

# **Finland and Singapore, Two Different Top Countries of PISA and the Challenge of Providing Equal Opportunities to Immigrant Students**

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## **Abstract**

*International student achievement comparisons have aroused interest widely across the world. Finland dominated the comparisons for a long time but now Asian countries have fared better. Both countries studied have faced abundant immigration, which has changed the student groups. In this article, we compare two quite different top countries: Finland and Singapore. How do immigrant children succeed at school? How do the Finnish and Singaporean educational systems support their academic success? Our purpose is to discuss these countries' educational systems in the light of immigrant students' study success. The review showed that the Finnish system can provide profound support for learning among immigrant children and that the strength of the Singaporean system is in the adoption of high aspiration and motivation to strive for success. Both systems provide opportunities to succeed at school, but opportunities to participate and willingness to integrate may also be the keys to academic success.*

**Keywords:** *PISA; Finland; Singapore; immigrant student; study success*

## **Introduction: What makes Finland and Singapore special?**

Every year countries compete against each other in various international student comparisons. It seems that some countries tend to perform better than others do, but the success of the students cannot be concluded only by looking at the

education system: there are quite different ideologies among the most successful countries for example in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (see e.g., Sellar and Lingard 2013). In today's world, the student groups have become more and more heterogeneous, too. Our interest in this article is in the immigrant students' study achievements in PISA top countries. It seems that Finland, representing a Scandinavian welfare system, alongside East Asian countries can be found at the top of the ranking. Singapore represents the best East Asian country in this sense. In addition to their differences in educational systems, the immigration structure in Finland and Singapore is different, which will be explained in further detail later in this paper. We selected these two countries to analyze what could be the determining factors to support immigrant students' study success. This information is crucial if we want to ensure that every student has the opportunity to do well at school.

## **Background of Study Success and Immigration in Finland and Singapore**

### **Case Study Finland**

As mentioned, the Finnish educational system has succeeded extremely well in international comparisons (Kupiainen, Hautamäki and Karjalainen 2009) and Finland has been claimed to be the top country of education (Kämppi et al. 2012; Lavonen and Laaksonen 2009). Recognition for this success belongs also to the Finnish teacher training system, which has been the subject of worldwide interest after the aforementioned international comparisons of pupils' academic achievements were published (Uusiautti and Määttä 2013). However, the Finnish society is changing fast and students are more heterogeneous than ever, due to increasing immigration (Valtiontalouden tarkastusvirasto 2015). New methods and approaches are being introduced in the curriculum (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014, 2014) and in teacher training and the teachers' work (see e.g., Leskisenoja 2016; Taskinen 2017).

According to the latest statistics provided by the Finnish Immigration Service (2018), the immigrant arriving to Finland are mainly from Russia and Iraq, followed by somewhat equal numbers coming from China, India, Afghanistan, Vietnam, and Somalia. The National Audit Office of Finland has recently published a report about how immigrant children learn in Finnish schools (Valtiontalouden tarkastusvirasto 2015). The purpose was to find out how the general goal of equal education becomes fulfilled among immigrant students in Finland. In this study, the learning outcomes in PISA 2012 of immigrant students and Finnish original population were compared. According to the analysis, 15-year-old immigrant students' skills in math, reading, and science are clearly weaker than those of students in the original population, even when the main background factors, such as gender, grade, socio-economic background, home language and age when arriving in Finland were standardized. Therefore, it is not just the matter of whether immigrants form so-called poor communities but how the children adjust to the host country and especially its school culture and standards.

Similar differences have been found in other European countries too (e.g., Meunier 2011). However, the differences in learning outcomes have increased in Finland more than in any other European country (Valtiontalouden tarkastusvirasto 2015), which makes Finland an interesting comparison point here.

One critical viewpoint to the fall of the PISA test scores in the Scandinavian countries suggests that it could be caused by the increased number of immigrant children who have not been fully assimilated into the host society (Brunello and Rocco 2013). For example, Entorf and Miniou (2004) noted in their international comparison of immigrant students' achievements about 15 years ago that one reason for the Finnish success was that it was "a country which is

almost unaffected by major immigration flows” (p. 3). After that immigration has increased in Finland considerably, but question is how well the Finnish society has considered the new demands and expectations set for education sufficiently and successfully? Finland’s school system has been widely admired (Sahlberg 2010). However, researchers such as Chung (2010) warn that uncritical educational policy borrowing is not reasonable without the analysis of current and overall situation (see also Pereyra, Kotthoff and Cowen 2011) as well as familiarity with the past, the history of education in the country (Sahlberg 2010). Andrews (2014) even reminds, that “it is naïve to assume that success on any form of international test is a guarantee of transferable pedagogical quality” (p. 43).

### Case Study Singapore

Likewise, Singapore is on the top of the educational success according to the PISA report. The PISA report itself creates a need to make a comparative study between the Asian and European educational systems, which could be a significant new reference of a new society for Europe. The educational system of Singapore is often linked to cultural factors, and the structural functionalism of school is different, emphasizing the goals of the parents and the children and their motivation. Both educational systems are different, yet the outcome is the same.

Singapore is a super diverse country with 64% of foreigners (Yeo 2016). Immigrants to Singapore mainly come from China (Yeoh and Lin 2013). Therefore, the situation in Singapore is quite different than in Finland. While Singapore has achieved top results in PISA with a huge number of immigrant students, Finland’s falling PISA test scores have been explained by the increasing number of immigrant children.

According to an empirical examination of data, the immigrant students in Singapore fare better than native students (Cheng 2017), which is the opposite of Finland. In Finland, the academic achievements of second-generation immigrant children are better than first generation. However, overall the immigrant children seem to learn best when they become well integrated in the schools. Immigrants who are segregated in bilingual classrooms while engaging with classmates of the host countries tend to perform better academically than immigrant students who experience immediate language immersion at school. Usually the immigrant community tends to be the poor community in the host society. There is a negative effect of the socio-economic status of parents on the education of immigrant students (OECD 2015a, 2015b). Immigrant students with comparatively better socio-economic status achieve better scores than non-immigrant peers with the same socio-economic status. Some factors may change in the school composition.

### The purpose of this article

Since immigrant and non-immigrant students in top-scoring countries fare differently in academic sense, it is reasonable to discuss and try to find the key areas that support learning and that could be shared with other countries.

Therefore, we analyze factors that make Singapore and Finland successful with and without academic achievement of immigrant students in the two different systems.

In this article, we discuss the differences between the Finnish and Singaporean education systems in the light of immigrant children's school success (see also Ciccone and Garcia-Fontes 2009). The following research questions are set for this study:

(1) What are the main features of education systems and immigration in Finland and Singapore?

(2) What are the main factors explaining students' success in PISA comparisons in the Finnish and Singaporean educational systems?

(3) How does immigrant children's school success appear in the light of the aforementioned factors?

The purpose is to discuss how to support immigrant children's success at school and which factors can be highlighted as good practices generally from this perspective.

## **Finnish and Singaporean Educational Systems**

### The Finnish educational system

The Finnish educational system rests on the welfare state tradition of the Nordic countries stressing, for example, diminishing inequality in education and in other areas of life (Rinne, Kivirauma and Simola 2002; Sahlberg 2010). Thus, in Finland, education is a public service, and general education, vocational education, and higher education are free of charge (see the chart of the Finnish Education System,

[http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Koulutus/koulutusjaerjestelmae/liitteet/finnish\\_education.pdf](http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Koulutus/koulutusjaerjestelmae/liitteet/finnish_education.pdf)). Basic education, upper secondary education, and vocational education are financed by the state and local authorities (municipalities). General education and vocational education are provided by local authorities, while universities are autonomous and financed by the government.

Municipalities are the providers of basic education. Providers of education and schools set up their own curricula based on the national core curriculum. That means that schools can have their own profiles, such as science or music education (Jakku-Sihvonen and Niemi 2006; see also Määttä and Uusiautti 2012). According to the Finnish Education Act (628/1998), all children in

Finland have to go to school at the age of seven. Primary school begins at the beginning of the autumn semester. Basic education lasts nine years. At the comprehensive schools, classroom teachers are mainly responsible for classes 1–6, and most of the subjects are taught by subject teachers in grades 7–9 (Jakku-Sihvonen and Niemi 2007). Preschool education starts at the age of six, and it is free for the Finnish children. It was voluntary until 2015, but still almost everyone participated in it. After 2015, the law states that children are obliged to have preschool education before they start basic education (Laki perusopetuslain muuttamisesta 1040/2014).

Finnish teachers have plenty of freedom in how they design their lessons and what kinds of teaching methods they use. School days are relatively short, and there is not much testing of students in basic education nor control over teachers' performance in Finnish schools (e.g., Baines 2007; Gamerman 2009). Among others, these features of education have puzzled researchers and they have, in part, been considered a reason for the Finnish students' generally high scores in PISA comparisons (e.g., Simola 2005; see also Paksuniemi, Uusiautti and Määttä 2013).

### The Singaporean educational system

Singapore is a highly diverse country because of frequent migration to and from the region (Czaika and Haas 2014; Lian 2015; Yeoh and Lin 2012). Migration is reflected not only in demographic trends but also in boosting integration of the economy of the region (Bove and Elia 2017). The growing mobility of migrants across the borders is beneficial for both sending and receiving countries. The legal provision for average duration of free and compulsory education is from 6 years on to those who have not yet attained the age of 15 years (Ministry of Education) in Singapore. There are both private and state schools, state education is subsidised for Singaporean citizens, but the cost for non-citizens is

comparatively higher. The share of education in the total governmental expenditure is based on the annual budget.

Primary school lasts six years and, after passing the primary school examination, students go to secondary education for 4-5 years. The length of education depends on the specialization of the schools: there are special education schools, privately funded school, specialized independent schools, normal academic and normal technical schools etc. Post-secondary education takes 2-3 years. Singapore offers many different schools and many options in the post-secondary levels.

A prescribed national curriculum characterizes Singapore's educational arrangements. Teaching coherency is fit for purposes and pragmatic teachers rely on textbooks, worksheets, examples and drill and practice. Classroom discussion is teacher-dominated. National examinations at the end of primary and secondary schooling incorporate top-down forms of teacher accountability based on student performance.

Teachers follow a national curriculum that allow teachers to design tasks to encourage students to learn more and prepare themselves for the national examination (UIS 2012; IBE 2011). The Central government maintains the teacher employment and governance policy in Singapore. Only accredited schools in Singapore can employ teachers (UNESCO Bangkok 2014). The Ministry of Education in Singapore is responsible for meeting the demands of good teaching.

After 1990, Singapore has made five reforms in their educational curriculum, based on the rapid changes in the environment, context, aspirations, and expectations (OECD 2010). There are quality assurance bodies for ranking the



performance indicators and examinations. A range of cultural orientations includes a commitment of meritocratic achievement and social capital. Ethnic pluralism creates collective values, social capital, and economic growth for Singapore. The value of education is highly and positively regarded by the policy makers, schools, parents and students (Teh 2014).

Historically, the past policy model of education has not been an integral part of the development of modern systems of education. Recently competition for a better life and the patterns of looking abroad have attained new dynamics in the world education system (Waldow et al. 2014). Finland has been a reference society for Asian PISA success, since the national media discourses shift the focus to the politics of externalization by showing the references to legitimize policy ideas and values (Sung and Kang 2012; Takayama et al. 2013).

### **Comparing the educational systems of Finland and Singapore**

PISA has influenced education reform discourses in both countries. Finland represents a welfare state ideology in education, too. Singapore is a part of East Asia where the starting point for education is considerably different. Korea, Japan, China and to some extent Singapore share an educational culture that is here referred as East-Asian. According to Jerrim (2014), cultural factors beyond school play a key role in their success. We have compiled various factors influencing students' study success in Finland and Singapore that are divided into analysis of inequalities and structural issues in educational systems.

#### What forms of inequalities are present in the educational systems of Finland and Singapore?

The socio-economic status of the parents is a factor for children's success in school, all the way to the university level for an influential future career. This is a well-known fact, according to international research on the way children

“inherit” their parents’ social status (Blanden et al. 2013). While this holds true also in Finland, the influence does not, however, affect children’s education in quite the same way as in more unequal societies. In Finland, the number of private schools is very low and basically education is free for everyone. The parents’ socio-economic status does not influence children’s opportunities to participate in education per se. However, but it does influence immigrant children’s educational achievement (Kilpi 2010). When it comes to special education needs, students are evaluated individually, and support is provided to each student based on their needs (e.g., Piippo-Näätänen et al. 2013). However, socio-economic status indicators such as social class (Breen 2004), education (Björklund and Salvanes 2011) and income (Björklund 2002) of immigrant parents is highly correlated to children’s educational achievement (Erola et al. 2016). The home-school relationship is also affected by ethnicity, social class and educational background of immigrant parents. The relationship is closer with ethnic Finnish families than with immigrant families in Finland. Usually school authorities fail in engaging immigrant parents in a dialogue that reflect competing priorities and agendas (Leinonen 2013). On the other hand, children’s well-being and learning reflects their sense of inclusion. School inclusion depends on social participation and interaction, after school recreation (e.g., hobbies and other extra-curricular activities), equity and empowerment. The sustainable pattern of interactive platform or well-being promoting activities among immigrant children are still in the developmental stage in Finland (Kivirauma et al. 2006).

In Singapore, the parents’ occupational status along with education, income and wealth do determine the children in terms of educational outcomes. At the institutional level, disciplinary climate and academic norms of school community and mutual trust between school and home are major forms of social

capital contributing to learning outcomes in Singapore (Sui Chu Esther Ho 2000; Board 2017).

Singapore has been shown to have a significant impact by improving the quality of schooling and reducing inequality of learning outcomes of different social-class groups. (ibid.) According to the economic status of the parents in East Asia, they organize shadow education for their children. Shadow education starts from a commitment to the idea that all should meet high standards. Shadow education (Bray 2009; Byun 2014; Waldow et al. 2014) after regular school in the form of for example private tutoring and coaching is the fastest growing industry in Asia. In the year 2011, Korean families spent approximately 19 billion US dollars on shadow education (Byun 2014). Students' individual and family backgrounds make a key determinant for educational attainment. The economic status of the family matters in terms of paying, of being able to afford, the tuition fees of the advantaged schools. Favorable socio-economic condition of the family provides support beyond school education. There are low-performing students in East Asian countries as well. They are all top-ranked by PISA because the majority perform higher than average, although there are students scoring on the lowest level (Tucker 2016). The success of Asian nations is based on the competitiveness in acquiring education and in a more traditional method of teaching. In China, schools provides separate curricula based on the academic abilities of the students and encourages academic competition by entrance examinations into the middle schools.

Students in Singapore are tested to see whether they need extra help in mathematics when entering the first grade. Students who are behind the standard can get more teachers for getting up to speed (Tucker 2016). Likewise, in China, disadvantaged students get support, and in Japan, university students

are subsidized by voluntary activities to assist low performing students in their homework and tutoring them and helping their parents (Tucker 2016).

On the other hand, family attitudes and parent-child relation is a factor for educational attainment. Parents who have more time to spend with their children in terms of maintaining appropriate levels of discipline influence education attainments (Considine and Zappala 2002). Families that placed value upon education, willingness to invest in out-of-school tuition, instilling a hard-work ethic in their children, try to grow high aspirations.

**Table 1. Comparison of multiple faces of success**

Factors behind Success	Finland	Singapore
Socio-economic factor	Do not matter (school is free for all)	Matter for achieving shadow education after regular school
Family Attitudes/ Parent-Child relationship	Flexible approach	Firm approach
Motivational factor	Less aspiration	High aspiration
School amenities (tuition, warm meals, school materials, new equipment, textbooks etc.)	Ensured	Partially ensured
Learning environment/cultural factors	Pressure free environment (e.g. no regular pressure for education, pedagogical freedom, liberal curriculum encouraged creativity)	Purposeful and deliberate environment

What are the structural issues that influence immigrant children’s study success in Finland and Singapore?

School culture in Asia builds on motivation, high aspiration and the industriousness of children as well as parents whereas in Finland the system is liberal (Jerrim 2014; Schultz 2010). However, it is puzzling that students do not thrive in Finnish schools (Ouakrim-Soivio, Rinkinen and Karjalainen 2015) or do not seem to be as motivated as students in Singapore are. On the other hand,

in Finland, children and youth can have more leisure time after school for play and can maintain hobbies whereas many children in Asia balance under the pressure of regular and shadow education (Takayama et al. 2013). Some researchers point out that the Finnish education serves as the image of an educational utopia for learners, while “Asian” education provides the dystopian mirror image to the learners (Taffertshofer and Hermann 2007; Waldow et al. 2014).

**Table 2. Summary of Finnish and Singaporean educational differences**

Aspects	Finland	Singapore
Supporting Mechanism	Education is free School governance is liberal/ cognitive System	Education is subsidized School governance is structured and Standard System
Core resources	Learners’ freedom Teachers’ freedom Less examinations Regional curriculum based on national core curriculum	Motivation of learners and parents Teacher dominated classroom Shadow education Centrally planned curriculum for all
Desired outcome	Flexible education system for children based on their needs Self-learning	Competitive education system Top-down/ guided approach Education system based on societal needs

Table 2 summarizes the core factors explaining study success in Finland and Singapore, simultaneously showing the main differences between these countries. Cultural factors or a collectivist perspective of the country have an impact on education in East Asian countries. In these cultures, students are respectful in class and towards older people. Their participation and interaction styles in the classroom are controlled and restricted (Rosenberg, 2010). The

collective programming of the mind and the dominant values of the countries influence educational attainment (Wursten and Jacobs 2013). The Finnish model emphasizes flexibility, the freedom of teachers and students, and an autonomous learning approach.

In all, the comparisons between the Finnish and Singaporean education systems show that there is not just one path to students' success. Different factors may result in the desired outcomes from the perspective of PISA comparisons. However, in this article, we were interested in finding out how immigrant students are doing in these countries, examples of top achievers in PISA.

### **Immigrant children's school success**

When analyzing critically the PISA achievements, it is important to pay attention to what PISA actually measures: what kind of success it recognizes and what it ignores. In PISA, sampled students completed a computer-based assessment that included a combination of science, reading, mathematics and collaborative problem-solving items (see OECD: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>). The sample of students represent the full population of students of each country or school system. The participant information also includes information about the number of immigrant students.

According to PISA results, immigrant students do better in those countries where there are highly selective immigration policies (OECD 2015a) but their performance in the school is more strongly related to the school systems of the host countries.

Therefore, school itself has a great role in integrating immigrant students in the host country. The culture of the country of origin, the socio-economic status of family and the learning environment have differing effects on the educational

performances of immigrant children (Considine and Zappala 2002; Schnell et al. 2015). The economic, political and cultural characteristics of the country of origin may also affect immigrant children in school integration (Bhugra and Becker 2005).

Academic achievement of immigrant children differs due to various macro-level and micro-level characteristics that were viewed here with two analytical strategies. Macro-level characteristics, such as cultural and educational political features, can increase or hinder students' self-determination level to integrate into the micro-level characteristics of host country. Therefore, macro-level characteristics are influential for immigrant student for acquiring knowledge and skills that meet their needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness. Micro-level characteristics lead to social capital, which can positively affect educational achievement, such as positive attitudes to students' own effort and achievements (see Marks 2010).

Children from well-educated families and a 'respectable' cultural background- one in tune with school values- are self-determined to cope in schools (Levels et al. 2008). Immigrant children are traumatized if their parents have experienced trauma for their political and cultural background in their country of origin. These children perform poorly in school compared with other immigrant students. Cultural and parental support have been shown to have an impact on children's self-determination. A full internalization of the host country culture is associated with greater well-being and success (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim and Kaplan 2003; see also Downie et al. 2007; Taskinen 2017). Parental autonomy influences self-determination in the children. If the living and learning environments of immigrant children are positive, they are more likely to perform better at school. Cultural strengths e.g. strong family relationships improve resilience among Chinese immigrants (Ni et al. 2014)

The parents' role in immigrant children's school success is significant (Dronkers 1999). Immigrant children have very positive attitudes and behaviors toward education if they adopt higher educational aspirations (Kao and Tienda 1995). Kao and Tienda (1995) concluded that immigrant parents who come with very high levels of motivation to succeed pass their aspirations onto their children. Taskinen's (2017) research among immigrant students in a Finnish basic school showed that willingness to integrate in the host country and learn its language supported the children's thriving at school in many ways, e.g. through increased interactions with peers. Indeed, peer culture in school has an impact on educational outcome. There is either a positive or a negative relationship between peer culture and immigrant children's patterns of attitudinal changes (Greenman 2013). Asian children are not usually accepted by the local peers in the school (Yearwood and Carroll 2012), therefore they are likely to accept such children as their friends who are from similar background and similarly natured based on their home culture and learning environment. Thus, the home culture of children encourages the development of peer relationships and other positive and negative views towards peer acceptance (Yamamoto and Li 2012). Immigrant children usually find peers from their own cultural background and sometime from their own enclave and own language speakers rather than among natives (see also Taskinen 2017) for racial and ethnic stratification (National Academy of Science 1998). A different social status was related to different level of self-esteem, competences, and relatedness. Relationship with peers has an impact on perceptions of relatedness and develops motivation (Cox et al. 2013). Students' own cultural perceptions can support interaction with the surrounding environment (Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton 1976) leading, at its best, to a forming of a peer group with regular interaction, shared values, belongingness, and specific norms (Hartup 2009).



Children from an economically powerful country along with good educational background face fewer problems to assimilate in the host community. Cultural respect and identity, along with social norms and policies are important for immigrants' well-being in the new host country (Bhugra and Becker 2005). Immigrants, who experience that they are losing their own culture and identity, may not incorporate the majority culture. At the same time it is important to note that the acceptance of the heritage culture and identity by the receiving culture increases positive integration in the host country (Akhtar and Choi 2004; Rumbaut 2008).

According to our review, in this context, social capital is a cluster of the culture and financial capital of families, and the obligations of families, the learning environment and the policies of schools and societies that exist within the school. Peers and community can significantly increase students' self-determination level, which can explain the disparities in students' educational performance among immigrant children. Social capital improves knowledge and perspectives by widening the awareness of children (Taskinen 2017). Furthermore, macro and micro level characteristics produce social capital that serve the children with more information and facilitate pursuing self-determination. School, peer groups, and the community lead to social capital that positively affects the educational achievement of immigrants.

## **Conclusion**

The question of how to enhance immigrant children's success at school is very topical and important. It is important for these children and their families but also for the host countries. More attention must be paid to the factors that enhance study success of all students (see e.g., Määttä and Uusiautti 2018).

Although the immigration situation in Finland and Singapore are quite different as are the educational systems of these countries, it was remarkable to notice that certain factors arise above these and could be the determinants of study success among immigrant children. Yet, more research is needed: these connections need to be investigated through large-scale surveys. Equally, it is very important to hear the voices and experiences and wishes of immigrant families and especially children about their experiences of schooling in these two top-scoring countries.

When it comes to the immigrant children in Finland and Singapore, it seems that the most important factor enhancing success is the level of integration and social relationships at school. Indeed, other researchers have pointed out the same issue. For example, Entorf and Miniou (2004) emphasize that educational policies should focus on the integration of immigrant children. In addition, they speak for early integration with a particular emphasis on language skills (Entorf and Miniou 2004; Mackey and Silver 2005).

The Finnish system can provide profound support for learning among immigrant children since the objective is to notice everyone's special needs (e.g., Taskinen 2017). However, this objective does not always become materialized perfectly (cf. Karoly and Gonzalez 2011; Matthews and Ewen 2006), and for example, regional differences in the Finnish education system can decrease immigrant children's equal opportunities to successful studies (Heikkilä & Yeasmin, 2017) because even immigrant children lack equal opportunities in the same cities in different schools. In Finland, the teachers have the right and responsibility to care for each student's individual needs. Therefore, equal treatment of immigrant children in a classroom rests mainly in teachers' hands. Teachers need to know about their students' cultural backgrounds in order to maximize their learning potential (Lahti 2007).

Therefore, teachers themselves need multicultural education which will help educators to boost student achievement and confidence (Lahti 2007). However, some regions in Finland lack proper recourses to educate teachers which partly depends on municipality government. Since diverse classrooms is a relatively new phenomenon in Finland, multicultural education has not been integrated into teachers education curricula, but is now getting more attention (Dervin et al. 2012; Rasanen 2007). Blakeslee (2015, p. 9) stated, that the Finnish education policies must be reorganized to include and promote multicultural education, in order to truly sustain equity in the Finnish education system.

The strength in the Singaporean system is in the adoption of high aspiration and motivation to strive for success, which is typical of Asian countries (e.g., Ho 2003). Both systems provide opportunities to succeed at school, but without the immigrant families' own activeness—willingness to integrate and familiarize with the host country—and the support from the school and people in the community, success is not likely. Immigrant children are an important part of schools in Finland and in Singapore, and therefore it is important to notice how their success can be enhanced. The teachers' role is to create opportunities for positive learning experiences and creation of friendships in the classrooms (Leskisenoja and Uusiautti 2017; Taskinen 2017). Parents' attitudes matter, too, and if they are willing to work in the same direction as the school culture in the host country does, they can support their children's success at school the best (e.g., Beveridge 2005; Epstein and Dauber 1991; Uusiautti, Määttä and Määttä 2013).

It is worrying that the Finnish schools that have more immigrant children score lower in PISA test, for example, in science (OECD 2015a, 2015b). Indeed, teachers need more multicultural education and training (Heikkilä and Yeasmin 2017). Especially lower secondary level teachers are in high need of

professional development in teaching of multicultural and multilingual students (Heikkilä and Yeasmin 2017). Teachers need better understanding about the way, for example, racist discourses are perceived by immigrant students and their families and how their integration could be better supported by the school (e.g., Ahmed et al. 2010; Mähönen et al. 2010). Lower secondary non-achievement and higher parental non-employment cause higher probability of dropping out among immigrant students (Kilpi 2010). Almost all immigrant children seem to have experiences of prejudice or discrimination (Honkasalo 2007). Immigrant children who neither have resourceful parents in terms of functioning within Finnish society, nor 'good cultural reputation' in the eyes of teachers and local communities, or who are stigmatized negatively are at great risk of educational failure and downward assimilation (Kilpi 2010; see also Simpson and Dervin 2017a). Anti-immigrant and xenophobic political discourses have an impact on dealing with diversities in schools, which can produce disparities and hierarchizing of teachers' professionalism. In this case, teachers also can lack tools to analyze and perceive discourses that can maintain otherness (Dervin et al. 2012; Simpson and Dervin 2017a, 2017b).

However, one can also ask to what extent is it reasonable to compare immigrant students' study success with international comparisons such as PISA given that their familiarity with the study system of the host country may be varying and still developing. These students have potential and skills that are not necessarily recognized by PISA. The test is not probably fair in this sense, and there are numerous school cultural issues that may influence their success (see e.g., Soh 2013). The Singaporean perspective can provide some fresh viewpoints to this matter. Singapore has responded by considering immigration as a valuable human recourse, which is actually a very different perspective than of Japan or many other Asian countries (see e.g. Morita 2016). The open-door policy to attract talent for creating more jobs for Singaporeans is the main target.

Therefore, government provide specific, formal training on diversity, intercultural pedagogy for school leaders and teachers (OECD 2015a). Extra support is offered for immigrant children to prevent them from facing an identity crisis and to realize their potential before assigning them to any particular study program. Government takes many different initiatives to reduce or eliminate the use of ability grouping and grade repetition (OECD 2015a). As the result, 83% of immigrant children feel that they belong to school in Singapore. The government of Singapore provides information to immigrant parents and help parents to overcome their socio-economic status to access the school of their choice (OECD 2015a). Regular monitoring for the equality of early childhood education and programs support integrating immigrant students with mainstream classes which encompass study success of immigrant children in Singapore.

Integration is always a two way-process. In order for the immigrant student fitting in the host society, schools have to be welcoming and accepting those students by identifying shared values in the classroom. For creating a sense of belongingness, it is potentially important to plan opportunities for sharing personal values and beliefs in classroom. Therefore, the study success of the immigrant students would need to be evaluated in relation to their participation in the classroom, integration in the society, socialization by mixing all students in small groups, and development of language skills. Becoming accepted in the group and finding friends, the chances of immigrant students´ understanding the school culture in the host country also become better. Then succeeding well also academically in the traditional sense will not only be more likely but also easier.

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