



A Light from Finland: Uncovering Teachers' Role in Evaluating Students' Learning through Parent-Teacher Conferences

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Abstract

The implementation of the Merdeka curriculum has posed significant challenges for teachers, particularly in learning assessment practices. This study explores the roles of Finnish teachers in evaluating student progress during parent-teacher conferences (PTCs) using a qualitative, autoethnographic approach guided by teacher practice theory. The findings highlight that Finnish teachers utilize comprehensive materials and diverse sources, playing as mentors for children by empowering students to articulate their learning experiences and collaborate with parents through fostering shared educational responsibilities with parents, which indicates the practice represented beyond solely the pedagogical domain. However, the study cautions against directly replicating the Finnish model in Indonesia due to the limited number of participants and differences in educational systems, cultural contexts, and institutional frameworks. Future research should include a larger participant pool to provide a broader understanding of PTCs in Finland, enabling Indonesia to adapt these practices effectively and resolving the problem of student learning assessment in the Merdeka curriculum.

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INTRODUCTION

Merdeka's curriculum has positively impacted educational practices at the basic education level in Indonesia. Studies have shown that the new curriculum provides teachers with greater flexibility to navigate the educational process, increases their motivation, encourages parental participation, and fosters strong enthusiasm for learning among students (Alfajri & Andarwulan, 2023; Ariyanti et al., 2024; Fransiska et al., 2023; MOECRT, 2024; Sukoco et al., 2023).

However, despite these benefits, many teachers still face significant challenges in the effectiveness of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Albar & Nugroho, 2024; Ana et al., 2023; Aqodiah et al., 2023; Asmahasanah et al., 2023; Fransiska et al., 2023; Lisdawati, 2024; Mufida et al., 2023; Sahnun & Wibowo, 2023; Sitorus, 2024). Previous studies indicate that while there are various assessment methods available, such as authentic, diagnostic, summative, and formative assessments (Azis & Lubis, 2023; Budiono & Hatip, 2023; Mujiburrahman et al., 2023; Mukhtamar et al., 2024), teachers often find these methods difficult to apply, particularly at the basic education level (Albar & Nugroho, 2024; Astuti et al., 2024; Dharmawan et al., 2020; Firdaus & Permana, 2024; Hanifah et al., 2024; Laulita et al., 2022; Purwanti et al., 2024; Putri & Mustika, 2024; Rosidah et al., 2021; Sucipto et al., 2024; Wijayanti, 2023).

According to the Merdeka curriculum prescribed document (MOECRT, 2022), it is explicitly stated that assessment is an integral component of the learning process. It facilitates learning and provides comprehensive feedback for teachers, students, and parents, guiding them in determining subsequent learning strategies. However, the significant challenges teachers face in terms of assessment might threaten the overall effectiveness of the learning process and the Merdeka Curriculum as a whole. Accordingly, addressing these issues is essential to ensure that the curriculum can be implemented successfully and achieve its intended educational outcomes. Asmahanan et.al. (2023) reported that first-grade teachers have been proactive in enhancing their teaching skills by tapping into a variety of resources. They utilized official sites like the Ministry of Education's website and the Merdeka platform, attended specialized webinars, and sought advice from school supervisors and seasoned colleagues. Additionally, they embraced diverse teaching methods to enrich their classrooms. In addition, enhancing teacher support and fostering collaboration have been emphasized by Hafiz et.al. (2024), who highlights the importance of bolstering teacher support and fostering collaboration among educators. Aini and Adiyono (2023) highlight the need for synergy among relevant parties, including the Ministry of Religious Affairs, to ensure cohesive efforts in curriculum implementation. Then, support from the principals and the broader school community to create a conducive environment for the new curriculum is also important (Lubis & Priyadi, 2022). Furthermore, more comprehensive training for

teachers to effectively implement the curriculum is also needed (Abdullah & Hendrayanto, 2024; Fitriyah et al., 2024; T. D. Latifa et al., 2024; Lisdawati, 2024).

Other studies propose diverse strategies to address the challenges of assessment, each with unique benefits and potential limitations. For instance, Shodiq (2023) advocates for the use of formative assessment apps, which can deliver real-time feedback and effectively monitor student progress. However, this technological reliance introduces challenges related to accessibility and digital literacy, particularly among both teachers and students. Astari et al. (2023) Wulandari and Maemonah (2023) recommend frequent feedback rubrics to offer structured and consistent insights for teachers when doing the assessment. While this can aid students in understanding their strengths and areas for improvement, it also requires significant time and effort from teachers to develop and apply these rubrics consistently. Hadiastriani et al. (2024) emphasize the need for innovative assessment tools to capture student learning more dynamically. Although these tools can enhance engagement and provide a broader picture of student learning, they may also require additional training and resources that are not always readily available. Serani and Hairida (2024) highlight the importance of integrating technology into the assessment process, making it more efficient and engaging. However, this integration can be hindered by a lack of infrastructure and support, particularly in under-resourced schools. Finally, Nurcahyono (2023) and Wilson (2023) stress the necessity for technical guidance and specific training for teachers.

This study investigates a unique perspective regarding how students' performance is assessed from overseas, specifically drawing on the Finnish model of parent-teacher conferences (PTCs). According to Berger (2008) PTCs in Finland are personal opportunities for three-way communication among parents, teachers, and students. It refers to the process where teachers, parents, and students sit together discussing the children's learning journey as a crucial aspect of their development (Hautamäki & Kupiainen, 2014; Schaffar & Wolff, 2024). The international experiences discussed in this study provide valuable insights and alternative approaches for addressing assessment challenges faced by teachers in Indonesia. By sharing first-hand experiences with the Finnish educational system, this research aims to highlight practical strategies that could complement and enhance existing methods in Indonesia. The objective is to offer meaningful insights that can enrich educational practices, particularly in the evaluation of student learning.

This research has the potential to inform the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which, like the Finnish system, prioritizes student-centered learning and teacher flexibility as the PTCs offer valuable insights for a more holistic and personalized approach to students' learning evaluation.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach, especially the autoethnographic method. Autoethnography (Adams & Herrmann, 2020; Holman-Jones, 2005) provides the researcher's personal experiences to problematize on cultural practices and social interactions, offering a profound and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter that they investigate. Practically, this method involves reflection on one's own experiences and their intersections with broader societal issues, facilitating an understanding of the interplay between the personal and the cultural (Ellis et al., 2011), which then justifies the contextual understanding of the researcher (Yazan, 2024).

Living in Finland with family for over six years has given researchers a deep understanding of the Finnish education system through both direct involvement and personal experiences. Frequent PCT attendance has made the researcher well-versed in the comprehensive features of the educational practices in the country. This unique perspective, blending researcher's academic background with the experiences as a parent, allows him to explore the complex dynamics of PCTs in a meaningful way. Therefore, this study positions the researcher as both an investigator and a participant, making autoethnography the ideal method (Ellis & Adams, 2014), while Freeman (2011) suggests "the researcher functions as the prime, and often the sole source of information" (p. 927). In adopting a dual role as both a researcher and a parent, Elliot (2011) used the term "researcher as narrator" (p.153), I bring a unique and enriched perspective to the investigation of PCTs within the Finnish context.

In conducting this autoethnographic study, the data collected encompassed a variety of sources. I primarily relied on my reflections and notes taken during and after PCTs in an international school in Finland where my children attended preschool and basic educational levels (*peruskoulu*). This included documenting interactions, observations, and feelings experienced throughout these sessions (Adams & Herrmann, 2020; Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011; Freeman, 2011). Additionally, I gathered forms distributed by teachers, self-assessments completed by my children beforehand, and their responses during conferences. Conversations with teachers and students during these meetings also provided valuable insights.

Conducting research on personal experiences provides unique insights that other researchers might miss (Zichner et al., 2014). However, potential biases from personal experiences can impact the objectivity of findings (Webber et al., 2022), and limited research experience may affect the study's rigor (Gilfedder, 2010).

As the theoretical base, this study utilizes the teacher practice theory as proposed by Klein (2012), further elaborated by Teig et al. (2024), which encompasses a broad spectrum of activities and responsibilities undertaken by teachers within educational settings. These activities include selecting and

implementing instructional methods, designing and administering assessments, developing lesson plans, and adapting curriculum materials (Anderman & Anderman, 2020; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Denessen et al., 2022; Fullan, 2016; Shulman, 1986; Wallace, 2009; Wong & Wong, 1998). Teig et al. (2024) point out three key aspects of teacher practice that directly impact student learning are content coverage (what teachers teach), teaching quality (how teachers deliver the content), and assessment practice (how teachers evaluate students' learning outcomes), as shown in the Figure 1 below:

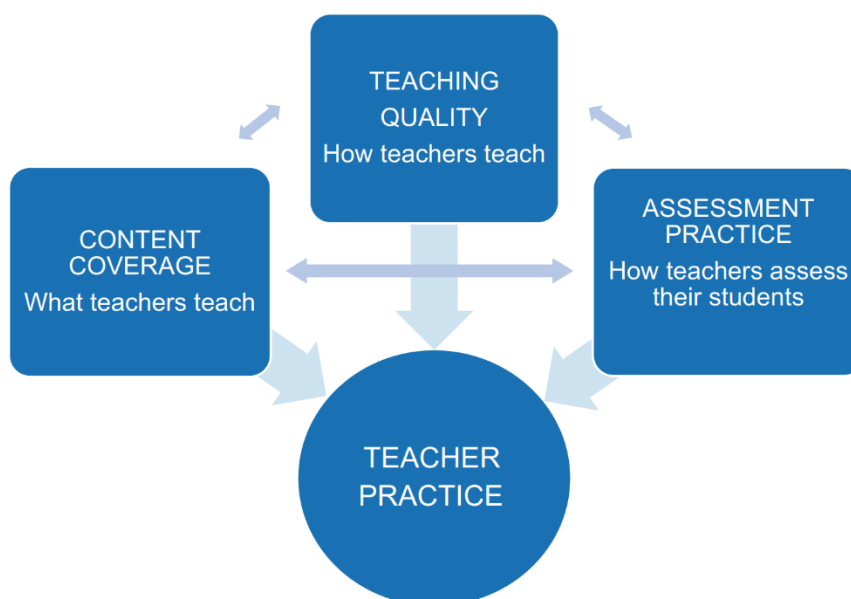


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of teacher practice by Teig et al. (2024)

These features are interconnected and significantly shape students' learning experiences and progress (Fauth et al., 2014; Panadero et al., 2017; Schmidt et al., 2021). Practically, Klein's (2012) theory of teacher practice provides a valuable framework for examining the role of teachers in parent-teacher conferences.

More concretely in the analysis stage of this study, I used 'interactive model' (Miles et al., 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994), consisting of four main stages: Data Collection, Data Condensation, Data Display, and Conclusion Drawing/Verification. The process begins with data collection. I gathered information through personal notes and observation during parent-teacher conferences, sheets distributed to be filled out by parents and students, and teachers' feedback on children's development and learning progress. Next, data condensation involves selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the raw data to make it manageable and meaningful. Following this, the data display stage organizes and presents the condensed data in formats like charts, matrices, graphs, and narrative descriptions, creating visual representations that highlight key findings and relationships. Finally, drawing conclusion and verification involve interpreting the displayed data to

identify patterns, themes, and insights that answer the research questions. Verification is an ongoing process where I checked the validity and reliability of the conclusions by revisiting the data and ensuring consistency. The Interactive model is iterative, not a linear or sequential, meaning I often moved back and forth between these stages as new insights emerge, emphasizing the importance of continuously refining and verifying data to ensure robust and credible findings.

The analysis focused on how teachers operated the parent-teacher conferences. Teachers' roles in presenting and explaining student progress and development were scrutinized, with particular attention to how they confirmed what parents were doing to help their children learn at home. The feedback mechanisms employed by teachers were analyzed, assessing how constructive criticism, praise, and suggestions for improvement were delivered and received. Additionally, the extent of content coverage during the meetings was evaluated to ensure a comprehensive overview of the student's learning journey. I maintained reflexive notes on how teachers navigated and conducted the conferences.

By applying Klein's theory and interactive model (Miles et al., 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994), the analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the role teachers play in parent-teacher conferences. The interconnections between content coverage, teaching quality, and assessment practice were explored, highlighting how these aspects collectively shaped the effectiveness of the meetings. The contextual analysis considered Finland's collaborative educational culture, providing insights into how local norms influenced teacher practices.

RESULTS

1. *Pre-conference Practicalities*

Approximately two months before the parent-teacher conferences, the teacher typically offered the parents an extensive range of scheduling options, considering their individual preferences. Teachers employed '*Wilma*', an online platform designed to facilitate communication between parents and the school. Parents had the freedom to select from this comprehensive set of options or propose a new schedule if they did not find a suitable option. Furthermore, the teacher provided opportunities for parents to modify the prearranged schedule, should they express a desire to do so. I recognized that I frequently requested to reschedule due to various reasons such as my obligations as a doctoral researcher, or the schedule coincided with other personal responsibilities.

Moreover, teachers would inquire if parents planned to attend the meeting with their spouse, a practice that was highly recommended (Alasuutari, 2020), or alone. In most instances, I found myself attending these conferences alone, as my wife was engaged in a language course or due to her work commitments.

Subsequently, approximately one week prior to the scheduled meeting, teachers commenced the process by disseminating forms, which are to be filled out by each student and parent. For the student, the form usually represents a self-evaluation encompassing several aspects, though it also depends on the class. In 2022, my first daughter, who was in the 9th grade, was asked to reflect on her learning strategies, questioning the methods she employs and how she strives to perform at their best. This is closely followed by an evaluation of student's academic strengths and areas requiring assistance and deliberations on their approach to lessons. My daughter was also asked to assess her ability to concentrate on tasks and their capacity to collaborate effectively with peers. Lastly, she was asked to consider her interpersonal skills, particularly how she considered the presence and feelings of others around them. This kind of self-assessment can help students identify areas where they excel and areas where they might need to improve.

The form given to my second daughter, who is in 2022 and was in the fourth grade, was slightly different as she was required to provide non-descriptive responses, but a range of options - 'always,' 'usually,' 'rarely,' as can be seen in Figure 1 below. The form looked for any insight and opinion by my daughter herself information about her behavior, her response about the way she managed work and assignments, and aspects that she needed to improve in the future.

SUBJECTS

I have done a good job in: Math and art

I think I need improvement in: Finnish

BEHAVIOUR

	always	usually	rarely
I take others into account		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
I behave nicely on all lessons	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
I follow the school rules	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
I give others peace to work	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
I help my classmates if needed		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

WORKING

	always	usually	rarely
I take care of my homework	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
I have my things with me	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
I can concentrate on lessons		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

If I want to do better at school, I need:

Finnish and English

Figure 2. Self-evaluation form for grade 4 in 2022

In addition, like the requirement for my second daughter, my son, in the second grade in 2023, was asked to select from a range of options - 'always,' 'often,' 'sometimes,' 'rarely' - in response to questions regarding behavior and works presented in the form, as can be seen from the Figure 2 above.

Self Evaluation Form

Name: _____ Date: _____

Classes 1-2	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
1. I am responsible and do my homework on time.				
2. I do my work carefully / neatly (spaces between words, periods, capital letters).				
3. I bring my books and other supplies to class (pencils, erasers etc.)				
4. I listen to instructions and follow them.				
5. I know how to work independently and quietly.				
6. I know how to express my own opinion and share ideas with the class/ group work.				
7. I listen to other people and take their opinions into account.				
8. I raise my hand before speaking.				
9. I ask when I don't understand.				
10. I enjoy learning new things.				
11. I behave well and speak in a polite manner.				
12. I get along with other students at Fista.				
13. I play fairly during breaks.				

Figure 3. Student self-evaluation form for Grades 1 – 2

In the context of the parental form, as can be seen in Figure 4 below, parents were required to narrate an in-depth reflection guided by a series of questions. These inquiries may encompass: "What is your child's disposition towards their educational institution?"; "What subjects does your child show a preference for in school and what are the reasons for this preference?"; "Which peers does your child

frequently refer to from their school environment?"; "In what areas do you perceive your child's progress to be strong?"; "Do you harbor any concerns regarding your child's progress in specific areas?"; and "What topics would you be interested in exploring further?". The completed forms from students and parents were then returned to teachers no later than one day before the conference was conducted.

PRE-CONFERENCE SURVEY

Please fill this survey and send it back to school with your child before our student-parent-teacher conferences. This will ensure that we cover all your concerns. If you need more space for writing, please feel free to use the back. You can write in Finnish or English. I look forward to seeing you soon!

Student name : _____

Parent(s) name(s) : _____

My child attitude about school is:

.....

What is your child favorites subject(s) at school and why?

.....

What and which friend does your child talk about from school:

.....

I see strengths in my child's progress in these areas:

.....

I have concern about my child's progress in these areas:

.....

Topics I would like to discuss further:

.....

Figure 4. Pre-conference survey form for parents of grade 4-9 students

Regarding the frequency of attendance at parent-teacher conferences, during my stay in Finland from 2018 to 2024, I attended a total of 20 parent-teacher conferences. Notably, only two of these conferences were conducted online due to COVID-19. Typically, I participated in at least one conference per year for each of my children.

This engagement provided me with valuable direct insights into the Finnish educational system and the dynamics of parent-teacher interactions. Table 1 below illustrates the frequency of attendance at those conferences.

Table 1. My attendance in parent-teacher conferences

No	Academic year	Children	Class	Attendance
1	2018 – 2019	First child	6	1x
		Second child	1	1x
2	2019 – 2020	First child	7	2x
		Second child	2	2x
3	2020 – 2021	First child	8	2 x (online, on-site@1x)
		Second child	3	2 x (online, on-site@1x)
4	2021 – 2022	First child	9	1 x
		Second child	4	2 x
		Third child	pre-school	1x
5	2022 – 2023	Second child	5	2x
		Third child	1	1x
6	2023 – 2024	Second child	6	1 x September 2023
		Third child	2	1x December 2023
		Second child	6	1 x January 2024

In terms of the conference’s mode, as Covid-19 emerged, the prevalence of online meetings surged. Teachers typically presented us with a choice between online or on-site meetings. I opted for on-site meetings, as they provided me with an immediate opportunity to seek clarification whenever I encountered something unclear.

Concerning the venue, the conferences always occurred in the classroom. Although I was uncertain about the rationale behind this selection, I speculated that it was largely about the teacher’s convenience. This setting enabled them to display my child’s academic achievements and creative projects, serving as tangible proof of their educational progression. Last, regarding the duration of the conferences, despite an anticipated timeframe of 25-30 minutes, the reality often stretched to 40 – 50 minutes. This additional time facilitated comprehensive discussions, rendering each meeting distinct. During these prolonged dialogues, I seized the opportunity to explore the Finnish learning style and pondered ways to align or modify my own learning approach.

2. The Typical Activities During the Conferences

During the parent-teacher conferences attended by students, parents, and teachers, the procedures typically followed a structured format. The teacher began by inviting the students to share their thoughts on their learning process over the

past semester. During this time, the teacher provided comments and clarifications, fostering a discussion. Following this, parents were given the opportunity to speak, after which the teacher presented their evaluation and observations. The conference then moved on to discussing any emerging topics before concluding with plans for the next year. These stages are illustrated in the figure 5 below.

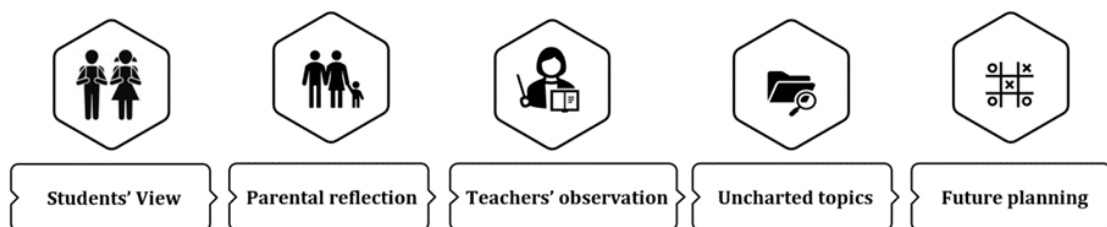


Figure 5. The Flow of Parent-Teacher Conferences in Finland

Firstly, after a brief introductory speech, the teacher initiated the discussion by posing questions to the students to listen to the children's voices and views. Some typical inquiries included: *How did you perceive your experience with schooling? What are your favorite things about schooling? Which subjects do you enjoy the most? Which subjects posed the greatest challenge for you? What studying methods do you find most effective? How can your schooling experience be enhanced? Did you engage in outdoor activities during breaks? Who do you usually play with during breaks?*

I always paid close attention to how my children responded to the teacher's inquiries. Their responses varied, ranging from detailed elaborations to succinct affirmations or negations, simply saying "Yes," "No," or "hmmm...kind of...". Sometimes, they were unsure, saying things like, "I am not sure, but history was the most challenging subject." The teacher replied:

I noticed your score is between 6 and 7, but don't be too hard on yourself. The key is to enjoy learning. Scores matter, and so do your understanding and engagement. Learning is a journey, and your effort is truly appreciated.

I was impressed with the teacher's response during the conference. When my daughter mentioned struggling with history, the teacher refrained from being judgmental and instead encouraged her to seek help, emphasizing their support and guidance. I was also surprised by my children's confidence in responding to questions, something I could not have done at their age. Most of the conference was dedicated to allowing children to express their opinions, which facilitated deep reflection on their learning experiences. Teachers asked clarifying questions and occasionally sought additional context from me, which I provided or encouraged my child to elaborate on. In addition to academic discussions, teachers inquired about my children's social lives, new friendships, weekend activities, and hobbies, demonstrating an interest in their overall well-being.

Then, move to the second round, where the teacher gave parents a chance to describe their views. The teacher asked parents to explain regarding their child,

assessing their development, behavior at home, and the efforts parents made in supporting their studies, such as whether parents assist with homework or if they accompany the child during study sessions. Additionally, parents are queried about the school's relationship with them, including the effectiveness of existing communication platforms in facilitating parent-teacher collaboration.

A thoughtful explanation was provided, acknowledging that the perspective shared is subjective. Assistance with children's learning, such as using a whiteboard at home to explain math problems, was discussed. For Finnish language lessons, reliance is placed on the wife, who is more skilled in that area. This teamwork within the family has been a key part of reflecting on the role in the child's education. However, it was also admitted that help cannot always be provided due to commitments as a doctoral student. Sometimes, arriving home very late prevents assistance with homework. Honesty about these challenges was felt to show that perfection is not claimed, but efforts are made to do the best possible.

In addition to discussing the questions provided by the teacher, I took the opportunity in 2023 to share specific information about my second daughter's education. I explained that, alongside her regular school attendance, she is also engaged in online learning for Indonesian education. This decision was made because we do not plan to stay here permanently, and we want to ensure she can easily adjust when we return. The teacher appreciated this decision and remarked, *"This is your decision as parents to do so. You know your own plan and what is best for your child. Make sure you discuss this with your child."*

Reflecting on this, I recognize the importance of open communication with teachers and the value of making informed decisions that align with our family's future plans.

After the student and parent's turn to express their opinion, the teacher delivered a comprehensive overview of the child's performance, behavior, and daily school life. Grounded in meticulous observations and notes, the teacher meticulously outlined areas of excellence or specific events and those demanding heightened parental attention.

I noted in Wilma that your child missed homework three times last semester. I just wanted to check if you were aware of that (conversation with a teacher of grade 4).

I openly admitted that it was my mistake for not ensuring whether my daughter had completed her homework or not. In 2022, when my son was in grade 1, the teacher shared something we hadn't heard from him before. She mentioned, *"I've noticed your son often takes on a 'policeman' role in class. For example, when I'm speaking, and some friends start chatting, he quietly reminds them to stop talking and listen."* My son immediately responded, *"Yes, because it's annoying... I couldn't hear*

what you were saying." The teacher smiled and said, *"Yes, you're right, but you should tell the teacher instead of handling it yourself."*

One year later, I met the same teacher; she explained another behavior about my son in the classroom:

I'm really impressed by how caring your son is with his friends. For example, when one of his classmates fell in the schoolyard, he was quick to check on them and offer help. He also showed kindness by sharing his cakes with others. His empathy and willingness to share have made a positive impact on his friendships. It's truly wonderful to see!

In the 2022 conference, the teacher of my first daughter also shared a kind of empathetic comment regarding the character of students of my daughter's age.

Dealing with teenagers can be tricky, especially when they start showing those rebellious traits. A lot of parents notice their kids shifting focus towards their friends and not relying on them as much. But don't stress—other kids are going through the same thing, too, and it's totally normal. (Teacher of Grade 9, Spring 2022)

In addition to using her own notes and observations, the teacher also gathered information about my children from other teachers. One teacher mentioned my daughter's performance in Swedish class, saying, *"Swedish might not be a popular subject, but it's part of the schedule this semester. I heard from the teacher that your daughter is doing really well in class."*

Last, the teacher also used a report card containing quantitative scores representing the performance of my first daughter.

Your daughter's overall score is great! As you can see on the report card, she's really excelling in Math. I don't usually give a perfect 10, but she's definitely on track, and I might consider it next semester (conversation with a teacher of grade 8)!

During the next phase of the conference, we had an open forum for unexplored topics. Typically, teachers would ask if we had any additional subjects to discuss beyond what was covered earlier. I often used this opportunity to seek their opinions on specific themes. For instance, I once asked about the use of gadgets for school children, expressing my concern about my children spending too much time on screens. The teachers usually responded thoughtfully and professionally.

On another occasion, I inquired whether the school provided a designated room for religious activities, such as a prayer room, since we are Muslim. The teachers gave brief responses, and if the matter was beyond their authority, they promised to seek information from the relevant school officials. The question about the prayer room was one such instance. Overall, this open forum was a valuable moment for us to raise additional concerns and receive feedback. There were times when I did not use this opportunity because we felt that everything had been clear.

The final stage of the conference usually focuses on future planning. During this phase, teachers provided specific details regarding the plans for the students. For instance, next semester, my daughter would have had the option to choose from several language classes, including Spanish, French, or German. This was crucial because, in subsequent years, students would need to concentrate on strengthening their proficiency in the chosen language, as mastering multiple languages was essential in Finland.

Another teacher mentioned that in the next grade, there would be the introduction of new subjects, such as biology and chemistry. However, this information was only a brief overview. For more detailed updates, the teachers would provide further information in a more comprehensive manner.

3. Post-conference Follow Up

After parent-teacher conferences, discussions with my wife and children typically took place during dinner. We reviewed the conference topics, clarified any ambiguities, and added our insights. Teachers' feedback was rephrased to highlight strengths and areas for improvement. We addressed our son's behavior at school and discussed strategies for improvement without assigning blame. The focus was on doing their best and following teachers' instructions.

Future actions were also considered, such as my increased availability to support our children due to a more flexible schedule while my wife had commitments to her language course. We planned new strategies for hobbies and activities, like regular cycling or badminton. These discussions helped us coordinate efforts to support our children's development. Any agreed actions impacting schooling were communicated to the teacher via email. Teachers' expectations for learning and behavior were reinforced during our conversations.

DISCUSSION

1. Finding a common ground

The teacher's initiative to offer parents flexibility in choosing the schedule is a significant demonstration of their commitment to fostering a collaborative and inclusive educational environment. This action could be interpreted as an active pursuit of consensus or mutual understanding with parents on certain aspects. While the teachers could have exercised their authority to determine a fixed schedule, they instead chose to empower parents with the autonomy to select a schedule that best accommodates their individual circumstances. This decision not only highlights the teachers' preference for a more collaborative approach but also shows their dedication to finding common ground with parents.

Moreover, the teacher's request for parents to fill out the pre-conference forms is another evidence of their efforts to engage parents in the educational process. This proactive step ensures that the discussions during the conference are not unilaterally driven by the teacher but are shaped by the concerns of the parents. It is a clear indication of the teacher's commitment to creating a dialogue with parents, further strengthening the notion of finding common ground.

These actions reflected the Finnish education system, while teachers are highly respected professionals trusted to make decisions about their teaching methods and learning materials (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2020), but they initiated to involve parents in the educational process. The action demonstrates a commitment to creating a collaborative and inclusive educational environment. Teachers do not dictate that parents show their power in decision-making. The Finnish education system emphasizes equal opportunities (Kumpulainen & Lankinen, 2012). By involving parents in the decision-making process, teachers are promoting these values, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their circumstances. The teacher's actions indicate their collaborator, working tirelessly to find common ground with parents. It is evidence of the comprehensive understanding of a teacher's role in today's educational landscape, where decision-making is a shared process, and parents are valued partners, not solely dominated by teachers themselves.

2. Encouraging self-reflection to students

This study revealed that teachers provided students with a self-assessment form to complete before the conference commenced. In addition, during the initial phase of the conferences, teachers always offered the first opportunity for students to express their thoughts on their learning. This approach suggested that teachers encouraged students to engage in self-reflection. Self-reflection is a conscious mental process where individuals observe and report their own thoughts, desires, and feelings. (Gläser-Zikuda, 2012; Phillips, 2020). By prompting students to contemplate their experiences, the teacher assists them in developing self-awareness about their learning processes and interests. This practice is indicative of a pedagogical strategy aimed at fostering student autonomy and self-directed learning. Teachers place significant emphasis on student voice, a concept deeply rooted in democratic education. This approach aligns with the belief that students should have the right to express their thoughts and opinions about their educational experiences (Cook-Sather, 2006), contrasting with the practice in another part of the world where teachers dominate the assessment of learning progress, and students have no opportunity to say a word (Lee, 2016).

It clearly indicated that teachers implemented the student-centered approach, where students are treated as active participants in their learning process rather

than passive recipients of knowledge (Niemi, 2018; Sahlberg, 2011), especially the learning assessment process during parent-teacher meetings. Teachers foster student autonomy by encouraging the exploration of topics of interest, cultivating a love for learning, and developing critical thinking skills (Piaget & Cook, 1952). Teachers also provide more opportunities for students to take part in decision-making; their preferences are considered in the learning process in an educational setting, aligning with the principles of self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975). This approach allows students to take the initiative in their learning process, from diagnosing their learning needs to evaluating their learning outcomes. Furthermore, this practice of encouraging student voice also aligns with the sociocultural theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in cognitive development. By giving students the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings, teachers are essentially creating a dialogic learning environment where knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and dialogue with their surrounding actors and environment (Janfada et al., 2022; Lehesvuori et al., 2017), not solely individual process within themselves.

Furthermore, teachers offer students the opportunity to express their perspectives during PCTs, suggesting that teachers not only utilize these sessions to define moments of learning assessment but also view them as integral to the learning process itself. Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating these discussions, guiding students to actively engage in self-evaluation. This involves identifying their strengths, preferences, ineffective methods, subjects they struggled with, areas for improvement, and strategies for achieving their learning objectives (Hautamäki & Kupiainen, 2014; NSW, 2020). Learning is considered a personal process in which the interests, expectations, and strategies are unique for each child. Teachers accommodate to personalize the learning plan. Parent-teacher conferences in Finland have become a place for a contestation where teachers empower students.

There is a significant insight regarding the opportunity for children to express their opinions. The key point to consider is that addressing this issue is feasible because the Core Curriculum for Education mandates that children are active participants (The Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018). Consequently, Finland implements policies that prioritize the best interests of children, ensuring they have the right and opportunity to voice their views. In contrast, in Indonesia, although the Merdeka Curriculum principle mandates a learner-centered approach, in practice, children remain subordinate to adults (Adriany, 2019). Their rights to participate in the decision-making process are relatively limited.

3. Inquiring about Parental Involvement

This study found that during parent-teacher conferences, teachers took the lead by inviting parents to share what they had done to support their children's

education. By doing so, teachers actively promoted the importance of the home-school connection. They emphasized the critical role that parents play in their children's academic success and personal development. Teachers encouraged parents to be more involved by highlighting how their support at home could complement and enhance the educational efforts at school. This proactive approach by teachers helped to build a strong partnership with parents, fostering a collaborative environment where both parties worked together towards the common goal of improving student outcomes.

Previous studies highlight the importance of parent-teacher partnerships in fostering children's academic and social success. Simon & Epstein (2001) and Rouse (2012) emphasize that these relationships are crucial for improving children's academic performance, work habits, social skills, and emotional well-being. Goodall and Montgomery (2023) discuss the evolution from parental involvement to parental engagement, highlighting that active parental engagement has the greatest impact on a child's educational experience. This shift signifies a more proactive role for parents in their children's education. Wilder (2023) synthesizes findings from nine meta-analyses, confirming this relationship. Similarly, Fan and Chen (2001) and Jeynes (2007) support these findings by noting the particular benefits for certain elementary school students who face additional challenges such as limited resources and socio-economic disadvantages. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2010) explores the mechanisms through which parental involvement influences student achievement. They highlight that these mechanisms enhance academic performance, motivation, and self-regulation, showcasing the multifaceted nature of parental involvement.

The discourse of parental involvement is context-dependent, meaning that how teachers, parents, and authorities conceptualize it can vary significantly. This variation is influenced by cultural, social, and educational contexts, including in countries like Indonesia. Indonesia's diverse socio-cultural landscape, with its numerous ethnic groups, languages, and traditions, adds layers of complexity to how parental involvement is understood and practiced (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

By inquiring about parental involvement, teachers play a crucial role in emphasizing that education is a shared responsibility, involving not just the school but also active parental participation to help children grow and develop (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; R. Latifa, 2024; Liu et al., 2020; Manduku et al., 2017; Sitanggang, 2023; Sulaiman et al., 2022; Ubaidillah et al., 2024) as a cornerstone of effective education. In Finland, the principle of shared responsibility is deeply embedded in the educational framework (The Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018; Toom & Husu, 2012). Finnish schools prioritize a strong collaboration between parents and teachers, recognizing that the combined efforts of both parties are essential for fostering students' academic and personal growth. This shared responsibility involves regular communication, active parental involvement in school activities, and a unified commitment to supporting students' overall development (Kambouri

et al., 2022; Purola et al., 2022). The Finnish model demonstrates how a well-coordinated approach, where parents and teachers work together seamlessly, can create a more supportive and effective educational environment, balancing rights and obligations between supporting one another (Levinthal De Oliveira Lima & Kuusisto, 2020).

Conversely, the responsibility for education in Indonesia being primarily held by teachers rather than shared with parents can be attributed to various factors highlighted in the research. The existing confusion and lack of communication between parents and educators, as discussed by Kimmel (1976), contribute to the unclear roles each party plays in curriculum development. Additionally, the unequal distribution of cultural capital among families, as emphasized by Smith (2004), can lead to challenges in parental involvement in education. Furthermore, the traditional perception of educators as experts and parents as peripheral to the educational process, as explored by Dunn (2004), reinforces the idea that education is primarily the responsibility of teachers. These factors combined create a scenario where the educational responsibility in Indonesia remains predominantly with teachers rather than being effectively shared with parents.

4. Adopting holistic assessment

From the discussions during the PCTs, it was evident that teachers focus on the holistic development of students, not just their academic performance. They assess various aspects such as classroom behavior, favorite subjects, homework, and other relevant factors. Beyond academics, teachers also engage with both students and parents about friendships, leisure activities, hobbies, and social-emotional development. This thorough approach ensures that the evaluation of each student encompasses their overall growth and well-being, reflecting a commitment to nurturing their complete development.

Their role represents a shift from a purely academic focus to a more balanced perspective of education that values personal growth and life skills alongside academic achievement. In short, the role of teachers in the Finnish education system points out the potential benefits of adopting a more holistic approach in other educational contexts. Their role as facilitators of a comprehensive learning experience is a testament to the effectiveness of this approach.

Holistic development of children is essential in Finland due to the country's emphasis on child-centered approaches, well-being, and education systems that prioritize a child's overall growth and learning (The Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018; Yliverronen, 2014). In Finland, early childhood education and care, pre-primary education, and basic education are integrated to facilitate a child's development progressively, focusing on imagination, play, and problem-solving skills (Adaikalam et al., 2018). The Finnish education system aims to promote a

child's holistic growth and development through a national core curriculum that values each child's individuality and potential, ensuring that every child is accepted and supported in their learning journey (OECD, 2019). Additionally, Finland's National Child Strategy highlights the importance of anticipation and well-being for children, aiming to create a consistent foundation and better cooperation across different government levels to secure the status of vulnerable children and embed children's rights in mainstream policies and practices (Adaikalam et al., 2018; Pylväs et al., 2018). This comprehensive approach to child development in Finland emphasizes the significance of considering all aspects of a child's well-being to ensure their overall success and thriving (Niemi, 2015; Toom & Husu, 2012; Trodd, 2016).

The education system in Indonesia perceived teachers predominantly emphasizing academic intelligence, often prioritizing academic achievements over other aspects of children's development, which can limit their potential (Fuad, 1970; Sakhiyya & Rahmawati, 2024). This focus is particularly evident in how teachers assess children's readiness for elementary school, with a stronger emphasis on academic preparedness rather than adopting a holistic approach (Pangestuti et al., 2019). Although teachers do make efforts to incorporate character education alongside academic learning, the system's prevailing emphasis remains on academic outcomes (Agustini, 2021). As a result, teachers often prioritize academic performance at the expense of fostering the overall development of children (Ardika et al., 2017).

In contrast, teachers in Finland adopt a more balanced approach, giving equal importance to both academic and non-academic aspects of a child's development as mentioned above. Finnish educators embrace a holistic view of education, recognizing the importance of nurturing students' overall well-being and personal growth alongside their academic achievements. This difference highlights the potential for Indonesian teachers to broaden their focus, integrating both academic and non-academic dimensions to support the full development of their students.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the essential role of Finnish teachers in parent-teacher conferences, where they go beyond conservative role, as merely educator with pedagogical boundaries in evaluating children's learning. Teachers encourage self-reflection in children, empowering them and ensuring their voices are heard, indicated the mentoring role they played. Additionally, teachers actively involve parents, advocating for shared educational responsibility and emphasizing that children's education is primarily the responsibility of parents, with teachers providing secondary support, representing collaborator for parents. Through holistic assessments, teachers endorse a whole-child approach, addressing every

dimension of a child's development, beyond mere academic performance. This comprehensive involvement highlights the importance of a collaborative and inclusive approach to education, where the roles of teachers and parents are harmoniously integrated to support the overall growth and development of children.

The current research was conducted based on experience and the observations of a single participant, which limits the potential for generalizing the results and findings. The Finnish methods of evaluating student learning through parent-teacher conferences should be interpreted with caution when considering their applicability to Indonesia. While practices such as involving children in expressing their opinions, encouraging greater parental participation, and using various resources—not just academic reports—offer valuable insights, they may not be directly transferable due to cultural and systemic differences.

To build on this study, future research should aim to include a larger number of participants to provide a broader and more comprehensive understanding of parent-teacher conferences in Finland. This would enable Indonesia to draw valuable lessons and adapt these practices in a relevant and effective manner.

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