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The role of the teacher in heritage language maintenance courses in Finland

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation has resulted in European families that have a variety of home languages, leading to the need for heritage language learning (HLL). The purpose of HLL is to ensure that in addition to learning the language of their schools, children with migrant backgrounds also maintain their heritage language (HL). Besides the 'regular' teaching, in many countries, there are usually voluntary, extra-curricular maintenance courses available for migrant children. The purpose of our study was to investigate the impact that HL teachers working in Finnish schools have on the process of learning HLs. The data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire ($N = 25$) and semi-structured interviews ($N = 15$) with HL teachers representing 24 different languages. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted to check the survey construct validity. The statistical and qualitative analysis of the data indicated that HL teachers act as multilingual identity supporter, that is that they showed understanding of their students' multilingualism and were convinced about the positive impact of HL for students' future lives. Our study also reported on the challenges teachers face in the classroom.

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Introduction

A heritage language (HL), as the language spoken at home with parents and other family members, is often understood as 'a trait or asset gained through birth' (King and Ennser-Kananen 2013, 1). The role of the family in HL use and learning is decisive in providing affective, cognitive, and interactional scaffolding (Melo-Pfeifer 2015). In a bi/multilingual context, parents may wrestle with the question of how to support the maintenance of the home language while, at the same time, encouraging their children to master their language of schooling.

In general, teachers play an important role in language education, creating and recreating language education policies (Menken and García 2010) as well as promoting their students' multilingualism (Haukås 2016; Hélot and Laoire 2011). In HL learning, teachers support the use and/or maintenance of the home language both inside and outside the classroom (De Angelis 2011). In schools, different questions must be solved concerning the teaching of the prior languages of migrant, transnational, and HL students. Besides the 'regular' teaching, in many countries, maintenance courses are available for migrant children so that they can maintain their home language. These are not necessarily integrated into normal school practice, and parents with a migrant background may themselves decide whether or not their children attend. In general, it can be stated that

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an HL teacher is a very important person in the lives of migrant children and families, for instance, in building future perspectives for their students (Kim and Kim 2016).

In this context, our aim is to investigate the role or roles that HL teachers play and the challenges that they face in the school life (see Section 3). Moreover, the purpose of this study is to examine the teacher's impact on HL learning processes and on family language policy (FLP). First, previous studies on the teacher's role in HL learning and the implementation of FLP are discussed. Second, the collected data are analysed statistically (Principal Component Analysis PCA) and qualitatively in order to capture the teaching experiences of HL language teachers in Finnish schools. Finally, the results of the study are discussed in order to examine whether more attention needs to be paid to HL teaching and learning in the implementation of language policies on both a micro and macro level. Our study aims to shed light on the complexity of HL teachers' actions in the Finnish context as Finland is considered to be a as a new immigration country. Another rationale behind this study is to focus on HL teachers, because the research on HL education has so far concentrated more on HL learners than teachers (Cho 2014). Moreover, it is important to investigate HL instruction as it is in many countries not institutionalised (Carreira and Kagan 2018).

HL is a little studied field in Finland and our paper provides new data about HL teachers.

Theoretical background

Two areas of research literature are discussed below. First, the literature on the role of teachers in family language policy (FLP) is examined. Second, reflecting our study context, studies on HL learning and HL teachers in Finland are discussed.

Previous studies on the role of HL teachers in FLP

Today, raising multilingual children has become more common as in past decades two social developments, globalisation and immigration, have caused linguistically and cultural diversity worldwide (Carreira and Kagan 2018) This fact, according to Piller (2001), provides opportunities for language policy concerning bi/multilingual families. The command of many languages is an advantage for children in their future lives (Piller and Gerber 2018), so supporting multilingualism can be considered an investment in the child's future. Curdt-Christiansen (2009, 352) defined FLP as 'a deliberate attempt at practicing a particular language use pattern and particular literacy practices within home domains and among family members'. It is influenced by both macro factors, such as the socio-political environment, and micro factors, such as parents' expectations, parents' education, home literacy, immigration experiences, and language experiences (Curdt-Christiansen 2009). Accordingly, FLP includes a very broad range of language beliefs, language decisions, ideologies, and actions regarding language practices. It encompasses language use in different contexts and with different interlocutors, including children, parents, other family members, and teachers (Spolsky 2019). In the context of the present study, the child's attendance in a voluntary, extra-curricular language maintenance course can be seen as an FLP action or as a family strategy that helps the child develop his or her bi/multilingual abilities.

Studies focusing on the role of HL teachers in HLL and FLP are situated mostly in classical migrant countries such as the USA, Canada, and Australia. A decade ago, when HL instruction was at its early stages, Bateman and Wilkinson (2010) concluded that the teacher plays a critical role in the design of Spanish HL programmes in the USA. In another study, conducted in the 1990s in Canada, Feuerverger (1997) examined narratives of HL teachers working in Toronto. It emerged that Canadian HL teachers in this study had difficulties in cooperating with families and the school. They also wished they had more collaboration with 'regular' teachers.

There is only a small amount of research work focusing on HL teachers' competence. Generally, teachers share different views about the role of HL maintenance in schools (Lee and Oxelson 2006).

Thus, most of the little information that is available is elicited as a by-product of studies undertaken for other reasons. For instance, a study by Li (2006) conducted in Canada among Chinese HL children revealed that parents often volunteered as teachers in Chinese classes without having specific knowledge of teaching. Furthermore, the question of whether HL is taught by a specially trained HL teacher or a 'regular' mainstream teacher is of utmost significance when talking about HL teaching and learning. There are only a few studies dealing with mainstream or regular teachers' influence on family language policies. In the Netherlands, a study by Bezcioglu-Göktolga and Yagmur (2018) examined the impact of Dutch 'regular' classroom teachers on FLP in Turkish immigrant families. Based on observation of 20 families and interviews with 35 parents and five teachers, their findings showed a conflict between parents' and teachers' views. The parents had doubts about the teachers' professional advice for them, and, vice versa, the teachers were concerned about the parents' role in the schooling of their children and their use of an HL language at home. The teachers advised the parents to speak Dutch at home, while the parents wanted their children to maintain Turkish. Both parties wanted the children to be successful at school, but they misunderstood each other, and conflicts occurred. In the Finnish context, some studies are available on language use by preschool teachers in different language settings. Palviainen et al. (2016) studied bilingual preschool teachers (Finnish–Russian and Finnish–Swedish). They found that they switched flexibly between the languages when resolving the needs of children.

Studies on HLL and HL teachers in Finland

Since most studies on migrants' language learning have so far been conducted in countries with high numbers of migrants, especially Canada and the United States (e.g. Burns and Roberts 2010), Finland, as a new immigration country, is an interesting case. The proportion of persons with a migrant background in Finland seems very small (7% of the population) compared to other immigration countries (Statistics Finland 2019), including other Nordic countries, for instance, Sweden 24.1% (Statistics Sweden 2017), and Norway 18.2% (Statistics Norway 2019). Another reason that makes Finland an interesting case study is that it is one of the few European countries with a special curriculum for HL teaching. In the study by Zilliacus, Paulsrud, and Holm (2017), the most recent Finnish core curriculum for basic education (FNBE 2014) was found to be very progressive compared to the curricula of other countries, including Sweden, because all students' multicultural identities are taken into consideration. Finland was also one of the locations in an international study by Minkov et al. (2019) that focused on the command of Russian as an HL by Russian-speaking adolescents in Israel, the United States, Finland, and Germany. Above all, the results showed advantages with respect to competence in Russian when the HL was used both at home and at school. When comparing the situation in these countries, the findings revealed that in both Finland and Germany, bilingual education and multilingual policies were better promoted than in the other countries. But it can be stated that better promoted does not necessarily mean better enacted. For instance, studies in the German context demonstrate that, also in HL education, a monolingual and monoglossic mindset still is prevailed (Melo-Pfeifer 2019).

Perhaps because HLL is a new phenomenon in the Finnish context, little background or research literature is available. In Finnish, the heritage language is generally called 'oma kieli', which means literally 'own language' (FNBE 2014). In recent years, some studies have been carried out. For instance, Ansó Ros (2019) examined the benefits of being bilingual in families. The results described a specific family pattern whereby the mixed marriages are mostly at a high educational and socio-economic level, with the father coming from a Spanish-speaking country and the mother from Finland. They used the minority language at home and, in this way, facilitated the HL learning process of their children. Based on a meta-ethnography and discourse analysis of four recent studies from Finland, Tarnanen and Palviainen (2018) explored how mainstream teachers' talk reflected the language policies of the two recent core curricula for basic education. The results of the study

indicated that the talk of teachers was not in line with the new core curriculum (FNBE 2014) in which multilingualism and cultural diversity are highlighted (Skinnari and Nikula 2017).

Research project

The context of the study: maintenance courses in Finland

According to Baker (1996, 185), heritage or maintenance language education refers to minority language education. Although the number of persons with a foreign background in Finland is small compared to other European countries, there have been since the 1970s various efforts to support language minorities and migrants in the learning of their prior languages. In the Finnish context, free maintenance language courses are integrated into Finnish basic education. However, whether they are included in the school curriculum as an optional subject depends on the particular city's educational department (FNBE 2014, 463). In 2018, according to the National Board of Education (FNBE 2018), there were 88 Finnish education providers for maintenance courses in 58 different languages. The number of participants has been increasing in almost every HL group. In 2018, almost 21,000 students in basic and upper-secondary education attended HL maintenance courses, the biggest language groups being Russian, Somali, Arabian, and Estonian (FNBE 2018). As a complement to basic education, there are optional maintenance courses consisting of 2 hours (1 hr = 45 min) per week for grades 1–9. A native-speaker teacher teaches these maintenance courses, which take place after normal schooldays, in most cases during the afternoon. For tuition in school, a minimum number of four students are required. An average-sized class is normally a group of 12 pupils. All students who are allowed to attend these maintenance courses are bilingual. They have a mother tongue other than Finnish, Swedish, or Sami, which are the three official languages in Finland. Either one of their home languages differs from Finnish, Swedish, or Sami or they have acquired language proficiency abroad (FNBE 2014, 463).

In the Finnish context, teachers of maintenance courses have different profiles regarding their qualifications and places of origin. Some have obtained their degree in teaching in their country of origin. Alternatively, they can be first- or second-generation migrants who have been educated in Finland. Often, they are natives of the HL country, which can be regarded as an asset, as HL students usually show high oral skills a wide vocabulary (Valdés 2001). Like any other teacher in Finland, HL teachers have full autonomy. They can independently choose the learning methods and materials.

Study design

Research questions

HL teachers are professionals who mediate between parents and school and, in this role, give families advice about HLL, which, in our context, relates to maintenance courses. Against this background, the following research questions are addressed:

1. What roles do HL teachers play in HL maintenance courses and the implementation of FLP? (Section 4.1–4.3)
2. What kinds of challenges in their HL teaching profession do HL teachers report in working in HL classrooms? (Section 4.4)

Participants

Our study was conducted in schools in south Finland that organise HL teaching. The total number of participants was 25 who filled out the questionnaires and 15 who responded the interview. The

participants, both in the questionnaire and in the interviews, were all working as HL teachers teaching 20 different languages, including Arabic (3) and Russian (2). The participants were aged between 31 and 62 years, with most participants being at the younger end of this age range (see Table 1). As Table 1 shows, seven participants in the youngest (31–45) age group had a teacher qualification in Finland. This group of teachers had the highest number of validated qualifications ($N = 7$), comprising 58.3% of the group. Nevertheless, the oldest group had the highest percentage (83%) of validated qualifications. This may be because they completed their studies in Finland.

Data collection and methods

The questionnaire used in this study was in Finnish, following Borg's (2003) model. It was divided into four sections, with a total of 51 statements relating to the following aspects: personal information, teachers' beliefs, classroom practices, and subjective perceptions. The first section, Statements 1–12, included both demographic and personal information (e.g. number of groups, number of students, age, years of experience as teachers and validated qualifications in Finland). For the following sections of the questionnaire, a four-point Likert scale was used, which required the teacher to take a stand. Most of the statements had four options, ranging from 1 (I disagree) to 4 (I fully agree). However, Statements 39–41 were structured as open answers, while Statement 42 required a multiple-choice answer.

The second section focused on the teachers' beliefs and contained 17 statements (Statements 13–29). In this section, statements about the teachers' language and cultural identity were included. Other statements contained statements regarding their motivation, perceptions regarding the support of their superiors, and relationships with colleagues and parents. In addition, this section contained statements eliciting the value of language maintenance and multilingualism in Finnish society. The third section (Statements 30–42) dealt with teachers' practices, namely the methods and materials they used in the classroom. Finally, in the fourth section, the statements (Statements 43–51) focused on the participants' subjective perceptions of teaching.

The web-based questionnaire was sent to HL teachers in schools in south Finland in 2018–2019. For practical reasons during the survey, 19 respondents filled out a paper copy, while 6 answered a web-based questionnaire. In total, 25 HL teachers answered the questionnaire. To investigate construct validity of the survey a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was carried out. The aim of PCA is to detect variables in the data through checking correlations between items. A PCA was conducted in RStudio 1.3.1093 using FactoMineR (Lê, Josse and Husson 2008). To better describe the components, at least moderate ($r \geq 0.50$) and significant ($p < 0.05$) Pearson correlation (r) coefficients between variables and the dimensions were considered.

The questionnaire data were complemented by semi-structured interviews conducted in April–May 2019 ($N = 15$). All interviewees, with the exception of two, were from the same group of teachers that participated in the questionnaire. The interviews lasted on average 20–45 minutes. They were conducted face-to-face in Finnish or English, mostly known by both respondents and interviewers, according to the choice of the interviewees. In this way, we wanted to promote the equal participation in the interview situation. The interviews focused on different views and practices related to HL teaching and learning, such as teaching practices and contexts, perceptions of the role of the Finnish language in teaching, differences between Finnish teachers and HL teachers, and attitudes of Finnish teachers towards HL teachers.

Table 1. Teachers' age and gender, validated qualifications (VQ), and age group validated qualifications percentage (V%). (One participant did not supply any personal information in the questionnaire).

Age group	M	F	Total	VQ	V%
31–45	4	8	12	7	58.3%
46–55	1	5	6	2	33.3%
56–62	2	4	6	5	83.3%

After receiving the questionnaires, the data were coded to a particular topic and categorised accordingly. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed qualitatively in Finnish or English. The selected quotations in Finnish were translated into English by the researchers. As a result of the qualitative analysis, a set of topics emerged (see Section 4), as is typical in analyses using the grounded approach (cf. Strauss and Corbin 1990). Our aim was not to generalise the findings but to report and reflect on the experiences of the teachers. Because it might be possible to identify the respondents by mentioning their language, the HL is omitted in quoting the responses. This is particularly crucial when the teacher was the only representative of the language in question.

The data from the interviews played a complementary role to the data from the questionnaires. By combining them, we attempted to overcome the weaknesses of a single data collection method and consequently increase the reliability and validity of the research (Burns 1999, 20–21).

Results of the study

Results of the PCA

The responses to the questionnaire were subjected to PCA. A total of 24 components were returned initially, and, based on a scree test, four components (explaining 51.92% of the total variance) were retained for further analysis (see Table 2). The first component explained 20.05% of the variance, and a total of 12 items had significant or at least moderate contributions to this component. The second component explained 12.92%, the third 10.80% and the fourth 8.15% of the variance. To describe the components, items that had significant ($p < 0.05$) or at least moderate ($r \geq 0.50$) correlations with the components were considered (Table 2).

The first component primarily measured the extent to which the teachers paid attention to whether their students enjoyed the teaching (46) and how much they felt supported by colleagues (22). All the items that contributed to this component positively correlated with it and related to the

Table 2. Results of PCA analysis.

Item number	Statement	C1 (*r*)	C2 (*r*)	C3 (*r*)	C4 (*r*)
46	In my lessons, I pay attention to whether my students are enjoying the teaching.	0.81			
22	I feel that my colleagues support me.	0.72			
27	It is valuable to be multilingual in Finnish society.	0.68			
23	I think that *diversity* is a good value in Finnish society.	0.64			
30	I use different teaching methods.	0.63			
14	I feel identified with the language that I teach.	0.60			
17	I feel satisfied and motivated.	0.58			
49	In my lessons, I understand the student perspective and situation.	0.57			
21	I feel that my superiors support me.	0.57	−0.50		
51	I feel satisfied with my own practices.	0.56			
29	I have enough material for teaching.	0.53			
47	I do not only teach in my classes; I also do some extracurricular activities.	0.50		0.55	
38	I talk to my students about how important maintaining their own language and culture is.		0.78		
37	I use older students to help the younger ones.		0.76		
35	I respond positively to students when they correctly use their own language.		0.66		
33	I use codeswitching (I change to Finnish or other languages) in my class.		0.53		
43	The subject matter that I studied determined my way of teaching.			−0.54	
34	I get angry when pupils speak in a language other than our learning language.			−0.59	
24	Competence in their own language helps students in their academic and social progress.			−0.82	
36	I use gestures or body language to help students understand meanings.				0.57
13	I feel satisfied with my work.				0.52
32	I need to develop my knowledge for the needs of my students.				0.50
50	In my lessons, I have an active role as a teacher.				−0.51
Percentage of variance explained by each component		20.05	12.92	10.80	8.15

teachers' values (27 and 23), teaching practices (46, 30, 49, 29 and 47) and motivational factors (22, 14, 17, 21 and 51).

The second component measured the active role that these teachers took in teaching and fostering a connection between their students and their own languages. This was primarily constituted from the extent to which the teachers discussed with their students the importance of maintaining their own language and culture (78) and whether they made the older students in their classes help the younger ones (37), with other positively correlated items (35 and 33) also pertaining to teaching practices. Interestingly, a negative correlation between this component and whether the teachers experienced support from their superiors (21) was found, suggesting that in the absence of external support, the importance of one's own cultural community was heightened.

The third component largely measured the teachers' disagreement with the statement that knowing their own language helped the students' academic and social progress (24). At the negative end of this component, the teachers expressed disagreement with the idea that the subject that they themselves studied determined how they taught (43). At the positive end, arranging extracurricular activities (47) and feeling anger towards students speaking in a tongue other than the one that was being taught (34, reverse-scored) emerged as component factors.

As for the fourth component, the items positively correlated with it included the teachers' use of gestures and body language to facilitate students' understanding (36), the need to develop knowledge to match students' needs (32) and being increasingly satisfied with one's work (13). At the negative end of the component, the teachers reported that they had an inactive role as a teacher (50). After the analysis of the returned PCA items, the following roles of the HL teachers emerged: supporters of multilingual identity and agents in the learning process.

The teacher's role as a supporter of multilingual identity and family language policy

Regarding the teacher's role as a multilingual identity supporter, almost all the statements scored highly.

As summarised in Table 3, Statements 14, 38 and 49 scored highly, with a low SD. These results showed that the HL teachers identified themselves not only with the language and culture but also with their students. This indicated that the HL teachers in our study believed to understand their students' backgrounds better than mainstream teachers. The following excerpt from an interview showed this perception:

> HL teachers, we are more open-minded; we know and understand more deeply the "foreigners", immigrants. We have experience in that field, on the one hand about difficult situations or bullying; on the other hand, we know what the feeling of being bilingual or multilingual is it. (Interview no. 2)

When looking at Table 3, it can be seen that all the statements relating to multilingual identity scored highly. As can be observed (Statement 38), the respondents reported that they talked to students about the importance of maintaining their HL language and culture.

Table 3. HL teachers' ratings of their role as a cultural linguistic identity builder and FLP supporter. As described in Section 3.2.3, the average ranged from 1 (I disagree) to 4 (I fully agree).

Statement number	Mean	SD
14 I feel identified with the language that I teach.	3.76	0.42
23 I think that *diversity* is a good value in Finnish society.	3.66	0.55
24 Proficiency in their own language helps students in their academic and social progress.	3.84	0.36
27 It is valuable to be multilingual in Finnish society.	3.92	0.54
34 I am not angry when students speak a language other than the HL taught.	3.75	0.52
38 I talk with my students about the importance of maintaining one's own language and culture.	3.68	0.48
49 In my lessons, I understand the student perspective and situation.	3.64	0.49

One aspect that emerged from the interviews but was also in the questionnaires (see Table 3, Statement 49) was the importance of understanding otherness. The HL teachers seemed to understand the situation, context, and background of their students, which can facilitate learning. They regarded this as an important aspect for both students and their families. It emerged that the HL teachers did not necessarily feel that they were supported by families (Bezcioglu-Göktolga and Yagmur 2018). However, some interviewees commented that they felt that families support them because they help to maintain one of their home languages. The interviews also underscored that some teachers collaborated with families in many different ways. For instance, one teacher stated that s/he prepared school activities with the help of parents (e.g. by taking his/her HL class to visit persons from the country of origin in the city; Interview no. 4). It was noticeable how parents did not just strive to transmit the HL but also engage in bilingual education of their children by cooperating with the HL teachers. HL teachers also seemed to support the familiar patterns from the country of origin that may be very different to those in Finland, As one interviewee stated, in his/her country of origin, 'the child is very protected'. All these considerations showed that HL teachers felt that parents implicitly were engaged in the bilingual education of their children (similar results were gained by Costa Waetzold and Melo-Pfeifer 2020).

Statements 23, 24, 27 and 34 related to the HL teachers' beliefs and practices about teaching minority languages and being bi/multilingual. They were designed to generate information about the teachers' attitudes towards multilingualism (Tarnanen and Palviainen 2018). As Table 3 shows, there was a high average for every statement regarding multilingualism, with an average mean of 3.79. This meant that the HL teachers in our study seemed to support multilingualism at both the micro and macro levels (Curdt-Christiansen 2009).

In this context, we would like to highlight Statement 27, showing the highest mean (3.92), which indicated that the HL teachers highly valued multilingualism in Finnish society. In general, the teachers showed a very positive attitude towards multilingualism. In conclusion, the results showed high scores in all statements. They also showed that the teachers valued bi/multilingualism in their classes. Finally, we confirmed that their actions and attitudes corresponded to what the Finnish curriculum recommends regarding teachers' awareness of and support for multilingualism (FNBE 2014, 89).

Reported teaching practices by HL teachers

Considering HL teachers' role in the learning process, it is evident that they have an impact on students' HL learning process through the years in which students are enrolled in maintenance courses. We should keep in mind that HL students are not the same as native language students (Valdés 2001). Most HL students grow up either bilingual (in the majority and minority language) or multilingual. In addition, they show different degrees of proficiency in the minority HL language and the majority language. In this context, HL teachers face an important challenge in teaching heterogeneous groups. One HL teacher commented on this in the interview:

> An HL teacher works with pupils from different ages and different levels, so a very heterogeneous group, which makes teaching quite challenging. (Interview no. 10)

As summarised in Table 4, the statements regarding teaching practices demonstrated that the HL teachers seemed to value the use of the minority language in the HL classroom. The answers to Statements 35 and 36 indicated that most of the teachers reported that they responded positively to students when they used their HL correctly. They also told that they used gestures and body language to help students understand meanings.

Statement 29, about the lack of teaching materials, showed a higher SD (0.93). This implied that there were differences among the teachers in this aspect. These differences may lie in the teachers' country of origin. There are more ready-made teaching materials available for teachers of, for example, English or German than for teachers of Kurdish, who have to take into account a completely different alphabet.

Table 4. Teachers' ratings of their teaching practices. As described in Section 3.2.3, the average ranged from 1 (I disagree) to 4 (I fully agree).

Statement number	Mean	SD
29 I have enough material for teaching.	2.8	0.93
30 I use different teaching methods.	3.24	0.65
33 I use codeswitching (I change to Finnish or other languages) or translanguaging (I use one language to reinforce the other in order to increase understanding) in my class.	2.48	1.02
35 I respond positively to students when they use their own language correctly.	3.8	0.4
36 I use gestures or body language to help students understand meanings.	3.28	0.64
37 I use older students to help the younger ones.	2.92	0.74
43 The subject matter that I studied determined my way of teaching.	2.8	0.98
46 In my lessons, I pay attention to whether my students are enjoying the teaching.	3.6	0.57
47 I do not only teach in my classes; I also do some extracurricular activities.	3,15	0.86
50 In my lessons, I have an active role as a teacher.	3.75	0.49

Statement 33, about the use of codeswitching or translanguaging, stands out for its high SD (1.02). In the research literature, both codeswitching and translanguaging are seen as communicative tools (Melo-Pfeifer 2015). Translanguaging is even seen as a 'border-crossing communicative practice' and therefore a desirable HL teaching practice (Hornberger and Link 2012, 263). It seemed that the HL teachers in the present study seemed to acknowledge the value of translanguaging in HL classroom contexts (similar results were gained by Dávila 2017).

Given the mean of the 'I partially agree' and 'I fully agree' responses and the answers to the open questions in the questionnaire, it could be observed that most of the participants said that they used teaching methods other than those traditionally used in foreign language classrooms. The teachers reported that they applied creative teaching methods such as drama, arts and crafts, movies, songs, table games and other games. For instance, they stated that they produced their own workbooks, handouts, e-materials and other texts. In addition, a high proportion of the respondents encouraged older students to help younger ones (see Table 4, Statement 37). This indicated that the teachers seemed to use the help of student peers in heterogeneous groups. In an interview, one teacher illustrated this internal differentiation. S/he related that if they concentrated on, for example, diphthongs, s/he would carry out a vocabulary activity with the older group and verb conjugation exercises with the whole group. For the other activities, the children would carry out language exercises individually or in small groups (Interview no. 10). We also want to note that the HL teachers in the present study did not have to teach the home language in mixed classes (Carreira 2016). The interview data revealed that HL teachers seemed to have adopted pedagogical practices used by Finnish teachers, especially those they had considered effective. For instance, one interviewee mentioned that s/he had found Finnish methods 'more effective' and had tried to 'merge' Finnish methods with the ones from the country of origin. The effective methods were described as open, interactive and student-centred.

Based on the interview data and the responses to Statement 47 (see Table 4), it could be observed that the HL classes were not strictly linguistic. This meant that not only the language itself was taught (grammar, spelling, etc.) but also a variety of cultural aspects (e.g. traditional festivities, history and geography, food, literature, music and poetry). In the interviews, one of the HL teachers stated that s/he dealt with 'dates and festivities' and the geographical characteristics of the country in question. The methods used by the teachers varied widely. Language teaching in HL classes seemed to be not very systematic and included, in addition to various aspects of language and communication, cultural information and different methods to encourage learning of the language by doing (e.g. cooking and games). Because the HL classes were heterogeneous and mostly took place in the afternoon, the teachers had to look for functional activities to maintain their students' interest and motivation (see Table 4, Statement 46).

Table 5. Teachers' ratings regarding the challenges facing HL teachers. As described in Section 3.2.3, the average ranged from 1 (I disagree) to 4 (I fully agree).

Statement number	Mean	SD
13 I am satisfied with my work.	3.36	0.54
17 I feel satisfied and motivated.	3.4	0.93
21 I feel that my superiors support me.	2.92	0.47
22 I feel that my colleagues support me.	3.28	0.54
29 I have enough material for teaching.	2.8	0.93
32 I need to develop my knowledge to meet the needs of my students.	2.88	0.82
47 I do not only teach in my classes; I also do some extracurricular activities.	3.15	0.86
51 I feel satisfied with my own practices.	3.5	0.70

Challenges in HL maintenance courses

The reported challenges by HL teachers can be categorised based on the following factors: context, schedule, heterogeneous groups, materials and the language itself. Table 5 shows statements related to these challenges.

The responses to Statement 29 (SD = 0.93) indicated that there was a lack of teaching materials and that a considerable number of the HL teachers had to adapt their own materials. In the interviews, one teacher commented that his or her stress was due to the lack of teaching materials. The questionnaire results showed that the HL teachers usually felt motivated (see Table 5, Statement 17, SD = 0.93) and (with a lower SD) that their superiors and colleagues supported them (see Table 5, Statements 21 and 22). As stated in the interviews, both afternoon and early morning schedules were considered as a challenge. Teachers told that in the afternoon, the students after school were more tired; besides, other extracurricular activities, such as sports and music, often coincided. Therefore, their schedules represented a challenge for the HL teachers, as the following comment showed:

> Another point … it is that HL is after school, so I have to do more projects, games, etc. I have to be more flexible and also to adapt or do different activities depending on the level of the pupils. (Interview no. 3)

As stated above, another challenge seemed to be the heterogeneity of the groups concerning both age and level of language proficiency although they did not have to teach in mixed language classes (Carreira 2016). The language itself appeared to be sometimes a challenge, even more so in the case of a pluricentric language (Clyne and Kipp 2011). The following excerpt from an interview illustrated this:

> This is complicated in my case. There are Arabs from all over the world; there are big differences. I explain the differences—how it is done in … another country … The big problem is religion, within the Muslims themselves, you know, Shiite, etc. … Some people want that I teach things that do not correspond to me … I solve it by saying that this is Finland, that religion does not enter language maintenance classes. (Interview no. 9)

Besides the challenges above, the HL teachers felt that Finnish mainstream teachers did not trust them. They reported that Finnish teachers doubted whether the HL teachers could manage the classroom or produce teaching materials; moreover, they even seemed to doubt whether the HL teachers were qualified for the teaching profession. One interviewee, for instance, stated that Finnish teachers think that HL teachers are 'not important'. The interview data also indicated the willingness of HL teachers to meet Finnish teachers during school days. One interviewee pointed out that s/he 'almost never meet Finnish teachers' as s/he is teaching on Friday afternoons 'when almost all teachers have left already'. The distrust may be due to the fact that the training and the qualification of the HL teachers often is not institutionalised (Carreira and Kagan 2018). The following excerpt from an interview illustrated this distrust:

> They think that we do not have qualifications, competence. I think that we look strange, but sometimes this feeling is also reciprocal. They think that we are not professional: we do not have language skills [Finnish] or pedagogic skills, didactics, etc. They think that we are part of the afternoon club of the school—in other words, that we don't know how to teach. (Interview no. 2)

The HL teachers often felt that they needed to develop their specific pedagogical knowledge in HL teaching (see Table 5, Statement 32, SD = 0.82). From our findings, it emerged that when the HL teachers were happy with their work, the challenges were easier to deal with. In the interview data, it could be also stated by some HL teachers that they would have needed more possibilities to exchange thoughts about teaching practices with Finnish mainstream teachers working in their schools. Some interviewees, for instance, referred to their multifaceted language skills, as they often worked not only as HL teachers, but also as translators or interpreters, but seemed to need to discuss about pedagogical issues with Finnish teachers.

Discussion and implications for HL teaching

In general, the results of our study in the Finnish context indicate that HL teachers are very important persons in the lives of HL children and families. First, based on our results, they seemed to play a significant role as multilingual identity supporters (De Angelis 2011; Menken and García 2010). The teachers in our study gave a very high score when asked about their identification with the language, the culture and their students. They highly valued diversity in Finnish society as well as their students' own maintenance of their language and culture. They mentioned that they discussed these aspects frequently with their students. In this way, HL teachers indirectly support the FLP of families that register their children in maintenance courses (Bateman and Wilkinson 2010; Melo-Pfeifer 2015).

Our results showed the important role played by the HL teachers in building linguistic and cultural identity. A possible reason for this may be that they were native speakers and shared the same cultural background as their students. The HL teachers also seemed to value the importance of showing the presence of the heritage culture outside the school. In their beliefs and practices, the teachers showed a deep understanding of their students' multilingualism (Haukås 2016; Hélot and Laoire 2011). They were also convinced that minority language skills would help their students in the future. This is also in line with the goals of the current core curriculum for basic education in Finland (FNBE 2014). As HL teachers are aware of the goals prescribed in the curriculum, they play an important role as political agents when they implement these in their teaching (Tarnanen and Palviainen 2018).

Second, the HL teachers reflected a willingness to develop themselves pedagogically. As revealed in Section 4.3, the teachers created their own materials and adapted these to meet the needs of their students. Their teaching methods varied from traditional vocabulary learning to more creative methods, such as drama, games, and arts and crafts. They creatively used different teaching methods, especially learning by doing and translanguaging strategies (Melo-Pfeifer 2015). They also adapted or developed their own teaching materials.

From the results of the present study, it emerged clearly that the HL teachers encountered many challenges in their day-to-day work. Regarding the second research question, they highlighted, for example, that they felt Finnish mainstream teachers' distrust towards them. Other problems that were often brought up by the teachers included heterogeneous groups that differed both in age and level of linguistic skills. It could be observed that the teachers used student peers to assist in solving the problem of heterogeneous groups. Moreover, there seemed to be a lack of materials not only in the less taught migrant languages (e.g. Spanish, Polish and Italian) but also in some of the *bigger* heritage languages worldwide (e.g. Arabic, Kurdish and Russian). Also, the teachers identified challenges in the scheduling of classes and even in aspects related to the language itself.

Analysing interviews more deeply, we found some advances in the field of HL teaching. Nowadays, the HL is in the Finnish core curriculum for basic education as an optative subject (FNBE 2014). This means that it should be evaluated verbally in second, sixth and ninth grade.

The above-mentioned problems could be solved. For example, in the case of mainstream teachers' distrust, meetings could be organised where mainstream teachers and HL teachers could share their experiences. One challenge for the HL teaching in Finland is the lack of specialised

pre-service and in-service teacher training (cf. Carreira and Kagan 2018). In the case of heterogeneous groups, specific in-service teacher training could be offered. The lack of specific materials for HL teaching and learning could be solved through macro-level decisions (Curdt-Christiansen 2009). The findings of our study indicated that the HL teachers did not necessarily feel that they were supported by families (Bezcioglu-Göktolga and Yagmur 2018). Accordingly, more attention could be paid to cooperation between HL teachers and families. The results showed that there was no professional formative knowledge development in the field of HL teaching and learning. A significant number of the teachers felt that they needed more knowledge and felt insecure in their work.

One limitation of this study can be found in its subjective nature, as one of the researchers had a double role as both a researcher and an HL teacher. Although all the participants had a very good working knowledge of Finnish, their responses may have been limited, as the interviews were not conducted in their mother tongue. Moreover, we would like to note that teachers' affirmations cannot be assumed as a synonym for their practices. The questionnaire answers only show teachers' beliefs and not their real practices. Hence, we need more classroom-based research on HL teaching (Carreira and Kagan 2018). Another limitation of the present study is that we focused on HL teachers' perceptions in the Finnish context that do not account the full-complexity of HL teachers' actions. Finally, as there are very few studies on HL teachers (Cho 2014; Lee and Oxelsson 2006), there is a need for further research to understand the work of these teachers and their contribution to FLP. In addition, more information is needed about the profession of HL teachers, especially classroom-based studies (Carreira and Kagan 2018). We hope to be able to study this field further and analyse aspects that emerged from our results, such as the degree and type of pedagogical expertise and the beliefs of HL teachers.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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