Assistant Teacher (Grade-6)
Teacher-6 (T-6)	Assistant Teacher (Group-F)
Teacher-7 (T-7)	Hourly-Teacher
Teacher-8 (T-8)	Principal

4.4. Data Collection Method

Since an ethnography study involves conducting the research study using theory and then

looking for patterns of a culture-sharing group it would require the researcher to engage in extensive fieldwork, collecting data primarily through semi-structured interviews and observations.

Interviews with three class teachers, three assistant teachers and one school principal were conducted. The school has special needs education classes separately as there are children who require intensive or special support, the class teacher and assistants from the special needs classes have been interviewed. During the interview with the school principal, I was provided with various documents, including an information document for the academic year 2023-'24, an annual plan document for the year 2023-'24, a document about the plan for activities on student well-being and a document created for school ethos.

Observation involved spending time in the school and building rapport with pupils, teachers and the school principal to understand the functioning of the school on an overall level. Observation was held for a duration of eight weeks. Another source was taking notes taken at the staff meeting and documents that teachers and the principal shared during the interview. Informal interactions with members have also yielded insights about the research study, which has been looked at (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The sample has been collected by myself where I have engaged in an empirical study through observation in school, taking part in teachers' and principals' meetings and interviewing them. Since the study is qualitative, the sampling strategy will be non-probability sampling. The individuals have been selected based on their availability and consent. Within the non-probability sampling, has been purposive sampling and partly voluntary responsive sampling. As there is a clear criteria and rationale for including the research study i.e. teachers and school principals as the study aims to understand the school effectiveness process.

4.5. Data Analysis Method

The analysis of the results gives an understanding of how a group functions sharing their roles and responsibilities and how they are interconnected with each other. The data analysis is done through thematic analysis. In this method, a researcher gets the insider's perspective of having immersed oneself in the environment. The reporting is done through verbatim quotes and then synthesizing the data through the researcher's overall cultural interpretation. This interpretation will be based on the themes from theoretical concepts used as well as the group being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For this study, different themes have been pre-determined based on the literature review. Through deductive thematic analysis, the responses of the participants as well as the observation

of the school and classroom are held. Having pre-determined themes sets clear goals and it also gives a sense of direction for the responses that would come and at the same time leaves the scope for more themes to come up. The themes that have already been identified in the matrix created, helped to understand the effectiveness of the school under study.

4.6. Decisions of Research Ethics and DMP

Since this study involves only teachers and school principals, consent will be required only from them. As part of research ethics, voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, safety and security, and communication of results will be strictly considered. For data analysis and research reports, it will be strictly noted to make sure that authentic data is being collected and analysed. All the data collected will be stored on the author's personal computer. It will be ensured that no names of any participants are reflected in the report.

4.7. Researcher Positionality

Based on the previous research studies and personal experiences, I have developed an understanding that decentralization leads to greater school effectiveness. When schools and their stakeholders are allowed to take decisions at their level, it enables individuals to make decisions based on contextual needs. In the case of Finland's education system where municipalities are designated with a budget to disseminate according to the needs of the schools within the region. Moreover, the National Core Curriculum that is prepared by the Finnish National Agency for Education is developed at the municipality and school level depending on the needs of the context. The schools are meant to follow the guidelines broadly but can modify them according to the requirements. This is indeed an essential step to make the stakeholders accountable.

As an international student, it has been quite intriguing to see the importance given to the Swedish language where Finnish is the majority spoken language in the country. The interview with the principal, class teachers, assistant teachers and spending a considerable amount of time for school and classroom observation in a Swedish-medium basic comprehensive school gave me an interesting view into understanding minority language perspective. This gave me a closer understanding of the workings of a Finnish school. Through this research I could understand how various constituencies have to work together with a shared understanding and various systems need to be created to facilitate students' learning.

5. Results

Based on pre-determined themes, the participants' understanding of school functions and the respective school features within them are shared below. The five functions are: (1) Technical/Economic function which comprises the feature of acquiring basic skills (2) Human/Social functions comprises of student-teacher relationship and teacher cooperation and consensus (3) Political function (4) Cultural function have been combined comprising of school ethos (5) Education function comprising the features of orderly atmosphere conducive to learning, having high expectations for children's achievements and frequent monitoring of student's progress. One common feature that has been placed in all the five functions is that of school leadership. Since this study also includes teachers who teach in special education classes, the responses are according to their context too. The responses for the functions and their respective feature are given below:

5.1. Technical/Economic function

According to Cheng's definition of technical/economic function, it refers to how the school prepares students for working life. One of the aspects that has been included in this function is the acquisition of basic skills. As twenty-first century skills are gaining importance for students to be prepared when they begin their working life as professionals and this aspect has been placed within this function. The participants commented on literacy and social skills as important skills that are essential for students to be equipped with when they go for their working lives. They have shared that it is important to be prepared to work with different kinds of text and be prepared to work with individuals as well as in a group. In the case of special needs students, learning to manage daily activities oneself and interacting with peers was considered to be important.

T1: I think I work a lot with reading because I find that still a basic skill too as to be able to meet text. Then, I also have students who are not going to be able to read so then I'm trying to find other ways. Then in my class, there has been a lot of talk about feelings to understand their selves and others and I think that is also a basic skill in that age.

Students should be able to come together with other people. They are not there yet. So, I guess that's what I'm doing.

T2: I think something that is bothering me really a lot is the reading part. I've read a lot of books to my children. I think it's so important because with good reading skill you get the words and you can argue for things instead of using your fists. I also think that you

understand the world around you.

T3: At least in my class, it's mostly very basic skills like managing some money, keeping keys maybe to an apartment or cleaning your clothes or remembering to clean your hands when you come indoors or before you eat. I would say a lot the biggest challenge usually can become like social skills like interacting with people like in a good way that people enjoy spending time with you, like enjoy being with you. So, a lot of I think at least from what I've got speaking to colleagues, they usually say like social teaching is like the biggest thing we also have four assistants here so we're like six adults and five children here. Teaching them to socialize with different people because they have a routine. Routines also makes that you usually want to spend time with the exact same person because you know what the person is like. There's not going to be many surprises. So at least here I think a lot of what I've tried to concentrate on is just that the students getting along amongst themselves. They can work in different constellations in the classroom and that they don't get anxious around each other. They can maybe share opinions, even though others are listening and those kinds of things.

Through classroom observation, it was seen that a considerable amount of time has been allotted for reading books. There have been reading projects within the classrooms, where teachers read aloud books, and students are asked to read books of different genres. In the special needs classrooms, teachers selected books to read based on a theme. For instance, when the winter season had started, books about the season were being read and during the Snälla vecka (week of kindness), books about emotions were read aloud. In the case of special needs students, they are trained with the objective that they should be able to manage their daily activities on their own. Two other initiatives are held in the school, one is about vänelevs verksamhet (peer collaboration) where two or three students are grouped to meet and work together on some activity and Grade-6 students have a visit to a company to learn about how companies work and their culture.

5.2. Human/Social function

Three aspects within this function have come up. One is about the teacher-student relationship, the second is about the kind of support teachers get in their work and their collaboration with fellow assistant teachers and the third is about the scope for teachers to make decisions at their level while planning the teaching. The common response to student-teacher relationships has been about building trust and getting to know the students individually. It is also been referred to as synonymous with parent-child relationships. In situations of conflict, the

teachers prefer to talk individually with students.

T1: With my students, I find it is very important to have a close relationship. They have to trust me and it's very important that we know each other both inside and outside the classroom. I think it's important to build the relationship outside the classroom because then it also affects the relationship inside the classroom. When it comes to conflicts, they have to trust me to listen to them. So mostly I do it like... I talk to one at a time and listen to both. And when I have done that, I ask them if they are ready to talk better to each other and sometimes they are, sometimes they aren't, but it's better they have both had the possibility to tell me about what has happened and then we can talk together. That's the way to solve it for me in school.

T5: I have heard some kids calling the teachers like Mamma and that shows a big thing like you know...the teacher is spending so much time with the kids after the parents at home. The teachers are spending a big chunk of the day with the kids. So, it's a very important relationship.

T6: It's very important, but if I'm working like with one child very closely, so it depends entirely on me whether that happens anything or not, because they're concentration is all over. But if you think in a normal class, of course, having some respect for the teacher is obvious and I think the teachers could work very much of at least in the beginning, how to work on respect. But also, students respecting other students, because that's the sort of the mindset that comes. But yes, of course the teachers' role is crucial. If you don't like the teacher, you probably don't like the teaching either. I think the teacher really needs to put a lot of effort in understanding a lot of different child's mindsets, and that's a lot.

The support and collaboration for teachers occurs through the assistant teacher system and the supervision system helps teachers to work in cooperation and consensus. The teacher points out that the trust between the assistant teachers and the class teacher matter which has to be two-sided and keeping the expectations clear is important during the work. Although the teacher highlighted that finding a separate time to review there is a challenge which they usually do throughout their work itself. All the class teachers have expressed the importance of having assistant teachers in the classrooms. It helps them to manage various activities in the classroom with ease and students' needs can be attended.

T3: I've had just a ton of help from assistant teachers. They've been very like understanding and helpful. For any collaborative thing in the beginning, you have to kind of find each other and understand how do you think and I think just assuming good

intent in everyone and I feel that's been well, of course I trust that every person working in this school has, like, good intention. But I feel like it's been very clear for everyone that every assistant here just wants their own student to thrive, and they want them to learn as much as they can. I'm always willing to listen because I think they have like a valuable perspective. So, it's been about like reviewing through things. It's usually very quick on the go because the only times we have is like break time or maybe when we're having lunch time or if we're having some like activity that doesn't require very much from the assistance from the adults like the kids can read by themselves that they're doing some activity that they can do on their own. Then usually we're like kind of just discuss and I maybe say like... Oh well, the student has improved it in this or they come and say to me like, yeah, I think this is very challenging for the student.

The third aspect within the human/social function is that of decision-making and planning on the scope for teachers or principals to make decisions at their level.

T2: Well, I think we make decisions almost every minute because when you have students that are in different levels in reading, in maths and everything and it's a lot of work I do without even thinking. Then when I start to think at it, it's like, hmm, yeah, I do it like this. But it happened so automatically since I've worked so long... Most of them are on what we see at the moment and then there are some that are not good when seeing like you reflect on it. I have a certain number of hours in different subjects that I cannot change and that's from the government's decision but then with the core curriculum, I suppose that's lateral planning. I see it like a frame I need to be aware of and I also check back with it, but then with the experience in it I have the ability to see that there's no worries with this part.

Most teachers highlighted that teachers do have the scope to make decisions at their level within the classrooms to address the needs of the students although they do follow the guidelines set in the core curriculum. However, teachers did highlight that the core curriculum is written quite vaguely so that they can set the plan according to the student's needs.

5.3. Political and Cultural function

This function has covered three aspects: one about competition, secondly on values, norms and beliefs and third about cultural-linguistic. The culture of competition is seen quite positively because students must not feel insecure. The prevalent idea exists that every child should learn in the end and competition should be controlled as it can affect students' sense of

self-esteem.

T2: If we are speaking about general like education in general, I don't like competition. I try to find ways or methods to work that don't allow competing because I think it's stressing in that sense that somebody that has learning difficulties will never feel good enough, so I try to plan my work so that they have. There might be five students working in a group and they will only know what those five are doing. They have no idea what the other five over there are doing. But then competition in some sense, you have to have because they will meet competition or find competition anyway and there, I'm quite old fashioned. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. Since there's no money involved, who cares? So I try to be as undramatic as I can, but I like to win also, and I try to also speak that I hated losing. And I wasn't always that nice to the ones that I thought made me lose because I think it's good that they hear that. I wasn't perfect. I'm not perfect still, and I probably never will be. And that's quite good.

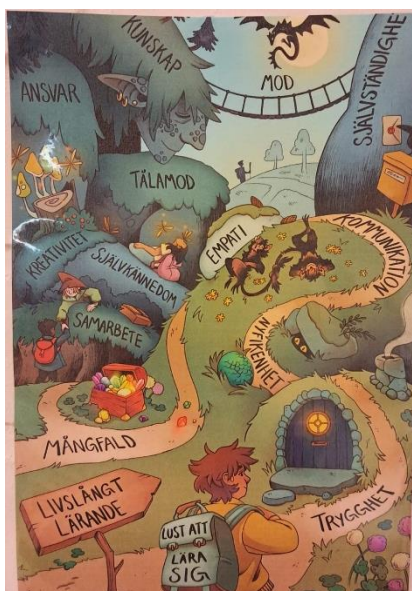
The values, norms and beliefs are done through various initiatives in the school and creating an environment within the classroom and school. A poster has been created about it which is like a roadmap where a student starts and as he/she begins to walk develops an understanding of various aspects of the school ethos. It includes the following: trygghet (safety), nyfikenhet (curiosity), kommunikation (communication), självständighet (independence), mod (courage), kunskap (knowledge), ansvar (responsibility), tålmod (patience), empati (empathy), självkänedom (self-awareness), kreativitet (creativity), samarbete (co-operation), mångfald (interdisciplinary). The objective is that students should have a desire for a life-long learning process. Although class teachers have explained their understanding and not the assistant teachers.

T2: Well, we spent a lot of time to get this värdegrund (foundational values). You probably see the picture and since I've worked that, this is my tenth year here now and it's gotten better and better I think, because I really think that our frames in this school are like really bubbly, and they're also really stretchy. We will find a place for everyone and I really like that. I really like that we're a small school. I know the names of every student here, and if I'm not the right person for this child, there might be another person that will be the one. I think that's a really important thing and I think it might be easier in a smaller school to establish that relationship and we also we start the year when we have the teachers' fortbildning (continuing education). We always bring these subjects up again and go through them and think about them. And I think the most awakening moment for myself was that we talked about having a backpack and my backpack is

filled with my experiences and how I think a family should work and my beliefs. I can't apply what I have here on everyone because everyone has their own. Yeah, and I think that's a thought that you have to have.

Figure 4:

School Ethos poster created by Teachers and Principal



The cultural-linguistic aspect is held through preparatory language courses for students from other countries. It has also been observed that children whose home language is Finnish prefer to speak it but teachers emphasize switching to Swedish within the classroom. For special needs education classes, a lot of emphasis is placed on learning sign language too.

T3: I think at least hearing that there's already even without, like multiculturalism, there is always like bilingualism, you understand there are several languages and that I think everyone kind of innately understands and their strength in knowing. Being able to interact with different groups of people. So, I think there's like an innate understanding of that and I think. In the school in general, there's an understanding in that. There is nothing to lose from having more like having different points of view or having different cultural inputs or having different languages. Of course, it's going to be a little more challenging in the beginning say if you come from a different country and you're trying to learn what like... learn the language and learn like the ways of the culture in the new school. But I think like past the initial challenges I think at least kids are very understanding and like accepting, I think after a while it's just a... it's always net positive.

I think in the long run you have like different experience and different points of view in the classroom. I think the students that speak Finnish well... usually they become friends with other students who also speak Finnish. It's kind of like they have a shared thing. At the same time, it's funny how they probably all still see themselves as Swedish speakers or like that. They don't know that their native language is Swedish... but still at some level, most students who speak Finnish is kind of like their own shared thing. Sometimes I can notice that they think that they're like code language that the adults don't understand when they speak Finnish. But yeah... I don't know at least in Vasa, it's pretty not completely split down the middle, but it's such a large minority of Swedish speakers.

The students who are part of the preparatory course have their schedules designed according to their respective needs. The objective is to introduce students to the Finland-Swedish culture by learning the language.

5.4. Education Function

The Education function includes three aspects where one is about having an orderly atmosphere for conducive learning, the second is about having high expectations about children's achievements and the third is about frequently monitoring students' progress. Through classroom and school observation, it was seen that there is a huge significance given to having quiet classrooms where individuals listen to one another, and raise their hand if someone wants to say something. The school climate is reinforced through various methods such as posters put up in the classroom and corridors as well as how teachers engage in conversation with children to help in creating a student-friendly environment. All the teachers expressed the importance of having expectations for children's achievements.

T4: It's very important to have an expectation of the teacher or as an assistant, or I mean anything can happen. The fact that the child is not so... intellectually intelligent or something doesn't mean it's always going to be... as humans we evolve all the time. So, anything... that's why it's very important for a teacher to have that kind of confidence in the student and the child sees or the students see how confident you are and it motivates them also.

T1: Of course, it's very important and it's also important that they see it, that you have expectation. If they see that she doesn't expect something of me then...they would sink themselves even lower. So yes, it's really important. But if it's too high expectations, it's also can be a bad thing because then if they all the time feel I can't do that and I want

them to but they can't so... then it gets too hard.

The evaluation is held continuously so that students receive feedback. The teachers shared that the assessment format is flexible. In the case of special needs students, teachers get to work closely with students, taking notes about their challenges and achievements. However, teachers mentioned that special needs students require repetition of what they have learnt. Through evaluation what becomes important is to address the needs of the students.

T2: Well, for example, the first graders, they don't get a grade or academic report for Christmas. They just get the ones in the spring. But then, for example, in mother tongue, I gather most of their work and I look through it and then I write about every student what they had worked well with, what the challenges were and what I was particularly pleased with. Then I will do the same, maybe in May, to see how it progressed. I usually give them an assignment; I tell them what I expect. I always give them an evaluation in the middle and I always give them the option. If you want to, you could work with this. If you don't think that it's you, don't you need to... That's your choice and usually they choose to work with it some more. But it's the same that you have to work to get them to realise that I want the best for them, but they can choose it themselves. I would never say that this is bad...do better.

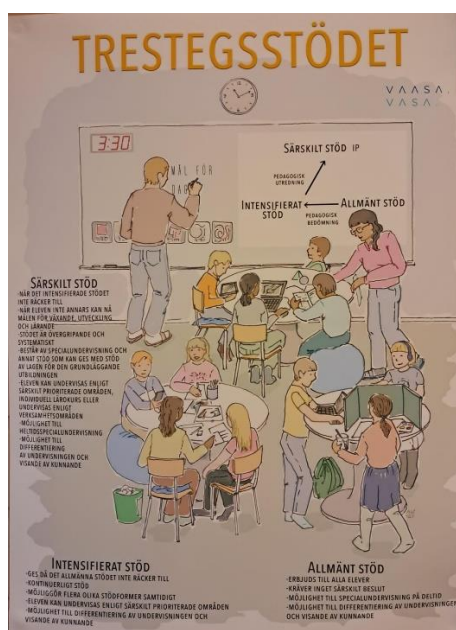
T6: This is an interesting question because I think a lot about these things and I already have a lot of notes since I started with this girl. So, I have a lot of notes on how what I want her to achieve and what is possible to achieve and what needs do I meet and how? How can we proceed with little bit of timetable. But of course, with these special needs children... People may not have expectations...think that they will change you...or think that they will not develop, they will not get any smarter. They will stay. That's not true. So, expectations should always be there and they should always be positive expectation every time.

The evaluation method is also described in the school's annual plan. There are two kinds of assessment: formative and summative. The formative assessment includes methods such as self-evaluation, peer feedback, oral assessment, and portfolio. The summative assessment includes methods such as writing tests, project work, presentations, and essays. One of the important principles that the teaching-learning in the school is based on is the "Three-Step Support" which has:

- General support (Allmänt stöd): applicable to all students, does not require special decisions on their needs, possibility for special teaching part-time.
- Intensified support (Intensifierat stöd): requires continuous support, the possibility for having different kinds of support at the same time, and students can have teaching in special priority areas.
- Special support (Särskilt stöd): When students cannot reach their desired level for development and learning, the support is overall and systematic, students can be taught in a special priority area, can have individual learning courses, and have the possibility for full-time special education teaching.

Figure 5:

Poster created in the local curriculum explaining the “Three-Stage Support” (*Kolmiportainen Tuki Ja Pedagogiset Asiakirjat*, n.d.)



5.5. School Leadership within all Functions

The feature of school leadership is seen to have been present within all functions. The following section describes the general administration work of the principal, its role within the technical/economic function, political and cultural function, human/social function and education function.

5.5.1. Principal's role in Administration

One of the main tasks of the principal involves administrative tasks such as working in collaboration with the municipality functionaries, planning, reviewing and feedback.

5.5.1.1 Working with Municipality Functionaries. This mostly includes working in cooperation with the Education officer, School Director and Sector Manager. The principal has to keep informed the three functionaries about the school's logistical work.

T8: It's a lot of things..sort of you're like a spider. You have your web.. you are in the middle of that. And you can do a lot of it is communication. If you like your communication is not good then it's not going to be a successful project. Whatever the project is. So that's the important thing and I did this drawing. So, we have a lot of people and a lot of things to do what you say...to relate to/deal with (Showing the paper) If we look at this web, here I am as the principal and here is also the other principals of Vasa. We have an Education officer (Undervisnings chef) and School Director (Skol direktor) and the Sektor chef. Then we have the politicians that we work in cooperation with each other. All the arrows go up and down. So, now we have a lot to work in cooperation and communication. If I don't communicate what I am doing in the school, then neither will they know what our school needs. Similarly, for them to know what we are doing here in the school.. So, everything goes like we are connected to each other. So, basically it is about keeping contact, communication and knowing about each other.. What are the other tasks, what is important for them, how can we cooperate and in what, for there are several different things. The politician can also ask the school principals about different things to solve and understand how we function.

5.5.1.2. Planning. Another task that the principal does is planning the tasks about infrastructural, human resources, budget allocation and use, and academic events.

T8: Mostly I do things is about planning. Preparing to plan things together with someone. I mostly plan together with teachers, other principals or education officers and school director. A lot has to do with planning and similarly with the renovation, planning how to make it work. I am also responsible for the staff so I must have development conversation for example with teachers, assistants individually or in group and keep in contact with them. And then there is some economy issues, we have a riksbudget (budget from the state/government) not a salary budget – the salaries are handled via the economy section in Vaasa (city). So that is separate but the economy regarding for

example schools books and chairs I am responsible for allocating.

5.5.1.3. Review and Feedback Mechanism. To know how the performance within the school, is held through discussion with teachers through teacher meetings which are held every week with the class teachers. Teachers are also encouraged to self-evaluation their work and through parent-teacher meetings, they get to understand the specific needs of the students.

T8: Mostly we have discussion..there is something we call development conversation (utvecklingssamtal) in Finland that happen at least once a year to discuss with our own supervisor to think about what is working? What is good? Is there something that needs to become better? If there is something that you want to learn more about. And by doing it regularly it means that we get to know each other quite well but then we can also see different things and from a different perspective so we can develop overall. Then with our teacher group we plan for the next academic year but we also see the previous year how was it that we had decided. What works and what went well? what can we improve? Was there something badly planned? what shall we do differently if we do something again? There is continuous evaluation.. teachers in Finland are also taught to have self-evaluation..how have I worked as a teacher today? was it like I thought?so when you plan your lesson..was it successful? Did I get all the students?did all the students feel good? Was it tedious or difficult? What can I do? So there are many discussions..it is possible to discussion individually with someone..often in Finland it is a bit scared to say something negative..well in group we can do things together..then it is also possible to leave feedback in writing..but a lot comes through discussion..we also have development conversation with students in Jan/Feb with parents to ask what do they like about school, how was it in the beginning, do you have friends? it is comfortable for the students to have parents along with..then also we have well-being staff in case one needs professional help or psychologist..so there are different support system.

However, as an official system to know whether there is any issue within the school, there exists a system within the Municipality. In the situation of a formal complaint, it can be done to an agency called a Regional State Administrative Agencies.

T8: We also have a system if there is something that someone is dissatisfied about, such as a guardian who is unsatisfied with something in school and thinks “now something has gone really bad”, then we have something called Regionsförvaltningsverket (RFV/Regional State Administrative Agencies). They are our control authority. They can

first control us only if they have gotten any complaints. In Sweden, they have school inspections/inspectors who can come anytime to school. But here in Finland it's only if there is a reason to inspect such as through a complaint. Otherwise, you assume that the schools can fix it all themselves. The RFV would send questions to schools and need to answer them.

5.5.2. Principal's role in Technical/Economic and Political, Cultural Function

For the Technical/Economic and Political and Cultural function Principal has set the vision for the school by working in collaboration with the class teachers. According to the Principal, the school ethos poster is the important skills and values that students should develop as part of their life-long learning process. According to the Principal, it is those skills and values that are important for students to be prepared for their working life.

T8: There is something that we did here by creating a poster. There is also in the curriculum small part regarding evaluation and what a person thinks are important to be. There is a section written specifically for students. There is a long version of the text which is difficult for students to understand. For example, a 7-year-old can have a hard time comprehending longer texts and we needed this text from the curriculum to be written in a different way. So, we brainstormed about it with the teachers that we think that students need to understand from this text in addition to knowledge which can be measured but there is also knowledge that cannot be measured. Then we did something like this where you have to be prepared to be a lifelong learner. It is extremely good if one has the desire to learn. These are important things to understand and as a 7-year-old it's especially important to feel like it's fun to learn new things. And then we thought further about what are things you need to carry with you: we need safety that's why we have a home here, be curious and think if I need to learn something, communication, empathy and then you can be independent, be courageous (courage to do what you think is important in life), have knowledge, take responsibility for self and others, have patience and try several times if it is hard, then you need creativity and then knowing one self- what do I like? What is important for me? And that you can work together and we believe in our school that everyone should have their capabilities that they need and it is good that we are unique and here is the treasure box. So, we try to adapt the text from the curriculum so we can discuss with the students at their level. Of course we can read out from the thick book.. Oh this is important but then you don't understand what it is talking about. Now we try to work with this here and we put it for two weeks during this

academic year when we work with things that have to do with student health, school rules and then of course things such anti-bullying, to encourage group play/activities and be social as well as how to behave when you are online.

The principal also mentioned that recently, there was Finland's Presidential election where students were asked to cast their votes for the person who could win. An opinion poll of students was organized demonstrating how conversation around political events is also encouraged.

For students with immigrant backgrounds, the preparatory course has been set up in collaboration with the Vasa Municipality. The principal states that having preparatory courses helps to build a bridge between students of immigrant backgrounds the native students.

T-8: In this school we have the preparatory course.. We have students from different countries..we cannot really decide for the parents by saying that if you have moved to Finland..oh you need to do like this..except we can show these are the possibilities how we do it here. My perspective at least is that anything/anyone that comes here is a learning possibility for us and we are richer for that. We can maybe try to understand another way and we have developed. As the world has become more global and to consider that for the students future working life in Finland where they may work with someone who is not from Finland and it is good to have had an experience with others from other countries. That we do not need to be scared, it is ok that someone is different from me – it's not weird, it is just different and one can learn from each other, that is very important especially for tiny Finland to have contact with people from other countries.

5.5.3. Principal's role in Human/Social Function

In the Human/Social function, the principal describes the various initiatives held for the well-being of students, how teachers have a support system called the handledning system (collegial/supervision system) for their work and how the decision-making process takes place.

5.5.3.1. Well-being. It has been described as one of the most important aspects where the school organizes various events and there are health care professionals who work in the school. Organizing activities such as kindness week, discussion on anti-bullying, and taking care of one's mental and emotional health are held in the school. There is a big emphasis on positive psychology where teachers are also encouraged to use different materials as part of their teaching work.

T8: We did this with these weekly themes mentioned earlier and I have a program (shows the paper) for what could be organised during the snälla veckan in August and January, such as understanding school rules- why do we have rules? then well-being rules which is little easier to understand and then what can we do to stop bullying. Every student should have at least one adult that is their safe adult at the school so that they know if something has happened, must tell something and know whom I can go to. Here is something that we have where we have bought many materials that can be used but it's up to the teacher to use them when they are suitable. So we have about mindfulness, use of phone and internet, student well-being, anti-bullying, foundational values, to feel good and take care of one self, sometimes we do it with the healthcare provider on what to do in order to feel good, managing daily routine, sleep and all other things, we have also had about how to build strong individuality where the program is called pepp which is also for preventing drug use, so we have had different lecturers that come to different classes and talk about for example that students can have their own opinions, don't need to have another person's point of view. Part of it is that maybe you already know about the different types of drugs, then to know if it is good or not good, and then to also be so strong in myself that I don't even need to experiment with drugs. Then we have also worked with positive psychology.. part of teacher's continuing education to build up teacher's knowledge and skillset, stories about movements using body, emotional skills and stories about feelings, how one can be a good friend, relate with other, then we have about first aid, also psychological first aid, student care before they start class have their psychologist/kurator, with older students about feelings and empathy, some telephone game, book about understanding oneself, life knowledge...there are a lot many... So, the teacher's task is to be ready to understand how is it with my group, what do they need? one can discuss what do they think? What is fun? Also, one needs to know what do they need, everyone for example needs knowledge, self-knowledge and form the teaching that is suitable for them... Many of the things that we have now has come through the continuing education of the teachers. Some of them have been suggested to the teachers/schools externally and also through development conversation with teachers about what they think is important. Recently, we have had a guest lecturer to take a session on positive psychology.

5.5.3.2. Support system for teachers. An important part of teacher professional development is through the handledning system or supervision system set up for teachers. This is a hand-holding system for teachers who newly join within the school that helps them to do their work better. A newly joined assistant teacher would require orientation about the student that they will work with or to manage admin-related work for which such a system helps to facilitate their work more easily.

T8: Now we have many assistants who work here... Some of them have lot of education and many have general education which is very short. And as it turns out for example special education is this wide: you can have a child who has mobility impairment, a child who cannot speak, etc. And then it takes many years of experience to know everything – not that anyone knows everything. That is why we have many teachers who have supervisor training and so do I so that we can help each other. So, if a school assistant (skolgångshandledare) has got a new student...and let's say the student has autism so one can feel it is challenging if you haven't worked with this before and you need someone to go talk to so that you don't need to have it with yourself. Then one can also ask for support from the class teacher, sit and discuss about what one can do in different situation... then we can have a new teacher who has not worked for long, and we know in Finland there are many different bureaucratic documents, things to fill in and you are not quite familiar with it all or maybe forgotten then may ask for help I would think... so one can come ask me or some other colleague and I think that works fine...so one need not feel oh I am so bad at this, I feel instead happy because then that means you want to learn more.

5.5.3.3. Decision-making. There is a scope for the principal to decide on certain aspects but there are activities suggested in the local curriculum as well as guidelines from the national core curriculum which need to be followed. The curriculum guides about what needs to be done but there is flexibility in how it can be done.

T8: Often when you think about what must be done, most of it is already in the curriculum. Then there can be some small things that municipality can decide on. Vasa has the energy industry and an objective to work in cooperation with industries around energy here and they have seen that it can be good to involve schools in it somehow. For example, in high school they might have weekly themes specifically around energy. So, these small things the municipality can decide on. We have chosen in Vasa, and

politicians have been involved here as well, to have an optional subject for Grade-5 around entrepreneurship/enterprise to understand how does the community work- where does the money comes from, why should we pay tax and then in Grade-6 you can go to the company village (Företagsbyn) where the students can roleplay having their own company. And then later in high school you can create your own company, handle the economics etc. But this is quite specific for Vasa, that this is what we would like to do in schools.

It's quite strict regarding following the curriculum. Of course, the municipality can decide how to do various things. The foundation of the curriculum we cannot change or do anything about. We can't say "oh we won't have math for this year" that won't work. It's specified in the curriculum for example how many hours you must teach in Finnish subject, Math subject. But there is a little room for municipalities to decide on small things and municipalities can also choose to add more hours. Teaching hours cost money of course so the municipality can decide to for example set 2 hours for Finnish for Grade 1 instead of the minimum hours decided in the curriculum. Then you add more hours but you also incur more costs for yourself (the municipality).

5.5.4. Principal's role in Education Function

In the Education function, the principal describes how teachers are prepared when they study to become teachers which helps in the later stages of working as a teacher. There is flexibility for teachers to design the planning, use as many teaching-learning resources and have self-evaluation for one's work which is taught in the teacher education programme in Finland.

T8: The teachers in Finland have a good education so that is the foundation...so that has been mine...we have had the same education so we can help each other. In Finland all principals have a teacher background or teacher education and I believe that is good because it gave me a good understanding about the challenges in the job, background, education and if we need anything more. We are always learning the whole time and I believe that we should have that kind of climate to learn in school and that we are present in many ways so that we can also learn as teachers. I believe that students also see how my teachers are doing, for example when we had the reading project... It is important that teachers also show that we read and it is important that we read, although we read different things so the teacher is not just sitting and correcting maths tests but also reading. It is not a good example that students are reading and the teacher is not... Then

we have a feedback/follow-up system in Finland within special ed teaching where we test the basic knowledge in mother tongue, Math literacy and that is maybe our speciality in Finland, to make sure that everyone is together (att alla kommer med). And as a teacher it is important to learn to self-evaluate how successful is my teaching-is it good? And then also for me as a principal to think how successful is my work as a principal-has it been good?

5.6. Defining School Effectiveness

The teachers and principal share that school effectiveness is about working together, and continuing to learn with shared understanding for the well-being of every person involved in the process of teaching-learning.

T8: It contains a lot of things school effectiveness. You can think about effectiveness sorts of bring my thoughts to thinking about numbers and figures. But it's so much more in the school, right. You're just and I wouldn't ever want my students to think about themselves as a number or a figure. They are so much more. Yes. And that's the thing that we will also. I would like to think that they could... the measures and the numbers they are, of course they're important, but there are so much more in a human being that is so much more important. So, the effectiveness and the school effectiveness is so much more than numbers. It's also kind of a well-being, you have more chances and opportunities if you're feeling well and if you're if you're... You think well about yourself if you think well about your co-students and about your teachers and your life. Yeah. Yes. So that it's really many bits. If you if you go down to bits in school of effectiveness then you can get a lot of studies about very different.

T6: If you attain the Goals that are set up for. The school for the season, let's say or for the. For the special education or for the child in somehow that you can attain those goals, then then it's effective depending on what your goals of course, what your aims are.

T3: I think it's a like a strength in that every teacher here, even if they're not in special education or even if they don't have students from different country or like student from elsewhere, integrated into their class. I think still everyone has a good understanding of the fact that everyone has needs. Every student has different needs, even if not that explicit, as in they they're in a special education class where they have another mother tongue, I think it brings an understanding in every teacher here that every student needs. I feel like I'm still. Learning. I feel like I'm trying to mostly what I'm trying to focus on is just. Trying to understand and be supportive adult as much as I can to the students and

but at the same time. I think I'm very much at the end like in the start of started the road, so I still see myself as like learning from the other teachers and they're very generous in how much they're willing to support me. So, I would say. I would say I'm most learning still.

T2: I think as a teacher you have to have the ability to look at details as well as the big picture. You can't just choose one of. Them OK. And I think that you have to know that even though I want or I wish for a child the best. I can only. Handle a certain part of their life. I can't change their home. I can't change the economical situation. I have to be here and now. And even though I think things that happened at home are wrong, that's not my place. To try to change and reboot the parents, for example.

T1: I can say some things that for the classroom situation to be effective, if I would tell about every student. Different things you are going to work with this lesson you are going to do this... you are going to do this and then we have half the lesson and nothing has happened. So, one way of being more effective there is that I have the notebooks for my assistant teachers and they can read. I have this student to work with this lesson and we are going to do this then they can start with it. Another way of being more effective is maybe when you have when you cooperate with other teachers so. Instead of trying to find all the teachers and tell them the same thing, maybe put it in a mail or a message to everyone.

The perception of school effectiveness of school teachers and the principal pertains to factors that go beyond the teaching-learning process and most importantly catering to the needs of the students.

To sum, in the interview with seven teachers, the principal described how the five functions of school effectiveness are held. They shared about how various systems and mechanisms are created within the school to help children attain better learning. The pre-determined five themes and the feature of school leadership/administration are seen to contribute to school effectiveness. The following section will describe connecting the perception with the theory.

6. Discussion

This study aimed to understand the perception of school teachers and the principal about the concept of school effectiveness. As discussed in the theoretical framework section about school effectiveness concept, Cheng (1996) explained school effectiveness is about understanding how well school functions are being performed (Cheng, 1996). The five functions

and their respective features are technical/economic function (acquisition of basic skills), human/social function (student-teacher relationship and teacher cooperation and consensus), political function (school ethos), cultural function (school ethos) and education function (conducive atmosphere for learning, expectation from students, monitoring students' progress). The results of the five school functions along with the features of an effective school demonstrated that these are significant aspects to consider to understand school effectiveness. It also showed that when a school has the scope to decide on its functioning based on the contextual needs, it enables school to perform better. However, the core curriculum remains the guiding principle for teachers and principals to execute the school functions and depending on the school requirements various systems and mechanisms have been created.

The perception of school effectiveness by teachers and the principal covers all five functions as significant for a school to function effectively. They define how it is about giving importance to the physical, emotional and mental well-being of students which requires teachers and the principal to work in collaboration. It is also important that the school has a vision and that it works for and helps students to continue learning even in their working life. As Cheng defines how the school functions are performed as the basis for school effectiveness, it shows that various constituencies work individually and at the organisational level in performing the functions. Thus, Engeström's theory of CHAT describes that individual actions work together towards a collective that could be understood through the perceptions was evident in the finding (Engeström, 2001).

The two interacting activity systems as shown in Figure 3 have been reflected in the responses of how the principal's work is affected by the policies, law, municipality, and guidelines of the curriculum by supporting teachers. The work of teachers is also affected by the teaching methods, core curriculum, parents, and policies to teach students in a better way. While Cheng's concept of school effectiveness could be seen in the work done by various constituencies, Engeström's theory can be seen as an overarching idea where the school functions are not distinct from each other but rather interconnected.

As discussed in the theoretical review section, the CHAT theory looks at the interactions taking between professionals where there is a constant connection between its core idea of learning, communicating and acting (Foot, 2014). The constituencies of the school system- municipality functionaries, principals, class teachers, and assistant teachers have their respective functions to perform by learning, communicating and acting and simultaneously intertwined with the work of one another. However, all the constituencies are working with a vision and towards the goals of student learning. This becomes the crux of school effectiveness.

6.1. Technical/Economic Function

As discussed in the literature review section, Cheng (1996) defines Technical/Economic functions as to how schools prepare students for the working life, for which they need to be equipped with basic skills. The teachers and principal pointed out the importance of literacy and social skills as extremely necessary. Students must be prepared to deal with listening, reading, writing and comprehension. Along with this, students should be prepared to work in a group where they can express themselves and learn to get along with others. There has been a huge emphasis on reading where children are heavily encouraged to read books and so do the teachers. Being a Swedish-medium school, it is considered quite important to strengthen the mother tongue to prepare for using the language in working life.

The findings of school/class observation showed that various activities are organized such as week of kindness, and peer collaboration where students can learn how to work in a group. This is also an essential skill that the teachers and principal consider to be important because working with other people also helps to build other related skills such as making decisions, negotiating, and learning to agree or disagree. Students from special education classes are also grouped which helps to build sensitivity of working with individuals who may have various challenges. In the case of special needs education, teachers expressed how students should be able to manage their daily activities. Teachers highlighted that it is essential that students get enough chances to practice any skill. A similar finding has been highlighted by Ananiadou & Claro (2009) that the twenty-first century which includes collaboration, communication, ICT literacy, and social/cultural skills is indeed extremely relevant for students (Ahonen & Kinnunen, 2015).

Other activities in the school include students learning to do craft work- metal/wood and embroidery which helps students to develop motor skills. Students are also involved in sports activities that can also give a glimpse for students to create an interest in the sports profession. Similarly, the students visit companies to understand the work culture and they have events at school where they can make their products and sell them. This helps to orient towards the idea of managing businesses.

One of the important findings in technical/economic function is that students should be able to get an orientation about different kinds of professions. An interesting aspect of the school is students with special needs should also be prepared and be able to foster some skills so that they can also work in some independent manner in the future. With the increase in the advancement of artificial intelligence, this would become an integral part of future work but then schools will need to prepare students to use it in safe and ethical manners in the coming times.

6.2. Human/Social Function

As discussed in the literature review section, Cheng (1996) defines Human/Social function on how schools help students to develop psychologically, socially and physically and helping them develop their potential as fully as possible. According to Cheng (1996), a school is a social entity that is composed of different human relationships (Cheng, 1996). This function comprising of the features of student-teacher relationship, teacher collaboration and consensus can be observed in the responses where teachers mention student-relationship as an important aspect where they need to get to know the student to build trust.

Vygotsky (1978) points out, that the interaction between student and teacher stimulates cognitive development. When teachers know their students well, it helps them to cater to the needs of the students (Choi & Han, 2023). This was evident in the findings that there is an advantage when the number of students in the classroom is low, it helps teachers to build a better rapport with the students. Moreover, in the case of special needs students, they have their personal assistant throughout the school day which is intensive work. One of the special needs assistant teachers mentioned that she was noting how the student is developing an interest in painting. The assistant teacher motivates her to explore painting which gives a motivation for the student to learn further. In the whole school, there is a culture in which teachers and students know each other. There has been an initiative in the school where a student will have a teacher that they can reach out to if students experience any kind of problem. The teacher would be like a trusted adult which can also help in situations when any dispute occurs between students.

The second aspect of this function is that of teacher cooperation and consensus. In the assistant teacher system, class teachers work together with the assistants. They need to have a joint understanding and, based on the situation or requirement involved, they discuss and work accordingly. As Johnson (2003) points out, working in collaboration provides support, enhances teacher morale and more chances to learn from each other, the findings showed that class teachers having assistant teachers is a very big support in their work but they also shared in the challenge of having separate review-feedback meetings due to the lack of time (Ramberg et al., 2019).

Most teachers agreed that the national curriculum has been written quite vaguely or broadly. This has given the scope for teachers to make decisions about planning and classroom proceedings. In special education classrooms, the class teachers have a dialogue with the assistant teacher enables them to make decisions based on the situation. This flexibility helps to a large extent in working towards a better learning of the students.

6.3. Political Function and Cultural Function

As discussed in the literature review section, Cheng (1996) defines Political function school as a place for students to help understand political events happening around and about different ethnic-linguistic group rights. Cheng (1996) defines Cultural function as schools helping students to develop norms, values and beliefs of society. Both functions have been combined because of their interrelatedness in this study. The feature that both functions comprise is that of school ethos.

Donnelly (2000) defines school ethos as a distinctive range of values and beliefs that define the philosophy or atmosphere (Donnelly, 2000). The findings demonstrated that the school puts a good effort into maintaining the school ethos. Initiatives such as kindness week (snälla vecka) and student-friendly work (vänleivsverksamhet) help to build a culture of respect and a helping environment. During classroom and school observation, it was seen that there were several posters put up inside the classrooms and corridors about the need to be kind and have a friendly environment with classmates.

An interesting aspect has been about understanding the culture of competition where all the teachers highlighted it exists in a very healthy manner because the self-esteem of students should not be affected in a harmful manner. So, it is not encouraged much among the students. It was also observed in the classroom that all students getting a task done was given priority which indicates how creating and maintaining a certain culture is extremely important to help children attain positive experiences.

Another aspect that has been included in these functions is that of cultural-linguistic. The celebration of Lucia Day is an important event that teaches about Finland's Swedish tradition. Similarly, there are several popular children's literature books from Sweden which are also well-known in Finland's Swedish-speaking region help to orient students with learning the culture.

The school being a Swedish-medium also has children from Finnish-speaking families. Students prefer to speak in their respective mother tongue outside the classroom, indicating ease with their mother tongue. It shows that students' home background does contribute to the development of linguistic understanding. For students who come from other countries, there is a system with language preparatory courses where the school helps students learn the Swedish language so that they can join the classes full-time. However, there is a challenge for foreign students in interacting with their classmates which could also mean that students from other countries take time to understand the culture of a new place.

6.4. Education Function

As discussed in the literature review section, Cheng (1996) defines Education function as schools helping students to learn how to learn and help teachers in how to teach. One of the fundamental principles based on which the Finnish education system functions is the "Three-Stage Support" where teachers should be able to design the planning according to the needs of the students. The school has a system of separate classes for special needs students with an assistant teacher for each student and the number of students ranging from 15-20 in other classes is an important aspect for effectively conducting the teaching-learning. This gives the possibility for teachers to give sufficient attention and work according to the needs of the students.

Three aspects have been focused on in the education function which include: students having a conducive atmosphere for learning, having high expectations for students' achievements and frequent monitoring of students' progress. The conducive environment is about the kind of school climate that can enable better learning. According to Younas et al., when a classroom is characterized by congenial, supportive, harmonious social relationships, it is conducive to academic achievement which was evident in the findings (Younas et al., 2013). The classroom and school observations showed that students are encouraged to remain calm and have a helping attitude towards their peers. This is reinforced in the way how teachers talk to the students, through posters put up in the classrooms and corridors to enable students to put it into practice. When students feel pleasant being with peers, it is observed to enhance motivation for students to learn.

The other aspect of better learning is teachers' expectations of students. Most of the teachers have expressed on the need to have expectations that students will progress. However, teachers did point out that expectations should not make students feel overwhelmed. As Urhahne (2015) points out teachers' behaviour towards the student does communicate their expectations affecting their motivation and achievement outcomes (Hornstra et al., 2018). This was evident in the responses of teachers on how children's learning is also dependent on the motivation they have by the way teachers behave towards them.

The third aspect of the education function is that of frequently monitoring students' progress. As Furey & Loftus-Rattan (2022) points out students when actively involved in progress monitoring through goal setting and feedback can enable improved academic and motivational outcomes (Furey & Loftus-Rattan, 2022). The findings showed that the evaluation system in the school is based on giving qualitative feedback. In the example given in Section 6.2 where the assistant teacher motivates the student to explore painting creating an interest for it. Students have both formative and summative assessments. Teachers observing how students'

progress gives feedback for the teachers themselves to know how to modify their teaching. A qualitative discussion with assistant teachers is also an added advantage in the evaluation methods.

6.5. School Leadership and Administration

One of the most important features of the school effectiveness is the school's leadership and administration. As Ramberg et al., 2019 point out the effects of school leadership are indirect as they influence student learning by helping to promote vision and goals and ensuring that the resources and processes are in place to help teachers to teach well (Ramberg et al., 2019). The findings demonstrated that school principal is involved in a variety of tasks such as administration, managing logistics and resources, setting vision and supporting teachers.

The principal works in rapport with the municipality functionaries by keeping updated about developments at the school and does the annual plan for the school. Although the broad guidelines set in the national and local curriculum are followed but have the scope to organize activities according to the schools' needs. However, the task of a principal significantly revolves around planning various aspects of the school's functioning and then ensuring that the work is being implemented. Thus, one of the crucial roles of school leadership is to be a bridge between different constituencies.

Another significant role of the principal is to set a vision for the school. The principal considers it to be important that the school should encourage students to have a desire for lifelong learning. Moreover, the school aims to develop the full potential of students and help them to achieve it whenever they require support or even a challenge. The principal's task is to convey this idea to the teachers and students. This has been done through the school ethos poster developed where teachers and principals have conversations around it with students on various occasions. Due to these students understand various values that they are supposed to do while being at school or home. Goldring and Pasternak (1994) also found that when the principal frames a goal and establishes a clear mission can lead to better school outcomes which has been evident in the finding (Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

As discussed in Section 3.4.1., distributive leadership supports the professional capacity building of teachers, and helps to create an active engagement of teachers (Lahtero et al., 2019). The findings showed that working in cooperation with teachers is an important work for the school principal. Most of the teachers highlighted that the support for their work occurs through a handledning system (supervision system) where they can reach out to their handledare (supervisor) in situations of challenges in the teaching-learning. The school principal conducts weekly meetings with the class teachers which is a platform for teachers to get information, raise

concerns, get delegate different tasks. However, the principal is meant to work in cooperation with the municipality functionaries which has given the possibility to make certain decisions at the school level but following the broad guidelines. The teachers take an active role in the work delegated to them which could be a result of the work culture that has been created.

6.6. Limitations and Further Implications

The concept of school effectiveness is quite broad and as defined by Cheng, various aspects could be looked into. Most previous studies on school effectiveness have employed quantitative or mixed methods. However, due to the limited scope, this study did not measure any of the aspects of school effectiveness but aimed to gain deep insight into how the principal and the teachers perceive effectiveness within their school. In addition, future studies could include perceptions of parents, and municipality functionaries such as the school director, and education officer to get a full picture of how the school functions effectively. Perhaps, a comparison between Swedish-medium and Finnish-medium schools could have provided a picture to see patterns between schools of two different languages.

Future studies could also explore school functions from students' perspective to understand how students could be prepared for the working life and the gaining significance of twenty-first-century skills, how students need to be prepared to work in collaboration, how students understand their rights and values so that they build a better understanding as the world is witnessing constantly changing political and cultural events. Most importantly how education function can address in catering to the needs of the students could be explored.

One interesting aspect that has been found in the current study is the flexibility for schools to make decisions based on the context by keeping note of the curriculum guidelines. This could be further explored by looking at the impacts of decentralization policy. Moreover, the fact that the Finnish education system received international attention raises the question of whether standardized assessment can be the only parameter for an education system to be called as performing well. A greater significance for standardized testing can lead towards working for performing well in the test and this needs to be explored further if there has been a shift in the teaching-learning process for the international standardized assessment.

7. Appendix

7.1. Interview Questions for the Principal

1. Could you please share briefly about your role?
2. What is School Effectiveness according to you?
 - What do you think are factors contributing to a school functioning effectively?
3. What is the role of a principal? Responsibilities? Bridging between Municipality and School
 - What are the different kinds of administrative tasks that you have to do in your work as a principal?
4. Which are the different areas where school gets to take decisions at the school level?
 - Are there any must be followed or done rules? (Scope for school to take decision at their level and how much obligation to follow the municipalities and national demands)
5. How are the different functions achieved/held in the school?
 - a. How do you think a principal contributes to preparing children for the working life?
 - b. What are the skills that children need for the working life? How does the school help to learn those skills?
 - c. How does a principal you take into consideration helping children in their psycho-socio-emotional development?
 - d. How does a principal contribute to helping children in building citizenship education? What kind of citizen that want children to become?
 - e. What are the vision or goals of the school?
 - f. How does a principal set the vision or goals for the school?
 - g. How does a principal contribute to helping children in learning to learn and for teachers learn how to teach?
6. How would you assess this school?
 - Is there a school performance assessment? Or a review of how 'well' the school has performed annually?
7. How has decentralization has affected or contributed to school functioning effectively?
8. As we have children of different cultures and linguistic backgrounds, how is multilingualism understood?
9. Could you explain the structure of the organogram of the Finnish education system?
 - How much power does Principal in decision making?

- How does the political situation contribute to the changes in education system? E.g. Policies introduced, Core Curriculum
10. Is there anything that you would like to add- your role in how you contribute to school effectiveness?

7.2. Interview Questions for the Class Teacher

1. Could you please share briefly about your role in the school?
2. What is School Effectiveness according to you?
 - Topic
 - Different things that make the school run effectively
3. What kind of different decision-making do you get to take in your everyday work at school?
 - When a decision is made how does it happen effectively translated into the classroom?
 - Decisions that you get to take independently
 - How much do you refer to the Core Curriculum? How much do you have the freedom to decide the planning at your level?
 - What kind of support system do you get from the school principal?
 - Do you expect any more support?
4. What do you think are the basic skills that children should develop?
 - How do teachers contribute to develop them?
 - How do teachers help in building 21st century skills?
5. How important is the student-teacher relationship in helping student's learning?
 - Within and outside classroom?
 - When there are disputes between students
 - Competition between students (how much do you think competition is required?)
6. What the important values/norms/beliefs of the school?
 - How do teachers help in building them?
7. How do you work in collaboration with your assistant teacher?
 - Could me tell me about how do you do the lesson planning (annual/term/daily)
 - How much does it help to have an assistant teacher?
 - Challenges of working with assistant teacher
8. How do you assess the progress of students?
 - How do you set targets when there are students with learning levels?

9. How important is it to have expectation about the children's learning progress?
10. As we have children of different cultures and linguistic backgrounds, how is multilingualism understood?
11. Is there anything that you would like to add- your role in how you contribute to school effectiveness?

7.3. Interview Questions for the Assistant Teacher

1. Could you please share briefly about your current role in the school?
2. What is School Effectiveness according to you?
 - Topic
 - Different things that make the school run effectively
3. What do you think are the basic skills that children should develop?
 - How do teachers contribute to develop them?
 - How do teachers help in building 21st century skills?
4. How important is the student-teacher relationship in helping student's learning?
 - Within and outside classroom?
 - When there are disputes between students
 - Competition between students (how much do you think competition is required?)
5. What the important values/norms/beliefs of the school?
 - How do teachers help in building them?
6. How do you understand the progress happening in children's learning or behavior?
7. How important is it to have expectation about the children's learning progress?
8. Collaboration with co-teacher
9. As we have children of different cultures and linguistic backgrounds, how is multilingualism understood?
10. Is there anything that you would like to add?

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