Intersectional Factors between Ethnicity, ADHD and Dropout in Upper Secondary School in Iceland

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Thesis for B.A. degree

International Studies in Education
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Abstract

Studies show that a large percentage of children with multicultural backgrounds dropout of school in Iceland (Birgisdóttir, 2015). There are numerous and intersecting factors that influence this decision for students. Among these factors is the lack of academic and social support they receive during their school years. Research on Icelandic children between the ages of 7 and 15, who have an ADHD diagnosis has increased in the last few years, and a study conducted in 2007 shows that 5% of children were using psychotropic drugs, which could be a further factor in dropping out. To date, there is no research in Iceland that indicates if a diagnosis like ADHD contributes to the rate of immigrant student dropout. These factors need further analysis. My paper is an attempt to understand how an ADHD diagnosis can impact immigrant student retention rates in Icelandic schools. With the continued increase in the number of multicultural children in the schools, the need is great for better implementation of theory and practice in inclusive education to benefit all students.
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Preface

When pursing a dream, investing everything is worth it and seeing results is very satisfying. Knowledge is rewarding, especially when it relates to something about which you care very much. This work has increased my views and interest about human and social dynamics and the importance of contribution and reciprocity. This is only the beginning.

I give special thanks to my family, particularly to my children who have been patient with me as a student and who inspire me to pursue my dreams. To my husband, thanks for your support.

This thesis was written solely by me, the undersigned. I have read and understand the university code of conduct and have followed them to the best of my knowledge. I have correctly cited to all other works or previous work of my own, including, but not limited to, written works, figures, data or tables. I thank all who have worked with me and take full responsibility for any mistakes contained in this work.

Reykjavík, May 8\textsuperscript{th} 2018

\textit{Gloria Zarela Castro Conde}
1 Introduction

Iceland was an ethnically homogeneous society towards the end of the 20th century. Today, that reality has switched with immigration. Multiculturalism is growing much more rapidly within Icelandic society in comparison to its Scandinavian neighbors (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b). During the last decade, the number of people of foreign origin living in Iceland has risen considerably (Statistics Iceland, 2017a), having a big impact on society in different fields, not the least in the education system.

The impact of this growing diversity on the education system is reflected in student performance and outcomes during the school years. One of the consequences is a high percentage of children dropping out of upper secondary school, which will be explained in the second chapter. There are many reasons behind this, but children with multicultural backgrounds seem to be among the most vulnerable in the system, putting them at higher risk of dropping out of upper secondary school than their native-born peers. These children have to face many challenges related to intrinsic factors, such as family traditions, cultural perspectives, language, and moral values and extrinsic factors, such as income at home, mental illness, and behavioral problems. Dropping out will eventually influence their future attainment. In the third chapter, I introduce what multiculturalism brings to a new society and the immigrant population in Iceland. In the fourth chapter, I introduce ADHD and its influence on students, from dropping out to stigmatization due to the diagnosis. Finally, the fifth chapter is about Inclusion and suggestions for what we can do regarding Icelandic laws and regulations around children with disabilities. Supporting children diagnosed with ADHD with multicultural backgrounds is of great benefit for all students.

The reason for my interest in this subject comes from being an immigrant living in Iceland and having children with multicultural backgrounds, as well as having to live with ADHD at home. The procedure we had to follow with one of our children took a long time and few ordinary events happened along the process, delaying the agenda. I believe we will face many more challenges in the future and there will be unexpected events on this path. Therefore, awareness and better implementation of practices in the Icelandic education system are needed. Additionally, Icelandic policies regarding student dropout and for students with multicultural backgrounds with conditions such as ADHD need to be reinforced. This needs further analysis.
2 Dropout in Iceland

Since the high dropout rate in Iceland (Birgisdóttir, 2015) is worrisome which will be explained in the following paragraphs. First of all, it is necessary to explain how the process takes place for students who make this decision. According to Russell Rumberger (2011), dropout can be considered in at least three different ways. However, it is important to take into consideration demographic groups and countries.

1. As status. This means that students can be considered to be a dropout if they are not enrolled in a school and have not graduated from a school above the compulsory level. It can change within a period of time. With this statement, we can gather information concerning the numbers and more specific details about the students who dropout. In the White Paper on Education Reform (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b), the group of early school leavers is defined as the percentage of students who have neither completed any further education after completing the lower secondary level nor received any education or training.

2. As an event. Students can legally leave schooling if they are over the legal age for doing so. A less formal way of doing this is to stop attending classes or moving to another school, but possibly enrolling again. This definition can help us to understand the actions of groups of students and the different genders according to school communities during a period of time.

3. As a process. Students who had challenges during their school years will eventually abandon all effort in continuing studies because they do not think that they can do better. In this part, we can analyze behaviors and external factors that influence them to make such decisions and adjust for changes in specific schools. (Rumberger, 2011, chap. 3).

Iceland has high rates of dropout in upper secondary education, at around 20% (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive education, 2018). The results of a survey about Dropout in Iceland were presented in a white paper by Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2014b). It shows the difficulty that schools are facing in tackling the reasons for student dropout. It is necessary to understand how the Icelandic education system is structured to apply the above categories.

2.1 Educational system in Iceland

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Iceland is responsible for enforcing legislation for all school levels through preparing curriculum guides, promulgating regulations and preparing reforms. The Icelandic education system is divided into pre-
primary (leikskóli) (2-5 years old) and compulsory school (grunnskóli) (6-16 years old), which are under the responsibility of the municipalities. Upper secondary school (framhaldsskóli) (16-19 years old) is not mandatory. Higher education (háskólar), like upper secondary school, is the responsibility of the national government. Even though Icelandic education is provided by the government, there are private institutions that provide education at all the educational levels. The educational system is based on a framework known as the national curriculum guides for each stage in the educational system (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014a). The guides provide information about the school’s and/or institution’s objectives and activities for students, basing their foundation on six pillars: literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, and equality and creativity. Every pillar is inferred from Icelandic laws, legal provisions for education and teaching (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014a, p. 9), and international conventions such is the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014a, p.14), among others.

The Upper Secondary School Act No. 92/2008 states in the Article 34 that the support for students with disabilities or emotional or social difficulties should be provided according to the individual’s skills and needs (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2013). Article 35 states that students whose mother tongue is another language than Icelandic should be provided with translation and alternative subjects relating to their continuing studies.

According to European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2018), the Icelandic educational system is guided under Education for All movement from UNESCO (1994), implemented in the curriculum guides from the Minister of Culture, Science and Education (2007). Education for All states that the government is responsible for meeting all special education students’ needs with no differences from regular students at all educational levels. All students have an equal opportunity to attend school and receive education according to their abilities and needs, and schools should provide support according to everyone’s needs. Therefore, special needs students should receive support according to their needs.

2.2 Dropouts

According to the White Paper on Education Reform (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b), around 20% of students drop out of schools in Iceland, one of the highest numbers within OECD countries (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b).
In the State of the Nordic Region 2018 (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018) report, students dropout rate in Iceland is higher than in the other Scandinavian countries. The report (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018) states that students who face more challenges in life are more likely to drop out of school, thereby increasing their chances of future social exclusion. Students in rural areas, where resources are limited face limitations to meeting their needs (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018). This report also mentions that, in Iceland, young students are twice as likely to drop out if they live in towns, suburbs or rural areas than if they live in a city (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2018).

Research has shown that student grades from compulsory school have the highest predictive value of success rates in upper secondary schools, and results from 10th grade will define which school students will attend (Birgisdóttir, 2015). Nonetheless, more students from the 10th grade got into the school they were applying for in the autumn of 2014 (Birgisdóttir, 2015). That is, almost 99% of students entered their first or second choice school (Birgisdóttir, 2015).

Statistics Iceland (2018) shows that, in 2016, the total number of students who were enrolled in compulsory school was 44,609, including all nationalities. From this total, 2,046 (4,6%) were students with other nationalities than Icelandic. The total number of students who enrolled in upper secondary school between the ages of 16-19 years old in 2016 was 14,668. From that total, students with multicultural backgrounds numbered 689 (4,7%) (first generation immigrants, second generation immigrants, one foreign parent and those who were born abroad with an Icelandic background). There is no up-to-date information regarding the dropout and graduation rates of students with a multicultural background. Campbell (2015) points out that students who drop out of school usually come from disadvantaged backgrounds and that many factors influence students’ decisions.

In the following table presents the factors or possible causes for students to drop out of upper secondary school (Birgisdóttir, 2015).
Table 1. Causes of student dropout in upper secondary schools in Iceland from Birgisdóttir (2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors for Dropouts</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Totals</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial conditions</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning disabilities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The study prove meaningless / indifferent</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning too hard</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication difficulties with school staff</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred from school / violation of school rules</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood illness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of school</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical illness</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal reasons</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption / treatment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>408</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the results of a survey made by Birgisdóttir (2015) in 31 upper secondary schools around Iceland in which 790 students participated, 408 men and 382 women. These students terminated their studies without completing exams at the end of autumn 2014. Of the 790, 117 left one school for another one. These students are not considered to be dropouts. The remaining 673 students who began studying in autumn 2014 stopped studying before the final exam. The table above shows the total numbers and reasons for dropping out by gender.

Schools were requested to register the age of students who quit school. The reference for this research (Birgisdóttir, 2015) is student’s year of birth up to 20 years of age. Students over the age of twenty were classified as “senior.” Of The 790 students who left school during the fall of 2014, 471 were between the ages of 16 and 20, or 60% of the total. Therefore, about 40% of the students who quit education during the semester were 20 years-old or older.
From this list, the factors in Table 1 with the highest percentages are working, with 17%; change of school, with 10% (which is not considered as a real dropout because students remain enrolled in some school); and others, with 14%. Other factors with high percentages are that studying proved to be meaningless, with 9%; referred from school/violation of schools’ rules, with 10%; and mental illness, with 12%. However, a deeper explanation in what lies behind each cell in the table is needed. For example, gender makes a difference in some of the factors, such as going to work or had problems with authorities, where men have a higher percentage than women. Turning the focus from those who drop out towards those who complete their studies, we see that 1.3% had a different mother tongue than Icelandic (Birgisdóttir, 2015).

Factors such as mental illnesses and breaking school’s rules are not well explained and can be triggered by many other factors not in the study (Birgirsdóttir, 2015). The category of “prove meaningless / indifferent” (Birgirsdóttir, 2015) is of concern due to the lack of explanation behind it. These factors are similar characteristics as those that determine an ADHD diagnosis, knowing that the percentages of children during school years diagnosed with this disorder has increased tremendously (Zoega, 2011).

Comorbid disorders such as learning disabilities indicate a high risk of children dropping out of school (Harðardóttir & Kristinsdóttir; 2016) as well as children with multicultural backgrounds. As a consequence of their stigmatization among students – who consciously or unconsciously will be more likely to be discriminated against – affects their emotional stability (Rumberger, 2011). Even, in some cases, these children may be neglected by teachers and authorities (Mak & Rosenblatt, 2002).

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 1. Number of students dropping out from upper secondary school by year of birth, from Birgisdóttir (2015)**

Figure 1 shows students who quit their studies in autumn 2014 by year of birth. The elimination of those belonging to a younger group (years 1998 & 1997 as in Figure 1) was
highest among those who were in age at the third year in upper secondary school (year 1996 as in Figure 1). These numbers are cumulative, and there is no data that differentiates students with multicultural backgrounds.

It is important to consider that psychological support is very limited in upper secondary schools. It should be analyzed if psychological support has good outcomes for the students or if it is worth to increase support within schools instead of referring students to outside psychological (Birgirsdóttir, 2015).
3 Multicultural Society

As immigration is increasing around the world, multiculturalism is a new reality within Icelandic society (Statistics Iceland, n.d.). Immigration brings along many challenges and opportunities (Banks, 2007). According to Statistics Iceland (2018a), the percentage of the population with different backgrounds continues to increase. In 2017, the population with multicultural backgrounds was 35,997, or about 10.6% (Statistics Iceland, 2018a). In 2016, the number was 9.6% of the population (31,812) (Statistics Iceland, 2018a). Since 2012, the percentage of the population with multicultural backgrounds has increased in Iceland from 8.0% to 10.6% (Statistics Iceland, 2018a). The number of second generation immigrants has also increased (Statistics Iceland, 2018a). In 2016, this was a total of 4,158 and in 2017, 4,473 (Statistics Iceland, 2018a). Together, first and second generation immigrants are about 12% of the total population in Iceland (Statistics Iceland, 2018a).

Statistics Iceland (2018a) considers a person with multicultural background to be an individual who was born abroad and both parents as well. Those individuals born in Iceland who have both immigrant parents including those individuals or who have one foreign parent are also included. Those who were born abroad with Icelandic parents are also considered to be in this group. Until 2016, 114 nationalities lived in Iceland (Statistics Iceland, 2018b).

3.1 Culture

According to Edward T. Hall’s (as cited in Devarakonda, 2013, p. 55) cultural iceberg model, culture resembles an iceberg, showing that there are many features on the tip of the iceberg that are visible to everybody, but the major part of the iceberg is usually hidden underwater and is not visible to everyone. Religion, beliefs and thoughts are examples of those factors that are not visible to everyone and are important in shaping behaviors among people from a specific culture (Devarakonda, 2013). In many cases, the hidden factors of a culture will differ from family to family and it will be difficult for a person who does not share the local culture to understand it or vice versa, if not explained (Devarakonda, 2013).

In some cases, children who are brought up with/in a different culture may have limited exposure to the mainstream culture because of cultural family values. In many cases, the culture they come from can be stereotyped due to political issues that are recognized as negative around the world.
3.2 Multiculturalism, what does it bring?

Culture implies interaction between humans and the way individuals connect to the community. In some cultures, parents will encourage their children to be independent from them regarding issues such as dressing, decisions and feeding. Other cultures do not encourage that. Expressions like gestures and sounds are another important factor which is particularly characteristic of every culture. Status according to job, class, gender, profession or education is also culturally dependent. The lack of understanding of these attributes in a culture can become a reason for isolation from the mainstream culture for a person who lives in a multicultural environment (Devarakonda, 2013).

3.3 Immigration in Iceland

According to Ari Jónsson in Tölfræðiskýrsla (2013), since the end of 2008 – the year of the economic crisis in Iceland – the number of foreign citizens living in Iceland has increased massively. Polish citizens are the biggest group of foreigners in Iceland, followed by Lithuanians. Over half of the foreigners living in Iceland come from these 2 countries and represent 3% of the whole population. People with Filipino backgrounds are in third place. Statistics show that 10.6% (Statistics Iceland, 2018a) of the whole population are immigrants, and if we include second generation immigrants within this group the number goes up to 12%. Proportionally large number of immigrants is aged between 25 and 34 years old, which puts this group in the age of being able to have children. There is one child with foreign background for every ten native-born Icelander (Statistics Iceland, 2018).

Taking into consideration all the numbers above and the number of children in preschool having another mother tongue than Icelandic (Statistics Iceland, n.d.a), immigrants and second generation immigrants, the educational system in Iceland is facing many challenges that need to be improved. The Icelandic population is growing and also the population with multicultural backgrounds.
4  ADHD and Diagnosis

4.1  ADHD

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurobiological disorder that affects 5-10% of school-aged children and is characterized by inattention, hyperactivity and impulsiveness that interferes with development and performance of daily tasks during the lifespan of a person (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Inattention is characterized by being easily distracted and lacking attention for long periods of time. Hyperactivity is characterized by extreme physical activity and the child will have a hard time being still. Impulsiveness is characterized by acting on impulses without caution, such as darting into the street without caution (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Individuals diagnosed with ADHD can present comorbid symptoms such as learning disabilities, depression, anxiety and oppositional defiant disorder (Rief, 2015).

ADHD is a condition that affects the child’s understanding and assumptions about the environment (Rief, 2015). Boys are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD than girls because girls do not manifest the typical core characteristics of hyperactivity (Rief, 2015). In many cases, its characteristics may be misdiagnosed as autism due to similarities in core symptom (Rief, 2015). These children face many academic, social, emotional and behavioral challenges. A high percentage of children with ADHD have comorbid disorders, learning disabilities and mental illnesses (Climie & Mastoras, 2015). This influences, in many cases, other people’s and their own negative views of themselves. Due to the core symptoms of ADHD and its difficulties, students with ADHD usually do worse than their peers in school and show low self-esteem (Guðmundsdóttir, Weyandt & Ernudóttir, 2017).

Research shows that many children from 4-12 years old in Iceland are being prescribed medicine to treat ADHD (Zoega, 2011). After USA and Australia, Iceland has the third highest number of medical prescriptions for ADHD in the world, and among European countries is the first one which indicates its increment in 75% percent among the consumer population. There has been a wide use of medication for ADHD in children indicating safety use. However, these medications are not indicated for the use in minors, generating crisis within the discourse of ADHD medication for minors (Zoega, 2011). It is proven that students with ADHD, compared to their non-ADHD peers, are more likely to experience academic failure (Trampush, Miller, Newcorn & Halperin, 2009). Early recognition of ADHD and intervention can be of great help for student outcomes (Rief, 2015).
4.2 On the rise of diagnoses

Research shows (Zoega, 2011) that Iceland has the highest consumption of psychotropic drugs prescribed for ADHD. During the period of 1989-2006, the increase in the number of diagnoses was tremendous, from 0.2 to 25.1 per 1000 individuals in Iceland, in boys more than girls (Zoega, 2011). Punzi (2016) points out that professionals involved in the care of children are concerned about the increase in diagnoses and, therefore, prescriptions for ADHD should be more cautiously prescribed, since there is very little research on the risks, benefits or consequences of these medications.

The legitimacy of ADHD diagnoses has been in controversy in different countries, raising a debate that possible over diagnosis could lead to over treatment and the wrong treatment (Zoega, 2011). In Iceland, diagnosing children is done by a psychologist with knowledge in ADHD, a child or adolescent psychiatrist, or a pediatrician with a specialization in neurology in collaboration with the staff of the child’s school and the child’s parents (Zoega, 2011).

What raises concern and controversy is that research shows (Guðmunsdóttir, Weyandt & Ernudóttir, 2017) that among youth in Iceland the use and misuse of stimulants are very common. Despite the benefits of stimulants in people, there are also side effects that people can acquire, and the misuse of them could lead to psychological and physiological reliance. Although there are different reasons to get involved in the misuse of stimulants, the most relevant one is to help with cognitive and academic enhancement. However, stimulate misuse has been shown to have the opposite effect on academic outcomes (Guðmunsdóttir, Weyandt & Ernudóttir, 2017). Depression, anxiety, stress and internal restlessness were among the psychological effects of using stimulants. Some researchers suggest that students are self-medicating to counteract ADHD symptoms, indicating that ADHD symptoms are a high-risk factor for misuse of stimulants. Despite the wide use of medication for ADHD in Iceland, there is only one study about the misuse of stimulants among Icelanders who have substance abuse problems (Zoega, 2011), showing an increasing problem in Iceland. This study shows that the majority of the students who used stimulants had not been formally diagnosed with ADHD, leading to false positive diagnosis, and that some who were identified as truly having ADHD had not been diagnosed (Guðmunsdóttir, Weyandt & Ernudóttir, 2017).

This kind of practice may be related to the factors for dropping out of upper secondary school (Birgirsdóttir, 2015), where mental illness and behavior were in the top percentages. However, with all that is shown in research, including the increase in diagnoses and use of stimulants, there is no study that shows a correlation between
auto/misdiagnosis of ADHD and students dropping out of school or to multicultural background.

4.3 ADHD and achievement

It has been shown that children with an ADHD diagnosis are at higher risk of dropping out of school because of the challenges they face reflected in their behavioral, academic and social capacities (Rieff, 2015). Their achievements in different areas will vary according to individuals. Some will have problems in academic performance, other will show more challenging behaviors and still others will show poor organizational skills and autonomy (Zoega, 2011).

Many parents fail to recognize their children’s abilities and skills, paying more attention to diagnosis (Schirduan, Case & Faryniorz, 2002). It is critical to counteract this and pay more attention to the children’s abilities in order for them to succeed (Rieff, 2015). All children have different and unique strengths. and if we pay closer attention to children who have ADHD or learning disabilities, we can see that they are very talented. Some of the characteristics these children have are that they can be enjoyable to be with, playful, lovable, funny, perseverant, resilient, courageous, independent, accepting and forgiving, adventurous, resourceful, and inventive. Children with ADHD usually have awakened their imagination, making them full of creativity, innovation and curiosity that gives them a sense of trying new things (Rief, 2015). With all these positive characteristics, it is important that parents and teachers help children with ADHD to enhance their abilities, using their own strengths to build up their self-esteem based on their academic achievements. (Cvencek, Fryberg, Covarrubias & Meltzoff, 2017). For instance, it is important to pay special attention to the student’s family dynamics, socio-economic status, and hereditary history of diagnosis, considering that these factors will affect their mental state and may help to delay improvement in their symptoms (Carlson, 2010).

4.4 Multicultural background and ADHD, intersecting factors for dropouts

Multicultural perspectives are fundamental to understanding how societies work around the world, especially now that immigration is a reality that many countries across the world are experiencing (Achenbach, 2010). However, multicultural perspectives can be under the scrutiny of intersecting factors. The concept of intersectionality is widely used to address how the multiple forms of inequality and identity interrelate in different contexts and over time, as an example, the interconnection of race, class, gender, disability, etc. (Gillborn, 2015).
Intersectionality is a concept that enables us to recognize the fact that perceived group membership can make people vulnerable to various forms of bias, yet because we are simultaneously members of many groups, our complex identities can shape the specific way we each experience that bias. (Gillborn, 2015, pp 278).

The intersecting factors can influence misdiagnosis in students with certain disabilities. As Gillborn (2015) mentions, these factors can exclude students and present inequality among student’s rights. Thus, people involved in children’s education need to be aware of the various difficulties they may have at home, from economics to family dynamics. According to Achenbach’s (2010) hypothesis, the parent’s socio-economic situation increases the children’s future possibilities or limits their economic status. Children in lower socio-economic statuses are at higher risks for presenting different forms of psychopathology (Achenbach, 2010).

The reasons of cause for some psychopathological syndromes may include genetics, experiential and environmental factors (Achenbach, 2010). In order to understand different conceptualizations in different cultural groups about ADHD, it is necessary to measure a diagnosis by culturally appropriate assessments (Achenbach, 2010). However, limited research suggests that children with multicultural backgrounds are at higher risk of developing ADHD (Haack & Gerdes, 2011). Nevertheless, it is important to consider that different psychopathologies can be experienced in different ways in relation to social and emotional functioning, which, at the same time, can be influenced by cultural factors (Haack & Gerdes, 2011).

4.5 Individual skills

It is important for teachers to be able to recognize children’s struggles as their strengths and offer the necessary support. There are a variety of reasons why a student struggles in class, as mentioned in Chapter 2, but in many cases, insufficient support makes them fail (Brownell, Smith, Crockett & Griffin, 2012).

Teachers must be aware of the different skills and the different ways students use to acquire new ones (Brownell, Smith, Crockett & Griffin, 2012). For instance, they must be prepared to face the different challenges students with ADHD will present when coming to the classroom. For example, children may lack exposure to certain knowledge because of their parents’ economic situation or lack of time. Another factor may be differences in how each individual process information, such as their working memory, delayed language development, fluency problems, inappropriate behavior and social skills, poor
motivation, or inappropriate and insufficient instruction. Some students that have mild challenges, arranging the classroom environment is an extra support depending on the disability intensity (Brownell, Smith, Crockett & Griffin, 2012).
5 Inclusion

The Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014a) in Iceland refers to inclusive education as the right of every student to participate in local schools regardless of physical or mental condition or disability, and every school should provide students with these basics. It is important to mention that Icelandic schools have already been implementing different ideas of inclusion for all students, yet there is more to do in the educational system. Jóhanesson, Geirsdóttir & Finnbogason (2002) clarify that whatever the difficulties the students have, diagnoses will depend on disability differences due to cultural and socio-economic factors. In short, students in Iceland are classified by the use of clinical methods, and may then be provided with treatment to minimize their disabilities for support their daily functioning, rather than using different pedagogical approaches (Jóhanesson, Geirsdóttir & Finnbogason, 2002) as advocated for in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994).

Nonetheless, their research points out that if children are diagnosed with a condition or disability, he or she will be more likely to get help according to their needs rather than other personal status such as gender, ethnicity, economic status, etc (Jóhanesson, Geirsdóttir & Finnbogason, 2002).

To be able to implement inclusion, it is necessary to understand its meaning. Inclusion is a word that is understood in different ways. In Iceland, the history of inclusive education dates back to the 1970s, which was a starting point for educational reform towards democracy and inclusive education (Jónsson, 2016). During the 1990s, policies were not effective in upholding inclusive education, even though policies as reflected in the Ministry of Education’s documents, did mention the following:

1. Individualistic understanding: focus on the individual’s needs and the challenges they face within school and family (Jónsson, 2016).
2. Medical model: usually, inclusive education is implemented if there is a mental or physical diagnosis (Jónsson, 2016).
3. Technical approach: Jónsson (2016) points out that diagnosis and technical methods are advised as a response to students challenges, rather than inclusive education practices.
4. Market-commodity view of education: the educational system is based on competition and its principal function is to increase students own market value.
Ideological differences, as Jónsson (2016) mentions, produce conflicts among educators and authorities in the educational system between what is normal or traditional and what is inclusive and democratic. Thus, it is easier to list the challenges that impact the educational system than to creatively tackle them and make them opportunities (Banks, 2007).

In order to implement better inclusive education, this discourse should include teachers and explore the fundamental work they do in schools and their basic experiences with teaching different students with different skills, or these neglected children will not be receiving the support they deserve (Gunnþórsdóttir, 2014). In some Icelandic schools, the implementation of inclusive education among teachers is optimistic and supportive, whereas others still need to improve the process and practices.

This term in practice is challenging the traditional perspectives about special education. Around the world, the focus is on social change that includes integration between the mainstream schools and special education schools. Special education separates children into different kinds of education, usually around the idea of disabled people (physically and/or mentally challenged) (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2010). In addition, the implementation of inclusive education will greatly depend on the teachers’ perspectives on the subject. Teachers should be familiar with and know the foundational issues of inclusive education, and personal biases should be put aside.

5.1 Collective indifference, what can we do

We have come to the time that inclusion is invisible in society’s eyes, and that is the reason why it becomes more difficult to deal with (Slee, 2011). In the Icelandic educational system, support for students with learning difficulties relies on a medical diagnosis, increasing the need for better practices (Jónsson, 2016). The Icelandic educational system works in a traditional way, where teacher oriented pedagogy is dominant and students’ initiative are scarce (Jónsson, 2016). As French sociologist Alain Touraine clarifies, the challenges of inclusion (Slee, 2011), in recognizing the diversity of cultures and the dominance relations existing between them, leads us to understand exclusion, where it happens and how to respond to it, by taking action and accepting that children with physical or mental disabilities are worth the same as their peers.

In today’s multicultural societies, we cannot work with only one method. We need to develop different ones, as all individual are different (Punzi, 2016). If we are neglecting the way students are driven or behaving in schools, we also need to take into
consideration how the family dynamics are at home and how those might influence, positively or negatively, the student (Punzi, 2016)

There is a question by Punzi (2016): “Can we find a proactive approach towards the future for the masked needs and interests of children that are now diagnosed with ADHD?” (p. 1). According to Slee (2011), the discourse of negative attitudes comes from students, teachers, college professors, non-disabled children, school administrators, and the list goes on. The challenge is in changing the attitudes in society towards disabilities and diversity in general. Teachers, who spend most of the time during the day with children, need to get more knowledge about inclusive education and children with disorders and disabilities, along with parents.

5.2 Icelandic regulations and laws regarding children with disabilities

According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2018) and regulation 584/2010, municipalities need to provide special services in compulsory schools. Social services are provided and paid for by municipalities. The municipality should provide professional guidance to school staff facing any challenges that any student may present in coordination with their parents, providing them information and further procedures. Act 3 on goals to general provisions for students with special needs, states the right of the child for inclusive education in that every child has the right to receive education according to his or her individual needs. This is supported by the Salamanca Statement and Education for All in Iceland (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive education, n.d.).

5.2.1 Salamanca Statement

In 1994, more than 300 people representing 92 state entities gathered in Salamanca, Spain to establish Education for All to promote inclusive education (UNESCO, 1994). Iceland was one of the countries who participated. It proclaimed that:

1. Every child has the fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning;
2. Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs;
3. Education systems should be designed, and educational programs implemented to take into account the wide diversity of the characteristics and needs;
4. Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs;
5. Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system (UNESCO, 1994, p. 8-9).

The Salamanca Statement has become the backbone for inclusion in many societies to improve regulations and local laws around the world. This statement helps approach the fundamental right to education though it does not assert a statement for inclusive education (Slee, 2011).
6 Conclusion

Diversity is a big challenge in Iceland, and its impact is showing in the education system. Multiculturalism brings along challenges, as well as many benefits, and will keep growing around the world, including Iceland. For these reasons we can not overlook dropout in the Icelandic context. Especially when dropout rate is high and affects disporportionally the most vulnerable group of people in society, those students with multicultural background.

When school staff are not well prepared to face multicultural challenges in classrooms, there is a need to re-educate and foster new ideas among them. As the Icelandic policy establishes in compulsory school act, No. 91/2008 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008), every child has the right to education, regardless of their personal status. Every child must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2008). And as the Salamanca Statement states, schools that follow inclusive orientation are the most powerful means for combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all (UNESCO, 1994, p.9); moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

Lack of information on ADHD diagnoses among children with multicultural backgrounds hampers improvement in supporting student retention in Icelandic schools. At the same time, studies have shown (Zoega, 2011) that the high rates of medication usage among youth in Iceland is growing and the risk of youth misusing psychotropics may be a further factor for students to dropout from upper secondary schools. There are intersecting factors that influence students to dropout, including the factors that may be related to an ADHD diagnosis, such as mental illness, behavioral problem or learning disabilities. Diagnosis of ADHD should be handled carefully, as should medication. Medication has been proven effective to suppress core symptoms of ADHD. Nonetheless, no research shows the long term consequences of such medication, especially when taken by children. This needs further analysis.

The number of children with multicultural backgrounds is growing in Icelandic society, and the educational system should be able to tackle the challenges by paying attention to what is needed in the educational system to decrease the dropout rate. Dropping out is the consequence of a process a student goes through. Therefore, special attention to
better implementation in educational support from school staff could determine a student’s decisions, and individualized assessment should take place according to Icelandic law. Further research and analysis of factors that influence dropping out are needed. The future is uncertain for anyone, but as society we can make it better if we work in the present.

Conclusively, the *White Paper* regarding Icelandic education pays little attention to ADHD and intersecting factors as influence for dropout among students in upper secondary schools with multicultural background (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014b). There is a lack of information about students with multicultural backgrounds and updated information.
References


