



Perspectives of immigrant parents on education for newly arrived adolescents in Iceland

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Thesis for B.A. degree
International Studies in Education



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Abstract

The study explores how immigrant parents in Iceland, perceive school collaboration and reception departments for their adolescent children, who at the time of arrival entered lower secondary school. Parent-teacher collaboration and school services are elements that can help immigrant students succeed academically. For the research, we used a case study method. Data collected from the interviews were interpreted using qualitative analysis. Four participants were interviewed, and data was collected using questions regarding parent-school collaboration and services that are offered for the newly arrived students. The results of the study showed that parents mainly focus on the wellbeing of their children and have positive attitudes towards the educational system in Iceland. The findings of the parental collaboration with the school revealed that parents are willing to participate in their children's school activities, but language is a barrier for many school activities. The findings of the reception department showed that immigrant students mainly make friends with other immigrant students and in one case the language of communication and instruction was primarily in English. The findings revealed that the reception department program is an exclusory practice that separates immigrant children from the mainstream class, inhibiting integration with the Icelandic peers.

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Preface

This thesis was written solely by us, the undersigned. We have read and understand the university code of conduct (November 7, 2003, <http://www.hi.is/is/skolinn/sidareglur>) and have followed them to the best of our knowledge. We have correctly cited all other works or previous work of our own, including, but not limited to, written works, figures, data or tables. We thank all who have worked with and take full responsibility for any mistakes contained in this work. Signed:

Reykjavík, _____._____ 20__

1 Introduction

With the arrival of people with foreign backgrounds in Iceland, each year society is becoming more diverse and multicultural. This is having an impact on the educational system as there are now more students attending whose native language is not Icelandic, have a different ethnicity, religious beliefs or cultural background. Students and teachers face new challenges and educational experience and it is important that schools apply practices to accommodate the diversity amongst the students and that teachers in Iceland receive the appropriate training to manage the multicultural classroom (Jónsdóttir & Ragnarsdóttir, 2010). One essential factor that benefits effective student learning is the parental collaboration with schools, as their perspectives can highlight issues that need to be addressed regarding the well-being and education of the students.

There has been research from both Iceland and abroad on developing parental collaboration between schools and families which show positive outcomes in children's educational achievements (Hill and Taylor, 2004; LaRocque et al., 2011; Lay, 2016). Another factor are the programs that exist to integrate newly arrived immigrant students into the new schools. To help students with different cultural backgrounds to prosper academically in a new country, it is important that schools incorporate receptive plans which empower students and promote inclusiveness that protects them from feeling marginalized or excluded from other members of the school (Nieto, 2010). Thus, this can promote successful integration of immigrant students into the new society.

The purpose of this study is to analyse how parents of immigrant students perceive school collaboration and services that are offered to immigrant students in Iceland. The researchers have personal reasons to conduct this study, as parents and immigrants in Iceland. The researchers had personal struggles integrating into Icelandic society and individual interests to analyse the current educational situation. For that reason, the researchers are interested to learn about the school services that are offered to newly arrived immigrant students in Iceland and what measures schools are taking to collaborate with parents to help students succeed academically. The main objective of the study is to understand parents' perceptions of the services they receive from the school for their children's adjustment and have a better understanding of the expectations immigrant parents have from schools. For this, we formulate the research question as follows:

How do parents of immigrant students perceive school collaboration and reception department services which exist in Icelandic compulsory schools for newly arrived students to support their academic achievements?

The thesis is divided into the six chapters. The first is an introduction to the following study. The second chapter is a literature review, with a theory background of concepts related to our study, summary of the theory background, an overview of the immigration status in Iceland and of the Icelandic educational system. The third chapter is a methodology where we describe the case study methods we used in our research and introduce the participants that we interviewed as part of this study. In the fourth chapter we describe the interviews and the main findings of the study, based on inductive analysis. In the fifth chapter we analyse and discuss the findings and we conclude the thesis on the sixth chapter.

2 Literature review

This chapter is a literature review with the focus on the importance of collaboration between school and home. It has been recognized over the years that parental input into the child's education has many benefits and it is important to keep a line of communication between the home and school to ensure better educational outcomes for the students. We will discuss the importance of building networks that can increase social capital to benefit academic achievement. We will examine how the Bank's multicultural model and the practice of culturally responsive teaching helps reinforce connections between school and parents. We will look at the socio-cultural benefits of parental involvement in their children's schooling. Further in the chapter we will provide a definition of the term immigrant and look at the status and development of immigration in Iceland. We will also provide an overview of the educational system in Iceland, including brief descriptions of the levels of education that exist, policies that are in place to help integration of immigrant students and elements of the curriculum that focus on school home collaboration. We will finish the chapter with a depiction of research that has been made in Iceland on immigrant experiences in relation to parental and school involvement.

2.1 Theory background

Today, many schools are starting to recognize that classrooms with students from different cultural backgrounds can be challenging and require a lot of preparation (OECD, 2015, p.16). Thus, teachers need to acquire skills which prepare children to face a multicultural society. There are strategies that teachers can incorporate to ensure beneficial communication with parents and successful learning outcomes for students which we will discuss in the theory background.

2.1.1 Social capital

Social capital is a concept which can have a positive role in shaping various educational outcomes (Byun, Meece, Irvin, & Hutchins, 2012). One aspect by which parental school involvement advances their children's academic performance is by increasing social capital. Considering Bourdieu's theory, social capital is essential for the students' academic success, because of the network of relationships individuals possess (Bourdieu, 2016, p.89). Social capital includes all connections between family, teachers or school and social networks that can be used as a stepping stone to benefit individuals in various fields, as well as at educational institutions (Bourdieu, 2016). Lack of social capital can lead students to social exclusion and academic underachievement. Thus, it is necessary

that schools help build social capital for individuals from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds, because education is a way to develop equal access for students and their parents.

It would be an educational asset to provide professional development training to aid teachers in understanding the complex characteristics of diverse groups within society and how race, ethnicity, language, and social class interact to influence student demeanour (Banks et al., 2001). Furthermore, schools should ensure that all students have equitable learning opportunities to meet high standards and are provided with the chance to connect and socialise with each other in extra and co-curricular activities to cultivate knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enhance academic success and foster positive relationships amongst diverse groups (Banks et al., 2001). We considered the importance of increasing social capital in forming a network of relationships that can benefit the child to have better educational outcomes. Strengthening networks between the school and home are especially important for immigrant parents as it provides them with a voice and opportunity to indicate if there are any concerns over the school practices that are in place. The school can also learn a lot from the parents and act on issues or recommendations addressed by them that can lead to positive educational outcomes for the students.

2.1.2 Multicultural education

Multicultural education is one of the approaches that meet the educational needs for students from different cultural backgrounds. The application of this approach is vital for newly arrived immigrant students to ensure an effortless transition in their new school lives. Multicultural education is an important component of the education that helps build strong connections between school and parents. The primary objective of multicultural education is to equip teachers and schools with the skills and knowledge that will enable diverse students to get equal opportunities to learn, regardless of their background, social status or resources (Banks, 2007, p. 82). Multicultural education applies policies and practices that are beneficial for students from diverse ethnic, linguistic or cultural backgrounds to learn to their best potential and helps successful integration into a global society. To improve school organization and increase student learning progress Banks (2007) offers a model of multicultural education which encompasses five dimensions. As Banks (2007) states, the five dimensions are; content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy and an empowering school culture and social structure, which are equally important for effective learning. All the multicultural dimensions are of equal importance, because they

help teachers to be aware of the issues with diverse groups of students. Effective application of the Banks dimensions improves immigrant students' introduction to a new educational system. To clarify the factors that are fundamental to multicultural education we will provide brief descriptions of the Banks (2007) multicultural dimensions which can help teachers to understand and incorporate strategies for a better connection with the immigrant parents.

Content integration is a strategy that teachers can use by drawing examples from different cultures, which help teachers to explain generalizations, principles, and theories in their subject (Banks, 2007, p.83). This dimension is essential when students with a foreign background enrol in a new school with a different language and culture. To understand immigrant students, teachers should be aware of different cultures, gather information about the children's background and then implement the strategies that meet student's needs. When teachers use the content integration strategy, interactions between teachers and parents are important, because of valuable information teachers can receive from parents.

The knowledge construction process implements methods, questions, and activities to help students to understand how knowledge is influenced by ethnicity, race or social class (Banks, 2007, p.84). The knowledge of construction consists of two types of knowledge: mainstream academic and transformative academic (Banks, 2007, p.85). Mainstream knowledge consists of the concepts that embody established and traditional knowledge in behavioural and social sciences (Banks, 2007, p.85). By implementing transformative academic knowledge, educators believe it will help students to advance their learning and acquire new perspectives that will positively reflect on society (Banks, 2007, p. 87). Transformative teachers relate the knowledge to the cultural experiences and groups (Banks, 2007, p.87). To be able to effectively incorporate the knowledge of the cultural experiences, teachers should begin their transformative practices starting with their personal transformation by reflecting on personal life and the results that helped them to change. Then they can learn cultural experiences from the collaboration with the parents and help them to reflect on their life.

Prejudice reduction is a strategy that teachers can use to help students establish democratic values and beliefs (Banks, 2007, p.84). If society has certain views on how to behave with and treat students according to their background, this can impact how students perform in school. Collaboration with parents can help teachers to reduce prejudice, by recognizing social and political climates of the diverse families. The strategy

can help teachers to establish practices that enhance human rights and maintain democratic values.

Equity pedagogy is a teaching strategy that supports students from diverse backgrounds academically. The equity pedagogy includes strategies that will increase the cultural and linguistic strength of diverse students (Banks, 2007, p.84). Collaboration with students and their parents, commitment to diversity and confronting racism and biases towards certain groups, is crucial for the equity pedagogy. Parents, students, teachers and other school personnel must engage in dialogue and exchange ideas to create an environment of openness and equity.

An empowering school culture addresses curriculum, teaching materials, social structure and educational reform implemented in this dimension (Banks, 2007, p, 85). For students, to be academically successful, empowerment is a critical approach to pedagogy, which consists of relationships between teachers, students, and parents. Development of the empowerment pedagogy in schools, where students learn cultural awareness of other communities can make a real difference for immigrant students.

The implementation of multicultural education is valuable for all students as it eases them into their role in a new society while protecting their connection to their own culture and identity. Integration of these dimensions is beneficial for immigrant students and the overall education system in creating better members of society. When students arrive in a new country they have a lot of adjustments, particularly when it comes to settling into a new school environment, learning a new language, making new friends and the emotional factors of leaving behind all that is familiar to them in their home country. It is crucial that the education system they are entering is prepared and competent to handle immigrant students ensuring they have a smooth transition into their new school life. Implementing multicultural strategies and theories which exist to improve students learning can be successfully implemented by teachers with the help of the parents. Teachers can learn about students' cultural background, immigrant status and ethnicity, which affect students learning (Nieto, 2010, p. 201). We should consider those factors that affect immigrant student learning when applying multicultural strategies, along with how teachers implement and understand their students' needs and values.

2.1.3 Culturally responsive teaching

The program of culturally responsive teaching is another approach available for teachers to be competent working with students from different racial, social class, ethnic or linguistic groups. With the cooperation of parents and other family members, this method is more likely to be effective. On the assertion that children and their parents are

valuable assets that can encourage learning and have positive consequences for the overall benefit of the school and lives of the students signifies that teachers need to impose culturally responsive teaching for their students (Nieto, 2010). The approach provides a deeper insight into different cultures and knowledge that can be applied in teaching diverse students and forming connections with the parents.

Culturally responsive teaching examines five pillars: developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, designing culturally relevant curricula, demonstrating cultural caring and building a learning community, cross-country communications with ethnically diverse students and cultural congruity in classroom instruction (Gay, 2002, p.107). To build the connection with immigrant parents, teachers must develop a solid foundation of culturally diverse knowledge. The knowledge about diversity includes straightforward implications for teaching culturally diverse students, where teachers must be aware that immigrant students' families have values, morals, and differences exclusive to their culture (Gay, 2002, p.107). Culturally responsive teachers are sensitive and empathetic towards the needs of the diverse students and show commitment and determination to ensure each student receives the same level of educational achievement, regardless of their background (Rychly & Graves, 2012). They must provide the support to balance the class and ensure that the parents feel welcome to share their views regarding the education of their children.

To have meaningful collaboration with parents and understanding of immigrant parents' cultures, it is important for culturally responsive teachers to practice self-reflectiveness and consider their personal beliefs and perspectives about other cultures (Rychly & Graves, 2012). We can, therefore, say it is adopting teaching practices and policies that serve the specific cultural characteristics which differentiate students from the teacher and from each other, family involvement is a crucial element to the success of this approach (Fenner & Snyder, 2017). Culturally responsive teachers have the skills and professionalism to teach in a cross-cultural or multicultural setting.

Within multicultural education, the program of culturally responsive teaching can encourage and support immigrant students' academic performance. Collaboration between school and parents plays a pivotal role in the improvement of children's school life and could greatly improve learning outcomes (Nieto, 2010, p.192). The successful culturally responsive teacher reinforces students' learning capabilities and builds a strong connection between parents and school. Teachers must be well prepared and have clear guidance on how to incorporate collaborative learning strategies into their practice.

2.1.4 Parental involvement and its benefits

With growing demands for children to perform well academically, parents have had to increase their input in school activities and become actively involved in their children's education (Hill & Taylor, 2004). To aid learning, relationships between schools and parents play an essential role in their children's school achievements. Students learn best when they work together in a community and achieve effective results when teachers develop learning communities (Nieto, 2010, p.122). When parents, teachers, and students are part of the educational mix, this can trigger positive results, because by being involved, parents in collaboration with a school can make decisions concerning for example tests, disciplinary policies or curriculum development (Nieto, 2010, p.193). There is an opportunity to improve socio-cultural relations amongst immigrant parents when they engage in communication with the school so that their culture and values can be acknowledged.

Parent and school collaboration is one of the essential factors for the students achieving success. When parents and teachers work together to keep each other informed on the educational progress of their students and everyone is involved to provide assistance and encouragement where it may be needed, the students have a greater chance to prosper academically (Nieto, 2015). As parents build connections with the teachers, they gain a better understanding of the school's expectations regarding their child's education in terms of behaviour and performance (Lareau, 1996). Moreover, having a good connection with the teachers can lead to a richer understanding of their child's education. Parents are more capable in terms of assisting with homework and it makes them better prepared for school-related activities.

Parents may have the enthusiasm to support their children academically, but schools might not be prepared to encourage parental involvement (Nieto, 2010, p.192). Lack of parental interest and support could lead to underachievement in the education of their children (Kidd & Czerniawski, 2010, p.162). Collaboration between teachers and parents with a foreign background can be challenging due to several factors, like the language barrier, cultural misunderstanding and different expectations. Moreover, some parents might feel uncomfortable or unequal in school participation. For that reason, it is important for educators to consider parental perspectives through interviews, questions or other interactions and address culturally responsive teaching concerning home-school collaboration.

Teachers should avail of various methods to help reinforce intergroup relations and socio-cultural benefits, especially concerning newly arrived students. Thus, contentious

topics such as stereotyping and other related biases need to be addressed so students are aware of the negative effects they can forge in society. Students should learn about the values that are common to virtually all cultural groups such as equality, freedom, peace, justice, compassion, and charity which can contribute to the feeling of being similar and promote healthy intergroup relations. Teachers must find a way to help students build the social competence which is essential for effective interaction with students from diverse backgrounds (Banks et al., 2001). Through collaboration with the parents, teachers can understand the cultural backgrounds of the students and with that, create effective connections with students from diverse backgrounds.

2.1.5 Summary of theory background

In the theory background, we discussed the importance of the educational aspect of social capital. We recognised that building a strong network connection between home and school can enhance the students' educational possibilities and achievements. We also touched upon the importance of multicultural education, with the incorporation of the Banks multicultural dimensions as a tool to aid immigrant students to adjust to a new school environment where the culture and values may be different to their own. The chapter also commends the practice of culturally responsive teaching as useful strategy to benefit immigrant and diverse students. Culturally responsive teachers can capitalize on communications with the parents to gain deeper insights into the cultures of their students. Finally, we explored the importance of parental involvement in a student's education. A strong connection between parents and teachers leads to deeper understanding of a child's education and what is expected of them so that they can succeed academically. It also provides parents with a voice in the school which the teachers can use to increase learning efficiency.

2.2 Icelandic context

In this section, we will define the term immigrant and look at the status and development of immigration in Iceland. In this paper, we will focus on immigrant parents and their children who were born outside of Iceland and speak another native language which is not Icelandic. According to the Icelandic statistics office an immigrant is a person born overseas with both parents and grandparents foreign-born, whereas a person with immigrant background or second-generation immigrant is born in Iceland but has parents that were born overseas (Statistics Iceland, 2017). A person with a foreign background has one parent with foreign roots (Statistics Iceland, 2017). In our study both the children and parents, we are referring to are immigrants as they were all born outside of Iceland.

Immigrants share the characteristic that their native language is not Icelandic. The term native language refers to the first language you learn as a child (Icelandic Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007). In our research, it is important to focus on children and parents who are not native speakers of Icelandic, because we want to discern how lack of knowledge in the local language affects collaboration and understanding of school services between the school and immigrant parents.

In recent years, Iceland has been experiencing a growth in migration and the number of immigrants is becoming larger each year. Figure 1 represents the percentage growth of population with foreign background, first and second generation immigrants (Statistics Iceland, 2017). The dark blue colour on the graph represents the members of the population without any foreign background, the lighter blue colour represents those who have a foreign background and the green colour represents immigrants and persons with an immigrant background. The graph demonstrates that the number of foreign background and immigrant members of the population has been increasing every year. In 1996 they collectively represented about 5% of the population and in 2017 this grew to almost 20% of the population.

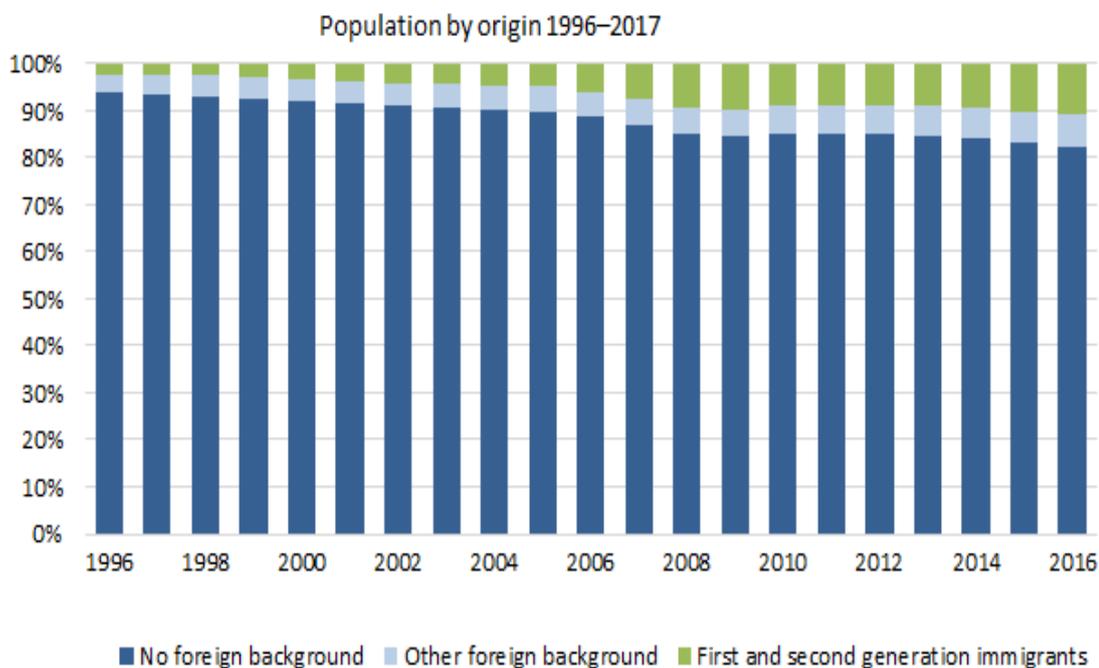


Figure 1. Population by origin (Statistics Iceland, 2017).

In January 2017, the percentage of immigrants alone reached 10.6% of the total population (Statistics Iceland, 2017). With having one of ten people as an immigrant, they represent an important share of the population. According to OECD statistics (2017),

generally immigrant students perform more poorly and fail to reach the levels of their non-immigrant classmates academically. With the growth of migration, in recent years there has also been an increase in children with a foreign background in compulsory schools in Iceland. The chart below represents students attending compulsory schools in Iceland, who have a different native language than Icelandic (Figure 2). We can see that this number has been growing since 2005. After 2011 we can see that the growth accelerated and in 2016 the number of pupils with a native language other than Icelandic was over 10% of the population.

Pupils in compulsory schools having another mother tongue than Icelandic 1997-2016

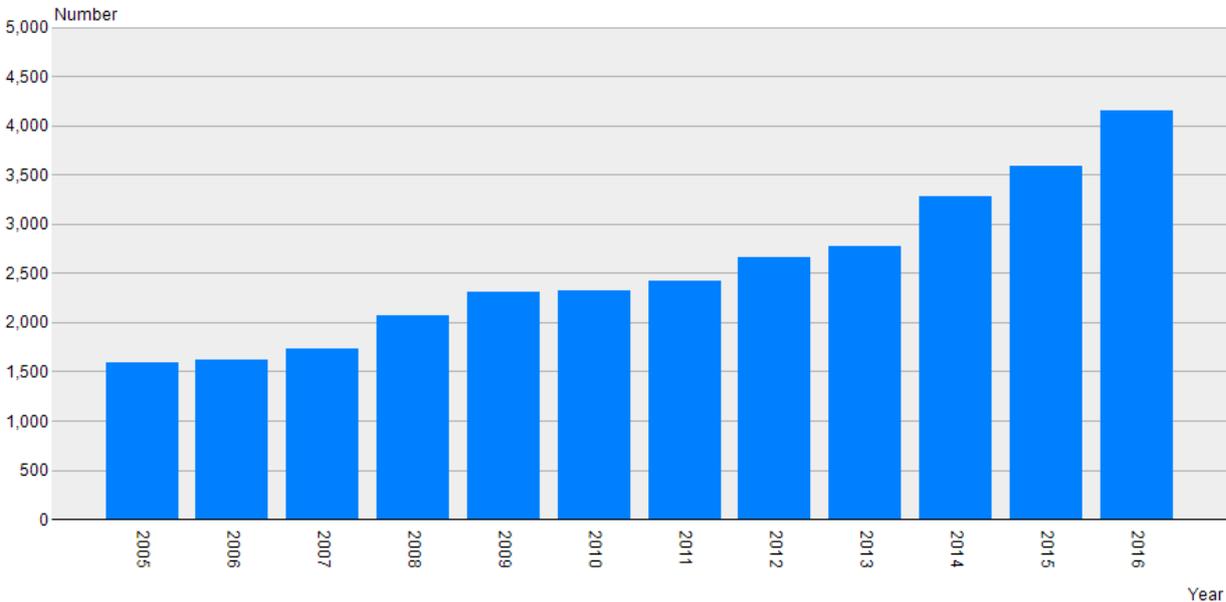


Figure 2. Pupils in compulsory schools in Iceland (Statistics Iceland, 2017).

2.2.1 Overview on education in Iceland

The education system in Iceland consists of four levels. The first level is playschool, where parents have the option of sending their children when they are around two years of age and they can stay until they reach the age of six when they start attending compulsory school (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). Compulsory school is arranged into primary and lower secondary level and students attend it between the ages of six and sixteen (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). On completion of elementary school, all sixteen-year-olds are entitled to attend upper secondary school if they wish to continue their education, and completion of this gives access to higher education at the university level (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). The

level of a child's education, which we are going to focus on in our study, is lower secondary school.

In 2011, Iceland developed a new National Curriculum Guide for pre-schools, compulsory schools and upper-secondary schools (OECD, 2016, p.6). The guide sets the core learning pillars for the compulsory school learners which are: literacy, sustainability, health, welfare, democracy and human rights, equality and creativity (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). The National Curriculum Guide incorporates learning and teaching principles that respect existing laws, regulations and international conventions. The main objectives of the curriculum are to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are necessary to enable an individual to become a critical, active and competent participant in a society based on equality and democracy.

Six fundamental pillars have been devised that have become the core of the educational policy. These pillars are literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality, and creativity (Ministry of Science, Education and Culture, 2012). The fundamental pillars are meant to emphasize the general principles of education and inspire a higher standard of education with more students continuing to the university level (Ministry of Science, Education and Culture, 2012). Additionally, in the social aspect, they are paramount in the promotion of equality and democracy and to prepare citizens to be well-educated and upstanding members of society (Ministry of Science, Education and Culture, 2012).

The National Curriculum Guide details certain provisions of the compulsory school act and regulations about learning and teaching at this school level. It appoints the learning and teaching goals that all Icelandic compulsory schools should try to accomplish. The National Curriculum Guide serves as an educational information and guideline tool for teachers, pupils, and their parents.

In order to improve student learning, it is important to involve parents and encourage a relationship of co-operation between the home and school. One of the policies of the National Curriculum Guide for compulsory school addresses strengthening the cooperation between home and school (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007). The aim of this policy is to empathize the importance of the teachers and school authorities to seek and encourage cooperation between home and school, which would initiate easier participation of the parents in their children's' education (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007). Moreover, the National Curriculum Guide, asserts that "Schools are responsible for establishing such cooperation and sustaining it throughout the child's compulsory school attendance" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012, p.43). Additionally,

studies have shown that parents are eager to be involved in improving their children's educational outcomes and usually execute requests received from teachers (Fields-Smith, 2005; La Rocque et al., 2011). It, therefore, makes sense for teachers and schools to employ the services of parents in building an educational system that enables optimum results for the students.

2.2.2 Policy on integration of immigrants

Icelandic society needs to react to the new circumstances in the school system that comes when immigrants arrive to Iceland (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007). In 2007, the Government of Iceland published a document which sets the goal for a policy on the integration of immigrants into Icelandic society (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007). The document states that “all residents of Iceland should enjoy equal opportunities and are active participants in society” (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007, p.2). The policy sets different goals for immigrants alongside with Icelandic core values of society. The core values of Icelandic society based on Icelandic Constitution and are “democracy, human rights, joint responsibility and personal freedom” (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007, p.6). To protect the Icelandic language, it is the policy of the Icelandic government and it is included in core values of Icelandic society.

The important issue addressed by the policy on the integration of immigrants is an enrolment plan in the school curriculum for the immigrant students to become active participants in a multicultural society (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007). According to the policy on immigrant integration, an enrolment plan should be constructed in accordance with the National Curriculum (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007). Moreover, schools should gather information about student’s background and their native languages (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007, p.15). The current legislation in the Icelandic school system highlights a focus on equality and commitment to organizing work in a manner that is appropriate to the individual needs and circumstances of every pupil, with the aim “to promote the all-round development, well-being and education of each individual” (Compulsory School Act No. 91/2008). This is echoed in the National Curriculum Guidelines for each school level, where the target is to provide every child an equal opportunity to perform well at school and achieve similar academic outcomes (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c).

A large proportion of the policy on the integration of immigrants was designated to the importance of the Icelandic language, with the focus on education to assure it is protected and upheld to a high standard. The document stated: “Knowledge of Icelandic language is a key to Icelandic society (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007, p.2). Research

shows that it takes many immigrant children three to five years to attain fluency in a new language and four to seven years to attain academic language proficiency (Collier & Thomas, 1989; Cummins, 1981; Hakuta, Goto & Witt, 2000). To help immigrant students to learn the Icelandic language, each school is required to have a reception plan for immigrant students with a scheme to move immigrant students to the mainstream classroom (Hillmarson-Dunn & Kristinsson, 2013).

From the report on immigrant pupils in Iceland (Danielsdóttir, 2008), immigrant students are sent to a receiving department for a period of two weeks or longer before they will be ready to continue studies in a mainstream class. The time spent in the reception department should provide help to adapt to a new culture and learn the Icelandic language. (Hillmarson-Dunn & Kristinsson, 2013). Children are taken from the regular class to take extra Icelandic lessons and arrangements of the lessons and the time spent in the reception department can vary from school to school (Hillmarson-Dunn & Kristinsson, 2013). The number of lessons depends on the age of the child, for example, younger children arriving in Iceland will receive more Icelandic lessons (Hillmarson-Dunn & Kristinsson, 2013, p.131). Sometimes students stay in the receiving class for up to a year or longer, which postpones their opportunity to integrate with their local community peers (Hillmarson-Dunn & Kristinsson, 2013).

An example of the reception policy for students with Icelandic as a foreign language in Fjölbrautaskóli, states that the school should consider the student's background, competence in other subjects and linguistic skills (Fjölbrautaskóli, 2011). Before entering the reception department, students and their parents meet the school counsellors and attain information about the school, including the services, social and leisure activities that are available (Fjölbrautaskóli, 2011). The reception policy states that students should receive an assessment at least once a week (Fjölbrautaskóli, 2011). Considerably, school registration websites do not provide a reception department time schedule which leaves us with a belief that schools have different approaches in this matter.

2.2.3 Research on immigrant parents' perspectives in Iceland

In Iceland, there are some studies that have been made on experiences of immigrant parents in relation to parental and school involvement. The results show that most of the parents experience positive relationships with schools in general, however, they still lack the involvement with the larger group of people in school, have major concerns regarding the native language and original culture of the immigrant children (Sigurðadóttir, 2012). Also, single mothers and parents of children with special needs were unsatisfied with the school communication and believed that the school did not meet their expectations

(Jónsdóttir, Björnsdóttir & Bæck, 2017). According to a study on multicultural education in Iceland, there is insufficient guidance on implementing multicultural practices at all school levels (Jónsdóttir & Ragnarsdóttir, 2010). Later research on immigrant students with a foreign background in Iceland revealed that teachers have difficulties in maintaining multicultural education and recommend improving collaboration between schools and parents which could help students in the educational field (Gunnþórsdóttir, Barillé, & Meckl, 2018).

3 Case study methodology

In this chapter, we will describe our research method, interviews, population, ethical issues, study limitations and describe how we analysed the data collected. To conduct our research, we used a case study methodology through interviews because we wanted to gain an insight into the school experiences of immigrant parents and elicit their perspectives on the school communication and education for their children when they were newly arrived in Iceland.

The research method we used was a case study method, qualitative research, which is “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake 1995, p.xi). The focus of the case study was to examine the experiences of immigrant parents who had moved to Iceland and had one or more adolescent children attending lower secondary school. In our research, we conducted interviews to interpret the different views of individuals sharing their experiences in similar circumstances. One of the fundamental elements of qualitative research is that it relies on verbal and visual communication to collect data and that the persons who are contributing to the study, do so in a place they feel comfortable, rather than in an experimental environment (Lichtman, 2013). Moreover, participants may be willing to open up more and share their experiences more freely when they feel like they are engaging in a conversation about issues that are meaningful to them. We selected this type of methodology for our research as it serves a more personal approach to becoming aware about a real-life situation.

We were aware that as we are both immigrants, we could have had preconceptions on the outcome of the interviews and it may have influenced how we posed our questions. Across disciplines, it is important to be mindful of paradigms and the differing views and frames of reference that can affect the research when constructing knowledge (Lichtman, 2013). Factors such as socio-economic situations, ethnicity, personal experiences or linguistic abilities can have varying impacts on the individual experiences of each immigrant. Paradigms, which are beliefs or theories, influence how we act, make decisions and carry out research. For this reason, we carefully analysed collected data objectively and always checked our progress with our supervisors. We used an inductive approach in our analyses, where we continually referred to a research question whilst we were conducting our interview data. The inductive approach advises that once data is collected, attention is paid to the similarities and differences that occur that can lead to the identification of a central idea, concept or theme (Lichtman, 2013). Interpretations can then be made from the data collected in our interviews, to provide our findings and

separate the responses into categories according to their distinctive characteristics and similarities.

3.1 Data collection methods

To carry out the study we conducted interviews with four immigrant parents, who have been living in Iceland for approximately five years and have one or more adolescents attending an Icelandic lower secondary school. The objective of this method was to gather relevant information for our research by having a verbal face-to-face conversation with the participant. We followed a guided semi-structured interview approach, with a set of questions we composed ourselves and format that we used on all the participants, with a little room to improvise and deviate according to the answers of the interviewees, as long as the topic was appropriate to our study. In this kind of interview, the questions are looked at more as guidelines (Lichtman, 2013). The focus to keep in mind during the interviews was to elicit the parents' thoughts and ideas about school collaboration and services that they have experienced, which exist in their children's schools.

The interview questions were open-ended, we composed a set of questions which we referred to during the interviews to make sure we were staying on track with the topic and getting the answers relevant to our research (Appendix B). To begin the interviews, we asked the participants to tell us a little bit about themselves and how long they have been living in Iceland before shifting the focus to their children and their school experiences in the home country and in Iceland. The questions were related to topics from the literature review. To allow for a more natural conversation the parents talked freely and occasionally deviated from the focus of our research, we referred to our list of questions at the end of the interview to ascertain that each question gained a response.

We made an audio recording of each interview which we then listened to and transcribed into a word document. Once the interviews had been completed, we transcribed from our audio recording to a word document and analysed the answers. We began each interview by introducing the aim of the research study to our participants and then followed this with questions about their background, experiences of their children's school in their home country and in Iceland. To proceed with the study, we made notes of the interviews into our database and compared it together. Further, we organized the interview content into specific themes and categories and finally, we began to develop a working theory to explain the key concepts (Lichtman, 2013). In the interviews, we discussed issues such as collaboration and parental involvement in school and focused on services that were provided for their children when they were newly arrived in Iceland.

The primary goal was to understand the parents' point of view from their stories and give a voice to the minority groups in Iceland.

Participants of the interview came from interested parents who responded to a social media post and through a notice on Móðurmál, which is a mother-tongue support program for bilingual families living in Reykjavík. Out of the respondents, we found four mothers that fitted our criteria. Interviews were conducted in English and/or Russian. A letter of consent was presented to each participant and all the information provided in the interviews was handled according to the Data Protection Authority's law for privacy (Appendix A). We registered with the Data Protection Authority (Persónuvernd) and informed them about the study.

The study had limitations, because of the small number of responses. Finding participants to fit the researchers' sample criteria was difficult and we only managed to find four suitable parents. Many immigrants who have adolescent children attending Icelandic school have been living in Iceland longer than five years. Some of them have only moved to Iceland on a temporary basis, therefore, their children are attending an international school. Finally, the responses we received only came from mothers limiting our chance to have a full parental overview as we did not interview any fathers. The sample excluded some immigrant groups, mostly, because of the language barrier.

3.2 Participants of the interview

To begin our search for participants, we posted a request on a Facebook parent group page. We only got answers from mothers, who showed their interest in the study. In total six mothers volunteered to take part in the interview. We asked our participants to choose a time and place that was convenient for them so that they could have a suitable time to talk and fewer chances of being disturbed by pressures that can come with daily family and work life. From the four participants, one of our interviewees chose to meet us in her office at her workplace, we met one at her home, and we met the other two in cafes which they chose. Two of the interviews had to be omitted as the participants did not quite fit the criteria of the study. One of these we could not use as she has an Icelandic spouse, meaning both parents are not immigrants. We could not use the other mother who volunteered as her child is attending an international school. In total, we had four completed interviews that we could use. The criteria for the individuals to take part in the study was:

- The participant is an immigrant parent in Iceland
- Has moved to Iceland in the past 5 years

- Has a child attending Icelandic school and is aged between 11 and 15
- Both parents of the child are foreigners/immigrants

The researchers could conduct interviews in English, Russian or Lithuanian, which limited the participation of many parents, which would otherwise have been suitable. We conducted three interviews in English and one in Russian, where the letter of consent and questions were translated from English to Russian. All the participants were European, one of the participants had a university education, two had a vocational education and one had finished secondary school. Two of the participants were married and two were single. At home, two of the parents speak Spanish, one speaks Russian and one speaks Hungarian. Three of the parents had three children and one of the parents had two children (Table 1)

Table 1. Participants of the interview.

	Hanna	Anna	Olga	Fina
Child's duration in Iceland	3 years	3,5 years	3 years	2,5 years
Marital status	Married	Single	Married	Single
Number of children in family	3	2	3	3
Child's age at the time of arrival	Girl 11,5 years	Girl 11,5 years	Boy 11 years	Boy 11 years
Languages spoken at home	Hungarian	Spanish	Russian	Spanish
Educational background of mothers	Post-graduate	High-school diploma	Vocational studies	Vocational studies
Child's attendance of the reception department	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

3.3 Data analysis

We used a coding strategy to analyse the qualitative data collected in the interviews. We used an inductive approach where the codes emerged from the data gathered in the interviews. Key issues began to appear that we could compare from one interview to another. This allowed us to label common themes and concepts that were occurring in the interviews, taking the first step in open coding and creating categories where we could place our findings from the interviews. Coding is a system that captures and

categorizes the main aspects of a situation or event by recognising patterns that exist in the data such as similarities, differences or frequent occurrences (Saldaña, 2015). The process of coding allowed the emergence of patterns and comparisons to be visible among the interviews that began to connect them to each other and distinguish categories and subcategories.

Once the interviews were completed, we transcribed the recordings and immediately began to see the similarities and differences that existed between the participants' answers. We discussed these in more detail and devised suitable categories to place the findings. The common experiences that were notably shared by each participant were placed into a category. The primary themes that emerged from the data were differences in the school workload between the home countries and Iceland, issues with adapting to the new school system, less demanding school practices in Iceland, language limitations and communication issues that the parents experienced with the schools. We analysed the issues related to these shared experiences. This process of comparing the responses led to concepts such as the challenges associated with the language being a barrier, social integration difficulties and concerns parents have regarding an unfamiliar school system. Our expectation was to receive a better understanding of the perspectives of the parents regarding the services provided in their children's schools. Furthermore, we predicted to gain a better understanding of the expectations and implications of parental collaboration with the school.

3.4 Participants descriptions

Below are brief descriptions of the four participants that participated in our research study interviews.

- Hanna moved with her three children to Iceland three years ago. At the time of the move the children were aged 9, 11 and 13. Hanna is fluent in English, German and since she has moved to Iceland she has learned Icelandic. After she moved, she took Icelandic courses in local language schools. Once she started working her Icelandic started to advance.
- Anna arrived in Iceland three and a half years ago. In our interview, we focused mainly on her daughter as she was in the age group that applies to our research, however, we talked about the both of her children, because it was important for Anna to compare how each of her children reacted to the challenges they faced in a new environment. Now, Anna speaks English

fluently and can understand Icelandic. Anna never went to university herself but finished high school.

- Olga moved to Iceland three years ago, in 2015. She had a son who at the point of arriving was 11 years old. The interview was conducted in Russian, as she doesn't speak English and only understands written Icelandic. The letter of consent was translated to her in her native language before she signed it. She has completed high school and has a diploma in vocational studies.
- Fina moved to Iceland three and a half years ago. She speaks Spanish, Catalan, some French and Arabic. In the region where she comes from it is quite normal to mix languages. Before moving to Iceland, she didn't speak any English and has been learning it along with Icelandic since her move. She hasn't done any Icelandic courses and is learning it gradually. Fina's son was almost 10 years old when they moved to Iceland. He is now almost 13 and is in the seventh grade at school.

4 Data results

In this chapter, we will present our findings from the interviews. A total of four interviews were conducted and all the participants were mothers from various parts of Europe. We discussed issues related to their children's school experience both at home and in Iceland. We also asked the parents to share with us their children's experiences regarding the reception department and contact they have had with the school and teachers.

4.1 Home country experience from the parents' perspective

We asked our participants to describe the school practices of their children's former schools in their countries of origin to get an idea of how they compared with the schools their children attend in Iceland. Moreover, this gave parents an opportunity to highlight issues that their children experienced as new arrivals in the school system in Iceland as well as the positive aspects of this change in their children's education. Each mother we spoke to admitted that their children had a stricter education in their home countries compared to Icelandic schools. Interviewees mentioned, that in Iceland, children have more freedom and teachers are more creative in their teaching methods. In their home countries, schools require students to be well behaved and strictly follow teachers' orders.

Hanna's children performed well in the school in their home country and received good grades. They liked the school, because they did not have any learning problems, had many friends at school and enjoyed taking part in activities which were organized by the school. From the interview with Hanna, it was revealed that in their home country, parents are asked to be involved in extra school activities such as organizing events, parties, however, their participation extends mainly to social activities, not academic. In Hanna's home country, the children went to a Catholic school and Hanna described it as being very strict. The children received a lot of homework which required help from parents and were left with very little time for extracurricular activities such as sports or music lessons. She did not agree with the amount of work the children received back in their home country and also the content as it was much too detailed, they had to learn a lot of data and information that she does not think is particularly necessary or helpful and induces stress in the students. She also did not agree with the strict grading system as it also causes anxiety. Subjects are graded from one to five, one being the lowest grade you can receive and five being the highest. Hanna explained: "If they only receive a grade of one, they must repeat the whole year in order to advance in their studies, it's a very unfair system with little room for error". According to Hanna, there is no support

available in their home country for the children who need it unless the parents are in the position to pay for extra tuition. Students, who cannot afford extra classes are susceptible to fail and may have to repeat the same grade. Hanna had to spend many hours with her children at home to help them with their homework to avoid such a situation.

Whilst interviewing Anna about the school experience of her children back in her home country, we found that her daughter had performed well and had no learning problems at her previous school. Anna mentioned that the school is “different than in Iceland because the children had to study longer hours and had more homework than in Iceland”. Talking about teachers and educational experiences back in her home country, Anna repeated several times, “they did the best they could according to the circumstances, maybe not the best for the kids, but they did not know how to do it better”. Anna revealed that they lived in a small town which was a problem for the school as there was a lack of professional educators compared to the more densely populated areas.

Talking to Olga about the experience of her son in their home country, she mentions that he was going to a school which was attended by students whose parents had a lot of money and were sending their children to school with very expensive equipment such as iPads, smartphones and other gadgets. Her son would often come home and ask his mother why he was not allowed this sort of equipment or go on the same sort of luxury holidays that his peers were going on during the school breaks. She was not happy with the apparent division of wealth and pressure that this puts on parents. She is pleased that this kind of situation does not exist in Iceland, at least not to the same extent that is done back in her home country. Although Olga did not like the materialistic culture that her son was exposed to in the school, she admits he was a good student and received good grades. Olga’s son had achieved very high grades and showed an aptitude for maths and science in their home country. Olga also maintains that her son had to study longer hours and received much more homework. According to Olga, the heavy load of school work expected from her son helped him to do well and be a good student at the school.

Fina said that the school system back home is very outdated, it’s an “old system” where there is a lot of pressure and focus on preparing for tests. Talking about the school, Fina mentioned:

The system never changes and has been the same for generations, students are learning for doing tests, nothing else. Teachers lack creativity. My son was ok at school but did not really like going as he found it a bit boring.

Fina also shared that her son received more school work in their home country and had less time for extra-curricular activities due to the pressure of keeping up with the demands of the school. When her son arrived in Iceland he had a higher level than his peers in mathematics. She thinks that children are pushed more back in their home country and the education system in Iceland is more relaxed and fun.

From the interviews, it was revealed that in their home countries schools focus more on subjects like mathematics and less on subjects like art, sports or music. Two parents mentioned that children were more advanced in subjects like maths when they arrived in Iceland than their new peers. We can see that in the home countries, three of the participants' children were restricted in taking part in extra-curricular activities due to the demands from school and pressure to do well in exams. One parent added that location played a factor in availability of professional services, making it difficult for children who live in small towns far away from large built up areas to receive the academic support that they might need. Another parent recalled the pressure that she felt from the apparent division of wealth, due to students displaying their expensive material possessions in the school. The parents each encountered a variety of challenges with the school systems in their home countries and although they admit the children were pushed more academically and performed well, the school systems they described each appeared to have areas they could improve on to make school life easier for the parents and the students.

4.2 “Something good is going to happen tomorrow”

In this section we will describe the children's first encounters with the new schools and difficulties they experienced adapting to the new system, according to the parents. All the children experienced some difficulties adapting due to the language barrier, and two of the children encountered problems making new friends and even experienced bullying.

Hanna's children adapted well into their new lives in Iceland, even though her son does not have many Icelandic friends and has failed to create much of a social circle for himself, despite receiving help for Icelandic in school, the language has always been a barrier for him. The students in his class were welcoming and made efforts to invite him to join them in social activities. Despite the language constrictions he is doing relatively well in school and is currently continuing his education at a college where he is in a computer studies programme. Hanna confirms that her children have never complained about the move to Iceland and have adjusted well to their new life and are happy in Iceland. Going to school for the daughters especially has always been effortless in Iceland

and they love going to school. Talking about the experience of school in Iceland, Hanna said:

They are so happy here, they like the freedom that they have. They do not have to spend long hours at home doing the homework, so they can spend more time with their friends. They always gladly go to school and stay there after the lessons with their friends.

Anna recounted that the change was difficult for her children when they first arrived in Iceland she remembers the children telling her about how they were coping with the new system “it was worse than I was thinking because they had problems with bullying and also with some teachers”. When we talked about the problems her daughter faced when she started the new school, Anna said:

In the beginning, it was very very bad. They could not understand what was going on in school. My daughter told me after they left the school that students were laughing at her and she could not say anything back. She was never invited to do something with her classmates. Teachers did not do anything to make the situation better. My daughter is very social, but then she felt isolated and missed her home.

Anna told us that her daughter had some English classes back in her home country, but she did not have the opportunity to practice it that often so when she came to Iceland, she could not understand anything. Anna elaborated:

She could not understand half of it but she was happy. She made jokes. Once she comes home and said: tomorrow something good is going to happen. I asked, what? The teacher said something and everybody started to clap and I understand that something good is going to happen. I asked, do you need hat or shoes? She doesn't know, but she knows that something good is going to happen tomorrow.

Fina says that when her son started, his first few months were a challenge and he and other foreign children experienced a lot of bullying. She believes that Latin and Icelandic personalities clash as Latin people are very loud and open and Icelanders are more reserved and quiet, and she thinks that this is one of the reasons, along with not speaking the language very well which lead to the friction between her son and local students. With time, the situation got much better as his Icelandic improved.

Talking to the parents about their children, it was clear that the language barrier was a problem for all the children in terms of making new friends and two of the parents told us how their children were subjected to bullying. Eventually the problems lessened and the children's social situation got better as their knowledge of the Icelandic language improved. It also appeared that cultural differences played a role in the difficulties encountered by the students, as one parent attributed this to being a possible reason behind the bullying that her son experienced.

4.2.1 School "like a holiday"

Interviewees were asked what they find different compared to their home countries and what were the main challenges their children faced when they first arrived in Iceland. From the participants' experiences of their children's school, all the parents agreed that the educational system back home seems to be outdated when they compare it to Icelandic schools. Each parent shared that their children received more homework in their home countries and the workload at school was heavier than in Iceland. Moreover, interviewees mentioned that longer school hours and discipline were the main aspects that are different from Icelandic schools. However, with all the demands that the home country schools put on their children, parents were happy about their children's more playful schooling in Iceland.

In the interview, Hanna said that compared to the system that exists in her home country, the school in Iceland is "like a holiday in comparison". Anna shared with us that when her daughter started school in Iceland, she was confident that she was going to adjust and make new friends easily: "She is very social, smart, enjoying people, very participative, has no problem making new friends... and anything you want she will make it." But when her daughter started school in Iceland, Anna described: "She had more problems when she came here, in the beginning, because here they have too much liberty and it takes time to adjust". Anna continued: "They have this kind of test they have to do. I ask my children; did you do the homework? And they do not have to do it". Also, Anna found it a challenge to accept the school's more easy-going approach to discipline as she was more accustomed to stricter policies at her daughter's previous school.

Olga also expressed concerns about the education system in Iceland and had once requested with a teacher at a parent meeting that she would like the school to discipline her son more, in response to her request the teacher told her that this is not how they operate in Iceland. The softer approach came as a culture shock to Olga in the beginning, especially considering her background where the school systems have very strict discipline policies and students are reprimanded for sitting the wrong way and have very

specific dress codes. She believes that there is a lack of discipline amongst the students and that in Iceland the student-teacher relationship is too informal and relaxed, which leads to the students having a lack of respect. She shared a story:

For me, it was a shock to see that no one pays attention to how students speak to their teachers. They are allowed to use abusive words... and nothing is done to them. Once, one guy even used offensive gesture to his teacher and the teacher did not say anything, just smiled.

Olga also expressed concerns over the ABC grading system that is in place in her son's school and admitted she does not believe this grading system is challenging enough for the students. Talking about the grading system, Olga said:

I do not understand ABC system, I had the numerical system when I was at school and my son as well. I knew that if he is getting five, then he is doing very well, if he gets three then he needs to challenge himself. But ABC has the linear approach, and I do not understand when he is doing very well or when he is doing bad, it is so much in the middle and it is not very clear to me how to measure his educational achievements.

Fina says that the education in Iceland is "kind of diluted" with a variety of other classes like dancing and cooking, whereas in their country, the school focuses more on core subjects like maths, science, history and geography. According to Fina, "the education in Iceland lasts longer and is spread out over a longer period." In the beginning, she found that Iceland is "behind and slower to deliver" the knowledge to the students. Fina found it a bit hard to get used to and was worried that her son's educational needs were not being met.

Discussing school differences that existed between home countries and Iceland, most parents mentioned that not getting homework for their children was unusual. Olga's biggest concern regarding her son's education was the lack of homework that he receives. She would like to see him having more homework and often encourages him to study at home. Even when he achieves high grades at school, she still wants to push him to do better.

Overall, all the parents expressed positive experiences with Icelandic schools, primarily because their children "feel good" in the new schools. With time, these parents have come to accept this difference about the school system in Iceland, mainly because

the well-being of their children is the most important aspect. As Anna said in her interview “if my children feel happy then the school is doing a good job”.

From the interviews, it was revealed, that the adaptation to the new school environment was challenging in the beginning due to factors such as language difficulties, concerns over the absence of homework, a new grading system, lack of discipline and shorter school hours. All the participants admitted that the education system in Iceland is different from their home countries which proved difficult for the parents to get used to. All the parents find that the schools in Iceland are more relaxed compared to their home countries and that in Iceland children get more freedom. Two of the parents expressed discontent with the softer approach to discipline and believed that it could lead to behavioural problems and lack of respect from students. However, despite the initial concerns all the parents conveyed positive attitudes towards the Icelandic school system as their children are happy and doing well.

4.3 Experience of the reception department

One part of the interview included questions about the reception department in schools in Iceland. The reception department is a service for newly arrived immigrant children that offers Icelandic lessons, however, to attend these extra classes the immigrant children are taken away from the regular classes they attend with the other local peers. The aim was to better understand if the parents found this service helpful academically and socially for their children. The primary focus of the reception class was on learning the Icelandic language, which helps children to study in regular Icelandic classes and make Icelandic friends. We discussed challenges that students faced in the reception department. We also examined whether teachers responded effectively to the challenges and what is the current outcome of the extra classes were.

All the parents told us that their children attended the reception department when they arrived in the new school in Iceland, where they received extra classes with other immigrant students to learn Icelandic. All the parents agreed that after attending reception classes their children socialized mostly with immigrant children and communicated in English. Despite this three of the parents confirmed that the reception classes were beneficial for their children, although one said that it only helped her children learn to speak English and make friends with other immigrants. In the instances where students received extra language assistance from a support teacher, the parents agreed that this assistance was beneficial for their children.

4.3.1 Learning three languages

All the children had been enrolled in schools where Icelandic was the language of instruction. For that reason, we inquired if the children experienced any difficulties learning the Icelandic language, did the schools provide any extra language support to help them advance quicker in the new language and what is the current language level. All the participants said that their children adapted well in their new schools, because of extra classes they had taken for learning the language in the reception classes. After three years of living in Iceland all the children can easily communicate in Icelandic but experience some difficulties with grammar.

When Hanna's children arrived in Iceland, they only spoke their native language. Hanna says that in the beginning, her children all received help to integrate into the school and learn the language. At first, they attended a reception class every day for around three hours, where they went to receive support from a teacher who is specially assigned to help immigrant students. Hanna says that their peers were also very helpful and friendly towards her children, for example, they would stick post-its and labels on items around the classroom to help them with their vocabulary. Now they all speak Icelandic well, it took around two and a half years to gain fluency, although her son, who was thirteen when he arrived, struggled the most with the language and is still not very confident when it comes to speaking it. Hanna also shared:

I guess not knowing any English when they got here helped them when it came to learning Icelandic, otherwise, they would have probably fallen back on it a lot. They're starting to learn English quite quickly now though and I'm hearing them speaking it a lot more than before.

Anna's children also only spoke their native language and could not understand any Icelandic or English, when they first arrived in Iceland. Her children had English classes back in their home country, but because of little exposure to the English language, they could not communicate. According to Anna, after three years of living in Iceland, her daughter is fluent in Icelandic and her English has improved greatly. Anna mentioned:

In the reception class, they all spoke English at the start to get by with, even the teacher spoke to them in English. To me it made no sense that they were sent to this class, taken away from all the Icelanders, then they were speaking English. My kids didn't even know English till they came to Iceland.

During the discussion with Olga about reception classes for her son, it was revealed that these classes were very helpful, her son enjoyed it and like Anna's children, communicated mostly with children from an immigrant background. He was attending along with four or five other students who were at the same level of him in speaking Icelandic. Also, he was attending regular classes with the other students and if he needed it, he was provided with some help from a support teacher who was Icelandic and assisted him in English and Icelandic classes and provided extra help if there were exams. He had some prior knowledge of English from learning it at school in his home country. If he had any comprehension problems the language assistant would explain to him with gestures. According to Olga, her son had difficulties attending the swimming classes at school in the beginning, as he received no language assistance and the swimming teacher only offered instructions in Icelandic. Olga said about her son's experience of the swimming lesson: "Now he is a good swimmer. In the beginning, he did not want to go to the swimming lessons. His teacher told him that if he understood Icelandic, he could learn how to swim faster". Olga also mentioned:

The first friends my son met at school, he communicated in English. Most of them were foreigners. With Icelandic peers, he found it difficult to communicate at the beginning, because he did not feel that his English is good enough and he did not know Icelandic. He learned English back home, but it took him a while to adapt and start communicating.

Fina's son also attended a reception class for several months after he arrived. She said all the immigrant students were put in a group to receive separate Icelandic lessons away from the regular classes attended by the Icelandic children. According to Fina, it took her son around six months to learn Icelandic once he started attending his new school. In the beginning, the teacher spoke to him more in English to help her son. Fina recounted:

When he moved to Iceland he couldn't speak any Icelandic or English. He was learning English at school back home but never really progressed, because the level of English is really not as good as in Iceland or many other European countries.

Outside of the reception class her son had a classroom assistant, who was available to help all the immigrant students. Now her son speaks Icelandic well and since moving to Iceland he has also started to learn English. She believes that he would not be speaking

English as well if he was still living in their home country as very few children his age speak English.

All the parents we spoke to confirmed that their children can communicate easily in Icelandic. All except one felt that the reception class helped their children to learn the new language. The parent who did not find it helpful for her children stated that the reason behind it was because the teacher was communicating to them in English and that the immigrants did not have the chance to make Icelandic friends. All the participants also agreed that their children improved their English since moving to Iceland as there is more exposure to English than in their home countries. The children were also provided with extra language assistance with support teachers if they required it.

The participants revealed that their children all attended reception classes to learn Icelandic when they first arrived in their new schools. However, three of the participants told us that their children only made friends with other immigrant children, which hindered their chance to practice and learn Icelandic in a holistic way with their peers. As the other immigrant students also did not know enough Icelandic to communicate effectively, in the reception department, English became the language of communication, and in one case the language of instruction in the class. The immigrant children, by default, started to simultaneously learn English as they were learning Icelandic in the reception department.

4.3.2 Integration

In this section we will investigate elements that inhibit the students from integrating with the peers from the mainstream class, according to the parents. One parent felt strongly that separating the immigrant students from the mainstream classroom to attend classes in the reception department or receive extra Icelandic tuition isolated her children and made it more difficult for them to integrate with the other students.

Anna talked about the reception class and how she disagreed with the immigrant students being separated to attend Icelandic lessons in a separate room. She said that it excludes children from the mainstream classes and feels that it slows down their opportunity to integrate and feel included. Anna said:

Immigrant kids have problems at school because they have different systems and they had to go to a different class to learn Icelandic, they have this kind of program. On paper, everything looked perfect and very nice... but not working for my kids, they felt strange and apart, they did not feel welcome with other kids because they see other kids only five hours a week.

By the program, Anna meant the reception department that her children attended when they first started school in Iceland. Both Anna's children had to attend a reception class and only interacted with Icelandic children five times a week, joining them in maths, swimming and home-economic classes. In the reception class, children communicated in English. After a challenging first year, Anna decided to speak with the teachers. Anna shared:

My children do not know English, do not understand English and it's easier to learn than Icelandic, so do not give the chance for them, go directly to Icelandic class. The separate class has good things on a paper but it is not working for my children. It excludes children from others, they feel lonely and isolated.

By this Anna meant that her children were losing the opportunity to learn Icelandic by being separated from the Icelandic classmates and taken to another class where all the immigrants were instructed in English. Although they were supposed to be learning Icelandic, she said they were learning more English. She had concerns that it was not helping them improve their Icelandic whilst at the same time separating them from the Icelandic students making it difficult to form friendships with them.

The school failed to make any changes following her complaint so Anna decided to move her children to another school in Reykjavik. Once they started in the new school Anna says that "the situation was totally different". Now, after three years living in Iceland, her oldest daughter speaks Icelandic and English fluently. Anna said that her daughter started attending extra Icelandic classes during the school day and can now communicate easily and has gained more Icelandic friends. However, Anna had concerns about the way the Icelandic lessons for immigrants were scheduled, because her children had to attend these extra lessons, while the Icelandic children had a dancing lesson. She said: "My daughter also wanted to attend dance classes, because she finds it fun, but she had to sit in the class and learn the language, while the others were having fun".

The interview revealed that one of the parents felt that the reception department was excluding her child from integrating with the students from the mainstream class. Data also revealed that separating immigrant students from the mainstream class could cause a delay in terms of learning Icelandic and making friends with the local peers. The participant also revealed that she moved her child to another school where she could attend the mainstream class with a language assistant, and the situation got better. However, despite the positive change her child still had to attend extra Icelandic classes

which were organized in a way that meant that her child had to miss doing fun activities with her other classmates.

4.4 Ease of communication between parents and the teachers

We asked the participants to describe their initial contact with their children's schools as we wanted to gain an insight into how accessible it was for them to receive information and communicate over issues regarding their children's schooling. For two of the parents this was described as an effortless process with the schools being very accommodating to their linguistic needs but for the other two, the initial communications were described as more challenging and the parents had to organise their own interpreters as the school did not offer the service to them.

Hanna's first communications with the school were in English, the school offered to find a Hungarian interpreter, but she declined the offer as she speaks English, so it was not necessary. Hanna's first introduction to the school was a very positive one and she says, "it was easy" and the school personnel were very helpful. The principal and other staff members were very informative and provided all the practical information they needed to make her children's transition into their new school environment a smooth one. She said the school had a friendly environment and the staff were communicative, she talked almost every day with her children's teachers.

Anna, who spoke very little English and no Icelandic was not offered any interpreter or translating service. In the beginning, she had to take a friend to school who could translate for her. When Anna needed to address any issues regarding her children's education with the teachers, she had to communicate in English which was challenging for her. She found it difficult to speak coherently with the teachers and she could not fully understand what was happening in the school.

When Olga arrived in Iceland, her husband's friend assisted her in applying for the school and translating all the necessary information that she needed. Olga mentioned that the school provided information in many languages such as English, Spanish and Polish, but unfortunately it was not so easy to find information in Russian, therefore she relied on the help of her husband's friend and added that without this help she would have been lost and found the whole experience very daunting.

Fina said that getting information has always been easy and she is always provided with an interpreter by the school free of charge. The school always organises the interpreter to be there for any meetings that take place in the school. She said she found the teachers very approachable and when tackling the sensitive subject of bullying which

had been problematic for her son and other immigrant students in the school she commended the professional manner in which they dealt with the situation.

When immigrants move to a new country the language is going to be a challenge and we can see that the parents who were provided with interpreters for communicating with their children's school had a more positive experience when describing their initial communications. One of the mothers did not even need an interpreter, yet she was still offered the service. Unfortunately, two of the parents did not have the comfort of being offered such a service and it proved to be quite inconvenient for them, moreover, the school is failing to fulfil its responsibilities of building a strong connection between home and school that is a policy of the National Curriculum Guide. Two mothers admitted that they had to rely on the help of friends for translating important information regarding their children's schooling. Moreover, the same two parents admitted that they had problems attaining school information in their native languages and used google translate when receiving emails from the school. Parents also expressed concerns about school practices and how teachers are handling diverse groups of students.

4.5 Cultural identities

In the interviews, we wanted to know the ways that the teachers acknowledged the students' immigrant cultural background. We also wanted to determine if teachers are utilizing the cultural experiences of the immigrant students as a learning resource in the classroom. The interviews revealed that two of the four parents have never taken part in activities that share information about their cultural background. They did not express any concerns about not having any cultural exchange in schools and felt that it is normal for teachers not to ask about their cultural heritage. The other two parents, who had positive experiences sharing their home country culture and history, said that reminder about their home made their children feel proud of their culture. Preparing a lesson about their home culture was very educational and the children enjoyed it.

Hanna and Fina both said that their children were asked to share their cultural backgrounds with the other students. The teachers also approached them to ask about their opinion on teaching material and content that was being used. Hanna mentioned that the teachers made attempts to respond to the children's background culturally and that the school also holds multicultural events where children of the school can demonstrate their home culture:

Teachers asked the children to share stories about our previous school and home country, and make a presentation for the whole class. The whole family

got involved and we made a poster, some slides and showed them some words in our native language.

Fina also mentioned that her son was asked to talk about his home country in the class. She says the school even asked her if they wish to attend religion classes. The teacher asked if they had any religious traditions or customs that they could celebrate or acknowledge in the school. Fina informed them that they are not a very religious family and was fine with her son just learning the religion that the rest of his schoolmates were learning about. She says the teachers always respect the different religions that are practised in the school and celebrate them in some way. However, according to Fina, the teachers do not know how to handle all the new immigrant students in the class, and that it is a very new situation for them to have so many children with immigrant backgrounds in one classroom. She thinks that the increasing numbers of immigrant children in Iceland puts a lot of pressure on the teachers to get to know about each child's background.

We were informed by two parents that they had been approached by teachers to assist in teaching students about their culture. The parent that took part in the activity told us that it was a positive experience that benefitted her children and their classmates, as they learned about a new country and culture. The other parent conveyed that the school her son attends is sensitive to the needs of parents that come from different cultures. Both parents told us that the schools their children attend acknowledge the different cultures, religions and customs by holding events or celebrations, however, despite of the efforts, one parent believes it is difficult for the teachers to get to know about each student's individual culture, due to the increase in the amount of immigrant children attending school in Iceland.

4.6 Making connections

We asked the participants to describe in what form and to what extent they engage in collaboration with the school regarding social activities, teacher meetings to discuss their child's progress and whether they are involved in any academic activities. Most of the parents answered that they take part in school-related activities by attending events run by the school or parent committees. We observed that the activities that the parents admitted to taking part in are more social than academic. The main reason the mothers gave for not attending school social activities was due to not being able to speak or understand Icelandic.

All of the mothers we spoke to attend parent-teacher meetings regularly and contacted the teachers or other school personnel regarding their children when

necessary, although the language barrier has proved to be a challenge particularly for Olga who is not provided with an interpreter. Anna said that when her daughter was in the school in Hafnarfjordur, she found communicating with the teachers frustrating as the language was a barrier, but when her daughter started attending school in Reykjavik, it became easier as she had access to an interpreter.

Hanna informed us that her children's school encourages collaboration and she attends parent-teacher meetings to discuss their progress every three months. Regarding school social events, Hanna said that she and her husband found it a little difficult to make friends with the Icelandic parents, however, this did not deter them from attending school social activities. In the interview Hanna said:

It's not that they're unfriendly, everyone is really nice, but they have their friends and have established their social circles. Most of the parents are friends for years and probably even went to school and university together. They don't really need us to be their friends. So, it's difficult and can take time to really get your own social circle when you move to a new country with such a close-knit community.

Olga has never participated in any activities organised by the school, apart from attending parent-teacher meetings. She attributes this to the fact that all the information about these activities are sent through mentor, which is a website that parents use, and she is not very comfortable using it, she suggested that she might be more involved and know more about what is happening in the school if she learned how to navigate this website, however this is a challenge as it is not available in Russian. Olga shared:

All the information is there but not in Russian, they have it in other languages but not in Russian, so I just don't look at it. It's just too hard to get the hang of. If there is something I really need to know I will usually get an email.

Olga says that she does not attend school social activities as she does not speak Icelandic and it is her belief that the organizers of school social events do not invite her as they know she will not attend. She said that she would prefer if all the school communication would come through emails as then she can take her time to read through it and use google translate to help her understand it.

Fina says that parents are often asked to get involved in social activities with the school and they organise events like bingo, tournaments and coffee mornings. The school intervened when her son was being bullied and talked to the parents to help sort it out.

She says that some of the Icelandic parents emailed the foreign parents and were quite rude and told them that they were overreacting, and the school intervened again to suggest that they email the school instead of parents. They acted as mediators and Fina said they were very good at handling the situation.

The interview data shows that all the participants regularly attend parent-teacher meetings to keep an update on their children's progress at the school and two of the participants told us they have a good rapport with the school regarding issues related to their children's schooling. As for the other participants, language was a barrier in creating a good line of communication with the school. The data revealed that apart from parent-teacher meetings the activities that parents are usually invited to participate in at the school are social activities. Some of the parents expressed that is difficult to integrate into the school social circle due to lack of the Icelandic language and that it is difficult to form friendships with the locals that have already established their social circles.

4.7 Parents' educational aspirations for their children

Interviewees were asked if it is important to them that their children complete secondary school and pursue higher education. Also, parents were asked if they would like their children to continue education in Iceland. There were two reasons for posing these questions. First, to understand parental perspectives on education in general and second, to understand how parents value academic achievements of their children.

Hanna told us that it is very important to her that her children finish school and that they attend university. Mainly because she rates having a good education as being very advantageous in finding a decent job. However, she also hopes her children have the experience of attending university as "this is a very pleasant time in one's life". Her children have both already expressed that they intend to go to university some day and both look forward to it.

Anna admitted that she is not overly concerned about whether her children will eventually go to university or not. Her only concern is their well-being and knowing that they are happy. Anna said in her interview: "Getting a university degree for my children is not a primary goal, for me, it is more important how they feel than what they learn. I want to be a mother of the kids". Olga stated that she is determined to see that her son goes to university. She never had the opportunity to finish her education, and she thinks that in order for her son to get a good career he will need a degree. Olga mentioned that she will encourage her son to go to university and if he chooses to pursue his studies in Iceland, she will be satisfied.

Fina said that she would not be disappointed if her son does not attend university. She has two older sons who are both in their twenties and neither of them went to University and they both have good jobs and are doing very well. She is not so sure if her son will go to university but she hopes he will finish a college education. Fina said:

I will be happy if my son gets a good education, but it is not important if he goes to University or not. I just hope he finishes school and decide for himself what he wants to do in life.

From the interviews, it was revealed that all parents expect their children to continue education at the University level. Two parents said that it is very important to them that their children will go to University because they want them to have a secure future with better career prospects. For the other two parents, it was not as important what educational choices their children will make in the future. For them, personal well-being is more valuable than academic achievement, they believe that they can succeed and be happy in life without a degree.

5 Discussion

The main goal of the study was to examine the immigrant parental perspectives on the education of their children in lower secondary school with the main emphasis on the reception department and collaboration between parents and school. The purpose of the study was to give immigrant parents a voice on educational issues that affect their children. The responses of the mothers who were interviewed indicate practices that the educational system in Iceland can improve to make education for newly arrived immigrant students and collaboration between home and school more effective. We summarized the findings of the data by applying theoretical concepts that were discussed in the second chapter. The discussion will answer the research question regarding the parental school relations and reception department practices that are provided by the school in connection with the theories that we used in the literature review. Our expectation was to receive a better understanding of the parents' perspectives regarding the services provided in their children's schools. Furthermore, we predicted to gain a better understanding of the expectations and implications of parental collaboration with the school. For that, we formulated the research question as follows:

How do parents of immigrant students perceive school collaboration and reception department services which exist in Icelandic compulsory schools for newly arriving students to support their academic achievements?

5.1 Collaboration

Collaboration between the school and parents is a fundamental part of a child's schooling, and the input that a parent can give regarding various aspects of their child's education should not be undervalued (Nieto, 2010, p.193). When parents are committed, and involved, they acquire a deeper understanding of the child's education and can, therefore, be more supportive when their child requires assistance with school work. Having an effective communication system with the teachers means that parents are more likely to understand what is expected of their child regarding educational performance (Lareau, 1996). Our interview data revealed that the four women we talked to attend teacher-parent meetings regularly at the school to talk about their children. Furthermore, they felt they could contact the schools regarding their children's education freely and at their discretion.

Collaboration between teachers and immigrant parents can present many challenges due to language and cultural differences. As all mothers had very limited or no knowledge of the Icelandic language when they first arrived, it placed some restrictions on the level

they could participate in the school life of their children compared to their home country. The data revealed that two of the parents experienced problems communicating with the school due to language barriers. Both Olga and Anna were not provided interpreters by the school and both had to rely on the help of friends with the initial meetings. Olga commented: "It is difficult to understand information that is posted on the school's website because I do not understand English and it is not available in my native language". Anna described the challenges of voicing her concerns over her children's education to the teachers, as her level of English prevented her from being able to clarify what she meant. The experience left her frustrated and confused about what was happening in the school. Anna said:

In the beginning, I did not speak good English and it was hard to talk with the teachers, they were friendly, but I was not able to follow the conversation. I tried to speak how I can and in the beginning, I did not know what the teachers want from my children. I had to ask my children what do the teachers mean, but they did not speak English well and did not learn Icelandic yet.

However, Fina, who had an interpreter assigned to her for any teacher-parent meetings that took place, had no grievances when it came to talk about communication with the school. Like Anna, she went to the teachers to express some concerns over a negative situation that her son was experiencing, which the school then handled competently. Hanna was also content with the level of communication in her children's school and had no problems receiving or understanding school notifications. She was offered an interpreter service by the school, but did not need to avail of it as she has a high proficiency in English. We can elicit from the contrasting experiences of the mothers who were provided interpreter services to those who were not that, when it is possible to eliminate issues such as language barriers, communication can be more effective and achieve better results which benefits the overall functioning of the school.

One of the aspects of the Icelandic National Curriculum is to provide parental support and positive cooperation with the school as critical elements to ensure successful study progress of their children (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007). Moreover, for students to thrive and get the most out of their education, parents and teachers should exchange any information about the children that can encourage learning and activate their interests. The National Curriculum asserts that it is the responsibility of the school to establish parent cooperation and sustain it throughout the child's compulsory school attendance

(Ministry of Education, Science & Culture, 2012). To comply with the National Curriculum, it is important that schools take the measures to make collaboration with parents a success.

To build a connection with immigrant parents, teachers must develop a foundation of culturally diverse knowledge, where teachers are aware that immigrant students' families have values, morals, and differences exclusive to their culture (Gay, 2002, p.107). From the interviews with the mothers, it was revealed that in Iceland, students have a more casual relationship with their teachers and call them by their first names, whereas in their countries of origin, students address teachers in a very formal manner. One of the interviewees discussed her view that the teachers in Iceland are not strict enough and the students do not have enough boundaries. When she brought it up with the teacher that she would like them to be stricter, the teacher responded by saying this is how it is done in Iceland. Students could have very different views on gender roles and values and traditions may be very different to what the teacher is used to (Rychly & Graves, 2012). The teacher can take the time to connect with the student and get to know them personally, with the support of family involvement.

The findings of the study regarding the collaboration between parents and school showed that the main concern for all immigrant parents, in the beginning, was the language barrier. The parental involvement in their children's school activities and understanding of the school requirements often requires clear communication. The school is responsible for providing the parents with clear information in a language immigrant parents can understand (Compulsory School Act No.91/2008). The value of the interpreter service is immense, especially in the beginning for immigrant parents. Anna, who had a lot of difficulties communicating with the teachers about an issue regarding her children, eventually moved her children to a new school. The issue of effective communication can be resolved if schools provide translating services for immigrant parents, furthermore, parents may be more likely to participate in school activities if they were provided with the help of interpreters.

5.2 Reception department

The policy on the integration of immigrants' states, "Knowledge of Icelandic language is a key to Icelandic society" (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007, p.2). Moreover, the policy addresses the issue in the enrolment plan, in the school curriculum for immigrant students to become active participants in the multicultural society (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007). For that, schools are required to provide a reception class plan for the immigrant students to learn Icelandic language (Hillmarson-Dunn & Kristinsson, 2013).

Sufficient knowledge of Icelandic gives greater chances for immigrant students to be included in Icelandic society. The methods and services that schools provide for immigrant children to become successful learners play a significant role in building a solid foundation for effective learning. According to the mothers, participation in the reception classes helped students to improve their Icelandic language skills which provided better opportunities to continue further studies in the Icelandic classroom. However, findings showed that in one school, the reception class students learned English instead of Icelandic. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that students communicated in English with other immigrant students in the reception department. The findings showed that the reception class excludes immigrant students and communications in English slowed down their progress in Icelandic. The implementation of multicultural strategies can help to create a class where all students can learn the language and socialise together without excluding immigrant students from Icelandic.

Implementing multicultural strategies can help teachers to build stronger connections with immigrant parents, providing students with equal opportunities to learn, regardless of their cultural background (Banks, 2007). Moreover, multicultural education is important because it can encourage tolerance amongst people, promotes equality and equity among diverse ethnic groups. For that reason, a multicultural environment with relevant study programs is essential for students from diverse backgrounds. When we asked parents whether multicultural education was implemented in their children's schools, the interviewees were not acquainted with the program. The findings of the interviews revealed that students did not have any experience of being in a multicultural classroom before arriving in Iceland and have limited multicultural real-life experiences. Interviewees understood a multicultural classroom as a place where diverse groups of students meet. All the mothers mentioned that the extra classes in the reception department that their children attended were with other immigrant students, but did not include the Icelandic students. From the interviews, it was revealed that schools did not implement multicultural education which is important for all students.

According to Banks (2007), if teaching and curriculum are built on the learning characteristics of the students then the academic achievement of the students will increase. The cultural strength of the immigrant students, such as languages, behaviour styles and values that they bring to the school, can lead to positive academic outcomes (Banks, 2007). Teachers must understand cultural differences to make use of them in the classroom. Two parents, Hanna and Fina, revealed that the teachers acknowledged the cultural backgrounds of their children and used teaching methods to include this

knowledge in projects in the Icelandic classroom. The participation of the parents in cultural exchange projects helped parents to connect with their children, and according to Hanna “they learn about their own country”. For Anna and Olga, interview data showed that the children's cultural background was not acknowledged. Anna stated that separating her children from the mainstream classroom was a problem, especially in the beginning. Anna’s children did not have many friends and did not attend any activities, because of limited Icelandic and English. The reception department did not help them learn Icelandic, because the language of instruction was English and her children had problems with the teachers. Therefore, Anna complained about the reception program and suggested that it would be more beneficial for her children to attend regular classes along with the other Icelandic children with a language support teacher. That would help them interact with Icelandic children and feel involved in a multicultural classroom. Anna said:

Why they have to be excluded from Icelandic class? In my country, immigrant children immediately go to the normal class with locals. They will learn faster and will not feel secluded.

For Olga, the new system took some time to get used to and she is still learning how to adjust to a new system, as she is unfamiliar with the school practices of her son. But she is thankful for the education her son is getting at school and happy that her son does not feel isolated from his classmates, as it was in her home country. Olga had positive comments about the reception department because her son made friends there with other immigrants and he is currently tutoring another immigrant student, who recently arrived in Iceland. In the interview about the reception class, Olga said:

He likes it (reception department), he met many friends there. It is very new for me, but I see my son is happy, so it must be good for him. He often stays with his new friends and they go to play sports together. It is easy for them to communicate together because they come from the similar culture.

The collected data showed that the reception department became a place which excluded the immigrant students from the Icelandic by separating them from the mainstream class. After three years of attending reception classes, students had opportunities to study and mostly interact with children from diverse backgrounds. The separation from the mainstream Icelandic class, it appears, was beneficial in the beginning when they started the new schools, but later excluded them from social

interactions with local students. At the schools, where the teachers were helpful and showed understanding of cultural differences, worked in collaboration with the reception department, implemented multicultural teaching methods that involve and encourage cultural differences, inspired a positive outcome for the students' academic achievement and well-being. The participants' opinions about the reception department service were divided, but they all agreed that the teachers understand their children's cultural background, that was helpful for students to feel welcome and motivated to study.

6 Conclusion

Moving to a new country with adolescent children can be a challenging time for immigrant parents. Worries and questions about their children will arise, for example, how will they adapt to a new environment, will they find new friends or will they be able to follow requirements of the new school. Immigrant parents are a minority group in Iceland and therefore it is important to give them a voice to understand their needs. When it comes to their children and educational experiences that they acquire in Iceland, it is important to study what services are available and if schools are following the policies for immigrant students. Collaboration between school and parents is also one of the essential factors that are crucial to successful study outcomes. The purpose of this thesis was to examine parental perceptions of their adolescent children on school services and how parents felt about teacher-school collaboration.

The main findings of the study showed that all the immigrant parents mainly focus their concerns on the well-being of their children and have positive attitudes towards the school system after an adjustment period in Iceland. The mothers that took part in our study admitted to being apprehensive towards the educational system in Iceland when they first arrived because children have more freedom at school, less homework and shorter school hours, but after few years living in Iceland, they learned that the education in Iceland has the same outcomes as in their home countries. The parents maintain that the level of education might be behind what their children were receiving in their home countries and all of them said that their children were more advanced in many of the subjects when they arrived in Iceland, compared to their peers, however, despite some initial concerns, all the mothers agreed that the education system is efficient. From the interviews, the participants revealed that the education may be delivered more gradually than in their home countries, but they believe that when they have completed school the end results will be similar to other schools abroad and that the system in Iceland is not inferior.

The findings of the reception department showed that this program excludes immigrant children from the Icelandic students, as they separate from the mainstream class to attend Icelandic classes, However, this hinders their opportunity to make friends with other Icelandic students and the participants of the study revealed their children mainly made friends with other immigrant students from the reception class. Furthermore, immigrant students communicated in English with their peers at the reception class, because they had some knowledge of English, even if it was limited. One parent revealed that the teachers were not prepared to implement relevant teaching

methods while her child was in the reception department and that the language of instruction was in English, inhibiting her child's progress in learning Icelandic.

The findings of collaboration between school and the parents showed that immigrant parents are willing to participate in all school activities, but not knowing the language is restricting them from many activities. The teachers are supportive and schools provide parents with information in English, and in one case, in other languages. Three of four participants were regularly invited to attend school events, but some of them never participate, because they feel insecure communicating with others in Icelandic. In one case, the participant revealed that she never receives invites to school events and she attributes this to her lack of Icelandic and limited English. The participant expressed interest in participating in school activities and believes that if she were provided with an interpreter service, this would help her to engage more in her child's school life.

Our findings suggest there is a need to create an environment where immigrant parents and school teachers can meet and build strong personal relationships. Efforts should be made to provide information in the language of the immigrant parents and to make communication more comfortable. The more informed a parent is about the education their child is receiving, the more chance there is for better educational outcomes. To ensure each child has the same level of support as each other and equal opportunities for academic success, it is imperative that the parents are provided with the assistance necessary from the school so that they can support their child.

The study was limited by the small sample of the immigrant parents. The interviews revealed there are improvements needed in the lower secondary school so that immigrant parents can feel more included in the school community and have a voice that is relevant. To reduce aggravation, it is imperative that newly arrived immigrant parents are provided with an interpreter with efforts made to provide school information in their native language. To avoid exclusion immigrant parents should always receive invites to school social events, regardless of their level of Icelandic. The reception departments that the newly arrived students attend should avoid using English as a language of instruction or communication. Moreover, the parents we talked to believe that it would be more beneficial for the children to attend more time in classrooms with the local students, with the aid of a language support teacher, than being separated to another class with other immigrant students. Further study would be needed on reception departments to expand understanding on what methods are productive for newly arrived immigrant students.

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Appendix A: Letter of consent

Introductory Letter and Consent for Interview

Dear Parent,

You are being invited to voluntarily participate in a research project. You offered to participate in an interview with us regarding your experiences as an immigrant parent with a young teenage child. This Introductory Letter and Consent for Interview will give you information about the interview so that you can make an informed decision to participate. You will be given a copy of this Introductory Letter and Consent for Interview once it has been signed.

Purpose of the Study

We are B.A. students at the University of Iceland, and currently conducting research on the perspectives and expectations of immigrant parents in Iceland. The data from this interview will be used to elaborate on how immigrant parents understand their child's school practices, collaboration and pedagogy of the school. Specifically, we want to know more about your experiences of the school of your child, and how immigrant education can be improved to help children to succeed academically.

Structure of the interview

The interview will take approximately 30- 40 minutes at a time and place of your convenience. It will be audio-recorded, and a typed transcript will later be made of the recording. Notes will be written during the interview. You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time.

Confidentiality

Information provided by the participants of the study will be handled according to the local Data Protection Authority's laws for privacy, processing and destruction of source data. Any personal information that is collected will be held in the strictest confidentiality and anonymity. Your identity and privacy will be completely safeguarded. All the data will be destroyed after the study.

Please feel free to contact us if you require further information or have any questions.

Thank you for your participation,

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I have read the introductory letter regarding this research project and hereby consent to participate in the interview as described above.

Parent Signature

Signature of Interviewer

Date

Date

Interview date:

Interview place:

Appendix B: Interview questions

Interview questions for parents

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself and your family?
2. How old is your child?
3. How many years has your child lived in Iceland?
4. What school is your child attending?
5. What grade is your child in school?

Discussion about parent

6. What are your educational/social background?
7. Where are you from?
8. Where did you live previously?
9. How many languages do you speak?
10. What are the main reasons for living in Iceland (marriage, work, new experiences)?

Discussion about child's school experience in home country.

11. Can you tell me about your son/daughter's education before he/she came to Iceland?
12. How did you feel about it?
13. Did the school fulfil your expectations of what you felt your child should have been receiving at school?
14. How well did your child perform in previous school?
15. What languages did your child speak before starting school in Iceland?

Discussion about services offered in child's school

16. What services were available to help your child academically?
17. What services did the school lack, that could have been helpful academically?
18. Were parents asked to participate in any school activities? If so, which activities?

Discussion about your child's school experience in Iceland.

19. What is your experience about your son/daughter's education in Iceland?
20. How did you feel about it?
21. Does the school in Iceland fulfil your parental expectations for your child's education.
22. How well did your child perform in school?
What were the challenges, if any, that your child faced when he/she started the new school?
23. How did the school/teacher respond to these challenges?

Discussion about services (reception department) offered in your child's school in Iceland.

24. What services are available to help your child academically?

25. What services does the school lack that could be helpful academically?
26. How would you describe your introduction to the school? Were you fully informed of activities and services available for your child, or was it difficult to get information from your school?
27. How has the teacher/school responded to your child's diverse background?

Discussion about parental collaboration with school.

28. How many school activities have you participated in that were organized by the school, teachers or parents?
29. How often do you have meetings with the school teachers of your child?
30. Describe the ways you were provided information about the school?
31. Were you provided with translated material or interpreter services, perhaps?
32. In which ways do you think you can be involved in your child's school life?
33. How has the school encouraged collaboration between parents and the teachers?
34. How would you like to be informed about the school practices?

Discussion about parents' educational aspirations for their child.

35. How important is it to you that your child completes upper secondary school and continues higher education?
36. Would you like for your child to continue studies in Iceland?
37. What are your expectations from the school services?
38. Anything you would like to add?